

"Servants Under The Yoke ..."

"Let as many as are servants under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and the doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but let them serve them the rather, because they that partake of the benefit are believing and beloved" (1 Tim. 6:1f).

The religion of Christ in the first centuries were gladly embraced by some from all walks of life, but the majority of men of the first century rejected the gospel. Some, as with the Jews, violently opposed Christians, some regarded them as foolish; some heard and reported slanderous untruths about them. Some sought to hold themselves aloof from them. Even among Christians misunderstandings existed. Some (such as at Thessalonica) believed Christ's coming was eminent so they ceased working; some misunderstood their liberty; insisting that what things they had liberty to do, they would do, regardless of how it affected others. Thus it was necessary that disciples be reminded that being a Christian did not alter human relationships nor obligations. The gospel has always had greater appeal to the downtrodden. *"For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called ..."* (1 Cor. 1:26). Because of this truth, there were far more servants who became Christians than there were "masters" who bowed to "King Jesus." Paul most frequently touches upon the roles of both servants and masters, although Peter adds additional exhortations. Because slavery was so prevalent in the first century, instructions to "servants" are to be regarded to those who were slaves, although this is not always the case. Certainly 1 Corinthians 7:21 instructs slaves in saying: *"Wast thou called being a bondservant: nay, even if thou canst become free, use it rather."* Still, although slavery has been banished from our nation, Paul's instructions fit admirably today the very familiar role of "employee/employer" relationships. What do the scriptures, from different texts, teach *"servants under the yoke"* they must do?

Servants were to count their masters *"worthy of all honor"* They were to respect their masters, even though the master might be one who did little or nothing to deserve respect. Peter puts it this way *"servants be in subjection to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle but also to the froward"* (1 Pet. 2:18). Respect to masters required that servants not be disposed to *"gainsay"* (contradict) their masters (Titus 2:9). Showing honor to one's master necessarily meant they did not steal nor cheat them. These words from Titus 2:10 emphasize this point *"not purloining (pilfering) but*

showing all good fidelity." Sometimes it is not easy to show respect to a master who is "froward" (1 Pet. 2:18). Not only were servants to respect their masters, they were to obey them. The Ephesian letter says "be obedient unto them that according to the flesh are your masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart" (Eph. 6:5) Colossians were commanded to "... obey in all things those that are your masters according to the flesh" (Col. 3:22). and Titus was to "exhort servants to be in subjection to their own masters and to be well pleasing to them in all things" (Titus 2:9). This "obedience in all things" is limited. Peter and John were commanded by authorities to speak no longer in the name of Jesus and they responded "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). So, when a command comes to a servant from his master, if it violates no moral principle Christians adhere to, it is to be complied with, even if the servant believes such is not in the best interest of his master. In the event that the master is a brother, the servant is not to despise that master; rather he is to serve him the rather because his master is a partaker of the benefit, and beloved!

Service to one's master is to be offered in "*singleness of heart*" -- no hidden motive, no hypocrisy; in all good fidelity. Above all, the servant must never forget that by the way he lives, which includes the way he serves his master, he reflects good -- or bad -- upon Him whom he really is the servant of. Remember, the Holy Spirit's commands to servants apply to them in the business world, employed by others. So, in our lives when it is our lot to be hired by others to do a work for them, let us look carefully at the instructions the Holy Spirit gave to servants 2,000 years ago. Indisputably, we will profit from such a study.

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