

# Abiding Fruit

*Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart*

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## **Eye-Service & People-Pleasers Ephesians 6:5 - 9**

One of the areas that causes Christians great difficulty is that of slavery or indentured servants. In the New Testament, the existence of slaves was prevalent, understood and accepted. Today, of course, we abhor slavery and servitude. We believe that all men are created equal in the sight of God, all men and women bear the stamp of their Creator. Equality in terms of human dignity and image is something every Christian ought to affirm and promote. It is true also, that in terms of roles and function in the lives of individuals, there is not equality. We understand this since we see the practical application of it in our own lives. Businesses have a hierarchical structure of leadership, and within that structure there are various levels of leadership.

The New Testament offers no definitive statement about slavery in terms of abandoning it as a practice. In fact, Jesus accepts slavery and makes no mention of it as something abominable and abhorrent, and even the Apostle Paul makes no effort to suggest that slavery should be abolished or that slaves should rebel against their masters.

In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul uses the term, “slaves” often, but he is referring to our bondage to sin. First century Christians would understand what this bondage meant because of their background in human slavery. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul addresses his remarks to those who are Jews and Greeks, slaves or free and views them as one because of their union with Christ through the Spirit and their being brought into the Body of Christ. Paul remarks therefore, on slavery in two ways. In one sense, he is referring to bondage to sin, and in this case, Paul does urge that great effort be made not to be in slavery to sin. In the other sense, Paul simply refers to slaves in their position of slavery, and urges them to submit to their earthly masters with gladness, sincerity and willingness (see Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9).

On the other side of the coin, earthly masters are to treat their slaves with fairness and justice (Col. 4:1). Paul’s mention of both slaves and masters in the context of all the references that he makes, must be from the Christian perspective. Paul is referring to Christian slaves and Christian masters. His instructions would, of course, be of immense benefit to unbelieving slaves and masters, but because they are outside of Christ, there would be no compulsion or desire to live as Paul suggests. It would, in fact, be completely foreign and probably impossible for them to practice what Paul is stating. This is not to say, that there were not good masters and good slaves – there were.

Both masters and slaves understood the ramifications of abuse. Masters had complete power over their slaves, since slaves were regarded as property of the master. Slaves who rebelled or ran away were liable to the severest penalty – that of death. This is why when we read Paul’s letter to Philemon about Onesimus, the slave who ran away, Paul urges to Philemon to receive Onesimus back with open arms, since he became a Christian under Paul. For Paul to send Onesimus back, suggests that Paul believed that there was a bond between master and slave. Philemon, of course, could set Onesimus free, if he so chose, but it involved legalities to be followed.

Jean Jacques Rousseau said that, “*man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains,*” which was his commentary on a world of liberty in which men were slaves. The cause of all slavery is sin. Most Christians

analyze Old Testament slavery within the framework and context of human slavery during the past two hundred years or so. This surely colors a true understanding of indentured servitude in the Old Testament. We must never forget that Israel, as an entire nation was in slavery in Egypt. They knew slavery in its most horrible forms. They were ready for freedom, and God set them free. In Israelite society, however, God made provision for indentured servitude to operate most efficiently and with the indentured person's best interests at heart. Five forms of servitude existed in Israel. There was debt bond service for up to 7 years; becoming a permanent hired worker for up to 49 years; serving up to 49 years as servant in a resident alien's house; restitution bond service for convicted criminals, and voluntary lifetime servitude in a household to a master.

There is no denying the supremacy of the theocratic rule by God in ancient Israel, and along with that reign of God came subjugation for Israel's enemies. No Christian should ever be embarrassed with any section of God's Word because it is truth from God Himself. We may not be able to explain or understand all things, but this never changes the fact that the Bible is the Word of God given to us for our benefit and edification.

There is no indication anywhere in the New Testament that Jesus or His disciples or Paul ever stated that slavery should be abolished and that the political process should be used to that end. They simply recognized the present conditions, and then exhorted believers who were slaves to respond in certain ways because they were believers (1 Cor. 7:17 – 24). The same applied to Christian masters. Slaves who were believers and who served pagan masters were also to demonstrate by their lives that their service to their earthly master stemmed from their service to their heavenly Master. If it was possible to become free, then Paul advocated that slaves avail themselves of that opportunity (1 Cor. 7:21). In this regard, Paul issues instructions to Christian slaves as to how they are to serve their earthly masters. In Ephesians 6:6 (see also Col. 3:22); Paul states that the service of a Christian slave was to be done as service to Christ. This meant that their earthly service was also a heavenly service. They were not to serve their earthly masters with an eye to pleasing them or seeking to draw attention to themselves by way of their service, or only when the eye of the master was on them. It was to be humble sincere service all the time; service that drew no attention to self. It was to be an unflattering kind of service. Whatever the task, no matter how demeaning or menial it was, it was to be done as service to Christ. The only time a Christian slave would be exempt from this was when they would be required to do something unlawful in the sight of God and against God. Such disobedience would be considered obedience to God and would probably result in severe punishment or even death. This has never changed for Christians because we are the servants of Christ. In fact, every free Christian was to consider themselves as a slave to Christ (bound to Him), and every slave in Christ was to consider themselves as free men and women (read 1 Cor. 7:20 – 24).

Christian slaves were to serve with their eyes on the inheritance that awaits them. This reward is from the Lord Himself, their true Master. His eye is on them always. The Christian who is a slave to Christ is also to serve in this way. Since we do not have earthly slavery in our society (there are societies, or course, where slavery still exists), we are to recognize that we are in bondage to Jesus, and our service to Him is to be exactly the same as a Christian slave in the first century. We are not to serve with an eye to pleasing others in the hopes that we receive their praise and adulation. We are not to be people-pleasers. The weakness of the Church is due to this problem. Instead of having our eyes on Christ, our eyes are on others to the detriment of Christ. We are to serve others, which implies a caring consideration and concern for them, but if you are serving them to win their praise, you have lost your reward in heaven (cf. Matt. 6:1, 2, 5, 16). Let us not serve our Lord as men-pleasers or by way of eye-service. Let us be true, sincere bond slaves of our Lord Jesus Christ indentured to Him by His redeeming blood for all eternity. Let us serve our fellow men because we serve the risen Christ. This is doing the will of God from the heart (Eph. 6:6).

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