

“As Those Who Know the Lord in Heaven”

Ephesians 6:5–9

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Ephesians 6:5–9 (PowerPoint)

Preface

It has been a while since we last looked at the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Up to now, we have been looking at where and how specifically we are to live out the Word of Ephesians 5:18, “Do not get drunk on wine, but be filled with the Spirit.”

The faith of a person filled with the Holy Spirit—that is, the faith of a Christian who believes in Christ and lives seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit—where and how such faith is to be practiced, the first important field of practice that we were taught was in the relationship between husband and wife, and between parent and child.

Both of these are the most basic human relationships for maintaining human society, and they are the foundational relationships from which everything begins.

To live seeking to believe in Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit is not some unrealistic, far-off dream or vision, but an activity that appears in the place of the family and home, which is the nearest, most realistic, and most intimate relationship where everyone probably feels some awareness of problems.

And the human relationship that spreads further beyond that is the relationship in social life between slave and master, which we read just now in the Scripture passage.

In the world under the Roman Empire in the first century A.D. two thousand years ago, the master–servant relationship was a very ordinary relationship that supported society; yet even in that relationship, the Apostle Paul, the author of the Epistle to the Ephesians, teaches us as if admonishing us, saying that “the figure of one who is a servant of Christ, and the concrete good deeds of one filled with the Holy Spirit, ought also to appear.”

Perhaps, even more than the husband-and-wife or parent-and-child relationship, this was the human relationship that everyone at that time faced with a deep sense of problem and pain, and that could be said to have been an unavoidable relationship in living in that society of the day.

Applied to the modern day, it may be likened to relationships between organizations, or the relationships between superiors and subordinates in the workplace.

Of course, in today’s society, on the surface there is no so-called slavery system, but in reality, relationships of master and slave-like hierarchy seem to exist in many places—in relationships between nations, and within various organizations, institutions, and groups.

To Christians who are made to live in such a society, what the Apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, spoke was not a reform of the system of slavery, but an improvement of human relationships.

Because it is the improvement of relationships between people, rather than the change of systems, that is far more important and essential.

The pains and sufferings, and various problems in this society in which we live, may all, in every place, be said to arise from relationships with other people; yet the root cause of them, the Bible teaches us, is that human beings have destroyed their relationship with God—that people have departed from God, forgotten God, made what is not God into their god, and have tried to act as though they themselves were God.

Therefore, if we have been allowed to have our relationship with God restored through the Savior Jesus Christ, that restoration ought to appear also in our relationships with others, and we should strive to let it appear, the Apostle Paul tells us.

For the restoration of human relationships itself is the greatest wound and pain of the world that has forgotten God.

It has been quite a while, but in the previous sermon, from the Word of Ephesians 6:5–8, we thought about the exhortation to the slaves regarding improvement of their relationship with their masters—about the Word, “Serve your earthly masters, as you would serve Christ.”

And this morning, I would like to think about the next verse, verse 9, which gives the exhortation, “Masters, do the same to them.”

Part One

Some time ago, I once heard a story that made me feel a tightening of the heart, thinking, “This is not someone else’s matter.”

In the workplace where a certain Christian person was working, a much younger man with far less life experience newly came to work.

From that young man’s viewpoint, that Christian worker seemed to look down on him, to deal with him in a cold manner, even with a bit of unkindness.

And at one point, by chance, he came to know that this young man also was a Christian, and moreover, attended the same church as that Christian worker.

Until then, neither of them knew that they were living their faith life in the same church.

But once they came to know, the older Christian worker’s expression and attitude toward the newly joined young man suddenly became soft and gentle—to the point that the young man felt it a bit strange how drastically the attitude had changed.

Perhaps the worker thought, “Oh no! My dark side has been exposed!”

Hearing this story, I myself felt it pierce my ears—it felt not like someone else’s story, but like my own.

And just the other day, I also heard another story.

A certain celebrity, when young, was told by the president of the entertainment agency to which he belonged something like this:

“You don’t have to greet me so politely. Instead, greet politely the people who always clean for you, offer a cup of coffee to the person who drives you, and show gratitude to those who support you in your daily life. That is the most important thing for you, and what you should do.”

I do not know whether this president was a Christian, but it sounded like today’s Scripture words, and I was made to think, “Yes, I want to be like that, I ought to be like that.”

As I ponder the Word of verse 9, “Masters, do the same to them,” an honest thought came to my mind.

Though I do not possess slaves under an actual system of slavery, in every situation and relationship, I have to honestly admit that there is within me the feeling of a master who wants to be the superior one—who wants to make others move as I wish, who says within, “Don’t you dare look down on me!”

And even if I happen to be in the lower position, in the subordinate side of a hierarchical relationship, there is also the feeling of wanting to “push up from below, and if possible, have those above act as I wish,” pretending outwardly to be humble but inwardly having the mind of a master. I can only confess that shamefully but honestly.

The Apostle Paul teaches us, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6:12), but when I think about what kind of battles I myself am fighting daily, I realize that in the end, I am probably secretly fighting a battle of the flesh and blood kind—wanting to be above others, to take the upper hand, to make others obey my words and deeds—while hiding, getting angry, feeling down, irritated, or pleased, all the while trying not to get caught.

It may differ from person to person, but for me, marriage and married life have become a precious opportunity to see and face my true self vividly.

I could not help but acknowledge my own cunning, stinginess, desire to dominate, and selfishness.

Before getting married, I thought of myself as a “good person.”

“I don’t act mean to others; I think I am more tolerant than others; I’m not stingy; I’ve never bullied anyone; compared to others, I think I’m a kind person”—such a “good person” illusion.

“Because I’m a good person, I was able to fall in love; because I’m a good person, I was able to get married; because I’m a good person, I advanced to a good place; I’m a

good person, so of course people should listen to the good person that I am”—with such deep-seated psychology and confidence, I entered married life, but all kinds of ugly, muddy aspects began to show themselves.

I had a bullying tendency, wanted to raise myself by looking down on others, wanted to talk about myself more than listen to others, and my desire to dominate was far stronger than to obey. I was made to realize, through the fact that I had hurt my one and only wife and children—those whom I love most and who are dearest to me—that I had merely been acting the part of a good person on the surface.

In verse 6, Paul says, “not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ,” but in my case, I have done only surface-level serving like people-pleasing, and in the end, I cannot but admit that within this body flows a cunning evil, poison, and sin that tries to justify human relationships in which I make myself into God, following the desire to enshrine myself as a “good person.”

Part Two

The reason why I am speaking about this now is because I have become aware that even in various human relationships which could be compared to those between master and slave, I harbor the same kind of maliciousness and poisonous feelings. First, when someone younger than me—a junior or someone with less experience, that is, someone in a lower position than myself—acts admirably, says something good, or performs a task or job very well, there arises within me a feeling that does not want to accept that honestly.

Somehow, I feel compelled to find fault, to point out something, to show that *I am still above them*.

Rather than focusing on their good points, my attention is drawn to their shortcomings, and I find myself criticizing their immaturity, thinking, “No, no, they still have a long way to go,” and this attitude even shows itself in my words and behavior.

Or, in another case, when my social position or organizational rank is lower, but I am older in age, I feel a strange urge to show off my years of experience. A twisted desire for control arises—an unwillingness to submit—and I end up taking on a defiant facial expression or attitude.

Furthermore, what makes things even more troublesome is when it comes to peers or friends of the same age.

Even though we went to the same school, live the life of faith in the same church, and believe in the same God, when that friend of mine seems to have greater social recognition or a higher status, strange jealousy wells up in me. I begin to make obvious appeals like, “I am doing better, I am trying harder, I am suffering more,” or else I take on a cold, indifferent attitude, as if to ignore them—looking at them with a cold gaze

that says, “They don’t understand,” or trying to appear calm and composed, as if I had some strange sense of superiority.

In various situations and relationships, I am driven by the desire to create master-and-slave relationships, and the wish always to stand on the side of the master who controls the slave. That, I believe, is the reality of us sinners—people who have broken our relationship with God.

To such as us, the Apostle Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, gives these words of exhortation in Ephesians 6:9:

“Masters, do the same to them.” (slide)

That is to say, “As you would obey Christ, with fear and trembling and with a sincere heart, treat those whom you think of as subordinates with care. Not with a superficial or flattering kind of kindness, but as servants of Christ—doing the will of God from the heart, gladly showing honor and care not as to men but as to the Lord.”

This is because of what follows in the latter half of verse 9:

“You know that their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with Him.” (slide)

We Christians believe in the One who has neither slave nor master—the One who treats every human being equally, who makes authority, power, status, and experience as nothing. We believe in the one and only God, the Lord of hosts, the Lord of lords, the King of kings, the Prince of Peace, who possesses absolute glory.

We are those who measure value not by comparison, but who believe in the one absolute One.

We are those who know true authority.

Before that authority and righteousness, we must recognize—not ninety-nine point nine percent but one hundred percent—that we are sinners.

We are those who must acknowledge that we have no right to accuse others.

Therefore, if we Christians, toward those who may be like slaves to us—or those in positions lower than ours—hold thoughts, attitudes, facial expressions, gazes, or words that treat them like slaves, then at that very moment we are denying the fact that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if even while doing such things we can still call ourselves Christians, it is not because we are righteous, but solely because of the eternal grace, mercy, and compassion found in the perfect forgiveness and redemption of Christ Jesus on the cross.

Our daily battle, for the sake of Christ, is to die to ourselves each day.

Part Three

The Apostle Paul also says this in the First Letter to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 15:31 (slide)

“I affirm, by the pride which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, that I die daily.”

1 Corinthians 4:10–14, 16 (slide)

“Be imitators of me. As I die daily by the pride I have in Christ Jesus my Lord, being reviled, I bless; being slandered, I speak kindly. I have become as the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. Therefore I urge you, be imitators of me.” Paul speaks these words to us sincerely.

This is the way of life for us Christians.

It is the narrow and difficult way that Jesus spoke of.

It is the path that Jesus Himself walked, and by His own example taught us.

He emptied Himself, humbled Himself, had no appearance that we should desire Him, no beauty or majesty to attract us. He was despised and rejected, yet He obeyed to the point of death on the cross. He not only considered each one of us human beings as better than Himself, but actually acted accordingly. We Christians are those who wish to follow and imitate such a Jesus, and live in that way.

When I hear the words, “If you believe in Jesus, then this will come true, that will come true; everything will go well, you will receive this and that, and feel so good,” I feel as though we are being like strange adults still wearing childish clothes, always seeking milk. I sense Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, gently urging us, “It is time to move on—to enter the joy and taste of solid food. Go deeper into faith. Gain the power to understand how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.”

And the One who walks this journey with us is God—Jesus Christ Himself.

Conclusion

The world says, “Let’s change the world. If the world changes, things will change. If the world changes, it will move toward the better.”

Of course, not everything in such a claim is wrong.

But the Bible does not begin there.

The Bible does not say, “Change the world first.”

It first says, “Receive salvation. Be born again. Be filled with the Holy Spirit, and serve one another.”

Only then—through the new relationships of people who have been newly born in Christ—does the world change.

Yes, through the new relationships of those who have been made new in Christ, the world is changed.

But the world seeks the opposite.

It says, "If my surroundings change, if society changes, if my position or circumstances change, things will get better."

In other words, "I will not change. I refuse to change."

Believing "I am right," they say, "Let's change the world first."

But the Bible teaches the opposite.

Those who have been newly born in the Lord Jesus—those who have truly become Christians—through that completely new way of life, first change and build their relationships with those closest to them.

It teaches that for us to change, in the Lord, our relationships with our spouses, parents, children, and those near us in society—this is what changes the very essence of all things.

We are those who know the Lord God who is in heaven.

We are those who know His authority.

We are those who, before that authority, can rest assured even in death.

As those who know the One who is true authority, we are able—joyfully and willingly—to change our relationships with others.

May we be those who live in imitation of the Apostle Paul and our Lord Jesus.

Let's pray.

Benediction:

"I have become the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. Therefore, I urge you—be imitators of me."