

Servant Evangelism: A Biblical Perspective On Slavery
Titus 2:9-10

- I. Be productive for your superior. 2:9

- II. Be pleasing in your spirit. 2:9

- III. Be polite in your speech. 2:9

- IV. Be principled in your service. 2:10

- V. Be public in your sincerity. 2:10

- VI. Be praiseworthy for your Savior. 2:10

Servant Evangelism: A Biblical Perspective On Slavery

Titus 2:9-10

Introduction:

- 1) Few things reveal the depth and breathe of the total depravity of mankind like the institution of slavery. Treating those made in the image of God as a commodity to be bought and sold, this barbaric social structure reared its ugly head almost from the beginning of human history and has continued its cruel exploitation and abuse right on to the present. Ripping children from parents, as if they were nothing more than a litter of puppies, separating husbands and wives because it was economically prosperous with no regard for the heartache and devastation it inflicted, the institution is a blight on the human race and demonstrates just how wicked the human heart can be.
- 2) In the 1st century 1 out of 3 persons in Italy and 1 in 5 elsewhere was a slave. A person could become a slave as a result of capture in war, default on a debt, inability to support and “voluntarily” selling oneself, being sold as a child by destitute parents, birth to slave parents, conviction of a crime, or kidnapping and piracy. Unlike the slavery that arose in the Americas in the 1600’s slavery in the ancient world was racially indiscriminate cutting across racial, social and national lines. As with many other pieces of property, slaves had no rights (Slave/Servant, *HBD* 1286). And yet the state of slaves varied in the ancient world. Some were forced to work in the fields and mines in gangs, while others were highly skilled workers and trusted administrators. It has been noted that frequently slaves were better off than free laborers (Slavery, *EDT*, 1112). Still, if a slave attacked his master, every slave in the household was killed, and until the time of Christian emperors, the penalty for rebellion was crucifixion (Ibid).
- 3) One would have thought that with the spread of Christianity, slavery would have met its demise. Unfortunately that was not the case. Justinian (527-65) sought to abolish slavery, but the numbers again grew, and after the collapse of the Roman Empire, it merged into serfdom. The Crusades boosted slave trade, and in Venice Christian slaves were actually sold to Muslims (Ibid).
- 4) But what about the modern era and the enslavement of some 24 million Africans, many of whom were sent here to America and found themselves in

servitude to Christian masters? Any honest history must note that the enslavement of Africans by Africans was common and had been so for hundreds of years. Still, the pattern changed radically from the 15th century onward and the crimes of humanity visited on fellow humanity is shameful beyond imagination. Person were kidnapped, families destroyed, and unbridled cruelty was rampant. And what of Christians? What about Baptists? What were we doing as a nation?

When America was founded, there were about half a million slaves. Approximately one third of the founders had slaves (George Washington and Thomas Jefferson being the most notable). Most of the slaves lived in the five southern colonies.

Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Franklin (both signers of the Declaration of Independence) founded the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery in 1774. Franklin saw slavery as “an atrocious debasement of human nature,” and Rush went on to head a national abolition movement.

John Jay was the president of a similar society in New York and said: “To contend for our own liberty, and to deny that blessing to others, involves an inconsistency not be excused.”

John Adams opposed slavery because it was a “foul contagion in the human character” and “an evil of colossal magnitude.” His son, John Quincy Adams, so crusaded against slavery that he was known as “the hell-hound of abolition.”

It’s important to note that when these anti-slavery societies were founded, they were clearly an act of civil disobedience. In 1774, for example, Pennsylvania passed a law to end slavery. But King George vetoed that law and other laws passed by the colonies. The King was pro-slavery, and Great Britain (at the time) practiced slavery. As long as the colonies were part of the British Empire, they would also be required to practice slavery.

When Thomas Jefferson finished his first draft of the Declaration of Independence, it included a paragraph condemning the King for introducing slavery into the colonies and continuing the slave trade. It

said: “He [King George] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it’s most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither.” Unfortunately, this paragraph was dropped from the final draft because it was offensive to the delegates from Georgia and South Carolina.

(Kerby Anderson, “Slavery and the Founders,” 7-14-03)

- 5) But fast forward to the late 1700’s and early 1800’s and you find Baptists in the South arguing “What God sanctioned it the OT, and permitted in the New, cannot be sin.” Baptist like Fuller, Dagg, Boyce and Broadus tragically can down on the wrong side of this issue. And, it is simply impossible to deny that slavery played an important role in the formation of the SBC in 1845, even if the Northern Baptist forced the issue and basically shoved Baptist in the South into starting a new Convention.
- 6) Thankfully one must also acknowledge that it was Christians who led the way in bringing to an end this horrible institution. Men like William Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, John Wesley and Charles Finney led the charge. Quakers and Moravians, Methodist and some Baptist voiced their opposition against great odds and were heard by God. Slavery was outlawed in 1807 in Britain and throughout its empire in 1827. Congress brought “slave trade” to a close in 1808, but the end of slavery would not come until 1865. Still, and do not miss the point: only where there was a Christian impulse did slavery come to an end. To this day slavery continues its reign of terror in many parts of the world where the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ has not yet taken hold. Where the gospel has found fertile soil the institution of slavery has vanished into the midnight darkness.
- 7) Now I want to raise a question, answer that question, and clarify an issue needing clarification. What does the Bible say about slavery? What words of guidance and instruction do we find? Summarizing the biblical teaching I believe the following to be an accurate description:
 1. The Bible regulates but it does not ordain or require slavery (Ex. 21; Lev. 25, Deut. 15; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; 1Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:18-25).

*Slavery is not a divine institution. Note the absence of an OT grounding in Eph. 6:5-9!

2. Paul taught if you can gain your freedom then go for it (1Cor. 7:21-24), but do not let it consume you.
3. Through a wise and strategic extension of the gospel, the NT sows the seed for the unmasking of slavery for the sin that it is and, its eventual destruction.
4. Scripture never advocates bloodshed or rebellion in confronting and overturning evil structures of society and culture. It rather attacks with the beauty of the gospel, the grace of God, and the ethic of love.
5. Paul turns the table on the institution of slavery placing it in eternal perspective! From the perspective of eternity, the slave is master of his master for The Master! The earthly master who does not know Christ in a real sense finds his eternal destiny in the hands of his slave who actually is the free man. It is the slave who knows Christ, it is the slave who possesses the gospel treasure that saves. From the gospel perspective, it is the unbelieving master who is in the position of disadvantage.

Thus Paul puts into action a strategy of servant evangelism whereby everyone in a position of service, everyone under authority, sees before them a fertile and open field for evangelism. Here is their mission field, here is their place of ministry. Now the question becomes, what will they see? How will you serve the one over you, regardless of the social, governmental, business, family, or religious context? Moving to our text, Paul lays before us 6 powerful principles which will shut the mouth of the evil one. 3 are in verse 9 and 3 are in verse 10.

I. Be productive for your superior 2:9

- 1) Exhort is not in the original text. The verse simply says slaves (*doulous*) to [their] own masters (*despotais*) be subject (submissive). How can we do this? Why should we do this? Colossians 3:24 provides the answer, “for you serve the Lord Christ.” Ultimately I am serving Jesus. My motivation in serving others is wonderfully raised to a whole new plane. I want to serve

this man, help this man, honor this man, because to do so is to honor my Lord.

- 2) Any exceptions? Yes, there are 4:
- a) unbiblical
 - b) unethical
 - c) illegal
 - d) immoral

Outside of these, my goal is to submit to him and serve him, all the while seeing the true Master, the Lord Jesus, who stands behind him.

II. Be pleasing in your spirit 2:9

The text says “in all things well-pleasing.” This addresses both the scope and the spirit of my service. The scope is in everything. Now there is a small debate. Does “in all things” (*NKJV*), “in everything” (*NIV*), go with “be subject to their own masters” (*NIV*) or with “well-pleasing” (*NKJV*). Neither rendering greatly changes or understanding or the meaning of the text, but I understand it to refer to “well-pleasing” as it is in the *NKJV*. Growing out of an attitude of submissiveness that seeks to be productive for one’s master, a servant strives to be well-pleasing in spirit, in attitude. A Christian servant wants to please his master, delights in pleasing his superior. Ephesians 6:6-7 says, “do the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.”

Both in action and attitude the servant of Christ puts on display for all to see “the grace of God that brings salvation” (2:11), putting to shame the opponents of the gospel who will have nothing evil to say of them (2:8). We serve others gladly not grudgingly, joyfully not resentfully. Only by means of the filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5) can servants of Christ serve others in this kind of way.

III. Be polite in speech 2:9

“Not answering back,” lit. “speaking against.” Servants of Christ do not back talk, mouth off. They are not argumentative, contentious, disagreeable. They do not gripe about their boss behind his back and compromise their testimony as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Words are powerful weapons. In a matter of seconds a testimony built over a lifetime can be destroyed by a few careless words. The wisdom of Proverbs is crucial at this point:

A worthless person, a wicked man, Walks with a perverse mouth;
-Proverbs 6:12

He who guards his mouth preserves his life, But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.
-Proverbs 13:3

An ungodly man digs up evil, And it is on his lips like a burning fire.
A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends.
-Proverbs 16:27-28

A fool's lips enter into contention, And his mouth calls for blows.
-Proverbs 18:6

A fool's mouth is his destruction, And his lips are the snare of his soul.
-Proverbs 18:7

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.
-Proverbs 18:21

Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.
-Proverbs 26:20-21

I said, "I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue;
I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me."
-Psalm 39:1

Yes, the servant of Christ will be polite in speech, esp. when talking to and about his boss.

IV. Be principled in your service 2:10

“*not pilfering*” (NKJV), “stealing” (NIV). The servant of Christ is not a thief! Rather he is a man you can trust when you are not around. He is honest, dependable, a man of integrity. He does not take what belongs to another justifying in his mind he has earned it and that he desires it.

This servant will go the extra mile in maintaining his financial accountability. There will be no inflated expense accounts, time sheets, or unauthorized use of his employer’s resources. From a paper clip to an expensive business resource, he will conduct himself with absolute honesty and integrity. After all he serves Christ, and he would never think of stealing from Jesus.

V. Be public in your sincerity 2:10

“But showing all good fidelity” (faithfulness). “But” denotes a strong adversative, and emphatic rejection of what goes before. “Not stealing but showing faithfulness.” The word “showing” means to demonstrate or show forth. The idea is that your faithfulness and fidelity to your master is evident and visible to all. Your trustworthiness, reliability and dependability are continually on display. No one needs to be looking over your shoulder. You are known for your loyalty and integrity. Others may cheat the boss but not you. Others may betray the boss but not you. Others may become embittered, especially if they serve a tyrant or bully. Not you. The Christ servant, in stark and remarkable contrast, will put on public display the gospel’s transforming power that enables him to bless rather than curse, to serve rather than steal.

VI. Be praiseworthy of your Savior 2:10

Being a faithful, honest, gracious, kind and submissive servant has a noble end: “to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.” This kind of servant makes beautiful and attractive the teaching of God our Savior, and he does so in all things. Though he be a slave or servant, the one under authority makes gorgeous the things of God by his productive, pleasing, polite, principled, public service. It is indeed a praiseworthy service as it puts on display the character of God shining forth from one of His children. Hayne Griffin is right on target when he says,

“The effect of individual Christian behavior on unbelievers cannot be underestimated. Inevitably, unbelievers judge the gospel message by the lives of those who embrace it. As we live and identify ourselves as Christians, we can make the gospel message attractive and credible by our godly attitudes and behavior. However, if we are perceived as unloving and hypocritical, we provide unbelievers with good reason to be skeptical about the power of the gospel. Paul’s exhortations, both to these Cretan groups and to Christians of every age, should alert us to the tremendous importance of being in reality what we profess in word.” (Griffin, NAC 308).

Conclusion

Why did Paul provide this charge to those who are under the authority of another? I think the answer is easily answered. Without the mind of Christ, the filling the Spirit, and a spiritual perspective on now and eternity, we will be

rebellious not submissive
irritable not pleasant
ugly not polite
thieves not honest
unfaithful not faithful, and
an embarrassment not a blessing
to a Saviour we say we adore.

When you are in the position of disadvantage, when you are the servant rather than the master, then you will discover if your faith is real and your profession genuine. It will not be by accident you are there. A sovereign God put you there that by your life, those who see you, will also see the beauty of your Lord, the beauty of Jesus as you serve others, just as you would Jesus.