

How to Show Honor to Employers

Slavery is first mentioned in the Bible in the book of Genesis and the last time in the book of Revelation. It occurs most often in the book of Luke. History tells us that it was very common for nations to make slaves of their enemies. It was also common for people to sell themselves and their children into slavery to work off a debt. In the Roman empire, masters owned slaves as property. Some people were initially kidnapped and others were born into slavery. As a punishment for a crime, the empire of Rome made some individuals slaves. In some countries, the owners could put slaves to hard work, torture them, and kill them because they owned them like property. Individuals could sell and buy slaves. This still occurs today in some locations, especially in the black market.

In preparation for our study, I want to quote Ralph Gower. He gives us some important information about slaves from the Old and New Testaments times. I am doing this because our study is about slaves and their masters. Ralph Gower states this about slaves in ancient Israel in his book, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*,



Most [slaves] had been captured in wartime (Numbers 31:26; Deuteronomy 21:10) or purchased from slave markets (Leviticus 25:44). Hosea bought his wife back again from a slave market. Although such slaves were regarded as property (Leviticus 25:45) they were carefully protected by the [Mosaic] law. They could not be oppressed (Deuteronomy 23:15-16), and they had

the right to Sabbath rest (Exodus 20:10) and to attend national festivals (Deuteronomy 16:10-11).

Slaves were often very well treated, as if members of the family. If they were circumcised they enjoyed most of the privileges of Jewish society except that they could not acquire property or marry foreign slaves. Good treatment was not solely a Jewish characteristic. Naaman's wife's slave was well treated (2 Kings 5:2-3), and so apparently was the Roman slave Onesimus, even at a time when Roman law made escape by a slave to be a capital offense (Philemon 17).

It was possible for a Jew to become a slave so as to repay money owed through debt or theft, or even because he

found greater security in another man's house than in his own. Families and children could be sold in this way (Exodus 21:7; 2 Kings 4:1; Matthew 18:25). Such a person would normally sell his labour for seven years

(Deuteronomy 15:12-18) unless he wanted to stay as one of the family (v. 16), in which case his ear was ceremonially pinned to the doorpost (v. 17).

Some slaves were entrusted with great authority by their masters. Eliezer was responsible for finding a wife for his master's son (Genesis 24). A master's daughter

could marry a slave (1 Chronicles 2:34-35), but if the son-in-law decided that he wanted to leave the family after all, he had to leave his wife and children behind (Exodus 21:4). Normally slaves were set free in the year of jubilee to return to their inheritance, which was freed at the same time (Leviticus 25:39-41). Slaves could be freed at any time if the debt they owed was paid by another member of their family, or even themselves (Leviticus 25:48-49); only girls sold as maidservants remained bound for life.

The generous Israelite rules toward slaves contrasted strongly with the harsh laws toward slaves in other areas of the Middle East. The economies of the Greek and Roman empires were largely built upon slavery. The New Testament accepted slavery as a fact of life (Ephesians 6:8; Colossians 3:22; Philemon 16) but it laid down the doctrinal foundations that would finally bring slavery to an end (Galatians 3:28).

A different form of slavery was known in Israel.¹

You can see that the Mosaic laws were very unique in comparison to other countries. God wanted the Israelites to care for their slaves.

At NeverThirsty we have been asked why the Bible does not prohibit slavery. The answer is that the Bible never tells us. Yet, it is clear that God has given us principles that should end slavery. It is also clear that civil laws cannot change the hearts of men and women. Slavery is occurring today in some countries due to unloving hearts. This results in tyrannical nations. Tyranny is just another form of slavery. Tyranny can only be ended by changing the hearts of men. So, it appears that God took the approach of changing the hearts of men and women in order to set everyone free. It is the hearts of men and women that must change to eliminate evil.

Unbelieving Masters are Worthy of Honor.

Our study is from 1 Timothy 6:1-2. It is primarily about the attitude of one's heart. That is the overarching principle

taught in this passage. It is a call to show love. But the details are about slaves and masters.

As I was studying this passage, I realized that it may not seem to apply to us in the United States of America because slavery is illegal. We can thank the men and women who fought the Civil War to end the ownership of people. We thank God for the civil rights laws that have been passed which ended slavery. So, what is the benefit of studying this passage? The answer is that God's overarching principle also applies to employees and employers.

The Holy Spirit teaches us two principles in these two verses. Verse 1 gives us the first principle. The first principle is that slaves are to regard unbelieving masters as worthy of honor. This principle also applies to employees. Employees are to regard their employers as worthy of honor too! Here is the first verse,

All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against. 1 Timothy 6:1 (NASB)

In order to understand this verse, we must first notice that God is speaking to real slaves and to their masters. God is not speaking to servants, but to real slaves. Why do we know that? In the Greek culture the word that is used in this verse for "slaves" is *doulos*. It does not refer to servants but to slaves.

Also notice the Greek word for "masters" is *despotes*. It is used of Christ three times in the New Testament (2 Timothy 2:21; 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4). Since Christ was not a cruel and unloving master, this helps us understand that *despotes* can be used in a negative or positive sense. In our passage, it merely refers to someone who has total control over another person. The Greek culture used both *doulos* and *despotes* together in reference to slaves. This is the second reason we know that Paul is referring to people who are under the control of someone else. The passage is about slaves.

So, the Holy Spirit is telling slaves to regard their masters as worthy of honor. The Greek word for "honor" is once again *tima*. It means "respect." So, we have learned that we are to honor the elderly, those younger than us, true widows,

1. Ralph Gower. Bereavement. The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times. Moody Publishers. 2005. pp. 56-57.

the elders of the church, and slaves must regard their masters as being worthy of honor. Military veterans understand this concept of regarding a superior as being worthy of honor. In the military, soldiers are taught to salute the rank and not the man. So, Paul tells slaves to respect their masters, not because they are wonderful people, but because Christ wants them to be shown respect. We need to apply this principle to ourselves. We need to show honor to even those who control us, whom we may not like.

The reason for this command is that, “The name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against.” Can you imagine the bad testimony that Christian slaves could have given to their master?

While a person’s freedom is very important, the potential salvation of the master was even more important. Imagine a slave not paying off the debt his master had paid for him or his family in exchange for his service, as an



act of rebellion. Imagine a criminal who was paying off his crime, now being insubordinate and unwilling to suffer for his wrong. Most likely their masters would have been furious with the slave if they were lazy, refused to work, was rude, or ran away. But worst of all, these masters might have rejected Jesus Christ, and considered the teaching of Scripture to be dangerous.

Imagine what would have happened if the early Christians had campaigned for anarchy and urged the 50,000 slaves to rebel against the Roman empire! Historical records reveal that the Roman empire was extremely intolerant of any rebellion by slaves. Therefore, imagine what the empire would have done to Christians had they motivated slaves to rebel.

Rome might have killed vast numbers of believers. The real solution was not a civil law in order to force obedience to a biblical command, but changed hearts as the result of people becoming believers. Imagine how Christ feels about rebellious believers!

Titus 2:9-10 gives slaves another instruction. It says,

Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect. Titus 2:9-10 (NASB)

Here slaves are told to be well-pleasing, to not argue, to not steal, and to be faithful in everything. Why are they to behave this way? So that they will bring great honor and beauty to the doctrine or teaching of God our Savior. The

message is that we can bring dishonor not on the Bible we hold in our hand, but on the teachings in the Bible. How we behave can motivate someone to reject the Bible.

1 Peter 2:18-19 gives slaves a second reason to give honor to masters. It says,

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. 1 Peter 2:18-19 (NASB)

The Greek word for servants is *doulos* and the Greek word for masters is *despotes*. It is identical to 1 Timothy 6:1. Notice this time we are told that slaves are to submit with all respect even when masters are not reasonable. Now most of us would probably refuse. But verse 19 gives us the principle that God wants slaves to still submit, even though they experience sorrow and suffer. Slaves are to obey so that their conscience does not feel guilt. This means that giving honor to a master begins in the heart. If the heart is pleasing to God, then the slave would work hard, be committed, be honest about the hours worked, and do it with a positive attitude.

So, the first principle in 1 Timothy 6:1 is that slaves are to regard unbelieving masters as worthy of honor or respect.

Believing Masters as Worthy of Honor. The second principle is given to us in 1 Timothy 6:2. It says that slaves are to regard believing masters as worthy of honor.

Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles. 1 Timothy 6:2 (NASB)

Slaves show believing masters honor by serving them all the more than what they were told to do in Paul's first principle. They are to never show disrespect. Why? Because both the slave and master are believers.

J. Vernon McGee makes this great comment in his commentary on 1 Timothy.

Now suppose a Christian has a Christian boss. That puts their relationship on a different basis; it brings it to a level above any kind of contract. I know of a manufacturing plant in Dallas, Texas, where the owners are Christians and many seminary students are employed. I have had the privilege of speaking to them in a forty-five minute chapel service they have and for which time the workers are paid. The spirit is marvelous there, and one time I commended the management for it. They replied, "Don't commend us! We find that these Christian men are better workers than anybody

else. It's a two-way street. They are such wonderful employees that we don't feel that we are giving them anything. They give so much to us." What a wonderful relationship!²

You see, Christianity gets out into the workshop. It gets its hands greasy. It gets its feet down in the mud sometimes—not the mud of sin, but the mud of hard work.

So, the first and the second principles are essentially the same. They are about a heart problem. Some slaves were lazy, and did not want to submit to another person. That is, they did not want to please Jesus Christ. Such slaves did not give honor to their masters.

Think about what we have learned. Slaves are to regard both unbelieving and believing masters as worthy of honor. That reveals they must be willing to submit to their master, to please their master, not argue with, not steal from, not cheat on the time card, not leave early, not be lazy at work, and be faithful to the master in everything - without exception. If they suffer unjustly, then they must remember they have pleased God by following these principles.

Application to Employees and Employers.

These same principles also apply to the employee and employer relationship. An employee is usually defined as someone who agrees to do a certain type of work for a given amount of money. They agree to take directions from an employer. In a sense, the employee is like a slave in that they are to submit to a job description from their employer in exchange for money.

The two principles that we have been taught apply also to the employee-employer relationship. The principles reveal that the main issue in employee-employer relationships is a heart problem. I want to share what the Bible teaches about the employer first, and then the employee.

Scriptures About Employers. Leviticus 19:13 is about employers. Notice God's warning to employers.

You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. Leviticus 19:13 (NASB)

2. J. Vernon McGee. 1 Timothy. Thru The Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1983 p. 455.

This verse is about an employer who hired a day-laborer. A day-laborer was paid at the end of the day for his physical work. I remember as a boy that my father took us boys to a strawberry farm in the state of Washington. We picked strawberries all day. At the end of the day, Dad was paid for all the strawberries we had picked. We were day-laborers. This helps us understand Leviticus 19:13.

God says that the employer oppresses the laborer by not paying at the end of the workday as had been agreed. First, this means that God is watching employers. Second, it reveals that God wants employers to pay their employees.

Near the end of Luke 10:7 Christ tells employers that,

The laborer is worthy of his wages. Luke 10:7 (NASB)

That is, it is not fair to withhold payment to a worker. I am sorry to say that I know an employer of a small company who did not pay her employees sometimes for a couple of months. Jeremiah 22:13 says,

Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness

And his upper rooms without justice,

Who uses his neighbor's services without pay

And does not give him his wages,

Jeremiah 22:13 (NASB)

Matthew 10:10 tells us that the worker is worthy of his food. Maybe that is why God was not enabling this employer to earn enough to pay her employees on time.

James 5:1-4 is about employers and employees. Here is a part of the passage,

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against

you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. James 5:1-4 (NASB)

The message of all these passages is that employers are to faithfully pay their employees a fair and just wage. God is watching and He will bring a curse on unfair employers.

I think this principle applies even when we go to a restaurant. I always try to give the waiter or waitress a twenty-percent tip. Yes, they are being paid by their employer, but it is customary to tip them. We do that because they are working for us. I also tip my barber for the same reason. I want to be sure that I am being fair. We need to love others and not just our pocket book.

Scriptures About Employees. The great majority of Scripture verses about employees are warning about being lazy on the job. So, we will look at only two passages about lazy employees.

Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, So is the lazy one to those who send him. Proverbs 10:26 (NASB)

I do not know if you have tried vinegar on the teeth, but I am sure that you have experienced smoke in the eyes! It hurts. So, the last part of the proverb says that is what it is like for "those who send him." In the context of the employer, a lazy employee hurts, both financially and emotionally.

It has been reported that today's workers are slower and more lazy than those in the past. This passage of Scripture reveals that lazy employees have always existed. There are some who do not want to work and do not want to submit to another person. They would prefer to earn a wage and also do as they please.

Proverbs 25:13 is about a submissive and obedient employee.

Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest Is a faithful messenger to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters. Proverbs 25:13 (NASB)

This employee is called faithful. That is, the employee submitted to his employers and did as he or she was directed. He was faithful, did not steal, cheat on the time-card, and did not leave early. He was a blessing to his employers. He is an example of one who honored his employer!

Conclusion. In summary, 1 Timothy 6:1-2 gives us a principle that applies to slaves and employees. Both slaves and employees are to consider their masters or employers worthy of respect. Verse 2 adds to the principle. From their hearts, they must serve them all the more. Then if they do serve them all the more, it will reveal if their heart attitude is correct. That means we must serve those for whom we work all the more. This is pleasing to the Lord.

Therefore, Paul concludes his instruction in 1 Timothy 6:2 with,

Teach and preach these principles. 1 Timothy 6:2
(NASB)