

Servants & Masters

1 Timothy 6:1-2

The relationship between servants and masters is frequently addressed by Paul. The institution of slavery in the ancient Greco-Roman world was unavoidable. Slavery was to this civilization what electricity is to ours: slavery was how things got done. All of the impressive roads, temples, coliseums, aqueducts, theaters, and government buildings were built by slaves. The materials were quarried and hewn by slaves. To demand an end to slavery would not have been taken seriously by anyone. There was no conceivable, realistic alternative to this institution.

Now, slavery is condemned by God. When we abuse our fellow man in any form or fashion, we sin. All have been made in the image of God; therefore, all are owed love. Treating our fellow man like mere property is ungodly to the core. More specifically, Paul condemns the slave trade in this letter (1 Tim. 1:10). Rather than overtly attack this institution, however, Paul goes deeper in his teaching. He takes a more realistic approach by considering the relationship between servants and masters in light of the Gospel.

In all likelihood, slaves were part of the make-up of the church at Ephesus. What were their responsibilities towards their masters now that they had obeyed the Gospel? Servants were to honor their masters. This was to be done as a method of influencing their masters with the Gospel. Rebelling against their masters would only give an opportunity for their masters to speak against the faith.

If the servant and master were Christians, the servant was to honor the master. He was not to use their common faith as a means to dishonor his master. If they were both Christians, their relationship should improve. The Gospel unites, not divides (Col. 3:11).

QUESTIONS

- 1. Describe slavery in the ancient world.**
- 2. If a slave was a Christian, how was he/she to behave?**
- 3. How does the servant-master relationship relate to the employee-employer relationship?**