

Read 1 Timothy 6:1–10 in your favorite translation. I will print the NET 2 translation.

6:1 Those who are under the yoke as slaves must regard their own masters as deserving of full respect. This will prevent the name of God and Christian teaching from being discredited. 2 But those who have believing masters must not show them less respect because they are brothers. Instead they are to serve all the more, because those who benefit from their service are believers and dearly loved.

Teach them and exhort them about these things. 3 If someone spreads false teachings and does not agree with sound words (that is, those of our Lord Jesus Christ) and with the teaching that accords with godliness, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in controversies and verbal disputes. This gives rise to envy, dissension, slanders, evil suspicions, 5 and constant bickering by people corrupted in their minds and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a way of making a profit. 6 Now godliness combined with contentment brings great profit. 7 For we have brought nothing into this world and so we cannot take a single thing out either. 8 But if we have food and shelter, we will be satisfied with that. 9 Those who long to be rich, however, stumble into temptation and a trap and many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is the root of all evils. Some people in reaching for it have strayed from the faith and stabbed themselves with many pains.

#### COMMENTS:

One of the most frequent complaints about the early church is that they didn't speak out against slavery. We must remember that slavery was a significant part of the culture in those days. There were no programs for care of the elderly like we have in Social Security today.

Social Security was signed into law a little more than a year before I was born, but money was not collected until several months after I was born. It is a recent development in our own civilization. It was part of the New Deal under FDR and was passed because of unemployment in the great depression, poverty, and security for people in their old age.

Having given Timothy instructions about the treatment of widows and elders, the apostle now broaches a third social relationship, namely the behavior of slaves towards their masters. We properly consider slavery a "monster abomination" today.

There is nothing demeaning about service, when it is given voluntarily. On the contrary, Jesus himself demonstrated its dignity by washing his disciples' feet. He called himself both servant and slave, added that each of his followers must be 'the slave of all'.

What is degrading, and fundamentally destructive of a person's humanness, is when one human being is forcibly owned by another and is thus robbed of all freedom. Slaves have three defining characteristics. Their person is another's property, so that they may be bought and sold; their will is subject to another's authority; and their labor is obtained by another's coercion.

Slavery was a form of tyranny. Even though some slave-owners were kind to their slaves, since they saw them as a valuable investment, the institution itself was a denial of human personhood. It was also a 'gigantic cancer', which drained the political, economic and moral forces of the Roman Empire.

Why is it, then, that neither Jesus nor his apostles called for the complete and immediate abolition of this horror? Probably the main reason is that slavery was deeply embedded in the structures of Graeco-Roman society. All well-to-do people had slaves, and very wealthy people had several hundreds.

They were regarded as essential, especially as domestic servants and farm laborers, but also as clerks, craftsmen, teachers, soldiers and managers. It is believed that there were more than fifty million of them in the Empire, including one third of the inhabitants of Rome. In consequence, to dismantle slavery all at once would have brought about the collapse of society.

At the same time Paul enunciated principles which undermined the very concept of slavery and led inexorably to its abolition, even though Christians are ashamed that it did not happen sooner.

In 1:10 The word translated as “kidnappers” is understood to be a “slave trader.”

In his earlier letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians he has also shown slavery to be in breach of the gospel. He has implied the equality of slaves and slave owners by declaring that they have the same heavenly master, who shows no favoritism. In consequence, he has told masters to provide their slaves with what is ‘right and fair’.

Paul has also written of the radical transformation of relationships which the gospel effects, so that slave and slave owner become brothers. Indeed, ‘there is neither ... slave nor free ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus’, equally God’s children and heirs without any distinction between them.

In both verses (6’1 & 2) the slaves whom Timothy is to instruct are clearly Christians and church members. However, the owner is not in v. 1, but he is a fellow Christ in v. 2. So Timothy is to adjust his teaching to the context.

First, slaves should consider their masters, even though they are unbelievers, to be worthy of full respect. That is, they will treat them with respect because they consider them worthy of respect, which they are as human beings, irrespective of their behavior. Then there is another and missionary reason why slaves should respect their masters. It is because the reputation of God’s name and the apostles teaching are at stake.

Because their masters are brothers, slaves must not show them less respect. Instead, because they are believers and beloved, they must serve them even better. The faith, love and brotherhood which unite them in Christ, far from being an excuse for neglect, should be a stimulus to service.

Now Paul returns to his pupil, Timothy. He is to teach and exhort the congregation about certain specific responsibilities. First and foremost he is to watch out for false teachers. When they contradict Jesus and don’t submit to guidance, they are conceited and without understanding.

They enjoy controversies and disputes and cause numerous problems (vs. 4–5) They even imagine that their teaching innovations are a way to make money. They are more interested in profit than truth.

That is why Paul inserts v. 6 which I’m sure he hoped would become a motto for life. Our relationship with money, goods and stuff, reveals character. God wants us to be content with what we have. He warns us, “You can’t take it with you!”

The desire to be rich is one of Satan’s trap. I believe God provides what I need and what I can handle. He protects me from things which would lead me away from him or tempt me into destructive habits or pleasures.

Note carefully: it is not money which is the root of evil. It is the LOVE of money which is the root of all evil. We are warned, that some have been turned away from Jesus or brought much pain into their life by pursuing riches. Contentment is a great protective gift from God.

REFLECTION QUESTION: Did you notice what preceded contentment in v. 6? It was godliness. The real blessing of contentment will not be ours if we don’t have godliness. I have

never known a contented person who was unhappy. Have you? Why not examine yourself on godliness and contentment? It could change your life.