

# Sermon-Based Small Group Bible Study

## Glorious Church: Power and Justice (Ephesians 6:5–9)

### Open

Select one of these “ice breakers” to get the conversation going toward the study.

- Kids often complain “that’s not fair.” As an adult, what makes you want to say, “That’s not fair”?
- What is the most powerful position, formal or informal, you’ve ever held? What was the least powerful position you’ve ever held?
- Tell about a business where you always receive excellent service. How do you feel when you go there?

### Dig

After reading Ephesians 6:5–9 together, discuss these questions.

1. “Bondservants” (verse 5) are slaves. Paul addresses household slaves in the Roman world against the background of the Bible’s response to humans enslaving other humans, grounded in the story of Israel’s exodus from Egypt. Look at each of the following texts to see what the exodus story expressed about slavery: Exodus 6:1–13; Leviticus 26:13; Deuteronomy 6:20–25; Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 7:20–24.
2. Notice the way verse 5 ends: “as you would Christ.” What does that suggest about the “fear and trembling” earlier in the verse: in response to whom does that fear and trembling come? (You might compare Ephesians 5:21.) How does the focus here on Christ, who suffered unjustly and rules as Lord, change the way enslaved people saw themselves?
3. Verse 5 says “with a sincere heart,” and verse 6 says, “not by way of eye-service.” If a person is serving Christ rather than just a human master, how does that emphasize sincerity and rule out doing things just to be seen?
4. Count the number of times in verses 5–8 the enslaved are directed to Christ and God. What does all this direction on Christ-ward and God-ward attitudes create? What does it change about a person in an unjust institution like slavery?
5. How is the instruction to the master in verse 9 like that to the enslaved? If a master took these instructions seriously, what would be the necessary actions to take?

*Summary: As with other household roles, Paul does not challenge the institution but calls everyone, not just those in subservient positions, to love and serve one another as Christ has served us. Even in the injustice of enslavement, Christians are called to act with grace, mercy, humility, and love because we serve Christ, who even prayed for and forgave those who crucified him. Even with the power of a master, Christians are called to act with humility and generosity. But the grace of God still penetrates deeply. When it takes root in the human heart, it also begins to change the structures of society. Today with centuries of Christian influence the injustice of slavery is widely perceived, even if oppression continues in other forms. And today the lordship of Christ challenges every way humans try to use other humans for their own selfish advantage while bestowing dignity and significance on the oppressed.*

## Reflect

Use any of these prompts to encourage group members to apply the text to their own experiences.

- Are you presently living with an unfair situation? How can the lordship and example of Christ direct your response to that situation?
- Or are you presently in a position of power? How can you exercise the power you have in a way that honors Christ?
- The Bible's teaching on slavery is often cited as a reason not to trust it as God's word ("The Bible gets slavery wrong, so why should we trust it for anything else?"). In light of your study so far, including our discussion, what do you think of that idea? What problems or questions remain for you about this subject?
- Paul addressed the injustice of slavery by telling both the enslaved and enslavers to submit to Christ and treat one another as Christ has treated us. What are some areas of life today where Christians need to apply this approach?

## Pray

Invite the group to pray together using any of these suggestions.

- What needs have you heard from others in the group that we can pray about?
- What areas of injustice, those we face or those others face, need the transformative grace of God?
- Are there ways we've mistreated others for which we need forgiveness?