

Goodwill Cannot Be Demanded: It Can Only Be Given

Ephesians 6:5-9

Key Thoughts

1. **The master owned the flesh and nothing past it.** Paul writes "masters according to the flesh," and the qualifier concedes something on purpose. Earthly authority ruled the body of a bondservant. The heart and the integrity lay elsewhere, under different ownership.
2. **Obedience is without option, but it has a ceiling.** This is the same obey Paul used of children, not the voluntary submission of a wife. It ends where an instruction violates the Word of God, and even then consequences follow. Christ Himself would not be silenced when the authorities of His day demanded it, and it cost Him His life.
3. **God did something better than a prohibition.** Rather than a flat "thou shalt not," Scripture forms what we are to be and how we are to act. Love God, Love People became the catalyst that would eventually overturn most of the world's slavery, led by the church, over the better part of two millennia.
4. **Eyeservice exposes who you actually serve.** Serving properly only when eyes are on you is men-pleasing. The believer works as a bondservant of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, because Christ is the owner who bought us at a price.
5. **Goodwill can only be given, and nothing given is wasted.** Obedience can be compelled and diligence can be inspected, but goodwill is active benevolence toward a person and no master can extract it. It is given to the Lord and not to men, and the Lord repays it whether the giver was slave or free, with no partiality toward the master either.

Discussion Questions

1. Paul writes "masters according to the flesh." What does that qualifier concede to the earthly master, and what does it deliberately place outside his reach?
2. Read Romans 13:1. If the fear and awe belong to the God who appointed the authority rather than to the authority itself, how does that change obedience to someone who has done nothing to earn respect?
3. The message argues that God did something better than issuing a flat prohibition against slavery, forming hearts instead and letting Love God, Love People work over centuries. Why is that harder for us to accept than a rule would have been?
4. Eyeservice is serving properly only when eyes are on you. When nobody is watching, how does your service actually change? And when the person is not in the room, how do your words change?
5. Obedience can be compelled and diligence can be inspected, but goodwill can only be given. Name a relationship where you have been supplying obedience without goodwill. What would goodwill look like there this week?
6. Personal: Read 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 1 Corinthians 3:13-15. Your salvation is not what is being tested at that seat. Your work is. Name one thing you are doing now that you expect to last, and one you suspect will burn.

Applications

1. **Run the eyeservice audit.** Pick the one place this week where your effort changes based on who is watching: the job, the house, the church building. Hold the unwatched standard equal to the watched standard for seven days.
2. **Give goodwill where it is not owed.** Name one person over you or under you toward whom you have been compliant but not benevolent. Do one concrete good for them this week, aimed at a person, done to the Lord and not to them.
3. **Serve one thing nobody will credit to you.** Choose a task for the body that carries no visibility and no thank-you. God sees what nobody else saw and He does not forget your work.

Closing Prayer

Father, You bought us at a price, and we are not our own. Thank You that there is no authority on this earth that reaches past the flesh, and that our hearts have always belonged to You. Forgive us for eyeservice, for working well only under a watching eye, and for the kind of men-pleasing that looks like faithfulness and is not. Teach us to serve from the heart, with sincerity, doing Your will in the ordinary hours nobody records. Give us goodwill toward people who have not earned it, since goodwill was never something anyone could take from us and always something we could give. Steady those among us who are under an authority they did not choose and cannot leave, and remind them that You see, that You do not forget, and that nothing done for You is wasted. And for every one of us who holds authority over another person, take the threat out of our hands, because our own Master is in heaven and there is no partiality with Him. Make us steadfast, immovable, always abounding in Your work. In Jesus' name, amen.