

# 1 Timothy 6

## 1 Timothy 6:1–2

Let's be clear, slavery was never part of God's design. Slavery is a result of living in a broken world.

World history is filled with different types of slavery.

### 1. Hebrew servanthood

- a. This was a type of slavery set up to help impoverished Israelites. (see Deuteronomy 15:1–18 and Leviticus 25:35–43).
- b. Someone could sell themselves into slavery in order to escape poverty.
- c. The person would enter into an agreement/contract and would work until he could become a free and full citizen again.
- d. Cruelty was not God's intention for slavery in Israel. It was care for the poor.
- e. God provided mercy for the slaves by instituting a Sabbath year (every seven years) when the slaves had to be released. (Exodus 21:2–4)

### 2. Roman slavery

- a. Some scholars estimate that over one-third of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves (that's 50–60 million people!).

- b. Slavery in the Roman Empire was based on economic and social status, not on ethnicity or skin color.
- c. Some slaves were employees who held positions such as: teachers, craftsmen, managers, cooks, and even government officials.
- d. Many slaves had slaves themselves.
- e. Some would become slaves in order to gain Roman citizenship and enter into Roman society.
- f. Slavery was often beneficial for poorer individuals because it provided security and stability.
- g. Many slaves were released by the time they were thirty years of age because they had become capable of providing for themselves at that point. This gave them opportunities beyond slavery.
- h. Not all slave positions were desirable nor were all slaves treated well.

### 3. Indentured servitude

- a. More common in colonial America.
- b. People could not afford to come to America on their own so they sold themselves into slavery in order to make it to America.
- c. They worked in apprentice style positions until they could afford to pay off their debt.
- d. Historians estimate that over one-half to two-thirds of European white immigrants who came to America were indentured servants.
- e. This is much more like Hebrew servanthood than anything else.

### 4. African slave trade

- a. Promoted across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- b. Millions and millions of Africans were traded and sold across Europe, as well as brought into the United States.
- c. Many were subjected to harsh conditions and abuse.
- d. This is not the kind of slavery Paul was addressing in 1 Timothy 6.

The slaves Paul referenced in 1 Timothy 6 were most likely those of Hebrew servanthood and/or Roman slaves. These slaves were most likely sitting in the churches with their masters who cared for them and provided for them. Paul never condoned the mistreatment of slaves.

It might seem odd that Paul would throw in these two short verses about slaves honoring their masters, but remember, in this letter Paul was basically going through all the groups represented in the church at the time. This letter to Timothy was full of instructions from Paul that was meant to be read out loud to the church. They were to hear all of Paul's instructions.

As we have seen throughout his instruction, there could have been a group of slaves who weren't being respectful to their masters and Paul was saying this was not right because it wasn't bringing honor to God. Some believe that there were some slaves who were trying to take advantage of their Christian owners thinking they no longer had to keep their obligations now that they were Christians. The slaves had to worry just as much

as their masters about how they lived out their Christian lives. Because slavery was a part of this culture, Paul was telling the believers in the church who were slaves to treat their masters as they would all people, and if the masters were believers to do so even more because the masters were helping other believers who are well loved. Remember, in this context, slave owners were not inherently bad nor doing the wrong thing. On the contrary, masters were seen as providing a way of provision for those in need.

Let us remember this about slavery:

1. Slavery is not a part of creation; it is a product of sin. There is no free or slave in the New Creation (Revelation 21–22) and we are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).
2. Biblical instructions concerning slavery do not imply biblical approval of slavery. When Paul addressed slavery, he was not endorsing it. He was giving instruction for people who were trapped in a sin-tainted economic and social system that produced the need for slavery.
3. The Bible condemns slavery because it undermines God's creation. In Genesis 1:27 it says that God created male and female in His image so we all have equal dignity before God. Slavery undermines this by denying it. It's not a product of God but rather a result of sin in the world.
4. We are all equally submissive to God. Regardless of our position in this world, we are all to submit to the

authority of God. All of our actions should flow from this position regardless of our positions.

5. We will all receive equal justice from God. God is impartial (Colossians 3:25). All believers will receive eternal justice from God. And, Paul in Ephesians 6:9 gives a stern warning: “And masters, treat your slaves the same way, without threatening them, because you know that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with Him.”
6. The Bible denounces physical abuse. (Exodus 21:26–27) If a slave suffered injury, he was to be set free. Because Jesus said in Matthew 25:34–36 that when we care for the poor and needy, we are actually taking care of Him.
7. The Bible denounces human trafficking. Exodus 21:16 says that whoever kidnaps someone must be put to death, whether the person sells the person or the kidnapped person is found in the person’s possession. The death penalty was for the kidnapper and the one who received the kidnapped person. Paul mentioned earlier that the law was put into place for those who needed the law to restrain evil. He specifically mentioned kidnapping in 1 Timothy 1:10. The word “kidnappers” in the original language means “man-stealer” or “slave-dealer.” Paul said then that anyone who stole people to sell them was lawless, rebellious and ungodly (1 Timothy 1:9).
8. The Bible regulates slavery. Just as sin was not God’s perfect design, slavery is not either. However, just as with

many other topics throughout the Bible, the Bible provides regulations and order for how to live.

9. The Bible provides for physical protection and financial provision for slaves. God ensured slaves would be supervised with care.
10. God promotes eventual freedom from slavery (in this life or the next).
11. The Bible encourages slaves. The same hope extended to the free is extended to slaves.
12. The Bible instructs slaves to treat their masters with honor...whether the owners are believers or unbelievers. Those slaves who had unbelieving owners had the ability to share the Gospel through their lives, actions, and work ethic. It was for God's glory. Paul's greatest concern was that the unbelieving masters would see the grace of God in the lives of the slaves who had become followers of Christ.
13. This witness advances the Gospel. Titus 2:9–10 says, "Slaves are to be submissive to their masters in everything, and to be well-pleasing, not talking back or stealing, but demonstrating utter faithfulness, so that they may adorn the teaching of God our Savior in everything."
14. Christianity is not primarily aimed at social reform. Christianity is not meant to change societal structure. Paul never said in his letters for Christians to work against the system of slavery, but instead live for the salvation of their masters.

15. Christianity is primarily aimed at personal redemption. As people are redeemed by the Gospel, societal structures begin to be transformed. The key is the heart of the people. Redeemed people become in community with fellow believers regardless of societal classes, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

### Practical application for today:

1. Do you treat Christian employers worse than non-Christian employers? If so, why?
2. How are we today complicit as it relates to the idea of slavery?
3. How should we respond to those who still find themselves in slavery today (not the African slave kind of slavery but the other forms)? What help can we provide?

### 1 Timothy 6:3–10

Paul is urging Timothy, as well as the church at large, to **open our eyes** to the following:

1. There is an urgent spiritual need in the world.
  - a. Out of seven billion people in the world, only one-third claim to be Christian. This means that 4.7 billion people are on the road to eternal hell unless they hear about and receive Christ. Out of the 4.7 billion people, two billion of those don't have access to the Gospel.

2. There are urgent physical needs in the world.
  - a. The Western world makes up the majority of the world's income. Every day, billions of people live in poverty, and are dying from it. They are marginalized, brutalized, and live powerless lives. And we often ignore them for our own comforts.
3. Realize the extravagant kingdom opportunity in the church because of the need in the world.

Paul next tells Timothy, as well as the church at large, to **guard our hearts**. In verse 3, Paul reverts back to the false teachers he has addressed this entire letter. He says the false teachers are doing two destructive things:

1. He says the false teachers have an unhealthy desire to stir up controversy, quarreling, and division.
2. He says the false teachers have a love of money that has caused them to wander from the faith. He says they are doing what they are doing to earn an income and honor instead of serving the people they have been called to serve.

Paul tells Timothy (and the church) to not crave spiritual division but to work toward unity with one another. He says in verse 4 that the false teachers are fueled by ignorance and arrogance (a deadly combination).

Along with Paul's warning about the false teachers, he also exhorts Timothy and the church to be content in the Gospel. The



Gospel is what should motivate us, and it is the Gospel that provides for us. We don't need to add to it for our benefit or manipulate it.

Paul also says not to crave material possessions. We can't take what we have with us when we leave so we shouldn't let our material possessions lord over us while we are here. We shouldn't hold too tightly to our possessions nor should we let the craving for more ruin our lives. God richly provides for all we need for "our enjoyment" (verse 17).

In verses 11 through 16, Paul gives another encouragement directly to Timothy. These words can be applied to us all and we should all interject our own names in the place of Timothy.

Paul reminds Timothy that he (and we) are in a spiritual war. It is a good fight because it is for God's goodness. We need to always remember and lead with the Gospel.

Paul commends Timothy for his diligent job in sharing about the Gospel to many witnesses. Paul tells Timothy that the one thing he needs to do is to hold tightly to eternal life God gave him and share the Gospel (verse 14).

Paul then reminds Timothy about the future coming of Christ as a promise not a possibility.

In verses 17 through 19, Paul instructs Timothy to teach the truth and to never waiver in the truth. Timothy should encourage and

instruct people to trust in God alone for their needs, use the money they get to do good (never hoarding it for themselves), and that they should always be ready to share with others. This results in good works being stored up in heaven not here on earth.

In the last verses, Paul reminds Timothy once again to guard the Gospel and the Word of God. He instructs Timothy not to get into foolish conversations with people who oppose him or spread false doctrine (because those people have wandered or are far from faith). The truth of God's Word won't let Timothy down and it needed to be his anchor in those difficult days just like it needs to be our anchor today.