

# Abounding Grace Christian Church

## A Study of Paul's First Letter to Timothy – Part 16

### I. Exposition of Chapter Six.

A. Verse 1 – “Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and *His* doctrine may not be blasphemed.”

1. The word “bondservants” means; “pertaining to a state of being completely controlled by someone or something—‘subservient to’”<sup>1</sup> People often wonder why the New Testament doesn’t seem to denounce slavery. To help us understand, consider the following statement:

“Paul did not call for slavery’s abolition—a futile endeavor in the ancient Roman world that would have confirmed pagan suspicions that Christianity destroys the fabric of society. Paul urged slaves to embrace freedom if the opportunity came (1 Co 7:20). He also called for slavery reform within the church, urging fair treatment of slaves and generous financial support (Col 4:1). These reforms amounted to a virtual abolition of slavery by Christian masters. Christian masters were to view Christian slaves as brothers (1 Tm 6:2), thus as equals. And Paul described the slaves’ service (lit. “kind deeds”) as voluntary rather than coerced...”<sup>2</sup>

2. “...as are under the yoke...” – A “yoke” is defined as: “(an idiom, literally ‘to be under a yoke’) to be in a state of slavery”<sup>3</sup>

“An instrument made from bent wood that was placed around the necks of animals or persons. A mark of slavery; often used for animals, but more prominently used in biblical literature for humans. Used metaphorically to refer to the responsibilities of slaves.”<sup>4</sup>

3. **NOTE:** It’s important to realize that New Testament slavery was much different than the slave trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dr. Paul Copan writes:

“During the first century AD, 85 to 90 percent of Rome’s population consisted of slaves. Although slaves were considered their masters’ property and didn’t have *legal* rights, they did have quite a range of other rights and privileges. These included (1) the possibility of starting a business to earn potentially large sums of money, (2) the capability of earning money to eventually purchase freedom (manumission) from their masters, or (3) the right to own property... The work of slaves covered the spectrum from horrid conditions in mines to artisans, business agents, and other positions of respect and prestige such as civil or imperial servants. So slavery wasn’t unkind to *all* slaves in the Roman Empire.”<sup>5</sup>

4. “...count their own masters worthy of all honor...” – The word “masters” means; “one who holds complete power or authority over another”<sup>6</sup> Paul commanded the slaves to “honor” their masters. The word “honor” simply means; “the amount to which something is valued”; “respect.”<sup>7</sup>

5. “...so that the name of God and *His* doctrine may not be blasphemed.” – The word “blasphemed” means; “to speak against someone in such a way as to harm or injure his or her reputation”<sup>8</sup> From this we see that Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, made sure that the slaves (bondservants) would represent Christ well. Again, Paul Copan writes:

“Paul (and Peter) didn’t call for an uprising to overthrow slavery in Rome. They didn’t want the Christian faith to be perceived as opposed to social order and harmony. Hence, Christian slaves were told to do what was right; even if they were mistreated, their conscience would be clear (1 Peter 2:18–20)...On the one hand, a slave uprising would do the gospel a disservice and prove a direct threat to an oppressive Roman establishment (e.g., “Masters, release your slaves!” or “Slaves, throw off your chains!”). Rome would meet any flagrant opposition with speedy, forceful, lethal opposition. So Peter’s admonition to unjustly treated slaves implies a suffering endured *without retaliation*. No, suffering in itself is not good (which would be a sadistic attitude to adopt and certainly not the view of Scripture); rather, the *right* response in the midst of suffering is commendable.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. 1996. In *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 1:471. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>2</sup> Cabal, Ted, Chad Owen Brand, E. Ray Clendenen, Paul Copan, J.P. Moreland, and Doug Powell. 2007. *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

<sup>3</sup> Louw and Nida, 740.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah K. Garrett, “Yoke,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 151.

<sup>6</sup> Louw and Nida, 478.

<sup>7</sup> *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, William D. Mounce, Gen. ed. (Zondervan Publishers, Grand Rapids, 2006.), 340.

<sup>8</sup> Louw and Nida, 433.

<sup>9</sup> Copan, 153.

B. Verse 2 – **“And those who have believing masters, let them not despise *them* because they are brethren, but rather serve *them* because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.”** – Now Paul addresses the subject of slaves who have masters who are believers.

1. **“...let them not despise them because they are brethren...”** – The word **“despise”** means; **“look down on, scorn, show contempt”**<sup>10</sup> It could have been a temptation for a slave with a Christian master to disrespect him and not work for him as he should.
2. **“...but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved.”** – So Paul is telling them that they are to serve them as they would if they weren’t believers. He gives the reason as being that the ones benefited by their service were **“...believers and beloved”** so why would they serve them less than those who were not believers? A. Duane Litfin writes:

**“Paul’s thought here is totally foreign to the world, and can be fully appreciated only by those who view their lives through the eyes of Jesus Christ (cf. Mark 10:42–45). Christian slaves whose masters are also believers should redouble rather than reduce their service. This should stem purely from the realization that the one who is receiving the benefits is a beloved brother or sister in Christ.”**<sup>11</sup>

3. **“Teach and exhort these things.”** – Always remember that the chapter and verse divisions are not necessarily inspired. This particular sentence is either concluding the previous two verses about slaves or it is an introduction to the things that follow. It seems to fit better with what follows.

**“All slaves should show full respect for their masters so they will not bring shame on the name of God and his teaching. If the masters are believers, that is no excuse for being disrespectful. Those slaves should work all the harder because their efforts are helping other believers who are well loved. Teach these things, Timothy, and encourage everyone to obey them.”** – I Timothy 6:1-2 - NLT

C. Verses 3-5 – It seems most scholars consider this to be Paul returning to the subject of false teachers as he prepares to close this epistle.

1. Verse 3 - **“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,”**
  - a. **“If anyone teaches otherwise...”** – This could be a reference to the teaching of opposite doctrine concerning any subject mentioned in this epistle.
  - b. **“...does not consent to wholesome words...”** – The word **“consent”** means; **“to come to a position of holding the same opinion as someone else”**<sup>12</sup> The word **“wholesome”** means; **“the state of being healthy, well (in contrast with sickness)—‘to be well,’**<sup>13</sup> This is the same Greek word translated **“sound”** in 1:10.
  - c. **“...even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ...”** – Without doubt, Paul is emphasizing the fact that the teaching he’s presenting, which is wholesome, is actually the words given by the Lord Jesus Christ. Dr. Gordon Fee asserts:

**“Some think this refers to what is found in a written Gospel and thus means the words spoken by Christ. But that misses Paul’s emphasis, namely, that the false teachers have abandoned the truth of the gospel, which comes *from* our Lord Jesus Christ himself, who is the ultimate origin of the faith or ‘godliness’ Paul proclaimed. Their abandonment of Christ (i.e., his gospel) is their grave error.”**<sup>14</sup>

- d. **“...and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,...”** – From this we could say that healthy doctrine promotes godly living. The opposite of this is what was the result of the false teachers, unhealthy, or unsound doctrine led to ungodly living. (cf. II Peter 2:1-3; 12-18).

<sup>10</sup> James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>11</sup> A. Duane Litfin, “1 Timothy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 745.

<sup>12</sup> Louw and Nida, 367.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988)