

**Notes: *Instructions for Servants and Overseers (Eph. 6:5-9)***

**Intro:** Thankfully we in modern day America are not slaves. We have not been sold to a master. But we *may* have “sold” forty or more hours of our week to an earthly employer. Paul’s instructions about how the gospel of grace could transform an ancient social order that we find intolerable--slavery--has relevance to our work today. There are lessons here about attitudes and the use of time that we can apply to our own daily work conditions.

**#1: We must serve with a new attitude.** The Roman Empire of Paul’s day practiced slavery on a grand scale. Slaves made up anywhere between twenty to thirty-five percent of the population. Without its slaves, the Roman Empire could not have functioned as it did. Slaves performed a variety of roles from the menial to the highest. Some became educated and served as teachers. Others accumulated great wealth and power. Felix, the Roman governor of Judea (Acts 23) was a former slave who not only gained his freedom but also the reigns of political power. It’s estimated that between 89 and 49 BC half-a-million slaves obtained their freedom. Although Roman slaves were frequently not as destitute as those in other cultures, slaves in the Roman Empire were basically only property and had few rights in the eyes of the law. Masters had almost limitless power over them. History shows that Roman slaves were sometimes harshly and brutally treated. Sometimes modern readers of the Bible are surprised that Paul was not a kind of first century abolitionist. It’s not that he condoned slavery as it was popularly practiced, Philemon shows us that, it’s rather that his purpose was intensely practical. For one thing he was powerless to bring about the abolition of slavery. For another, Paul ministered with the deep conviction that social and personal conditions were not the most important issues of life. Fellowship with God, liberation from sin and judgment, transformation into the image of Christ, the growth of the gospel—these Paul’s basic concerns. He was convinced that the gospel can work anywhere. It grows according to the unmerited grace and limitless power of God. Nothing can hinder the power of the gospel. Not tyranny, prisons, or chains. Paul continues to emphasize here what he said earlier—that the Christian is a new person. He has God as his Father. The mind and heart of Christ. The indwelling and transforming power of God’s Spirit. Therefore he must have a new attitude. The Christian slave’s attitude in the first century has applications to our attitudes in the work place today. Serve with fear and trembling. In the Greek OT of Paul’s day the phrase “fear and trembling” appeared often as a description of the reverential fear people have in the presence of God (cf. Exo. 15:16). Mark uses the phrase describe a woman who fell down “in fear and trembling” before Jesus (Mk. 5:33). The phrase was a favorite of Paul’s. He used it to describe approvingly how the Corinthians received Titus (2 Cor. 7:15). He used it to describe the Christian’s general attitude because he knows he lives each day in the presence of a sovereign, wise, and merciful God who has ordained our steps. We must work out our salvation with “fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). As in the case of a first century slave, fear and trembling must characterize the respect we give to our masters. Not a shaking- in-your-boots servile fear of man but a deep reverence for authority because we know and love the glorious King who stands behind it. Serve with sincerity of heart. An undivided mind. No ulterior motive or hypocrisy. We must honor our boss not only when he is present but when he isn’t. Our great need is for clear-sightedness to see Jesus Christ and to set him before us. This makes unbearable situations more bearable and seemingly meaningless work meaningful.

**#2; We must serve with a new purpose.** The reason that the believing servant is so responsible, gracious, and diligent is because ultimately he does not have his earthly master in

view. Must not focus on serving an earthly master. Doing so leads to people pleasing and courting the approval of others. This may become a form of idolatry (cf. Prov. 29:25). Must focus on serving our heavenly Master. This was Paul's focus. We must find our greatest pleasure in pleasing the Lord rather than others in the work place. It may be impossible to please one's supervisor no matter how conscientious the work. But we can know God's peace and joy if we set our desire on pleasing him. Doing so will set us free from anxious servility to find joy and pleasure in our labors.

**#3: We must oversee with a new perspective.** Paul didn't call for slave owners to free their slaves. Why? He knows God has a time and place for everything and that sometimes more is achieved by deprivation than by liberty. His instructions to owners, however, will sow the seeds of slavery's destruction. The owner who has Christ as *his* Master because Jesus sought him and bought him from slavery to sin and judgment must oversee with a new perspective. Without partiality. We must shun the world's social distinctions. If Christ died for us, unworthy as we are, then we know that thankfully God shows no partiality and neither should we. Without threatening. Firm patient love.