

1 TIMOTHY 6:1, 2a LABOUR RELATIONS

“Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.”¹

With some degree of regularity, individuals—not surprisingly, usually of Negroid descent—demand reparations for slavery. These demands are echoed by several prominent race baiters who anticipate that they will be appointed to administer the reparations when they are finally extracted from taxpayers. This is an odd demand, if one should pause and think. It means that people who fled Hungary in 1956 to escape Soviet oppression are responsible to pay moneys to assuage the hurt feelings of Igbo tribesmen who fled Nigeria during the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 to 1970. Of course, such reasoning makes no sense.

Then, the question arises, what percentage of “blackness” qualifies for reparations? Should Barak Hussein Obama pay reparations to himself? His mother was a white woman from Kansas and his father was a black man from Kenya. Or should he pay reparations to his wife, Michelle Obama? Is it even possible to find a black person who is racially pure without any genetic material contributed to her or his makeup either from Mongoloid or Caucasoid progenitors? Perhaps those advocating payment of reparations based on race are actually attempting to game the system. Assuredly, the demands—based as they are on race—anticipate a racial purity akin to Aryan purity that was demanded by the Nazis—a purity that was impossible to demonstrate and meaningless if it could be achieved.

What is indisputable is that slavery has been a plague on the world, beginning from ancient times and continuing to this day. The estimates of those enslaved in our modern world run as high as thirty million people. The number includes people in debt bondage, domestic servants kept in captivity, indentured servitude, serfdom, adoptions in which children are compelled to work as slaves, child soldiers, women in forced marriages and sex slaves in addition to actual slaves captured and held in bondage in a surprising number of Asian and Middle Eastern countries.

It is generally assumed that Caucasians enslaved Negroid races and Mongoloid races. However, all races have practised slavery. Historically, Asians enslaved Asians. Today, slavery among Muslim countries is relatively common, especially in the Middle East. Arab Muslims enslave black Africans with dismaying regularity. Black Africans enslaved fellow Africans, often selling them to Caucasian slavers seeking cheap labour for the new world. Without the enslavement of blacks by blacks, slavery among the European nations during the eighteenth and nineteenth Centuries would never have happened. Set against this is the fact that without white Christian intervention slavery would have continued in Europe and the Americas.

I have included this brief address of the subject of slavery by way of introduction to the text before us. Slavery was one of the most common conditions of those living in the Roman Empire. Some estimates suggest that six out of ten people living in the Roman Empire were slaves. Slavery presented a complex situation in the ancient context.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

UNDER A YOKE AS BONDSERVANTS — I provided the introduction in order to state that direct application of the text to our current situation is not possible. Within the Christian world, slavery simply will not be tolerated today. However, this fact must be offset by the repeated call to Christians to offer themselves as slaves to the Master. Underscore in your mind that we are called to offer ourselves voluntarily as “slaves” to Christ and to serve one another voluntarily.

Perhaps a few references to the call to voluntary servitude will be helpful. “Whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” [MATTHEW 20:27, 28].² The Master clearly calls those who would follow Him to choose a life of service. He speaks of those who choose this life as choosing to be a “slave,” a *doûlos*. A slave was “completely controlled” by another.³

Having spoken of His pending return to take His own out of this world, Jesus then stated, “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” [MATTHEW 24:45-51].

Those who wrote the New Testament Letters often spoke of themselves as servants or as slaves of God and of Jesus Christ. Paul appears to have favoured speaking of himself as a “servant of Jesus Christ” [see ROMANS 1:1; GALATIANS 1:10; TITUS 1:1]. In similar fashion James [JAMES 1:1], Peter [2 PETER 1:1], Jude [JUDE 1] and John [REVELATION 1:1] each refer to themselves as servants of God or of Christ Jesus. The angels of God speak of themselves as servants of God [REVELATION 19:10; 22:9]. No wonder that these whom we consider to be great in the Kingdom of God speak of themselves as slaves, for Christ Himself presented Himself as a slave for our sake. Recall the description of the Master which Paul presents in the Letter to Philippian Christians. “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” [PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7].

All who are believers in the Risen Saviour are expected to present themselves as slaves of righteousness. Listen to the Apostle to the Gentiles as he instructs the Roman Christians. “Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification” [ROMANS 6:17-19]. We Christians are “slaves to righteousness,” and we are slaves to one another. Elders are to make themselves slaves to those whom they are appointed to serve. “Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” [2 TIMOTHY 2:23-25].

² See also MARK 10:43-45

³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains** (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) 41

All the verses I have cited speak of voluntary servitude. Perhaps one of the reasons we recoil from speaking of ourselves as slaves is a misperception of what is meant. Whenever we think of slavery we tend to think in racial terms. Slavery in the New World and in Europe was imposed on races considered inferior. Thus, there was a decided racial component in slavery as practised in the New World—a racial component that continues to colour our perception of slavery. The slavery that is practised in numerous Muslim countries is likewise racial in nature. Filipinos, Hindi or black Africans are enslaved by Arabs and often sold to the highest bidders. The slavery witnessed during the past three centuries is decidedly racial in nature.

However, at the time Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, slavery in the Empire was changing dramatically. Slavery appears never to have been based on race in the Roman Empire; rather, slavery within the Empire reflected the economic and political realities of the day. Conquered peoples could be enslaved, regardless of race; or an individual could sell himself or herself into slavery due to poverty. Freedom could be scary; so some individuals seeking a measure of security chose slavery. I'm speaking of those who were bondservants or conquered peoples. Those who became slaves of the state through conviction of criminal charges were sent into the mines and rowing gangs on the galley ships, and there they were expected to die.

Though the master had complete control over a slave, it should not be assumed that slaves were necessarily uneducated or of low social class. In the Roman Empire, manumission at age thirty was the rule. It is reported that there was such a high rate of manumission that Augustus Caesar introduced legal restrictions to curb the trend.⁴ Slaves in the Empire could own property, even owning other slaves. The excess numbers of *nouveau riche* ex-slaves was said to have scandalised “old money” Romans.⁵

No particular work was reserved exclusively for slaves. Slaves and freeborn people worked side-by-side in both menial and responsible tasks. Slaves might be physicians, teachers or business owners; or slaves could work as street sweepers, hand workers and dock workers. Selling oneself into slavery was commonly used as a means of obtaining Roman citizenship and gaining entrance into society.⁶ I am not suggesting that buying or selling slaves was Christian—it was decidedly sub-Christian. However, if we wish to understand how to apply what Paul has written concerning slavery, we need to understand how the first readers of his writings reacted.

Therefore, it is appropriate to state that the concept of slavery is more complex than the word might indicate. Bible translators struggle to convey most accurately what is meant. Consider this statement from the preface of the English Standard Version of the Bible, the translation that I use. “In New Testament times, a *doûlos* is often best described as a ‘bondservant’—that is, as someone bound to serve his master for a specific (usually lengthy) period of time, but also as someone who might nevertheless own property, achieve social advancement, and even be released or purchase his freedom. The ESV usage thus seeks to express the nuance of meaning in each context. Where absolute ownership by a master is in view..., ‘slave’ is used; where a more limited form of servitude is in view, ‘bondservant’ is used...; where the context indicates a wide range of freedom..., ‘servant’ is preferred.”⁷

⁴ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, **1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word** (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 2000) 136-138

⁵ S. S. Bartchy, “Servant; Slave,” (article) in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, **The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised** (Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1979-1988) 420-421

⁶ Hughes and Chapell, *op. cit.*, 138

⁷ Preface, **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version** (Standard Bible Society, Wheaton, IL 2001)

Slavery was not an ideal state, but neither was it the inhumane condition which we associate with modern slavery. Though the Apostle did not advocate a slave revolt or throwing off slavery through some form of resistance or revolution, Paul did teach, “If you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:21]. For the purpose of understanding what is written, we need to know that the social status of a slave was dependent upon the social status of the owner of the slave. “Free persons who had to look for work each day without any certainty of finding it (day labourers) were at the bottom of the social-economic pyramid, not those in slavery.”⁸

Slaves in the New Testament were considered part of the extended household. Self-sale into slavery was the most common way in which one became a slave. This provided a model for freeborn people who became Christians, as the Apostle writes in the First Corinthian Letter: “He who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:22, 23]. Nor should anyone imagine this concept of voluntary slavery to have been restricted to Paul. Peter teaches us to live as “slaves of God.” “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” [1 PETER 2:16]. Likewise, those who entered the Faith while in slavery were to think of themselves as freedmen. “He who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:22].

Let’s focus more particularly on those whom Paul addressed in this portion of the letter. He has been addressing social relationships in the congregation of the Lord, speaking first of widows—whom we would see as the vulnerable in the modern context. Then, the Apostle addressed the relationship of elders to the assembly, providing protection for the elders from frivolous charges while at the same time holding them accountable for their lives and their teaching. Now, he addresses slaves, speaking of their responsibility to their masters.

It is likely that the makeup of the congregation in Ephesus was disproportionately composed of slaves. In the encyclical that went to Ephesus, the Apostle invested considerable time addressing the relationship of slaves and owners, perhaps indicating that there were some tensions. This is what he wrote in that letter. “Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him” [EPHESIANS 6:5-9].

The instructions were similar but more extended than were those provided in the Letter to the Church in Colossae. “Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

“Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven” [COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1].

In either instance, slaves are to realise that their conduct reflects Him who is truly Master. Whether the master is a fellow saint or an unbeliever, the conduct of the slave reflects on the Saviour. The same truth must be kept in mind by masters as they interact with their slaves.

⁸ Bartchy, op. cit.

Undoubtedly, some of the slaves holding membership in the Ephesian congregation came from homes where their master was not a Christian. Other slaves were likely members of households where the master was a fellow believer. We can readily believe that some of the elders were slave owners, as was true of Philemon in the Colossian church [see **PHILEMON 1:1, 2**]. The point to hold in mind is that the teaching that slaves were to consider themselves free in Christ and that masters were to keep in mind that they were slaves to Christ the Master could be—and likely had been—distorted, generating tension within the congregation. Therefore, Paul chose to address the matter in succinct fashion in this letter.

Those under a yoke as bondservants were to keep in mind that their conduct could bring reproach upon the Name of Christ the Lord. I suggest that Paul did not address believing masters at this point because he had done so previously in the Ephesian encyclical [see **EPHESIANS 6:5-9**]. What is important to keep uppermost in our own minds is the knowledge that conduct, whether as one with authority or whether as one under authority, reflects on what we profess concerning Christ Jesus our Master. The old saying that people cannot hear what we are saying because our actions are so loud must surely apply in this instance.

WORK AS GOD’S GIFT TO MANKIND — When these verses are addressed in most western pulpits, it is axiomatic that the preacher will focus on relations between labour and management. Of necessity, the expositor in that instance will be compelled to speak primarily about the responsibilities of the labourer to fulfil the expectations of the one who hired him or her. To be certain, the concept is valid; and the text will support such views. Candidly, I would be remiss if I ignored that aspect of Christian responsibility.

However, as I have already indicated, the primary emphasis in the Apostle’s instruction is the necessity of honouring those in authority. This is in keeping with what has been discussed to this point. The congregation is to “Honour widows who are truly widows” [**1 TIMOTHY 5:3 ff.**]. Likewise, the assembly is to honour elders, “especially those who labour in preaching and teaching” [**1 TIMOTHY 5:17 ff.**]. With these verses the Apostle focuses on a particular group within the church, undoubtedly representative of what likely was the largest faction within the congregation—slaves and bondservants. They are here instructed to honour their masters—both those who believe and those who do not believe. They must be respectful and they must ensure that those for whom they labour benefit from their work. I will say more about this shortly; but for the moment I want to turn attention to what is the more common application of these verses.

Without distorting the text, we can readily apply Paul’s words to reveal principles related to labour; and perhaps it is important, even vital, to address the matter of work. Christians today have forgotten the admonition of the Reformers to view our work as an offering before the Lord. The ancient concept is that what we do must honour the Lord. Surely that is apparent from numerous passages. For instance, Paul writes, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” [**COLOSSIANS 3:17**].

In the same letter, the Apostle admonished believers, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” [**COLOSSIANS 3:23, 24**].

Work provides opportunity to reveal the presence of the Living God in the life of a believer. Undoubtedly, sloth is condemned throughout the Word of God, and diligence is commended. For instance think of the commendation of diligence delivered by the Qoheleth. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might” [**ECCLESIASTES 9:10a**]. Similarly, sloth is condemned in the Proverbs. Consider a few examples of such censure.

“How long will you lie there, O sluggard?
When will you arise from your sleep?
A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest,
and poverty will come upon you like a robber,
and want like an armed man.”

[PROVERBS 6:9-11]

“A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.”

[PROVERBS 10:4]

“The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing,
while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.”

[PROVERBS 13:4]

“Whoever is slack in his work
is a brother to him who destroys.”

[PROVERBS 18:9]

Permit me to cite but one further instance of censure provided from several that are recorded in the Proverbs.

“The desire of the sluggard kills him,
for his hands refuse to labor.”

[PROVERBS 21:25]

It is impossible to read passages such as these cited without drawing the conclusion that God is not favourably impressed by the lazy person. When we read passages such as these, our mind turns almost automatically to the stern words the Apostle wrote in one of his earliest letters. You will recall that in his Second Letter to the saints in Thessalonica he spoke of idle saints and how a congregation is to treat them.

“We command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

“As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” [2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-15].

Paul's instruction in this instance is nothing less than a specific application of the instructions provided in his earlier letter to this same congregation. "Concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one" [1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-12].

I understand that people think of work as a curse arising from the fall of our first parents. Nevertheless, such a concept is gravely errant. When God created Adam, He pointedly commanded him to work. The specific admonition is recorded for us in Genesis. "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it" [GENESIS 2:15]. Before the Fall, God assigned the man to till the Garden, to tend the plants in the Garden, to work with his hands. Work is not a curse—work is given by God in the perfect environment that existed before sin. The Hebrew term *'abād* means to work, to labour, to expend considerable energy and intensity in a task or function. This is a highly generic term for almost any activity.⁹

Therefore, work cannot be said to be a curse. However, after the Fall, the ground was cursed and man would toil to enable the earth to bring forth its fruit. God warned Adam,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

[GENESIS 3:17-19]

Knowledge of the new reality is revealed in Paul's statement concerning the creation. "The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" [ROMANS 8:20-22].

We would do well in this day to seek and to adopt again a biblical theology of work, realising that God designed us for labour. We find fulfilment in work, in gainful employment. We have come to a day when we exalt pleasure at the expense of fulfilment. I fear that we are moving inexorably toward, and perhaps we have already arrived at, a day in which we invite Divine wrath because we eschew work and embrace pleasure. God warned Israel:

⁹ See James Swanson, Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament), (Logos Research Systems, Inc., Oak Harbor, WA 1997)

“Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory
and stretch themselves out on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock
and calves from the midst of the stall,
who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp
and like David invent for themselves instruments of music,
who drink wine in bowls
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile,
and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.”
[AMOS 6:4-7]¹⁰

Pleasure is not evil in itself. Ease of life is not evil in itself. Comforts are not evil of themselves. The conveniences of modern life are not evil of themselves. What is evil is when we elevate our comforts and our pleasures to the highest good in our lives. When we begin to esteem the pursuit of ease rather than the rigour of gainful work, we are making a fool’s trade. Whenever I begin to say, “I need my rest,” rather than saying, “I need refreshment for my soul,” I am swiftly moving toward spiritual irrelevance. When recreation looms larger in my desires than knowledge of the Holy One, I cannot please God.

We are not Sabbatarian in our theology; according to the Word of God, the Law has been put away and we are not under law but under grace [see **ROMANS 6:14**]. Nevertheless, it is wise to heed the principle provided in Scripture to set aside time to worship the Lord our God. The fourth commandment sets the principle for us: “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work” [EXODUS 20: 9].

With the exception of works of necessity—works necessary for the preservation of life or necessary to ensure that ongoing production is not negatively impacted or halted—Christians should set aside time to worship and to refresh their bodies and their souls. We do a good job refreshing our bodies, but we are too often failing miserably at refreshing our souls. Work is given by God, but we tend to become so focused on the physical that we forget that we are tripartite beings—possessing a body, we are living souls with a spirit given by God. Just as we need to refresh the body with regular sleep and refresh the soul with change of pace and relaxation, we need to refresh the soul with time spent in the present of God who is life.

APPLICATIONS FOR THIS DAY — Information without application is useless. Therefore, we need to ensure that we understand how this information provided by the Apostle may be applied. Few who listen are slaves, though there are times that your work may seem like slavery. Nevertheless, the truths Paul presented still have application for each of us in this day.

Our conduct has an outsized impact on the view others have of Christ and His church. This is the first truth I urge you to take away from the message today. How you live your life, the manner in which you conduct your work, must either draw others to Christ or repel them. People discover very quickly whether we profess Christ the Lord, or whether we are part of the world as they are. If we attempt to live as the world lives, we say with our lives that God is irrelevant. If we are slack in our work ethic, that will dishonour the Lord God.

¹⁰ See also **ISAIAH 5:11, 12; 22:12-14**

Increasingly, I read of people that are refused employment because they are Christian. Undoubtedly, there is resistance to hiring those who are Christians because the world is incensed that we do not worship the gods of tolerance and diversity. An unfortunate truth is that opinions concerning the Faith are drawn from observing those who profess the Faith. If we fail to honour those who employ us, we are making a negative statement about our estimate of God who gives us strength and opportunity to work. In such an instance, we dishonour Him we call Lord.

Christians should see their body as a Temple of the Spirit of God, their work as a means of worship and their workbench as an altar to God who gives strength and life. No task is below the Christian if she understands who she is and if she performs the work to the glory of God. Martin Luther was undoubtedly correct when he wrote, “To call popes, bishops, priests, monks, and nuns, the religious class, but princes, lords, artisans [sic], and farm-workers the secular class, is a specious device... For all Christians whatsoever really and truly belong to the religious class, and there is no difference among them except in so far as they do different work... Hence we deduce that there is, at bottom, really no other difference between laymen, priests, princes, bishops, or, in Romanist terminology, between religious and secular, than that of office or occupation, and not that of Christian status. All have spiritual status, and all are truly priests, bishops and popes. But Christians do not all follow the same occupation... A shoemaker, a smith, a farmer, each has his manual occupation and work; and yet, at the same time, all are eligible to act as priests and bishops. Every one of them in his occupation or handicraft ought to be useful to his fellows, and serve them in such a way that the various trades are all directed to the best advantage of the community, and promote the well-being of body and soul, just as all the organs of the body serve each other.”¹¹

John MacArthur pointedly and correctly writes, “Every legitimate job has intrinsic value because it is in the arena in which believers live out their lives.”¹² How we conduct ourselves must reflect on Him whom we call Master. If you are a Christian, you should strive to be a better worker at whatever task you do because you are a Christian. The quality of your work should be better because you worship the Lord Christ. The reliability of your service must meet the highest standard because you are a Christian. I recall a man who trained as a craftsman. When he began his apprenticeship, he was assigned the most humble job on the job site. He refused to perform the work because he believed it to be below him—he would not dig with a pick and shovel. Though he had made much of his faith, he destroyed his testimony with that one arrogant act.

Honouring those in authority, such as slaves honouring their master, reflects recognition of God’s sovereignty is another truth that I urge you to hold dear and remember. This is but a restatement of Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian Christians. “Let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him” [**1 CORINTHIANS 7:17**]. It is recognition that God is in control of life and even of one’s situation in life. It is recognition that the believer is to labour as to the Lord. Listen again to two statements from the pen of the Apostle. “Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man” [**EPHESIANS 6:5-7**]. Of course, you will recall Paul’s words to the Colossians cited previously. “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” [**COLOSSIANS 3:23**].

¹¹ Martin Luther, “An Appeal to the Ruling Class,” in John Dillenberger (ed.), **Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings** (Anchor Books, Garden City, New York, NY 1961) 407, 409, 410, cited by John F. MacArthur Jr., **1 Timothy, MacArthur New Testament Commentary** (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1995) 227

¹² MacArthur, *ibid.*

1 TIMOTHY 6:1, 2a
LABOUR RELATIONS

Focus on Paul's reason for the instructions he has provided. We who are Christians are to act honourably at our labours "so that the Name of God and the teaching may not be reviled" [1 TIMOTHY 6:1b]. As Christians, we guard God's name and truth so that they will not be reviled. Paul uses the present tense, indicating that this is an ongoing concern. Our common mission as Christians is more important than any individual circumstances. We must take seriously the manner in which people view us and our work. Christians must understand that if they do not labour honourably, those who observe their work and who pay their wages will transfer their disgust to Him whom we claim as our ultimate Master. This must never be allowed to happen. Perhaps a good overarching verse to supplement this truth is given by Peter. "It is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil" [1 PETER 3:17].

I do want to point believers to an eschatological principle in the work we perform. Recall that Paul urged the Colossians, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" [COLOSSIANS 3:23, 24]. His message to believers is to focus on what is coming rather than focusing on this world. When you serve honourably, you know that you will receive the inheritance as your reward. Honouring those for whom you labour honours Him whom you call Master, and He will ensure that you are rewarded for your labour. This lifts your toil and the labours you perform from the mundane to the sublime.

The story is told of three masons who were engaged in building one of the great cathedrals in England. One of the men was asked, "What are you doing?" He replied, "I'm carrying a hod of mortar for stones in the wall of this building." Another of the men was asked, "What are you doing?" He responded, "I'm laying stone as the wall is erected on this church." The third mason was asked, "What are you doing?" He replied, "I'm building a temple to the glory of God." May I suggest that the latter had a true understanding of his task.

Perhaps you are driving a truck. You have the choice either to drive the truck to haul product from one site to another, or you may deliver necessary goods to the glory of God. Perhaps you are a mother. You may prepare a meal and clean a house, or you may serve your family to the glory of God. Perhaps you are a craftsman. You may choose to conduct your trade in order to earn a wage, or you may fulfil your responsibilities to the glory of God. Perhaps you work with your mind. You may think and imagine in order to secure your future, or you may endeavour to think the thoughts of God after Him. It matters not what your work may be, if you are a Christian, do your work to the glory of God who gives you all things. Amen.