

Conduct that Calls Followers

Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven. ² Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; ³ praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; ⁴ that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. ⁵ Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. (Col. 4:1-5)

Today is July 4th—Independence Day for America.

I believe the Apostle Paul has something very significant to say to us Americans about our attitude toward our nation as well as these type of national observance days.

In Romans 13:1-7 Paul writes

- [governmental authorities] ministers of God to you for good (Romans 13:4)
- Therefore, it is necessary to be in subjection (Romans 13:5)
- Because of this you also pay taxes (Romans 13:6)
- Rulers are servants of God (Romans 13:6)

Paul is saying that since God ordains human earthly governments

... so, as Christians we should honor the government under which we live.

... and as an American, to hate America would be an offense to the sovereignty of God in our lives.

Please don't misunderstand me ...

... Paul is not saying that political government is the final or ultimate authority

... it is never right to obey man and disobey God.

That isn't the context of Paul's words to the Roman Christians.

Paul is speaking about the broad umbrella of government that exists in any given nation at any given time ...

... regardless of that government we are to honor it and pray for it.

... this isn't simply about who or who isn't president.

America (the institution/nation/country) is much bigger than the person who sits in the White House.

... and that principle is true of any nation.

The focus of God's truth/grace/redemptive work is not on nations but on individuals in those nations.

Here is the reality ...

There are godly Christians in China/Iraq/Russia/American

... in the same way there are godless infidels in America/Great Britain/Russia/North Korea

Ultimately government has zero power over consciences of men.

... This is why scripture never commands us to rebel or disrupt the established order.

Paul never challenged the political status quo of his day.

He was not a political dissident,

... and let me be clear Paul does he call us to champion societal or economic equality ...

In fact, in 1 Timothy 2:1-4 Paul tells young Timothy to exhort Christians to petition heaven for ALL who are in authority.

Paul seems to balance obedience to God with (for lack of a better word) good citizenship.

Paul's constant affirmation of God's sovereignty requires this of the true believer.

I am thankful for America, I salute the American flag, I respect the America soldier ...

... not because I am worshipping America,

... not because I've made an idol out of the flag

... I do so because I trust and celebrate the sovereignty of God in my life.

... All things work together for God's glory and my good and it is no accident or quirk of fate that I was born in, and I live in, America.

... Now I know this perspective isn't very popular in our post-COVID world

... not even in some of our Baptist churches

But we need to avoid reading scripture through the lens of our contemporary world.

Paul's life was devoted to the mission of the gospel and the advancement of God's kingdom

Paul's purpose was not to overthrow Rome or transform worldly governments ...

Paul's goal was the transformation of the individual's spiritual life, public life, inward life, mental life, and societal life.

Paul was a preacher, not a politician

Paul was a minister, not a philosopher.

Paul was consumed by the mystery of God, which is Jesus Christ...

... he didn't have time to get involved with overthrowing governments.

... Remember that the Jews got it wrong because they were looking for a militant Messiah to lead them in a revolt against the Roman government.

That wasn't what Jesus was about ... and that wasn't what Paul was about.

Paul understood what the contemporary mind doesn't...

The world is not transformed through the power structures of politics and governments ...

No political system has ever ushered in utopia ... and not political leader ever will!

... but I can promise you that the grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ will one day usher in the kingdom of heaven on earth!

The problem of humanity is the problem of the human heart.

... and the key issue is not socialism ... the key issue is sin!

This is why Paul makes this wonderful statement in Colossians 3.

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Col. 3:17)

The solution to society's ills is not cancel culture or behavioral punishment legislation

The solution is for people to turn to Christ and start living for the glory of God!

... regardless the nation/government

... it doesn't matter if the general society or dominant culture is just or unjust

... it doesn't matter what the law does or doesn't allow

... If the world is going to change for the better then people must turn to Christ and begin to live their lives for the glory of God.

This is why, at the end of chapter 3 Paul specifically deals with how wives, husbands, fathers, children, slaves, and even masters should treat one another.

... Paul is not endorsing slavery,

Paul is saying that even if slavery exists in society

... as a single individual you may be powerless to change society

... but you are not powerless in how you live your life or how you treat others.

What I'm saying is this ...

... as God's church in the earth we must be committed to living the Christ life even if everything in society is against it.

Paul teaches us three things about the Christ life that the world does not know.

1. Christ REORDERS life (4:1)

Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven

Before we can even begin to talk about what Paul is saying here, we must first detach the word 'slavery' from our civil war.

Slavery is a terrible thing, but it is not unique to America.

... at some point in human history every ethnic group has been enslaved.

In fact, it has only been in the last few hundred years that slavery was thought of as immoral or degrading.

In some ancient societies it was a means of survival for the poorest in society

... “to sell oneself as a slave was a device of last resort for someone in debt.”

We also find this as part of the Jewish economy in the Bible.

During Paul’s lifetime, in the Roman world, slaves were sometimes well educated ...

... people who had great social status and power would often entrust their slaves with considerable responsibility and wealth.

... again, the slavery that existed in America before the Civil War was quite different from the slavery during Paul’s day ...

... LET ME CAUTION YOU, if you read Paul’s letters and then come away saying that Paul would have supported the slavery that existed in America.

... you have read poorly and without true understanding.

On the other hand, even though the word ‘slavery’ is a loaded word in our present culture ...

... I refuse to avoid a text or topic of scripture simply to appease the dominant culture.

In **1 Cor. 7:20-24** Paul encourages his readers (including slaves) to “remain in that (situation) in which they were called.”

Listen to what Paul writes in verse 21 of this passage:

21 Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. (1 Cor. 7:21)

In other words, being a slave won’t prevent you from becoming a follower of Jesus Christ

... now if you can get free do that, but either way, FOLLOW JESUS

What matters the most is not economic or societal status but our relationship with and obedient to God.

22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise, he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. (1 Cor. 7:22)

The point Paul is making to the Corinthians is that regardless of our “societal situation” our first primary obligation and dependency is upon Christ.

I love how Paul wrote it in the last chapter of Colossians.

... there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. (Col. 3:11)

By putting it this way in a public letter Paul is acknowledging that all of us (free or slave) are equal before God and in the Church.

Look at verse 1 again:

Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven

In fact, ... Paul’s command that slaves be treated just, and fair indicates a higher degree of equality within the church (and expectation of it) than as seen generally in public society.

... look at the word “**grant**” it is the word—**pareko**—

... this word carries with the idea of reciprocation and restitution.

... look at the word “**fairness**” it is the word—**isotes**—which is equality and not merely legal equality ... RELATIONAL equality

... this is why Paul would tell Philemon to treat Onesimus as a brother.

The law can force you to treat someone equally, but **Christ can reorder your life and heart** so that you will actually love them as you would a family member.

Paul says give your slaves wages, food, suitable work, and brotherly love.

Governments, political forces, and societal power structures can affect the level of your freedom and liberty...

... they can impact your finances

... but how we feel about one another and how we authentically treat one another ... only God can change that.

2. Prayer OPENS DOORS (4:2-4)

² Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; ³ praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; ⁴ that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

The most powerful thing you will ever do is pray.

... the problem we have with prayer is that the outcome is rarely immediate and often unobservable.

Paul gives the three commands regarding prayer.

- Devote yourself to prayer
- Keeping alert in prayer
- Pray for us that God will give us an open door for the word

Make it a fundamental part of your life ...

Be vigilant in prayer ...

Pray for what God wants to do ...

Dr. A. T. Pierson once said, *“There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.”*

Most people don't know that after the success of the American Revolution there was a moral slump in America.

- Drunkenness became epidemic. Out of a population of five million, 300,000 were confirmed drunkards.
- Profanity was of the most shocking kind.
- For the first time in the history of the American settlement, women were afraid to go out at night for fear of assault.
- Bank robberies were a daily occurrence.

The Methodists were losing more members than they were gaining.

- That Baptist were in sharp decline and the Presbyterians were no better off.
- The Lutheran denomination was so broken they discussed uniting with Episcopalians, who were even worse off.
- The Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York, Bishop Samuel Provost, he had confirmed no one for so long that he decided he was out of work, so he took up other employment.
- The Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall, wrote to the Bishop of Virginia, James Madison, that the Church "was too far gone ever to be redeemed."
- Voltaire declared and Thomas Paine echoed, "Christianity will be forgotten in thirty years."

A poll taken at Harvard discovered that there was not one believer in the whole student body.

- At Princeton, a much more evangelical place, they discovered only two believers in the student body.
- Christians were so few on college campuses in the 1790's that they met in secret, like a communist cell, and kept the records of their meetings in code so that no one would know.

About that time there was a Scottish Presbyterian minister in Edinburgh named John Erskine, who published a Memorial (as he called it) pleading with the people of Scotland to unite in prayer for revival.

He sent one copy of this little book to Jonathan Edwards in New England.

The great theologian was so moved by that little book that he wrote a response that was an even longer book entitled

A Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of all God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth ...

In New England, there was a man of prayer named Isaac Backus, a Baptist pastor, who got a hold of this and made an urgent plea for people of all denominations to specifically pray for revival in America.

The Christians in America got a hold of this, heard the call and responded.

Soon all across America, the first Monday of every month, prayer meetings were being held and it was not long before revival came.

... it was called the 2nd great awakening in America.

Out of this awakening came the modern missionary movement, the abolition of slavery, bible societies, and even the Sunday School movement.

*One interesting account during this time was that of a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian minister named **James McGready**.*

... it was said that his only claim was that he was so ugly that he attracted attention.

... but he was a man of prayer.

*He called his people to take up the call of **Isaac Backus** and pray the first Monday of every month.*

*... before long the people in **James McGready's** church (of their own volition) added a concert of prayer every Saturday at sunset and Sunday at sunrise to pray for their pastor.*

God began to move, and word got around

In the summer of 1800, Eleven thousand people came to a communion service there in Southwest Kentucky and thousands came to Christ.

Listen, it's OK to be depressed and throw up your hands in despair about how bad things are if you don't know God.

But if we are children of God then we need to be **devoted to vigilant prayer**

... **prayer for God** to give us an open door to speak, preach, proclaim and live out the Word of God.

- Christ reorders our life
- Prayer opens doors

3. CONDUCT is COMPELLING

⁵ Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

The phrase “making the most of” is the word –**ex-agoratzō** –which is also translated redeeming

The word “opportunity” is –**kairos** –which is also translated time

So, Paul says **redeeming the time** or **making the most out of the opportunity**

Paul says that conducting ourselves wisely toward outsiders is how we make the most out of our opportunities

... but let me add one more thing.

Look at the word KAIROS or opportunity.

Kenneth Wuest says that this is not a specific time but (and I quote) “A space of time filled with possibility.”

Not chronological time but a space of time filled with possibility

Whether you are a wife, husband, mother, father, child, slave or master ...

... whatever your station in life on the earth is

... You live in a space that is filled with POSSIBILITY!

Possibilities we would realize if we would do all we do for the glory of God

... we allowed Christ to reorder our lives and relationships

... we devoted ourselves to diligent prayer for open doors

... we lived lives that declared the glory, wonder, and beauty of Jesus.