

## 1 Timothy 6:1-5 “Christians at Work and at Church”

Intro. This month I plan to complete our study of 1 Timothy. We are going to look at two topics this morning that are only somewhat related. I normally select a text that only deals with one main topic. However, both topics in my text today address some responsibilities in the lives of believers. We have work responsibilities and also worship responsibilities. So I’ve entitled my message this morning, “Christians at Work and at Church.”

The unifying theme of this text is honoring the gospel and teaching of Jesus Christ. For example, in v.1 Paul instructed Christian servants to serve in such a way “that the name of God and [His] doctrine may not be blasphemed.” In the last of v.2 Paul said, “Teach and exhort these things.” Then in the last of v.3 Paul refers to the “wholesome words, [even] the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness.” So basically, Paul is teaching that our lives and our words should not contradict the teaching of Christ, or harm our witness for Christ. There should be consistency between who you are on Sunday and who you are Monday through Saturday. Is that true of you?

So first of all, notice from our text that there are:

### I. SOME WORK RESPONSIBILITIES

So far in chapter 5 Paul has addressed the fact that honor is to be given to the elder members of the church. Then he said that widows and pastors should be honored, not only with respect, but also financially in the case of pastors, and widows should be honored with financial support, first as needed from family and then from the church in some cases. Now as we move on to chapter 6, Paul addresses another group of people that are to receive honor, and that would be slave masters.

It is hard for us to imagine, but at least 1/3 of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves.<sup>1</sup> Barclay estimates that there were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire at this time.<sup>2</sup> They were treated little better than animals, as the phrase “under the yoke” in v.1 indicates. As a result, they had no rights. The authority and power of a master over his slave was almost absolute. In fact, the word translated “master” (*despotes*) is the word from which we get our word “despot.”

In that day there were a number of ways a person could become a slave: a. as prisoners of war, or b. through legal action, such as to pay unpaid debts, or c. through kidnapping or, d. as those who had been sold into slavery by their parents.<sup>3</sup> Then, many were born into slavery. Human trafficking is still going on today, even in the United States. Many of these people become sex slaves or are at least in a form of bondage until their trafficking debt is paid. It is

---

<sup>1</sup> Ironside (p.136) even says that more than half were slaves, but that was probably only true in certain areas of the Empire.

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, & Philemon* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), p.121.

<sup>3</sup> By law fathers had absolute control over their children!

disturbing that our government has enabled this practice and enriched the cartels, all for perceived political gain.

As you can see, slavery was an institution that was pervasive and deeply ingrained in Roman society, and Paul knew that it would continue for years to come, and any attempt to overthrow the institution would be in vain and likely result in much bloodshed. So in spite of the injustice of slavery, Paul does not call for the abolition of slavery, but the application of Christian principles to the existing institution. The answer of the Christian faith to social institutions that are wrong is not a violent revolution but rather to permeate society with the gospel to change hearts and minds from within. In fact, the belief that all men are created in the image of God and other biblical principles led to a gradual decline of the practice in the Roman Empire. Having once been a slave himself, St. Patrick (385–461 AD) condemned slavery and taught Irish Christians to free slaves. Eventually, Christianity led to the abolition of slavery in more recent history. We should be glad of that!

Christianity spread among the slave population, and many believers in the churches came from the ranks of slavery (cf. 1 Cor. 7:21; 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:18)<sup>4</sup>. Realizing that slavery as an institution was not likely to change, Paul gave some instruction on how Christian slaves were to relate to masters.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between slaves and masters was a pressing problem, especially when both were Christians.

I believe that the principle that he lays down here will *apply* to Christian bosses and Christian employees. How many of you are still employed and have a boss at work? If you are retired or unemployed, let me ask another question. How many of you have a boss at home? The husband is the head of the home, but we saw in 5:14 that the wife is to manage the household! Most of us work for *somebody*, so how should we relate to those in authority over us at work?

A. Give Honor to Your Bosses – Paul says in v.1, “Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor....” They are especially called upon to honor the position of authority they occupy. Romans 13:7 gives a general principle that applies here, “Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, ... fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.” Even though I do not agree with many of the policies and actions of President Biden, I am reminded in Scripture that I have a responsibility to give him honor and respect due to the office he holds. Even though slavery was an oppressive institution, the Christian’s first responsibility is not to change our circumstances, but to live godly within our circumstances. And giving honor to those in authority over us is a biblical principle that should always be followed, even in the case of the master of a slave.

We should be taught from an early age that we are to give honor and respect to our parents. Then we should be taught to give honor and respect at school, to the school principal and to our teachers. If we have learned to give honor and respect in those realms, we will be much more likely to give honor in other realms where we deal with an authority figure, including at work, and to those in law enforcement. Certainly the military understands this principle!

So let’s consider together:

1. How We Should Give Honor – The Greek word translated “honor” literally refers to something or someone of value. We are to recognize the value and importance of those in authority. Without leadership and authority there will be a breakdown in order resulting in

---

<sup>4</sup> The very fact that master-slave relationships were addressed so much in Scripture demonstrates that there were many slaves in the Christian church.

<sup>5</sup> See also 1 Cor. 7:21-24; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; Titus 2:9; Philemon; and 1 Peter 2:18-25.

chaos. Nothing will get done. Thus, we are to honor them by giving respect to them, even one who is not a Christian and overbearing. So speak respectfully. Listen when they speak. We honor them by giving obedience to them.

Next consider:

2. Why We Should Give Honor – Paul gives a reason why Christians should give such honor in the last of v.1, “so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.”<sup>6</sup> Paul was very concerned about the witness of believers. If Christian slaves were only concerned about their own personal rights, and if they rebelled against their Masters, then Christianity would be associated with rebellion, and it would be discredited in the eyes of many people. The name of God and His teaching could be slandered.<sup>7</sup> Paul did not want Christians to develop a bad reputation which could harm the spread of the gospel, and reflect badly on Jesus and His church.

There is an important principle here. We believers represent Jesus Christ. What we do and say reflects upon Him, for good, or for bad. We should be more concerned with our witness for the Lord than we are for our personal rights or comfort. We should also be more concerned about our *eternal* reward than our present situation. Jesus said in Mt. 20:27, “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave.” It will transform your work if you see yourself primarily working to please God rather than just your employer (Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:22). Christians ought to have a strong work ethic as a way to have a positive witness for the Lord.

Next we see that we should:

B. Follow Special Instructions Concerning *Christian* Bosses – Paul addresses a potential problem in the relationship between masters and slaves. Suppose a slave became a Christian, and in the course of time, the master also got saved. Perhaps the slave was even the one who won his master to Christ.<sup>8</sup> Paul addresses two possible outcomes:

1. The Christian Slave Might Despise His Christian Master – Paul says in v.2, “And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren....” The word translated “despise” [*kataphroneo*] literally means “to think down,” so instead of honoring a master you despise him.

You can imagine the problem. The Christian slave would easily think like this: “If my master is really a Christian, how can he keep me in bondage?” He would have higher expectations of treatment from a *Christian* Master. But such despising of a master goes against his command to give honor to such people.

Now let’s apply this to us today. Suppose you have a Christian employer. You could focus upon yourself and be very self-centered in your relationship with that Christian boss. For example, if you are not given a raise, you may despise your boss, and fail to give the honor that is due. Or suppose your boss has a reputation of being a slave driver. He makes you work long hours as you work to complete a project. Will you despise your boss, especially if he or she is a Christian? Or will you always give honor and respect to him or her? Or suppose since your boss is a Christian, you feel he should give you extra time off to spend with your family. Yet he

---

<sup>6</sup> Peter stated this principle in a positive way in 1 Pet. 2:12, “having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles that ... they may, by [your] good works which they observe, glorify God....”

<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Paul quoted from the Old Testament and said in Romans 2:24 concerning the Jews, “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

<sup>8</sup> A Jewish slave girl witnessed to the Syrian General Naaman (2 Kings 5).

doesn't, because he needs you to work and he is only expecting you to work according to the agreement you signed when you were hired. Should you respect him any less?

So when a Christian serves another Christian, we should avoid despising that Christian brother who exercises authority over us. Instead:

2. The Christian Should Serve Even Better – In the last of v.2 Paul says, “rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved.” Paul turns the situation completely around. Instead of focusing on *ourselves*, we should focus on benefiting *others*. Instead of complaining that the Christian master keeps him in bondage, he should focus instead on the general teaching of Jesus that we should be serving one another anyway. Jesus said, “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...” (Mk. 10:45). Then, after washing the feet of the disciples as a slave would do, He said in John 13:15, “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” And if you are serving a Christian, that should make you want to work *harder*, to be the most benefit<sup>9</sup> for that fellow believer. Wouldn't you rather work to benefit a fellow believer? Not only does Paul refer to such masters as believers, but also “beloved.” They should love them as brothers in Christ. And love always motivates us to serve. Galatians 5:13 says, “... through love serve one another.” Besides, since slavery was legal at this time, wouldn't it be far better to serve a *Christian* master, rather than a cruel unbeliever? Paul taught elsewhere that masters were accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ for how they treated their slaves.<sup>10</sup> Surely they would receive better treatment from a Christian! So a change in perspective makes a big difference.

Speaking of that, how many of you want to be happy? Well let me tell you the secret of happiness. It is something of a paradox. The more you focus on yourself, your own needs and desires, the more unhappy you are likely to be, because too often those desires and even needs are unfulfilled. Yet, the more you focus on *others*, to love them, to be a help to them, to give gifts to them, the more you will be happy. After all, those who love others are much more likely to receive love and benefits from others.

If slaves followed the teaching of Paul, the result should be the cruelty and brutality of many masters would melt into kindness and love, and even mutual respect. Perhaps the day would even come that they would set the Christian slave free!

So in our text of Scripture we see that we have some work responsibilities. Next, Paul tells us that we have:

## II. SOME WORSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

When God's people gather for worship, some of us have a responsibility to teach God's Word. The Christian listener also has some responsibilities that I will bring out from our text of Scripture. So let's begin with a responsibility that I and others have in our church:

A. Teach and Exhort God's Word – In the last of v.2, Paul tells Timothy, “Teach and exhort these things.”<sup>11</sup> That is the responsibility of pastors and other teachers within the church. To “teach” is to give instruction in what we are to believe and do. To “exhort” is to encourage

---

<sup>9</sup> “Those who are benefited” comes from a compound Greek word (*antilambanomai*) which refers to someone getting opposite another and helping them with a heavy load.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Col. 4:1 says, “Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.” See also Eph. 6:9.

<sup>11</sup> These words probably refer to what Paul has just taught, but it could refer to what follows.

and motivate people to go and do what they have been taught. We must appeal to the mind, the heart and the will.

The flip side of the last of v.2 is this: you have a responsibility to listen, learn, and do what you are taught to do from God's Word. This means you need to apply the teaching of vv. 1-2 to your own situation.

The second main responsibility Paul gives in this text is to:

B. Withdraw from Those Who Teach Contrary to God's Word – After speaking of false teachers, he said in the last of v.5, "From such withdraw yourself." Your translation may omit those words, for some of our oldest manuscripts omit this sentence.<sup>12</sup> However, this truth is taught elsewhere in Scripture (Rom. 16:17; 2 Tim. 3:5; 2 John 10-11), so I will go ahead and present this truth. I hope you do realize that as a Christian, once you identify someone as a false teacher, you are to withdraw yourself from their influence. Don't listen to them. Don't read their books. Don't go to their public events. And certainly don't send them any offerings!

Since we should withdraw from certain teachers and spiritual leaders, how can we identify them? Well, we need to understand first of all:

1. Their Teaching - Paul says in v.3, "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness." This is an example of the kind of teacher we should turn away from. The words, "teaches otherwise" [*heterodidaskaleo*] come from one compound Greek word, which means "to teach something different." Literally, they are heterodox in their teaching. We are to compare their teaching to the Word of God, including the teachings of Jesus. This principle is supported in the middle of v.3, where we see that they should consent or agree (ESV; HCSB) with "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ." If they are teaching something different, then we are to withdrawal from them and no longer listen to them, or give them opportunity to teach in our churches or institutions, no matter how popular they seem to be (1 John 4:5). Now in order to exercise such discernment, you need to learn the Word of God well enough to know the difference!

On the other hand, two things are said about the right kind of teaching. Put a preacher or teacher to the test to see if they match up. First of all, they should be teaching "wholesome" words, or healthy words.<sup>13</sup> Teaching that is truly based on God's Word will promote spiritual health and well-being. Godly teaching even promotes physical well-being. Those who follow biblical teaching *tend* to live longer, healthier lives. Secondly, in the last of v.3, we see that they should consent "to the doctrine which is according to godliness." The Word of God leads to godly living, while false doctrine tends to promote ungodly living. That is why when Paul listed the qualifications of a pastor in chapter 3, the emphasis was upon discerning their Christian character. So is this religious teacher promoting godly and holy living? Do they exemplify such holy living? A biblical teacher will promote godliness. The apostle Paul did that. Almost every letter he wrote begins with sound doctrinal teaching, followed by how that doctrine should affect how we live.

Next, you can also discern false teachers by:

2. Their Traits – Jesus said in Mt. 7:20, "...by their fruits you will know them." So notice how Paul describes these false teachers in v.4, "He is proud, knowing<sup>14</sup> nothing...."

---

<sup>12</sup> Irenaeus (AD 130–202) evidently includes these words in a quotation.

<sup>13</sup> Our word "hygiene" comes from this Greek word [*hugiaino*].

<sup>14</sup> Here Paul uses the word *epistamai*, meaning "to put one's attention on, fix one's thoughts on," thus "to

False teachers tend to pride themselves in their knowledge and speaking ability. Paul said in 1 Cor. 8:1, “knowledge puffs up....” Yet pride is never a Christian trait. They may think they know a lot. They want you to think that they are authorities, but in actuality, Paul says that they know and understand nothing of spiritual truth. In fact, in v.5, Paul says that they are “men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth.”

You can also discern false teachers by:

3. Their Talk – Some people are good talkers, and they think that being able to talk and argue is a sign of intelligence. And so in the middle of v.4 Paul says that often false teachers are “obsessed with disputes and arguments over words....” They are hair-splitters! They will make mountains out of molehills. Some people seem to have a morbid delight in such quibbling and word-battles.<sup>15</sup> Then in v.5 he says that they engage in “useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds....” That Greek word [*paradiatribe*] describes one engaged in talking as a useless occupation. They would travel around as public speakers. Among such people, some were secular talkers, peddling Greek wisdom and philosophy. Others used their oratorical skill in the religion business. In fact, in the last of v.5 this is brought out by the words, “who suppose that godliness [or religion] is a means of gain.” They come to realize that they can make good money in the religion business<sup>16</sup> and charge exorbitant fees for their “religious lectures.” These days we have those who preach a prosperity gospel, justifying excessive prosperity for themselves and promising prosperity through religious faith and prayer. Some preachers and gospel singers are multimillionaires. We saw last week that the apostle Paul taught that pastors *should* be financially supported (5:17-18), but not the ones who are preaching in a greedy pursuit of significant material gain.

When people get into competitive religious arguments, notice how it will adversely affect interpersonal relationships. Paul says in the last of v.4, “from which come envy, strife, reviling [*blasphemia*], evil suspicions....” Some of these folks would get into religious or philosophical arguments. Then one disputant, smarting under defeat, is filled with poisonous envy against the victor and his success. Bitter discord follows. They engage in scornful and insolent language against their human opponent. Paul especially has in mind teachers and preachers who are rivals for the same potential audience. Paul had such people in mind when he previously wrote in Philippians 1:15-16, “Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition....”

So once we have heard enough and seen enough of a teacher to make a determination that they are teaching contrary to the Word of God, we should withdraw from them. It would be wrong to continue attending their church, their seminar, or reading their books, or listening to their teaching over the Internet.

Conclusion: So let’s review. How well are you representing Jesus at work? Are you giving honor to your boss and others in authority over you? Are you doing a *good* job? If you have failed to live by this Christian teaching recently, I encourage you to confess that to the Lord and make a commitment to honor your boss, and to do a good job. You have even more reason to do so if your boss is a Christian.

If you are a teacher in this church, are you following the command of Paul in the last of

---

understand, to know.”

<sup>15</sup> 2 Tim. 2:14 says, “Remind [them] of these things, charging [them] before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.”

<sup>16</sup> Compare Simon Magus in Acts 8:9-24.

v.2? Are you both giving instruction *and* exhortation? And I want to challenge each of us to exercise discernment in who we listen to and read among preachers, teachers, and Christian authors. Then, as you find good biblical teachers, be faithful to listen to them and apply biblical teaching to your life.

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hgths, VA: Published by Author), 2024; Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: 1-II Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957); H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First and Second Epistles of Timothy* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947); Thomas D. Lea, *New American Commentary: 1, 2 Timothy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992); Walter L. Liefeld, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on 6:1-10); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: The Pastoral Epistles* in Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

#### ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The “live” recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author’s own words. To obtain an audio or video recording of this message, go to [www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker](http://www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker). Dr. Felker’s email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).