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Proverbs: Servants and Masters



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg touches upon various human relationships as espoused in the book of Proverbs. He notes that relationships between brothers and friends are not straightforward, and that the government has historically played a role in defining various relationships, including those between masters and servants. Gregg emphasizes that the practice of slavery, while prevalent throughout history, was often immoral and abusive, with enslaved individuals often having abusive owners, against their will. Despite this, he notes that it was also possible for masters to show genuine care for their servants and that the complex nature of human relationships has been a perennial theme in Proverbs.

Transcript

Today we're looking at Proverbs again and the general theme of human relationships. There's a number of relationships that Proverbs discusses. A couple of them we have behind us now, the parent-child relationship and the husband-wife relationship.

There's a little less material on certain other relationships, but there's quite a few other relationships to consider. The next, about which we only have a few verses to consider, is the relationship between servants and masters. Now, when we talk about relationships between people, we have to know that there is essentially two very great broad categories of relationships.

There are what we call egalitarian relationships and hierarchical relationships. Egalitarian relationships are those where there's nobody who's automatically in the position of leadership. There's no one who, by definition, has to submit to the other person.

They're just friends or brothers or neighbors or something like that. In a relationship between your brothers or your friends, it's not a given that one of you has to do what the other one says or that one of you is in charge. That's probably decided case by case.

In an egalitarian relationship, nobody is standing in a position of authority over another person. In hierarchical relationships, one party, by definition, is in authority and the other is subordinate. There are both kinds of relationships that we all have.

We're all involved in hierarchical relationships. For example, we're all born in families where we were subject to our parents. So, the parents were in authority and the children were in subjection.

We also have friendships where there's no hierarchy. They're simply egalitarian. Both kinds of relationships are right, but they have to be defined.

We have to know what they are. We were talking about husband-wife relationships. In the Bible, husband-wife relationships are treated as a hierarchical relationship.

Although, it's much more popular in our present day to opt for egalitarian relationships between husband and wife and to suggest that husband and wife have to equally submit to each other. That's not really what the Bible teaches, since the Bible teaches that husband-wife relationship is supposed to be a picture of Christ and the Church, and in particular, that Christ is the head of the Church and the Church submits to Christ. But, the idea of hierarchical relationship is out of fashion in our day.

They have not yet come to the point in our society of saying that parents have no authority over their children, but they're chipping away at that. Basically, the trend of our society is to eliminate all hierarchical relationships, with the exception that the government is in authority over everybody. The government owns the children.

The government owns the marriages and can license and dissolve them. The government owns everything. That's the move toward tyranny that societies go toward when they're not subject to God and they're not following God's ways.

Basically, the first thing you do is you break down all other hierarchical relationships so nobody has any particular authority over anyone else, and then you give all the authority to the government, and they simply have all authority in all areas. But, God has it otherwise. Governments have some authority.

Parents have some authority. Husbands have some authority. Masters have some authority.

And, we come to the master and servant relationship, which is of all the relationships in the Bible, probably the one that is most offensive to modern sensitivities. You might think that to suggest a hierarchical relationship in marriage is the most offensive to our modern sensitivities, and it is very offensive to some. But, master-servant relationship is offensive to almost everybody in our society, because we're talking about slaves, and slavery is an offensive institution to us, and for good reason.

Our country has known some very oppressive forms of slavery and its history, some very wrong treatment of slaves, or even the means by which slaves were obtained was immoral in this country. We know very much that the history of slavery in this country was a history of kidnapping. It was a history of racism.

It was a history of abuse, of one race counting itself superior to another race, and going to the country of another race, and kidnapping people from their homes, and bringing them to our country, and pressing them into slavery. And, all of that is sinful. It's sinful to kidnap.

Under biblical law, kidnappers would be put to death. So, under biblical law, slave traders who brought slaves to this country from Africa would be put to death. But, slavery as an institution was not immoral in itself, because not all slavery involved kidnapping.

Not all slavery involved abuse. In Israel, as often as not, a man who was found to be in slavery had sold himself into slavery voluntarily. It was an economic necessity for many people.

You see, they didn't have middle class in the ancient world. Everybody was either dirt poor or unusually rich. There just wasn't some large middle class like we have in modern society.

The rich people were very rich, and the poor people were very poor, typically. In Israel, poor people often had land because they had inherited it. There was tribal land that was passed down from generation to generation.

But, as the tribes became larger, and there were a larger number of people to divide up the land and so forth, some people ended up without much land. Some had to sell their land. And, although it would be returned to them in the year of Jubilee, some wouldn't live that long.

The year of Jubilee happened every 50 years. So, there were people who found themselves in great poverty. And, they would, well, they'd borrow money if they could to feed their families.

But, if they borrowed money, they often were not in the position to repay it. And, they found themselves way over their head in debt. And so, the only thing they could do is sell themselves as slaves.

Now, in Israel, if we've got an Israelite who sold himself into slavery to another Israelite, it was more like an indentured servitude, because it was not really a life sentence. In Israel, a Jew who had a Jewish slave had to release him after seven years. So, a man who sold himself into slavery was only selling himself for a maximum of seven years.

And then, he would be offered his freedom. But, if he wanted to remain a slave, and the Bible makes this provision, he could say, no, I don't want to leave slavery after seven years. I want to be a slave for life.

I love my master. I love my conditions here. And then, he could have his ear bored and

have an ear ring in his ear, which would indicate that he was a voluntary slave for life.

Now, we can hardly imagine somebody having such a sentiment as that. To us, slavery just smacks of absolute oppression and torment. Of course, we are children of the Enlightenment.

We and our ancestors for many generations have had very high vision of human freedom, human rights, human dignity, which makes it unthinkable that I would allow myself to be a piece of property, even for any number of years, seven or any other number. I'm an independent American man. How dare anyone think about owning me? You can't own people.

Well, that's our modern idea. And, it might be a better idea. It might be an improvement over the old ideas, but it simply was not the idea of societies until about less than 200 years ago.

For all history until less than 200 years ago, every society in the world had slavery as it was just a given. Some people had to be slaves because they couldn't pay their bills. Slavery was an out for them from starvation.

If they couldn't buy food, they wouldn't be able to live unless they had the opportunity to put themselves under a master who would provide for them. To sell oneself into slavery meant that you had no more financial obligations. You just had to wake up in the morning and work for your master all day and go to bed and get up the next morning, work for your master all day and go to bed.

You didn't have any rights, but then you didn't have any lack either. You had a roof over your head. You had clothing.

Your children had clothing. You had medical care. You had food every day because your master, that was his responsibility.

He provided that. In a sense, people who were slaves in ancient times were sometimes actually financially better off than many people in America who have to work two or three jobs to make ends meet. And they're still not sure they'll be able to pay the rent.

They still lose their home. They still have trouble feeding and housing their children. And so, you know, we think, oh, but it's so undignified to be a slave.

Well, how dignified is it to be homeless in this country? Now, see, there wouldn't be homelessness. At least able-bodied people would not be homeless in ancient times because if they didn't have a home or food, but they're able-bodied, they'd simply sell themselves into slavery and someone else would take care of all their needs. And there's a sense in which we all who have jobs, sell ourselves into temporary slavery, eight hours a day or however many hours a day it is.

We belong to, those hours belong to our employers. And we expect them to take care of us in measure. But the thing is, they don't get all of our time and we don't expect them to cover all of our needs.

I mean, we'd like it if the paycheck we get from them will cover all our needs. But if we have emergencies and so forth, we don't go to our boss and say, you know, I need an extra thousand dollars this month. They say, well, get a job, get another job because they aren't responsible for you.

So in a sense, a man who is a slave, if he didn't mind the indignity, and sometimes he had no choice, but it's not any worse than being a homeless person. There's a lot of indignity in that too. A person who is a slave actually had security.

Now we, as I said, we think of slavery very differently because in our history we're familiar with what's usually referred to as Atlantic slavery, where white people went to Africa and kidnapped black people from their home and crossed the Atlantic and sold them as chattel and slaves in this country. Now, as I said, that would be punishable by death under the law because it involved kidnapping. And that, and kidnapping was one of the laws, one of the crimes that was punishable by death under the law.

So when the Bible seems to endorse slavery, many modern people say, oh, God is immoral. Look at that. He endorsed slavery.

And we're thinking of slavery as it was in this country. We're not thinking of slavery as it was throughout history in almost all other countries, which by the way, if a person was so unfortunate enough to have to sell himself into slavery, he might be even more unfortunate by having an abusive master because of being a slave meant you were in fact owned. You had no rights.

And if your master didn't treat you well, then you were really out of luck. Obviously there were slaves who loved their masters and when offered their freedom after seven years said, Hey, I don't want to go anywhere. I want to stay here.

I like my master. This is, things are good for me here. I wasn't able to make it out there in the world.

I can make it here. You know, my family's growing up eating food. They're, they're quote, frankly, even in this country, although slavery was almost an unmitigated evil in this country, there were slaves who actually had pretty good circumstances and didn't want to be emancipated.

There were slaves that were unhappy about the emancipation because their masters, in many cases, Christian masters had treated them like a member of the family. And they'd come to love the children of the family and the, and their masters and so forth. There was no abuse.

And you know, they, they didn't anymore want to leave their conditions of slavery than they want. Then someone wants to leave their family. And so, I mean, slavery isn't all one thing, but where people are taken away from their home against their will and made slaves and where they are abused, this is evil.

And the Bible considers that an evil, though the old Testament law, it took for granted that there would be slaves. It always made it very clear that it's wrong to be abusive to slaves. And, although persons, persons could get away with being abusive to their slaves, even in Israel, they, there were limits to what they could do as opposed to other societies.

Other societies could kill their slaves. Your slave was a piece of property, like your dog was your property. And of course, in our society, you can't even kill your dog now.

But the point is they, they could kill a slave if they got angry enough at them. In Israel, if you killed your slave, you'd be put to death. Now, if you beat your slave and he lingered for a few days and then died from unseen, probably internal injuries, then there would not be a penalty to the master because it was considered that he did not intend, it was unintentional.

If he had wanted to kill a slave, he would have beaten him to death. Instead, if he beat him hard and the slave lived a few days and then died, the idea is that the master didn't know that he'd beat him that hard, didn't intend to kill him. In any case, when we think of slavery in the Bible, we're not even thinking of racial slavery.

When we think of slavery in our history, we think of specifically one race of people. Black people were enslaved by white people, but actually in Israel, it would be Jewish people enslaved by other Jewish people or other Middle Eastern people who were prisoners of war and brought back as trophies were made slaves. Of course, this was against their will, but it wasn't kidnapping.

This was a matter of the spoils of war. There was a war and they lost. Instead of getting killed, they got captured.

They were taken that way. That was the more unfortunate way to become a slave, obviously, because that's involuntary. It was still not a racial thing.

We associate slavery in our country almost entirely with racism. It's one group of people, one race, thinking that they're superior by nature to another race. Back in the days of slavery, the general feeling was that the African races were actually almost not quite as human as white people were.

Of course, we're fortunate to be beyond that crazy belief. What I'm saying is when we talk about slavery, a lot of times we're thinking of some really sinful, negative things that are associated with slavery in this country, but were not necessarily inherent in the

institution of slavery. Slavery was simply an economic, not a racist arrangement.

It was an economic arrangement. The slaves either had sold themselves into slavery because they'd rather be slaves than starve, or they were people who were taken in war, and they'd rather be slaves than be killed. We have in Scripture the presumption that slavery is a factor, that slavery exists.

You would have found this to be true in any society at that time. Not only in ancient biblical times, you go back 200 years and you'd find slaves in every society too. Even in our own time, in non-Christian lands, especially in Islamic countries, slavery is still permitted in many cases.

In many African Islamic countries, slavery is legal. In fact, one of the ironies of history is that after slavery was abolished in this country, the American government established an African nation called Liberia as a place for the liberated, emancipated slaves to go and live if they wished to go back to Africa. And so some did, and they set up a government there, and you know what? Now they have slavery there, black on black.

The government there and the people in power are black, and the slaves are black. So, in other words, slavery isn't always about racism. It's about economics.

It's about power. It's about other things. And it can be an institution that is oppressive.

Obviously, so can parenting be. There are parents that abuse their children. That's not a good argument for abolishing parenthood.

It means there should be some kind of controls. There should be some kind of penalties and so forth for parents who are abusive. But you don't abolish hierarchical relationships because they tend to be arenas for sinful nature to manifest itself in one party abusing another.

And I think I mentioned it at an earlier time in some lecture here this year already. An article I read years ago in the Oregonian, when I lived in Oregon, front page of one of the sections of the Oregonian, was talking about a conference in Chicago that was going on at the time, where two Christian organizations that had different opinions about male and female relations were getting together to sort of see if they could convince each other, or come to an agreement or something. And one of the organizations, I don't remember the names of the organizations now, but one of them was arguing for egalitarian society, where men and women had equal rights, for example, to the priesthood or to the ministry.

And likewise in marriage, that there should be no headship, no hierarchy in marriage. And the other organization was arguing for hierarchy and saying, you know, there are biblical norms in marriage and biblical norms about women in ministry and so forth. Anyway, the two groups did not agree.

But the newspaper article was, of course, favorable toward the egalitarians. And there was a large quotation. It came from one of the participants at the conference.

She was an elder in a church, and her statement went like this. She said, until, she said, as long as we hold to a patriarchal view, we will never be able to end child abuse and wife abuse by men. And when I saw that, I thought, maybe that's why women aren't supposed to be in leadership.

Some women at least don't think very clearly. Some men don't either, by the way. It's not a man-woman thing necessarily, but this woman was not thinking very clearly.

She thought that having a patriarchal view promoted child abuse and wife abuse. In other words, having the view that the husband is the head, having a hierarchical view of marriage, is that which causes abuse. Well, my parents had a hierarchical view of marriage and there wasn't any abuse in our home.

And there are homes that might not have any interest in hierarchical or egalitarian theory, but there's abuse. You know, it's not because the Bible says the husband is the head of the wife that there's abuse, because heads usually will not abuse their bodies. My head doesn't abuse my body.

Actually, my head is interested in the well-being of my body. The decisions my head makes usually are to try to keep my body out of pain, out of sickness, out of trouble, well-fed, comfortable. I mean, the interests of my body are the interests of my head.

And a man who takes his headship seriously is going to be watching out for his wife as he watches out for himself. Paul said, he that loves his wife loves himself, just as Christ does the church. And it has nothing to do with the man being the head of the body, but there are some people who view it as the reason that some men abuse women and abuse children is because they are bigger and angry and sinful.

They're expressing their sinfulness. They're not expressing a biblical norm of patriarchy. They're basically the biblical norm of patriarchy is that the husband is the protector of the wife and any husband that's decent has that instinct.

But there are husbands and wives and children who are not decent. And in the case of men who are not decent, they often will do bad things to anyone that's near them, anyone who's vulnerable. And the wife and the children are sometimes the ones nearest and most vulnerable.

And it's not because the husband says, the Bible gives me headship so I can beat up my wife. The man who's beating up his wife isn't paying any attention to what the Bible says. He's not a man trying to follow scripture or else he wouldn't be beating up anybody.

It has nothing to do with the biblical teaching. It has to do with the sinfulness of a man. And that's true in slavery.

That's true in parenting. In every hierarchical relationship, one could argue, well, some parents abuse children. So it's wrong to have parents have authority over children.

No, it'd be extremely wrong to not have parents have authority over their children. But parents should be good. All people should be good.

The same thing is true when we come to the subject of servants and masters. In the Bible, masters can abuse their servants. Now, in this case, perhaps it is the institution that allows for the abuse, because a slave might be bigger and stronger than his master.

Unlike a wife toward her husband or a child toward a parent, the slave might be big enough to take care of himself in a conflict with his master, but it is the institution itself that subjugates the man who's a slave. And therefore, slavery does lend itself to abuse, as every hierarchical relationship does. But in a sense, slavery could be blamed for the abuse more than, say, the relationship of parenting or of marriage.

And these are the primary hierarchical relationships. Parent, child, husband, wife, servant, master, also ruler, subject. Those are the ones that the Bible mentions.

They're hierarchical. Then other relationships are going to be egalitarian. Now, with reference to masters and servants, there are a few things that Proverbs says.

Of course, we don't get a comprehensive teaching on the subject there, but we have some acknowledgment of the phenomenon and some of the dynamics of it, of that kind of relationship. In chapter 17, now in your notes it says 12.9. Don't look there. And the reason is, although 12.9 in the New King James does mention the servant, the translation is disputed.

And some people would translate that verse in a way that doesn't even have the word servant in it, an entirely different concept. So we're not going to deal with that verse here. In Proverbs 17, it says a wise servant will rule over a son who causes shame and will share an inheritance among the brothers.

Now, what this is saying is, although a servant holds a lower position of power in society, he can actually, by his wise and good conduct, rise to a position of authority in the smaller circle of the family that he's in. Now, it's not very common, but it's not unthinkable. When Abraham had not yet had any children and God said to him, Abraham, I am your great reward.

This is at the beginning of chapter 14 of Genesis. Abraham says, well, what shall you give me? I don't have any seed. And Eliezer, my slave, is the heir of my fortune.

And God said, well, you're going to have a son and that'll change everything. So Abraham, when he had no children, had nothing to do but leave his wealth to a slave. And if Isaac had never been born, or if Ishmael had never been born, if Abraham had never had sons, then this Eliezer, a slave from Damascus, would have inherited his master's fortune.

Now, if Abraham had had a son and his son proved to be unworthy of the fortune, Abraham could have left it to Eliezer after all. It's not common, but it was not unthinkable that a servant might actually inherit his master's stuff, either if the master had no son or if he had a son that he was in no way going to leave his stuff to. There are people who write their children out of their will because they're so disgusted with their children's choices in life and behavior.

And if the only person left to inherit is the servant, then the servant's going to get it. And so a wise servant will rule over a son who causes shame. A son who causes shame will be written out of the will.

And the servant who is wise and good will be trusted by his master and honored by his master and will share an inheritance among the brothers. You know, it's an interesting thing that Solomon wrote this because although he did not live to see it, this happened in his own family. His own son, Rehoboam, took the throne after him.

But Solomon's former servant, Jeroboam, ended up ruling over the majority of the kingdom that Solomon left. Solomon left his kingdom to, it was a united kingdom, twelve tribes. He left to his son, Rehoboam.

But the kingdom divided because his son was a fool. And ten of the tribes went under Jeroboam, who had been Solomon's servant previously. So Solomon, when he wrote this, had no idea that this exact thing would happen in his own home.

That his servant would rule over, a wise servant would rule over his son who was shameful and foolish. So it's not unheard of. And that means, of course, that slavery wasn't always a bad deal for the slave.

I mean, if somebody was captured in war, who knows where Eliezer, Abram's servant, came from. He came from Damascus. Maybe he was captured in war by someone previous to Abram and Abram bought him.

We don't know. But the man had lost his freedom. But it was quite possible that the man could have inherited a fortune as a result of being a wise servant.

So being a servant may look like a disaster to the person who falls into that calamity. But in some cases, the wisdom of that servant can lead to exaltation. Think of Joseph, who started out as a slave in Potiphar's house.

And although he never became more than a slave in Potiphar's house, he was elevated to a position above all the other servants. He was made like a ruler in the house over the other servants. Obviously, because of a false accusation, he was put in prison.

But even there, he rose to position above all the other prisoners. The captain of the guard made him authority over all the other prisoners. And then eventually, he was given authority over the whole nation, only under Pharaoh himself.

A wise, prudent, honest man in the position of a slave. God providentially brought him to the place where he not only ruled over the household, he ruled over the whole nation of Egypt, thus even ruling over his former master, Potiphar. And the jailer that had watched him in prison.

Now, in chapter 29, a couple of verses here regarding servant masters, servants and masters. Chapter 29, verse 19, it says, The servant will not be corrected by mere words, for though he understands, he will not respond. Now, this is obviously talking about a particular kind of servant, because Solomon also knows about other kinds of servants.

But there are some servants who are stubborn and rebellious. They don't want to be there. Or they're just having a bad day, and they're just defiant.

And in many cases, you can't just expect a servant to respond because you speak to him, you might have to discipline him. Just like children in a household have to be disciplined, so sometimes servants have to be disciplined. And a man could discipline his servants, even if they were adults, just like he could discipline his children, because they were part of his household.

And just like the children, the servants were required to be obedient. And if they weren't, you couldn't change them with just words. There had to be a rod or something there to bring discipline of a servant who would not be obedient, just like a child would not be.

After all, he says in verse 15 of the same chapter, the rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame. Now, children and servants often needed more than words to correct them. They shouldn't require more than words, because a person who is conscientious, a child who's conscientious toward his parent, the servant who's conscientious toward his master, should be able to say, okay, my master has expressed, my father, my mother has expressed their opinion, what they want, their will is known to me, their wish is my command.

I'm going to do what they say. I'm not going to stand against them. But Solomon knew that sometimes servants are not so willing to just jump when you speak.

And therefore there has to be something of a penalty besides just words that's available to the master, just like there has to be to a parent, because children can be that way too. And if a parent is not allowed to discipline a child, and in our society, that's becoming

more and more the sentiment that parents should not be allowed to discipline their children because their children are given much more of an equal status of rights in society than they used to have. And maybe that would be good for some children, but in general, it's not good for society, because society needs to have parental guidance of children and children and servants, both are human beings, sometimes stiff necked, sometimes strong will, sometimes just speaking to them isn't going to get what you need.

You have to have something else available to you, something, you have to be able to have some teeth behind the commands, or else they'll just look at you and defy you. That's what kind of servant is the pampered servant in verse 21. Maybe he's not the opposite kind, but he's a different situation.

In chapter 29, 21 says he who pampers his servant from childhood will have him as a son in the end. Now, this almost sounds like a positive thing, the way it's read. It's like, you know, if you favor your servant, he'll be like a son to you.

And no doubt that is the way it worked in many households. We know in the Bible of many servants who love their masters and who apparently were treated very well by their masters. And likewise, even in even in our country, there are stories of people who slaves who love their masters and were treated well by their masters.

And they were like members of the family. And this could be talking about that, but pampering is not usually a good thing. It's not generally a good idea to pamper children or servants or anybody else.

Pampering is not really, it's been too indulgent. David pampered or indulged his son Adonijah, and it didn't turn out to be a good thing. And Solomon everywhere indicates that an overindulgent parent is not really loving toward his son.

And the same thing would be true of an overindulgent master, unless he intends to give his slave freedom, which is one thing. Then of course, he could treat him like a free man. But if the slave is going to have all his life responsibility to serve his master, then pampering him is going to make him feel more sense of privilege, more sense of entitlement.

That's how, that's what happens when people are raised being pampered. They grow up feeling entitled to things, and then they're going to have resentment when they actually have to do something they don't want to do. And this word will have him as a son in the end.

The word son in the Hebrew, the way the Hebrew is, it's, the scholar's not sure which word belongs there, because you know, the Hebrew text originally didn't have vowels. It just had consonants, and different vowel points would make the word into something

different than different vowel points would. And so there's a dispute among scholars as to whether this word is supposed to be the word son, or whether it's supposed to be the word weakling.

It appears to be related to the word weakling in Hebrew. And that would seem to have a very different, put a different aspect on this verse, and it would make sense too. A man who pampers his servant from childhood will have a weakling, a weakling servant, who's pampered.

You know, he's never had to lift anything. He's never had to do any work. He's never developed any muscle or any work ethic.

He's a worthless weakling, because he's been pampered from the beginning. So if that's the meaning, and many scholars think that it is, then what Solomon is saying is something very different. He's not saying something positive, that oh, you know, you and your servant can be like family, which is true.

But he'd be saying something more negative, more like a warning. You don't pamper people. You don't pamper your servants, or they'll be weaklings.

You don't pamper your children, or they'll be weaklings. So the idea is if a person is a servant, he's there to work. If you don't, if from his childhood, he's never made to work, he's going to be ill disposed toward work.

He's not going to be good at what he's supposed to be doing. And the same is true of in any situation where you're, where you've got somebody who's supposed to be carrying some weight in the household. If from childhood, they're never made to carry any weight, that means someone else is going to carry their portion, because there is weight to be carried.

Every time there's mouth to feed, there's a certain amount of food that has to be generated. If one person is not doing their share of the work, then someone else is carrying an extra load. That's why Paul indicated that those who don't work should not eat, because he said those who don't work, it's not loving.

It's not loving to not work with your hands, because ever since the fall, food is generated by sweat. Before the fall, you could just go through the garden, pick food and didn't have to work hard at all. But ever since the fall, there's been thorns and thistles to fight against and weathering and so forth.

And so generation of food from the ground has always been a matter of labor and sweat. And that means that everyone who eats is eating something that caused somebody to sweat. Of course, the farmers have air conditioned combines, so they don't literally sweat probably that much, but they still do hard work.

The point is, though, if the food I eat is generated by somebody's sweating, and I'm not sweating, then somebody's sweating my share. Someone's doing what I'm supposed to be doing. A child in the family who is pampered, his workload is going to be carried by the other members of the family.

A servant whose job is to serve the family, if he's pampered, he's going to be worthless for that task. He's just going to be an eater. He's not going to be a producer.

And he's going to be weakling. So the idea is you have to be careful with servants, but not only the servants, because we don't have servants. We have children, we have people, have employees.

Same thing could be true of an employee. And probably the closest parallel we have in our society is an employee. They're not strictly speaking servants or slaves, like, like we're talking about in this situation, but they are in a somewhat analogous position, because for the hours that they're employed, they are the servant of their employer.

And they are obligated to do what they're told. But if an employee who's, you know, somehow spared by their employer, by favoritism from working, is going to be really unfit for work, eventually, and weakling in the end. Now, in chapter 30, well, let's look at chapter 25, verse 13.

It's not in your notes, but you may want to put it in there. Proverbs 25, 13. The word servant is that the word master is, which means that a servant is in the picture.

Proverbs 25, 13 says, like colds of snow in time of harvest. Now, time of harvest is summer, and in the Middle East, that's a hot time. The time of harvest is a very hot time.

And snow is very unusual, very unexpected at that time of year. But it may happen on rare freakish occasions that snow occurred in the harvest. It is a refreshing and rare thing.

He says, so also is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters. Now, the messenger is obviously a servant, because he has masters. And this is a servant who is sent on errands.

A messenger might be someone who simply carries a message, or he might be someone who's sent on any other kind of errand. He's somebody who is sent by his master to do something. And when you find a faithful messenger, somebody who, when you send them on an errand, you can count on them.

They're reliable. You don't have to check up on them. Again, you don't have to send somebody to monitor their behavior and make sure they're not wasting their time.

When you have a faithful servant, it's refreshing to the employer. It's refreshing to the

master. Like snow, it's also as rare as snow in the summer.

It's not just refreshing, but it's an unusual thing to find a faithful servant. I've known many Christian men who have owned businesses and had employees, and there's been many times I've heard complaints about the quality of employees that they get these days. The employees, they want to work as little as they can.

They want to take breaks. As long as they can take coffee breaks, they'll stretch them out. They'll take their lunch breaks, stretch it out.

They'll come late to work. They'll leave early. And when they're there on the job, they'll work as slowly as possible.

They'll get involved in conversations that detain them from their work. We just have an unconscientious workforce in many respects. Now, there's a lot that is said about slothful and diligent people in the book of Proverbs, and we'll take that subject as a separate topic later on down this series.

But when it's applied to a servant or a messenger or somebody who's been assigned a duty, the person who's given the assignment, the reason they have a servant is so that the master doesn't have to do it himself. He doesn't want to have to just hold that person's hand and make sure they're doing it all right. To be able to give an assignment to somebody and walk away and know that that person is not going to take extra time off, going to neglect their work.

You get to tell them again a third time, a fourth time. To have somebody that is just conscientious, in other words, who's reliable is a refreshing and rare thing for an employer. And I believe that anyone who works for somebody else would do well to realize that if you are diligent and faithful and you do your work as a servant to the Lord, then almost certainly, well certainly you'll be a refreshment to your employer and in all likelihood you'll be promoted.

At least when they're downsizing, you'll be the last one they want to get rid of. An employer would be crazy and usually knows that he'd be crazy to get rid of the reliable persons on his staff and his workforce. He might get rid of someone who's been there longer because they're not as diligent or as reliable and hold on to somebody who's been there a shorter time because they are reliable.

Because reliability, faithfulness in a servant is really what is most called for. In the book of Colossians, Paul writes to husbands and wives and children and parents and servants and masters. And speaking to servants in Colossians three, verse 22 and following, Paul says, Service obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.

That is your human masters as opposed to your master in heaven in this case. Not with eye service as men pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. Now, eye service

means working when you're under the eye, when you're being watched.

Everyone knows, you know, oh, boss is coming to look busy. Well, if you are busy, you'll look busy. You should be busy before the boss even shows up.

You're not supposed to be getting busy to impress the bosses, you know, impression of you that he sees you. You have, as a Christian, other motives for keeping busy. He says you fear God and whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you'll receive the reward of the inheritance for you serve the Lord Christ.

Now he's saying you Christian servants, and these would be slaves who are Christians in the Roman Empire. In the days of Paul, probably at least 50% of the persons in the Roman Empire were slaves and probably a larger proportion of that were slaves in the church. That is Christianity appealed more to the disenfranchised than to the rich.

And if 50% of the Roman population were slaves, then the percentage of slaves in the church would be a much higher percentage in all likelihood because Paul said not many noble, not many great men are called, you know, it's the weak things and the marginalized people who come to Christ more. So a very large percentage of the church in the Roman Empire were comprised of slaves. And he's writing to them here, as he does in other passages in Ephesians and Titus and other places.

And he says, servants, you obey your masters, not just when they're looking. You obey them because you have a conscience toward God. You fear God.

And your service is not to be seen as to your master, but to God. And God will give you a reward. Now slaves weren't entitled to much reward.

I mean, the master might be very generous to his slaves and reward them, but the slaves couldn't claim it. Couldn't demand it. And if they had a stingy master, they couldn't just change jobs.

They were owned. They couldn't just quit and go find a better job like we could today. And so what reward would they have for good behavior if they didn't have a master who would reward them? Well, he says, you're going to receive your reward from God if you do your job well as unto the Lord, no matter what job you do, whether it's an employment situation or whether it's an errand you're running for someone else, a message you're carrying, like Solomon said, or maybe a work duty at a school like this or anything, whatever you do, you're not serving the person who made the assignment.

As a Christian, you're serving God because the quality of your work is your testimony for Jesus. Therefore, doing good work is serving Christ's interests. And you may not even like your employer.

You might even resent that you're given more work than somebody else is given on a job. But you're working for Jesus. And if you love Jesus, then you want to do your best work.

You can. You're not seeing it as something you're doing for the employer or for the master. You're seeing it as something you're doing for God.

And therefore, it doesn't matter where your employer is looking or not. You know that you're always living your life under the eye of Jesus and of God. And therefore, your love for him and your desire to please him makes you put out the best work you can in all circumstances, even when nobody else is watching.

The contrast of a faithful messenger, which Proverbs 25, 13 talks about, is, of course, an unfaithful one. In Proverbs 13, 17, Solomon says, A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a faithful ambassador brings help. So there is such a thing as an unfaithful messenger.

And he's going to fall into trouble himself. He's also going to bring trouble on others. In chapter 26, 6, Proverbs 26, 6, it says, He who sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off his own feet and drinks violence.

So the foolish or wicked servant or messenger is going to bring harm on himself. And he's also harming his master. The person who sends on an errand, somebody who is a fool, you might as well cut off your own feet.

You're doing yourself serious harm. That's what he's saying. So being a good servant is obviously the duty of a good person who's in a position of servitude.

And in chapter 30, in verse 10, it says, Do not malign a servant to his master, lest he curse you and you be found guilty. Now, what does this mean? Maligning a servant to his master is probably referring to slandering or at least putting a more negative twist on a report that you're giving about a servant to his master. The servant is, of course, vulnerable to his master's discipline and displeasure.

So if you make a master angry at a servant, you're bringing harm on the servant. And if the servant really isn't deserving of that harm, you are guilty. And the servant himself may curse you.

And the curse may, in fact, alight upon you because you are, in fact, guilty of bringing harm on another man who happens to be in a position of vulnerability to his master. If you put a servant who is, in that society, a very powerless person, a person who didn't have legal recourse, a person who didn't have the ability to just walk away from an abusive situation, he was stuck. A servant was stuck in his circumstances.

And therefore, if you make it more difficult for him by bringing reproach against him,

bringing repercussions upon him from his master, that makes his life miserable. The assumption being that either the servant is not guilty, or if he is, it's something of which it's none of your business. And you're simply making it harder for him to live out his life under his master by bringing false charges or malicious charges against him.

Well, that servant may curse you. That servant might not be a Christian. He might not just bless those who curse him.

He might curse you back. And you will deserve it. It says he may curse you and you may be found guilty.

That is to say, God may listen to that servant's curse against you. What this is suggesting is that the servant who, in that society, by definition, is a powerless individual, he's not powerless on the side of God. Wrongs done to a servant are noted by God.

And if the servant cries out for vengeance, then that's what God's about. Vengeance of mine, says the Lord, I will repay. The servant is not in a position to defend himself against free men.

Free men had more rights than servants had. But he can call on God and God can vindicate him. I think of the situation the Christians are in, in times of persecution.

And in biblical times, they were not in a position to defend themselves. Partly because Jesus said to turn the other cheek and bless those who curse you and do good to those who persecute you. So, they often were walked upon, as people often will be.

And sometimes we are told that, I mean, human beings, at least in America in modern times, in a free country, we're often told you should never let anyone walk on you. You should make sure you're not a doormat, because if you're a doormat, people just take advantage of you. Well, there's truth in that.

People will take advantage of you if you're a doormat. But many times the only alternative to being a doormat is to do what's not open to you as a Christian. And that's to retaliate, or to intimidate, or to do something else that prevents people from walking over you.

There are times when you can't really do anything except lie down and be walked on. That's what Jesus did. He just let them crucify him.

And Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 4, in verse 19, Therefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as unto a faithful creator. Now, let me show you that because in 1 Peter chapter 2 and chapter 4, we have instructions that are kind of related to probably what this proverb is about. Writing to servants, Peter says in 1 Peter 2, 18, Servants, be submissive to your masters with all

fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

For this is commendable if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. That is, you suffer when you haven't done anything wrong, but you take it patiently. That's commendable to God for you just to absorb the injustice.

For what credit is it if when you are beaten for your faults you take it patiently? But if when you do good and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. Now, if you do the wrong thing and suffer the consequences, don't expect God to sympathize. You get what you deserve when you do wrong.

But if you are doing the right thing and you don't deserve to suffer for it, and you suffer for it, then God takes note of that. And he says in verse 21, Now, does he mean slaves alone are called to take abuse patiently? No, it's the call of Christians. Generally, even Christians who are not slaves are sometimes in a position where they are abused by other people.

Possibly people that they could physically or in their own flesh defend themselves against, but only by means of compromise. Only by means of retaliation, which were forbidden to do. And so when the slave is told to take it patiently, even if he suffers at the hands of a harsh master unjustly, he says, for to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow his steps.

Now, Jesus suffered injustice and he turned the other cheek and he took it patiently. And he said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they do.

And it says Christ suffered for us. Now, some people teach it that Christ suffered for us so that we won't have to suffer. By his stripes we're healed.

He received the suffering and we received the immunity from suffering because after all, he suffered in our place. If he suffered in our place, we shouldn't have to suffer. They think.

But Peter sees it differently. He says Christ suffered for us to set an example for us to follow the same example of suffering patiently. He didn't suffer for us so that we wouldn't suffer.

He suffered for us so that we would suffer like he suffers. We follow his example in suffering. And it says of him, he committed no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth, who, when he was reviled, he did not revile in return.

When he suffered, he did not threaten. What did he do then? He committed himself to him who judges righteously. That is to God.

He committed himself to God. When Jesus was on the cross, he said, Father, into your

hands, I commit my spirit. I'm suffering abuse here, and I could call twelve legions of angels here and lop off the heads of all these people who are bugging me.

And I could just come down from this cross and just show them who's who and what's what. But that's not what I'm supposed to do. I'm drinking the cup that my father has given me, and I simply commit the keeping of my soul to God by continuing myself to do what I'm supposed to do.

That's what Jesus did. Servants are told, take the abuse patiently, because Jesus took abuse patiently, and he set an example for us to follow his steps. Now, this is not only to servants, because in chapter four of First Peter, in verse 19, he says, Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God.

And here he's talking about Christians in general, not servants, but all Christians are servants of sort. Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him in doing good as to a faithful creator. So that's what Jesus did when he suffered.

He didn't threaten. He committed himself to God. Now, that's what he says.

Now, that's what all people who suffer according to the will of God should do. Commit yourself to God. How do you do that? By doing good.

In other words, by not retaliating, by not doing the wrong thing, by continuing to do the good thing, the very thing that's causing you to suffer. You're suffering for doing what's good. So what do you do? Stop doing what's good? No, you keep doing what's good.

Well, then who's going to take care of me? Well, that's what you're leaving in the hands of God. You're committing your case to God by continuing to do what he says and saying, OK, God, I'll do what you say. You take responsibility for what happens to me.

That's what committing yourself to God means. And you may find that God rescues you or not. Sometimes Christians have suffered unto death and God did not rescue them.

And we read in Revelation chapter 6 of a group of people like that. They've been martyred because they were righteous and their souls are seen under the altar in heaven. They've committed the keeping of their souls to him and they died.

Jesus said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit and he died. You might think, well, as soon as I surrender to God, that's when God's going to come through and rescue me. He's just been waiting for me to surrender.

Now I've done it. Now he's going to rescue me. Jesus surrenders.

Into your hands I commit my spirit. And he didn't get rescued. He died.

He got vindicated in resurrection. And so also Christians, when they surrender to God and commit themselves to him in well-doing, whether they're servants or any other kind of Christian, they often will die. But as they continue to do what's righteous, they're committing the keeping of their souls to Christ by doing what's good.

And when in Revelation 6, 9 says, when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony that they have their souls. They committed their souls to God and well-doing. And where are their souls? Well, their souls are now in heaven.

They're in safekeeping. God takes that which is committed to him and keeps it. Paul says that in 2 Timothy 1.12. He says, I know that whom I believe, I'm persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed to him against that day.

When I commit my soul to him, he's able to keep that. I believe that. It's one of the Timothys.

I think it's 2 Timothy 1.12. I get the two Timothys mixed up because they're so much similar material. Is that right? So Paul says, I know that he's able to keep that which I've committed to him. And so these people have committed the keeping of their souls to him and they died.

They died as martyrs. They were beheaded. They were slain.

And so he sees their souls in heaven under the altar. And he says, they cried with a loud voice saying, how long, O Lord, holy and true until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell in the earth. And a white robe was given to each one of them.

And it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed as they were was completed. So they're saying, God, we have suffered injustice here and we've committed the case to you. What's it mean? It means we're going to leave it to you to avenge our blood.

How long is that going to be? We did not seek to do it. We would not avenge ourselves. We would not even save ourselves if compromise was required.

People can save themselves if it requires no compromise. Jesus says they persecute you in one city, flee to the next one. That's not compromising necessarily, unless God is saying don't flee.

Unless God is saying stay right here. When Paul was persecuted in Corinth or Ephesus, one of those two places, I think it was Corinth, he was persecuted. But God said to him, Jesus appeared to him and says, be of good courage.

I've got many people in this city. You'll be fine. You know, I'm going to take care of things.

And so he wasn't allowed to leave. He couldn't flee. He had to trust God for the situation.

God took care of him, although taking care of meant getting beatings and imprisonments and so forth. That's God taking care of him. But, of course, you should see him now.

And so Christians are not able to protect themselves from persecution and from abuse if that protection requires compromising their Christian behavior, being unlike Christ. If it doesn't, then feel free. Protect yourself as much as you can without violation of your Christian principles.

But if you either have to violate your Christian principles or suffer, then suffer. And in doing so you commit the keeping of your soul to Christ. And that's what Peter says servants are to do also in situations where they have abusive masters.

Now, if you have an abusive situation you're in with an employer, of course, you don't have to stay in that employment. Slaves didn't have the option of changing employers. That wasn't up to them.

We had more freedom than they did. But there are situations we may live in, maybe under oppressive government, which, although we have taken every legitimate step we know to change, we can't change. I'm not saying that's true.

I'm just saying what if that happened? That is the case with Christians in many countries. They don't have any power to overthrow the government or to move to another country. But what are they supposed to do? Commit the keeping of their souls to God and well-doing.

Just keep doing the right thing. And children or wives or other people who are in situations they just can't walk away from often have to suffer insult or abuse of some kind. And they're not really in a position to leave.

Children are not really able to just run away from home. Wives sometimes, I think, can and should leave a home where there's dangerous abuse. I think that's part of them loving their husbands, is that they don't let their husband get away with that because that's not good for the husband or the family, and especially with children involved.

There are sometimes steps that Christians must take out of love to bring about a more just situation for everybody. But when it's simply a matter of taking wrong, just something you don't like happening to you, but you really, as a Christian, you're just like Jesus in the situation. You don't threaten.

You don't abuse back. You just commit yourself to God. Sometimes people even die

doing that.

But even then, it's not too late because God can keep that which is committed to Him. And so servants in biblical times were very much in a position of vulnerability to abuse. Often they suffered abuse.

And in that respect, they're not really much different than the rest of us. They were different than many of us because there's certainly a difference between being free and being a slave. But Paul said, anyone who's a slave and serves God is Christ's free man.

Anyone who's a free man and serves God is Christ's slave. So there's a sense in which there's a similarity in all states. We are all in situations where we don't have complete power over our own well-being, our own safety.

And servants in that society were particularly that way if they had an unpredictable or an evil or a cruel master. And Christian slaves were told to be submissive to such masters and to just let God handle the outcome. Christians have to do that in all kinds of circumstances, not just slaves.

So we pass from that subject.