

“The beauty of God in a servant” (Eph 6:5-9)

Today we will study the theme, “The beauty of God in a servant” from Eph 6:5-9.

In Eph 1-3, Paul describes who we are in Christ. And 4-6, he discusses our practice – how we are to live in Christ. In cp. 5 he says, “Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. Walk in love. Live as Children of Light in this evil days. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Respect one another and serve for one another.”

After these exhortations, three kind of relationships are listed. The relationship between husband and wife, relationship between parents and children, and relationship between master and slave.

The relationship between husband and wife is the closest relationship. The relationship between parents and children is the one that cannot be avoided, and in which there is no choice. And the relationship between master and slave is the strictest relationship.

These human relations are the arena where we live as dearly loved children, and be imitators of God, walk in love, live as children of light, be filled with the Holy Spirit, respect and serve for one another.

If we can be imitators of God in the closest, unavoidable, most severe relationships, we can live like that in any other relationships.

1. Serve with the sincerity of heart

6:5-8

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ 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. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

In those days, there were some people who were slaves. And in the church in Ephesus, there were some slaves who believed in Jesus and followed Him. Paul is speaking to these people.

What if they were asked to do what they want to do? Of course they would do it. Then when they finish doing it, they would think, “I did what I was told to do.

What a good slave I am!" Of course, sometimes they were asked to do something they didn't want to do. Perhaps most of the time it must have been like that. In situations like that, their attitude is tested whether they are truly ready to obey.

"Well, I am a slave, so I have no choice but to obey my master. I cannot help doing what I was told to do. If I don't, I will be in trouble, so I must do it. I don't want to be whipped. I don't really want to do it, but I have to do it."

Paul says, "Don't do it like that, but obey your earthly masters with sincerity of heart." We may say, "No way!"

Let's think about the meaning of "serving with sincerity of heart."

David served king Saul with sincerity of heart. He went wherever Saul sent him and fought the battle. It was not for himself, it was for Saul and for Israel. However, as people praise so much about David's victory, Saul became angry. And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David (1 Sam 18). Finally, Saul started to think of killing David. He not only thought of it, but also told this to his son Jonathan and all his attendants (1 Sam 19:1). Even after that, David continued to serve him (1 Sam 19:7). Saul tried to pin David to the wall with his spear, but David escaped from him (1 Sam 19:10). But David continued to respect Saul as the Lord's anointed (1 Sam 24:6). David could have killed Saul in the cave, but he didn't do it (1 Sam 24:11).

Tit 2:9-10 (NASB)

Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

This verse shows what it means to "serve with sincerity of heart." By the person who serve with sincerity of heart, the gospel of Christ will shine as reality. The gospel of Christ will move with life and show how rich and powerful the gospel is.

The point is we are placed here to show God's glory as one who is in Christ. In other words, to serve with sincerity of heart is not necessarily to do what you were told literally. There are some things we cannot do as Jesus followers. We cannot turn our back on God. We cannot grieve the Holy Spirit. We respond to the difficult situations as one who does the will of Christ. We respond, receiving

the wisdom and courage from the Holy Spirit. Paul says “I no longer live, but let Christ live in me (Gal 2:20).”

We may be asked to do too much, something impossible. How we respond at that time will display the beauty of God, our savior and Lord. Man cannot see God with physical eyes. But through our response, the riches of God will be shown vividly.

We are servants of Christ. As servant of Christ, we will obey our earthly masters with sincerity of heart. Then our works display the beauty of God.

I had opportunity to meet a writer, Kyoko Toda long time ago. We talked about zoos. She said when we visit a zoo, we can know the culture of the city. So when she goes to a zoo, she looks at not only animals but also people.

She said: At the zoo, there is a person in charge of disposing animal “stuff”. It is a very meaningful, important job actually. By looking at the excrement, they can know the health condition of the animals. But it is not a good-looking job. “What does your father do?” “Well he picks up animal stuff...” How do you feel when you say that, or listen to someone say that?

Here is the conversation between a parent and a child at a zoo. “Look at that man! His job is to collect animal stuff. Don’t become like that man. You must study hard.” The another family made a conversation like this, “Look, that man is collecting animal stuff. By doing that, he is checking animals’ health and body condition. Because of him, animals can stay healthy even in the cage. That is a great job, isn’t it?”

It’s the same for us. There are some jobs that look trivial, boring, unexciting. There are many things we don’t want to do, but must do. At that time, we can do the job while thinking “what’s the meaning of this? Picking up animal stuff! What an unpleasant job! How boring!” Or we can do the same job with the thought “Now I am doing very important job that is a matter of life and death for animals. I’m serving my God, the Creator, the source of life.”

“God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself. God blessed them and told them, “Be masters over the fish and birds and all the animals” (Gen 1:27-28 NLT). It’s such honor to be a partner of God. Amen?!

We must remember that each of our works can display the beauty of God. How important it is! There is nothing more important than that. Some people may

look at us and think how foolish we are. They may make fool of us, “If you use your brain a bit better, you can make your way through the world. Just being honest and diligent doesn’t promise you a success. You are losing out because you became a Christian.”

The Bible says, “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord” (Eph 6:7). “Make the most of every opportunity” (Eph 5:16). Each of our works can display God’s beauty.

In what kind of situation, can we not obey? It is when we stick to our own opinions. Of course there are things we cannot accept as Christians. But most of the time, it is nothing to do with salvation, or eternal life. It can be option A or B or C. I like option A for example. If we look at closely, each of options has its merits and demerits. But I don’t want to follow other opinions. Why? It is often a matter of emotion.

What do we do then? We insist how excellent our opinion is, and how inferior other opinions are. Sometimes we actually argue, and other times we think about it in our head. By doing that, whose glory are we fighting for?

In the first year after graduating from the Bible school, I was serving in a church in Japan. I often ate with my senior pastor and his wife at his place. They cooked rice in gas cooker, and put the rice in electric pot to keep it hot. I washed the electric pot, then I put the rice into it. But the senior pastor said, “No need to wash it. Put rice into it immediately.” It doesn’t mean he doesn’t wash it at all, but he means, “You don’t need to wash it every time.” Well, they’ve been using it like that for many decades and they’ve been fine, didn’t get sick or anything. But I wanted to wash it every time before I put rice. “That’s unhygienic! I am not asking him to wash. I am saying I will wash, so why not?” I complained in my head, as I helped them prepare the meal and clear the table.

Then what happens? Guess what? No matter what he asked me to do, it became difficult for me to say simple “yes”. I was always finding fault with him. No matter what he said, I was doing what I was told to do while thinking my idea is better, more correct and more excellent than his. This attitude is far from displaying the beauty of God. The problem is not whose idea is more superior or inferior. But the problem is my attitude while obeying.

I couldn't serve with sincerity of heart in the small thing. And that brought a negative influence on my relationship with the pastor, my ministry, and also the whole church.

When we serve with sincerity of heart, that means our actions will display the beauty of God.

2. Servants of Christ

When we look at the Bible, we will read about slaves. In the Old Testament, there are many things written about slaves. As we just saw, even in the New Testament, we read about slaves. Then, does the Bible affirm slavery?

Gal 3:26-28

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We are all one in Christ. We are all children of God. That is the claim of the Bible. There is no discrimination because of nationality. There is no discrimination because of gender. There is no distinction because of social position or job. We are all heirs of God's glory in Christ. There is no one who can make others his slaves, and there is no one who should be other's slave.

Slavery is the situation that shouldn't exist. But the Bible dares say, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters" (v.5).

The situation that shouldn't be is happening. That is the reality. Evil days are becoming more and more evil. God says, even if you are placed in the situation that shouldn't be, continue to be a Servant of Christ. Because you are redeemed by God at the cost of Christ. Because you belong to God. Because you are God's dearly loved children. Because Christ lives in you.

Whatever situation we are in, even if that is the situation that shouldn't be, God is with us, He supports us and protects us. So continue to be a servant of Christ.

That is the same even if you are masters. Continue to be Servants of Christ.

6:9

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

The Bible says, “Live as children of light in this evil days” (Eph 5:8). “Make the most of every opportunity” (Eph 5:16). We take an action and attitude that display the beauty of God.

God allowed a certain situation to happen to us. In that situation, we will follow God. Even when we are in the situation that shouldn't be, we will still trust in God. Because we know that God is with us.

I'd like to share this story. This is introduced in Loren Cunningham's book.

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a big field before God's throne. Some of the groups near the front talked heatedly, not cringing with shame but with aggression.

“How can God judge us? How can He know about suffering?” She jerked back a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. “We endured terror, beatings, torture, death.”

In another group, a black man lowered his collar. “What about this?” he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. “Lynched for no crime but being black! We've suffocated in salve ships, been wrenched from loved ones, toiled till only death gave relief.”

Far out across the field were hundreds of such groups. Each one had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering being permitted in this world.

So each group sent out a leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. There was a Jew, a black, an untouchable from India, an illegitimate, a victim of atomic bomb from Hiroshim and one from a Siberian slave camp. In the center of the field, they consulted with each other. At last, they were ready to present their case.

It was rather simple: Before God would be qualified to be their judge. He must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth as a man.

But because He was God, they set certain safeguards to be sure He could not use His divine powers to help Himself:

Let Him be born a Jew.

Let the legitimacy of His birth be doubted so that non will know who is really His father.

Let Him champion a cause so just but so radical that it brought down upon Him the hate, condemnation and eliminating efforts of every major traditional and established religious authority.

Let Him try to describe what not man had ever seen, tasted, heard or smelled. Let Him try to communicate God to men.

Let Him be betrayed by His dearest friends. Let Him be indicted on false charges and tried before a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge.

Let Him see what it is to be terribly alone, completely abandoned by every living thing. Let Him be tortured, and let Him die the most humiliating death with common thieves.

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the great throng of people.

When the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered another word. No one moved. For suddenly, all knew – God had already served His sentence.¹

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.

Servants, slaves. In those days they were treated like belongings. They had no human rights. If this verse is applied to slaves in those days, there is no reason this cannot be applied to any kind of our relationships today.

“If I obey such harsh masters, I will fall into a terrible situation, right?” Yes, that’s right. It will be terrible. Let’s read the following.

1 Peter 2:19-25

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a

¹ Quoted in Loren Cunningham, *Making Jesus Lord*, YWAM Singapore, 1988, pp..95-98, from Christian Liberation, *Right On*, Berkeley.

beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²² "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." ²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

God is *not* telling this as if it is someone else's business. Indeed Jesus experienced it, leaving us an example.

When we obey because we are conscious of God, then we may suffer various unjust treatments. But, we are not to retaliate or handle it by ourselves, but entrust ourselves to Him who judges justly in eternal perspective. We can also entrust other people's evaluations about us to God. We can entrust our sufferings which we receive in various incidents to God too.

At the cross, Jesus not only received and carried our sins and mistakes, but also the pain and wounds we received because of other's sin and mistakes. And he will heal us.

So we can serve with sincerity of heart. And that will display the beauty of God.

There is no one who chose to be born as a man or a woman. There is no one who chose to be born in which country, in what period of time, as what ethnic group, under which parents. There are so many things we cannot control in this life. But everything is in God's hands. We must recognize God in the situation where we are placed. We must count God. By faith in Him our decision will be made, and it will lead our action. And our action will display the beauty of God.

1 Cor 6:20 (NASB)

For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

In Christ, we belong to God. We are who we are, but we are no longer our own. We have been bought with a price by God. The owner changed. We are the Servant of Christ.

We used to be a slave of sin. However, now we are set free from the rule of sin by the cross of Christ. We are now made servants of Christ and given a new life to live as God's righteousness in Christ (2 Cor 5:21). There is no greater grace than this. We are made ones who show the glory of God. There is no greater honor than this.

Let us be servants of Christ, doing the will of God from our heart.

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection

- 1) How can your work/daily routine be the opportunity to display the beauty of God?
- 2) As followers of Christ, what are the things/commands/instructions we cannot follow in work place or society? Which one is difficult for you not to follow? Why? How would you overcome it?
- 3) Do you have any experience in which you could not obey one thing sincerely and as a result you started to feel a gap with the person? Why couldn't you obey? How did you deal with the situation?