

## # 22 – Agree with God – Ephesians 6:5-9

There is a devotional reading practice called "Lectio Divina" where you read Scripture and allow God to speak to you as you ask specific questions about what you've just read. God speaks to us in His Word through resonance and resistance. He speaks to us through resonance when something we read captures our attention and it feels as if God Himself is whispering those words in our ears. He speaks to us through resistance when we encounter something that immediately causes repulsion or displeasure.

I believe today's text may have that effect in us. Do not be afraid; allow God to speak to you and allow yourself to agree with Him.

<sup>5</sup> Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, <sup>6</sup> not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, <sup>7</sup> rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, <sup>8</sup> knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. <sup>9</sup> Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Paul begins his letter by revealing God's transcendent plan for believers: from before the foundation of the world, God planned to save us through the gospel of Jesus Christ, rescuing us from our sinful life and uniting us to Him in a personal relationship that gives us new life.

He teaches that we receive this salvation by hearing, believing, and accepting the gospel. Despite being dead in our sins and enemies of God, and not being of Jewish descent, we are now called the family of God, that is, the church.

Paul was fully committed to proclaiming God's glorious plan of love, willing to give his life for this message on behalf of his listeners, trusting in God's power to enable believers to live according to the gospel.

Furthermore, he exhorts all who are transformed by the gospel to demonstrate that transformation by imitating God in Jesus Christ, living a life of love, light, humility, and submission as a testimony to the world.

Finally, he explores how this transformed life is reflected in the fundamental relationships of every believer, such as marriage, parent-child relationships, and now, relationships between masters and slaves.

**The Bible's primary purpose is to introduce us to Christ.** It is through accepting Christ as the sacrifice for our sins and our only hope that we can understand passages like Ephesians 5 and 6. It is not merely a morality manual but a description of how the Spirit of God empowers us to become what God planned for us to be.

When the Spirit of God enters a person's life, it transforms everything, especially their thinking regarding marriage, parenthood, and work. This change is wonderful but also radical.

In Paul's time, the church included both masters and slaves, who likely sat together when the letter was first read.

**1 Our spiritual reality does not always change our external circumstances.** It is crucial not to interpret these texts through the lens of American history. It is important to understand that, in Paul's time, slavery was a widespread reality in the Roman world. While it is difficult to accept today that one person could own another, this was common back then.

It is not correct practice to substitute the modern terms "employee" and "employer" instead of "slave" and "master" like some teachers like to do. Paul was speaking to real Christian slaves and real Christian masters.

Paul was not speaking of the same type of slavery practiced in more recent times. In Roman society, slavery was a complex institution that was a fundamental part of the economy, and many slaves were treated both with abuse and consideration, sometimes as family members.

Westerman says: "The institution of slavery was a fact of Mediterranean economic life so completely accepted as part of the labor structure of the time that one cannot speak correctly of the 'problem' of slavery in antiquity."

- Slavery in Paul's time did not have a racial component as it did during the American Civil War era.

*BEFORE TALKING ABOUT WHAT PAUL WANTED TO SAY, LET'S LOOK AT WHAT HE DIDN'T SAY:*

*- He does not tell Christian slaves that they are now free from their obligations.*

*- Nor does he tell Christian masters that since they now follow Christ, they should free their slaves.*

Of course, Paul was anti-slavery. But Paul did not want Christians to base their identity on their circumstances (whether master or slave).

He wanted every Christian, like himself, to find their identity in their relationship with Christ. **Galatians 3:27-28** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- "Paul could not abolish Roman slavery, but he could promote freedom in Christ. He could not change circumstances, but he could impact the way his listeners thought."

- Where do you find your identity, in your circumstances or in your relationship with Christ? Am I saying there aren't bad circumstances worthy of your intervention? NO - Am I saying we as Christians should be apathetic of the social needs around us? NO - "Until you find satisfaction in Christ, you cannot understand or positively impact your own circumstances or those of others." I am also saying that through your satisfaction in Christ it is possible to endure circumstances that may or may not change.

## **2 Let yourself be used as an instrument for the gospel**

**Titus 2:9-11** <sup>9</sup> Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, <sup>10</sup> not pilfering, but showing all good faith, **so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.** <sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.

"Paul is not guided by a pragmatic spirit; rather, he allows himself to be guided by his theological convictions. What is the theological conviction that guides him? It is that God's priority, as revealed in His word, is to reconcile sinners through Jesus, and that those of us who are reconciled should increasingly resemble Jesus."

Paul was clear that his message was that of reconciliation **2 Corinthians 5:19-20** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (by the way, that is the message that God entrusted to every believer)

Paul's goal was not to please those on the left or those on the right in the human rights debate. His desire was to bring as many as he could from both the right and the left into a life-giving relationship with Christ.

"Paul was very clear about the message; he also understood the nature of the circumstances (knowing that the issue of slavery, like divorce, and every other social problem, lies in the sinful nature of humanity); and finally, Paul understood the urgency of his message."

How many people would Paul have reached for Christ if his message had been the abolition of Roman slavery? None. **The power of influence of Christians in Paul's time, as well as today, lies solely and exclusively in how we preach and live the gospel.**

Here's the corrected version of your text:

"Why is the church in the world? Why does Awaken Church exist in Las Vegas? What were you saved for? Our mission is not political, social, or economic. Society does not determine what the church is about; Christ determines what the church is about.

"When the central—that is to say, the gospel—becomes peripheral, then the peripheral becomes central."

WE NEED TO RETURN TO THE CONVICTION THAT THE GOSPEL IS THE ANSWER OF GOD FOR THE WORLD **Romans 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

"Why is there so much impiety in the world? Because there are not enough disciples of Jesus. How do we get more disciples of Jesus? By talking about the social problems of the day? No. We make more disciples of Jesus as we preach and live the gospel.

More disciples of Jesus = More people who think like Jesus = More people who live like Jesus = Godly science, godly politics, godly arts, godly athletes, etc."

### **3 Choose God**

**1 Peter 2:18-21** <sup>18</sup> Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. <sup>19</sup> For this is a gracious thing, when, **mindful of God**, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup> For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, **this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.** <sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, **so that you might follow in his steps.**

Each time I read Paul's directions for Christian relationships—between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves—Paul reduced his instructions to include submission, love, honor, consideration, and obedience. That's it???

Every time I read these words as a young person; thousands of alternative scenarios arose: What if my parents asked me to do something bad? What if they mistreated me?

When I entered the workforce and read that I must be obedient and maintain integrity in my work, I asked myself: What if my boss is unfair? What if there is favoritism?

When I got married and read that the husband must love his wife, the scenarios arose again: What if my wife doesn't respect me? What if she cheats on me? What if she is not who she says she is?

And I wondered, why doesn't Paul include all these details to help me better understand what he meant?

Later, I realized two things about my doubts: **First**, they revealed more about my heart than I realized. They showed that I was looking for an excuse not to do what God wants me to do. **Second**, I discovered that what the Spirit of God gave Paul was sufficient for every scenario I considered. **Because in any situation, the responsibility lies with me—whether I am to please God or whether I am to please myself.**

Some business owners present may be waiting for me to discuss the work ethic that Christian employees should have. Workers are waiting to hear how employers should be thoughtful and generous.

Others may be waiting to hear about how a good work ethic can increase the chances of financial success for both employers and employees. However, this would simply be me appealing to our greed (not that there aren't benefits to being a good employee).

But what Paul and Peter, whom we have just read, are telling us aligns with what the Westminster Confession says about the ultimate purpose of humanity: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Paul is instructing us that when faced with challenges in every human relationship, we should do exactly what God did for us: 'Choose Him.'

**Choosing God means choosing to be like Him.** In other words, not only choosing behaviors that imitate Him, but also choosing the attitude of the heart that emulates Jesus. That's why the Bible teaches us about obedience, humility, respect, and love—these are all attitudes of the heart of Jesus.

Whether as an employee or employer, adopt the attitude of Jesus toward your counterpart.

**Choosing God means opting for His joy over our own.** It's about seeking to please our Savior by doing what He approves of. So, whether as an employee or employer, when faced with the choice between our own satisfaction and pleasing Him, we choose to prioritize pleasing Him over ourselves.

**Choosing God means agreeing with what he says:**

**Psalms 19:7-9** The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup> the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; <sup>9</sup> the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.

**Job 22:21-23** Submit to God and you will have peace, then it will be well with you. <sup>22</sup> Listen to God's instructions and keep them in your heart. <sup>23</sup> If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored; therefore, clean your life.

**Have you found the peace that comes from agreeing with God?** You can do it today.

- Agree with God in what he says about the rebellion of our hearts—that we are sinners.
- Agree with what God says in providing us with a wonderful Savior in Jesus—even though we separated and sinned, he loved us enough to send us a Savior.
- Agree with what the Bible says about what it means to not only be intellectually engaged with the idea but to trust our lives to the God who loves us and who sent his Son for us.
- Be in agreement with God and be at peace.