

1 Timothy 6:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

Analysis

And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren (οἱ δὲ πιστοὺς ἔχοντες δεσπότας μὴ καταφρονείτωσαν, ὅτι ἀδελφοί εἰσιν, hoi de pistous echontes despotas mē kataphroneitōsan, hoti adelphoi eisin)—'those who have believing masters must not disrespect them because they are brothers.' Kataphroneō means to despise, look down on. The danger: Christian slaves might presume on brotherhood to slack off or show disrespect.

But rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit (ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον δουλευέτωσαν, ὅτι πιστοί εἰσιν καὶ ἀγαπητοὶ οἱ τῆς εὐεργεσίας ἀντιλαμβανόμενοι, alla mallon douleuetōsan, hoti pistoi eisin kai agapētoi hoi tēs euergesías antilambanomenoi)—'rather serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers and beloved.' Douleuo means to serve as a slave, work. Euergesia means good deed, benefit, kindness.

Christian slaves with Christian masters should serve better, not worse—motivated by love for brothers and desire to honor Christ. Gospel unity doesn't erase social distinctions but transforms their meaning. Master and slave are equal in Christ (Galatians 3:28) while maintaining different roles. Love motivates excellence in service.

Historical Context

The early church included both slaves and masters worshiping together (Philemon demonstrates this). Some slaves apparently assumed Christian freedom meant social equality—refusing proper respect to Christian masters. Paul corrects this: spiritual equality in Christ doesn't abolish social roles. Slaves should serve Christian masters even more faithfully, motivated by brotherhood, not less. The gospel transforms relationships, not structures.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does spiritual equality in Christ relate to social/economic differences in this world?
2. Why should Christian slaves serve Christian masters even better—what motivates excellence?
3. How does this principle apply to Christian employees and employers today?

Interlinear Text

οἱ δὲ πιστοί ἔχοντες δεσπότας μὴ καταφρονείτωσαν
G3588 And believing they that have masters not despise
G1161 G4103 G2192 G1203 G3361 G2706

ὅτι ἀδελφοί εἰσιν ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον δουλευέτωσαν ὅτι
because brethren they are but rather do them service because
G3754 G80 G1526 G235 G3123 G1398 G3754

πιστοί εἰσιν καὶ ἀγαπητοὶ οἱ τῆς εὐεργεσίας
believing they are and beloved G3588 G3588 of the benefit
G4103 G1526 G2532 G27 G2108

ἀντιλαμβανόμενοι Ταῦτα δίδασκε καὶ παρακάλει
partakers These things teach and exhort
G482 G5023 G1321 G2532 G3870

Additional Cross-References

Colossians 4:1 (Parallel theme): Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

1 Timothy 4:11 (Parallel theme): These things command and teach.

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