

Bondservants for God

Part 2: Biblical Submission Series

I. Intro

- a. Imagine: We time travel back to the first century and have a house church just outside the city of Rome. Look out window and see a chariot ride by, and occasionally Roman soldiers marching by in their regiments. One day, without notice, barbarians come and raid our home, and take Adam as prisoner, take him back to their country and make him a slave. They ask for a \$5 million ransom for his safe return.
 - i. What will Adam do? How will he conduct himself?
 - ii. We don't have the money. What will we do? How will we conduct ourselves?
 - iii. We'll come back to these questions later in our lesson.
- b. Today, the second of a series on Biblical submission. Important that we understand what the Scriptures teach about submission so we
 - i. are not influenced by the world's standards;
 - ii. are ready to respond to situations we find ourselves in; and
 - iii. learn important lessons about what is most important to God and have His perspective on things.

II. Read 1 Peter 2:11-12

- a. Peter tells the Christians to do two things:
 - i. "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against your soul."
 1. We are just passing through, headed for final destination of heaven. Denying ourselves of pleasures now for a future reward.
 2. This sounds like The Exodus Map! We are not here to create a wonderful life with the scorpions and snakes in the desert. Our goal is get out of the desert and make it to the Promised Land!
 - ii. "having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation."

1. Called to do good works, with honorable conduct
 2. so that the Gentiles may glorify God when Jesus returns!
- iii. This is the context of the next part of the Scripture, which was the topic of the last lesson I taught, on submitting ourselves to the governing authorities. Quick review...
- b. Read **1 Peter 2:13-17**
- i. “Therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme or to governors....”
 1. We obey the laws whether we agree with them or not, including paying our taxes, the speed limits, etc. (as long as they do not cause us to disobey God’s word).
 2. We don’t trash the president or other officials. “Honor all people.... Fear God. Honor the king.”
 3. We don’t rebel against or overthrow the government.
 - ii. Remember the context: Peter and the Christians are suffering incredible persecution from Nero, a wicked king who tortured Christians.
 1. No big deal. Not living for this world. Just passing through, headed to a different place, heaven.
 2. Our goal: honorable conduct and silence evil men by our good deeds, and win over as many as possible!
 - iii. Peter says you are free, “not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.”
 1. This introduces our topic for today: submission of servants/bondservants/slaves to their masters.
 2. So, what is a bondservant? “Bondservants” – from Greek word “*doulos*”, which can be translated in several ways, including slave, bond servant, or servant. Peter says you are free (from sin) but bondservants of Christ. *Doulos* used in many places in OT (LXX) and NT.
 - a. Slave.
 - i. “Remember this day, in which you went out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage [or

slavery]; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place.” (**Exodus 13:3**)

b. Bond servant.

- i. **1 Peter 2**, which we just looked at.
- ii. Bond servant: a person who serves another for a period of time. May have gone into debt and sold self into servitude. Had certain rights. But you belonged to your master until the service was completed. Less freedom than a paid servant (who could walk away), but more freedom than a slave (as we think of slave).
- iii. (Some Bibles translate *doulos* as slave, others as bondservant. ESV changed to bondservant, in part because the term slave conjures up very strong negative connotation / meaning, which did not match what the Greek word meant.)

c. Servant.

- i. “For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant [*“doulos”*], ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” (Centurion in **Matthew 8:9**)
- ii. “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master.” (Jesus in **Matthew 10:24-25**)
- iii. **Matthew 18:23-35**
 1. Parable of the unmerciful servant (*“doulos”*).
 2. Not clear the economic relationship with his master, but under the Master’s authority, has great debt, debt forgiven, and fails to forgive debt owed to him.
- iv. **Matthew 25:14-30**
 1. Three servants (*douloi*) given money to invest, freedom to invest as they wished and given time. Each called to account.

2. Two receive praise: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”
 3. One receives punishment: “You wicked and lazy servant.”
 4. Many of Jesus’ parables have characters that include masters and servants, many which are referred to as “*douloi*” with lessons for us.
3. So, we see that being a *doulos* could mean a person who was in a range of situations: a slave, someone who sold themselves into servitude but had some freedoms and liberties, or simply a servant/worker with opportunity for advancement.
 4. Let’s take a look at what the Scriptures teach us about how we live out our faith and Christianity if we are in the role of a servant, bondservant, or slave.
 5. Let’s return to our passage in **1 Peter 2**.

III. Submission of Slaves and Servants to Masters

- a. Read **1 Peter 2:18-25**
- b. “Servants be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.”
 - i. Why is it commendable, if because of conscience toward God to endure grief and suffer wrongfully?
 1. “For to this you were called.” Because Christ suffered for us, we are to follow in his footsteps.
 2. God has laid out suffering for us. That we endure with conscience toward Him to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to suffer as God’s Son suffered.
 3. “Beloved, do not think it is strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” (**1 Peter 4:12-13**)

4. This is commendable. Do we see it as commendable?
 5. Is this teaching in **1 Peter** based on culture of the local times?
- c. This seems a bit radical. What about Paul, did he have anything to say about servants?

i. Read **Ephesians 6:5-9**

1. Paul uses the term bondservant. Consider what he is saying to Christian bondservants in Ephesus. A bondservant is to:
 - a. Be obedient with fear and trembling to earthly master
 - b. In sincerity of heart, as to Christ
 - c. Not with eyeservice as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ (who sees all)
 - d. Doing the will of God from his heart (not begrudgingly)
 - e. Knowing he will receive a reward from the Lord later, even if not adequately compensated now
2. Paul had something to say to masters as well:
 - a. you should do the same, and give up threatening
 - b. You also have a master in heaven, who shows no partiality (who you will meet on the Last Day)
3. Let's get practical
 - a. First, Peter's teaching destroys the idea that once you become a Christian, our lives will get easier, better, more comfortable and we will be more prosperous. Maybe, maybe not! We should be expecting fiery trials, not be surprised.
 - b. Second, as a servant, as an employee, or as someone with clients, whose authority we may be under – the same commands laid out by Peter and Paul apply to us today:
 - i. Obedient with fear, trembling (God as Master)
 - ii. Not only when their eye is upon us (integrity, honesty, deadlines, quality)
 - iii. Doing the will of God from the heart

- iv. not just working hard and with excellence “as if working for the Lord” (Colossians 3:22-41)
 - 1. many work hard and excellently without God in mind.
 - 2. We need to ask: how does God want me to work? (goes beyond excellence and working hard – honesty, care for others, humility, above reproach, etc.)
 - v. Working not for a paycheck, but for an eternal reward. (Much further off than my 401k.)
 - vi. These create a very different perspective in how I go in and do my work!
- c. Joseph’s example
- i. From wealthy family, favorite son to slave sold by brothers (terrible situation)
 - ii. Read **Genesis 39:1-9**
 - 1. “[Potiphar] left all he had in Joseph’s hand, and did not know what he had except for the bread he ate.” (so did the jailor and Pharaoh!)
 - 2. “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (was serving God)
- d. I also need to consider how I am doing as a master, boss
- i. How do I treat those under my authority?
 - ii. Jesus’ example and expectations
 - 1. Read **Philippians 2:3-8**
 - 2. Read **Matthew 20:25-28**
 - a. “whoever wants to be great among you, let him be your servant”
 - b. “And whoever wants to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,

and give His life a ransom for many.”

- c. Jesus gave his life for others, we are called to do the same, to serve one another.

- iii. In Christ, every Christian master, boss, manager is called to be a humble servant/slave to others.

IV. How does God view the situation of servants and slaves?

- a. Read **Exodus 6:5-9**

- i. “I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage.”
- ii. “I will rescue you from bondage and redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgments.”

- b. But, God allows (and protects through) oppressive times: Joseph, and Jacob (God protects Jacob through 20 years of hard labor, see **Genesis 31:38-42**)

- c. Read **1 Corinthians 7:17-24**

- i. Paul is instructing people in various life situations: married, single, married to someone who is not a Christian.
- ii. If you were called to Christ in a certain state of life, that is fine.
 - 1. Don't need to get circumcised.
 - 2. Don't need to get uncircumcised.
 - 3. If a slave, “do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it.”
 - a. Get free if you can, otherwise, not a big deal, don't concern yourself about changing your position.
 - b. For us today, debt can be a master which we should throw off!
 - i. “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.” (Proverbs 22:7)
 - ii. We need to be serious about extricating ourselves from this type of slavery.

4. "For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave."
 - a. If a slave, you are free in Christ – free from sin, from Satan, from bondage.
 - i. You have been cleansed; have gained an eternal salvation/inheritance with all believers, which will be granted in the future.
 - b. But, if you were freeman when called, you are now a slave to Christ!
 - i. We were all purchased by the blood of Jesus, He owns us now.
 - ii. You voluntarily give up your freedom to lay down your own life for others/God. Like Jesus and Paul, voluntarily took on suffering for the Gospel!
5. In the big scheme of things, what God is most concerned about is our conduct in whatever station of life we are in, whether a slave, master, servant, employee, business owner, carpenter, whatever. Most God cares most about is that we get to the Promised Land/Heaven.

d. Read **Philemon**.

- i. Letter from Paul to Philemon.
- ii. Philemon had bondservant Onesimus, who deserted Philemon, and it appears wronged him and owed him money.
- iii. God leads Onesimus to Paul, Onesimus becomes a Christian, and is ministering to Paul, who is in chains/imprisoned.
- iv. Paul sends him back to his master Philemon.
 1. Tells Philemon that he, Paul, will pay for anything Onesimus owes him.
 2. Tells Philemon that he, Philemon, owes Paul his very self!
- v. "For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave – a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in

the flesh and in the Lord. If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.”

1. Paul willing to pay off his debt, buy his freedom.
 2. Paul sacrifices what was to his benefit, to see these two men reconciled, to see Onesimus do the right thing, submit himself to his master and Master!
 3. How would it turn out? Sending a bondservant to return to his master! What a terrible idea!
- vi. “Now concerning those bishops which have been ordained in our lifetime, we let you know that they are these [goes on to list the original bishops and those who succeeded them after they died, including]: -- James the bishop of Jerusalem, the brother of our Lord... Of Caesarea of Palestine, the first was Zacchaeus, who was once a publican; ... of Ephesus, Timotheus, ordained by Paul... Of Collossae, Philemon. Of Borea in Macedonia, Onesimus, once the servant of Philemon....” (Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, c. 375-390 AD, ANF 7.478)

e. Early Christian quotes on how they viewed slavery and slaves/servants

i. Christians compassion for those in slavery:

1. “As for such sums of money as are collected from them in the aforesaid manner, designate them to be used for the redemption of the saints and the deliverance of slaves and captives.” (Apostolic Constitutions c. 390, ANF 7.435)
2. “We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to slavery, in order that they could ransom others. Many others have surrendered themselves to slavery, so that with the price that they received for themselves, they might provide food for others.” (Clement of Rome, c. 96, ANF 1.20. Clement of Rome was a Bishop of the church in Rome. He may have been companion of both Peter and Paul, see Philippians 4:3.)

ii. Regarding equality

1. “Someone will say, ‘Are there not among you some who are poor and others who are rich? Are not some servants and others masters? Is there not some difference between individuals?’ There is none. Nor is there any other cause why we mutually bestow upon each other the name of brethren, except that we believe ourselves to be equal. We measure all human things by the spirit, not by the body. Although the

condition of bodies is different, yet we have no servants. For we both regard and speak of them as brothers in spirit and as fellow-servants in religion.” (Lactantius, c. 304-313, ANF 7.151. Lactantius was a prominent Roman teacher who converted to Christianity. In his old age he tutored Emperor Constantine’s son.)

V. What about Adam?

- a. We left Adam in captivity, enslaved by barbarians in a foreign city!
- b. What should we do?
 - i. We will do all we can to raise the ransom. Sell our homes, cars, work more, to see Adam freed. Just like Christians have done in the past.
 - ii. If we can’t, we know that Jesus has already ransomed Him. He is free in Christ, and no captor has final hold on Adam.
- c. What should Adam do?
 - i. By his example of doing good works and being conscience of God, working hard for his captors, without complaining, without stealing, with integrity, hard work – he may win some to Christ. And he is storing up a rich inheritance above.
 - ii. Perhaps Adam will be freed, like Joseph, like Israel, like Onesimus. Perhaps not. But we will see him when we reach heaven on that last day when Christ arises. What an amazing reunion that will be! While God has compassion for us and hears our groaning, His view and reward are eternal.
 - iii. May we all be bondservants for God – excellent, humble servants of our heavenly Father and Master, laying down our lives for one another, and be excellent, humble servants to our earthly masters as well.