

Speaking to the soul



Slaves and masters

All slaves should show full respect for their masters so they will not bring shame on the name of God and his teaching. 1 Timothy 6:1

It's hard for us to imagine what it must have been like when slavery was normal. Between ten and 20 per cent of the population were slaves in Roman times, so it was an issue

with which everyone was familiar. Because the members of the Church were largely drawn from the poorer members of society, it is likely that the proportion of Christians who were slaves was much higher. It was vital, therefore, that Paul handled the question of how Christian slaves should act towards their masters, and the fact that he did so in many of his letters shows what a major issue it was.

Here, he told slaves to give their masters full respect, whether they were Christians or not. That must have been tough, especially if their masters were unreasonable and cruel. However, Paul knew that if Christian slaves acted aggressively and rudely towards their masters, it would give the faith a bad name. If the slave masters were followers of Christ, this was no excuse for Christian slaves to be disrespectful. Indeed, Paul urged them to work all the harder.

Paul's words are of immense value to us today as we reflect on the relationship between employers and employees. The principles haven't changed. We must always act towards our employers with wisdom and respect, whether or not they share our Christian faith. For most Christians, their witness to Christ will be most easily seen in the quality of their daily work. The opportunities to declare our faith in words may well be few and far between, but every hour of every day, people are watching our actions and trying to work out what sort of people we are. Let's pray that the way in which we work today will point people to Jesus, even if we have no opportunity to say a single word.

QUESTION

What do you learn from Paul's teaching about slaves and masters?

PRAYER

Loving Father, help me to live so close to you today that other people will be drawn towards you. Amen

Photo - Entrance to Portstewart Strand. A National Trust facility.

