

Ephesians: Growing Up Into Christ
Part 10
“The Gospel and Slavery”
Ephesians 6:5-9
Pastor Charles Price

If you have got a Bible with you, I am going to read from Ephesians and Chapter 6, the letter of Paul to the church in Ephesus. And I am going to read four verses, five verses from Chapter 6, reading from Verse 5 down to Verse 9.

Ephesians 6 Verse 5:

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

“Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

“Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.”

Those of you who have been with us regularly will know that we have been looking into this letter of Paul to the Ephesians for many, many weeks. We haven't looked at it for a little while now – had several weeks away from it.

It consists of six chapters. The first three chapters Paul talks about the resources of a Christian. A key verse is Chapter 1 Verse 3:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

Everything God has to give us He gives us in Christ. By giving to us Christ, He gives us everything.

Now that's the first three chapters, which explores that in various ways – the resources of a Christian.

And then the second three chapters – chapters 4 to 6 – talk about the responsibilities of a Christian. But the responsibilities are always to be understood in the light of the resources. If we try to just take on the responsibilities without drawing on the resources, we will exhaust ourselves and accomplish very little. And we have talked about that.

But now we come down to a particular passage where Paul is talking about some key relationships. Our life is made up of relationships essentially.

And there are two guiding principles that lie behind what he teaches here. The first is when he says in Chapter 5 Verse 18,

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

The necessity of living in the fullness of the Spirit is the first guiding principle to what follows. And then secondly, in Verse 21:

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

That is, you live in the fullness of the Spirit in mutual submission within your relationships. And he talks in particular about husbands and wives in Chapter 5 Verses 22-33, about parents and children in Chapter 6 Verses 1-4.

But now in Chapter 6 and Verse 5 he talks about masters and workers – at least that is what I put down when I began to prepare this message, thinking “well, there are no slaves today but these principles apply to us in the workplace”.

And then I began to feel “No, I can’t do that – we have to address the text as it is.” And he is actually talking about masters and slaves. And I want to talk to you this morning about the gospel and slavery.

Slavery was a reality in the Roman Empire. It is very hard to get accurate statistics from back in the First Century, though there are some indications of the number of slaves. And it is estimated by some as many as one in three people in the Roman Empire were slaves.

This was especially true in the city of Rome and other key cities, particularly in Asia Minor and parts of what we know today as Greece.

You don’t read of slaves out in the far-flung provinces of Rome. You don’t read of slaves in Judea for instance. Jesus, in His years of ministry, never encountered a slave, never dealt with a slave. It seems there weren’t any in places like Judea.

But when Paul writes his letters he refers to slaves in eight of them. And particularly in his letters that address churches in the Asia Minor area, such as his letter to the Ephesians and to the Colossians and his letters to Timothy, who was in Ephesus. And to Philemon who was in Colosse.

Peter writes his letters to the church in this area as well and he also talks about slaves. So it seems that slavery was fairly common up in this area of the Roman Empire as well as in the city of Rome itself.

Now, by definition, slavery is the ownership of one human being by another. It has connotations of forced servitude, of cruelty, of abuse, of exploitation, of degradation. These are the images that come to mind when we talk about slavery.

And slavery has left a very long and ugly scar on the history of the human race. And tragically it still does.

Now slavery today is technically abolished by international law. The United Nations General Assembly in 1948 adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And this declaration has 30 articles in it.

Article 1 says, *“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”*

Article 3 says, *“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”*

Article 4 says, *“No one shall be held in slavery or servitude. Slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their form.”*

That is the universally accepted declaration of human rights by the governments of the world.

The fact is, however, that illegal slavery does exist in our world today. The estimates of the number of people held in some kind of slavery vary. Although I have tried to find out this past week and the estimates that I have come across range from 12 million to 27 million.

Most are debt slaves, largely in South Asia who are under debt bondage imposed by lenders. And sometimes this debt goes on for several generations.

Human trafficking enslaves many women and children in particular. The United Nations estimate that there are nearly two and a half million people from 127 countries who have been trafficked around the world. And tragically that is not a static number; that is a growing number.

But the Council of Europe state this: they said, *“People trafficking has reached epidemic proportions over this past decade with a global annual market of about 42.5 billion dollars.”* It is the second largest illegal trading in the world after arms trading and now it is more lucrative even than drugs trading. That is the trafficking of women and children.

Now we are in no doubt as to the evil of slavery in every form. Neither was Paul. In 1 Timothy Chapter 1 and Verse 9 Paul writes about the judgement of God on lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, those who kill their fathers or mothers, murderers, adulterers and perverts, slave traders, liars and perjurers.

So in giving that list of these people who are under the judgement of God, Paul is unambiguous that slave trading brings people under the judgement of God. And therefore slavery itself is recognized by Paul to be something that is evil and wrong.

Yet, when we come to the passages in Scripture where Paul addresses slaves themselves, not talking about slavery but he says, as here in Ephesians 6, “Slaves,” (recognizing in the church in Ephesus there will be some people who are slaves).

He says things to them, which appear to be very accepting, and almost endorsing, their position as slaves. He says here,

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart.”

And I imagine the slave owners shouted a big “Amen!” He seems to be encouraging slaves there to buckle down and do your job well with respect for your master and with sincerity of heart.

When he wrote to the Colossians he addressed the slaves there. And he said,

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.” [Colossians 3:22]

There he cloaks it as a spiritual exercise. Your slavery is to be carried out with reverence for the Lord.

In 1 Timothy Chapter 6 and Verse 1 he says,

“All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God’s name and our teaching may not be slandered.”

Titus 2 and Verse 9 he says,

“Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted...”

And then he gives a very important reason:

“...that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.”

I'll come back to that in a few moments.

Peter writes to slaves in that same area and says in 1 Peter 2:18:

“Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.”

Now the New Testament has been criticized, and Paul in particular has been criticized, for this apparent acceptance and even endorsement of slavery. He doesn't criticize it in these verses. He doesn't condemn it. He doesn't encourage rebellion against it.

He doesn't say to these slaves, “Nobody has a right to own you like this; take your liberty.”

In fact the letter to Philemon was a letter he wrote when he met a slave called Onesimus who had run away from Philemon and he was in jail.

And Paul was in the same jail and Paul became his friend and Paul led him to Christ. And Paul sent him home to Philemon and said, “Here, I am sending your slave back to you. But you would be wise if you treated him not as a slave but as a brother,” he says. But he is sending him home back to him.

Why does Paul not begin an anti-slavery campaign? He has already stated that those under the judgement of God include slave traders because it is such an evil thing to be trading in human beings like cattle.

There is such a thing as the spirit of the age. And by that we mean there is entrenched in the collective psyche and outlook of people a certain perspective and understanding and a status quo about life. Every age has its blind spots, including ours. Though, by definition, because they are blind spots we are not as acutely aware of them as the next generation will be.

Every age has its institutionalized sins. It is in the living memory of many of us in this room that racism was legally enshrined in certain countries, in fact up till very recently.

South Africa is a classic example of that. If you were to arrive in South Africa and fill out your immigration card, one of the first questions is you have to check a box indicating your race. And which box you check would determine how you might be treated and what liberties you might have and where you might go and what bench you might sit on and which door you might go through.

Now you go to South Africa today and most people are acutely embarrassed about that – acutely embarrassed. Though, 20, 30 years ago, one of the most segregated places would be on Sunday morning in the churches. There was a blind spot there for whatever reason.

And of course you can legally change that. You don't always change peoples' perspective.

But the point I want to make is this: that when you recognize the spirit of the age, the collective psyche and outlook, you can fight against that and accomplish very little.

Whereas the gospel, which is Paul's primary concern and must be our primary concern, is subversive in the way it works. It doesn't just go to the symptoms and attack the symptoms; it goes behind those symptoms to transform people's lives and transform people's outlook as a result.

You see when Paul talked about slave traders as being under the judgement of God, he tells us why it is under the judgement of God and what is actually wrong with it.

I will read again part of 1 Timothy 1:9-11. It's about lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, murderers, adulterers and perverts, slave traders and liars and perjurers - listen:

“and whatever is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.”

Now says Paul, there is a plumb line which you hold against all these activities and that plumb line is what he calls the “glorious gospel of God and sound doctrine that conforms to that gospel.”

Now when you hold that plumb line of sound doctrine and the gospel of God over these behaviours you see they do not conform to it, they are in violation of it and therefore they are under the judgement of God.

So how are you going to correct what is wrong and that deviates from the sound doctrine that comes from the “glorious gospel of God”, as he puts it?

By proclaiming the gospel of God and by proclaiming sound doctrine, which addresses the cause that lies behind it.

And in changing the cause, in changing the hearts of people, you will in the course of time, change the external expression of their hearts and you will change the culture and you will change the spirit of the age.

That's why the church of Jesus Christ is not called to social campaigns as its primary function.

Now the Bible tells us that we must live under the law, and therefore we can campaign in the law against those things which are illegal.

So we support, for instance, the International Justice Mission, who are working in parts of the world where people are being abused and exploited, but they are being so illegally.

And their approach is this is wrong because the law of this land says it's wrong and we want to bring it to light and bring about the kind of prosecution that will end this.

Well that is good. That is consistent with Romans Chapter 13 where Paul says that government is given to us for our good. But if you do wrong, beware – he is God's servant of wrath.

Therefore we work with the law of the land.

But when the law, as here, permitted slavery and encouraged it, the approach of Paul and the approach in the church of Jesus Christ is to so proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ that people's hearts are changed, that the culture is changed, that the external fruit of that culture is changed with it.

And this is what happened, though it took 300 years for it to happen. 300 years – less than 300 years, but close to 300 years - after Paul and after the birth of the church, the emperor Constantine (Roman emperor) was converted.

Up until then the Christian church has not been afforded the freedoms of other religious bodies. It was basically illegal, had to function underground at various stages; there was a lot of persecution against Christians.

But when Constantine himself became a Christian, he published the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D., which permitted religious liberty. It didn't make Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire – that did happen eventually but that was not what Constantine did. He simply made it legal for Christians to meet because now there were so many of them and they began to grow significantly in influence and in power.

And as the Christians grew in numbers it became incongruous to them that one human being should own another. And so there were Christians who purchased slaves for the express purpose of giving them their freedom.

And when a slave was declared free by his owner he could claim full Roman citizenship and never again be enslaved. And little by little, as a result of this

movement of Christians in Rome, the whole of slavery disintegrated until it ceased in the Roman Empire.

Now it took 300 years. And by the way, of course, God works over longer periods of time than we like to see Him work. We'd like to see things very quickly.

We are allotted about three score years and ten if we're lucky. And I am heading that way and I feel I have not been alive very long. I sometimes wonder how I can be as old as I am when I feel as young as I do. But I know the date on which I was born and it is genuine and so I must be a lot older than I would like to be. And I realize that I have got a few years left before I start really closing down and I want to accomplish a lot.

But actually we are part of something bigger God is doing. We have to see our small lifespan and our small contribution to it in the light of something bigger.

I think it was Zhou Enlai, who was the premier of China under Mao Tse Tung, who was asked on one occasion whether he thought he thought the French Revolution was a good thing. (The French Revolution took place in the 1700's.)

And Zhou Enlai said, "It's too early to say." And he was showing astute wisdom in saying that, because the fruit often of change that takes place is a long time coming.

But actually the task of the church of Jesus Christ is to so address the causes of those things that are wrong and to deal with those causes that they will affect and change the spirit of the age.

And I am not using the term "spirit of the age" as a necessarily negative thing, just as a descriptive thing of an age and generation.

That's why Jesus in His teaching, if you have noticed, always worked back from the externals and said, "Don't be too taken up with those ... ? internals."

In the Sermon on the Mount you remember He said, "Have you heard it said, 'you must not kill?' I say if you are angry with your brother you are guilty of murder."

It's not the killing that is the issue; that is only the consequence of the cause, which is your anger.

"Have you heard it said, 'you must not commit adultery?' I say to you if you lust after a woman you are already guilty because adultery is only the consequences of the cause of lust."

And you can get all wrapped up with the consequences – murder and adultery – but actually the real issue is what lies behind it. It's your heart that needs to be made right.

He said in the Sermon on the Mount, "There are those of you who pray to be seen by men. And what is important to you is that you are known to be a man or woman of prayer. No, go into your room and close the door and that's where you will be real in your praying with God."

"There are those of you who give to be seen by men, when there is an audience around you will drop your money in the bag and let everybody know." He says, "No, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Do it in secret."

"There are those of you who fast to be seen by men. You disfigure your faces. No," He says, "make your face look good when you are fasting so that nobody knows you are doing it. It is not about the externals; it's about the internals."

He said to the Pharisees, "You are like whitewashed sepulchres – outside you look good, you look beautiful – beautiful sepulchre - but inside you are dead men's bones. That's the real issue. You are like a cup washed on the outside. It looks good sitting on the shelf but look inside; there is all kinds of gunge. You haven't cleaned out the inside."

The message of Jesus was always it's not about the externals. Don't campaign for the externals. Deal with the root cause, which is the human heart, which of course is what the gospel of Jesus Christ is about.

And that's why the priority of the Christian church is and must be the proclamation of the gospel. Now we can help (and historically the church has done this), we can help to adjust the symptoms. But that would not be effective until the cause that lies behind it has been addressed, which is the wickedness of the human heart. And when the heart is addressed then the externals begin to change.

I have a great interest in the Welsh Revival in 1904. 100,000 people came to Christ in 6 weeks, and then many thousands more in some of the following weeks. But that was the main hot time of the Welsh Revival.

And I have an interest in it because my great grandfather became a Christian in that revival and so did my grandfather, who was then a young man, about 20.

And I want to read you part of a report on the Welsh Revival. It says,

"Not only were individual lives changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, but whole communities were changed. Indeed society itself was changed. Public houses (that's beer halls) became almost empty. Men and women

who used to waste their money on getting drunk were now saving it and buying clothes and food for their families, giving it to help those in need. And not only drunkenness but stealing and other offenses grew less and less so that often a magistrate came to court and found there were no cases waiting for him.

Men whose language had been filthy before learned to talk purely. It is related that not only did the colliers put in a better day's work but also that the pit ponies didn't understand them because the ponies were so used to being cursed and sworn at that they didn't understand when the orders were given in kind, clean words.

The dark tunnels underground in the mines echoed with the sounds of prayer and hymns instead of oaths and nasty jokes and gossip. People who had been careless about paying their bills or paying back money they had borrowed paid up all they owed.

People who had not been friends for a long time because of something that had happened in the past forgot their quarrels and were united together again."

Isn't that fantastic? How are you going to change the society of Wales in 1904? Have campaigns about the fact that people are getting drunk and people are not paying their bills? No, bring them to Christ.

Now you say that's a bit unrealistic isn't it?

It's the only message we have – it's the only message we have.

I read recently that when Billy Graham was in Australia in 1959 he had a 15-week crusade - the cities of Melbourne and Sydney primarily, briefly in Brisbane and across to New Zealand in Auckland.

But I quote to you from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It says,

"In 1959 there was a drop in alcohol consumption, extra-marital births and crime statistics during 1959 and in the immediate years following."

And they attribute it to the Billy Graham mission where they estimate up to 2% of the population of Australia came to Christ.

Last Thursday morning I was in Calgary Airport getting a flight back to Toronto. I had been there to speak at an event this last week. And I was going through the security area and when I had finished a man came across from the next line. I had noticed him look at me two or three times.

And he came across to me and said, “You are Charles Price aren’t you?”

And I said, “Unfortunately, yes.”

He said, “I watch you on Living Truth.”

I said, “Well, it’s lovely to meet you.”

He said, “Listen, years ago I used to handle prostitutes. I was what they call a pimp. I controlled prostitutes, made money from them. I used to drink and I became an alcoholic. I turned to drugs and I became a drug addict. I ended up on the street with absolutely nothing, begging for pieces of bread.

He said, “On the street Jesus met me.” He said, “I was converted. I was born again. I now have a family – I don’t deserve them. I now have good work.”

And he said, “I listen to Living Truth because,” he said, “it feeds my soul.”

I thought, what good discernment. If it feeds your soul it will have its consequences in your physical life as it had in his.

I don’t know how long ago he was converted. I didn’t ask him how long this was. But there was a radiance in his face. Before I said I saw him look at me a couple of times and then he came across to me. And I knew before he told me he was a Christian. There was a radiance in his face that said so.

What’s the answer to men like that who are selling women on the street? Bring them to Christ. You change everything. You could of course stop them doing that – and it’s illegal, so we should if it’s appropriate and we are in a position to do so. But change their heart.

And you know the cultures of our countries – of this country – and I know we are a very cosmopolitan group here, as Canada is, made up of migrants from so many countries of the world.

But there are many of us with a background that in the past was significantly impacted by the gospel and the whole culture, and our whole legal structures represent that which is sound doctrine and conforms to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But in the last 50 years some of us have seen huge changes there. We all have.

If you went to almost anywhere in Europe prior to the 16th Century, in the thousand years before the 16th Century, and asked anybody “What is truth?” they would probably tell you truth is what God says.

Then you ask them, “Well how do you know what God says?” They would tell you, “What God says is what the church says” because the Roman church was authoritative in the way Scripture was to be read and understood.

And then in the 16th Century Luther nailed his 95 theses onto the door of the church in Wittenberg in Germany and the Reformation began, which transformed Europe. It was a spiritual movement but it became a political and a social movement that impacted the world.

And after the Reformation if you asked somebody in Europe, “What is truth?” They would give you the same answer, “Truth is what God says.”

But when you ask them, “How do you know what God says?” they gave you one of two answers. There are those who would still say, “What God says is what the church says”. But others would say, “What God says is what the Bible says” because one of the great principles of the Reformation was the authority and sufficiency of Scripture – Sola Scriptura – Scripture alone.

But then of course, when you say, “Well, how do you know what the Bible says?” people began to read it with slight variations. Luther in Germany read it one way, and we have Lutheranism, which has come from that.

Zwingli, in Zurich, read it slightly differently - John Calvin in Geneva, slightly differently again. John Knox in Scotland, who founded Presbyterianism, a little bit differently again. Menno Simons in Holland, who began the Anabaptist movement.

Henry VIII, who was a quirky king in England, who started the Church of England, so that he could divorce his wife, and he had his own spin on what the Reformation would mean.

And Alister McGrath has written a book called “Protestants’ [Christianity’s] Dangerous Idea” and the dangerous idea, says McGrath, is it is a great thing but is a dangerous idea that any man, woman, boy and girl can read the Bible for themselves.

But it had such an influence that you can’t go anywhere in Europe today and not see a church somewhere. Every village in England where I come from – every village has its parish church. Because Christianity, in whatever form and we won’t discuss that – the purity in their doctrine or the impurity in their doctrine – that’s not the point.

But there was a Christian presence, which brought about a sense of God-fearingness, which caused the culture to reflect that. And the early migrants to North America, the Pilgrim Fathers – that was a 17th Century movement – the Puritan movement and the Pilgrim Fathers came over here.

And then in the 18th Century we have the Evangelical Awakening with Jonathon Edwards in North America and John Wesley in Britain and George Whitfield, who was on both sides of the Atlantic.

But alongside this spiritual movement that left such a mark on the whole culture of the country was a strong secular movement known as the Enlightenment. And the Enlightenment, which was triggered by the Reformation, which gave people freedom to think for themselves; the Enlightenment was based entirely on reason.

People often date it back to Descartes, a French mathematician, who decided to doubt everything and reduce it back to what could not be doubted. And he came up with one little sentence, one little axiom, "I think, therefore I am". That's what I am sure about.

And so everything was built from that on a purely rational, what you could prove and see and touch and taste.

And so alongside this begins to grow this secular movement. And out of that was the development of the industrial age, the scientific age, technology.

But into the lifetime of many of us, in the last 50 years or so, all that felt too clinical, too cold, too much about scientists and white coats. And we moved away to a greater subjectivism. What do I feel? Not what do I think; what do I feel, what would I like?

Truth became entirely subjective. We have given a name to it because we don't know what else to call it. We call it post-modernism. Modernism was the age of reason when everything was logical and had to be proven. But now post-modernism, the day in which we live, doesn't recognize a mega narrative – a big story – you have your own story, you are your own person.

And the big value of post-modernism is choice. Don't let anybody else impose on you what you should think or believe or do. It is non-judgemental. How dare you say the person living a different life next door is wrong?

And the primary issue in terms of relationships, and especially sexual relationships, is consent. If it is consensual it's okay, just don't force anybody. That is still wrong.

And so out of that spirit of our age things have happened right under our noses that 50 years ago would have been almost unbelievable. Abortion, the increasing moves towards euthanasia (in Europe certainly) – that's ending life prematurely when the value of life is deemed to be no longer significant.

We have redefined marriage from the historical traditional male and female and said gender is not a criteria. Well who's to say that number is not a criterion? Why is it one and one? Why is bigamy not legal?

And it is being challenged in the courts in British Columbia that bigamy is unconstitutional. Or at least to say bigamy is a crime is unconstitutional because it denies people their freedom. If a man wants three women and three women are happy about that, let them. And you can be sure bigamy will go through the statute books.

What has happened? It is the spirit of the age that has changed.

So what are we supposed to do? Are we going to campaign against bigamy, campaign against gay marriage? That won't accomplish anything. I'll tell you what it will do though. It will create hostility against the Christian church.

And Paul, if we take the principle that Paul applies here, he is saying to these slaves, although he is unambiguous slave trading brings people under the judgement of God, he says, "In your context do the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly as if you were serving the Lord, not men. You know the Lord will reward everyone for what he does."

And in fact in the five verses, six times he talks about the Lord. He is writing about slavery but in every sentence he ties it back to the Lord, saying, "Listen, there is a bigger picture here than the picture you are aware of. You are wrapped up in the scene where you are the slave and you have a master. That is not good. That is against the basic principles of humanity. We understand that. Slave traders are under the judgement of God. But, you are not going to change it by campaigning about it. Nor are you going to change it by rebelling against it because it is too entrenched in the collective psyche of the age. So I will tell you what to do: live in such a way that you are living before God in His strength, doing the will of God."

And as one of those statements says – this is to Titus, this was in 2:9:

"Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive."

"Slaves, live in this context to show that the life you live is attractive because the teaching of Jesus Christ is attractive, and get under the skin of your master this way.

I remember once being in a mall – I may have mentioned this – I think I did mention this probably at the time – but it's several years ago now. And there was

a display about HIV/AIDS and some guys were there. They were collecting money. I have forgotten the particular project but it was for people who had HIV/AIDS.

And I walked by them and I stopped and I said, “It’s good you are doing something about this.” I made a donation. I said, “I have been involved with others in addressing this in Africa” (where of course the pandemic is huge).

And this guy I talked to was very excited about that. “Wow, that’s great! What do you do?”

I said, “I am a pastor.”

And he immediately turned around, turned his back to me and walked away.

And I said, “Come back.”

He didn’t respond so I walked behind him and I said, “Is it a problem to you that I am a pastor?”

And he just gestured to me like this and didn’t speak to me again.

Why? Because what does he know about Christians and homosexuality? That we’re against it – that’s what he knows. He doesn’t know we actually love homosexual people. (And this particular rehabilitation they were connected to was a gay thing.)

Now Paul says to the slaves in this context regarding the spirit of their age, “Listen, if you fight against your masters you’re not going to get anywhere, so why not just bring the Lord into your slavery and serve the Lord, submit to the will of God from your heart in this context?”

He said to the Corinthians, by the way, “Whatever you were in when you were saved, stay there. If you were a slave, you don’t have to get out of this. If you were free, you’re free. Remember you are slaves to Christ anyway. But don’t start to create a movement to get out of it. Do the more important work, which is getting into the hearts of men and women in such a way that these things that are contrary to the gospel and to sound doctrine will begin to fall away.”

Now we are not going to see changes in our laws that bring it back to the gospel in the next couple of decades. We are going to see the continuation of the eroding of the Christian ethic.

But let’s think bigger than that and let’s, as a church, and let’s, as individuals, rather than fretting over these movements – and they do cause us to be anxious; of course they do because our kids are growing up in these environments – but let’s

so work to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ into our city, our communities, through our own faithfulness to the Lord Jesus, through our own kindness and love of those who live outside of Christ that, as Paul said to Titus about the slaves, that they (the slaves) who don't talk back to their masters but who subject themselves and try to please them, they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

And if we don't make Christ attractive, if we portray Him as something other than who He is, we are not going to win people's hearts.

And so five times in the four verses he talks to slaves, he brings the Lord in, he brings Christ in, he brings the will of God in, he brings God in, even though this was a sinful structure that they were part of.

If we want to change our city – and we do – change our nation – and we do – change our world – and we do – we begin with the gospel. And out of that, as God the Holy Spirit works in people's lives and brings that reconciliation to Himself and then that transformation, the spirit, the collective psyche and outlook and perspective of our day will change. But it may be long after most of us are dead that there is anything significant that comes from that.

In the grand scheme of history it has happened before. The world has lived in secular ages like this before and people have come back to seek after God.

Where are the great spiritual movements coming from in the next decades in this century? I don't know but I would suggest South Korea would be one. There was no church there 120 years ago. It's now the second largest missionary force in the world.

Perhaps more unexpectedly, China where they estimate in 1949, the time of the Revolution, there were about a million Christians. Today it is hard to be accurate but those who watch China carefully estimate anything from 70, 80, 90, 100 million Christians in China now. China is growing and will be in the 21st Century, probably the greatest economic power in the world, and probably, as a result of that, the greatest political power in the world. And let's dare to pray that it will be the greatest spiritual power in the world.

You look at the Chinese Diaspora, look at the Chinese churches in this city and every city of the world where Chinese people have gone, you find churches that are alive and healthy and growing. And God is doing something there that is going to transform their country, and through them, perhaps the world.

Who knows what's going to happen in India with the growth of the church there, Indonesia, with the growth of the church there? It is going to change the structures of society and become vehicles for the gospel.

It may be a long time before the gospel comes back with that kind of power in Europe and that kind of power in North America, but we long and work and pray that it will do so.

And although it is right and good to be involved in political issues and social issues, our primary calling is to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ because that alone counters those things, which do not conform to the gospel, and to sound doctrine, says Paul. That is what will change people and that alone.

And like Paul, we have to say, in Romans 1:16:

“I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation.”

Do you believe that? Are you committed to that?

There may be some of us here this morning and you know there are lots of things wrong in your life, never realized it's not the outward fruit that is the problem; it's the inner cause. You have never come to Christ yourself, and you can do so this morning. You can say, “Lord, I need You in my life. I realize all these things I have battled with out here, outside, I try to control them, but it's a transformation of my heart that is going to change everything else.”

And if that is you this morning, you can come to Christ and just acknowledge your need of Him and invite Him to come and be your Savior on the basis of His death for you on the cross and His resurrection from the dead and to reign as Lord. And in your life, in changing the heart will change the externals.

He will do that for you this morning. And we collectively, as the salt of the earth, can have that influence in our culture as well.

Well, let's pray together. Let's ask God to make this real in our lives, not just theory, but something that drives us and steers us.

Lord, we thank You so much for the power of the gospel, not just in the hearts of individuals which all of us are – that's where it begins – but thank You for the power of the gospel in the community and the cultures where it takes root in the hearts of people. We know not everybody is ever going to become a Christian, but we pray again Lord that there will be such a work of God in this land and such a work of God in our world that there will be those whose life in Christ has such influence that we will see righteousness and godliness exalted again.

But first Lord, work in our own hearts and give us a vision for this, we pray. For we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

**Note: Page 8 - there is a word I couldn't catch ("Don't be too taken up with those ... internals.)