

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Understanding Paul's Approach to Slavery in Ephesians 6:5 – 9**

Submitted to Dr. Robert Wayne Stacy,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

THES 690 – A09 LUO

Thesis Defense

by

William D. Smith

April 25, 2022

## Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>CHAPTER ONE: Introduction .....</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| Statement of the Problem .....   | 1         |
| Statement of Purpose .....   | 2         |
| Statement of Importance of the Problem.....  | 4         |
| Statement of Position on the Problem .....   | 6         |
| Research Methods.....  | 6         |
| Data Analysis.....   | 7         |
| <b>CHAPTER TWO: Understanding the <i>Haustafel</i> in Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9 .....</b> | <b>8</b>  |
| How Christians Should Live a Spirit – Filled Life.....                               | 9         |
| <i>Haustafel</i> in Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9 .....                                       | 12        |
| Ephesians 5:22 – 33 (Wives/Husbands).....  | 12        |
| Ephesians 6:1 – 4 (Children/Parents) .....   | 13        |
| Ephesians 6:5 – 9 (Slaves/Masters).....  | 14        |
| Summary .....  | 15        |
| The Background of Slavery in the Greco – Roman World .....                           | 17        |
| Methods of Enslavement .....   | 18        |
| Treatment and Rights of Slaves.....  | 19        |
| Slavery as the Praxis.....   | 22        |
| Exegesis of Ephesians 6:5 – 9 .....  | 23        |
| Conclusion .....   | 31        |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE: Did Paul “Authorize” Slavery .....</b>                             | <b>33</b> |
| What Pauline Critics Say About Slavery in the New Testament .....                    | 34        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| What Paul Wrote About Slavery .....   | 39        |
| First Corinthians .....   | 40        |
| Galatians .....   | 42        |
| Colossians .....  | 43        |
| First Timothy .....   | 45        |
| Titus .....   | 46        |
| Philemon.....   | 47        |
| Conclusion .....  | 49        |
| <b>CHAPTER FOUR: Alternative Approach in Understanding Ephesians 6:5 – 9.....</b> | <b>52</b> |
| Authority of the <i>Paterfamilias</i> .....                                       | 54        |
| How Leaders Transform the Culture .....   | 56        |
| Warren Buffett Story .....  | 61        |
| The Transformed <i>Paterfamilias</i> .....  | 64        |
| Conclusion .....  | 65        |
| <b>CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion.....</b>  | <b>68</b> |
| <b>Bibliography.....</b>  | <b>72</b> |

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Statement of the Problem

“Grounded in both Old and New Testament scriptures, proslavery rhetoric evolved even as American slavery evolved. The earliest scriptural justification of slavery as ‘not inherently sinful’ eventually evolved into the justification of slavery as a ‘positive good’ for both slave and master.”<sup>1</sup>

“If we turn to the New Testament, we shall see that slavery is not incompatible with the principles and profession of Christianity. We have the most conclusive evidence to the contrary.”<sup>2</sup>

“If we followed Ephesians 6:5 or 1 Peter 2:18, we might still have slavery.”<sup>3</sup>

The topic of slavery in the Bible has been studied and taught extensively. However, it is still challenging today for some Christians to explain and defend biblical passages concerning slavery. As implied in the opening quotes, there are biblical passages in the New Testament that can readily be misinterpreted for one to believe that the Bible endorses the practice of slavery. These beliefs surface when one reads these biblical passages without contextual understanding or believing what the critics say regarding these passages. In addition, modern readers sometimes impose their current cultural standards on the first century. For example, someone might say, if Paul did not directly disavow the practice of slavery, he must therefore agree with it. Some critics ask, why did God not directly denounce slavery altogether? If God can command “you shall not murder” and “you shall not steal,” indeed God could have commanded that you shall

---

<sup>1</sup> Yolanda Pierce, *Hell Without Fires: Slavery, Christianity, and the Antebellum Spiritual Narrative* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 98.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Dalcho, *Practical Considerations Founded on the Scriptures, Relative to the Slave Population of South-Carolina* (Charleston, SC: A. E. Miller, 1823), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Hector Avalos, “Yahweh Is a Moral Monster,” in *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010), 153.

not own another person as your property. These questions can lead someone to question God's attributes and ask: If God is omniscient, and slavery was not in His original plan,<sup>4</sup> then why did God not command against slavery? Why did Jesus not directly rebuke the practice of slavery during His earthly ministry?<sup>5</sup>

The claim from authors such as Alexis Jemal et al. that racism has been embedded in the United States since its development and the country was “built on the foundation of slavery and bondage”<sup>6</sup> further accentuate the problem of racial oppression and division in the country. The misuse of biblical slavery passages during the antebellum era has added to the racial division in the United States; as described by a Pew Research survey, “More than eight-in-ten [84 percent] of black adults say the legacy of slavery affects the position of black people in America today.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, when these unsubstantiated claims are associated with biblical texts concerning slavery, it can lead one to question the worldview of Christianity. Thus, Christians must accurately respond to the critic's queries concerning slavery in the Bible.

### Statement of Purpose

As described in the problem statement above, a gap in understanding the first-century culture led some Pauline critics to believe that Paul authorized the practice of slavery. This thesis intends to rebut claims from John Loftus and his co-authors that seeing Paul did not “clearly

---

<sup>4</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 89.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 151.

<sup>6</sup> Alexis Jemal, Sarah Bussey, and Briana Young, “Steps to Racial Reconciliation: A Movement to Bridge the Racial Divide and Restore Humanity,” *Social Work and Christianity* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 31–33.

<sup>7</sup> “Views on Race in America 2019,” *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project* (blog), April 9, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/04/09/race-in-america-2019/>.

condemn” the practice of slavery; therefore, he “authorized” its practice.<sup>8</sup> These claims are based on the Pauline critics’ understanding of what Paul did not say. However, this thesis will demonstrate that the Pauline critics are influenced by their presuppositions toward Paul, resulting in their misunderstanding of Ephesians 6:5-9 and Paul’s other letters. In describing slavery in the first century and its culture, modern readers will see how radical Paul’s command was to his original audience and that he was commanding Christians to show dignity and respect to all people.

After analyzing Paul’s writings concerning slavery, this thesis will demonstrate that Paul’s command to slaves and masters in Ephesians 6:5-9 did not “authorize” slavery; however, they gave priority to the slaves’ and masters’ eternal position with God. It will accomplish this demonstration through an exegesis of Ephesians 6:5-9 and an examination of Paul’s other writings concerning slavery in 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and his household command in Ephesians 5:22-6:9. Then it will offer a side-by-side comparison of Paul’s command to the household leader (*paterfamilias*) with corporate American CEOs to understand how a change in leadership style influences the organization’s culture and ethics. Thus, providing an exegetically based rebuttal to the Pauline critics’ false claims that Paul’s command in Ephesians 6:5-9 “authorized” the practice of slavery.

This comparison of Paul’s command to the household leader and CEOs’ influence over their organization’s culture will be demonstrated through a peer-reviewed empirical study and include Satya Nadella’s and Warren Buffett’s mission and priorities as incoming CEOs. These examples will assist modern readers in understanding how a cultural change is implemented

---

<sup>8</sup> John W. Loftus, “The Slave Is the Owner’s Property,” in *Christianity Is Not Great: How Faith Fails*, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2014), “Keep in mind the Apostle Paul authorized slavery” (174).

within a corporation, which usually begins with changing the leadership style from within the organization.

### Statement of Importance of the Problem

The Pauline critics' statement that Paul "authorized" slavery misrepresents the Bible and further adds to the current racial division and tension in the United States. These divisions and tensions have recently increased in the United States due to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, among others, which has led to, as Paula McClain describes, a "crisis of faith in U.S. institutions."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, correctly understanding and defending these biblical passages concerning slavery, which anti-Christian critics have associated with racism,<sup>10</sup> is needed and relevant today for Christians in the United States.

There have been several scholarly books and articles written about slavery in the Old Testament,<sup>11</sup> and these biblical texts explain the reason for slavery, its duration, and the slave's treatment. However, slavery passages in the New Testament are often overlooked and difficult for some Christians to explain and defend, such as Paul's passage in Ephesians 6:5-9. When slavery in the New Testament is discussed, scholars cover what the text is saying and the culture in the Greco-Roman world during the first century.<sup>12</sup> However, few scholars address Paul's

---

<sup>9</sup> Paula D. McClain, "Trump and Racial Equality in America? No Pretense at All!," *Policy Studies* 42, no. 5–6 (November 2, 2021): 491–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2021.1979502>.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this, see Avalos, "Yahweh Is a Moral Monster," 226; John W. Loftus, "What We've Got Here Is a Failure to Communicate," in *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010), 184–85, 191; and Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 51.

<sup>11</sup> For scholarly books defining slavery in the Old Testament, see Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011); and Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> For examples of the historical-cultural context of New Testament passages, see Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*, chapter 14; Gordon D. Fee, "The Cultural Context of Ephesians 5:18-6:9," *Priscilla Papers* 31, no. 4

direct attack on the culture and practice of slavery from the inside. Paul's attack on slavery from the inside was accomplished through the spiritual transformation of the Christian's heart to have a Christ-like character, which changed how Christians treated the slaves within their household and the community. This approach has been overlooked and not well known among Christians, which this thesis will address.

This thesis will address the importance of Christians understanding and defending that Paul does not "authorize" the practice of slavery. It will accomplish this by explaining the first-century culture concerning slavery and the Roman householder's legal authority over his family. The knowledge of the first-century culture is vital in defending Paul's command and in describing how radical his command was to the first-century household leader. It is essential that Christians recognize when Pauline critics attempt to impose their twenty-first-century culture and ethical standards back onto the first century. In other words, what may not be acceptable by today's standards may well have been the practice in the first century.

In defending first-century expressions of Christianity to a critical contemporary culture, it is beneficial to provide current examples that may bridge the cultural gap in understanding Paul's command. For example, Paul's command to the household leader (master) can be compared to an American corporate leader (CEO), and how both leaders influence their organizations and household culture and ethics. This information will demonstrate for Christians that the Pauline critic's issues regarding Paul's command result from reading this passage without contextual understanding. Any attack on God's Word must be taken seriously, and when the Pauline critics do not know the purpose of Paul's message, it does not make it acceptable for the Christian to be equally ill-informed on such weighty matters. It is essential that Christians understand that Paul's

---

(2017): 4–8; and N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), chapter 2.

primary mission was not to dismantle the institution of slavery in the Roman Empire; his mission was to teach the gospel of Christ Jesus. Finally, there is already division and tension regarding race in the United States, and Christians must defend against any allegation that the Bible created or adds to this division.

### Statement of Position on the Problem

Paul's writings provide enough information to defend themselves against the allegation that they are pro-slavery. Although Paul never rebuked the practice of slavery, neither did he advocate its practice. The position of this thesis is that Paul was not authorizing the practice of slavery, which remains consistent with other scholars' observations concerning the subject of slavery in Ephesians 6:5-9. Despite the Pauline critic's attempt to claim that Ephesians 6:5-9 was pro-slavery, they have proffered no compelling evidence to change this position.

### Research Methods

This thesis focuses on Paul's commands to slaves and masters in Ephesians 6:5-9. Therefore, it will not present or compare or contrast slavery in the Old Testament. However, it will examine Paul's other letters regarding slaves and masters, and for this study, this thesis will assume a Pauline authorship of Ephesians.<sup>13</sup> It will not address or attempt to refute statements made by pro-slavery or antislavery proponents during the antebellum era.

The period covered for examining slavery in the New Testament focuses on how Paul's original audience understood his letters and how some current Christian and non-Christian authors interpreted his writings concerning slavery. The writings from the late first century and

---

<sup>13</sup> For discussion of Pauline authorship, see Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, Vol. 34, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 36; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, ed. Robert Yarbrough and Robert Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 5–11; and Fee, "The Cultural Context of Ephesians," 4.

extrabiblical writings are beyond the scope of this thesis and, therefore, will be excluded. The primary source used for this thesis was the Bible. The secondary sources used were Strong's Concordance, Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Barbara Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, and other scholarly commentaries. The tertiary sources used during this thesis were the early church fathers' writings when referenced in the secondary sources and other publications that were not available digitally.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis is a critical step during this research that requires excellent attention to detail and vetting. The first step consists of analyzing the source of information, ensuring it is current, from a scholarly publication, followed by careful research into the author's background and motivation for writing the article or book. Finally, research the author's biblical stance on this passage, the apostle Paul and the inerrancy of the Bible. The data analysis step was done concurrently with the data collection step and continued until the thesis's completion.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Understanding the *Haustafel* in Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9

Paul's statement on slavery in Ephesians 6:5-9 presents some challenges for modern readers. In Ephesians chapter six, Paul is writing about the slave master relationship, where he commands,

<sup>5</sup> Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; <sup>6</sup> not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. <sup>7</sup> With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, <sup>8</sup> knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. <sup>9</sup> And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.<sup>14</sup>

The challenge of understanding this passage first surfaces when one reads the passage without having a proper contextual understanding of Paul's extensive discussion regarding the relationships of wives/husbands, children/parents, and slaves/masters within the *Haustafel* (household code).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, this chapter will first explore Paul's use of the domestic code in Ephesians 5:22-6:9 to understand Paul's statement concerning slavery, which is the context for Paul's words regarding the slave and master relationship in Ephesians 6:5-9. Next, it will describe the historical and cultural background of slavery in the first century, including the methods of enslavement, the rights and treatment of slaves, and how slavery was a societal norm during Paul's writing. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an exegesis of Ephesians 6:5-9 for one to understand the original language of Paul's writing and how his counter-cultural command

---

<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New American Standard Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> For a definition of *Haustafeln*, see John T. Fitzgerald, "Haustafeln," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), "The German word *Haustafeln* ("tables of household rules") is a technical term used to designate lists of duties for members of a household. These lists were widely used in antiquity as part of the moral instruction given to individuals in regard to proper behavior toward the gods, the state, friends, fellow members of the household, and others" (80).

positively impacted the household and his original audience regarding slavery. This chapter will first examine key verses explaining to whom Paul was writing and why he expected them to submit to one another voluntarily before exploring the domestic code Paul gave his readers in Ephesians 5:22-6:9.

### How Christians Should Live a Spirit-Filled Life

Paul tells his readers in Ephesians 5:18-21 that to express their Spirit-filled life adequately, they must do so through fellowship with others within the community, and it must not be done solely on an individual basis. Therefore, the one filled with the Spirit must joyfully fellowship with others in the community and be willing to submit to one another (cf. Eph. 4:2-3). Frank Thielman describes the importance and grammatical structure of Ephesians 5:18b-21 where the “first term in this new section is the participle *ὑποτασσόμενοι* (*hypotassomenoi*, submitting), and grammatically speaking, it is simply the last of four participial elements that modify the phrase *πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι* (*plērousthe en pneumati*, be filled in the Spirit) in 5:18b.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Paul tells his readers that an indication of one filled with the Spirit will speak, sing, and give thanks (5:19-20) and will also voluntarily submit to one another in fear of Christ (5:21).<sup>17</sup> Paul expects his readers to act differently than those around them because the Holy Spirit leads them.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*, 365. See also, Harold W. Hoehner, Philip W. Comfort, and Peter H. Davids, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, Vol. 16 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), “The verb *hypotassomai*... with regards to its form, the participle is rendered by some as in the middle voice— ‘submitting or subjecting yourselves’ (KJV, ASV, NIV), while others render it as a passive ‘be subject’ (RSV, NASB, JB, NJB, NRSV). There is not much difference between the middle and passive” (110).

<sup>17</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1042. Hereafter, BDAG.

<sup>18</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 508.

The subordination command in 5:21 of “be submissive” (*hypotassomenoi*) is for the entire church and therefore is foundational in understanding the *Haustafel*. The subordination command directs the church to look at the servant role Jesus took, as Frank Stagg notes, “with a total rejection of the world’s measure of greatness in terms of ruling over other people” (cf. Mark. 10:42-45),<sup>19</sup> and should be executed out of reverence and “fear of Christ” (5:21).

The importance of 5:21 concerning the household code requires Paul’s readers to understand the entire household code is hinged on the act of mutual submission to one another.<sup>20</sup> According to Francis Foulkes, the concept of submission is important to Paul, so much that he mentions it “more than twenty times in his letters.”<sup>21</sup> The Christian must be willing to fellowship and serve all, regardless of their age, sex, class, or any other division that may exist.<sup>22</sup> Also, as Foulkes notes, this willingness to fellowship and serve others must first occur within the household, where the “love and discipline of Christ are most clearly manifest.”<sup>23</sup> Timothy Gombis writes, in *Haustafel*, Paul defines the household code and what a relationship with Christ “ought to look like in the New Humanity.”<sup>24</sup> Gombis continues, the *Haustafel*, “therefore, is a manifesto for the new creation people of God” and how the relationships within the household

---

<sup>19</sup> Frank Stagg, “The Domestic Code and Final Appeal, Ephesians 5:21-6:24,” *Review & Expositor* 76, no. 4 (1979): 544.

<sup>20</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 168. See also, Craig S. Keener, “Mutual Submission Frames the Household Codes,” *Priscilla Papers* 35, no. 3 (2021): 10.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 158.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Timothy G. Gombis, “A Radically New Humanity: The Function of the *Haustafel* in Ephesians,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 2 (June 2005): 320.

should change because of this “New Humanity.”<sup>25</sup> As Stagg states, Paul identifies that the household relationships in Ephesians 5:22-6:9 “are to be governed by one’s attitude toward Christ. Remembering that one is ‘in Christ’ and under Christ should determine the quality of relationships from the Christian’s side.”<sup>26</sup> Paul understood that mutual submission must first be addressed to the household leader (*paterfamilias*).

Paul’s focus in Ephesians 5:21-6:9 is on addressing the *paterfamilias* (householder) and instructs him how to become a servant and image-bearer of Christ. Paul understands that by first addressing the behavior and heart of the *paterfamilias*, the rest of the household will follow. As Gordon Fee describes, the relationship of the latter party mentioned in each group of the *Haustafel*, wives/husbands (5:22), children/parents (6:1), and slaves/masters (6:5) is the same person: “husband = father = master.”<sup>27</sup> In this passage, one can observe that Paul’s more significant concern is with the *paterfamilias*. He mentions the *paterfamilias*’ role in the household three times, husband, parent, and master. This concern is evident by the number of words Paul uses when addressing the husband compared to the other two relationships. As Fee observes, Paul uses “four times as many words to [the husband] as there are to the wife.”<sup>28</sup> However, the ratio of words used in the other two relationships reduces to a two to one ratio. According to Fee, this purposeful attention being paid to the *paterfamilias* stresses the “crucial matter for Paul is with what Christ has done to the first relationship.”<sup>29</sup> Additionally, when

---

<sup>25</sup> Gombis, “A Radically New Humanity,” 320.

<sup>26</sup> Stagg, “The Domestic Code and Final Appeal,” 545.

<sup>27</sup> For more on this, see Bock, *Ephesians*, “That parents are in view and not just fathers seems likely given the citation including both in verse 2 and the fact that responding to both parents is in view in Proverbs (Prov. 1:8-9; 17:25; 19:26; 20:20)” (187). See also, Fee, “The Cultural Context of Ephesians,” 4.

<sup>28</sup> Fee, “The Cultural Context of Ephesians,” 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

addressing the three groups, Paul first addresses the powerless and defenseless one in the relationship. Paul does not need to command the *paterfamilias* in the *Haustafel* to assume the leadership role within his household; that was already the accepted practice within the Greco-Roman culture.

### *Haustafel* in Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9

#### **Ephesians 5:22 – 33 (Wives/Husbands)**

In the Greco-Roman world, it was the practice for the wife to love and submit to her husband.<sup>30</sup> However, as Hoehner states, Paul’s command for the husband to love his wife was unique to his ancient readers and not found in any “rabbinic literature” or the Old Testament.<sup>31</sup> Paul’s radical, counter-cultural command for the *paterfamilias* to love his wife (5:25) lays the foundations for his servanthood to Christ. For the husband to love (*ἀγαπάω*) this way, points to “Christ’s love for the Church and gave himself up for her” (5:25; cf. John 10:11, 15, 17; 15:13; Eph. 5:2).

The reference of a wife submitting to her husband in Ephesians 5:22-33 may cause some concern for modern readers. However, Paul’s audience had a more significant concern for the husband to submit any authority to his wife. The husband’s act of submitting displays that he will not defend his position (rank) in the household but will serve Christ. Although Paul had some challenges with women in Ephesus exercising their independence (1 Tim. 2:9-15), he displays love and equality in his command expressing mutual respect and submission within the

---

<sup>30</sup> Mark J. Keown, “Paul’s Vision of a New Masculinity (Eph 5:21-6:9),” *Colloquium* 48, no. 1 (May 2016): 54.

<sup>31</sup> See, Hoehner, *Ephesians*, “This exhortation to husbands to love their wives is unique. It is not found in the OT, rabbinic literature, or in the household codes of the Greco-Roman era” (525). See also, Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger et al., Vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014), “that *ἀγάπη* language is not found in Greco-Roman household codes” (374).

household (Eph. 5:21-6:9).<sup>32</sup> Darrell Bock describes the act of submission: “the submission-love combination is not to be seen in terms of power or rank, as it often is portrayed, but as a form of cooperation in reaching for a shared goal.”<sup>33</sup> Paul’s more significant concern was not with what power or position one had on earth. The primary goal he was teaching his readers was to have a common goal of mutually submitting to one another and with the shared goal of pleasing Christ.

### **Ephesians 6:1 – 4 (Children/Parents)**

One command that most modern readers still believe is transcultural and, therefore, not radical is for children (*τὰ τέκνα*)<sup>34</sup> to obey their parents (6:1). The command for children to obey their parents was also the practice of Paul’s ancient readers in the Greco-Roman world. However, what was unexpected to ancient readers was that Paul, as in the case with the wife, directly addresses the children. Gombis explains that by Paul directly addressing the children, he “grants them dignity and affirms their valued position” within the household and that they are members of the church.<sup>35</sup> As Hoehner states, the children in the Ephesus church were not infants, but in this context, Paul had in mind children who were “old enough to understand and exercise their free will.”<sup>36</sup> The children addressed were most likely teenagers who were still young enough to be brought up by their parents (6:4) yet old enough to have a committed relationship with Christ.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Bock, *Ephesians*, 171-72.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>34</sup> BDAG, 994.

<sup>35</sup> Gombis, “A Radically New Humanity,” 328.

<sup>36</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 548.

<sup>37</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 403.

Paul's direct appeal to the father in 6:4 not to provoke his children to anger highlights the patriarchal structure in the Greco-Roman world, where the father had complete authority over his children. Paul expects the father to be filled with the Spirit and offers a Christ-like way to discipline and treat his children. As Peter O'Brien states, Paul instructs the Christian fathers to differ from "those of their surrounding society"<sup>38</sup> and raise his children with the gospel being the center of their lives. Paul's command to the *paterfamilias* to love his wife and father his children with the gentleness of Christ is a new standard of what it looks like to be a Christian male in the Greco-Roman world. Although this command sounds normal to modern readers, Paul gave this command to the patriarch over his family. As Thielman notes, the *paterfamilias* was an "extraordinarily powerful figure, with far-reaching legal authority over his children."<sup>39</sup> Although the *paterfamilias* had complete authority over his children according to Greco-Roman law, Paul still instructed him to act differently from those in his community and to train and discipline his children as prescribed by Christ. Paul was not concerned with one's rank or position; all are equal under Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).

### **Ephesians 6:5 – 9 (Slaves/Masters)**

Paul's third command to the *paterfamilias* in the *Haustefel* is his position as the master over his slaves. In the Greco-Roman world, slavery was a societal norm. As N. T. Wright states, for most people in the Greco-Roman world, "slavery was simply part of the praxis of their worldview."<sup>40</sup> There were millions of people enslaved in the Roman Empire and the estimated population of those enslaved in Greece and Italy during the first century ranges from twenty to

---

<sup>38</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 447.

<sup>39</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 401.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 32.

thirty-three percent.<sup>41</sup> Once again, Paul demonstrates equality among all in Christ (Gal. 3:28) by directly addressing the slaves. Paul commands the slaves to obey their masters with “fear and trembling” (6:5) and to serve their masters as “slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (6:6). As Mark Keown describes, Paul tells the slaves that such service will “reap its eschatological reward.”<sup>42</sup> Paul’s counter-cultural command to the *paterfamilias* is to “do the same things” (τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε) (6:9) and not treat his slaves as, “vassals and possessions,” but to follow God’s example outlined in Ephesians 5:1-2 and apply them to his slaves.<sup>43</sup>

## Summary

Paul’s command is focused on the *paterfamilias* and is centered on Christology; as Mark Keown states, “with Jesus’ gentleness and self-giving the primary pattern for what it means to be a male (and human)” (cf. 5:1-2).<sup>44</sup> Paul gives the readers of his letter to the Ephesians the basic moral instructions about how they should now live within the new creation community.<sup>45</sup> Paul defines the foundation of this Christology in Ephesians 5:23-25. According to Keown, the *paterfamilias* is to love his wife, raise his children, and serve and treat his slaves “with the grace of Christ as fellow citizens and brothers or sisters.”<sup>46</sup> The commands Paul lays out for the *paterfamilias* radically alter the traditional structure of manhood in the Greco-Roman world and define what it looks like for men to be the image-bearers of Jesus Christ as Lord. As Keown

---

<sup>41</sup> For estimations of the slave population, see Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 58. See, also Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 42, 417.

<sup>42</sup> Keown, “Paul’s Vision of a New Masculinity,” 57.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>45</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 369.

<sup>46</sup> Keown, “Paul’s Vision of a New Masculinity,” 59.

notes, Paul’s “emphatic three-fold appeal to the ancient *paterfamilias* for cruciform self-sacrificial love, *kyrios* centered parenting and service of slaves, balances out his appeal and indicates that mutual submission (5:21) is, in fact, mutual service.”<sup>47</sup> As Gombis states, the “*Haustafel* in Ephesians, then, presents a comprehensive vision of the eschatological New Humanity – the new creation *politeia* – realized under the conditions of this present age.”<sup>48</sup> For Paul, having a Christ-like character of self-giving love is expressed by one being subordinate to one another from the heart. This Christ-like character is accomplished through following Paul’s moral instructions outlined in the *Haustafel* and through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

Paul’s household code presents a departure from the social norms of the Greco-Roman world, such as directly addressing children and slaves and giving counter-cultural commands to the *paterfamilias*. As Wright notes, Paul’s command offers “evidence of a fundamentally Jewish, and indeed renewed-Jewish, perception of the dispersed messianic people.”<sup>50</sup> Paul provides the framework of how his readers can follow and imitate the Messiah and submissively (Phil. 2:5-11) become the household of Christ. Harold Hoehner summarizes the household code purpose as “fostering unity of believers in that community in Asia Minor. Specific groups of believers are addressed regarding their responsibilities to other groups who may or may not have been believers. The believers are to carry out their responsibilities as to the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>51</sup> The act of a wife submitting to their husband or slaves obeying their masters may seem antiquated and discriminating to modern readers. However, when including mutual

---

<sup>47</sup> Keown, “Paul’s Vision of a New Masculinity,” 59.

<sup>48</sup> Gombis, “A Radically New Humanity,” 322.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>50</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1009.

<sup>51</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 514.

submission aimed toward a common goal of pleasing Christ and understanding slavery in the first century, one can see Paul's Christological theme and how radical his commands were to his first-century readers.

When Paul's command in Ephesians 6:5-9 is understood in its context, it is evident that he does not "authorize" the practice of slavery. Instead, Paul breaks away from the cultural norms and commands the *paterfamilias* to treat his slaves the way he wants to be treated. These cultural distinctions between slave and free were irrelevant to Paul; the slaves were now part of the Christian community (cf. Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13). Paul displayed respect to slaves by directly addressing them as church members and that they too would receive an eschatological reward for serving as slaves of Christ.

#### The Background of Slavery in the Greco – Roman World

The above section offered a foundational understanding of the structure and societal norms within the Greco-Roman household and that Paul commanded Christians to adopt a Christ-like character of submitting to one another from the heart. Although Paul provided the basic moral instructions on how Christians should live within the new creation community, the evil of slavery was still present. Therefore, it is necessary to examine slavery during the first century, describing who they were and why they were enslaved. This examination of slavery in the Greco-Roman world will consist of three parts. First, what were the methods of enslavement, second, the rights and treatment of slaves in the first century, and thirdly, provide historical information to assist in understanding how slavery, although deplorable to modern readers, was normative, and anyone could have been enslaved during Paul's time. Finally, with this historical information, one will see the difference between slavery in the pre-Civil War United States and

how any attempt to immediately dismantle the juggernaut of slavery in the Greco-Roman world would have been futile.

### **Methods of Enslavement**

In the Roman Empire, it was not someone's race or the color of their skin that determined whether one was a slave; slavery usually resulted from losing in war or that one was unable to repay a debt.<sup>52</sup> In challenging economic times, someone could voluntarily submit themselves into slavery, or a parent could sell a child into slavery to earn some money. Unfortunately, another way a child could become a slave is when an unwanted child, who was left alone to die, could be enslaved if found alive.<sup>53</sup> If someone sold themselves into slavery, they could regain their freedom once they fulfilled their debt or obligation. Other than economic reasons, one might submit themselves into slavery to become highly trained or educated. According to William Westermann, some slaves became tutors (Gal. 3:24), some "professors of higher education (*literature, Grammaticus, rhetor*), and others, physicians."<sup>54</sup> Finally, a person could own or acquire a slave either through the purchase from a slave driver, inheritance or through what Everett Ferguson describes as "home breeding," where the child took on the status of their mother.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 281–82.

<sup>53</sup> William L. Westermann, *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1955), 84.

<sup>54</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 559.

<sup>55</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 59.

Although Roman law considered slaves people,<sup>56</sup> they still viewed some slaves as property or tools rather than human beings.<sup>57</sup> Unlike slavery in the United States, slaves did not have any distinguishing marks (skin color), and slavery was not race-related. Therefore, it did not matter what race or nation the slaves came from; anyone could have been a slave during Paul's time.<sup>58</sup> Many skilled slaves in the first century attained freedom and independence, and some could become Roman citizens. However, their rights and treatment as slaves were determined by the legal system and their masters.

### **Treatment and Rights of Slaves**

The treatment of slaves varied significantly in the first century, and the slaves' treatment was based solely on the attitude and behavior of their masters. The determining factor of slaves' longevity was their ability to work for their masters. As Keith Hopkins writes, the master would sell off the slave when they were "worn out with work," or if they were ill, their master would leave them in public places to fend for themselves as a dedication to "the god of healing," where the master could reclaim them if they were healed.<sup>59</sup> As N. T. Wright states, slavery was challenging to understand in the first century, and it was "omnipresent."<sup>60</sup> Even though some slaves held respectable positions in their households, most often, slaves were mistreated, exploited, and abused by their masters. According to Hopkins, most "Roman slaves were freed

---

<sup>56</sup> William Warwick Buckland, *The Roman Law of Slavery: The Condition of the Slave in Private Law from Augustus to Justinian*, Cambridge Library Collection - Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511707360>.

<sup>57</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 583-84; cf. Aristotle *Ethica Nicomachea* 5.6.8 §1134b.11; and *Politica* 1.2.4-6 §§1253b.23-1254a.8.

<sup>58</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 12.

<sup>59</sup> Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 118, <https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.liberty.edu/2027/heb.01449>. See, Suetonius, *Claudius* 25; D. 40.8.2.

<sup>60</sup> Wright, *Paul: A Biography*, 282.

only by death.”<sup>61</sup> There are numerous examples of domestic slaves being mistreated and abused at the hands of their masters. For example, the emperor Augustus had his slave’s legs broken for taking a bribe, and the emperor Hadrian in a fit of anger, stabbed his slave “in the eye with a stylus,”<sup>62</sup> Caligula cut off his slave’s hands for “stealing a piece of silver,”<sup>63</sup> and Seneca wrote of a slave receiving flogging and imprisonment for coughing and sneezing.<sup>64</sup> The slaves in the early first century did not have many rights; therefore, they often received cruel treatment. Whenever there was a legal case brought against a slave, the life of the slave was literally in the master’s hands.

As indicated above, masters could exploit and abuse their slaves because they did not have many rights. As a result, the slaves in the Greco-Roman world could not do many things most modern readers take for granted. For example, slaves could not legally marry or have legitimate children.<sup>65</sup> However, slaves were still required to attend to their master’s needs. For example, Ferguson states that slave girls were kept in the house where they were expected to serve “various household functions,” and during banquets, the slaves “attended to everyone’s needs.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, if a slave became pregnant and had a child because of serving everyone’s needs, their child was considered illegitimate.<sup>67</sup> The slaves in the Greco-Roman world were

---

<sup>61</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, “this assumes an egalitarian heaven” (118, n. 39).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>63</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 559; cf. Suetonius *Caligula* 32.2.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 559; cf. Seneca *Epistulae Morales* 47.2–3.

<sup>65</sup> Fee, “The Cultural Context of Ephesians,” 6.

<sup>66</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 106, 420.

<sup>67</sup> See Joseph Francis Super, “Slavery and Manumission in the Pre-Constantine Church,” *Eleutheria* 2, no. 2 (2013): “Because they could not legally marry, their children were illegitimate” (4). See also, Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), “I find Harrill’s [*Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity*, p. 122] argument that in [1 Cor.] 7:21 Paul urges slaves to take advantage of opportunities for

viewed as property, or as Aristotle writes, slaves were “inanimate tools.”<sup>68</sup> The slaves in the Greco-Roman world were denied many characteristics of freedom allowed to Roman citizens.

According to Everett Ferguson and Harold Hoehner, there were four characteristics of a freed person that were denied to the slaves: “the right to be his own representative in legal matters, to protection from illegal seizure, to work where he pleased, and to freedom of movement.”<sup>69</sup> An example of the four characteristics are: (1) in legal cases, the slave must be represented by their master, or someone else approved by their master, whereas the freedmen could represent themselves; (2) the slaves could be arrested and seized by anyone, where that was not the case with the freedman; (3) the slaves had to do what their masters ordered them to do. However, the freedman could earn a living any way they desired; (4) the slaves had to live where their masters desired, and the freedman could live where he desired.<sup>70</sup>

Even though some slaves were treated well and had respectable positions within their household or the imperial palace, the legal scales favored the masters’ rights and protection over their slaves’,<sup>71</sup> and death was often the punishment for slaves who testified against their masters.<sup>72</sup> With no legal protection for the slaves, their masters were free to make up their own

---

freedom to be convincing. Moreover, I find it plausible that Paul gives such advice in the midst of his discussion of marriage because he is aware that slaves, who are unable to contract marriages, are the sexual property of their owners” (68).

<sup>68</sup> See, Super, “Slavery and Manumission in the Pre-Constantine Church,” “slaves were considered property and not people” (4). See, also Hoehner, *Ephesians*, cf. Aristotle *Ethica Nicomachea* (5.6.8 §1134b.11.), “Some viewed slaves as property, like chattel” (559); cf. Aristotle *Politica* 1.2.4-6 §§1253b.23-1254a.8), “or an inanimate tool rather than complete human beings” (559).

<sup>69</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 59; and Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 559.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 560.

<sup>72</sup> K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 137.

rules.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the slave was in a no-win situation where their life and livelihood depended on their master's attitude.

### **Slavery as the Praxis**

Slaves in the Greco-Roman world held various positions within the economy, and whatever needed to be done was done through the work of the slaves. Slavery was not only part of Paul's worldview; it was also part of Roman society's worldview.<sup>74</sup> As N. T. Wright states, it would have been hard for the ancient society to function without the work of slaves, they were the "electricity of the ancient world."<sup>75</sup> According to Mark Keown, "the Empire was run on the back of the service of millions of slaves; this was normative."<sup>76</sup> Hopkins and Ferguson state that in the first century BC, Rome's population is estimated to be between "fifty and sixty million" people, approximately twenty percent of the entire world's population, and that one in five residents in Rome were enslaved.<sup>77</sup> Slaves were in many of the ancient households, and few societies in the ancient world functioned without the work of slaves.<sup>78</sup>

In the Greco-Roman world, slaves worked in many sectors, from working in the mines to physicians in the imperial palace.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the Roman state had slaves who performed

---

<sup>73</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 560.

<sup>74</sup> Super, "Slavery and Manumission in the Pre-Constantine Church," 15.

<sup>75</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 31.

<sup>76</sup> Keown, "Paul's Vision of a New Masculinity," 57.

<sup>77</sup> For more on this, see Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 102; and Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 58-59.

<sup>78</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, "The only ancient communities that managed to live without [slaves], so far as we can tell, were self-chosen, quasi-monastic groups who lived far away from other habitations" (32); cf. Taylor, J. E. 'Therapeutae,' in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, eds. J. J. Collins and D. C. Harlow (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 1305-7.

<sup>79</sup> Westermann, *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity*, 90-94, 110.

various municipal services, which included maintaining the imperial properties and working inside the imperial palace. For example, as Hoehner notes, the imperial palace slaves worked as “physicians, chamberlains, overseers of furniture and palace lighting, selectors of jewelry for specific costumes, valets, tailors and clothing menders, butlers in charge of wine for the imperial table, official tasters, and stewards in charge of supplies.”<sup>80</sup> Slaves performed much of the work, and it would have been challenging for the Greco-Roman world to imagine a society without slaves. Therefore, any attempt to denounce slavery in the Greco-Roman world would have been hopeless, and all one could do was attempt to change the way Christians treated their slaves.<sup>81</sup>

Although slavery was ingrained in the Greco-Roman culture, Paul commanded those filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit to treat their slaves as fellow Christian brothers and sisters. Slaves did not have many rights in the Greco-Roman world. However, Paul challenged the cultural norms by giving the slaves rights and protection from abuse (Eph. 6:9). Paul also told the slaves that they would receive an eternal reward for “whatever good thing each one does” (Eph. 6:7). Paul’s command to the *paterfamilias* in Ephesians 6:9 to “do the same things to them, and give up threatening” his slaves radically altered the practice of slavery in the first-century Christian household. Paul treated the slaves with dignity and respect, and he challenged his readers to act differently than those around them. The following section will clarify Paul’s counter-cultural command to slaves and masters through an exegesis of Ephesians 6:5-9.

#### Exegesis of Ephesians 6:5 – 9

It is important to restate that Paul’s command to the slaves and masters in Ephesians 6:5-9 are given to those who are filled with the Holy Spirit, and they are to submit to “one another in

---

<sup>80</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 559.

<sup>81</sup> Wright, *Paul: A Biography*, 281.

the fear of Christ” (5:21). As mentioned earlier, verse 5:21 (submission) is, as Hoehner states, a hinge or transitional verse that carries over into the household codes, including 6:5-9.<sup>82</sup> The recipients of the household codes are to please the Lord through understanding His will, and they are to be filled with the Holy Spirit (5:15-18). As in the two previous relationships in the household code, wife/husband and children/parents, Paul addresses the subordinate partner first. As Hoehner notes, both groups are equally and “ultimately answerable to the Lord” (cf. Gal. 3:38; Heb. 4:13).<sup>83</sup>

6:5 οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου ἐν ἀπλότῃ τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ,<sup>84</sup> “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling in singleness of heart, as you would obey Christ.”<sup>85</sup> Although the phrase οἱ δοῦλοι, “slaves,” is in the masculine, it includes both male and female slaves who are accepted members of the church at Ephesus. As mentioned earlier, Paul once again breaks away from the social norms by directly addressing the believing slaves, thus laying the burden of responsibility on them to execute his commands (cf. Col. 3:22-25). Paul directly addressing the slaves was counter-cultural, whereas the Stoics primarily addressed their messages to their social peers.<sup>86</sup> However, Paul taught the gospel directly to the slaves (cf. also 1 Cor. 7:21; Col. 3:22).

---

<sup>82</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 514.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 558.

<sup>84</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Greek references are from, Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament: Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008).

<sup>85</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all English translations referenced are from, Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger et al., Vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014).

<sup>86</sup> Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, Key Themes in Ancient History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 150.

Paul describes the masters as τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις, “to the masters according to the flesh,” which contrasts with their heavenly Master in 6:9. As Andrew Lincoln notes, it “ties the passage together.”<sup>87</sup> First, Paul addressed the earthly Christian slaves (v. 5), who are commanded to see themselves as metaphorical slaves of Christ (v. 6).<sup>88</sup> Then the slaves will display their obedience to their heavenly Master (vv. 7, 8) through obedience to their earthly master (v. 5). However, this portion of the verse has raised some questions for some readers. The phrase, κατὰ σάρκα, “according to the flesh,” refers to the kind of master they are, that is, composed of flesh, their human (earthly) masters. There is only one true Master for the enslaved Christians; that is their Master in heaven. Next, Paul describes the objective of the slaves’ obedience and uses five phrases to describe how they are to obey their master’s orders.

The first objective Paul describes is that the slaves should obey μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου, “with fear and trembling.” This phrase is only used twice in Paul’s writing, here and when Paul addresses the Philippian believers in 2:12,<sup>89</sup> where Paul tells the Philippians they are to remain humble and reliant on the Lord for strength to “fulfill his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13; NIV). Therefore, the slaves are to remain humble in their earthly position and rely on the Lord for strength. The submitting in fear, accomplished only through the power of the Holy Spirit (5:18), goes back to 5:21, where all believers are to submit to one another in fear of Christ. Harold

---

<sup>87</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 420.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>89</sup> For more on this, see Thielman, *Ephesians*, Thielman notes that “the phrase ‘with fear and trembling’ can also refer to the Corinthian believers’ willingness to obey Titus when he came to them with corrective advice from Paul: they welcomed Titus ‘with fear and trembling’ (2 Cor. 7:15). In a slight variation of the phrase, Paul says that he came among the Corinthians ‘in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling’ (1 Cor. 2:3)” (405). See also, Lincoln, *Ephesians*, “three times in Paul (1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15; Phil. 2:12), and in a verbal form in Mark 5:33, and which functions here to intensify the attitude of respect for the authority of masters” (420).

Hoehner adds that this fear is “best viewed as reverential fear or respect.”<sup>90</sup> Paul later tells the believing masters not to threaten their slaves with violence (6:9).

The second way slaves should obey in ἀπλότητι (haplotēti) of heart. As Thielman states, this term “ἀπλότης (haplotēs) means ‘integrity,’ and coupled with ‘heart,’ it refers to inner sincerity.”<sup>91</sup> Paul uses this term, ἀπλότητι, in other New Testament passages, (see, Col. 3:22; 2 Cor. 1:12; 8:2; 9:11, 13; 11:3; Rom. 12:8), referring to someone generously serving others with a sincere attitude. As Hoehner writes, “the word καρδία, ‘heart,’ is the center of a person, the seat of feelings and emotions, of will or volition, or as here, of religious and moral conduct.”<sup>92</sup> According to Thielman, this virtue of heart being the center of a person was “highly valued in Hellenistic Judaism.”<sup>93</sup> Therefore, Paul expects the slaves to obey their masters with integrity and sincerity in both their words and actions.<sup>94</sup>

The third way the slaves are to obey their earthly masters is to obey them, ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ, “as to Christ,” who is their ultimate Master (6:6). This term does not mean believing slaves are subjected to their masters as representatives of Christ; almost the opposite, as Thielman explains, “the master is factored out of the equation and replaced with the Lord.”<sup>95</sup> This phrase follows the same command Paul gave to the wives in 5:22, where the wives are to submit to their husbands ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ “as to the Lord,” in 6:6 ὡς δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ, “as slaves of Christ,” in 6:7 ὡς τῷ

---

<sup>90</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 561.

<sup>91</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 406.

<sup>92</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 562.

<sup>93</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 406.

<sup>94</sup> BDAG, 104.

<sup>95</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 406.

κυρίῳ, “as to the Lord,” and in 6:8 παρὰ κυρίου, “by the lord.”<sup>96</sup> As Lincoln notes, whatever work the slaves do, their “work is related to the lordship of Christ.”<sup>97</sup> Again, Paul provides the Christological motivation and application for the slaves.

6:6. μὴ κατ’ ὀφθαλμοδουλίαν ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι, “not to catch their eye as those who please men.” Positively and negatively, Paul describes the fourth way in which slaves obey their masters. As Hoehner states, in the negative, Paul uses this term, κατ’ ὀφθαλμοδουλίαν, “eye-service or eye-slavery,”<sup>98</sup> which also appears in Colossian 3:22 meaning, serving to impress others.<sup>99</sup> Paul once again describes the importance of personal integrity (cf. 6:5). The slaves’ motivation to do the right things should not be because they want to catch their master’s eye or only do what their master can see. Their motivation is “to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (5:10). Paul tells the slaves that they are not primarily slaves of men, but slaves of Christ.

ἀλλ’ ὡς δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ ποιοῦντες τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκ ψυχῆς, “but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God wholeheartedly.” The positive explanation Paul gives his readers is that they are to obey their earthly masters “as slaves of Christ.” According to Hoehner, Paul tells the slaves they are to “obey their masters not ‘according to’ the standard of mere outward performance,”<sup>100</sup> but in “doing the will of God wholeheartedly.” Paul again emphasizes the importance of inner motivation from the heart (6:5) and contrasts it with the external motivations of eye-service.<sup>101</sup> The slaves’ focus and motivation in their work are on doing the will of God.

---

<sup>96</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 421.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>98</sup> BDAG, 744.

<sup>99</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 562.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 563.

<sup>101</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 422.

6:7. μετ' εὐνοίας δουλεύοντες, ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις, “serving with enthusiasm, as you would the Lord and not men.” Paul transitions to the fifth way and underlines why slaves should obey their masters. As a slave of Christ, slaves serve their master with goodwill. As Hoehner notes, “this service with goodwill is to be done ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις, ‘as to the Lord and not to people,’” with their ultimate obligation is to please the Lord (cf. Gal. 1:10; Col. 1:10) and not their “faulty earthy master.”<sup>102</sup> As Lincoln states, the slaves’ service to their masters is “performed enthusiastically” instead of unwillingly or out of necessity.<sup>103</sup>

6:8. εἰδότες ὅτι ἕκαστος ὃ ἐάν ποιήσῃ ἀγαθόν, τοῦτο κομίσεται παρὰ κυρίου, εἴτε δοῦλος εἴτε ἐλεύθερος, “knowing that whatever good each person does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.” Unlike some of the things that motivate most modern people to perform better at work, such as better shoes, clothes, praise, or money, Paul offers the slaves an eschatological reward, that the Lord will reward each one of them for the good they do. Therefore, there is no need to try and impress their master with their good works; their Master in heaven sees all. This positive concept of reward or final judgment was common in Judaism and is seen throughout the New Testament,<sup>104</sup> and it applied equally to both slave and free (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).

Paul is directing this message to all slaves and that no slaves are excluded. As Hoehner states, “the conjunction ὅτι after verbs of mental perception serves to indicate the content. This is followed by the distributive pronoun ἕκαστος, which refers to every individual.”<sup>105</sup> In following

---

<sup>102</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 564.

<sup>103</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 422.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.

<sup>105</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 565.

Paul’s message, the slaves will please their earthy master by doing good work; more importantly, their good works will be noticed and measured by the divine moral standards of God. In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul writes of the eschatological rewards that both slave and free will receive at their appearance “before the judgment seat of Christ.”<sup>106</sup>

The phrase εἴτε δοῦλος εἴτε ἐλεύθερος, “whether slave or free,” is similar to other Pauline passages that, as Thielman notes, “nullify social and ethnic divisions for those who have been baptized and who have thus ‘put on’ Christ or the ‘new human being’ (Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 1:28; 12:13; Col. 3:10-11; cf. Philem. 16).”<sup>107</sup> God will treat both slave and free (masters) the same (cf. Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11); He sees no difference between them. Although this message is directed at the slaves, Paul warns the masters that their social status makes no difference to God, and they too will be judged in His eyes for their actions.<sup>108</sup>

6:9. καὶ οἱ κύριοι, τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς, ἀνιέντες τὴν ἀπειλήν, εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ αὐτῶν καὶ ὑμῶν ὁ κύριός ἐστιν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, καὶ προσωπολημψία οὐκ ἔστιν παρ’ αὐτοῦ, “And masters, do the same to them, abandoning the use of threats, knowing that both their and your Master is in heaven, and there is no partiality with him.”

Paul transitions his exhortation directly toward the master, giving them brief,<sup>109</sup> and specific responsibilities toward the treatment of their slaves. As Norman Geisler notes, the phrase τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς, “do the same things to them,” follows Paul’s exhort in Colossians 4:1, where he tells the masters they are to provide (“give deliberate care”) for their

---

<sup>106</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, 408.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 408.

<sup>108</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 422.

<sup>109</sup> Thielman, *Ephesians*, “Paul can be brief because he intends for masters to act in the same way he has just instructed the slaves to behave—there is no need to repeat himself” (408).

slaves with what is right and fair (“equitable”).<sup>110</sup> Paul instructs the master to ἀνιέντες τὴν ἀπειλήν, “forbearing the threat.” According to Hoehner, the noun ἀπειλή most commonly used as “threats,” only appears in the New Testament three times (Acts 4:29; 9:1; Eph. 6:9).<sup>111</sup> Paul remained counter-cultural by addressing the topic of the slave/master relationship, which was not a concern for many in the Greco-Roman world. Paul commanded protection and rights for the slaves by commanding the masters to stop threatening their slaves and held the master accountable for the treatment of their slaves. Paul has removed the social barriers between the slave/master relationship and was concerned about the treatment of the slaves. However, his primary concern was the Christian slaves’ and Christian masters’ eternal position with God.

Paul ties the conclusion of the *Haustafel* back to 5:21, where the mutual submission between slave and master is now made possible in “fear of Christ” (5:21). Paul accomplishes this by reminding the masters that “both their and your Master is in heaven,” and that “there is no partiality with him,” connecting both groups, slave and free (6:8), together in a mutual relationship.<sup>112</sup> As Lincoln states, this connection makes the “masters conscious of their present accountability, which they share equally with their slaves, to their heavenly Lord.”<sup>113</sup> Paul states that there is no difference between slave and master when they both approach the judgment seat of the Lord (cf. Gal. 2:6; Col. 3:25). Unlike the Greco-Roman social structure, Paul explains that one’s social position on earth is irrelevant to God. God will judge the slaves and master the same and hold them accountable for their earthly actions, not their social standings.

---

<sup>110</sup> Norman L. Geisler, “Colossians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 684.

<sup>111</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 567.

<sup>112</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 423.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.

## Conclusion

It is important to restate that throughout the *Haustafel*, specifically in 6:5-9, Paul always directs his readers to the Christological theme of mutual submission in fear of Christ (5:21). Paul expects the recipients of his letter to be filled with the Spirit and voluntarily submit to one another, in other words, to act differently. Paul knew that through the work of the Holy Spirit, the behavior and heart of the *paterfamilias* would be transformed, and soon after, the rest of his family would follow.

Slavery in the Bible is challenging for many to understand; however, as one can see, Paul was not conforming to societal norms regarding slavery. On the contrary, when Paul's statement concerning slaves and masters in Ephesians 6:5-9 is understood within its context, one can see that throughout the *Haustafel*, Paul broke away from the social norms and sought to radically alter the Greco-Roman world culture. Paul accomplished this by directly addressing wives, children, slaves and giving counter-cultural commands to the *paterfamilias*, commanding him to treat his slaves as he wanted to be treated. Paul treated all subordinate members in the *Haustafel* as equals and full members of the Christian community and the church at Ephesus.

The rights and treatment of slaves in the first century were complicated, and anyone could have been enslaved in Paul's time, regardless of their race. Paul knew what God had done in the past in freeing the Israelites from bondage and that God would provide freedom for all His children (Rom. 8:18-21). The next chapter will explore several books John Loftus, a Pauline critic, and atheist, has written about slavery in the New Testament to understand better how Loftus and his co-authors concluded that Paul "authorized" the practice of slavery. It will also examine other Pauline letters about slaves and masters. In these letters, one will see the

continuity of Paul's treatment and commands for the slaves and masters and that he gave priority to the Christian slaves' and masters' eternal position with God.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Did Paul “Authorize” Slavery

The previous chapter covered Paul’s writing concerning slavery in his letter to the Ephesians, which Paul was writing to Christian slaves and Christian masters who were filled with the Holy Spirit and expected to submit to one another voluntarily. Considering the cultural and class divisions between slaves and masters in the Greco-Roman world, Paul was challenged throughout his letters to include slaves and masters in the Christian community and the church. Therefore, to understand how Paul included these two groups and his stance on slavery, this chapter will examine his other letters, focusing on the specific verses where he writes about slaves and masters.

Paul addresses both Christian masters and their Christian slaves in his letter to the Ephesians. However, in most of the letters that follow, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, and Titus, he singles out the attitude and character of the Christian slaves. In the final letter of this examination, Paul writes to Philemon, a Christian master whose newly converted Christian slave has run away. Throughout these letters, Paul focuses on the welfare and treatment of slaves, denounces slave trading as sinful (1 Tim. 1:10; cf. Exod. 21:16; Deut. 24:7), and is primarily concerned with the slaves’ eternal position and relationship with God. Paul expects the Christian slaves to set the standard of what it looks like to be Christians, regardless of the earthly position in which they find themselves. This chapter will first examine the Pauline critics’ understanding of slavery passages in the New Testament while concentrating on what they say about Paul’s writing concerning slavery. This examination of the Pauline critics may provide insight into how they concluded that Paul’s writings were pro-slavery and what evidence assisted them in reaching this conclusion.

## What Pauline Critics Say About Slavery in the New Testament

This section will examine the work of John Loftus, a former preacher with an M.A. in theology who is a Pauline critic and a leading proponent of atheism. Since leaving Christianity, Loftus has written and edited several books challenging Christians to test their faith by looking at the Bible from an outsider's (nonbeliever) perspective.<sup>114</sup> The focus will be three books that Loftus has edited: *The Christian Delusion*, *Christianity is Not Great*, and *God and Horrendous Suffering*. In these books, Loftus and his co-authors attempt to display that Christianity is flawed and challenges Christians to defend the Bible with such questions as, if God is omniscient, why did He fail to communicate His will regarding slavery to His believers?<sup>115</sup> The authors of these books make the overarching claim that Paul "authorized" the practice of slavery, and as an apostle, he did not precisely communicate God's will. It is essential to define the word "authorized" before proceeding. Merriam-Webster defines authorized as (1) "endowed with authority; (2) sanctioned by authority: having or done with legal or official approval."<sup>116</sup> This examination centers on what these Pauline critics have to say about Paul's writing concerning slavery.

In *The Christian Delusion*, Loftus concedes there are "some good moral teachings" in the Bible. Loftus finds, however, "moral problems" in "almost every chapter," which go "against every decent moral standard civilized people accept in today's world, despite several Christian

---

<sup>114</sup> John W. Loftus, *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010), 22.

<sup>115</sup> John W. Loftus, "What We've Got Here Is a Failure to Communicate," in *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010), 181.

<sup>116</sup> "Merriam-Webster Definition of AUTHORIZED," accessed March 16, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authorized>.

rationalizations for them.”<sup>117</sup> Loftus acknowledges that some people in the past have misinterpreted the Bible but faults God for not communicating His will. Moreover, God knew that these biblical texts concerning slavery would be misused and cause war and suffering.<sup>118</sup> Loftus gives his readers an overview of slavery in the Old Testament, then transitions into slavery in the New Testament, stating, “We find disturbing passages that slaves are supposed to obey their masters, which helped sustain the status quo (Ephesians 6:5-8, Titus 2:9-10, 1 Peter 2:18-20).”<sup>119</sup> According to Loftus, these biblical texts concerning slavery, when taken “at face value,” are not explicit, and the pro-slavery proponents in the United States had a better case in defending slavery with these passages than the abolitionists.<sup>120</sup>

Loftus believes that if God commanded, “Thou shalt not buy, beat, or own slaves as property and left out the other texts supportive of slavery,” this may have avoided all the suffering and bloodshed in the American Civil War.<sup>121</sup> Loftus states that New Testament writings concerning slavery did not positively affect the practice in the first century. Loftus responds to Paul Copan’s comment in his book, *Is God a Moral Monster?*. Copan states concerning New Testament slavery that having a “Christlike living could have a gradual leavening effect on society so that oppressive institutions like slavery could finally fall away. This is, in fact, what took place throughout Europe, as we’ll see in the final chapter.”<sup>122</sup> Loftus remarks, “Not so.

---

<sup>117</sup> Loftus, “What We’ve Got Here Is a Failure to Communicate,” 181.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 181-82.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 181, 195.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 195, 200.

<sup>122</sup> Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 153.

Keep in mind that the Apostle Paul authorized slavery.”<sup>123</sup> Loftus concludes his chapter stating that Christians today claim that the churches in the past incorrectly interpreted these biblical passages concerning slavery, but Loftus states that “they were wrong to believe the Bible in the first place,” and that his “contention is that there is not a single statement in the Bible that reveals a divine mind behind the human authors.”<sup>124</sup> According to Loftus, the Bible is not divinely inspired, and God did not precisely communicate His will regarding slavery in the Bible. This confusion about God’s will caused these biblical texts concerning slavery to be misinterpreted by Christians during the antebellum era.

Next is Hector Avalos’s chapter “Yahweh Is a Moral Monster,” in *The Christian Delusion*. Avalos critiques Paul Copan’s understanding of the Code of Hammurabi, and slavery passages in several Old Testament books,<sup>125</sup> including Exodus and Amos. Avalos states that “if we proceed to the New Testament (NT), slavery may have gotten even worse, not better, compared to Amos.”<sup>126</sup> The abolition of slavery in the United States is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is worth mentioning, according to Avalos, “after the secularization of the West, and after the erosion of biblical authority, that we moved away from slavery and toward greater civil rights for women. If we followed Ephesians 6:5 or 1 Peter 2:18, we might still have slavery.”<sup>127</sup> According to Avalos, not only did Paul not rebuke the act of slavery to Philemon, he

---

<sup>123</sup> John W. Loftus, “The Slave Is the Owner’s Property,” in *Christianity Is Not Great: How Faith Fails*, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2014), 174.

<sup>124</sup> Loftus, “What We’ve Got Here Is a Failure to Communicate,” 201.

<sup>125</sup> Hector Avalos responds to Paul Copan’s article, “Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?: The New Atheists and Old Testament Ethics,” *Philosophia Christi* 10, no. 1 (2008): 7–37.

<sup>126</sup> Hector Avalos, “Yahweh Is a Moral Monster,” in *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010), 218.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

acknowledged that it was Philemon's "prerogative to retain Onesimus" as his slave.<sup>128</sup> Avalos asks, which act is more sinful, being a slave owner or a drunkard? The drunkard is not allowed into heaven; however, there is no mention of slavery on the list of those excluded from heaven (1 Cor. 6:9-10).<sup>129</sup>

Although Hector Avalos's main focus in this chapter is responding to Paul Copan's article, which focused on slavery in the Old Testament, Avalos looks at slavery in the New Testament to see if there have been any advancements on how slavery changed or if their rights have improved since the laws in the Old Testament. For example, the Old Testament laws determined the length of time of enslavement (Exod. 21:2-4; Deut. 15:12), and runaway slaves were given refuge in Israel (Deut. 23:15-16). However, in the New Testament, Paul does not provide refuge for a runaway slave; instead, he returns the runaway slave back to his master without reprimanding him for enslaving a person (Philem. 1:10-16). Therefore, Avalos concludes that slavery laws in the New Testament were not an improvement; it was a regression from the Old Testament.<sup>130</sup>

In *Christianity is Not Great and God and Horrendous Suffering*, Loftus and his co-authors follow the same line of attack against slavery passages in the Bible, which according to Loftus, authorized slavery. Loftus continues to look at pro-slavery Christians during the antebellum era who interpreted these passages to justify the horrendous act of slavery. Moreover, the Christian God caused these horrendous acts, and they were abused throughout most of church history; therefore, Christianity should be rejected.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> Avalos, "Yahweh Is a Moral Monster," 218.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>131</sup> Loftus, "The Slave Is the Owner's Property," 161.

According to Loftus, slavery in the New Testament was worse when compared to the Old Testament to the point where Paul approved slavery. He states, “Keep in mind that the Apostle Paul authorized slavery (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22-25; 1 Tim. 6:1-6; Titus 2:9-10; Philemon; 1 Pet. 2:18-19) even to the point of saying a person was ‘called’ to be a slave (1 Cor. 7:20-22).”<sup>132</sup> According to Michael Paulkovich, the Old Testament “legislates the taking of slaves and specifies their punishment (Exod. 21:2-7, Lev. 25:44-5, Num. 31:17-18), and the New Testament supports the practice (Eph. 6:5, 1 Tim. 6:1, 1 Pet. 2:18).”<sup>133</sup> Loftus quotes from Hector Avalos’s *Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship*, where Avalos states that slavery in the Old Testament had set time limits; however, slavery in the New Testament “can be indefinite,” and slaves were commanded to be submissive to their “cruel masters.”<sup>134</sup> Richard Carrier claims that it is not surprising to find slavery passages “uniformly supported” in Paul’s letter to Philemon and throughout the New Testament.<sup>135</sup> Carrier concludes that seeing Jesus, Moses, or Paul never condemned the practice of slavery or asked that those enslaved be set free, they must support its practice.<sup>136</sup>

Although the authors in the above section are atheists and Pauline critics, they use their understanding of biblical passages in an attempt to refute the Christian claim that God is omniscient; if He were, He would have known these biblical passages concerning slavery would have been used to support its practice. The above excerpts from John Loftus’s books give

---

<sup>132</sup> Loftus, “The Slave Is the Owner’s Property,” 174.

<sup>133</sup> Michael Paulkovich, “The Ascent and Reign of the Christian Behemoth,” in *God and Horrendous Suffering*, ed. John W. Loftus (Denver, CO: GCR, 2021), 506.

<sup>134</sup> Loftus, “The Slave Is the Owner’s Property,” 174.

<sup>135</sup> Richard Carrier, “Christianity and the Rise of American Democracy,” in *Christianity Is Not Great: How Faith Fails*, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2014), 189.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

Christians a reasonable understanding of some of the Pauline critics' concerns regarding slavery in the New Testament. The essence of their argument concerning slavery passages is that when read according to them, (1) God did a poor job communicating His will, and (2) the apostle Paul authorizes the practice; therefore, Christianity should be rejected.

It is essential to understand the Pauline critic's point of view and how they arrived at their conclusion before presenting a biblical response. Therefore, as with the previous chapter, the following section will go beyond a surface-level reading of Paul's other letters regarding slavery to understand his approach to slavery, whether he "authorized" its practice, and precisely communicated God's will to his readers.

### What Paul Wrote About Slavery

In the first century, few people addressed the relationships between slaves and masters. Nevertheless, as the gospel was taught throughout the Greco-Roman world, Paul was challenged to include both slaves and masters in the Christian community. It was essential to discuss what the relationship between slave and master should look like in this new community, especially given the equalizing nature of the love of Jesus. As a divinely appointed apostle (Gal. 1:1), Paul precisely communicated God's will to his audience, stating that one's race, culture, class, or gender did not matter and that all believers are one in Christ Jesus (Eph. 4:1-6; Gal. 3:26-28; Col. 3:11). Paul's radical counter-cultural commands treated slaves as equals and fellow members of the Christian community. The best way to understand Paul's stance on slavery is to read Paul's writings regarding slaves, beginning with his first letter to the Corinthians.

## First Corinthians

Although Paul is writing about marriage and remaining single in 1 Corinthians 7, he is commanding all the churches in Corinth that they are to “remain as you are” (1 Cor. 7:17, 20, 24), and as Mark Taylor states, this is a “theological guidepost for the entire chapter.”<sup>137</sup> According to Paul, there is no need for one to rush out and change their status to fit the social norms. Paul wants to clarify that he is not concerned or distracted with these sorts of temporal matters or positions that preoccupy most citizens of this world. Instead, his concerns revolve around the Lord’s return (Rom. 13:11), as evident in his approach to his own life, where he waits not for the seen (temporal) but the unseen (eternal) (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18).<sup>138</sup>

Jesus speaks of these life distractions in His Sermon on the Mount. As David Lowery writes, Jesus warns His “followers against letting concern for the material aspects of this life distract them from devotion to God” (Matt. 6:25-34).<sup>139</sup> For Paul, the principle of remaining in God’s assigned calling is what it means to be a Christian, whether slave or free.<sup>140</sup> Paul argues that God is not concerned with one’s social position in life; the thing that matters to God is keeping His commands and following His will (1 Cor. 7:19). A Christian is a slave of God and not a slave of man (1 Cor. 7:23). In the opposite sense, Paul later uses himself as an example when he talks of sacrificing himself to teach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19). Leon Morris captures the heart of Paul’s thought, “All of life is God’s. We should serve God where we are until he calls us

---

<sup>137</sup> Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, Vol. 28, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 183.

<sup>138</sup> David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 519.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 520.

<sup>140</sup> Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 178.

elsewhere.”<sup>141</sup> Paul explains that when “God has called each” (1 Cor. 7:17), he is not referring to one’s social position but to the conversion itself. Once someone becomes a Christian, there is no need to immediately change their social status (1 Cor. 7:8); they must make the most of their current condition.<sup>142</sup> They must serve and live confidently in whatever situation the Lord has placed them. However, if a slave is given the opportunity for freedom, they are to take it (1 Cor. 7:21).

Throughout Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he instructs the Christians to have an eschatological outlook and focus less on their present state. Paul drives home this point by telling his readers that time is short (1 Cor. 7:29) and “this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31; NIV). Therefore, Paul wants the Christians of Corinth to view earthly things as less important than spiritual or eternal matters and for Christians not to allow their earthly positions to overshadow their eternal realities.<sup>143</sup> He is preparing them for the Lord’s return; therefore, “do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Rom. 13:11-14; NIV).

In chapter seven, Paul writes to the Church at Corinth concerning the state related to the present crisis, the “troubles in this life” (1 Cor. 7:28), and a shortened time (1 Cor. 7:29). Therefore, their commitment must be to eternal matters and devotion to Christ rather than temporal matters. Thus, Paul establishes that all believers, regardless of their race, culture, social position, or economic standing (Jew or Greek, slave or free), become one body when they are identified and baptized in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). Paul explains that it does not matter to God what position in society in which these believers find themselves (temporal); they are all children of

---

<sup>141</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 114.

<sup>142</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 145.

<sup>143</sup> Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 188-89.

God (eternal). Had Paul approved slavery as the Pauline critics claimed, he would have affirmed the social and cultural distinction between slaves and masters, as described above. However, for Paul, there was no difference between slave and free; he treated them the same and commanded that the slaves be treated as full members of the Christian community. Paul was seeking to change the hearts and behaviors of Christians to have a Christ-like character.

## **Galatians**

Paul's letter to the Galatians addresses the false gospel message being taught (Gal. 1:6) and confronts the separation between Judaism and Christianity. He is also defending his apostolic authority appointed to him by God the Father (Gal. 1:1). Paul once again shocks his readers by making the radical statement of "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female" among them because they "are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Paul's statement that there is no difference between these cultures, classes, or genders does not seem radical for most modern readers. However, as F. F. Bruce describes, Paul, like most male Jews in the first century, prayed his morning prayer, a prayer that usually meant giving thanks to "God that he was not made a Gentile, a slave or a woman."<sup>144</sup> The thought of anyone today praying this type of prayer sounds problematic, but it was the norm for Jewish men during Paul's time. Therefore, Paul is taking a radical step against the social norms of first-century Jewish culture by saying, all are one in Christ.

Paul states that regardless of their race, culture, gender, or social standing, all who come to Christ come to Him through faith and repentance; however, their human standings in society will remain the same. According to Roman law, a slave is still a slave, but his/her earthly

---

<sup>144</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 187.

standing in God's eyes has been erased; they are united together in Christ (Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:15-16).<sup>145</sup> However, Paul tells them that spiritually they are the same. As Donald Campbell states, a believing slave is not more spiritually superior than a believing free person, nor do they rank higher.<sup>146</sup> They are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

The slaves belong to a new community, a community in Christ, "the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17). As mentioned above, Paul breaks away from the cultural custom by directly addressing slaves (cf. Eph. 6:5-9). He also radically alters the Jewish culture's race and social structure by creating a new Christian community where all that come to Christ are equal through faith and repentance. Their culture or social standing no longer determines their relationship with God; all are heirs through the gracious act of God (Gal. 4:7). Paul cared and was concerned about the slave's treatment and position, as will be seen in 1 Timothy 6:1. However, he gave priority to their spiritual and eternal position with God. Paul's primary mission was not to reform the practice of slavery in the Greco-Roman world. Instead, his primary concern was that Jews and Greeks, and slaves and freed persons would now be a "new creation" in Christ (Gal. 6:15).<sup>147</sup> He wanted the Christians to live differently than before because these distinctions were meaningless to Paul and God.

## Colossians

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul addresses the false teaching that arose in the city. In chapters three and four, Paul stays steadfast to his message concerning division and continues to

---

<sup>145</sup> Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, Vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 40.

<sup>146</sup> Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 600.

<sup>147</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians*, Vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 282-83.

teach that through Christ, all race, cultural, and economic standing barriers have been destroyed. The Jews, Greeks, slaves, and the free are united into this new Christian community. Paul recognized that these cultural and class divisions were accepted norms in the ancient world, as expressed in the Jewish morning prayer.

As N. T. Wright states, the Greeks considered themselves members of a privileged group and would “look down on the circumscribed nationalism of the Jew who insisted on preserving and clinging to his old culture.”<sup>148</sup> These divisions and prejudices occurred between the slaves and free as well, as Wright describes, “the distinction between slave and free, of course, ran through ancient society just as obviously as a colour bar still does in some areas today (whether or not officially sanctioned), and with just as damaging an effect on human relations and self-esteem.”<sup>149</sup> These distinctions did not intimidate Paul, and he knew Christ had removed these barriers and were irrelevant. Therefore, Paul called for the Colossians to remove these prejudices and distinctions between Greek, Jew, slave, and free, and accept each church member regardless of their earthly culture or class. As James D. G. Dunn states about Christ’s work, “If ‘Christ is everything and in everything,’ then nothing can diminish or disparage the standing of any one human in relation to another or to God.”<sup>150</sup> Although Paul did not argue for the abolition of slavery, he did, as Timothy George states, instruct the “Christian masters and Christian slaves to relate to one another in a way that is informed by their mutual faith and service to Christ (cf. Col. 3:22-4:1).”<sup>151</sup> Paul once again breaks away from the cultural norms and class distinction between

---

<sup>148</sup> N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 12, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 144.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>150</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 227.

<sup>151</sup> George, *Galatians*, 289.

slave and free and commands them to treat each other with mutual respect (cf. Eph. 6:9) and that their service is first toward their heavenly Master.

### **First Timothy**

Paul's instructions to Timothy are consistent with his other teachings concerning the slave/master relationship. However, in chapter six, he only addresses the behavior and character of the slaves. It is important to restate that slavery during Paul's time was not race-related and addressing the social relationship between slave and master was not typical, nor was it a concern for most people in the Greco-Roman world. Paul's letters reveal his desire to establish a new standard, a new community where all that have faith in Christ are equal. Therefore, Paul writes to Timothy in Ephesus, commanding him to "teach and preach these principles" (1 Tim. 6:2).

Although some masters treated their slaves well, slavery, as John Stott states, was a "gigantic cancer, which drained the political, economic and moral forces of the Roman Empire."<sup>152</sup> Paul describes the slaves as subordinate to their master and "under the yoke" of slavery (1 Tim. 6:1). Moreover, Paul understands the oppressive position slaves find themselves in when he describes the slaves are under this yoke. Paul does not mince words; he knows that when the phrase "yoke" was used in Scripture, it has been used to describe a tyrannical human experience (cf. 2 Chron. 10:4; Isa. 9:4).<sup>153</sup> Paul understood the slaves were under the heavy burden (yoke) of slavery and that most masters did not care about the slave's burden or treatment, despite the slave's request to lighten the heavy yoke placed upon them.

---

<sup>152</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 142.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

Paul calls on the slaves to honor and respect their masters and condemns the practice of slave trading (1 Tim. 1:10).<sup>154</sup> The slaves should respect their masters because, first, their masters are also created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). As Stott states, "every human being is worthy of honour, even pagan slave owners, because they have been made in the image of God. Once we perceive the intrinsic worth of human beings by creation, and therefore recognize them as worthy of honour, all our relationships are enriched and ennobled."<sup>155</sup> The second reason slaves should honor their masters is that the slaves are Christians, and they should not misbehave and disgrace Christianity with their behavior.<sup>156</sup> As Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin write, the "malevolent behavior by professing Christian slaves could only lead an owner to mock Christianity."<sup>157</sup> Once again, Paul has a more significant concern; his concern is about bringing glory to God.

## Titus

Paul asks Titus, whom he left behind at Crete, to provide leadership for the Cretan churches in his letter to Titus. Titus is facing the pastoral problem of "many rebellious men, empty talkers, and deceivers" (1:10), and, as Robert Yarbrough states, the "unholy urges that guide them, and the deleterious effects they produce."<sup>158</sup> Therefore, Paul instructs Titus to teach (speak) the "things which are fitting for sound doctrine" (2:1). The teaching or speaking of this

---

<sup>154</sup> For more about unbelieving masters, see Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, Vol. 34, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), "The contrast in v. 2 suggests that Paul was thinking in this verse particularly of those slaves who had unbelieving masters" (163).

<sup>155</sup> Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 144.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>157</sup> Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 163.

<sup>158</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, *Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 470.

sound doctrine to all classes of people, including slaves, is the focal point of Paul's letter to Titus.

After detailing this particular doctrine, Paul continues to describe the character the slaves must have as Christians for Titus. Paul tells Titus that the slaves' characters should be polite, respectable, honest, and reliable. Paul contends that they, as slaves, can be effective Christian witnesses regardless of their position. They can set a positive example of the gospel message and what it looks like to be a Christian. As Stott observes, the slaves can either "give no evidence of salvation," or they can "give good evidence of salvation by living a manifestly saved life."<sup>159</sup> The life of a Christian is always on display. As A. Duane Litfin states, a Christian's "behavior is to be in accord with or befitting sound doctrine."<sup>160</sup> If Paul did not give these instructions to Titus, the rebellious people could have destroyed the churches and the faith and souls of its members.<sup>161</sup> The "rebellious men, empty talkers, and deceivers" (1:10) could have attempted to encourage the slaves to rebel and not adhere to Paul's command to set a positive example of Christianity. As a result, a slave rebellion would have caused people to look at Christianity negatively, resulting in many slaves losing their freedom and life.

### **Philemon**

As Paul addressed in his letter to Titus, theft was a problem with some slaves (Titus 2:10), which may be why Onesimus ran away from Philemon (v. 18). In his letter to Philemon, a man who converted to Christianity directly from Paul's teaching (v. 19), Paul appeals to

---

<sup>159</sup> Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 191-92.

<sup>160</sup> A. Duane Litfin, "Titus," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 765.

<sup>161</sup> Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 476.

Philemon to accept his runaway slave back as a brother in Christ. It is crucial to revisit the fact that slaves in the Greco-Roman world did not have rights, were not socially equal to free persons, and most runaway slaves, when caught, were severely punished. Nonetheless, Paul appeals to Philemon to forgive Onesimus's theft and to accept him as a beloved brother and spiritual equal.

Paul's radical request to Philemon to take back his slave gives modern readers an insight into his steadfast stance concerning slavery. His appeal to Philemon to accept back Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a fellow Christian, follows Paul's reoccurring theme of equality: "there is neither... slave nor free... for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). As Timothy George writes, "Paul's instructions to Philemon certainly carried within them the seeds of the dissolution of the very institution of slavery."<sup>162</sup> Richard Melick describes Paul's approach to Christian relationships and how they can end the evil institution of slavery in the first century. Melick states that "Paul did not speak against the institution; his theology spoke for him. Paul did not choose activism; he trusted the power of preaching. Paul refused coercion; he let God lead even his closest friends."<sup>163</sup> Paul trusted that Philemon would accept his appeal and respond as a fellow brother in Christ and do what God expected.

In Paul's other writings, we see him describe how Jesus forgave sinners and brought them to the Father, and Jesus paid the debt for sinners. However, in this short letter, we see Paul appealing for Onesimus' forgiveness and offering to pay his debt; Paul describes this as having the "same mindset as Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5-11). The fate of Onesimus is unknown; however, we can tell from Scripture that he traveled home with Tychicus (Col. 4:7-9). As Melick states,

---

<sup>162</sup> George, *Galatians*, 289.

<sup>163</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1991), 345.

had Philemon not obeyed Paul's request to accept Onesimus back as a fellow brother in Christ, his letter would not have remained in the canon.<sup>164</sup>

The Pauline letters highlight how firmly Paul held to his teachings and how he steadfastly established a standard of how Christians ought to behave, regardless of what positions or situations they find themselves. In his letters, Paul never supports nor "authorizes" the practice of slavery; he gave priority to both slaves' and non-slaves' eternal positions with God. In his letters, Paul takes on the task of incorporating both slave and master as equals within the Christian community, which runs directly counter to the culture of the Greco-Roman world. He remains counter-cultural in his commands by directly addressing slaves, telling them that all are spiritually equal, and making the radical request to Philemon to accept back Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. Paul encourages Philemon not to do what is acceptable in the eyes of Greco-Roman practices, but what is right according to God. Paul's letters were not written to end the horrendous act of slavery; the primary mission in his letters was to speak the truth about the gospel message. Paul chose to preach and teach the truth of the gospel message over activism. He knew that speaking the truth and Christians following his command would create a new Christian community, thus improving the slave/master relationship and ending such evils as slavery.

### Conclusion

The overarching concern of the Pauline critics regarding slavery is that God did not communicate His will and that Paul appears to support and "authorize" the practice of slavery. Unfortunately, these concerns surface when someone reads these passages without contextual understanding. When Paul's letters are understood within their context, it becomes clear that he

---

<sup>164</sup> Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 337.

does not “authorize” the practice of slavery. In fact, he condemns slave traders as lawless and insubordinate (1 Tim. 1:10) and primarily focuses on the slaves’ eternal positions with God rather than their earthly roles as slaves. He commands the slaves to set an excellent example of what it looks like to be Christians so that “our doctrine will not be blasphemed” (1 Tim. 6:1). Finally, Paul calls upon all Christians to follow the government’s rule and authority (cf. Rom. 13:1-7) and to be and act humbly and compliant (Eph. 5:22-6:9; cf. Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:28).

The only evidence the Pauline critics offered in supporting their claim that Paul “authorized” slavery was through the few words taken out of context. Paul wrote over fifteen thousand words in his letters listed above; however, the Pauline critics did not offer any background information about whom Paul was writing to and why he wrote those words concerning slavery that they take out of context.

Paul understood how entrenched slavery was in the Roman society and as William Barclay states, “if Christianity had, in fact, given the slaves any encouragement to revolt or to leave their masters, nothing but tragedy could have followed. Any such revolt would have been savagely crushed; slaves who took their freedom would have been mercilessly punished; and Christianity would itself have been branded as revolutionary and subversive.”<sup>165</sup> However, Paul’s focus was not on the slaves’ current position on earth; he gave priority to their eternal position with God. Therefore, if allowed freedom, take it; if not, remain where you are. Although Paul did not rebuke the practice of slavery, his letters should receive praise for creating a Christian community in which there was no social or cultural difference between Christian slaves and Christian masters. For Paul, they are all one in Christ Jesus (Eph. 4:1-6; Gal. 3:26-28; Col. 3:11).

---

<sup>165</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 306.

As an apostle appointed by God, Paul's letters specifically command how the slaves and the leaders are to change. Paul understood that these leaders, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and the *paterfamilias*, could positively change their household, the church, and the community. The following chapter will offer an empirical study to understand better how American corporate leaders can influence a positive change in their organization. Thus, demonstrating that Paul's command to the *paterfamilias* would influence a positive change toward slavery in his household as the household leader.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Alternative Approach in Understanding Ephesians 6:5 – 9

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Paul's command to slaves and masters in Ephesians 6:5-9 was given to those filled with the Holy Spirit and willing to submit to one another "in the fear of Christ" (Eph. 5:21), expecting that they would act differently than those around them. In the *Haustafel*, he focused on transforming the behavior and character of the *paterfamilias*. In Paul's other letters, he commands the church leaders to execute the Christian doctrine and to set a positive example of the gospel message. This chapter will offer an approach to understanding what Paul did to change the practice of slavery during the first century by changing the leadership style of the *paterfamilias*.

Paul understood that the transformation of the *paterfamilias* being willing to fellowship and serve others must first occur in his household; as Francis Foulkes noted, the household is where the "love and discipline of Christ are most clearly manifest."<sup>166</sup> Some modern readers of Ephesians 6:5-9 may understand that Paul was less concerned with the slave's temporal position and gave priority to their eternal position and relationship with God. However, Pauline critics ask, what good was that for those enslaved and possibly receiving cruel treatment from their masters? In other words, what was Paul doing for them at that moment to help them in their present state? Although Paul did not have the authority to end the evil practice of slavery, he addressed how Christians ought to live out a Christian life within the current social structure.<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 158.

<sup>167</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: Eerdmans, 1993), 529.

Paul's command, when faithfully practiced by Christians, would inevitably influence the practice of slavery in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>168</sup>

Until this point, this thesis has demonstrated that Paul's commands in Ephesians 6:5-9, when understood in their context, do not endorse slavery. The following section will demonstrate that the Pauline critics stating that Paul's writings did not positively affect slavery are mistaken. This will be accomplished by demonstrating that a change in leadership style can influence cultural and ethical changes in an organization and beyond, thus, demonstrating that Paul's command to the *paterfamilias* to change his character and behavior (leadership style) could positively affect the practice of slavery in the Christian household. This positive change in the *paterfamilias*' leadership would filter through to the rest of his household and the community.

After establishing a foundational understanding of the first-century household culture from the previous chapters, this section will offer a deeper analysis of the *paterfamilias* and his authority over his household. Then, it will examine an empirical study of the CEO's influence on organizational culture and Satya Nadella's and Warren Buffett's missions as incoming CEOs. The final section in this chapter will compare the information revealed about how CEO's leadership style affects organizational culture with how a change in the leadership style of the *paterfamilias* would affect his household. These comparisons will demonstrate that a change in the leadership style of the *paterfamilias* would have positively affected the ethics and culture in his household and the community in the Greco-Roman world concerning slavery. Paul's command was changing the practice of slavery in the Greco-Roman world from the inside out. In order to understand this inside-out approach, we will look at tactics used in corporate America

---

<sup>168</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 529.

today to change organizational culture. However, first, it is essential to understand how much legal authority the *paterfamilias* had as the leader in his first-century household.

#### *Authority of the Paterfamilias*

As mentioned above, the *paterfamilias* was the head of the Roman household. He had a *patria potestas* (paternal power) authority over all members of his household, unlike any husband or father in the United States today.<sup>169</sup> Despite how people may understand the first-century definition of *paterfamilias* used today, most people think of it as describing the family's patriarch without understanding how much legal authority they had in the first century.

According to Richard Saller, the *paterfamilias* in the Greco-Roman world was known as the "severe patriarch whose power defined the Roman family."<sup>170</sup> Modern readers believe many responsibilities and authorities are transcultural from the first century. For example, parents are to correct, discipline, and protect their children. However, the *paterfamilias*' legal authority over members of his household in the first century far transcends what most modern readers would consider permissible.

The right for a parent's control over a child's life is a contested issue in the United States. However, most modern readers in the United States would agree that the *paterfamilias*' authority over his children goes beyond this debate. The *paterfamilias* in the first century had what John Stott describes as "sovereign authority" over all members in his household, and he could kill an unwanted infant.<sup>171</sup> As Steven Thompson comments, the *paterfamilias* had "*potestas* over the

---

<sup>169</sup> Chris Frilingos, "'For My Child, Onesimus': Paul and Domestic Power in Philemon," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000): 96.

<sup>170</sup> Richard P. Saller, "Pater Familias, Mater Familias, and the Gendered Semantics of the Roman Household," *Classical Philology* 94, no. 2 (1999): 182.

<sup>171</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 245.

persons of household members, known as *ius vitae necisque*. The term is loosely translated ‘right of life [and] death.’”<sup>172</sup> The right of life and death (*ius vitae necisque*) was used in the Roman Empire, as Geoffrey Nathan notes, to control family size and “dispose of unwanted infants,” this legal right was commonly employed only at the time of the child’s birth.<sup>173</sup> However, according to Barry Nicholas and Susan Treggiari, some legendary accounts from the “historic period show *paterfamilias* executing, banishing, or disowning adult children.”<sup>174</sup> The *paterfamilias* also had specific rights to kill his daughter if caught in an adulterous act.<sup>175</sup> Although the killing and banishing of adult-age children are legendary accounts, it gives the modern reader an understanding of the *paterfamilias*’ authority over his children, which extended into adulthood.

When the children were married, their spouse, children, and according to *peculium*, all their property was under the *paterfamilias*’ control.<sup>176</sup> The children could be removed from the *paterfamilias*’ control only when he died or left that decision in his will.<sup>177</sup> The *paterfamilias* was the approving authority of the marriages of his children, and according to Nicholas and Treggiari, he “may bring about a divorce” for any of his children.<sup>178</sup> As Stott describes, the

---

<sup>172</sup> Steven Thompson, “Was Ancient Rome a Dead Wives Society? What Did the Roman Paterfamilias Get Away With?,” *Journal of Family History* 31, no. 1 (2006): 4.

<sup>173</sup> Geoffrey Nathan, “Infanticide and the Exposure of Children,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2018), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662778.001.0001/acref-9780198662778-e-2390>.

<sup>174</sup> Barry Nicholas and Susan M. Treggiari, “Patria Potestas,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford University Press, 2012), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199545568.001.0001/acref-9780199545568-e-4779>.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> For more information on *peculium*, see Nicholas and Treggiari, “Patria Potestas,” “Sons and daughters in power (*fili/filiaefamilias*) owned no property, though they might be allowed to administer property held by permission of the *paterfamilias*: this was called *peculium*.”

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

*paterfamilias* had sovereign authority, and the Roman women did not have any equivalent authority. William Barclay writes, “A Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could take the law into his own hands, for the law was in his own hands, and punish as he liked, he could even inflict the death penalty on his child.”<sup>179</sup> As a highly educated Hellenistic Jew and a Roman citizen, Paul knew the legal rights of the *paterfamilias*; however, he was not intimidated.

Paul’s readers understood the household language he used in his letters. For example, the family language he used to express affection (1 Thess. 2:11-12) and his description of the household’s hierarchical structure (Gal. 4:1-7; 1 Cor. 4:14-21; Eph. 5:22-6:9).<sup>180</sup> Nevertheless, Paul still commanded the *paterfamilias*, the man who had the legal right to kill his children, to treat his slaves as he wanted to be treated, and love his wife as Christ loved the Church. Paul knew his command to the *paterfamilias* was counter-cultural. However, he also knew the power of the Holy Spirit and what those filled with the Spirit can accomplish. One can see how radical a change toward slavery would occur when a *paterfamilias*, who was filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit started to treat his wife, children, and slaves better. The community would notice this radical change of the Roman household leader taking place and that soon his family would have the exact attributes.

### How Leaders Transform the Culture

A change in leadership is often needed in corporate America to have a positive cultural change. Some Pauline critics have concerns with Paul’s commands in Ephesians 5:22-6:9, where

---

<sup>179</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., The Daily Study Bible (The Saint Andrew Press, 1958), 208.

<sup>180</sup> Frilingos, “‘For My Child, Onesimus’: Paul and Domestic Power in Philemon,” 97.

the wife and slave were to submit to their husband and master. As mentioned above, these commands were the norm for the first-century reader. However, the command for the husband to submit anything to anyone in his household was radically counter-cultural. Paul's approach was to transform the leadership in the household. This tactic is often used in corporate leadership roles today. For example, as seen with professional sports teams, the team does poorly one season, and there is an immediate call to change out the head coach. Corporate America uses this same approach in improving the culture and performance within an organization. When the culture needs improvement, one area first addressed is the CEO's leadership.<sup>181</sup>

Today's leaders in corporate America do not have the same legal authority as the *paterfamilias* did in the first-century Greco-Roman world; however, they do have a significant influence on the organizations they run. Scholars have long understood that the culture and performance of an organization are an accurate reflection of the values and actions of the CEO's leadership. As one will see from the O'Reilly et al. study below, the CEO's leadership does significantly affect the organization's culture.

The objective of the O'Reilly et al. study was to provide empirical evidence that links "CEO personality to culture and organizational culture to objective measures of firm performance."<sup>182</sup> The O'Reilly et al. study was chosen for this section for the following reasons: (1) the large sampling size of 56 publicly traded, high-technology firms, which consisted of 880 respondents; (2) the study covered three years; the initial culture assessments were collected in 2009 with a follow-up survey in 2011; (3) the firms were based in the United States; (4) a

---

<sup>181</sup> John B. McGuire, Gary Rhodes, and Charles J. Palus, "Inside Out: Transforming Your Leadership Culture," *Leadership in Action* 27, no. 6 (2008): 3–7, "To effect change, leaders must first invest in changing the leadership culture. In turn, leadership can and will change the organizational culture" (6).

<sup>182</sup> Charles A. O'Reilly et al., "The Promise and Problems of Organizational Culture: CEO Personality, Culture, and Firm Performance," *Group & Organization Management* 39, no. 6 (December 2014): 595, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601114550713>.

relatively recent publication date (Sept. 2014); and (5) it is peer-reviewed.<sup>183</sup> The O'Reilly et al. study met four of the five criteria for this section, the most important being that the CEO assessment was conducted on CEOs in the United States. The ideal study for this section would have been within the last five years (2017). Nevertheless, O'Reilly et al. offered excellent data demonstrating that the CEO's personality affects the organizational culture. Therefore, before providing the outcome of the study conducted by O'Reilly et al., it is essential to define the authors' terms to assess the organization's culture and the CEO's personality.

O'Reilly et al. define culture as “those things that are valued and rewarded within your company—that is, the pattern of beliefs and expectations shared by members, and their resulting behaviors.”<sup>184</sup> O'Reilly et al. divided culture into six culture factors labeled “Adaptability, Integrity, Collaborative, Results-Oriented, Customer Oriented, and Detail Oriented.”<sup>185</sup> The CEO's personality was assessed using the “Big Five Model,” which, through previous research, showed that using the Big Five Model was more accurate than a self-rating from the CEO.<sup>186</sup> Although the O'Reilly et al. study also focused on how the organization's financial performance was affected by the CEO's personality, that is not within the scope of this thesis. Instead, this portion of the thesis focuses on how an organization's culture is affected by its leadership, beginning with assessing the CEO's personality attributes in terms of the Big Five. O'Reilly et al. define the Big Five dimensions as:

(1) CEO Openness to Experience, tends to be imaginative, unconventional, and independent. (2) CEO Conscientiousness, refers to the tendency to control impulses and tenaciously pursue goals. (3) CEO Agreeableness, individuals high on Agreeableness are

---

<sup>183</sup> O'Reilly et al., “The Promise and Problems of Organizational Culture,” 605, 609.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 606.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 606; for details of the subcomponents of each culture factor, see Table 1 (608) and Appendix (620).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 609.

typically seen as modest, helpful, and willing to compromise. (4) CEO Neuroticism, people who score high on Neuroticism tend to be anxious, emotionally unstable, defensive, and upset by minor threats or frustrations. Conversely, those low on Neuroticism are seen as emotionally stable, relaxed, and secure. (5) CEO Extraversion, the most obvious aspect of Extraversion is the propensity to prefer extensive interactions with others. However, extraverts are also characterized by optimism, energy, and a preference for excitement.<sup>187</sup>

O'Reilly et al. invited 60 high-tech firms based in the United States to participate in this study. Of the 60 firms invited, they received cultural assessments from 880 people from 56 firms. According to O'Reilly et al., "Eighty-nine percent of the 56 firms were included in the list of the *Fortune 1000*, representing the largest American firms, and collectively they generated 75% of the total revenue from high-technology *Fortune 1000* firms in 2009."<sup>188</sup>

The results from O'Reilly et al. "suggest that the personality of the CEO can be significantly related to the organization's culture."<sup>189</sup> Through additional analysis, they showed that there is a stronger association between CEOs' personalities and organizational culture with CEOs who have longer tenure.<sup>190</sup> The following are reports of the relationships between CEO personality and firm culture:

CEOs with higher levels of Agreeableness and lower levels of Neuroticism are associated with more collaborative cultures. CEOs who were more Open (curious, comfortable with new ideas, nonconventional) had more adaptive cultures (risk-taking, fast-moving, willing to experiment). More Conscientious CEOs (hard-working, orderly, disciplined) were associated with more detail-oriented cultures (analytical, precise, attention to detail). CEOs who were rated as less Agreeable (less willing to compromise, less concerned with the feelings of others, less trusting) would be associated with more results-oriented cultures. No support was found, which proposed a relationship between CEO Neuroticism and collaboration. No confirmation proposed an association between CEO Extraversion and more customer-oriented culture.<sup>191</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> O'Reilly et al., "The Promise and Problems of Organizational Culture," 601-03.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 605; for more information regarding the response rate and demographic profile, see 609-10.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 612, 614.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

As mentioned above, scholars have long accepted that the behavior and character of the CEO affect organizational culture; however, there have been few studies that could back up this assumption with empirical evidence. The O'Reilly et al. study has filled that gap with empirical evidence and has shown that the CEO's personality will engender cultures that reflect their personality.<sup>192</sup> As demonstrated from their study, if the CEO has an adaptive and detailed personality, the organization's culture will likely have the exact attributes. Some may assume the CEOs in this study were chosen because they reflect the preexisting organizational culture. However, as O'Reilly et al. state, the CEO was also the founder of many firms, so the causality in these instances seems apparent.<sup>193</sup> Also, organizations with particular performance records may likely have distinct cultures rather than the opposite.<sup>194</sup>

As with most leaders, such as Microsoft's CEO, leaders understand the importance of having a positive culture that facilitates growth. For example, when Satya Nadella became Microsoft's CEO, he understood how vital culture is in an organization, and transforming the culture became his highest priority.<sup>195</sup> He knew the employees at Microsoft were enthusiastic about improving their culture and doing more and that his primary job was to curate the culture from top to bottom. Nadella states he had to become the company's evangelist, "someone who drives a standard or product to achieve critical mass."<sup>196</sup> According to Nadella, creating the culture in the organization was his "chief job," and he believes that the "C in CEO stands for

---

<sup>192</sup> O'Reilly et al., "The Promise and Problems of Organizational Culture," 617.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 619.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Satya Nadella, Greg Shaw, and Jill Tracie Nichols, *Hit Refresh: The Quest to Rediscover Microsoft's Soul and Imagine a Better Future for Everyone* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2017), 2.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 2, 13, 76-77.

culture.”<sup>197</sup> Whether the leader is toxic or one that fosters growth, the employees of an organization take on their leader’s attributes. As a result, the leader can shape the surrounding culture. Unfortunately, there are times when the leader shapes the culture negatively, which can filter throughout the organization and lead to legal actions.

### Warren Buffett Story

Sometimes a leader uses their position to influence the organization destructively, and it takes a competent leader to realign the core values in the organization, and that is what Warren Buffett did at Salomon Brothers. This section will demonstrate the influence a CEO has, as noted above, with Warren Buffett’s transformation at Salomon Brothers; with Paul’s commands, one will see that Paul’s commands to the *paterfamilias* would have positively affected the perception of slavery and moved toward its abolition. Thus, providing an alternative approach to understanding Paul’s commands to the *paterfamilias* concerning slavery.

In 1991, John Gutfreund was the CEO and chairman of Salomon Brothers and was facing an investigation from the U.S. Treasury Department for illegal bidding. Unfortunately, Gutfreund was focused on short-term goals that encouraged unethical behavior, which became ingrained in the organization’s culture,<sup>198</sup> and the board of directors at Salomon knew the only way to change the culture in the organization was to bring in a new leader, which is what they did when they temporarily brought in Warren Buffett and Deryck Maughan.<sup>199</sup> According to Ronald Sims, Maughan stated that he must “lead by example” and “enforce values through

---

<sup>197</sup> Nadella, *Hit Refresh*, 100.

<sup>198</sup> Ronald R. Sims, “Changing an Organization’s Culture Under New Leadership,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 25, no. 1 (May 2000): 65, 67.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

punishment,” if not, people will believe that unethical behavior is okay.<sup>200</sup> As Michael Siconolfi and Laurie Cohen quote Buffett’s comment about changing the culture, Buffett states, “My job is to clean up the sins of the past and to capitalize on the enormous attributes that this firm has.”<sup>201</sup> Buffett understood that a CEO change was not enough to change the culture in Salomon. Therefore, as Sims notes, Buffett had to change the ingrained culture by improving the “moral fiber of the firm, firing ethical wrongdoers” and replacing them with people who were committed to “ethical principles,” and rewarding them for ethical performance, most importantly leading by example.<sup>202</sup> Buffett and Maughan became the role models for the employees of Salomon to emulate.

When there is a change, and the employees do not want to conform to the new standard established, they will leave instead of operating under these new ethical standards. As Sims observes, “When people are not sure what to do, unethical behavior may flourish as aggressive individuals pursue what they believe to be acceptable behavior.”<sup>203</sup> As a result of employees leaving due to the culture change, Sims quotes Buffett, who stated, “In the end, we must have people to match our principles, not the reverse.”<sup>204</sup> Therefore, the organization should not lower its ethical standards to accommodate the employees. This is similar to Paul’s command in Ephesians; he did not lower the standards of his command to slaves and masters to accommodate

---

<sup>200</sup> Sims, “Changing an Organization’s Culture Under New Leadership,” 68.

<sup>201</sup> Michael Siconolfi and Laurie P. Cohen, “How Salomon’s Hubris and a U.S. Trap Led to Leaders’ Downfall,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 19, 1991, Eastern edition, A1.

<sup>202</sup> Sims, “Changing an Organization’s Culture Under New Leadership,” 74-75.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>204</sup> Lynn Sharp Paine, *Cases in Leadership, Ethics, and Organizational Integrity: A Strategic Perspective* (Boston, MA: Irwin McGraw-Hill, 1997), quoted in Sims, “Changing an Organization’s Culture Under New Leadership,” 72.

the Greco-Roman culture. Having anything different than a Christ-like character was unacceptable for Paul.

As Sims remarked, a culture change may cause people to leave the organization. For example, it would only be a matter of time before the *paterfamilias* and others would stop the unethical practice of slavery, which would result from following Paul's command to treat slaves as they wanted to be treated (Eph. 6:9). Paul wanted the Christians to match the Christian doctrine (1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:1), not the other way around. However, a culture change may have the reverse effect; people may come to the organization because now, they agree with their practices. For example, others may have started treating their slaves better in the first century due to the Christian *paterfamilias*' example. They knew the slaves were also created in God's image (Gen. 1:27) and should be treated as equals.

The Warren Buffett example demonstrated that having new leadership influenced a positive change at Salomon Brothers. Buffett came into the organization, correcting unethical behavior, enforcing standards, and leading by example. After describing slavery in the New Testament, the power of the *paterfamilias*, and what Paul commanded above, one can see from a modern context that Paul used the same approach as Buffett in changing the culture of the Christian household from the inside out.

Using the Salomon Brothers' example, Paul, as the board of directors, wanted to change the unethical practice of slavery in the Christian household. However, instead of changing out the *paterfamilias* (CEO), Paul transformed his leadership style to represent a Christ-like character. Paul knew that slavery, although ingrained in the culture, was an unethical practice. However, Paul wanted to improve the moral fiber within the Christian household, which would be accomplished through the transformation of the *paterfamilias*. As demonstrated above, the

positive change in the *paterfamilias* leadership style would affect the behavior and ethics inside his household and would soon filter throughout the community.

Changing a culture ingrained in society is challenging, and it does not happen overnight. As Sims notes, “Changing an organization’s culture is more difficult than developing a new one.”<sup>205</sup> The practice of slavery in the Greco-Roman world was “omnipresent,” as N. T. Wright stated above,<sup>206</sup> and this is what the new Christians previously accepted as normal. Paul’s command would take time to impact the practice of slavery in the Christian household. As Sims states, “anthropologists and organizational scientists agree that changing culture” is an arduous and time-consuming process.<sup>207</sup>

#### The Transformed *Paterfamilias*

When most new leaders come into an organization, they are aware of the culture that already exists, and most leaders know that it will be a challenge to transform that culture into what they, as the new leader, believe will be the most successful culture for their industry. The *paterfamilias* had the same influence on his household’s culture. However, he did not have the challenge most new CEOs have when they come into the organization because the *paterfamilias* dictated the culture in his household. Morela Hernandez and Sim Sitkin noted that “leaders can influence followers’ ethical behavior by demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct.”<sup>208</sup> The *paterfamilias* was the household leader, and, as Hernandez and Sitkin state, he,

---

<sup>205</sup> Sims, “Changing an Organization’s Culture Under New Leadership,” 66.

<sup>206</sup> Wright, *Paul: A Biography*, 282.

<sup>207</sup> Sims, “Changing an Organization’s Culture Under New Leadership,” 66.

<sup>208</sup> Morela Hernandez and Sim B. Sitkin, “Who Is Leading the Leader? Follower Influence on Leader Ethicality,” in *Behavioral Business Ethics: Shaping an Emerging Field*, ed. David De Cremer and Ann E. Tenbrunsel (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 82.

as a leader, would influence the household's "cognition by shaping" how they would think about "moral justifiability."<sup>209</sup> The *paterfamilias* not only had the power to determine which attributes his household would have, but he also had the power to shape their ethical behavior.

The *paterfamilias*' authority in the Greco-Roman world is incomprehensible for most modern readers; however, this was the practice. Nevertheless, it would still take time for the transformed leadership style of the *paterfamilias* to positively influence his household. Although this was not Paul's primary reason for addressing the *paterfamilias* in Ephesians 6:5-9, one can see the effects a transformed *paterfamilias* had on the institution of slavery.

The *paterfamilias* treated his wife and children differently (better); moreover, he treated his slaves the same way he wanted to be treated (Eph. 6:9). In the Greco-Roman culture, the subordinate person (slave) submits to the *paterfamilias* (master); however, Paul's command goes beyond the culture by enjoining mutual submission (Eph. 5:21). Just as the CEO's leadership style filters out to their organization, it was a matter of time before the changed leadership style of the *paterfamilias* filtered out to the community.

### Conclusion

This chapter presented the modern reader with an alternative approach in understanding Paul's command to the *paterfamilias* in Ephesians 6:5-9 in response to the Pauline critic's claims that Paul's command did not positively affect the practice of slavery. This approach demonstrated that Warren Buffett's successful approach to changing the culture at Salomon Brothers is the same approach Paul used in transforming the *paterfamilias*' leadership style, which would change the practice of slavery from the inside out.

---

<sup>209</sup> Hernandez and Sitkin, "Who Is Leading the Leader?," 83.

The O'Reilly et al. empirical study presented the modern reader an awareness of the influence a CEO's personality has in their organization, which assisted in understanding how a transformed *paterfamilias* would influence his household. As incoming CEOs, Satya Nadella and Warren Buffett acknowledged the importance of culture in an organization and that change started with them. Nadella came into Microsoft to enhance the culture, and Buffett came into Salomon Brothers to fix the unethical culture. The story of Warren Buffett's tenure as CEO at Salomon Brothers offered modern readers a real-life situation where the previous CEO had unethical practices that filtered out through the organization. These unethical practices resulted in Buffett coming in and improving the organization's culture and reputation by enforcing ethical principles and leading by example.

Paul's command changed the practice of slavery from the inside out. He accomplished this by commanding a change in the leadership style of the *paterfamilias*. This change in the *paterfamilias* would soon filter out through his household and the rest of the community. Although Paul understood the *paterfamilias* legal authority, he was not intimidated and attacked the deplorable practice of slavery from inside the Christian household. Throughout Paul's ministries, the Holy Spirit led him, and he knew that a *paterfamilias* filled and controlled by the Spirit would have a Christ-like character which would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery.

With the information gleaned on how leaders can influence their organization, it is challenging to understand how the Pauline critics state that Paul's command in Ephesians 6:5-9 "authorized" slavery and did not positively affect its practice and even ultimately move toward its abolition. As Ronald Sims stated above, change takes time. Paul's commands may not have had the instantaneous results the Pauline critics were looking for; however, when one reads this

passage within its context, it becomes evident that, as F. F. Bruce stated, “the only thing that slavery could do was to wilt up and die.”<sup>210</sup> The Greco-Roman laws concerning slavery only encouraged its horrendous practice; however, Paul’s command would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery as his command filtered throughout the Christian household and the community. Paul understood that the current social structure of slavery belonged to the old age that is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31).<sup>211</sup> However, he still commanded the Christians that they are “no longer to be conformed to this age” because for the Christians, the “ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11); therefore, they are to act differently.<sup>212</sup>

---

<sup>210</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 401.

<sup>211</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 529.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that understanding Paul's command to slaves and masters in Ephesians 6:5-9 is not challenging to comprehend. However, as the Pauline critics demonstrated above, this passage is easily misunderstood when read without contextual understanding. Paul precisely articulated his command; however, it required the Pauline critics to read Paul's entire letter to the Ephesians to understand his authorial intent regarding slavery. The Pauline critics' lack of contextual understanding resulted in them believing that Paul's command supported slavery and that his command did not positively impact its practice.

The Pauline critics attempt to mislead their readers by stating that Paul "authorized" slavery. However, the Pauline critics are guilty of the same poor biblical interpretation that they state the pro-slavery proponents did during the pre-Civil War era; that is, reading Ephesians 6:5-9 without its contextual understanding. As demonstrated above, reading most biblical passages without understanding their context and extracting a few words from the text is a problem. This thesis has illustrated that Christians must understand the historical and cultural context of the Pauline critics' claims. There are 3,160 total words in Ephesians, and Loftus and his co-authors attempt to determine Paul's intent regarding slavery by extracting 108 words out of its context from Ephesians 6:5-9.<sup>213</sup> As John Dickson states, one cannot blame "Johann Sebastian Bach" after hearing someone's poor attempt at the "Cello Suites."<sup>214</sup> Therefore, Paul is only accountable for what he commanded concerning slavery, not what the Pauline critics think he should have written or when people misunderstand his commands.

---

<sup>213</sup> Word count used *New American Standard Bible*, excluding headings, subheadings, and verse numbers.

<sup>214</sup> John Dickson, *Bullies and Saints: An Honest Look at the Good and Evil of Christian History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 24.

The Pauline critics offered no evidence supporting their claim that Paul “authorized” slavery other than their understanding of the text. The Pauline critics above may learn an essential step in the biblical interpretation process from atheist and New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman. Ehrman states that biblical texts do not tell us their meaning; they have to be interpreted by people with presuppositions, which affects how they are understood.<sup>215</sup> Therefore, Pauline critics should not reject Christianity for their poor interpretations of these texts, nor should they state that the Bible, particularly Paul, “authorized” slavery.

After demonstrating the context of Paul’s command to slaves and masters in Ephesians 6:5-9, one can see that Paul’s commands changed the hearts and behaviors of the Christians toward the practice of slavery. His commands required that Christians have a Christ-like character toward the welfare and treatment of the slaves, eventually leading to the abolition of slavery (long term). Paul’s commands did not have the instantaneous effect on slavery in the first century that today’s Pauline critics require. However, that was not his intention. Paul was not sent on a mission from God to preach activism against the Roman government concerning the laws and culture of slavery in the first century (short term); his primary mission was to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He knew that the horrendous practice of slavery would not be sustainable through the teaching of the gospel message. Paul’s commands were counter-cultural to the approved practice of slavery within the Greco-Roman world. He created a safe community for slaves to worship Christ alongside their masters and treated the slaves as equals.

Paul’s command changed the culture and practice of slavery in the first century and beyond. He accomplished this by breaking away from social and cultural norms of discussing the slave/master relationship. Paul changed the *paterfamilias*’ leadership style, letting them know

---

<sup>215</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don’t Know About Them)* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 279, n. 5.

that they too have a Master, and He is in heaven and does not show favoritism. Paul's command radically altered the Greco-Roman culture by commanding the masters to treat their slaves the way they wanted to be treated. He held the *paterfamilias* accountable for the treatment of their slaves, which rarely happened to the *paterfamilias* in the first century. He created a Christian community where slaves were accepted as full church members. Paul's command for the slave/master relationship deviated from the Greco-Roman practices during his time.

Despite what the Pauline critics believe Paul should have written regarding slavery, it was not Paul's primary mission in Ephesians 6:5-9 or in his other letters to rebuke the practice of slavery. Instead, Paul's primary mission was to prepare the Christian slaves and the Christian masters for the Lord's return. He was less concerned about the slave's temporal position; he was more concerned about their eternal position with God. He cared about their welfare and treatment and understood the yoke the slaves were under; however, he also knew that a slave rebellion could threaten their welfare and possibly cost them their life. In addition, a rebellion would cause others to look at Christianity negatively. Paul's letter to the Galatians removed all distinctions and undermined the moral justification of slavery (3:28).

Slavery is a challenging and sensitive topic to discuss in the United States; however, this thesis has demonstrated that it is vital for Christians to defend these biblical passages concerning slavery with biblical and historical accuracy. It is essential not to let the critics extract one or two verses from the Bible to determine the authorial intent. This thesis has presented that Christians must understand the context in which these texts are written, to whom, and why. Paul was writing to Christians who belonged to the church at Ephesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, whom all came together, slaves and masters, in one Christian community. As Ronald Sims stated above, change takes time. The positive impact of Paul's command may not have happened quickly

enough to please the Pauline critics. However, Paul knew that God would come and deliver this fallen world from all its evil and sin.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, he knew the slaves' yoke would not be permanent, and the day was coming when they would be set free from the bondage of slavery and have freedom as "children of God" (Rom. 8:20-21).

---

<sup>216</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 375.

## Bibliography

- Aland, Barbara, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlos M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds. *The Greek New Testament: Fourth Revised Edition*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008.
- Anders, Max. *Galatians-Colossians*. Vol. 8. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999.
- Avalos, Hector. "Yahweh Is a Moral Monster." In *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*. Edited by John W. Loftus. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010.
- Barclay, William. *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. The Daily Study Bible. The Saint Andrew Press, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. The New Daily Study Bible. Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- Barth, Markus. *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*. Vol. 34. Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Edited by Frederick W. Danker. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *1 Corinthians*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1994.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Edited by Eckhard J. Schnabel. Vol. 10. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. London: InterVarsity Press, 2019.
- Bradley, K. R. *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Bradley, Keith. *Slavery and Society at Rome*. Key Themes in Ancient History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815386>.
- Bruce, F. F. *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Buckland, William Warwick. *The Roman Law of Slavery: The Condition of the Slave in Private Law from Augustus to Justinian*. Cambridge Library Collection - Classics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511707360>.

- Campbell, Donald K. "Galatians." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985.
- Carrier, Richard. "Christianity and the Rise of American Democracy." In *Christianity Is Not Great: How Faith Fails*. Edited by John W. Loftus. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2014.
- Copan, Paul. *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?: The New Atheists and Old Testament Ethics." *Philosophia Christi* 10, no. 1 (2008): 7–37.
- Dalcho, Frederick. *Practical Considerations Founded on the Scriptures, Relative to the Slave Population of South-Carolina*. Charleston, SC: A. E. Miller, 1823.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006.
- Dickson, John. *Bullies and Saints: An Honest Look at the Good and Evil of Christian History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021.
- Dunn, James D. G. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know About Them)*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011.
- Fee, Gordon D. "The Cultural Context of Ephesians 5:18-6:9." *Priscilla Papers* 31, no. 4 (2017): 4–8.
- Ferguson, Everett. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Fitzgerald, John T. "Haustafeln." In *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992.
- Foulkes, Francis. *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 10. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989.
- Frilingos, Chris. "'For My Child, Onesimus': Paul and Domestic Power in Philemon." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000): 91–104.
- Geisler, Norman L. "Colossians." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985.

- George, Timothy. *Galatians*. Vol. 30. The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994.
- Glancy, Jennifer A. *Slavery in Early Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.  
<https://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=150067&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Gombis, Timothy G. “A Radically New Humanity: The Function of the Haustafel in Ephesians.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 2 (June 2005): 317–30.
- Hernandez, Morela, and Sim B. Sitkin. “Who Is Leading the Leader? Follower Influence on Leader Ethicality.” In *Behavioral Business Ethics: Shaping an Emerging Field*. Edited by David De Cremer and Ann E. Tenbrunsel. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=956988>.
- Hoehner, Harold W. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002.
- Hoehner, Harold W., Philip W. Comfort, and Peter H. Davids. *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philemon*. Vol. 16. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008.
- Hopkins, Keith. *Conquerors and Slaves*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.  
<https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.liberty.edu/2027/heb.01449>.
- Jemal, Alexis, Sarah Bussey, and Briana Young. “Steps to Racial Reconciliation: A Movement to Bridge the Racial Divide and Restore Humanity.” *Social Work and Christianity* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 31–60. <http://dx.doi.org/10.34043/swc.v47i1.133>.
- Keener, Craig S. “Mutual Submission Frames the Household Codes.” *Priscilla Papers* 35, no. 3 (2021): 10–14.
- Keown, Mark J. “Paul’s Vision of a New Masculinity (Eph 5:21-6:9).” *Colloquium* 48, no. 1 (May 2016): 47–60.
- Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Chicago, IL: Eerdmans, 1993.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6535289>.
- Lea, Thomas D., and Hayne P. Griffin. *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*. Vol. 34. The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1992.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. *Ephesians*. Edited by Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, Ralph P. Martin, and Lynn Allan Losie. Vol. 42. Word Biblical Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014.

- Litfin, A. Duane. "Titus." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985.
- Loftus, John W. "The Slave Is the Owner's Property." In *Christianity Is Not Great: How Faith Fails*. Edited by John W. Loftus. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "What We've Got Here Is a Failure to Communicate." In *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*. Edited by John W. Loftus. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010.
- Lowery, David K. "1 Corinthians." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985.
- McClain, Paula D. "Trump and Racial Equality in America? No Pretense at All!" *Policy Studies* 42, no. 5–6 (November 2, 2021): 491–508. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2021.1979502>.
- McGuire, John B., Gary Rhodes, and Charles J. Palus. "Inside Out: Transforming Your Leadership Culture." *Leadership in Action* 27, no. 6 (2008): 3–7. <https://doi.org/10.1002/lia.1226>.
- Melick, Richard R. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. Vol. 32. The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1991.
- Morris, Leon. *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 7. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985.
- Nadella, Satya, Greg Shaw, and Jill Tracie Nichols. *Hit Refresh: The Quest to Rediscover Microsoft's Soul and Imagine a Better Future for Everyone*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2017.
- Nathan, Geoffrey. "Infanticide and the Exposure of Children." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*. Oxford University Press, 2018. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662778.001.0001/acref-9780198662778-e-2390>.
- Nicholas, Barry, and Susan M. Treggiari. "Patria Potestas." In *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford University Press, 2012. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199545568.001.0001/acref-9780199545568-e-4779>.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. PNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.
- O'Reilly, Charles A., David F. Caldwell, Jennifer A. Chatman, and Bernadette Doerr. "The Promise and Problems of Organizational Culture: CEO Personality, Culture, and Firm Performance." *Group & Organization Management* 39, no. 6 (December 2014): 595–625. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601114550713>.

- Paine, Lynn Sharp. *Cases in Leadership, Ethics, and Organizational Integrity: A Strategic Perspective*. Boston, MA: Irwin McGraw-Hill, 1997.
- Paulkovich, Michael. "The Ascent and Reign of the Christian Behemoth." In *God and Horrendous Suffering*. Edited by John W. Loftus. Denver, CO: GCRR, 2021.
- Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. "Views on Race in America 2019," April 9, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/04/09/race-in-america-2019/>.
- Pierce, Yolanda. *Hell Without Fires: Slavery, Christianity, and the Antebellum Spiritual Narrative*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6716499>.
- Saller, Richard P. "Pater Familias, Mater Familias, and the Gendered Semantics of the Roman Household." *Classical Philology* 94, no. 2 (1999): 182–97.
- Siconolfi, Michael, and Laurie P. Cohen. "How Salomon's Hubris and a U.S. Trap Led to Leaders' Downfall." *Wall Street Journal*. August 19, 1991, Eastern edition.
- Sims, Ronald R. "Changing an Organization's Culture Under New Leadership." *Journal of Business Ethics* 25, no. 1 (May 2000): 65–78.
- Stagg, Frank. "The Domestic Code and Final Appeal, Ephesians 5:21-6:24." *Review & Expositor* 76, no. 4 (1979): 541–52.
- Stott, John R. W. *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Super, Joseph Francis. "Slavery and Manumission in the Pre-Constantine Church." *Eleutheria* 2, no. 2 (2013): 3–17.
- Taylor, Mark. *1 Corinthians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Vol. 28. The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014.
- Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*. Edited by Robert Yarbrough and Robert Stein. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Thompson, Steven. "Was Ancient Rome a Dead Wives Society? What Did the Roman Paterfamilias Get Away With?" *Journal of Family History* 31, no. 1 (2006): 3–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0363199005283010>.

- Westermann, William L. *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1955.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.
- Wright, N. T. *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 12. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Paul: A Biography*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.
- Yarbrough, Robert W. *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. Edited by D. A. Carson. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018.