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Sermon Notes

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## **The Freedom of a Christian Slave**

### **Ephesians 6:5-9**

We come this morning to Ephesians 6:5-9, and I am very aware of the emotional power of these verses... for we come this morning to discuss the MASTER-SLAVE relationship. The easy thing to do is to move quickly to discuss the EMPLOYEE-EMPLOYER relationship based on these commands... and to ignore the deeper questions that we 21<sup>st</sup> century people must ask about the ancient book we revere... the BIBLE

**How can it be that one of the greatest triumphs of the gospel in improving life on this sin-cursed planet is the world-wide abolition of slavery**

**AND YET the greatest accomplishment of the gospel within our own hearts is to teach us to be cheerful slaves of God and of each other, and to do it for eternity in heaven?**

That is the paradox before us!! Slavery is both an enemy of the church and the highest glory of the church

But there is another issue—that of slavery itself, and I want to address that today

*Ephesians 6:5-9 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. <sup>6</sup> Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. <sup>7</sup> Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, <sup>8</sup> because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. <sup>9</sup> And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.*

## I. The Heroic Fight Against Slavery's Wicked Abuse

### A. 2007: Two Hundredth Anniversary of Wilberforce's Triumph

1. William Wilberforce, an Evangelical Christian in England and a Member of Parliament, led a successful eighteen-year fight against the British slave trade... struck down again and again, vilified, opposed, shouted-down, hated, mocked, threatened... he tirelessly persevered until at last success was his in 1807
2. This was just the first step: the abolition of the infamous MIDDLE PASSAGE... by which maybe 15 million Africans were eventually snatched from their homes and transported across the Atlantic Ocean to be enslaved in the Western Hemisphere

African kings, warlords and private kidnappers sold captives to Europeans who held several coastal forts. The captives were usually force-marched to these ports along the western coast of Africa, where they were held for purchase to the European or American slave traders. Ships contained up to 300 slaves aboard one slave ship with a crew of 30. The male captives were normally chained together in pairs to save space; right leg to the next man's left leg — while the women and children may have had somewhat more room. The captives were fed beans, corn, yams, rice, and palm oil. Slaves were fed one meal a day with water, but if food was scarce, slaveholders would get priority over meals.

in 1781, the Captain of the slave ship *Zong*, threw overboard 130 living slaves chained together to claim them as lost cargo and get insurance money

3. Wilberforce spared nothing in making the horrors of the trade widely known: the inhuman conditions on board the overpacked slave ships
4. 2007 marked the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of British slave trade...
5. But that was just the first step of the fight: for the next 26 years Wilberforce also participated in the fight to abolish slavery itself... that finally happened in 1833, days before he died

### B. History of Abolition

1. Abolition itself a product of the Gospel of Jesus Christ... the overwhelming majority of those who led out in the abolitionist movement were bible-believing Christians, making argument from the New Testament

African slavery began in North America in 1619 at Jamestown, Virginia.

The first American-built slave ship, *Desire*, launched from Massachusetts in 1636, beginning the slave trade between Britain's American colonies and Africa. From the beginning, some white colonists were uncomfortable with the notion of slavery. At the time of the American Revolution against the English Crown, Delaware (1776) and Virginia (1778) prohibited importation of African slaves; Vermont became the first of the 13 colonies to abolish slavery (1777); Rhode Island prohibited taking slaves from the colony (1778); and Pennsylvania began gradual emancipation in 1780.

The Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes and Others Unlawfully Held in Bondage was founded in 1789, the same year the

2. The excesses of American slavery were extreme
  - a. The middle passage was barbaric, crowding human beings on top of each other like cordwood
  - b. Once they arrived, they were auctioned off like animals... completely dehumanized
  - c. They were kept literally in chains; often they were branded with their owner's mark to prevent them from being stolen
  - d. They could not form families, because at any moment husbands and wives, parents and children could be sold and separated forever
  - e. Slaves were consistently beaten, even for tiny infractions, to assert the master's authority over their wills

- f. More willful slaves were forced to submit by iron bits, resembling medieval torture masks
- g. If slaves ran away, they were hunted down by slave catchers and dogs; they were often severely lashed with whips; if they persisted in running away, they might be permanently maimed by the removal of a foot
- h. It is INCONCEIVABLE to me that this could be supported biblically, because of Paul's words:

***Ephesians 6:9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.***

“It’s not okay to THREATEN them, but it is okay to BEAT them or cut off their feet????”

The system was clearly in violation of scripture

- 3. Under the influence of William Wilberforce, the slave trade was abolished in 1807, but slavery itself continued in the US until the end of the Civil War; the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery in the US was passed by the Congress on January 31, 1865, and ratified by the states on December 6, 1865
- 4. Illegal slavery began in earnest in the US:
  - a. Following the Civil War, hundreds of thousands of African Americans are re-enslaved in an abusive manipulation of the legal system called “peonage.” Across the Deep South, African-American men and women are falsely arrested and convicted of crimes, then “leased” to coal and iron mines, brick factories, plantations, and other dangerous workplaces. The system slows down after World War I but doesn’t fully end until the 1940s.
  - b. More in a moment on ILLEGAL SLAVERY
- 5. Abolitionists continued their fight all around the world... seeking to destroy the institution world wide

6. Islamic nations stubbornly resisted abolition, and only made changes when forced to by Western nations with whom they wanted to do business
7. 1948: United Nations General Assembly adopts Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including article stating "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."
8. The last nation, Mauritania, finally abolished legal slavery in 1980
9. The worldwide fight now is against ILLEGAL SLAVERY... including DEBT BONDAGE and SEX TRAFFICKING
  - a. In 2001, a BBC documentary called "Slavery: A Global Investigation" looked at questions of forced child labor in the cocoa and chocolate industries
  - b. **2005** The U.N. International Labor Organization's first Global Report on Forced Labor puts the number of slaves worldwide at 12.3 million. The organization's 2012 update increases the number to 20.9 million people.
  - c. **2007** *Ending Slavery: How We Free Today's Slaves* is published. Written by Free the Slaves co-founder Kevin Bales, it is the first plan for the global eradication of modern slavery, estimating the total cost of worldwide abolition at \$10.8 billion over 25 years.

<http://www.freetheslaves.net/about-slavery/slavery-in-history/>

- d. **2008** The U.N. International Labor Organization estimates that annual profits generated from trafficking in human beings are as high as \$32 billion. In 2014 the organization increases that estimate to \$150 billion in the report *Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labor*.
10. Clearly the WORLDWIDE FIGHT against slavery is not over
11. Christians have led the way in this fight; Worldwide abolition is one of the greatest social achievements of the Gospel of Jesus Christ... YET

### C. Questions Linger About the Bible

1. Once abolitionism gained power, many slaveholders began to defend the “peculiar institution” from texts of the Bible
2. They actually supported slavery from the Old Testament passages I’m about to discuss... and they used an argument from silence: Paul never abolished slavery but sought to regulate how it would be done... so slavery must be okay
3. My purpose today is to defend the Scripture’s astonishingly deep handling of the issue of slavery

This is especially poignant in our recent struggle to defend the bible’s timeless position on homosexuality and other LGBT themes. Ardent opponents see the bible as outmoded, obsolete, irrelevant to our day... they point to Mosaic dietary laws and other laws against wearing clothes woven with two fibers. They point to the bible’s patriarchy and say we’ve become more enlightened, embracing feminism. But especially, they point to the bible’s sanctioning (it seems) of slavery... and they say this absolutely clinches their argument... we all know that slavery is evil, but the bible has been used to defend slavery... so the bible is not a perfect book, and we have GROWN BEYOND IT... we are MORE MORAL than the Bible

#### 4. What is “slavery”?

Encyclopedia Britannica: The social sanction that permits one person or group to compel the involuntary labor of another person or group—whether slave, serf, indentured servant, or otherwise

**That bonded person is obliged to perform personal service for his lord or master under conditions that make him socially inferior and are restrictive of his freedom**

Key issues: compulsion of labor (involuntary labor)... conditions that make him inferior, even sub-human... no personal freedom... the Gospel TRANSFORMS EACH ASPECT

## II. Slavery in the Old Testament

### A. Overview of OT History

1. Noah's curse on Ham's son for his treatment of Noah

***Genesis 9:24-25 "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers."***

2. Abraham had male and female slaves, like Hagar
3. When Hagar was abused by Sarah, she ran away and God told her

***Genesis 16:9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her."***

4. Joseph was sold as a slave into Egypt... then threatened his brothers with slavery for stealing his cup
5. The Jews were slaves in Egypt, but then made slaves of other nations later in their history

### B. The Puzzling Laws of Moses

1. Moses constantly reminded the Jews that they had been slaves in Egypt
2. He commanded them to be mindful of treating strangers with kindness because

***Exodus 23:9 "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt."***

3. But yet, slavery was permitted in the Laws of Moses

Immediately after the Ten Commandments, several laws regulating, not abolishing slavery:

### C. A Key Text: A Voluntary Slave who Delights in the Master

***Deuteronomy 15:12-17 If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. <sup>13</sup> And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. <sup>14</sup> Supply him liberally from your flock, your***

***threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you. <sup>15</sup> Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today. <sup>16</sup> But if your servant says to you, "I do not want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, <sup>17</sup> then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant.***

This idea of the piercing of an earlobe, I think, is an incredible picture of Christ's stance toward His Father when He entered the world:

***Psalm 40:6-8 Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced***

Christ came into the world, then, as the perfect slave of a perfect master... He entered the world to do the will of the One who sent Him:

***John 6:38-39 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.***

The will of God was that Jesus should lay down His life... and this was the sacrifice He must make for the will of the Master:

### III. Christ a Perfect Slave, Christ a Perfect Master

#### A. Christ the "Very Nature of a Slave"

***Philippians 2:5-8 Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!***

#### 1. Exegetical observations

- a. the word "servant" is doulos... it is usually translated slave



b. Parallel Greek construction: “very nature God” vs. “very nature ... a servant”... Jesus was AS MUCH SERVANT AS HE WAS GOD

c. The essence of slavery is full obedience... in Christ’s case even to death

2. Thus Jesus was a perfect slave... and He went as low as a slave could possibly go... a humiliating death on the cross

#### B. Christ’s Slave-like Demeanor to Others

1. He willingly served anyone who came with a need

- The Centurion’s paralyzed servant: Jesus rises to heal him
- Jairius’ daughter: Jesus rises to heal her
- Huge crowds pressing in on Him: Jesus heals each one

2. Especially displayed in the footwashing, John 13

#### C. Christ’s Ultimate “Bondage”: The Cross

1. Philippians implied that the downward path of slave-like obedience culminated in His death on the cross

2. Jesus in another place used slavery language to speak of His “bondage” in the Father’s will

***Luke 12:50 I have a baptism to undergo, and I am in a straightjacket until it is completed!***

The Greek word translated “distressed” refers to bondage... like being in chains or tied up with ropes, like a prisoner, like a slave

His is clearly referring to His own death... the will of the Father, the will of His Master was binding him like a chain, and He could not get free until it was accomplished

As a slave, Jesus drank the cup of hell... no other servitude was greater

***Matthew 20:28 the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

## D. Christ Also a Perfect Master

***Colossians 4:1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.***

No one has ever gone so low, and no one has ever been raised so high... Christ's dual roles of Master and Slave changes the very essence of slavery forever

## IV. Slavery in the New Testament: Some Observations

### A. Spiritual Slavery: Every Human Being a Slave

Spiritually, as a human being you will SERVE SOME MASTER... there is no avoiding this

Satan's great lie is to offer "freedom" from all submission, from all authority... you can do whatever you want with your time... you can CHOOSE, and no one has the right to tell you what to do... you can eat whatever you want, spend your money however you want, go wherever you want, do what ever you want

But, at the core of it is slavery to SIN

#### 1. Every Non-Christian a Slave of Sin (and of Satan)

***John 8:34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.***

***Romans 6:17 you used to be slaves to sin***

#### 2. Every Christian a Slave of Christ

***Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."***

Paul uses slave language boldly:

***1 Corinthians 6:19-20 You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.***

Many Christian leaders took as their most exalted title "Bond-slave" of Christ:

Paul, Epaphras, James, Jude, Peter, Tychicus all delight to be called “bond-slave”

Bottom line: Every human being on the face of the earth will either serve God through Christ or serve Satan and sin... Christians delight to serve Christ, not Satan

**If you are ever talking to someone who says, “I am free... no one tells me what to do; I can do whatever I want with my life, my money, my time, my relationships, my interests, my hobbies...My life is mine to live it however I choose” be assured that person is serving Satan**

## B. Freedom and Slavery Both Redefined by Christ

### 1. “Freedom” Redefined by Christ

a. Freedom is NOT that attitude I just gave you... that is a faithless attitude that forgets there is a King who rules over everything

b. Freedom is defined differently now in Christ:

***Psalm 119:32 I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.***

Freedom is joyful obedience to the commands of a King you love and trust... freedom means complete obedience to God’s commands as revealed in His word

Jesus’ freedom:

***John 8:31-32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."***

Paul teaches this kind of freedom as well:

***Romans 6:18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.***

### 2. Slavery Redefined by Christ

a. Every Christian now a slave to Christ... and therefore to other people

- b. We are free to serve both Christians and non-Christians alike
  - i) We serve Christians by loving them, forgiving their sins, washing their feet, meeting their needs

***Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.***

- ii) We serve non-Christians by doing whatever is necessary to bring them to faith in Christ

***1 Corinthians 9:19-22 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.***

Thus Christians find themselves doing the most menial tasks, meeting physical needs of lost people, so that they could somehow win them to Christ

### C. Physical Slavery: Not Overthrown but Subverted

#### 1. Slavery Itself Not Clearly Overthrown

- a. Neither Jesus nor Paul ever commanded all masters to free their slaves
- b. There are no clear bible texts that expose slavery itself as wicked or evil
- c. Now you can see why: because there are aspects of the master-slave relationship that perfectly describe our relationship to God and to Christ, as well as to other people
- d. It is the wickedness attached to slavery that is clearly overthrown

BUT: slavery never clearly overthrown in the Bible!

#### 2. YET: Physical Slavery is Subverted

- a. The Golden Rule

***Matthew 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.***

Abraham Booth, an English Calvinist Baptist, preached a sermon in 1792 entitled,

***Commerce in the Human Species, and the Enslaving of Innocent Persons, inimical to the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ***

He said: How would you like it if some foreign slave traders came to Liverpool and took your wives and children right from you and enslaved them?

If you wouldn't like to be a slave, then why enslave others?

b. Jesus' statement to His disciples:

***John 15:13-15 "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> "You are My friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing***

This has power to subvert slavery... Jesus has elevated all of us from slaves to friends, and from friends to brothers

c. The common brotherhood of master-slave in the gospel

***Galatians 3:26-28 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***

d. The Command to Try to Seek Freedom

***1 Corinthians 7:21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you-- although if you can gain your freedom, do so.***

BUT...clearly, Paul felt you could productively live out the rest of your life as a slave

***1 Corinthians 7:22 For 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.***

BUT the whole flow of argumentation in 1 Corinthians 7 is that the freer you are from earthly commitments, the freer you are to serve Christ.

If you can get your freedom do it!!! Freedom is better than bondage

And this whole approach subverts slavery

#### e. The Condemnation of Slave Traders

##### i) In the Law of Moses

***Exodus 21:16 "Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death."***

##### ii) In the New Testament

***1 Timothy 1:9-11 We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup> for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--***

The image of wicked men, lying in wait near some African village for some hapless villagers who wander too far... jumping up suddenly with a net, beating them unconscious, dragging them to a slave fortress on the West Coast of Africa, then subjecting them to the wretched horrors of the Middle Passage...chaining them packed closely together in a stinking below-decks hold, giving just enough food to survive the voyage, withholding food from those too sick to continue... this is the SLAVE TRADE... done by kidnappers

This is CONDEMNED in the Law and will be condemned on Judgment Day

#### f. The Book of Philemon

i) Onesimus an escaped slave; Paul finds him and leads him to faith in Christ

ii) Paul sends him back to his master, who turns out to be Philemon, another of Paul's converts!!

iii) With him, Paul sends this letter and this command: SET HIM FREE

***Philemon 15-16 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good-- <sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.***

V. "Service" in Heaven: Redeemed from the Curse

A. Eternal Rewards Based on Becoming Slaves

***Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

B. Service Itself Will Be Redeemed in Heaven

1. God surrounded constantly by willing servants

a. The angels

***Daniel 7:9-10 Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.***

***Revelation 22:8-9 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"***

This is what Christ meant in the Lord's Prayer:

***Matthew 6:10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.***

Angels never bicker, they are never jealous of another angel's position... they serve God as He chooses and are delighted to do it

b. John Newton's observation

“If two angels were sent to the earth on a mission from God; one of them to run an empire, and the other one to sweep the streets of a city, neither one would seek a different job but would do it gladly to the glory of the One who sent them.”

2. The Redeemed from every nation will serve Him

***Revelation 22:3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.***

3. AND ALSO reign with Him!!

***Revelation 22:5 And they will reign for ever and ever.***

4. And the one who reigns over all, Christ, will actually serve us

***Luke 12:37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.***

ASTONISHING!!!! Imagine the King of the Universe, Jesus, the Son of God, getting down from His throne at the banquet in the Kingdom, and coming to you with a servant’s tray and asking “Can I get you something to drink?”

Jesus redeems slavery forever: redeeming us from slavery to sin

Redeeming service itself to be the most blessed state anyone can ever experience... the delight of living for someone else’s happiness... of putting yourself totally at the disposal of another

Jesus is the King who was a slave, and the slave who is a King... who delights more in serving than in being served

That is our future as well... that is our salvation!!!

Applications:

Submit willingly to Christ as your King... take his yoke upon you



Realize that to yield to sin is to act like you were never set free... don't jump to the voice of your old, wicked master when temptation comes calling

***Romans 6:18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.***

***Romans 6:16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?***

Seek to obey Christ at every moment, in everything he commands... for none of his commands are burdensome

Defend the BIBLE: when modern activists attack the Bible on the issue of its outmoded views of slavery, they are merely showing their ignorance of the true spiritual issue... we were CREATED to serve a master... and if they are not serving God, they are serving SIN and SATAN; the Bible tells the truth and tells it accurately

They also are forgetting aspects of the PAST: Christians, motivated by the themes of the New Testament, led the way in abolitionism

Be honest about the past: the excesses of chattel slavery in the US are REAL and people really did selectively and wrongly defend slavery from the Bible

Look forward to the future, when we will serve God directly and perfectly in heaven