

Equal Status But Different Roles

Proper 20

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1 Tim. 2:1-15

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

These are words that Paul wrote in his letter to those at Galatia. But what did he mean by them? Did he mean that distinctions no longer matter? Well, yes, and no. They do not matter in terms of salvation; Jesus Christ has paid the price for the sins of the whole, no matter what vocation, or position, you may have started in, be it Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. Jesus’ free gift of salvation is yours for the receiving through faith. But Paul did not mean to say that distinctions would be removed. In fact, in another letter, he wrote quite the opposite.

In the letter short enough to have only one chapter, Philemon, Paul not only encourages Onesimus to return to his position as a slave to Philemon, but also that Philemon would receive him back as such. However, Paul also wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians: “Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)”—but like in his letter to those in Galatia, he continues—“For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.”

What matters before God is not your position on earth, but whether you have been baptized in and have faith in His Son as the Christ. Nothing else matters. But as ones who have been redeemed, you have been called to serve others in the positions in which you were called, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female.

With this in mind, we’ll consider each of our texts for this morning as to how to best serve our fellow humanity as ones redeemed by Christ the crucified.

Section 1

In Amos, God calls out the wealthy of the land of Israel. He names their sins in being more concerned with riches than in assisting their needy fellow people. In fact, some of them they bought for silver rather than assisting. They were also dealing with each other with false balances and weights, and were not living as ones who had been set apart by God.

Thanks be to God that we no longer buy or sell people in this nation; but are you off the hook? Do you deal justly with all those who come to you for business? Do you try to use underhanded ways to get more or end up on top?

What is more, do you ever do this to those who treat you poorly on account of your faith? What kind of example does that set to those on the outside? In Amos’ days, it was the Israelites who had been set apart by God; and those of the rest of the world watched what was happening with them. That’s how Rahab knew to hide Joshua’s spies rather than to betray them to the government of Jericho. She said, “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, Sihon and

Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and the earth beneath.””

Rahab and others had heard of the God of the Israelites from the word being passed around. What is more, she had heard of the faithfulness of Israelites. Years later, though, Amos was accusing the people of Israel of a lack of faith in how they were treating people, both Gentile foreigners, and each other. As one who has been redeemed by Christ Jesus, how are you doing in fulfilling your duties, both to God and to other people? Would others hear of your faith so that they might desire to have your God as their God? Or do your interactions with them make them wonder if your God is really God because you don't fear Him enough to deal with them justly?

Section 2

The interactions that people on the outside watch are not only with them, but also how you treat one another in marriage, dating, and the like. Just a couple weeks ago, you heard from the author of Hebrews that you are called to “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral.”

Just as certainly as those outside the church watch how you deal with people in your occupational interactions, they are watching what you believe about marriage. While you may be able to live with another in the same household and not engage in married behavior, what example are you giving your neighbors? Do they presume you are living as though you were married, even if you are not? Might they get the idea that you are defiling the marriage bed by doing married things before marriage if you live together before you are?

What about you who are married: are you holding your relationship in the honor that it deserves? Remember that marriage was instituted before the fall into sin even occurred. It was one of God's first gifts to humanity.

Or those of us how are single: are we living in full devotion to God as ones who do not have another allegiance? Are we living chaste and self-controlled lives? Are we keeping our eyes to the tasks at hand as ones redeemed rather than allowing them to wander to places which can only bring us spiritual harm?

And just as there are particular roles for rich and poor, slave and free, there are roles for those of us who are male and those who are female, whether married or not. In 1 Timothy we heard that: “(I)n every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrel; likewise also the women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control...with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man.”

Here God gives both men and women things to consider in their place in life as ones redeemed: men, do you pray for everyone, lifting holy hands to God, and do you live in peace, without anger or arguing? Do you listen to the needs of your wives, if you have them? Do you put her needs above your own as Christ did for His Bride, the Church? Women, do you dress in modesty? Do you adorn yourselves with good works? Do you submit—not in inferiority, but as your role in your relationship with your

husband, again, if you have one? And so, also, women are not called to be pastors or leaders in the church, but learners and teachers over children.

Section 3

Again, the main question each of these texts is getting at is: Have you been living lives of faithfulness? As ones redeemed by Christ, we must honestly answer that we have not—not one of us has. Jesus said in His parable in Luke that ““One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?””

Truly, we did not deserve God’s riches before we were called to faith; and even now in faith, we could never hope to earn our salvation. Thanks be to God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, then, because through His works and His death we have been given eternal life as a free gift—not of our imperfect works!

So then we have the hope of eternal life not of ourselves, but of Jesus’ work. Because of this, we have been freed—freed to be children of God, but not freed to do whatever we want. We can only serve one of two things: righteousness or sin. Don’t live as a slave of sin, but for Christ’s sake, live as a slave of righteousness. It is true that you cannot do that of yourself; that is why God has given you His Holy Spirit.

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” Included in that promise is the promised Holy Spirit, whom you have received at that same baptism. Live then, as slaves of righteousness, loving God, and loving others—those of the faith and even those outside the church. In Jesus’ Name and for His sake. Amen.