

## “Subordinate Slaves” (1 Tim. 6:1-2)

### 1. Relationships (1) Me Edit sermon possibly strike through

- a. Then: “To understand slavery, believers today must strip away their preconceived notions of it. Those notions are drawn largely from the racial slavery of the pre-Civil War American South, which bears only some resemblance to slavery in the first-century Roman Empire. In the Ancient Near East, much of the seasonal field work and part-time project work was done by hired day laborers (cf. Matt. 20:1ff.). Permanently employed domestic slaves served as managers (cf. Luke 16:1ff.), cooks, artisans, and teachers, becoming a part of the household, almost like family. In many respects they resembled the indentured servants of the American colonial era. **Slaves** were acquired in several different ways. Many were prisoners of war (Num. 31:7–35; Deut. 20:10–14). They could also be purchased (Ex. 21:7; Lev. 25:44–46). Some people sold themselves into slavery (Lev. 25:39ff.; Deut. 15:12–17), others were sold to pay debts (2 Kings 4:1; Neh. 5:1–8). **Slaves** could be received as gifts (Gen. 29:24), or inherited (Lev. 25:46). Still others were born to slaves and remained in that role. The system was not perfect, but it was workable. Most of the abuses came from the evil hearts of men, not from the institution itself. Such abuses can be found in every system of employment, whether slavery, feudalism, communism, or capitalism. The Old Testament never forbade slavery, but carefully guarded the rights of **slaves**. Jewish slaves could not be held for more than six years (Ex. 21:2), unless they voluntarily chose to remain (Ex. 21:5–6). Those who came into slavery with a wife and children could take them when they left. Those given a wife by their master, however, could not take her until her time was up. That was necessary to protect the rights of the masters. Slaves who were abused by their masters were to be set free (Ex. 21:26–27). Their religious rights, such as enjoying the Sabbath rest, were also protected (Ex. 20:10). Slaves also enjoyed civil rights. The murder of a slave brought punishment (Ex. 21:20). Foreign slaves seeking asylum in Israel were to be protected (Deut. 23:15–16). Slaves had economic rights, including the right to own other slaves (cf. 2 Sam. 9:9–10). The nation of Israel even had state slaves, similar to civil service employees (Josh. 16:10; Judg. 1:28; Ezra 8:20). Jewish **slaves** in New Testament times were similarly protected. They were to be treated as equal to the eldest son in a family. So protected were they that an old Jewish saying went, “Whoever buys a Jewish slave buys himself a master.” Gentile **slaves** were not always so well treated, but on the whole were better off than day laborers. Slaves had their food, clothing, and housing provided, along with a small wage and security. Subtracting the costs of food, clothing and housing from a day laborer’s wages often left him worse off than a slave. Slavery was thus a workable, if not ideal, system. As in the Old, the New Testament nowhere calls for its abolition. By the New Testament era, slavery was waning in the Roman Empire, though there was still an enormous number of slaves. For Jesus and the apostles to have called for slavery’s abolition would have been to promote unemployment and social chaos. Further, the saving message of the gospel would have been swallowed up in the call for social reform. Eventually, the influence of Christianity helped bring an end to abusive forms of slavery in the Roman Empire. (For a further discussion of slavery, see *Colossians and Philemon*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1992], 152–53, 201–35.)”<sup>1</sup>
- b. Now: In our situation, we must willingly subordinate ourselves to respective authorities – not just the ones with whom we agree. E.g. our employers, our police force, teachers, governing officials, and yes – even pastors. Other countries still have slavery...

### 2. Respect (1)

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1995). *1 Timothy* (pp. 229–230). Moody Press.

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- a. It’s not about respecting the Pagan, the evil tyrant, or malicious authoritarian, or even the system which afforded those their positions over you and me.
  - b. It is about resolving to obey God’s wisdom – seen as foolishness to the world. →
3. Reality (1)
- a. Residences (our situations): Acts 17:26-27 cf. 1 Cor. 7:17-24, 29-31.
  - b. Radical (our attitudes): Jesus condescended to become as a bondservant (Phil. 2:5-6). Paul and Timothy (Phil. 1:1). Peter (1 Pet. 2:16-17).
  - c. Rights (our objectives): those who demand equality of outcome, reparations, and maintain that all slavery is sin reveal their priorities *and their ignorance*. To demand extra rights for minorities on the basis of their ethnicity, social status, gender, sexuality, political position, etc. reveals an objective of materialism, power, and prejudice. To conjure up an epidemic of racism (I know no white supremacists but have met many who say such are ruining our society) and ignore suicides, addictions, molestations, abortions, marriage defamation, human trafficking, child slave labor (e.g. mining cobalt for electric car which does dozens of times more harm to environment than fossil fuels and yet still demands fossil fuels to charge them), dehumanizing slavery abroad, rampant sexual promiscuity on all forms of readily available media, and to ignore or even promote medical practices and mandates which have proven to harm and even kill hundreds of thousands – is the height of hypocrisy. Rather than **demanding selective special rights**, we need to repent and **demonstrate true righteousness and integrity**.
  - d. Rebuke (our prerogative): We are to call for repentance for w/o such no one will enter the Kingdom. Our solution is spiritual not social. Social mandates are actually counter-kingdom (Matt. 11:12). Only the Gospel of Christ brings true reform of the heart. Revolution is from coercion and Redemption is from conviction (of sin, righteousness, and judgment Jn. 16:8-11).
  - e. Reference (our perspective): Robert Yarbrough is exactly right: To say that “the Pastorals endorse the cruelty of Graeco-Roman society without reflection”<sup>793</sup> may be technically true (depending on how one defines “reflection”), but it is, first, anachronistic. Known social orders free of slavery did not exist. It would be like condemning today’s church a thousand years from now because it did not speak out against traffic deaths. Second, there are estimated to be some 45 million slaves in the world currently; that is not appreciably fewer than would have existed in the Roman Empire. Third, it appears to assume the superiority of contemporary social orders. We are less cruel and would not condone such practices. Yet, the twentieth century was the most brutal in human history, measured by loss of life in war and genocide. The pace does not seem to be slowing at present. Or consider persecution of Christians. One agency says that 1,207 Christians a year die as martyrs.<sup>794</sup> That’s about 3.3 a day. By another reckoning 90,000 die a year.<sup>795</sup> That’s 247 a day. The larger figure is projected to continue through 2025, then increase to 100,000 annually through 2050.<sup>796</sup> How civilized is modern civilization, in which 200 million women cope with genital mutilation

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<sup>793</sup> Davies, 89.

<sup>794</sup> Open Doors, [www.opendoorsusa.org](http://www.opendoorsusa.org). They limit their numbers to eyewitness accounts.

<sup>795</sup> Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. See Mendy Belz, “Numbers Matter,” *World Magazine*, February 18, 2017, 32. They include all who have died as the result of being Christians, including those killed in war.

<sup>796</sup> Johnson, Zurlo, Hickman, and Crossing, “Christianity 2017,” 50.

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(most under the aegis [protection] of the world’s second largest religion)?<sup>797</sup> In light of the low moral ground modern commentators occupy, PE and other New Testament passages should get credit for calling for and enabling revolutionary ties between slaves and their owners, not criticism for failing to leave a clear record of direct condemnation of then-global economic and social orders.<sup>2</sup>

### 4. Representation (1)

- a. For God’s glory: Paul quoted Isa. 52:5 where in context, Israel incited blasphemy due to her disobedience. Such led to the oppression of their enemies thus they “wailed.” What is ironic is that Paul – by the virtue of Jesus’ triumph – insists that the subordinates in Christ possess the liberty to serve in any position they find themselves. Hence disobedience and complaining/rebelling results in wailing, bondage, and blasphemy yet obedience and submission results in victory and honor.
- b. For the Gospel’s advancement: 1 Cor. 9:19; Gal. 5:13. We are on a mission and it’s not the “American Dream” nor a “Social Justice” or “Civil Liberties” or political revolution!

### 5. Remembrance (2)

- a. Solution: John MacArthur wrote, “It is not the church’s role to undermine the foundations of social order by fostering rebellion.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus said render unto Caesar... and unto God... It is not via the sword of the State but the Sword of the Spirit. The solution is found in our position →
- b. Position:
  - i. Last shall be first: Jesus clearly articulated that being the lowest servant equates to being the greatest (Mk. 10:43-44).
  - ii. Labor from Rest: Clearly here, Paul employs this reality to exhort those “under the yoke” of earthly masters (of which we all are to a degree) to labor well and be subordinate to them because they had come to Jesus whose “yoke is easy and burden is light” (see Mat. 11:28-30).
  - iii. Dying to Live: Jesus won the victory through a cross and we are to do the same (Mat. 16:24-26). And because we are in Him hence we labor in our lots knowing our times and situations are in His hands (e.g. Deut. 32:35; Pss. 2; 31:15; Isa. 40:22 ff.; Ro. 12:17-21; 1 Pet. 3:9).
  - iv. Slaves of Liberty: We are in Christ thus Paul resigned to preach nothing more or less than Jesus crucified. It was His taking captivity captive which won the victory of our redemption and set the captives free (see Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:14-15 cf. Isa. 53:12; 1 Cor. 2:8). Thus we have been transformed from slaves of sin to slaves of God (Rom. 6:22 cf. whole chapter). Many (if not most) want to be free of responsibility, free from hard labor, free from moral and sexual restrictions viz. “free from righteousness” = freely sinning (Ro. 6:20). They do not know the liberty of righteousness and being a slave to God! I don’t know of any regenerate soul who complains about his freedom to live righteously.

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<sup>797</sup> For the 200 million figure, see P. Belluck and J. Cochrane, “Unicef Report Finds Female Genital Cutting to Be Common in Indonesia,” *New York Times*, February 4, 2016.

PE Pastoral Epistle(s)

<sup>2</sup> Yarbrough, R. W. (2018). *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (D. A. Carson, Ed.; p. 302). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos.

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1995). *1 Timothy* (p. 235). Moody Press.

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PC:

There is rebellion in every generation. The global form of rebellion we now see has taken the form of “virtuous” demands of social conformity using tactics of coercion and cancellation. Many religious folk in this rebellion have been hijacked by “another gospel” which has substituted redemption for redistribution, the Kingdom of God for Socialism, liberty from sin for liberty to sin, godliness for sanctimonious elitism, the Sword of the Spirit for the sword of the State, and true victory in Christ for an unattainable objective of social conformity. Conversely, the liberated Christian seeks not to conform to the world’s values and objectives and needs no other agenda than the Kingdom of God. We understand our duty is not to assert (Mat. 5:3-5), but merely pursue righteousness (v. 6) and promote it (vv. 13-16) meekly with obedience and proper subordination to legitimate authorities (see 1 Pet. 3:15ff; Ro. 13:1-5; Mk. 12:17 and our focal passage). Nevertheless, those who willingly, dutifully submit to authorities do not do so by compromising truth, righteousness, justice, or love.