



We're delighted to have each and every one of you here for worship today. You can go ahead and turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy 6 (p. 934, pew Bible). We'll get to our text in a moment. But I want to begin with a question: *What is a Christian?* Ask that question to people today, and you're likely to get a variety of answers. But if we go back to the origin of the term "Christian" in the New Testament, we'll discover its basic meaning. Acts 11:26 says, "in Antioch [of Syria] the disciples were first called Christians."

Christians didn't call themselves Christians. Non-Christians did to mock those who worshiped and followed a crucified Messiah. In 1 Corinthians 1:23 Paul testified, "we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." Paul went on to say, "we are fools for Christ" (1 Cor. 4:10).

So, what began as a term of derision became a badge of honor for all who follow Jesus. We unashamedly profess him as our Savior and our Sovereign. To rightly claim the title of Christian is to say with the apostle Paul, "To live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

Elsewhere Scripture says that we are not our own, for we have been bought with a price – the precious blood of Christ (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:18-19). We belong to him. We "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). We make it our aim to please him (2 Cor. 5:9), to glorify him in whatever we do, even eating and drinking (1 Cor. 10:31).

That's why we read Romans 6 a few moments ago. That Scripture reminds us that at one time we were slaves of sin. But by God's grace we have become slaves of righteousness, slaves of Christ, our blessed Lord and Master, the King of kings and Lord of lords. "The New Testament writers eagerly attributed the title 'slave of Christ' to themselves and others.<sup>1</sup> The Greek term for "slave" is *doulos*, a term that appears 124 times in the New Testament, often in reference to physical slavery. But in at least forty of those uses, the term *doulos* refers to believers, denoting their relationship to the divine Master.<sup>2</sup>

According to Scripture, *everyone is a slave* – either to sin or to righteousness, to Christ. Some are slaves to Christ and to human masters, albeit in a different sort of way. At the beginning of 1 Timothy 6, Paul says, "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."

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *Slave: The Hidden Truth About Your Identity in Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999). Cited in MacArthur, 12.

We know from chapter 3 that Paul's purpose in writing to Timothy was to let him know how believers are to behave in the household of God (3:15). The theme of chapter 5 is "treat your faith family well." This includes older men, younger men, older women, and younger women, as well as the leaders of the church (the pastors/elders/overseers). Now Paul is applying this principle by extension to other leaders in our lives, namely, our employers, both Christian and non-Christian.

That's why the word "bondservant" is used in 1 Timothy 6:1. It's a translation of the Greek term *doulos*, but the translators of the ESV chose not to render it as "slave" in this context. They tell us why in the Preface of the ESV Bible, under the section titled "The Translation of Specialized Terms." If you don't have an ESV Bible, grab one of the pew Bibles and turn to page ix (Roman numeral 9). Beginning in the third paragraph, which begins with the word "third," the translators proceed to say,

a particular difficulty is presented when words in biblical Hebrew and Greek refer to ancient practices and institutions that do not correspond directly to those in the modern world. Such is the case in the translation of *'ebed* (Hebrew) and *doulos* (Greek), terms which are often rendered "slave." These terms, however, actually cover a range of relationships that requires a range of renderings — "slave," "bondservant," or "servant"—depending on the context. Further, the word "slave" currently carries associations with the often brutal and dehumanizing institution of slavery particularly in nineteenth-century America. For this reason, the ESV translation of the words *'ebed* and *doulos* has been undertaken with particular attention to their meaning in each specific context. Thus in Old Testament times, one might enter slavery either voluntarily (e.g., to escape poverty or to pay off a debt) or involuntarily (e.g., by birth, by being captured in battle, or by judicial sentence). Protection for all in servitude in ancient Israel was provided by the Mosaic Law, including specific provisions for release from slavery. In New Testament times, a *doulos* is often best described as a "bondservant"—that is, someone in the Roman Empire officially bound under contract to serve his master for seven years (except for those in Caesar's household in Rome who were contracted for fourteen years). When the contract expired, the person was freed, given his wage that had been saved by the master, and officially declared a freedman. The ESV usage thus seeks to express the most fitting nuance of meaning in each context. Where absolute ownership by a master is envisaged (as in Romans 6), "slave" is used; where a more limited form of servitude is in view, "bondservant" is used....

Such is the case here in 1 Timothy 6, which is why I have titled this sermon *The Conscientious Christian Employee* – a title that I stole from John MacArthur's commentary.

### ***The Conscientious Christian Employee*** **1 Timothy 6:1-2**

While the parallel between bond-service in the first-century Greco-Roman world and job employment in our day is not exactly the same, the parallels are close enough for us to apply these biblical instructions to our own selves in the context of our work situation.

In his book, *The Challenge of Preaching*, John Stott asserted, “We have to study both the ancient text and the present scene, both Scripture and culture, both the word and the world. It is a huge task, demanding a lifetime of study.”<sup>3</sup> The Bible’s teaching on slavery is too broad a topic to cover in this sermon on 1 Timothy 6:1-2. So, for now I’ll simply reiterate that slavery in the first-century Roman world was notably different from the type of slavery that modern people have in mind.”<sup>4</sup> Dr. Michael Kruger, Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte, NC) notes that

slaves in the time of Paul were ... often paid a wage. Some were even known to accrue considerable wealth.... Beyond this, some slaves were highly educated. In fact, many slaves could read and write – and would often serve as the household “scribe” for employers who were themselves illiterate.

Moreover, how and why people became slaves in the Roman world was very different. For one, it was not due to their skin color or ethnicity. Often people voluntarily became slaves as a means to achieve a minimal level of financial security, and this was usually for a limited duration of time. It is precisely for this reason that many English translations of the Bible don’t use the word “slave” but prefer the word “bondservant.” The latter term more accurately captures the situation in the time of the first century.<sup>5</sup>

So, for our purposes here, keeping in mind the context of Paul’s letter to Timothy, we will consider key principles for Christian workers today. The primary point is this:

***Glorify God by being the best employee you can.***

This flies in the face of songs like “Take This Job and Shove It” and “Working 9 to 5.” Such songs unearth the magnitude of discontent rumbling beneath the surface of many workplaces. Current statistics show that 53% of Americans are unhappy at work, and 85% of people worldwide are dissatisfied with their jobs. Job dissatisfaction costs employers \$450-550 billion annually due to disengagement, absenteeism, and turnover.<sup>6</sup> Against this tide of discontent and disengagement stands the truth of God who gives Christians a remarkable opportunity to shine as his lights in the world.

### **The Precept (v. 1a)**

“Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor...” (1 Tim. 6:1). The phrase “under a yoke” doesn’t necessarily indicate an abusive relationship. After all, Jesus said,

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<sup>3</sup> John Stott, *The Challenge of Preaching*, (n.p.), 47. Cited in Kevin Halloran, “40 Quotes from The Challenge of Preaching by John Stott,” *Anchored in Christ* [online]. Retrieved on 15 February 2015 from <https://www.kevinhalloran.net/40-quotes-from-the-challenge-of-preaching-by-john-stott/>.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College*, Kindle version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 190.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Eser, “Essential Job Dissatisfaction Statistics in 2024,” *Zipdo* [online]. Retrieved on 15 February 2024 from <https://zipdo.co/statistics/job-dissatisfaction/>.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

- Matt. 11:28-30

Sin is a tyrannical Master. Jesus is a gracious, benevolent Master – one who laid down his life and rose triumphantly from the grave to rescue us from sin’s tyranny and to make us his own treasured possession. Submitting yourself to Christ is the greatest liberation you will ever experience, because it is only through Christ that you become all that God created you to be. And that includes being a good and faithful servant yourself.

So, Christian servants are to “regard their own masters as worthy of all honor...” (v. 1). The word “regard” can also be translated “esteem.” The Greek term (*hēgēomai*) literally means “what goes in front” has to do with “the leading thought in one’s mind.” Such a mindset is based not on how good of a boss they are or how you feel about them but about doing what is right before the Lord, our ultimate Master. Paul expounds on this concept in two other passages. In Ephesians 6, he says,

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.

- Ephesians 6:5-8

Similarly, in Colossians 3, Paul says,

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.

- Colossians 3:22-25

Here Paul gives both a positive reason and a negative reason for obeying earthly masters. The *positive* reason is that even if your boss doesn’t reward you for your faithful service, the Lord will. The *negative* reason is that if you don’t honor your boss by serving with a good attitude and diligent effort, then God will pay you back for the wrong you’ve done. You will be disciplined because God shows no favoritism. As our ultimate Master, God insists that we honor our earthly employers.

### **The Purpose (v. 1b)**

“... So that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled” (1 Tim. 6:1b). The Greek term translated as “revile” is *blasphēmēō*, from which we get our English word “blaspheme.” It means “to speak evil against” or “to speak lightly of sacred things.”

Your job is not ultimately about you. It's about God and how you are representing him. If you are lazy, undependable, disrespectful, always griping about this or that, showing up late, criticizing your superiors, etc. then you're going to give God a bad reputation. Your non-Christian boss will say, "If this is how believers behave, take your faith and shove it!"

The worst consequence of a poor work ethic or bad attitude would not be getting a bad performance review, a demotion, a cut in pay, or even fired. The worst consequence would be your giving God a bad rap. By dishonoring your employer, you are discrediting God's name and the teachings of his word. You're disgracing the gospel of Christ.

As believers we want to have the *opposite* effect. Paul talks about this *positive* purpose in Titus 2, where he says,

Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

- Titus 2:9-10

In other words, by showing ourselves to be "entirely trustworthy and good," we "will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way" (Titus 2:10b NLT).

I found this to be the case during my first year of seminary. Ruthie and I had just gotten married and had applied for jobs at a family-owned home center. We both got hired, and the owner of the company – who interviewed every applicant and did all the hiring – told me that his best employees had always been the seminary students. I later found out that the company had donated many building materials to the seminary. I'm not sure if the owner was a Christian, but he sure was impressed by other Christians' job performance.

What kind of impression are you making on your employer? "Paul's exhortation has a missionary motivation."<sup>7</sup> Non-Christian employers should witness the healthy work ethic of believers and be drawn to the glory of God and the beauty of the gospel.

### **The Prohibition (v. 2a)**

"Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers..." (1 Tim. 6:2a). The Greek word translated as "disrespectful" (*kataphronéō*) literally means "to look down." It's to think little of, to esteem lightly, to devalue or depreciate, to deem as unworthy. It's to do the very opposite of what believers are told to do in verse 1, which is to "regard their masters as worthy of all honor."

Just because your boss is a believer and is therefore your equal in Christ doesn't mean that you should treat him or her as your equal on the job. He or she is still your superior in that setting. So, instead of slacking off, showing a flippant attitude, or expecting preferential treatment, you should be even more diligent in your duties.

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<sup>7</sup> David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 107.

## The Perspective (v. 2b)

“Rather,” Paul says in the second half of verse 2, “they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.” This is consistent with what Paul writes in Galatians 6:10, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Since “believers” are “beloved” by God and are therefore our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, we should want to bless them in every way we can.

With that in mind, let me close by listing six qualities that should characterize every Christian employee. I’ll express them as exhortations:

1. **Be compliant.** “Be submissive to [them] in everything,” Scripture says (Titus 2:9) – not because they deserve it, but because God desires it, and “we make it our aim to please him” (2 Cor. 5:9).
2. **Be courteous.** Instead of being rude or argumentative, treat your superiors as “worthy of all honor” (1 Tim. 6:1). Show them by your words, attitude, and demeanor just how beautiful and attractive the gospel is (Titus 2:10).
3. **Be constructive.** Let your attitude and words, even to your fellow employees, build up rather than tear down. As Bing Crosby used to sing, “Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative!”
4. **Be credible.** Be a man or woman of integrity – someone who will not bleed the company, but bless it, “not pilfering, but showing all good faith” (Titus 2:10). Joseph was an outstanding example of this. Genesis 39:6 says that Potiphar “left all that he had in Joseph’s charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.” “A Christian employee should be the most trustworthy worker on the job.”<sup>8</sup>
5. **Be committed.** You can invite co-workers to church, share the gospel with them over lunch, and listen to Christian music in your workspace, but if you have a poor work ethic, you discredit your witness. “Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically” (Rom. 12:11 NLT). Ultimately, it is the Lord Christ you are serving (Col. 3:24).
6. **Be Christ-like.** This is the all-encompassing character quality. Not only is the Son of God our Master, but he also became our servant. That’s what Scripture says. He “made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). The word for “servant” in Philippians 2:7 is *doulos* – the same word used in 1 Timothy 6:1. Since Jesus through his selfless life and substitutionary death has done more for us than we could ever do for him, we should at least do all that we can for him, and that includes giving our best effort at work as much as anywhere else.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Kuyendall, “What Kind of Employee Are You? 5 Qualities Every Believer Should Exude” [online]. Retrieved on 17 February 2024 from <https://kennethkuykendall.com/2014/11/15/what-kind-of-employee-are-you-5-qualities-every-believer-should-exude/>. My list of five qualities is loosely adapted from this article.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*. Reformed Expository Commentary, NT edited by Daniel M. Doriani, series edited by Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 248.