

RBC Bible Study 2023

1 Timothy Bible Study

11/8/23

Dealing with Slavery and Godly Contentment (1 Timothy 6:1-10)

(6:1-2) How Believing Slaves Should Treat their Masters: Nothing about Paul's words to Christian slaves would have been upsetting to ancient believers. Within the Greco-Roman context, slaves were, with very exceptions, on the bottom rung of society socially. But this was not always the case economically. In some cases, slaves fared better than free people because they were able to have sustenance. The economy of this world was quite brutal. There was not social safety net. So, if you were poor, you typically had no assistance from institutions. So, Paul encouraged those who were enslaved to honor those who were their masters. He even suggested that they do them benefaction, which is a reversal of the roles. Benefaction was done from master to slave and not vice versa. The change in role activity reflects the Christian worldview which Paul is introducing in his command.

Christians believed in a fellowship where there was neither "slave nor free person" (Gal 3:28). Paul promoted the notion that in Christ there was inextricable egalitarianism. All were equal in the eyes of God. But this was no so in the world. Paul could not destroy slavery with the stroke of his pen or the loudness of his words. Instead, he urged believers to endure and to do good works towards their masters while in slavery. In 1 Cor 7:21, he suggested those who could be free should seek freedom, if possible. But here, he suggests that they try to show respect to them. In such a case, the church is able to thrive within a society that supports and advocates for master/slave stratification. While the kingdom of God did not, Paul offers the counsel that the church take care in promoting the need to dignify the enslaved while also not needlessly disrupting the system too much. This is why in Philemon, Paul sends Onesimus back. He was legally obligated to send the runaway slave back to Philemon. But Paul makes sure to tell Philemon to set him free!

(6:3-11) The Power of Godly Contentment: Paul turns his attention to the issue of greed. Gain is not godliness, Paul says. While, then, as it is now, gain is certainly perceived as godliness, it is not so. Paul urged believers to pursue godliness and the truth of the gospel but not to get caught up in worldly status and riches. The two can often become intertwined in the minds of believers. We will often assume that God is in something that has wealth. But this is not always the case. Rather, godliness with contentment is great gain. When we pursue the will of God and to be covenant with Jesus Christ, have gained all things. It is not found in any advancement in worldly circumstance. This is important but not central. What is important is our relationship with God and our working out our salvation in the world.