

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.” —EPHESIANS 6:5

Slavery has left a long and ugly scar on the history of the human race, and tragically, it still does. In the Roman Empire it is estimated that as many as one in every three people were slaves. Paul refers to slaves in eight of his letters, especially to the churches in Asia Minor. Peter also writes similar texts concerning slaves. Hence, the New Testament, particularly Paul, has been criticized for an apparent acceptance and even endorsement of slavery.

There is no question as to the evil of slavery in every form. In 1 Timothy 1:9, Paul writes about the judgement of God on the sinful, and included in a list of lawbreakers he gives are slave traders. Paul is unambiguous about slavery being evil, so why does it appear in his writings as if he condones it?

What we need to recognize is that there is such a thing as ‘the spirit of the age’. That doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a negative influence. What it means is that entrenched in the collective psyche and outlook of people there exists a certain perspective and status quo about life. Every age has its blind spots, and because we are blind to them, we are not as acutely aware of them as the next generation. Every age has its institutionalized sins. Racism, up until very recently, was legally enshrined in certain countries, and is still fresh in our memories today. However, fighting against this collective psyche usually accomplishes very little, whereas the gospel, which is Paul’s primary concern and must be ours, is subversive. It doesn’t merely attack the symptoms, which are the evil

ways of this world, but it goes to the root cause which is our corrupt hearts.

The gospel works first in changing our hearts, which will change our outlook. In the course of time, what is changed on the inside will be expressed on the outside, and eventually change ‘the spirit of the age’. That’s why the church of Jesus Christ is not called to social campaigns as its primary function. The task of the church of Jesus Christ is to address the causes of those things that are wrong and to deal with them in such a way that they will change the spirit of the age.

The priority of the Christian church is and must be the proclamation of the gospel. We can help to adjust the symptoms, but that would not be of lasting help until the cause that lies behind them is addressed. We change the wrongs of this world by bringing Jesus Christ in. It’s the only message we have... the only one.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, grant me your wisdom and the discipline not to be influenced by the ‘spirit of this age’, but only by your life in me. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: Am I influenced by the largely secular ways of this world or am I rooted in Christ?