

## **1 TIMOTHY 6:1-2**

*(Reading: Philemon 1-25; 1 Peter 2:13-25)*

### **The Way We Are In The World!**

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy is a letter about Church order.

It is an epistle from the apostle Paul which outlines very clearly how things are meant to be run in the Church.

As the apostolic age comes to an end here the Lord divinely guides one of those apostles to lay down His guidance in writing which previously had been through their speaking.

But along the way, this letter has also touched into how the Church ought to regard the world around her – and also the way the world ought to regard the Church!

We saw that in the way we are to pray for our secular rulers in chapter 2, and the way those outside of the Church have to think highly of our prospective elders in chapter 3.

So the Body of Christ is seen to be very much in this world, and yet also haven't we seen how much we're not to be of this world!

It's how we show the difference faith makes which comes out especially now in this text.

I mean, isn't it as we live lives pleasing God that Christians make the greatest impact for good in this world?

So what we have here is nothing less than the spiritual fuel for genuine revival.

This is how the Spirit makes God's Word bear fruit in a diseased and dying world.

Friend, don't you want to make a difference out there?

And how much won't you stand out through living in the way the Lord's servant declares here?

So let's shine the gospel light in a world which is so very dark.

We see that in two ways this afternoon.

The first is found in verse 1.

This is where the exhortation comes to **HONOUR YOUR MASTER  
WHERE YOU ARE.**

This would not have been an easy instruction to many of those New Testament Christians.

Because they were slaves.

And that's a word which just about says it all.

For slaves are simply not free.

Describing those folk as being under "the yoke of slavery" is a particularly vivid way of picturing their position.

A yoke was a piece of wood which had been shaped to sit on the shoulders of two animals and so tie them together as they ploughed a field.

A yoke meant both those animals had to go the same way and at the same speed.

Thus slavery is very much a bondage.

And so elsewhere the apostle Paul does recommend gaining your freedom if at all possible.

But in that same verse, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:21, where he encourages a slave to get his freedom if he can, he also says that if you're a slave when you became a Christian you shouldn't let that bother you either.

While other religions and ideologies can be very much focussed on your own personal rights, the gospel puts our situation under quite a different light.

Because it's not all about you!

It's about He!

As Paul goes on in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:22, "he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave."

As many Christians were slaves in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. this was a liberating truth.

Because then at least a third of the population consisted of slaves.

Slaves who had become so because they fell into debt, or were prisoners of war, or had been kidnapped, or who had been born into it because their mothers were slaves, or who even been sold into it by their parents.

One estimate has some sixty million people in the Roman Empire being slaves.

And the early church had more than its proportion of them.

In fact, some congregations were largely made up of them!

Congregation, now we know the reason why in Paul's letters slaves are addressed specifically are a number of times.

We read of it here in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, but it's also what we heard of from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, Philemon and then Ephesians and Colossians as well.

And Peter certainly addressed it in his letters also.

But let's also realise that slaves weren't only those who had the menial jobs in society.

They were not only the rubbish collectors or cleaners or cooks or waiters.

The family doctor or lawyer could well be a slave too!

We have to be careful not to join the word 'slave' here with the terribly abusive picture of slave trading from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Then especially the Negroes were badly treated.

And while a number were well treated by their masters in the new world it was the process of getting them there that Christians then, such as William Wilberforce, spent their lives outlawing.

Today the closest equivalent position of a slave in the 1<sup>st</sup> century would be that of employee.

So these words can equally be applied into the modern work force.

And they should be.

Because that is how you HONOUR YOUR MASTER WHERE YOU ARE.

And here we especially note the phrase 'full respect'.

For no matter what kind of slaves they were and how difficult their masters were, they were to honour them because they are their masters.

Now, as those living with much freedom and with much material wealth, it's not so hard bearing up with our employers.

But when you're living in poverty and there's little freedom, a spirit of rebellion easily festers.

And for those who have just come into the glorious freedom the gospel there may well be some resentment that changes aren't happening elsewhere either.

Yet it's exactly because of this new society these believers are part of – the Body of Christ – that they **have to** honour their masters.

Christians are called to have a high regard for those God has placed over them.

Starting at home with father and mothers, and going through to teachers and judges and rulers, there must be esteem for all those we're under.

That includes the boss!

The apostle Peter wrote of this in chapter 2 of his first letter.

In verse 13 there we read, "Submit yourselves **for the Lord's sake** to every authority instituted among men...".

Above all else, it is God's Name which must be held high!

He must be honoured through what they do.

And let's not forget that God's name here represents all that He is.

While God's name is often taken in vain these days, that's going to bring a terrible judgment on those swearing it.

Because when they use it as a swear word they bring God's name into disgrace.

The name of God is holy.

It stands for everything He is.

And so it is that whatever we do must reverence His Name in the highest possible way.

You only need to think of what happens in the work place when the manager is not highly regarded.

Because what happens when that disregard becomes despising?

It affects the whole atmosphere there.  
There's a poison spread which only breaks down.  
And in the end, after so much bitterness and unhappiness and lost productivity,  
someone has to go!

The 'teaching' Paul speaks of here is that which proclaims all that God's name stands for.  
This is saying that the gospel must not be hindered in any way.  
And Christian slaves living ungodly lives would certainly be one such  
hindrance!

Then you could imagine the kind of talk there would be about the believers.  
Not much different to when Christian employees do the same today.  
Because then you will hear all the criticism about how Christian say a lot  
but don't actually do much.

You know, those comments about how hypocritical we are!

As Paul says elsewhere, we must never forget that we have a Master in Heaven who sees  
all we do and to whom we are ultimately accountable.

It's when we live in that light that we shine out His Light!

And then verse 2 takes the honour due for the master or the boss into a whole different  
level.

In the words of the second point to this passage next we are told to HONOUR  
YOUR BROTHER WHERE HE IS.

Paul is concerned now for relationships with the Church.

While it's the most marvellous thing that all those in the church are equal before  
the Lord through faith in Jesus Christ, he doesn't want their continuing roles in this world  
disregarded.

While all believers are the same before God's face they don't all have the  
same place in this world.

Douglas Milne comments, "the forms and institutions of this world have not yet passed  
away."

"The Christian slave remains a slave in everyday life, and the Christian master  
still owns his slaves, even although they may in fact be fellow believers.

"The Christian slave must not exploit the working relationship to his  
master on the basis of their shared Christian faith.

"The contrary is the case."

This was shown in our reading from Philemon.

Because there it is clear that Onesimus has to go back to his master.

Congregation, we have already seen there are different callings.  
Something we have seen in the previous chapter with what was written about  
elders.

There in verse 17 the congregation is told that those elders serving faithfully are worthy of double honour.

It's the same language here.

In fact, what Paul says here is that it should be a special honour to be able to work for a fellow believer.

He goes on to say in verse 2 that "they are to serve them even better."

The same love they have for the Lord will not only help the business to prosper but it will enable the glory to be given to God all the more!

You think about it: A profitable Christian business is one that puts resources back into the church.

Not only does it provide work for believers but the income of both the boss and the employees gets given back into the church.

That helps us all to serve the Lord better.

But it also becomes a business with a good reputation.

People know they will get an honest deal when they conduct business with it.

And they know the workmanship will be the very best quality.

They will get what they expect to get – sometimes even better than they expected!

And you know what they do then?

It's all about word of mouth, isn't it?

More and more people will come through that door.

And they'll know it's a door which is closed on the Lord's Day.

Then there's that certain atmosphere at that business.

The language is wholesome, the people are healthy, and there's no pornography plastered all over the walls!

Ephesians 6 tells us what lies at the heart of that success.

There the apostle says in verses 5 till 8, "Slaves obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

"Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

"Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free."

David McCasland tells of how these verses once came to life for him.

He wrote the story of when he was at a local discount store early in the morning.

There he met a bright smile and cheerful face.

He wondered how a sales assistant could be so positive, especially at that hour of the day!

Then he saw her nametag.

And he had to look at it again because he wasn't sure if he had read it correctly.

For that nametag said: MARY-N-GOD.

He asked her if she and the Lord were doing this job together.

"Oh, yes," she said, beaming.

"He works with me and walks with me and talks with me, and we share the most wonderful life together,

"I couldn't do it without Him."

Mary was an attractive and appealing representative of Christ.

She showed the truth of Ephesians 6 verse 7 in serving the Lord from heart, doing it as though she was serving the Lord, not men.

While she's not in the limelight, Mary, through her attitude and actions, witnessed to hundreds of people every day.

Her pulpit was a checkout counter, and her smile was the opening sentence in a powerful sermon about the difference Jesus makes in your life.

If someone asked, she was happy to tell them.

Mary is clearly a slave of Christ.

She has been bought with a price – the cost no less than the precious blood of the Lord Jesus.

He's the Master who owns us, and we should love to serve Him.

We need to joyfully obey Him, doing what He says and going where He calls us, because we know He's the Master who will give us whatever we need to serve Him.

Tell me, what better thing could Timothy teach and urge on the believers in Ephesus?

And which better things could we be doing right here and now?

We are those who should be treating our heavenly Master with the utmost respect.

We are those who honour His name, because we in everything we think, and say, and do, Christ is living in us.

In fact, we spend that much time in the presence of our Master we truly reflect His glory in our lives.

Dear friend, you are a slave of Christ.

You are a bond-servant of the One who rules over all things.

And you know what a blessing that is.

In fact, you know there's no way you could never be a blessing unless you are under Him.

So let's listen up!

And let's be stirred up!

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Lord of lords and King of kings...

We have been put in our place once again.

We have been clearly told of how much we must be humble before You  
and serve You in everything.

And how glad we are!

Because this is the very best place!

O help us to live out of Your most amazing grace.

Through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, we pray, Amen.