

**SERVANTS AND MASTERS - A MESSAGE FOR ALL OF US**  
Ephesians 6:5-9

**Intro:** I hope that we all realize the place that these instructions to wives, husbands, children, fathers, and now servants and masters, have in this message of the Apostle Paul to the church at Ephesus, and perhaps to other churches in the vicinity of Ephesus. Paul was point out that the doctrine of the first three chapters, and the exhortations of chapters 4 and 5 down to 5:21, are to be put into practice on an individual basis. But in doing so it was not that any Christian lives in isolation from other people, whether they be Christians or non-Christians, but the results are to be seen in the one place where we are inclined to be ourselves. *That is in our homes. If our faith does not make a difference in us for the better in our homes, it can hardly be the true faith.* That is where the change will be seen first. So Paul began with husbands and wives, went on to children and their fathers (supported by their mothers), and then to slaves and masters who were often, not always, but often, a part of the home.

You see a husband would in most cases also be a father, and at the same time he might be a master, or he could be a servant. In the same way, a wife would probably be also a mother, but she also might be a servant. So there is a lot of overlap in what Paul was writing to the various groups he mentioned from 5:22 to 6:9. Their culture was very different from our culture. They spoke a different language, and there were many other differences between their practices and ours. BUT, basically their relationships to each other were the same for them that they are for us today. Husbands were to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and their wives were to be submissive to them in the same way that they sought to be submissive to the Lord. Children were to be obedient to their parents; parents were to teach their children obedience, but the fathers were not to be strict to the point where it would be impossible for their children to be obedient to them.

And so when it came to servants and masters, we are still to be thinking about the home. A whole family could be servants if the father and mother were servants. Or the family could be well-to-do, and have servants helping them in their home. We don't have situations exactly like this in our homes today, so usually we think of servants and masters when we read our text for today, and the parallel passage in Colossians 3:22 to 4:1, as referring to employers and employees. And there are ways in which Paul's instructions can apply to the job situation that we have

today, but there is not the intimate family relationship today between employees and employers that they had in Bible times. So I think that we should read and study this passage keeping the family in mind. Actually servants were often very dear to their masters, and *vice versa*, and yet often the relationship was very difficult. The word δοῦλος, which Paul used here means *a bondservant*, one who had been purchased by his master. And the word that Paul used here for master is the word, κύριος, which means *master*, or *owner*. So here is a picture of the relationship which we have with our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul called himself in Romans 1:1, “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ.” And the word he used for “servant” is δοῦλος. When we link this with what he told the believers in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 we see that we are all the Lord’s bondservants.

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

Now as important as that truth is, in Ephesians 6:5-8 Paul was not addressing those servants in Ephesus as servants of God, but as servants of human lords or masters.

We have one great story in the Bible of a master and his slave. Most of you know that I am speaking about Paul’s letter to Philemon. It is just a one-chapter letter, but it is full of important truth for the master/bond-servant relationship in NT times.

Philemon was the master; he was the lord. He may have had several slaves, or bondservants, but our interest is in a slave whose name was Onesimus. Paul in writing to Philemon about Onesimus said that he had been “unprofitable” to his master, Philemon. In fact, he ran away from Philemon, and may have stolen some money from him before he ran away, or it may have been that he had a habit of stealing from his master. There were apparently a lot of slaves in those days who ran away. That was their way of getting out of a situation that they did not like.

Well, in the providence of God, Onesimus, who was not a Christian, went to Rome, probably because it would be easier for him to escape detection because Rome was a big city. We don’t know if he got into trouble, or how it all came about, but Onesimus came into contact with the Apostle

Paul, and was gloriously saved. Paul was certain, probably because he had the opportunity to observe Onesimus some time after he professed faith in Christ.

Onesimus must have told Paul his story, and Paul knew his master, Philemon, because it seems that the believers in Colosse met in Philemon's home. So we can be certain that Onesimus did not leave Philemon because Philemon had mistreated him. But Paul knew that this whole situation with Philemon had to be settled, and so when Paul wrote his letter to the church at Colosse, he also wrote a letter to Philemon encouraging Philemon to take Onesimus back as his bondservant. But he told Philemon that Onesimus had been saved, and Paul assured Philemon that he would now be a profitable servant. And then Paul said this in his letter to Philemon:

15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account (Ph. 15-18).

Now I don't believe that Paul was asking Philemon to change Onesimus' state as a servant, but he wanted Philemon to know that the Onesimus whom he was sending back, was not the same Onesimus who had run away. And I believe that what Paul wrote about slaves in Ephesians and in Colossians was basically what Paul had taught Onesimus before he sent him back to his master. We don't know what Paul Harvey would call, "the end of the story," but I feel certain in my own heart, that Philemon accepted him back, that Onesimus resumed his duties as a faithful and profitable servant for Philemon, and that what had been a bad situation became one that glorified their heavenly Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now as I studied this passage in Ephesians again, I asked myself, and then I did something far better, I asked the Lord to give me guidance to give you something that you could carry away which would benefit you and me both spiritually, and by saying "spiritually," I mean in our relationship with the Lord.

We all have to admit that sometimes there are problems between a husband and his wife. Sometimes there are problems between parents

and children. Sometimes there are problems between employees and employers. And then there are numerous other situations in which we have problems with other people.

Recently Lucille and I got a letter from a dear friend of ours. She was commenting on our generation today, and she said this:

Somehow we have lost the significance of commitment. Don't like this job? Get another one. Don't like this church? Get another one. Don't like this wife? Get another one.

And then she added, "Makes me shudder."

Onesimus was unhappy about something. Perhaps he didn't like for his master to tell him what to do. That is often the source of conflicts. We may have acquaintances which rub us the wrong way. And so, instead of dealing with the problem, we just try to avoid that person.

If we could raise Onesimus from the dead and ask him, "What made the big change in you so that you decided to go back to Philemon's home if he would let you?" In many ways Onesimus' story is very similar to the Lord's story about the prodigal son which is found in Luke 15:11-32. In it we have the additional problem of the older brother who resented the great way in which the father had welcomed his son home.

In our text in Ephesians, I am sure that Paul would not have mentioned husbands and wives if he had not know of couples who were having problems. In the same way he wouldn't have mentioned parents and children if he hadn't known that there were parents who were unhappy with some of their children, and children in rebellion against their parents. And, knowing about Onesimus, Paul could probably have cited situation after situation where masters and servants were on the outs with each other. Where do we begin in looking for the answers? Where did Paul begin with Onesimus?

Here is my first point:

## **I. WE NEED TO BEGIN WITH OURSELVES.**

I hope you remember when we began this series having to do with the home that Paul did not tell the wives what their husbands ought to be doing, neither did he tell the husbands what the wives should be doing. He did not tell the children what their parents should be doing. He did

tell the fathers what the children should be doing, but then he told them not to be unreasonable in their demands. Coming down to servants and masters we find the same thing. He spoke to the servants, or slaves, about themselves, and he spoke to the masters about themselves.

It all adds up to this. In these unhappy situations that we all face many times in our lives, *we need to take a good look at ourselves to see where it is that we need to change.* With Onesimus it meant that he needed to be saved. I would love to have heard the Apostle Paul talking to Onesimus about his need of Christ to be his Savior. We don't know if that went well the first time Paul brought that subject up, or not. But eventually, and I am sure that it was in answer to Paul's prayer, and maybe Philemon's prayers also, Onesimus trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior. God made him a new creature, and his life was changed.

Now not everybody who claims to be a Christian, is a Christian. And not all Christians live like Christians should live. But whatever the situation may be, things have to be made right with the Lord *first*. Whenever things are not right between two people, husband and wife, parent and child, master and service, there is something that needs attention in one or usually both of their lives. This has to come *first*. I believe in our text in Ephesians Paul was speaking especially to Christians.

But the second point that arises out of our text is this:

## **II. BEGIN BY BEING OBEDIENT TO THE BASIC COMMAND THAT THE LORD HAS GIVEN TO EACH GROUP.**

For the wife it is "submit." For the husband he is to love his wife. For the child, "obey." For the rebellious servant, it is to obey God. For the master it is to forbear threatening, and to manifest toward his servant the same kind of attitude that he wants to see in his servant. The issue in every case is the need to be obedient to God, to do what the Lord tells each one to do.

The original sin with both Adam and Eve, was disobedience to God. There isn't anything that any of us can do that is more pleasing to God than to be obedient to His Word. Paul called unsaved people "children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). We show our love for God by our obedience to what He tells us to do in His Word. Our Lord said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

Let me give you a verse for this. You will find it in Proverbs 16:7:

7 When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

If pleasing the Lord makes peace with our enemies, what will it do in our family and church relationships.

But I want to give us all one more point before I let you go.

### **III. NOTICE THE REFERENCES TO THE LORD THAT ARE MADE THROUGHOUT OUR TEXT FOR TODAY.**

Let me show you what I mean.

In verse 5, how is a servant to do his work? (Read the whole verse, but emphasize the last three words: “as unto Christ.”)

In verse 6 we are told the attitude we are to have. (Read the verse, but emphasize the last seven words: “doing the will of God from the heart.”)

In verse 7 the servant is to serve his master, “as to the Lord, and not unto men.

In verse 8 we see that when we put the Lord first in our lives, He, the Lord, will give the rewards. The primary rewards will be the Lord’s blessing, and peace of heart. But there may also be other material ways that blessing will come.

In verse 9 Paul did the same with masters. Paul said to them that they were to deal with their servants in the same loving way that they want their servants to deal with them, And he told the masters how they needed to remember the Lord: “knowing that your Master also is in heaven” – the place of supreme authority.

And here let me give you a verse from the OT, words spoken I am sure many times by King David. You will find these words in Psalm 16:8:

8 I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

David did not mean that he had the authority to place the Lord wherever he wanted Him to be, but he meant that he was always mindful that he was living in the presence of the Lord – that the Lord always knew where he was, knew everything that David did, heard every word that David spoke,

saw everything that he wrote. knew everything that David thought!

What a difference it would make in all of our lives if, although we cannot see Him, we would *know*, as Paul said in Ephesians 6:9, that the Lord is just as present everywhere as if could see Him visibly present with us this very moment. We need to make a daily habit of recognizing the presence of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The change that it would make in our lives would be very apparent to all.

**Concl:** Next Sunday morning, the Lord willing, we are going to begin the study of our spiritual warfare. All that we have studied in Ephesians up to today, has been in preparation for the daily conflict we are all involved in with the Devil and all of the forces of evil. We have come through a kind of spiritual “boot camp.” It needs to be said that if we do not admit the reality of the Devil and his opposition to the truth, we will come to a new realization of his hatred of God and every-thing that has to do with holy living when we seek to put into practice the teachings of this great epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. I trust that we are learning our lessons well, and that we will keep on learning as the Lord continues to prepare His Church for our daily combat with our enemy.