

Honoring Authority and Living a Content, Godly Lifestyle

1 Timothy 6:1-8

1 Timothy 6:1-8: *“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. 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. 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, ⁴ he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicion, ⁵ useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. ⁶ Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸ And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.”*

Background Notes

If the theme of 1 Timothy is “Church Order,” then why did the apostle Paul write to Timothy about the responsibility of slaves to respect and serve their masters? The reason is that a good percentage of the 1st century Church was made up of slaves. In fact, in some 1st century local churches Christian slaves became church leaders. Maybe this was the case at Ephesus, where Timothy was located.

You can imagine the awkward situation if a Christian slave and a Christian master were part of the same church, and the slave became a church leader. At home, the slave would be subject to his master - but at the church the roles would be reversed. So the Christian slave and master relationship was closely tied in with the subject of “Church Order.”

Furthermore, the church’s testimony in the community was involved. If Christian slaves didn’t serve their masters well, or if they were to become involved in a revolt, the reputation of the Christian faith would suffer in the general public and the local church would get a bad name – and thus the name of God would be dishonored!

We know that Paul’s exhortation to the Christian slaves was heeded, because history shows that, in general, Christian slaves were very responsible. They served their masters so well that Christian slaves brought higher prices on the slave market.

Do the instructions of verses 1-2 mean that the Bible approved of slavery? No! The fact that the apostle Paul exhorted these Christian slaves to be good slaves does **not** mean that God approved of slavery! In fact, it was the teachings of the New Testament that eventually brought an end to slavery, as the biblical teachings gradually penetrated society.

When the Lord Jesus said, *“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”* He was not condoning everything that Caesar and the Roman government did. In the same way, when the apostle Paul exhorted Christian slaves to be good slaves, he was not condoning the institution of slavery. Certainly not! His point was that Christian slaves were not to revolt, or run away, or demand their freedom, but rather to be subject to the structure of authority and to serve their masters as they would serve Christ (Colossians 3:22-23).

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers should honor authority structures.

Romans 13:1 says that all authority has its source in God. God has ordained four lines or structures of authority: the authority structure of the family (parental authority), the authority structure of the state (civil authority), the authority structure of the church (spiritual authority), and the authority structure in the area of labor (social authority). We are all involved in these authority structures, and we are to be subject to them. If the state, for example, says that the speed limit is 55 mph, then we are to be subject to that authority - whether we like it or not, and whether we have a fast car or not!

The master/slave relationship in the 1st century was a combination of the authority structures of the home and the state and labor. In application, the best parallel for today would be the employer/employee relationship in the authority structure of labor. As the 1st century Christian slave was to honor the master in the sense of recognizing the authority structure, so the 21st century employee should honor and respect the authority structure in the workplace. If our boss says to do a job in a certain way, then we do it that way because the boss is over us in the authority structure in this area of labor. Employees can make helpful suggestions, but they don't have the last word because they are under the authority of the employer.

So if you're a Christian employee, be subject to the authority structure at your job. Put in a good day's work, don't cheat the company, and don't badmouth your boss. The Christian only refuses to do what the employer asks when that demand is contrary to the Word of God. For example, if your employer asks you to lie, or to do something that is unethical, you should refuse. You should obey the higher authority - the laws of God. This may cost you your job (or at least your promotion), and you'll certainly be unpopular, and you'll be accused of having a "holier than thou" attitude - but **God** will be honored, and He will bless you!

Do you understand verse 2? *“And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren.”* You see, there would be a natural tendency for some Christian slaves to try to take advantage of their masters if their masters were also Christians. That kind of disrespect was wrong then, and is wrong today. If you as a Christian have a Christian employer, you should not take advantage of the situation. Don't take the attitude that you won't be fired, or that you're a privileged employee, or that you don't have to work as hard because you have a Christian boss. As verse 2 says, serve with even more respect, because you're serving a beloved fellow believer!

The other side of the coin is that Christian employers should not take advantage of Christian employees by giving them the hard jobs or paying them less because, after all, they're Christian employees so they won't complain. That would be wrong. Respect goes both ways. Believers should honor authority structures.

2. Believers should heed sound doctrine.

Verses 3-5: *"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, ⁴ he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicion, ⁵ useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself."*

Once again, the apostle Paul brought up the subject of the false teachers. A characteristic of false teachers is that they don't teach wholesome words or sound doctrine. What is sound doctrine? Sound doctrine is teaching that leads to the spiritual health of the believer. Sound doctrine builds up believers so that they become strong in the faith. Sound doctrine results in more godly living.

Sound doctrine does not "major on the minors." Sound doctrine does not get involved in nit-picking arguments that lead to jealousy, anger, and strife. I've seen churches that almost split because of arguments over what kind of musical instruments God approves, or what constitutes long hair or short hair. These kinds of disputes and arguments are not compatible with "sound instruction" or "godly teaching" (v3).

What should the believer do to avoid these problems? Believers should not get involved in doctrine which is not wholesome, which is not edifying, or which does not lead to or result in more godly living. Believers should not "major on the minors." Believers should not get involved in nit-picking arguments that lead to jealousy and strife. Believers should heed sound doctrine!

3. Believers should harbor godly contentment.

In the dictionary, one of the definitions of "harbor" is "to give refuge to a thought or feeling." Many times it's used in a negative sense, such as harboring ill will or discontent. Here in verses 6 -8 believers are exhorted to harbor **godly contentment**. *"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."*

One of the characteristics of the false teachers was that they used their show of godliness for financial gain. Verse 5: *"Men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain."* What does that say about a number of TV preachers who use proceeds from their programs to live in luxury? In contrast, true godliness with contentment is a means of great gain - spiritual gain - peace and joy and satisfaction and fulfillment. Are you content with what you have, or are you always looking for "more"? Do you *harbor* godly contentment?

Verse 7 says reminds all of us that “you can’t take it with you.” *“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”*

Verse 8 indicates that it’s possible to be content with the basics, *“And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.”* True contentment is independent of outward circumstances! In Philippians 4:11 the apostle Paul said that he had ***learned to be content*** in all circumstances. The secret of contentment is not accumulating what you don’t have. No! The secret to godly contentment is ***adjusting to what you have***, and being ***thankful for what God has provided for you!***

True godly contentment finds its roots in the all-sufficiency and sovereignty of God. Once again the question: Are you content? Believers should harbor godly contentment.

Practical Application

Remember, salute the office, not necessarily the officer!

This practical application has to do with authority structures. When I was in the military there was a saying: Salute the rank, not the man holding the rank. In other words, you respect the office, even when it’s hard to respect the person holding that office. It was hard to salute some military commanders because they were not good leaders and not nice people. However, in the military authority structure, we were to salute the rank - not necessarily the individual person holding that rank.

This is true in all authority structures. Some people who are in places of authority are not “Mr. Nice Guy” - and yet God calls us to submit to authority. Remember - you’re saluting the office, not necessarily the person holding that office.

This can even be true of some Christian leaders in the church, or in Christian ministries. It’s not easy to submit to some Christian leaders, but remember, you’re saluting the office, not necessarily the officer. In that way, you are honoring and respecting the God-ordained authority structures.

I hope this is practical application helpful for some of you who may be in very difficult and unpleasant authority structure situations right now. Remember - salute the office, not necessarily the officer!