

Widows and Slaves Indeed

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon emphasizes the dignity and privilege of serving Christ, regardless of one's social status, and the transformative power of faith in enduring hardship.

Duration: 59:00

Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:3

Topics: "Widows"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of freedom and chains from a biblical perspective. He contrasts the idea of throwing off chains with the invitation to embrace them, using the example of Karl Marx's call for social revolution. The preacher emphasizes that true freedom comes from recognizing God's sovereignty and purpose in our lives, even in difficult circumstances. He encourages believers to find joy and honor in their callings, just as the apostle Paul did, and to serve the Lord faithfully in every aspect of their lives, trusting that God will promote them.

Transcript

And it's an unspeakable privilege to be a slave of Christ. So, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will, doing service as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatsoever good things any man doeth, the same will he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. Whether you're the master or the slave, if you're a master as unto the Lord, you're going to be treating your bond slaves differently.

Not because you're required by social legislation, but because you're in a relationship with one who is a master over you. And you want to extend to those who are under you the same kind of grace that has come from above to you. See how God has an answer.

Christ is the answer. But not in some kind of formulaic way. It's a mode of being.

If people could see it, we don't need revolutions, we don't need social upheavals, because there's nothing the book of Proverbs says, there's nothing more terrible than for a servant to become a ruler. And when we were in Yekaterinburg, that's the city where the Tsar was butchered. He and his family were shot and killed.

And the order was given by a Jewish Bolshevik. That's going to come back on our heads, you can believe. And if you see the pictures of this Tsar, talk about nobility.

The guy is something just to look at, his picture. I would rather take my chances with rule by someone like that than some guttersnipe who has come up from the bottom full of grievance and resentment and is able to pull a trigger, and he's now going to call the shots over me and over the nation? For a servant to take on rulership by force is something not to be desired. The way that the world is constituted, that God made the world with kings, with the rulers and the ruled, with masters and slaves, is another way of understanding reality, and that there's a greater issue at stake than men tearing up in order to, quote, obtain freedom.

And I'm looking at Pearl as I'm saying that, thinking as the former U.S. history teacher about the American civil war and what that has done to this nation beyond all of the foreign wars that we have ever fought. More lives were lost in America between North and South over the issue of slavery than any foreign war in which we've ever been engaged. And the fabric was torn in such a way that has not been repaired to this day.

And what has been the result, even of the civil rights movement, though it was pacifistic, it did not employ violence, but the language and the spirit and the temper, what comes out of these things when you tear and the dawn breaks? Are men happier? Are their lives more real? Is there greater justice in what they have obtained and won through those means? Or if we had remained in the condition in which God has set us and believed that God himself in his sovereignty has established it and that there's something to be wrought and displayed there of a kind that will glorify him and bring answer to men, there will be peace, there will be benefit, there will be benevolence, there will be the revelation of God. And what are we seeing in Israel? But something of the same thing, through usurping, through force, through manipulation, through intimidation, through threat, a Jacob people taking a land by the exertion of themselves rather than waiting to receive it as inheritance and as gift under the conditions that God intended that were covenantal, we would have seen another Israel altogether. We would not be seeing blood being spilled in these Palestinian cities.

We would not see these days of rage and outrage and vehemence and bitterness that comes when men are exacerbated by the demands of others upon themselves and like brings like, hatred brings hatred, violence brings retribution and more. So they blow up a Hamas leader with a helicopter, with a missile, and as the reprisal, 15, 20 innocent Israelis are then killed in streets and in cities and in response to that, another wave of violence. It's a downward spiraling, it's death, death, death.

This is the way of life. What is apostolic is life because God is the creator and life is respected and revered because of him. And though there are seeming injustices and things that need to be borne, saints are tried by that, they are perfected by that.

To be a God-pleaser and not a man-pleaser is not just some superficial outward accommodation, it's the deepest expression of some inward work of God because you cannot feign this. If you're going to be a God-pleaser, it's not merely superficially making an adjustment, it's got to come out of the deepest inward working of God or else it's phony. It's no longer pleasing to God nor to man.

So the Lord, Paul is saying what we should do, but he doesn't make, spell out what this will require in your relationship with God. If you're going to be this kind of a servant to this kind of a master who should be doing better because he's also a Christian but he's not doing it and you're not resentful and you're serving him even all the more, Paul says, all the more show yourself faithful. That kind of conduct can only issue out of the deepest relationship with God himself which is as much available to a slave as it is to the master.

Isn't that remarkable, Ben? Your ability to perfect and develop a relationship with God that would enable you not to be a man-pleaser is available as much to the man in chains as to the man with the whip. Nothing externally has to be altered and yet within that framework, if we take the word of Paul seriously and seek its fulfillment, would bring about the most radical transformation in society itself, bloodlessly. Knowing that whatsoever good things any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bound or free.

The same shall he receive of the Lord when? When will he receive of the Lord? Not necessarily in this life. His good service as a God-pleaser and not a man-pleaser is not necessarily going to bring an immediate benefit now. And if he's going to look for that in the change that is going to come from his master, his boss, he's going to be disappointed.

But the man who is a God-pleaser does not look for immediate gratification. When will he receive of the Lord? He'll receive of the Lord when the Lord comes and brings his reward with him and gives to every man according to his works. This is an appeal to those who have an eschatological mindset of expectation that do not demand or need instant gratification and payoff now, for they know that there's a payoff coming, that when it comes, it is eternal and enduring and beyond description, that I have not seen and you have not heard what God has laid out for those who love him.

And that motive and that belief can enable a man to plug away day after day in dreary monotony and regularity and injustice and not gripe and not complain and not murmur, but rejoice, for he knows how greater the reward that will be his. He lives in anticipation of that reward. Or else this is meaningless.

This kind of counsel is like water off the duck's back. It's totally impractical. It can't be performed unless it is set in its eschatological framework of expectation.

And, of course, what is an apostle but that very thing? An apostle is one who has brought eternity into time. He sees, he talks about this present world. Don't be conformed to this present world.

What do you mean? Is there any other? Yeah. This present thing is passing. This is momentary.

The one that's coming is the real one that's eternal and for which this is a time of preparation. And you can find that preparation for your eternal reward as much as a slave as you can as a master. In fact, you may find in eternity you have more privilege, more honor, more distinction, more oversight over five cities and over ten than your master.

You were his slave in this earth, but because you bore that social station with Christian dignity and patience and forbearance as coming from the hand of the Lord and served the Lord in that place without resentment, without disappointment, in anticipation that when that future comes, your reward and distinction and honor will much exceed the man who ruled over you. This is reality. And unless we take this into consideration, we ourselves are hitting on three or four similars.

We're just putting our way through life. We are perhaps more dead than alive. This whole thing needs to be factored in and made as real to us as Paul.

Paul is speaking from the vantage point of uttermost reality. He sees eternity. He sees the reward that is to come.

And therefore he can counsel men who are in the most unappreciated, despicable places of servitude and say, don't bolt, don't get violent, don't do your master in, but patiently take that as the place that God has assigned. And in that place, show to this man even greater service, all the more because he's a believer, but he's not acting like it. And your reward will be the greater in the Lord's coming.

And you masters do the same thing in verse 9, forbearing threatening knowing that your master also is in heaven and there is no respect of persons with him. So there's a little side note to the men who are masters that they need also to reckon on who is their master. Finally, my brethren, be strong, O Lord, in the power of this night.

Don't let that pass without due appreciation. Finally, my brethren. Paul is speaking both to slaves and to masters, and they're both his brothers.

Talk about freedom in Christ. Talk about rising above class distinctions and race distinctions and all of the kinds of things that make men to feel inferior or cut out or shut out. Paul says, my brethren, it doesn't matter what your social station is, whether you're a master or a slave, it's not your determination but his.

But here's the one thing that encloses us all, you're my brethren. This is no phony social liberal showing that he has a sympathy for the poor. This is deeper.

This is my brethren. We're pulling here together for the Lord and his name and his honor. So put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

We don't wrestle against flesh and blood. Your master is not the enemy. There are greater issues beyond flesh and blood, the principalities and powers of darkness.

And so put on the breastplate of righteousness, your feet shod with the gospel and preparation of peace, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. Even though you're a slave, you have full opportunity to put on this armor. This is not just for your master because he has a greater social privilege.

No, all of this provision to fight the fight of faith, which is not with weapons that are carnal but spiritual, is as much your privilege as his. You can put on the breastplate of righteousness as a slave. How? By conducting yourself without resentment and bitterness to the man who is over you.

That is righteousness. And save yourself from the fiery darts by the shield of faith that will quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. You know what those fiery darts are to a slave? You fool, you don't have to suffer this.

This guy is just a phony baloney believer. Look at the pretense. What has he ever done since he's come to the faith that has changed your situation one way or the other? Where has he ever given you greater consideration? Where has he given you a day off, an hour off? That guy is a phony.

Paul's counsel is a bunch of baloney. It's just to make you subjective and subjective and servile and keep the system going. He's a false apostle.

You have every right to throw off these shackles and you're a free man in Christ. Now, you don't have to take this guff. Paul says take up the shield of faith.

That's the fiery dart. That's the accusation of the enemy who knows exactly what to finger, what to appeal to. You don't have to submit yourself to that.

You're a free man. You're as spiritual as he is. You're more spiritual.

Put up the shield of faith and don't let those darts get to you. Stay with the counsel you got from God's own man. And you have access to every defense and all of the shield of faith and the best way to rest as anyone.

The fact that you're a slave does not prohibit you from taking on the full armor of God. So, then Paul says pray for me, for utterance that be given to me to open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel. Because what Paul is proclaiming is a revolution without blood.

What Paul is proclaiming is more than a little formula for how to get saved. Paul is touching the deepest issues of life and society that is the genius of the gospel that has come down from heaven. It's a mystery.

And it can save men from violence, from death, from misspent living, from false causes. Who should know that better than we of the 20th century of what false causes have meant for mankind. I think there were 20 million kulaks that Stalin annihilated.

A kulak was a middle class peasant. He wanted to standardize the whole of Russian agriculture in a system and all of these individual middle class farmers who had histories of traditions, blood, nothing but blood. And what is Russian agriculture? My God, if they can get a crust of bread, they're grateful for a system that continually fails because systems must fail when the organic thing that has been wrought over the process of time through generations of skill, devotion to the soil, attention and love for animals is destroyed overnight by men with systems.

Paul's gospel is a revolution. And that's why, pray for me, I'm not just preaching a little cutesy thing here, step one, step two. What my word is, is the word from heaven on how men ought to live.

And for that I need utterance. And pray for me, for I am an ambassador in Bons that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak. I could not address the situation except that I myself were also in Bons.

If I was speaking from any of the places I've said before of social privilege, or I'm an apostle and I've got this coming and that, my words would fall limply to the floor. But because my social condition is worse physically and naturally than those whom I am addressing, my word to them has greater credibility and power. For I have not a place to lay my head, and I'm hated, I'm despised, and I'm beaten, and I'm left for dead, and I have no certain future, known and unknown.

I'm a man in Bons. My life is not my own. I don't call my own shots.

I don't say where I'm going or what I'm going to do or even know what to speak. I'm really a slave, but I'm rejoicing in it. And my exhibition of the freedom in Christ that I bear is itself a liberating message, whether I speak it or not.

Just my coming as one in chains is an encouragement and an illumination for those in physical chains and in servitude that that's not the worst of all evils, that even in that the grace of God can come. And beyond that, great reward for your ability to bear it, as I'm bearing it also in this present world. Well, let me try and close, because this is so rich and I love it so much.

As this ex-Marxist, you know how Das Kapital begins? The classic work of Karl Marx, which is the invitation to social revolution in Blitzschild? Workers of the world, throw off your chains. You have nothing to lose but your chains. That's how Das Kapital begins.

So we have two Gospels, the worlds, both coming from Jews. Throw off your chains. You don't have to take this.

You can be free. Free for what? Free for a commissar, free for some punk who's going to tell you now how to run the show and regulate your life in every detail. That freedom is the worst slavery than what you were under, and its end is violence and death.

God says, keep your chains. Paul says, I myself am also in chains. But I kiss them, and I thank God for them, for in his great sovereignty he has determined my call.

I'm not an apostle by my own choosing, and you're not a carpenter or a bookkeeper or working in a supermarket or a department store by caprice or by accident. You're in that place and in that call as much as I am in mine. And in that very place is as much portent and possibility for the showing forth of the grandeur of God and the wisdom of God, the grace of God, as any other place.

And that's why you're there. You're not there to make a living. That's a secondary thing.

You're there to represent me, to be a witness unto me. And I said to this teacher as we were driving in the car in the Ukraine, whose kids were insubordinate, I said, well, you need to determine whether teaching is a vocation or a calling, whether you're a professional or a servant of God. Have you ever faced that issue and ever decided that issue? Because once you're a servant, you'll take the guff.

You'll bear up with those kids, because more is at stake than your success and your professional honor. What's at stake is their souls and eternity and what you display before them in your patience day by day, for they'll have no other expression of God than what they see in you in that classroom, for they're living in an atheistic country. This one last, you can make a note of 1 Peter 2.21 and Colossians 3.22, where Paul speaks on the same subject with other insight, but for our time for tonight, today, just 1 Corinthians 7, one little note that needs to be added.

Art thou called being a slave? What a question. Well, I'm not called. I'm not a preacher.

I'm at the bottom of the social pile. I don't even have an identity. My life is not my own.

I can't even marry. I can't leave this property yet. Paul says, are you called being a slave? It's the very same question I put to this teacher.

Are you a professional who has a vocation, or are you called into a mission field that is called the high school? You need to know that. You have to ask that question. Of course, many called, few chosen.

You may despise your calling. You may not recognize it as a calling, and you're living, therefore, only as a flunky, only as a vocation, only as a job. Well, no wonder it's dreary, because you're not seeing it in the magnitude of what it in fact is as God sees it.

You're not seeing it apostolically. You're seeing it humanly. Art thou called being a servant? Don't care not for it.

Don't give a rat. But that thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord being a servant is the Lord's freeman.

Likewise, also he that is called being free is Christ's servant. You are brought with a price, but be not the servants of men. Brethren, let every man wherein he is called therein abide with God.

I probably should not have included this. This deserves another Sunday, all by itself. Because you know what Paul is saying here? This thing in which you're called is not only an opportunity to make me known and to obtain eternal reward, but in that very situation is transformation itself for you.

You can be transformed right in that situation by merely a change of mind and a change of attitude. If you recognize that it's a call and submit to it, as I'm submitting to my call, Paul says, that you might be made free. Use it.

Don't see yourself as a victim and moan and groan about, I never had a break, I never had advantages of education. Use it. Take that situation and be transformed by that very same thing in the attitude that you bring to it, which is heavenly.

It will free you. You're going to come out another person. You're going to come out larger than life.

This is where apostles are formed in the narrow place of constriction, where we're chafed. I wish we had greater opportunity. No.

Submit there. For the place of restriction is the place of enlargement. You'll be transformed by it.

That's why I saw these men before the wall came down, Simon, I don't know if I know this earlier than your time, in Leipzig. I met that man again on this trip. He was a children's ministry, a youth worker.

He wasn't even ordained Lutheran, but he was working within the Lutheran system the same kind of thing that I had to choke and sputter against in St. Paul. And the two Lutheran superintendents were under communist authorities who were not even saved. It's a moot question where the Lutheran bishops were.

But this man never bucked. He never sought to circumvent it. He could not go out and start his own church the way we do in America.

We don't like the condition. We make our own. No.

He had to serve God in that strangulating restriction. And because he submitted to it as coming from God, he became free by it. He himself was transformed in that confinement and came to a place of apostolic stature.

The man has such a depth, such a breadth of being, such a godliness, such a righteousness. It was made in the place of contraction. Paul says, use your situation.

You're not victim to anything if you recognize that I'm the author of it and you receive it as your call, whether you're a freeman or a slave. It doesn't matter. Remain in that calling and in it is the prospect for transformation that you might be made free.

For to be free in Christ is to be free in deed. So just a little glimpse at the apostolic mindset. Knowing that Paul averted a disaster for the church in keeping people who were in bondage from throwing off their

chains, as Karl Marx said, you have nothing to lose but your chains.

Oh yeah? You have everything to lose when you throw off. But submit to the place wherein you are called and in that use it rather to be transformed and to find the freedom with or without chains that cannot be bought for money. And it'll avert social catastrophes and bloodshed and violence and the tearing of families in the Civil War.

There were families on both sides suffering at each other's hands death over rectifying social issues that God himself had established and would have wrought another America. We would be another nation today if we had allowed God to work out the issue of slavery and freedom. And the greatest fictional character in all American literature strange to say the one phrase that no black person wants to be accused of is Uncle Tom.

When I read Uncle Tom in American literature at the university level I was astonished. This figure, Uncle Tom who bore stripes and suffered indignation and brutality because of his Christ-likeness never once sought to be free of his master and could have. He was mighty in his personal strength could have broken loose.

Submitted. And unto death. What you have in Uncle Tom's cabin is the picture of Christ in a black man who is a slave.

So there's probably greater potential for America in a black people who will submit to their conditions rather than be violently seeking to free themselves from it. And that's true for any of us. What seems the most discouraging the American Indian wherever people are oppressed under minority conditions and have to face a servitude of unjust conditions there the potential for the kingdom of God is the greatest.

And what can be displayed to those who receive it as their calling coming from God and find the solution of God by his spirit in that place and are themselves transformed as well as transforming others. This is the gospel. So Lord we bless you.

Oh Lord! For Paul, my God! What a piece of humanity! What an example! Thank you my God. You didn't give us a textbook with principles. You gave us a flesh and blood man faced with comfort conditions appropriate both to his age and to every age.

Those issues have not changed. They're the same in our own generation and has brought, my God, rivers of blood by those who have sought to send off their chains. So we thank you for what Paul is.

For his mind. For his way of seeing real widows as against false. How to understand our situation.

How to act within it. Not as man pleases but as God pleases. That requires God.

And there's a God who can be required of for he will give grace to those who submit to his word and to his way. And so we're blessed Lord. Oh my God! No wonder that they're clamoring now.

Don't give us anything else but apostolic prophetic foundations. For that includes the subject of Israel. And Lord willing, Lord by your grace we will give it.

And we'll give it as one in chains. Not coming to them from some superior holiday inn mode of life. But out of the circumstances where you have called us.

So we bless you Lord. Oh may you free the church. That the church can be a statement of that ultimate freedom to a world that is in bonds even while it thinks itself free.

And who are dead even while they live. Show them what life is. Show them what freedom is my God.

That has been purchased by your blood. The sacrifice of yourself at the cross. You've sent freedom my God into mankind.

And so we bless you. And bless every child in this room my God. To review and look at their present circumstance.

What their employment is. The condition of their life. And to be freed from murmuring and complaint and to receive it as from the hand of God.

And there to show his grace. So we bless them everyone my God. Oh thank you for Paul.

The man in himself. The flesh and blood thing my God. Speaking just off the cuff about the issues that need to be touched in small things.

But in that small thing. What a window of the greatness of God. Of the genius of the faith.

Of the so great salvation. We're blessed Lord. And we want to be like that.

We want that reality. We want that perception. Taken up with this word that was spoken to these ministers as a day of small beginnings.

You know the way the Lord will begin. You come to a situation without any plan for it. And then something is quickened in the early morning hours and you begin with what the Lord has given.

And if these men had been patient and had waited and trusted the Lord from this modest beginning because the subject was widows. Widows and slaves. I don't know how the Lord had me to major on the minor key.

But it began with that little subject in 1st Timothy. You can turn to it chapter 5. And probably had they understood the process of God who is pleased to begin with small things they might have ended up with a really large statement from the Lord that would have helped them all their days. The reason that I was boycotted after that is that this kind of a word for them was a disappointment.

They were hoping something from America that had to do with church growth. Some program, some special principles or methods that would bring numbers. And here's this guy coming with some minor note on widows.

So you can imagine their disappointment. But I'm speaking this it's been requested that Simon and others heard about this. They said well let us hear it.

Bring it on Sunday. So something that has come out of all of these weeks that will now touch the future is a growing awareness on the part of many for apostolic and prophetic foundations. All of the commitments that have been made for October in Holland and in Germany that have come out of this present trip specify that this should be the topic of the leadership seminars and other activity.

There just seems to be an awareness growing awareness that these foundations need to be developed. And so the Lord has given us a very precious perspective on that word apostolicity that goes way back into Ben Israel's history and continues increasingly to become a central focus. And the remarkable thing about Paul on widows and slaves is that it's almost a minor note in passing.

Just Paul tending to some practical matters in giving Timothy guidance for his own conduct with the church. But as so often is the case, sometimes the profoundest insights and observations of the nature of something are given not in the grandiose climactic statements but in some little thing in passing, some minor note, some observation of something that seems relatively trivial in comparison to the weightier objects of concern. And you can see in the microcosm of a small note being struck the real genius of what is apostolic.

And that's why I love this so much. So in chapter 5 of 1st Paul is instructing on the subject of widows and he says in verse 3, Are not widows who are really widows? Now right there we ought to be arrested. What do you mean widows who are really widows? Isn't a widow by definition one who has lost her husband through death? Evidently Paul does not make his determination or his definition on natural factors.

And in that we begin to see what the apostolic mind is that goes beyond the immediate, the physical, and the apparent. That the issue of widowhood is something more than the absence of a husband. That there are widows, and widows are real.

What is a real widow? Because if there's such a thing as a real widow, then what shall we say about real believers? Real pastors, real evangelists, real teachers, real husbands, real wives. If Paul can make a distinction about widows as real and unreal, that distinction then can be extended to almost every category. And that's exactly the point.

There is an apostolic perception of everything that is above and beyond what one understands. And it's into that realm that God wants to draw us. And sometimes it's just a hairline of difference.

But that hairline speaks volumes. So are there widows who are really widows? If a widow has children, I'm in verse 4 of chapter 5 of 1 Timothy. If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn the religious teaching of their own family, make some repayment to their parents, for this is pleasing in God's sight.

The real widow, here's Paul's definition, the real widow left alone has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Oh, you dear saints, tune in.

Adjust your focus and don't miss a nuance of what Paul is saying in this one passing pithy statement because he's expressing his apostolic heart and mindset and mentality all the more profound because he has no awareness that this is going to pass into Scripture. This is just a momentary piece of counsel to a man called Timothy who is going to be working with the church. But in it is such an insight of the depth of Paul's mind that defines the word apostolic.

Let's go over this. The real widow. Who's the real widow? Left alone like the ordinary widow but what makes her real, she has set her hope in God.

This is apostolic. In other words, every definition of what is real has got to be set in the context of God. If that dimension is missing, it's no longer reality.

It's just physical. It's just natural. It's just social.

It's just political. But when God is a factor, that establishes its authenticity and its reality. A real widow is one who takes God into consideration is what Paul is saying.

If that's what makes a widow real, then it must be the same thing that makes a believer real, a teacher real, an apostle real, a prophet real. Reality is the issue of God. Here's a woman left alone, but how does she occupy herself in the absence of a husband? She has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

But the widow who lives for pleasure, this would have to be interpreted. This is the antithesis of living for God is living for pleasure. That one is dead even while she lives.

So here we have not only a definition of widowhood, we have a definition of life. Life is not biological activity. Life is relationship to God in significant prayer, supplication, and service.

If that fact is absent and removed, the person is dead even while they live, whether they're widows, husbands, sons, anything. And this is exactly what I saw in East Germany, in the city of Magdeburg as I shared with other of the saints here on Wednesday night when they had a Saturday morning outreach at the public mall. I watched the people come out with their shopping carts from the supermarkets and the different stores and they were like corpses.

They were walking corpses. They had biological activity, but that's all they had. They were dead, literally dead.

There was no light. There was darkness there. Grim.

But they think that biological activity and motion and movement and being able to buy and go into stores and fill shopping carts is living. But I saw right through that and I let them know what I saw. I told them that their faces accused them that they're, what's the word? The indictment of God is written in their faces.

That they're dead even while they live. And I didn't even remember that this verse was in here, but the statement was in their bodily life. We need to see like that.

That's how Paul saw it. And therefore we should not be impressed with physical motion, with movement, with bodies, with cities. It's death.

And maybe the whole contest of what reality is and the whole invincible thing from beginning is a contest between death and life. And death seems to be running the show. And people think that their life is life when it's really death.

But we who are in relationship with God in supplications and in prayer and service have the spirit of life know indeed what life is. And we need to bring the challenge of life to the dead and not be impressed with their death as if that represents life. You see, this is fanatical.

It's almost maniacal. The Russian authorities would have every right to take a man like this and put him behind bars or send him to a mental institution and shoot him up with drugs or give him shock treatments because his view of reality is totally askew. It's not at all in keeping with what the world defines and recognizes as reality.

And yet the issue for us and the issue for the church is, is Paul's seeing definitive? Is the way that Paul sees is that true seeing? And what is an apostle or a prophet? These foundational men, but men who see as God sees. And what is a church built on that foundation? A church also that sees as they see. And that this is reality, though everything conspires against it.

If you're going to take a view like this, you're going to make yourself a candidate to be opposed because this isn't some trifle. This is the very grit of what is real. What is life about? What is life? See where Paul is getting at? So this insanity is apostolicity.

This is definitive seeing. And out of this seeing comes all of Paul's conduct, all of Paul's activity, all of Paul's service, all of Paul's sacrifice. This is not just an observation that he can enjoy with a cup of coffee.

This is the foundation of the wellspring of all that he does. This is how he sees. And because he sees like that, he speaks like this, he writes like this, he acts like this.

That's an apostle. And we need to appreciate it. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.

So give these commands as well so that it may be above reproach. And whoever does not provide for relatives, especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever, an infidel. Here's another definition, another absolute statement of a maniacal kind where Paul says, in effect, I don't care what they profess to believe or how faithful they are to be in agreement with certain doctrines or even have had a born-again experience.

If they do not act in a certain way, if that faith does not translate into conduct of a very particular kind toward their own, it's a non-faith. They are like infidels. They are as good as unbelievers.

Talk about radical, I don't know, extreme. And yet this is not the dyspeptic thoughts of a man who's out of sorts and has certain strange negative views. These are the definitive apostolic statements of the man Paul, who is the chief apostle.

And we need to give very special attention to every one of his asides, every one of his comments. All the more powerful because he never thought or intended that they should be considered as programmatic, as a way of defining faith. They're just observations that Paul is sharing with Timothy.

But in them we have the very ground of apostolic being. All the more powerful because it's off the cuff. It's natural.

Not programmed. Natural. It's just a man.

You've pinched him on the question of widows and the question of taking care of widows that are real widows. And you have an obligation. Don't give us this highfalutin spiritual stuff and neglect your own flesh and blood.

You're as good as an infidel. Your faith does not count for anything. It's a denial of the faith.

It's worse than being an unbeliever. Why is it worse? Because it purports to be faith. You'd be better off in that kind of conduct to be an unsaved person.

Then you can still be reached and converted. But having purported to be saved and conduct yourself in this way makes it even worse. So let a widow be put on the list if she's not less than 60 years old and has been married only once.

She must be well attested for her good works as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, devoted herself to being good in every way. Well, I tell you what, we can use an army of widows like that. They're rare.

But refuse to put younger widows on the list. Evidently, the Church had a list of widows that were put under the Church's care. Maybe they didn't have relatives who could watch over them.

So here's another wonderful insight. The Church's care for its own. And to have a list, to be methodical, to make sure that no one is missed, is not unspiritual.

And Paul is describing who's to be included and gives that wonderful description of showing hospitality, washing the saints' feet, helping the afflicted, and devoting herself to being good in every way. But refuse to put younger widows on the list for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ they want to marry. And so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge.

Evidently, these widows had at their widowhood made a public declaration of determination that they're not going to seek to be married again. That they're now freed, so to speak, and to give their lives fully to the purposes of God and washing the feet of the saints and being devoted to their needs. But evidently, within a short period of time, sensual need or interest has made them to contradict their first proclamation.

And Paul says they're not to be included for they have violated their first pledge. Besides that, they learn to be idle and getting about from house to house. They're not merely idle but also gossips and busybodies saying those things that they should not say, and so on.

For some have already turned to Satan, to follow Satan, verse 15, if any believing woman has relatives who are really widows, here again, really. Let her assist them. Let the church not be burdened so they can assist those who are real widows.

So this is more than Paul's exaggerated statements. They are definitive insights of what believing actually means. This is not exaggeration for its own sake, but the real revealing of the apostolic mind that sees beyond and through mere appearances to the reality that needs to be recognized of what is real which is really a statement of how God himself sees it.

Apostolic seeing is God seeing. And then Paul turns to the subject of slaves in chapter 6. Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are the members of the church.

Rather, they must serve them all the more since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved. Well, you can't really fathom how great an issue Paul is touching. When the Protestant Reformation came, the peasants of Germany took occasion to revolt against their masters and interpreted the Reformation as an invitation or an incentive to be in violent revolution against their masters.

They were serfs, peasants, and they were landowners. If you know the history of revolution and the bloodbaths and the devastation that follows any attempt by man to rectify social institutions through

violence, you would understand that what Paul is touching here is not just the issue of society, but the church itself. If the church was not guided over this question, it would almost be inevitable that believers would interpret the freedom in Christ as to be free from their masters and to come out from this social institution that has long precedence, but that maybe the gospel means to be free and to be in a new relationship by which they no longer need to heed their masters.

And that could have set in motion not only reverberations throughout society, but probably could have undermined the church itself and made the church into some kind of revolutionary radical social upheaval by which the faith itself would have become sublimated and would have just become a cause for social action. That's not an exaggeration because that's in fact what has happened to the liberal social gospel of the 20th century. So this is an issue that is remarkably charged with enormous concern.

So what Paul has to say here is not just touching the issue of slaves and their masters, but the whole issue of the church itself is at stake in the kind of wisdom and counsel that he gives. I'm going to go back and forth between my King James and the edition that I've been using so far and read from other statements of Paul on the issue of bond and free because it's a remarkably significant thing and an issue that could have destroyed the church. In Ephesians chapter 6 are other statements of Paul on the same subject that fill out something of the ramification of servants and masters.

You understand the predicament. Both are now saved and shouldn't the servant who is now saved demand and expect from his master a new kind of relationship and consideration and maybe to take it easier on him if he'll not release him from bondage, to at least take it easier and in other ways show that, well, I'm a believer now and therefore you ought to receive certain consideration that was not to be expected before I came into the faith. But Paul is saying, what happens if your master does not give you those considerations, even though he's saved? Are you at liberty then to become resentful and bitter toward him all the more because you could call him a hypocrite? And what kind of believer are you? And is that the kind of faith you have that has not in any way altered my relationship with you? I'm still expected to work those many hours and without the compensation that would be fair? This is no small question and it's in these social issues that Paul is required to give comment that we see so much of the wisdom of the mind of Christ that is operating through Paul that would be of great value even today.

Not that we're in the issue of being slaves to masters, but we're in the issue of being employees to employers. And there's a certain application that is as valid in that as was valid to bond slaves with their masters. That is the issue of the faith itself.

So in Ephesians in chapter 6 Paul says, servants, in verse 5 be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling and singleness of heart as unto Christ. Don't look at your master as just being a piece of flesh and blood. You're not laboring for him.

You're really serving the Lord. And more than that, the fact that you are a bond slave and that he's the master is not some precarious accident of fate. It's God's predetermined and sovereign wisdom that you should occupy that role while he occupies that role.

And in that fixed relationship that God has ordained in his sovereignty, something is to be worked and something is to be revealed of the transcendent nature of the faith that will glorify God. So don't you murmur. Don't you complain.

Don't you take upon yourself the mentality of a victim as if you have something coming because your master is not your master. Your master is Christ. And you know what authenticates this, that Paul can speak with authority? He himself is a bond slave.

He's not speaking from some lofty, ethereal height of a man coming out of his holiday inn suite and giving the church a few words of wisdom going back to the privilege of that lifestyle. He himself is in chains. Not literal, although at the end of his life they were literal, but his entire believing life, he saw himself and he saw himself rightly as a bond slave of Christ.

Therefore when he spoke to men who socially were bond slaves, he could speak to them with an authority that was more than just incidental. In fact, it was the very issue of making his counsel significant that he himself also was in a state just like unto them. Only his master was the Lord.

But he was no more free to do his thing than they are free to do their thing. Because they are to regard their physical masters in the same way that Paul regarded his, namely as Christ. And to render service to them, not as man pleasing or I pleasing, but as God pleasing.

I don't know if you guys realize this. This is a revolution. Hey, this is former Marxist talking.

I know what's radical. And I would say, in all of my associations with the so-called radicalisms of the past, that's kid stuff. That's ephemeral stuff that goes into the dung heap.

It amounts to nothing but bloodshed. This is radical. This is revolutionary.

And it doesn't require one iota of social change. All that it requires is a change of mind. All it requires is an attitude.

All it requires is an apostolic mindset. Nothing needs to be disturbed in the fabric of society itself, because you don't want to begin caring there. But in the given situation, let that man Paul says in 1 Corinthians, remain in the place within he is called.

Because in that place is the whole drama and significance of the faith itself. Don't look for some lustrous occasion. If only you could be freed from this narrow obligation that is monotonous and predictable, and could be out there where art is, out in Russia, then you could really serve the Lord.

But here, in the monotonous regularity of my regular job from 8 to 5, I don't have the opportunity. Bologna. That is as profound an occasion for the setting forth of the grace of God and the marvel of the faith, and the reality of God, as anything that any man can do anywhere.

Who is it that has sent art to Russia? There's no other than the one who has put you in that place of employment. It's the Lord. He's absolutely sovereign.

He knows what he's doing. And if you're faithful in that place, with that employer, under those circumstances, in that monotony, that regularity, that unfairness, to serve the Lord, not as a man pleaser, but as doing something unto the Lord, and be faithful, he'll promote you. He'll open other doors.

That's the place. And you need to regard it as coming from the Lord. And to serve the Lord and not man, with singleness of heart, as unto Christ.

Not with eye service, as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart. You know, we are a remarkable society of slaves, and yet every wit free. We can kiss our chains.

We're not begrudging that we're under the obligation of Christ, because to be chained in Christ is paradoxically ultimate freedom. Look at Paul at Acts 16, when he was actually in a cell, bound hand and foot with his back hanging in strips in the most stinking place where men urinated and defecated. They didn't have outdoor toilets.

That's right where they were. They may have had a bucket that spilled over. In all of that filth, in all of that congestion, in all of that place where gangrene and death is an inevitability, at midnight, the darkest hour, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God.

Talk about madness. Talk about, this guy is not fit to live. No wonder men threw dirt on their heads and made a vow, this man's not fit to live.

If what he represents is reality and truth, then what we are about is totally folly, absolutely fraudulent. But look at the this guy is rejoicing in his madness and is able to sing with his back hanging in stripes, counting it all honor and privilege to have borne the sufferings of the Lord in the obedience of the vision that came. He's a bond slave.

How else would he have left Asia, where the churches were being added to daily, to go to a place where he had no one had ever been before, Philippi in Europe and Greece, merely because he saw a vision that he was able to be checked from going further in Asia where they were being prospered and go to a place where what happens when you go there? One woman gets saved, who is a demoniacal character making her masses much gain and for that they were stripped, beaten publicly in the marketplace and thrown into the dingiest of cells to languish unto death. There should have been every complaint. Is this what you call the heavenly vision? This is what I get for my obedience? I'm sitting here with my wounds unattended, shackled hand and foot.

I'm not even able to alter my position. Whenever a man had a justification for complaint, it's at that point Paul is rejoicing and giving praise unto God. Because in that confinement is the freest man on the face of the earth.

Because to be free in Christ is to be free in deed. This is the ultimate paradox of the faith that we're slaves but our slavery makes us free. We're free from the world.

We're free from the invisible taskmaster who crashes his whip that you have to have this car, this house, this clothing, this, this, this, this. You have what the Lord gives. In having food and clothing Paul says, there and be content.

You're free from envy, free from the kinds of things for which men exhaust themselves who are dead even while they live. And this is real living because it serves the purposes of God. It's moving toward a consummation.

It's in the mind and will of God who knows the end from the beginning. And it's unspeakable privilege to be a slave of Christ. So, doing the will of God from the heart.

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