

Slaves
Titus 2:9-10
ABC 1/31/21

Today we come to Paul's writing to Titus about **slaves** within the church in Crete & how they're to conduct themselves so as to **adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect** (10). Before we get to our text, it's important to see what the Bible has to say about slavery. In American slavery, both southern & northern Christians used Scripture to support their viewpoints. Reading some of the statements southern pastors made is appalling & a clear misinterpretation of Scripture. While slavery was a legally recognized in the OT, there were safeguards to protect slaves & ways to free them. In NT times, slavery was a longstanding & widespread institution of the Roman Empire. It's been estimated that 1/3 or more of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves.¹ The NT doesn't directly attack slavery as an institution, but it does reorder the relationship between slaves & masters, making all equal as brothers in Christ (Gal 3:28). It commands masters to treat their slaves humanely, with justice & fairness, remembering that they too have a Master in heaven (Eph 6:9; Col. 4:1; Philemon 16-17). It also commands slaves to be obedient & render good service as **slaves of Christ** (Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:22-25). These observations of what Scripture says about slavery can be quickly made:

1. God ordained the family & the church as divine institutions but He did not ordain slavery. The Bible regulates slavery but doesn't ordain or require it. Slavery is not a divine institution.
2. Paul taught that if you can gain your freedom, then pursue it (1 Cor 7:21-24), but don't let it consume you.
3. Through the gospel the NT sows the seed for the unmasking of slavery for the sin that it is & for its eventual destruction. The book of Philemon provides a witness to this strategy. Paul's letter to Philemon concerning the restoration of his runaway slave, Onesimus, newly converted, is relevant to the NT attitude toward slavery.

¹ Daniel L Akin, *Living Doctrine: The Book of Titus*, Logos edition

4. The NT never advocates bloodshed or rebellion in confronting & overturning evil structures of society & culture, including slavery. Rather, it attacks these injustices with the beauty of the gospel, the grace of God, & the command to love one another.

5. Paul turned the tables on the institution of slavery by placing it in eternal perspective. The earthly master who doesn't know Christ finds his eternal destiny in the hands of his Christian slave who is actually the *free* man. From the gospel perspective, it's the unbelieving master who's disadvantaged. From the perspective of eternity, the slave is master of his master for the Master (Col 3:22–4:1 is helpful in seeing this).²

Slaves in those days could be in horrendous conditions or in a much better apprenticeship or indentured relationship. They could be domestic workers, some who held high government office, & some were even better off than free laborers.³ Additionally, a slave could be considered a member of the master's household & a member of a religious community with freemen. The range of responsibilities, positions, & treatment was huge for slaves in that era. Yet, what was common to all slaves was that each was subject to the control of another person. Unlike American slavery in the 18th & 19th centuries, slavery in the ancient world wasn't racially restricted. It wasn't mainly agricultural (slaves could be doctors, administrators, tutors, & the like). Many slaves were well-educated, skilled individuals & therefore contributed greatly to the social & economic fabric of society. Neither was it reserved for the uneducated. The condition of the slave's life may have ranged from holding a position of trust & relative comfort to being treated in a cruel & evil manner. The reality was that slaves were the material possessions of their masters, who exercised complete authority over them.⁴ If you had a good master, it could be quite different than the slavery we think of, but there's no question that many slaves were mistreated & miserable. Legally & socially they weren't on the same playing field with everyone else, they were at their master's mercy. You can read horror stories of how cruel masters treated slaves in ancient times. Aristotle described slaves as being just a tool or instrument you own, hardly distinguishable from the animals you

² Daniel L. Akin, *Living Doctrine: The Book of Titus*, p 43

³ Walter A Elwell, *Slavery*, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p 1112

⁴ Thomas D. Lea & Hayne P. Griffin, [1, 2 Timothy, Titus](#), pp 305–306

own. He believed that, for some people, being enslaved was just & even beneficial for them.⁵ Such thinking makes it surprising to our minds & distressing to our sensitivities that Scripture doesn't directly condemn this evil institution.⁶ But it was Christians who led the way in bringing slavery to an end in many places throughout history. Today slavery continues its reign of terror in many parts of the world. However, where the gospel has found fertile soil, the institution of slavery has almost always disappeared.⁷ The master had legal power to do essentially anything he wanted to his slaves. You can read real-life examples of some who crucified their slaves for killing a household pet. One had his slave eaten by animals for breaking a vase. Although the NT appears to accept slavery as part of the socioeconomic fabric of its time & does not openly condemn it, it does not sanction slavery as a God-ordained institution. It displays a much different attitude to slavery from what was common at that time. The Christian gospel offered slaves, as well as freemen, the freedom from sin & its power that all men & women need. Converted slaves were brought into the fellowship of the church as sharing equally in God's grace.⁸ Scripture indicates that Christian masters had certain responsibilities for their slaves (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1). The abolition of cultural, social, & sexual distinctions **in Christ Jesus** stated by Paul in Gal 3:28 & practiced in the churches contained the seed that would finally abolish slavery. Instead of clearly attacking slavery, the gospel would slowly destroy it by its power to change individual lives & attitudes. The concern & care for slaves, foreigners, widows, & women in need in Scripture is in stark contrast to the rest of the ancient world. God's Word had hope for each group. The fact the Bible discusses slavery doesn't mean God instituted, ordained, or approved of it any more than its discussion of divorce, which it also regulates, though God hates it. The Bible recognizes that some human situations exist because of the hardness of sinful hearts, & what God does is provide principles for how we can glorify Him under any circumstance. Again, Paul doesn't condone, command, or commend human slavery, & didn't own slaves himself. In 1 Tim 1:10 Paul lists kidnapping for slavery as one of the

⁵ Dan Lowe, *Aristotle's Defense of Slavery*, <https://1000wordphilosophy.com/2019/09/10/aristotles-defense-of-slavery/>

⁶ R. Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy & Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, p 333

⁷ Daniel L. Akin, *Living Doctrine: The Book of Titus*, p 41-42

⁸ Slaves are included in the "Household Rules" in Col 3:22-25; Eph 6:5-8; & 1 Pet 2:18-25.

sins that's practiced by the ungodly. God is teaching us the virtue of glorifying Him by living grace-filled lives even in institutions that aren't good & by submission to ungodly authorities over us.

Not all masters or lords were cruel or harsh but many of them were, & it is under some of these that Titus 2:9-10 says: **Urge slaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be pleasing, not argumentative, not stealing, but showing all good faith.** This is why it's important to understand the historical context. Paul isn't giving this command to 21st century Americans working an 8-5 job. He's talking to **slaves**, some of whom may have been in working conditions far worse than we can imagine, with masters that would make the worst of your bosses look like angels. & yet Scripture tells slaves not to complain. If Christians should & could glorify God by their attitude & service as slaves where they had pagan masters who mistreated them mercilessly, if these commands applied to them, how much more should we respond when we get to go home with our freedom at the end of each work day? If overworked, unpaid, & unappreciated people in bondage were to obey these principles, how much more those of us who get paid to work? Without question & without exception, no matter how difficult your work week has been or how mean your boss is, none of us can come close to what some of the original readers of this passage had to go through. But the same Word of God & same Spirit of God applies to both them & us. We have no excuse not to glorify God in our work. So God inspired Paul to write this passage giving **slaves** (& us) 5 ways to glorify God in our situations & then the result of such behavior. While the parallel between slavery & being a modern employee isn't exact (in spite of what you may think), every Christian should also have these qualities. Our conduct & how we carry ourselves before others reflects on what or who we represent. You may disagree with your boss but all your opinions & complaints don't change the reality that who you work for & how you work for them (in submission with a cheerful heart rather than grumbling) is important to God. I can guarantee you that you have less to grumble about than the group we see today. **Slaves** didn't have any protection & there weren't any labor laws. How every Christian, slave or free, lives their life either reflects or rejects God & His gospel.

As this letter would be read by Titus in the churches of Crete there would be Christian slaves in the room, many of whom had non-Christian masters. God's Word in Titus 2 has something to say about the vital role of all His people, of every status & sex & stage of life, including those in bonds who may have been very low in the eyes of the pagan world, but who had a very high calling & role in the eyes of the God they ultimately serve. Titus 2:9-15

Slaves may not have been a special in the eyes of the world, but they were in the eyes of God. They may not have had a good human master, but they had an unspeakably glorious & loving heavenly Master. This passage calls on them, despite their difficult, degrading, & discouraging circumstances, to glorify God & His gospel by how they lived & served. & if God's grace was sufficient for them to do that, it's sufficient for us as well in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. In fact, God's amazing grace is the only explanation for how this passage could be possible for slaves in the Roman Empire. Often with the passages of Scripture addressing slaves we're quick to substitute the word *employee* instead of *slave* & *employer* instead of *master*, but let's not be so quick to do that it causes us to miss the full impact God intended. We want to be careful to keep interpretation & application in their proper order. I can understand why it's easier to jump over this subject & just view it through the lens of modern society. Of course, God's Word has application to our work & employment today. But we need to understand, as always, not 1st what does this mean to me, but what did this mean originally when God inspired it through the original author to the original audience & setting. As we do that, we'll see how relevant & revolutionary & powerful God intended vs 9-10 to be both then & now. Vs 9 doesn't begin with *employees* or *volunteers* & it doesn't even use the word *servants* (this isn't any of the 6 different Greek words that can be translated *servants*). This is the plural of the Greek word *doulos*, which means **slave**. Of the groups Paul addresses in this chapter, **slaves** may have been the largest. If we were gathered at a church on Crete in that day, at least 1 out of 3 of us would be a slave. In some parts of Asia Minor, slaves outnumbered free men. What does Paul tell Titus to teach Christian **slaves**?

1. Be Subject Urge slaves to be subject to their own masters in everything. It may seem unnecessary that slaves would be told **to be subject to their own masters in everything** since they were the property of their master & had no other practical option. However, this command to slaves may reflect an actual or potential problem among Christian slaves in light of their newfound freedom in Christ as compared with their forced servitude.⁹ Or Paul may simply have been encouraging Christian slaves to make the best of their social position & relationship to their masters by voluntarily subjecting themselves rather than serving with a reluctant & rebellious attitude. Christian slaves were **to be subject to their *own* masters** even as the young women were to be subject to their *own* husbands (2:5). Their subjection was strictly on the basis of an order within a specific context or relationship & not on the basis of any innate inferiority. This same expression is used in Titus 3:1 where it says we're **to be subject to rulers, to authorities**. As we all know, it's possible to obey yet be un-submissive in attitude, right? William Hendriksen writes: *External compliance with the will of the master is not enough, however. Growling & grumbling underneath are also forbidden. The sullen disposition has never yet won a soul for Christ.*¹⁰ What's commanded here is a continual placing of yourself under the authority of those over you in both actions & attitudes. As Paul states in Colossians,

Slaves, obey those who are your human masters in everything, not with eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord & not for people, knowing that *it is* from the Lord *that* you will receive the reward of the inheritance. *It is* the Lord Christ *whom* you serve (3:22-24).

The words, **sincerity of heart & heartily** show that the right attitude, not just grudging compliance, is required. If those words applied to **slaves** who were often under cruel, abusive masters, surely they apply to us today who may have unreasonable, hard-to-please bosses. Yet, we live in a society that feeds our sense of victimhood. If we're being treated unfairly, we hear, *You don't have to take that! Stand up for your rights & fight back!* But to those who were true victims, to **slaves**, Paul says, **be subject to your masters in everything**. As an employee today, Scripture would permit you to go

⁹ The political & social ramifications of Christian slaves behaving inappropriately would be far-reaching. Barrett, *Pastoral Epistles*, 136, says: *Christian slaves constituted a special danger to the good repute of the Church. Their Christian freedom could if wrongly expressed lead to the opinion that they & their brethren were social revolutionaries.*

¹⁰ NTC, p 369

through proper channels to seek to get a difficult situation corrected or you may choose to take another job. But, before you tell off the boss & stomp out the door, remember that the testimony of Christ is at stake. Have you demonstrated submission to your boss? If not, to leave that job would be to dodge the lesson that God may want to teach you.

2. Be Pleasing be subject to their own masters in everything, to be pleasing... This refers to an attitude of cheerful service. The 1st one we should always seek to please is the Lord. But we should also seek to please our human master or employer. While there's nothing wrong with trying to do a good job in order to get a promotion or raise, our ultimate objective always should be to please Jesus. This phrase is used 8 other times in the NT & everywhere else it refers to being pleasing to God. Obviously, it suggests a very high standard for pleasing earthly, human masters. In Rom 12:1-2, it says we're to **present your bodies as a living & holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship**. Phil 4:18 uses the image of a **fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God**. Our work should be well-pleasing & done with excellence as an act of worship. Col 3:20 shows us our desire to be pleasing to God is ultimately why we submit to & obey earthly authorities: **Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord**. Heb 13:21 tells us we don't do this in our own strength, but God is glorified when we rely on Him. It says He is the one who will **equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever & ever**. It's not just the lofty things in life that glorify God, it's the little, lowly things in the eyes of the world, if done through Christ by the strength which God supplies. How you serve, submit, & seek to please your master through your work is how God will be glorified. Nothing is too menial or mundane. As Paul says elsewhere **whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31)**. Some **slaves** may have been tempted to slack off or not to be so diligent to please a Christian master, thinking, *we're all brothers in Christ*. But in 1 Tim 6:2, Paul says that if slaves had believing masters, they should **serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers & beloved**. Paul next mentions 2 negative forms of behavior that may have been common among slaves but that the Christian slave should avoid.

3. Not Argumentative This means don't talk back, talk against, or talk behind the master's back. When we do that we aren't in submission. It suggests that Paul is thinking of the stereotype of the ill-mannered, unruly, rebellious slave. One of the common ways people under authority express rebellion is verbal challenges & under the breath sarcastic comments. Generally speaking, orders must not be questioned, especially by Christian slaves. There's a difference between feedback when it's asked for & being **argumentative**, which usually has a dishonoring that goes with it. In biblical submission, the most important issue isn't whether you're right or not. It's whether your attitude is right according to God's Word. There may be occasions where your concern to honor your boss compels you to graciously & humbly discuss it, but not in an argumentative way. You aren't always or habitually injecting your opinions, objecting to the boss's orders, & that ultimately you'll submit. The only biblically justified time not to obey is if authorities call us to disobey God (Acts 4-5). But even on those rare occasions, that many of us will never experience, you can still honor authority by your respectful attitude. David consistently honored King Saul who was as an ungodly authority. He had a submissive attitude & no ill will toward his unjust king. Daniel gives us another example of how God blessed his submissive respectful attitude toward his master in a diplomatic & wise way without violating scriptural commands or convictions (Dan 1). It's always wrong to oppose the boss or hassle him. Cheerful compliance without arguing should be a Christian's normal response.

4. Not Stealing This was a big problem in the days of slavery & you can understand how they could justify stealing as **slaves** who were not always treated fairly. They were often entrusted with managing a family's funds for the household. It would be easy to rationalize & think, *I'm living in poverty & they're living in luxury. They won't miss a little if I use it for myself. I deserve it!* As an employee, it's easy to use the same kind of rationale, but it's wrong & sinful. God says don't do this. After all, one of the 10 Commandments is, **You shall not steal** (Ex 20:15). & if He doesn't let mistreated slaves get away with trying to justify stealing, we certainly shouldn't go there. Never take what's not yours, whether pilfering supplies, stealing time by not working the hours you're paid for, or holding back from what the government demands. Paul told Timothy, **if we have food**

& covering, with these we shall be content (1 Tim 6:8). He says in even the worst of circumstance we can be content through Christ who gives strength (Phil 4). Slaves were given food & covering & could be content. We have so much more & are seldom content. Anything beyond what a slave has is an extraordinary blessing & a bonus we don't deserve. Beyond that, Eph 4:28 tells us, **He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.** If you weren't a slave in those days & were able to earn money by working, God's call goes far beyond, *Don't steal!* Instead, work hard so you can have resources to share with those in need. If you have a job, praise God. If finances are tight, keep honoring God by being a person of integrity & God will bless you even if you're not rich. & as you work hard, don't just do it for yourself, but so you can share with others in need in the body of Christ. Paul concludes his commands for **slaves** with...

5. Showing All Good Faith 10-11

Showing all good faith means demonstrating you're a dependable, faithful worker. Those over you should know that if they give you something to do, it'll get done in a timely fashion. They should know you keep your word. You don't pad expense accounts. You don't goof off when you're supposed to be working. You seek to help your boss & company succeed. Again, the motivation isn't primarily to be a good worker so you'll get a raise or promotion. Paul's talking to **slaves**, & he doesn't say be a good worker so your master may set you free one day. No, Christianity doesn't take us out of this world & its problems. But it does change us in the midst of them by the grace vs 11 speaks of. How could a slave live vs 9-10? Only as he knew the reality of vs 11-14 (next week). The focus of the Bible isn't how we can get out of circumstances we're in, the Bible's message is that we can enjoy & honor God in the midst of any circumstance, even slavery. He often doesn't take us out of our trials, but His sufficient grace helps us through them.

6. The Result Why were **slaves** to live this way? **So that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.** **Adorn** comes from a Greek word from which we get our word *cosmetics*. It means to arrange in an orderly manner so as to enhance beauty. Paul means we should live our lives with godly behavior so the world will be attracted to our Savior. This means you need to think

about your behavior & attitude, especially on the job. How will it make others think about the Savior you claim to follow? Your life must be the foundation for any verbal witness. If your life isn't an example of godliness, as Paul spells out here, please don't let others know you're a Christian! If you do, you'll dishonor the name of Christ & give reasons to unbelievers to continue in their sins. But while we need a consistently godly life to beautify the gospel, we aren't perfect. If that were the requirement, none of us could ever be a witness. But when you fail, confess your sin & ask forgiveness of those you've wronged. That also shows the reality of the gospel in your life & can be a powerful witness to those over & around you. The most menial & manual labor if done by a Christian to the glory of Christ, even if a slave, makes our Savior beautiful & the gospel believable. The behavior for Christian **slaves** was designed to produce a positive result. In both vs 5 & 10 it tells us the gospel message will be judged by the behavior of Christians. Especially noteworthy is the fact that the behavior of those at the lowest level of society has the opportunity of *making attractive* the gospel. Surely the gospel's transforming power in the lives of those who had every reason to be bitter would stand out clearer & brighter than in those who lived in freedom & dignity unknown to slaves.

In an article in Breakpoint entitled, *Drawn to the Light - Why Muslims Convert to Christianity*, Dr Dudley Woodberry, professor of Islamic Studies, aware that throughout the world Muslims have been turning to Christ, was curious about the reasons why, especially in countries where the cost of converting is so high. To find the answer, he created a detailed questionnaire. Over a 16-year period, some 750 Muslims from 30 countries filled it out & the results are stunning. The #1 reason Muslim converts listed for their decision to follow Christ was the lifestyle of the Christians who worked & lived among them.¹¹

If a slave behaved as Paul states here, he'd have stood out from other **slaves**. Many of whom resented their lot in life & fought back with a sulky attitude, an insolent tongue, petty thievery, or trying to get by with as little work as possible. The same is true of many workers today. But Christian workers should be different. God wants us to beautify our life by godly behavior so as to attract others to our Savior. God's beauty program starts when we repent of our sins & trust in Jesus as our Savior & Lord. Against the bleak hopelessness of slavery, the Christian slave's devotion to the gospel & resulting godly attitudes & actions serve to make attractive the ultimate freedom

¹¹ www.breakpoint.org/drawn-to-the-light/

that's only realized in Christ. As we live & identify ourselves as Christians, we can make the gospel message attractive & credible by our godly attitudes & behavior. However, if we're perceived as unloving & hypocritical, we provide unbelievers with good reason to be skeptical about the power of the gospel. & so, what appears at 1st glance to be a time- & culture-bound instruction to slaves applies to all who find themselves under the authority of someone else. Where all around there's disrespect & indifference to those in authority, a Christian's respectful attitude & speech, backed up by good performance, will demonstrate that God's message of salvation produces positive, visible results. This is an opportunity for witness that we must not miss. With these words Paul entrusts to **slaves** the ministry of making the gospel appealing to their masters. By giving this responsibility to slaves, he makes their masters' eternity subject to their good-hearted willingness to daily live out the gospel. The **slaves** become the Savior's representatives, responsible for conduct that can lead to their masters' salvation. This perspective makes a master's ultimate destiny dependent on his slave & makes a slave the master of his owner's future. The responsibility for gospel witness given even to **slaves** becomes the ultimate statement of Paul that everyone in the church community has a role in the progress of the gospel. If God has convicted you of your unbiblical view of work today, confess your sin & commit to applying His Word by His grace. Be submissive. Be well-pleasing. Be honoring, not arguing or complaining. Be content. Be an attraction for the gospel. For many Christians today, as throughout church history, the most important & fertile field for evangelism is the place where they work. That's their mission field. As in almost no other place, unbelievers have the opportunity to observe believers in daily situations & activities. They see whether the believer is patient or impatient, kind or uncaring, selfless or selfish, honest or dishonest, clean or vulgar in his talk. They have the opportunity to see how well the Christian lives up to the faith he professes & the principles of Scripture he claims to believe. Inviting unsaved friends to church certainly has a place in witnessing for Christ, but it will be useless & even counterproductive if our attitude, reliability, & honesty on the job are questionable.¹² If Jesus isn't your Master this morning, I pray you'll become His slave & call Him your Lord. You're already a

¹² John F. MacArthur Jr., [Titus](#), p 98

slave of sin, but Jesus can free you from that bondage. He is the way & truth & life, the only source of eternal life, the only way to heaven, & He alone holds the truth that can set you free to serve Him & others for the glory of God.