

## **"Not as Slaves, But as Servants of Christ"**

### **Ephesians 6:5–8**

**July 20, 2025**

**by Senior Pastor Hong Poonghwa**

### **Ephesians 6:5–8 (PowerPoint)**

#### **Preface**

We have thus far examined the existential application, the concrete field of practice, of the Word in Ephesians 5:18: "Do not get drunk on wine, but be filled with the Spirit."

The life of a person filled with the Spirit—that is, a Christian who lives seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit while believing in Christ—has its first important field of faith practice in the relationship between husband and wife.

And the second field shown is the relationship between parents and children.

Both the relationship between husband and wife and between parents and children are the most foundational human relationships for building human society; all things begin from here. In other words, to believe in Christ and live seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit is not some unrealistic, distant dream or illusion, but a practice lived in the closest, most immediate, most real place where everyone feels a sense of concern.

In that sense, the Word from Ephesians 6:5 onward, which we just read, on the relationship between slaves and masters, expands the realm of human relationships further from those of husband-wife and parent-child. In the world under the Roman Empire in the 1st century A.D., it was indeed society itself.

It may be said that, even more than husband-wife or parent-child, this was a human relationship that everyone faced with a serious awareness of the problem and one that could not be avoided in order to live within that society.

Applied to the present age, it may be likened to the hierarchical relationships within various organizations, including workplaces—between superiors and subordinates, those above and below, such as bosses and workers.

Of course, in today's society, the institution of slavery does not officially exist.

As stated in Galatians, all people are one in Christ Jesus—there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female.

In God's eyes, all are equal.

This is a very important biblical view of humans.

However, when we look into the inner reality of the actual society we live in, we see that there do exist, in effect, master-slave relationships.

In relationships between nations—especially between so-called developed countries and so-called developing countries—and among all kinds of organizations and corporations, and in

interpersonal relationships within those organizations, substantial hierarchical structures persist in various forms.

### **Part One**

The Bible, which records the history from the beginning of humanity to its end, vividly testifies that since humans sinned before God and became sinners, the world human beings have built has repeatedly mass-produced a heavy, class-based reality of inequality and hierarchy. Of course, humans have tried to reform such seemingly contradictory evil realities by proposing all sorts of ideas, philosophies, and theories.

But the undeniable fact is that, each time, in changing form, new master-servant structures have continued to be born.

Was it three or four years ago? I recall how, amid the increased demand from people staying at home during the COVID pandemic, the labor conditions of delivery workers at a certain global corporation were loudly criticized as resembling those of slaves, and there were widespread calls for reform.

Even now, such issues continue in various forms. And within our own interpersonal relationships, in our communities, groups, and organizations, we may find ourselves striving to rule over others, to make them submit, or on the contrary, thinking “Such things are outdated,” choosing to remain below and trying to push up from underneath—thus living with ongoing quiet conflicts and power struggles almost as if by habit.

In any case, no human theory, ideology, philosophy, conviction, or institution can restore, in this current world, the order of Eden that was once broken by fallen humanity before God. The Bible tells us that such an unequal, irrational reality will continue until the very end of this world’s existence.

However, when the Kingdom of God comes with the second coming of Jesus Christ, the broken order will finally pass away, and it will be restored, completed, and returned to its original peaceful form. Those who believe in Jesus Christ are promised in Scripture that they will inherit that restored and completed Kingdom of God, and that, just as Christ is King, they too will dwell there as kings.

This is the ultimate glorious blessing given to the saints who believe in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, “as Christians, always remember this most important truth, and even in the midst of unreasonable or dissatisfying relationships where you find yourself placed, discern the hand of God. See what is truly good and evil. And discern, in the midst of those very relationships, the hand of God who uses even them to grow us—who were once dead in sin—into the mature stature of Christ, pure and blameless. Live accordingly. Serve with humility for the sake of Jesus.” That is what today’s Word seems to be telling us.

## **Part Two**

The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 6:5, begins speaking by addressing “Slaves.” And I wondered, “How did those who, even after believing in Christ, still remained in the social status of slaves receive this Word?”

Did they think, “Please don’t say such heartless things. Isn’t true faith about overturning this very social structure from the roots?”

Or did they think as follows. “Paul-sensei, just as you say, our social status as slaves has come to further reveal and shine forth within us the glory of being children of God, royal priests, saints who will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. This status has now become God’s sign.

It has become for each of us the field of sanctification that God is using to transform this sinful person into someone holy and blameless before Him. It is a place of training, where we learn not to be deceived by outward appearance but to discern the essence. Having met and believed in Jesus, I have come to think that way.

Before, it was nothing but suffering and anguish. I could only resent my birth. But now, precisely because of my status as a slave, I have come to deeply understand what it means that I once lived as a slave to sin before encountering Christ.

With fear and trembling, I want to obey my master as if I were obeying Christ, finding God’s will there—not with outward service to please people, but joyfully serving as a servant of Christ.

And I want to walk forward, expecting the Lord’s reward in that very place.

We are no longer slaves. We are free persons who are servants of Christ.

As I continue to seek clearer spiritual sight and good works in Christ, I believe that fundamental reform will eventually come.”

I believe that both responses likely existed.

Or perhaps, there were many who initially felt, “That’s too heartless,” but as they continued to pray through the Word, they were led to understand, to accept, to affirm—“Yes, that’s right!”—what Paul-sensei was trying to say.

## **Part Three**

Also, as I read today’s Word again and again and meditated alone, a question came to my mind: “Who was Apostle Paul thinking of when he wrote and sent these words to the people of the Ephesian church?”

And I began to think, “Perhaps Apostle Paul had Joseph in mind when writing these words.” Furthermore, perhaps he was also thinking of Daniel, who was taken captive to the Babylonian Empire.

Or maybe he had in mind Nehemiah, who led the project of restoring Israel.

As I reflect on the lives of these three men while opening the Bible, I realize something: They were likewise slaves, or began their lives from a position similar to slavery. They were in positions of serving masters within the societal structures in which they were placed.

Yet rather than dwelling in lament over the irrationality of their condition, —they served earthly masters as they would obey Christ, —with fear and trembling, and sincerity of heart, —not in outward service as people-pleasers, —but doing the will of God from the heart, —serving not people but the Lord God Himself, even amid their struggles, with joy.

Of course, even though they served with sincerity, they were misunderstood. There were times they were treated unfairly or demoted. There were times they were even thrown into prison. Yet they lived boldly as people of faith, as if they knew they would receive the Lord's reward in due time—and they did receive it at the proper time.

Joseph, speaking to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, said: “Brothers, do not be afraid or grieved or blame yourselves for having sold me into slavery. It was God who sent me here to save our lives. It was not you who sent me here, but God who sent me to become a ruler in Egypt” (Genesis 45:4–8). Thus he confessed, and found God's will in the 13 long years of unjust slavery.

Daniel, too, when he was thrown into the den of lions due to false accusations, confessed: “My God, whom I continually serve, sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths. They have not harmed me, because I was found innocent before Him. And also before you, O king, I have done no wrong” (Daniel 6:22). And in that irrational injustice, he discerned the hand of God.

Nehemiah also prayed, “Lord, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of this servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who delight to fear Your name. Please grant success to Your servant today and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. My God, remember me and show me mercy.” (Nehemiah 1:11, 13:31) With such a prayer, he confessed that he was a servant of the living God, a servant of Christ.

We can see that in the life of Joseph, in the life of Daniel, and in the life of Nehemiah, there was a clear divine intention.

Namely, that God was shaping within them the character befitting a child of God.

All believers are on this journey.

That is why, when someone judges another and says, “That person is immature,” “That person is not very Christian-like,” “That person is still not there yet as a Christian,” “That person is not ready to be a pastor or an evangelist,” —how much such thoughts or words reveal spiritual ignorance! They show that the speaker has not discerned the will of God, the hand of God, nor the Word of God.

All who believe in Christ are on the journey.

Last week, in a brief conversation with a teacher of Mori-Gaku (The school of Megumi Church), he/she said to me, “It’s about waiting, isn’t it—when it comes to people’s growth.” And I really think that’s exactly right.

It took Moses 120 years to become Moses. It took Joshua 110 years to become Joshua. It took long years for Abraham to become Abraham, for David to become David, and for Apostle Paul to become Paul.

Each one was in the process—under the hand of God.

Psalm 105 also sings that this was true of Joseph.

### **Psalm 105:17–19 (PowerPoint)**

“The word of the Lord refined him.”

The word of the Lord refined Joseph.

To refine Joseph was the will of God.

Apostle Paul also said the same thing.

### **Romans 5:1–5 (PowerPoint)**

Through faith in Christ, we are able to accept and make peace with the place where we are currently placed.

Having been brought into peace with God through faith in Christ, we are able to perceive:

“This very place where I now stand is the grace of God.” “That God has led each of us into this grace.”

Even if it is suffering, even if it is the status of a slave, —we come to know that this suffering is the necessary place where God refines and reshapes us, sinners as we are, to produce in us the character befitting a child of God.

And that becomes our hope.

Maybe right now, you are in a place where you cannot sense such things. But surely, God will lead you to a place where you can make that confession.

Each one of us is on that journey.

## **Part Four**

In the time of Apostle Paul, 2,000 years ago, there were more than 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire.

In some Roman cities, about one-third to half of the population were slaves.

The city of Ephesus, which was called “New Rome,” was no exception.

There were likely a considerable number of people in Ephesus—and in the Ephesian church—who held the status of slave.

Nevertheless, Apostle Paul, rather than placing emphasis on reforming the institution of slavery, placed emphasis on the improvement of relationships—on the improvement of

human relationships, on the improvement of the relationship between slave and master—as he guided the believers in the Ephesian church.

Why?

Because transformation of relationships was far more important and essential than transformation of systems.

In fact, historians point out that this very message of the gospel—this practice of the Word—brought about change in the human relationship of master and servant, and ultimately became the greatest factor leading to the collapse of the institution of slavery.

In Britain as well, from the late 1700s into the 1800s, it was a man named William Wilberforce, who stood on the gospel and on the Word of the Bible, who led the movement to abolish slavery. And in America, the abolition of slavery was brought about through the dedication of people like Abraham Lincoln, who held the Bible as the textbook of life. That is a well-known truth.

There is also an anecdote:

One day, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who was leading the civil rights movement for African Americans in the United States, was walking through a Black neighborhood in Washington D.C. There, he saw a young Black man who had thrown down his cleaning tools and was hurling insults at the passersby.

Rev. King approached him, gently placed his hand on the young man's shoulder, and said: "Brother, can you not take pride in the fact that you are cleaning this land—this beautiful land created by God—for the glory of God?"

Regardless of one's position, if one seeks to fulfill one's job and task for the glory of God, —that very work becomes a sacred office, a sacred vocation, a sacred labor, and a sacred place. That is the view of life, view of vocation, and way of living that the Bible teaches us. And when we take on tasks while thinking and being conscious of "for the glory of God," —then naturally, those things will be sifted through the filter of God's will. We will stop seeking dishonest success, and even if something looks like failure from a worldly point of view, —we will shift our eyes to the blessing that begins from that sacred failure, and be led toward that blessing.

Even if we try to obey our masters and serve people as we would Christ, —we may be rejected, or unrecognized, or even envied in return.

But of course, this does not mean, "Turn a blind eye and submit to violence or injustice," or "There's nothing you can do but yield to unavoidable evil." Rather, to overcome evil with good is the way of life for us Christians. And that is the way to embody the sovereignty of God in our very lives.

The results may not come immediately.

But if we do not give up on living a life that overcomes evil with good,  
—then the God of justice will, in due time, grant a holy reward, —just as He did for Joseph,  
just as He did for Daniel, just as He did for Nehemiah.

### **Conclusion**

Let me end with one final parable.

There were three men working on the construction site of a chapel.  
A passerby asked each of the three: “What kind of work are you doing?”

The first man replied,  
“Can’t you see? I’m cutting stone. Just cutting stone.”  
The second man replied,  
“What kind of work? I don’t care what kind of work it is. I’m just here to earn money. That’s it.  
Money.”  
Then the third man answered,  
“Yes, right now I am building the house of God.”  
Though all were doing the same work in the same place, —how differently they viewed it. —  
how different their aspirations were.  
Among the three, who do you think worked with the most joy?

Today’s Word reminds us: Even if we do not immediately receive our reward, —if we live and  
work while keeping Christ in mind, —if we serve people from the heart as servants of Christ,  
—then in due time, we will receive a reward from the Lord.

What are we looking at as we live?  
Where are our eyes directed?  
Let us desire to see the will of God, and to live with our eyes fixed on His will.  
For in that place, there is the greatest reward for human beings.  
Let us close by reading the Word once more:

### **Ephesians 6:5–8 (PowerPoint)**

Let us pray.  
Benediction: Ephesians 6:7–8