

Pride

1 TIMOTHY 6:1-5

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This morning we continue in our study of 1 Timothy, we are in the last chapter, we are in 1 Timothy 6, and today we come to a passage with two very different thoughts that are structured around a common warning - two seemingly unrelated examples tying in to a common theme. As I was preparing today's lesson, I ran across a warning from Jonathan Edwards, the Puritan preacher who was made famous by his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Many of us perhaps remember that sermon from a literature class many years ago, as he described God dangling sinners by a thread over the fires of hell. So, he was quite a graphic preacher. But there was a time when he described a particular sin (the sin we are studying this morning) in this way - this sin is, "first and worst cause of error, the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of Christ, the chief inlet of smoke from the bottomless pit to darken the mind and mislead the judgment, and the main handle by which Satan takes hold of Christians to hinder the work of God." He went on to explain that this particular sin was so serious and so foundational that it needs to be conquered first before addressing any other. He was referring to the sin of PRIDE.

As you can see, I have put a picture of a Chihuahua on the wall up here. And I hesitate to offend our Chihuahua lovers, but I grew up with a Chihuahua, and she definitely had an issue with PRIDE. Muppet the Chihuahua very clearly knew that she was much better than the rest of us, so I am basing this off of my own personal experience. And the special danger of pride, of course (in humans and in Chihuahuas), is that we think of ourselves as being more important than we really are, and pride is deceptive. Pride keeps us from thinking that we have a problem in any other area of life. Pride keeps us from God, and it also affects our relationships with others. In a sense, the very first sin was a matter of pride. Satan appealed to Eve's sense of pride; he tempted her with being like God, and she fell for that temptation. We continue to be pulled away by pride, just as it was also a powerful temptation to the early church. So again, this morning we come to a passage where Paul gives two examples. They don't seem to be related at first, but they are tied together with a common warning. Notice, please, 1 Timothy 6:1-5,

¹ All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against. ² Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles.

³ If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, ⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

So, again, we have two parts here, both related to PRIDE - a command to slaves, and a warning about those who teach what is false. And I'm hoping that as we study we can see how the gospel applies to both situations, and I hope we can apply Paul's words to our lives today. Otherwise, we are wasting our time, and we did not come here to waste our time.

I. But we start with Paul's encouragement to slaves, that they are to live lives of HUMBLE SUBMISSION.

And that's the big idea here, that those who find themselves enslaved are to live lives of humble submission. And we will get back to that in just a minute, but we need to start by dealing with the problem of slavery. Many people have looked at this passage (and several others like it) and have concluded that the Bible endorses slavery. And so they paint the Bible as a barbaric book; completely out of touch with modern life. And part of the struggle comes with our own history in the fairly recent past. Slavery (as we understand it) is a stain on our nation's history - from the early 1600's all the way up to the Civil War, and even beyond. What we did, and what we tolerated, is a national shame, a national embarrassment. And this shame is rivaled only by what we did to many of the native peoples and by what we as a society continue to do to those who are not yet born. Future generations will not be kind in their judgment of how we as a nation have tolerated the murder of well over 60 million children, especially with the knowledge we now have concerning the development of human life. We know better. I mention this only because slavery, as we know it, is in the same category - a scar on our nation's history. And scars do not heal overnight. Most of us have scars. Many of you know that I have a scar over each eye - eight stitches over my left eye from when I was three, and six stitches over my right eye going back to middle school. I mention this, because when we discuss slavery, we (as a nation) have some scars, we have some history. And this history does not match up perfectly with slavery in the Roman Empire.

In the ancient world, and in Old Testament times, God allowed some forms of slavery, and he regulated it. He gave rules to protect those who found themselves enslaved. Usually slaves were basically prisoners of war or they traded their freedom for financial reasons - a scenario most of us would describe as "indentured servitude." And, in fact, kidnapping was specifically forbidden - you could not go capture somebody for the purpose of owning them as a slave (which is what we've seen in our own national history) - that was specifically condemned by the Law of Moses (Exodus 21:16). This, by the way, has already been condemned by Paul earlier in this letter (in 1 Timothy 1:10) - the word is "**man-stealer**" or "**slave dealer**." So, slavery as we understand it here in this country was consistently condemned in the Old and in the New.

However, in the First Century, slavery was common - not the kidnapping kind of slavery, but the kind where Rome might bring back some prisoners of war, and the kind where someone might sell himself for a period of time to get out of debt or to earn his Roman citizenship. First Century slaves in the Roman Empire were often highly educated - doctors, and lawyers, and architects, and so on. Socially, as I understand it, slaves ranked above day laborers. They were more financially secure than those who worked by the day in agriculture. This,

though, does not mean that their lives were pleasant. They were slaves! And there were many of them - around 60 million, by some estimates. And in cities like Rome or Ephesus, slaves could make up to 1/3 of the population. And as the gospel made its way around the Empire, many slaves obeyed the gospel. And this, of course, presented some unique challenges. You might have slaves and masters worshiping together, perhaps serving together as elders and deacons, partaking of the Lord's Supper together, singing together, and so on. We even have a book of the Bible written by Paul to a Christian slave owner, Philemon, whose slave Onesimus, actually ran away and found Paul in Rome. Onesimus obeyed the gospel, and Paul sent him back to Philemon. It's an awesome one-page letter, and in that message, Paul begs Philemon to welcome Onesimus back not as a slave, but as a brother.

Beyond this, slavery is often used as an illustration in the New Testament. Jesus said that he came to this earth not to be served, but to serve. He told parables about masters and slaves or servants. A number of New Testament writers identified themselves as ***"bond servants"*** of Jesus Christ. Paul reminded the Christians in the churches of Galatia that all of those who had been baptized had put on Christ, and because of that (among other things) ***"there is neither slave nor free"*** in the church. In other words, regardless of our social or financial situation, all of us are together in Jesus. All of us have value. Paul had some words concerning slavery in 1 Corinthians 7 - for those who were slaves when they obeyed the gospel, Paul told them not to worry about it; however, he also suggested that if they have an opportunity to become free, they should take it, and he also encouraged them to not become slaves in the first place, indicating that the slavery under consideration here was apparently at least somewhat voluntary (1 Corinthians 7:21-23). There is so much more we could study on this, but we come back to 1 Timothy 6:1, and we have this interesting reminder that ***"all who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor."*** And so, instead of being overcome with pride, Paul encourages these Christians to ***"regard their own masters as worthy of all honor."*** ***"Honor"*** is a word we've seen twice in Chapter 5 - we are to honor widows who are widows indeed, and we are to honor the elders of the congregation. So that thought continues as those who are slaves are told to treat their masters with honor, as if the master has weight, as if he is valuable.

And the reason is, ***"so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against."*** And that helps us understand what might be going on here. I want us to imagine something. Imagine a slave obeying the gospel, perhaps he has sold himself for a certain number of years so that he can earn his Roman citizenship. But halfway through that 10-year period he obeys the gospel. And for some reason, he thinks he no longer needs to submit to this earthly master. Paul gives the warning: You can't be doing that! Becoming a Christian doesn't relieve us of all earthly obligations. We can't be slacking in our work. We can't be disrespectful to a supervisor or to someone in authority over us just because we have obeyed the gospel. Otherwise, God will get a bad name. Otherwise, the church will start to get a bad reputation. And this is where I think we start to see that this might apply in some way today - not that we are slaves serving our masters, but we do work for a living. In at least some sense, we trade our freedom for money. The average person will spend nearly 100,000 hours at work over a lifetime. This presents a huge opportunity to influence the people around us, an opportunity to demonstrate humble submission.

As God's people, we have the great privilege of representing God at work. It's our mission to be honest and dependable, showing up on time and ready to work, not constantly wasting time throughout the day, and so on. We work as if we are working for the Lord himself. As Paul says in Colossians 3:23-24, ***"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."*** And when we work hard, as we should, God gives us opportunities. Some time ago, some of my wife's co-workers were having a discussion, and it turned

somewhat negative toward Christianity, “Christians hate homosexuals,” and so on. But then somebody turned to her and said, “But not Keola. She is a nice Christian.” I doubt she ever preached a sermon on homosexuality or how to treat people or anything like that, but there was something about her consistent, godly behavior that caused them to realize, 1.) that she is a Christian, and 2.) that she is “nice,” that she is different from the stereotype, that she is different from the way Christians are typically portrayed in the media. When we actually live the Christian life, the people we work with will notice. And that seems to be what Paul is commanding here.

Verse 2 is very similar, but just a bit different, because it addresses slaves who have Christian masters. And it seems as if Paul is saying: You know what I just said, it’s even more true if you serve a believer! We might be tempted to think we have an “in” if we report to a believer over us at work, that maybe they owe us some special favors here and there, “My boss is a Christian. I can slack off a bit!” But Paul says: No; instead, we need to work even harder, knowing our hard work benefits not only us, but a brother in Christ as well. And as we learn from other passages, when we work, we aren’t really doing our work for a man, but we are working for the Lord - whatever it is - if we are sweeping floors, or leading a team, or making pizzas, or driving a truck, or teaching a kid how to read - we are serving the Lord himself. A mere human being might sign the check and do a performance review from time to time, but we are serving the Lord.

The bottom line is: We cannot let PRIDE interfere with our work in the secular world. But instead, we jump in and we serve. We humbly submit - even in less than ideal circumstances, ESPECIALLY in less than ideal circumstances. We honor God right where we are.

II. Starting in verse 3, we have a different aspect of humility as we see the opposite of it, because in verses 3-5 we have **CONCEITED REBELLION**.

And so instead of humbly submitting to the will of God, we have some who are rebelling against it. And the most obvious symptom of this rebellion is that they refuse to accept what Paul is writing in this letter. They are promoting a different doctrine, they are not agreeing with sound (or healthy) words, the words of Jesus. Paul, then, takes this back to the Lord. Paul’s teaching comes from the Lord himself, and those who refuse to accept it are arrogant. This person is ***“conceited and understands nothing.”*** One author has said that he is “as ignorant as he is arrogant.” The two go hand in hand. Many times, an arrogant person thinks he is quite a bit smarter than he really is, and this builds on itself, especially in spiritual matters. And the things they teach get weirder and weirder. The teaching gets more and more bizarre. And they think they have all the answers.

Notice how this progresses (from the middle of verse 4), notice what this arrogance leads to, ***“...but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth....”*** This arrogance leads to conflict. And these people love it! They seem to enjoy arguing, they have ***“a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words.”*** Who enjoys fighting over words? These people do! And these controversies lead to envy, strive, and abusive language. Some of you have perhaps been through some difficult times with a church. And maybe you have seen this first hand, where people you thought were decent people turned on each other. That is what Paul is warning about here. ***“Evil suspicions”*** seems to be the idea of assuming the worst of somebody. ***“Constant friction”*** is the idea that we’re always ready to snap at somebody. We’re just looking for an excuse to go off on somebody. These men are ***“depraved”*** and ***“deprived of the truth.”***

Years ago, we had somebody here with this spirit, and he wanted to start a new Sunday night class where he could lead a discussion on every controversial topic known to man. This is before we had elders, but to me it seemed like just a recipe for spiritual disaster, "Let's just take everything we could ever possibly disagree about and have a yearlong study of every issue where we debate it for a few hours every week." And my answer was, "No." That is not what the church needs. Not that we need to avoid specific issues, but that proposal came from this ***"morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words"*** and it certainly would have led to ***"envy, strive, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction."*** That is not healthy. And Paul explains here that it goes back to this conceited attitude. As God's people, we can either HUMBLY SUBMIT, or we can ARROGANTLY REBEL. And Paul is clearly suggesting Option #1! We are to avoid the kind of pride that leads to spiritual disaster.

Conclusion:

As we apply these words from Paul to our situation today, it seems we have a reminder to look very carefully this morning at our own lives. Pride is hard to diagnose. So maybe we need to think about these two scenarios, asking ourselves some questions and asking God (through his word) to expose any sinful pride in our lives.

How are we doing at work? Are we able to honor those in positions of authority over us? And can we say the same thing about submission in other areas? Do we cheerfully submit to each other in marriage? As children, do we really submit to our parents? Do we honor them? Do we do what they expect, even when we don't feel like it? And what about with government? Do we honor our elected officials, even if we disagree with what they say and do?

And then, with the second example up here, how are we doing with the word of God? Do we enjoy keeping things stirred up religiously? Do we live for controversy? With all humility, do we submit to the will of God? Or do we think we know better than God? Are we always suspicious and assuming the worst in people? Do we have this morbid interest in controversial questions? Especially with social media these days, it is so easy to get sucked into various controversies. Is that a temptation for us?

It seems that how we react to others and to the word of God is something of a test of our pride, but when we humbly submit, we do what Jesus did. Earlier, brother Michael read a passage from 1 Peter 2 about the need for us to submit to the king and for slaves to submit to their masters. That's a hard passage, but it continues in 1 Peter 2:21, where Peter says this, ***"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps...."*** Jesus is our example. He did nothing whatsoever to deserve what happened to him. He was completely innocent. And yet he did not retaliate, he did not threaten, but he carried our sins on the cross, ***"...so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed,"*** Peter says. We accept his sacrifice by turning away from sin, by conquering pride, by turning to him in faith, calling on his name in the act of baptism. If you would like to discuss it, please get in touch. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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