

**A Postcolonial Re-Reading of Ephesians 6:5-9 in the Light of Teachers' Service in Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

Although the authorship of the epistle of Ephesians has been contested, this paper holds that Paul is the author of the epistle. This paper focuses on one aspect of the household codes in Ephesians on the issue of δοῦλος 'slave' and Κύριός 'master', which is showing Roman Empire ideology of inequality between the employees and employers relationships. The relationship was related to the particular ways in which employee and employer were constructed according to hierarchical notions, seen to provide the framework for a relationship which is relevant to the Nigerian hierarchy. Slavery was perceived to provide continuity and stability within the social order both during the Graeco-Roman time and present Nigerian context. Despite the various interpretations of Ephesians 6:5-9, it has often tolerated an uncritical stance on cultural-historical biases during its patriarchal history of interpretation. Therefore, dynamic processes of interpretation and reinterpretation within this epistle have often been neglected as important hermeneutic keys for contemporary Nigerian readers. Did Paul in a systematic way endorse slavery in Ephesians? This paper argues that Paul supported both the institution of slavery by legitimizing the role of the slaves to the relationship with Christ. This study examines the Nigerian context to explore possible new kinds of slavery found in the teachers' service which may be equivalent, wicked and more deadly than the treatment of slaves by their masters in Ephesus. In view of postcolonial criticism, this paper argues that the code serves as an ongoing invitation to resist any form of exploitation in Nigeria as well as ancient Roman Empire, the text serves as a yardstick for re-imagining of the teacher service in the Nigerian context.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial, Ephesians, Teachers' service, Nigeria

## Introduction

The household codes in Ephesians 5:21-6:1-9 have three-dimensional relationships: the husband and wife, parents (fathers) and children, and slaves and master. The same can be found in Colossians 3:18-4:1. Most scholars regard the *Haustafel*<sup>1</sup> to have an apologetic thrust in Ephesians, viewing it as an attempt to shield the new Christian movement from the suspicion that it might undermine contemporary social structures and ultimately threaten the stability of the Roman Empire (Timothy Gombis, 2005:317). In the classical period of the Graeco-Roman world, the family formed an important component structure in the *polis*, where relationships of power, protection, submission, honour and duty were to be properly shaped if a city was to flourish morally (Elna Mouton, 2014:1-2). The household functioned as the foundational unit of the state in antiquity and was supported by household codes that served as a model for the political order for both Greeks and Romans (Charles van Zyl & Lilly Nortjé-Meyer, 2018:2).

Ephesians 6:5-9 passages is helpful because it assumes that power is a fundamental reality in human relations from time past, which has been misused to oppress and exploit the poor. Yet in every case, power is subverted for a distinctly Christian purpose especially, but not exclusively regarding how people speak. This is what leads the Christian community into being a community where songs of praise and a symphony of thanksgiving break forth from everyone, the vision of the church that Paul gives in Ephesians 5:18-20 right before talking about these three relationships where power is involved. Subordination is considered to be the normal life during the Roman Empire because society is built on the household model where the *Paterfamilias* is the one with the authority over everyone under him. There are challenges when people in power are misinterpreting and misreading Ephesians 6:5-9 in order to exploit public primary school teachers in Nigeria due to lack of payment of salaries.

Postcolonial Biblical Criticism as affirmed by Surgirharajah (2001:247) is an “investigation into various colonial achievements and discussion on a variety of issues ranging from slavery to migration.”

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<sup>1</sup> The *Haustafel* which refers to "household table rules" has three different divisions, the husband and wife, parents and children, and masters and slaves. In this paper it is about the aspect of employer and employee relationship during the Graeco-Roman context which this paper will discuss later and how it is being misquoted by some Christian governors in Nigeria to exploit teachers by not paying their salaries.

Furthermore, he notes that it tries to emphasize the relationship between the rulers and the ruled is complex, full of cross-trading and mutual appropriation and confrontation (Surgirtharajah, 2001:250). Therefore, a postcolonial reader is challenged to ask why this was achieved through the Bible; why biblical texts endorsed unequal power distribution and how to read for empowering the disempowered areas and races or creating a better system (Musa Dube, 2000:17). A postcolonial re-reading aims at reading the text again because other postcolonial critics have approached the text from gender and patriarchal lens such as Elizabeth Johnson, Mouton among others. The re-reading in this paper aim at bringing out the hegemony found within the text and how it is being used in the Nigerian context by some Christian governors to exploit teachers by not paying their salaries. In light of these challenges, this paper first offers a brief overview on the letter to Ephesians, the notion of slavery in Graeco-Roman world as seen in Ephesians 6:5-9, the forms of modern-day slavery in Nigeria teachers service, followed by a postcolonial transformative potential of Ephesians 6:5-9 which calls for resistance to any form of misinterpretation which leads to exploitation, subordination, dominance, hegemony found in Nigeria context.

### **Ephesians at a Glance**

Ralph Martin (1986:223) argues that the epistle hard a long-debated questions of authorship and authenticity in Biblical scholarship. Scholars are divided when it comes to the issue of authorship of the letter to the Ephesians. Achtemeier, Green, & Thompson gave some reasons why some scholars disagree with Paul being the author of the letter. First is the style of Greek that was used in writing Ephesians which seems different from other major letters of Paul such as Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. The literary similarities between the letter and Colossians that it appears the author of Ephesians depended on Colossians. Lastly, Ephesians has several words and phrases that do not appear in other Pauline letters (2001:379-80). Other reasons against Pauline authorship is that there was no mention of justification in Ephesians; there seem to be contradictions when Ephesians is compared with letters to the Corinthians (Ephesians 5:21-23 contradicts 1 Corinthians 7; Ephesians 2:15 contradicts Romans 3:31). Bart Ehrman (2008:391) argues that the differences in style and vocabulary suggest that someone other than Paul wrote this gospel, and used semicolon as someone imitating the writing of the letters of Paul but without complete success.

Attributions by patristic writers, by orthodox and heretical alike are unanimous in favour of Paul being the author of the letter of Ephesians. Ephesians is quoted in 1 and 2 Clement (95 CE), Ignatius, and Polycarp, three late first and early second century writers and church fathers (Ernest Best, 1998:11-18). These early church fathers are believed to have lived closer to the period of the writing of the epistle, so they are closer to the truth about the authorship of Ephesians. Considering the internal evidence for the authorship, in 1:1 Paul is mentioned as the writer and as an apostle of Christ Jesus. It is also believed that the author of Ephesians choose to write in Paul's name implies grammar that he and those to whom he writes revered him, as noted by Best (1998:41). The letter notes that the writer was in prison (3:1; 4:1; 6:20) when it was composed which indicates that the writer probably wrote from prison (Achtmeier, Green, & Thompson, 2001:381). Cicero Marcus who was a Roman statesman, orator, lawyer and philosopher gives the varieties of illustrations on authorship as thus: authorship as writing in one's hand, authorship as writing by dictation, authorship as collaboration in writing (as it is done in academic publications), authorship as authorizing someone else to write, and finally writing 'as if' by the putative author' (Cicero, *Atticus* 6.6). Based on the contested issue on the authorship and authenticity of the epistle, this paper holds on to the first three views of Cicero that Paul was the author of the letter and also based on the evidence in the letter itself. The mention of the writer in the opening verse and reference to being a prisoner in chapter 3 shows that Paul was the writer of the letter. Johnson is of the view that if the letter is not written by Paul himself it is under his supervision or the work of Paul's best disciple: a person whose religious perceptions and theological vision are not inferior to that of Paul (1986:372).

The central messages of the letter to the Ephesians as noted by Martin are as follows: it addresses a perilous situation, full of Christian instructions which are seen as great importance. Such instructions include the unity of Jews and Gentiles as the body of Christ (1:23; 3:6; 4:4; 5:30), stressing the new humanity that has been created by God through Jesus Christ breaking down the barriers of race, culture, social status and unite humanity as one. The doctrine of the church is another message of the letter, which is seen as a single entity and all-inclusive. Paul warns against a cluster of evil practices among the members of the church (5:3, 5, 12), (Johnson, 1986:233-6). The epistles present a composite picture of Christ, Church, Christian life, and interrelationship and functioning of all. These different facets present Christian life on the highest plane.

The epistle presents the church 'which is Christ body' (Ephesians 1:22-23) this is the invisible church, of which Christ is the Head. Colossians presents Christ, 'the head of the body, the church' (Colossians 1:18).

The emphasis is upon Christ, rather than on the church. The interrelationship seems to be the heart of the message of Ephesians because from the beginning of the epistle to the end deals majorly on how God relates with human beings and how human beings need to relate with one another.

The household code in the letter to the Ephesians that has three-dimensional relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, and lastly master and slave depicts the Graeco-Roman status quo and the social order which the society is built on. The household code has received scholarly attention in time past and in recent time on how the relationship found within and outside of the household is being dealt with. Markus Barth (1974:757) argues on the relationship within the household code of Ephesians that focuses on the subordination of other members of the household by the man who is seen as the superior and has the final authority while others are inferior just like masters and slaves. Barth (1974:757) asserts that Paul is viewing slaves with the responsibility of maintaining the social order of the Graeco-Roman world; they are to be obedient to their masters who are considered as superior while the slaves are inferior and they must be happy with their position.

In the words of Francis Foulkes (1989:173), Paul is reflecting the social structure of the society and the church. The principle of this section applies to employers and employee in every age, whether in the home, in business, or the state. This entails the attitudes to work and the demand of master on how they relate with those under them. Elizabeth Johnson (1992:339-40) in her work on the household codes, argues on the neglect and subordination of the women within the household without considering the master and slave relationship within the same context of the household. Robert Bratcher and Eugene Nida (1993:152-5) only consider the historical setting of the relationship between the masters and slaves during the time of Paul. Sarah Tanzer (1994) also decides to focus on the subordination of women during the Graeco-Roman world of the Roman Empire comparing it with the subordination of women by men.

Charles Talbert (2007:145-7) deals with the master and slaves from the historical situation of the people and did some exegesis of the text and what Paul means by saying slaves are to obey their earthly masters as unto Christ. While masters in contrast with slaves are to be fair on how they are treating their slaves.

Showing how scholars that hold onto the traditional view (historical-critical method) of interpreting the Bible are in support of maintaining the social order and by so doing are encouraging slavery. But the challenge is if they are slaves themselves will they endorse it as a means of maintaining the social order? Do they consider the pains and agony some slaves are passing through?

Do they see slaves as human beings and should be treated as those created in the image of God? Or they see it as a means of exercising their supremacy over those that are called slaves?

Furthermore, Gordon D. Fee (2002:1-14) considers the household code from the cultural milieu of the Graeco-Roman world. It is important to note that in each case the first person addressed is the vulnerable and powerless one in the relationship within the household. Additionally, Gordon asserts that three basic assumptions defined the cultural milieu of the Graeco-Roman world: Honor/shame; patronage; and kinship. The concept of honour and shame ruled everything during the Roman Empire; honour, or its opposite, shame, was regularly the basis for most moral appeals, where everyone in the society is to maintain their status. A common sense as to what was honourable or shameful was the fabric that held Graeco-Roman culture together, that slaves are to be treated as chattel. Is a world predicated on honour/shame, patronage, and kinship, a world so radically different from ours culturally but also similar in other ways that it is difficult for one to even imagine. But what is of interest in this paper is how these cultural realities played out in the Graeco-Roman society are also reflecting in Nigeria society due to its patriarchal nature.

The classical system of Roman Empire honour and shame fit into a larger value system that included other contrasts such as active/passive, dominant/subordinate, independent/dependent, male/female, father/children, and master/slave. Within these interrelated oppositions, classical pagan ideals of masculinity were defined as active, independent, superior, brave, rational, and dominant. Slaves' qualities were defined as passive, dependent, inferior, foolish, irrational, and subordinate, which can also be understood as employers/employees (Christopher Paolella, 2015).

Most of these scholars wrote from the traditional interpretation (historical-critical method) of the text. Some approached the text from a feminist point of view, they note the important aspect of life during the Roman Empire of the 1<sup>st</sup> century and how women are being subordinated by the patriarchal structure of the society. The need to address the teachers service in Nigeria now arise because this research calls for resistance to any form of exploitation and mistreatment of human beings by others due to their social status. This study considers the misreading and misinterpretation of Ephesians 6:5-9 by some Christian's leaders in Nigeria. How the passage has been read to exploit public primary school teachers of their right in terms of salaries.

This inquiry will consider the misinterpretation of master and slave relationship on employer and employee relationship during the Graeco-Roman context and contextualizes it to Nigerian public primary school teachers that are being exploited by their employers (government) and some state governors are not paying them. A postcolonial re-reading from the side of the employee will give a better understanding of the text from Nigerian public primary school teachers who are not being paid but are required to still be going to work.

### **Pauline views on Slavery**

The business of slavery is not a new idea in the Bible, the Old Testament also talks about slaves as even the children of Israelites were in bondage for more than 400 years in Egypt. The Old Testament slavery is similar but not the same completely like the Roman Empire period of the New Testament that Paul was a contemporary. There are different ways in which people are enslaved: war captives (prisoners of war), sold (sold for payment of a debt by themselves or others), those abandoned as infants or children of slaves parents (James Jeffers, 1999:221-2). At the same time, Aristotle argues that where there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals (as in the case of those whose business is to use their body, and who can do nothing better), the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master. It is clear, then that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for the latter, slavery is both expedient and right (Aristotle politics). Aristotle is one of the 4<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers BC, whose ideas on the social structure give more insight into the world of the first century Graeco-Roman Empire.

Considering the historical usage of the word ὁ δοῦλος (slave), Connolly (2016) argues that ὁ δοῦλος (slave) remains a disputed figure in Pauline scholarship, in part because the older, more dominant understanding of the δοῦλος, paints a more beneficent picture of the Roman system of slavery. Slaves had no rights and could be killed, mistreated, or sold without a doubt (including women and children); the Roman government encouraged and promoted slavery in the Empire (Zimmerman Steve, 2014:187).

The noun ὁ δοῦλος (slave) which occurs in the New Testament with the stem δοῦλ-stem<sup>2</sup> appears a total of 182 times, with most occurrences δουλεύω “be a slave, serve” appearing 25 times, while δοῦλος “slave, servant” appears 124 times in the whole New Testament. The word δοῦλος (slave) appears in Pauline Epistles 61 times in several of Paul’s letters, normally in either its noun form, a contraction, or its verbal form. While the synoptic gospels and Acts have 71 times. The noun δοῦλος does not occur in the writings of Homer, who happens to be one of the Greek writers' in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century BC. The word δοῦλος has the connotation of possession, not belonging to oneself but to someone else (Moises Silva, 2014, and Horst Balz & Gerhard Schneider, 1990; Patrick Connolly, 2016). The Greek word δοῦλος is derived from the noun δουλεία meaning “slavery” and the verb δουλεύω refers “to be a slave, subject oneself to”, and δουλόω causative meaning “to enslave, subjugate, reduce to servitude” (Silva, 2014:767). The word δοῦλος can also be used as an adjective to mean “subservient, submissive” (Balz & Schneider, 1990:349). The word δοῦλος (slave) is a common image throughout the New Testament, but the variety of ways it is used allows for ambiguity.

In Pauline letters, the word δοῦλ- stem has a various meaning depending on the context; such as Christians are snatched away through baptism from enslaving power of sin, of the law, of death, of the cosmos, and freed for sonship (Romans 6:6-23; Galatians 4:1-5:1; Titus 3:3). Paul’s letter to Philemon is also one of the letters that he addressed the slave Onisimus, but this work will focus on the misinterpretation of Ephesians 6:5-9 by some governors in Nigeria. Slaves as a social class, it is said that their life is just as valuable before God as the life of those who are free (1 Corinthians 7:21; Colossians 3:25).

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<sup>2</sup> The emphasis on the words with the δοῦλ- stem lies "on the service being that of a slave, that is on a repressive or at least dependent form of service under the complete control of a superior. In the Greek world and the Hellenism, the word group has, because of the high evaluation of personal freedom, almost exclusively a demeaning, scornful significance. The δοῦλ- stem in the New Testament serves to designate the relationship of dependence and services: in terms of social reality ‘household slave’, figurative sense (which is the dependence and service of an individual to God). See Balz & Schneider, 1990 *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



Paul uses the word in a figurative sense referring to himself and those following him as slaves of Christ (Balz & Schneider, 1990:352). Paul's audience would have well understood the horrible implications of slavery during the Graeco-Roman world of the New Testament. Though it has an ambiguous meaning, the use of the term δοῦλος was deliberate and intended to evoke painful images and feelings (Patrick Connolly, 2016). The meaning of δοῦλος is that of being subjected as a slave to the will of another person. The word δοῦλος is serving as human independence is set aside and another person will take precedence of the person. Hence, according to the letter to Galatians 5:16-21, humans are subjected as slaves to their sinful nature that makes them behave as they do not want to behave (Paul is using δοῦλος in the figurative sense of being enslaved by the sinful nature). As subjects to sinful flesh, a human "...may obey the Spirit, but the flesh will restrict him/her" (Gromacki, 2002:164).

In other Pauline letters such as 1 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, and Romans, Paul has two distinct elements to his understanding of slavery: anthropological and sociological. Paul understands slavery to be an inherent aspect of life as a human being (Connolly, 2016:3-4).

This paper argues that a re-reading of Ephesians 6:5-9 about employers and employees due to the misinterpretation of some Christian governors in Nigeria, and contrasting it with the Graeco-Roman Empire which differs from the traditional interpretation of Ephesians 6:5-9. Any conclusions reached in the area of Biblical scholarship should provide a new framework in which to discuss Pauline social theory in Ephesians. Pauline understanding of slavery and obedient to their masters are oppressive towards his day's unjust social order, will create a framework for present-day Biblical scholars in postcolonial studies to subvert oppressive repetitions of their social orders in the modern time.

### **Hegemony in Ephesians 6:5-9**

The phrase οἱ δοῦλοι (the slaves) vocative of direct addresses and along with the present imperative ὑπακούετε (obeys) has a grammatical significance. It explains that slaves are subordinate to the superior power and are obliged to obey their masters daily regardless of their will even when they are exploited of their right as human beings. The epistle of Ephesians draws one's attention to the hegemony nature of the masters/slaves relationship during the Graeco-Roman Empire, where the masters are having supremacy over those under them as slaves.

Best Ernest who asserts that "slaves were, of course, accustomed to being addressed by their master and given orders, but probably not to being addressed on an equality with their masters" (1998:572). The social construction of the Roman Empire did not give room for slaves to be seen on the same level as the masters or employers. The elite and middle-class people that owned slaves in the Roman Empire did not consider themselves as being equal with their slaves. The relationship that existed between the masters and the slaves is more hegemonic. Paul's presentation of slavery took slaves from a non-recognized social status within the Christian faith to a fully recognized role in his Christian communities. Paul identified himself as a slave of God, which made him Christianize the subordination of slaves to their masters, which resulted in social recognition within the Christian communities.

There is no fair treatment between the masters and the slaves because it is a matter of superior versus the inferior. The relationship between the employer and employee is not of fair treatment but of seniority based on the structure of the Graeco-Roman Empire, which is still affecting the Nigerian society today. Those in a high position demand respect but in most cases do not pay those primary school teachers working under them their salary. The Graeco-Roman Empire is seen in such a hierarchical structure where others are to obey the employer without questioning his/her authority no matter what. This pericope is part of the household management where the focus was on how a master should rule his slaves, as observed by Lincoln Andrew (1990:415). The relationship between employer and employee in the Graeco-Roman is one in which it is inappropriate to talk about justice because there can be no injustice in relating to things that are one's own. A slave is a man's chattel "personal possession" (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 5.1134b). Drawing insight from Aristotle is to give a better understanding of slavery during the first century, where they are not considered for any benefits (payment) apart from eating the food they are given. More so, the Roman law further classified employees as chattel and as a speaking tool.

On the social context, the command to slaves takes into account the subordinate social position of the slaves even though some slaves are better than the poor in the society in the Roman Empire, they were not considered as persons with rights but as objects over which their master had the right of disposal at any given time.

The masters were the owners of the slaves, whom the slaves are to obey them. In the words of Keener Craig (1992:185-6) slavery was painful to slaves, and the insensitivity of authoritarian heads of households was painful to wives and children; these were the issues apostle Paul is faced with and needs to address within the small community of believers in Ephesus. Paul christianises the practice but did not come out to challenge the moral right of structure such as slavery that exists. In making a contrast of the ancient Graeco-Roman world with our modern world, Keener went further to state that "the ancient world was not a modern democracy (where you can fight for your right and have freedom) in which people of all classes could dissent and protest without anticipating violent suppression" (1992:185). This depicts the nature of the Roman empire of the ancient world, where the structure of the society cannot be challenged or protested against without facing suppression from those in power. Presently there are countries in the world that are facing such kind of suppression by their government.

It is important to note that without the instrument of slavery, the culture of the ruling class in Greece and Rome could in no way have become what it is then. It was slavery that first made possible the division of labour between agriculture and industry on a considerable scale. Without slavery, there will be no Greek and Roman state, no Greek art and science; without slavery, no Roman empire (Steve Zimmerman, 2014:188). Although slaves who worked on huge Roman estates as employees are tricky, flattery, fraud, and fawning obedience to lessen the burden work. There were no holidays, sick leave, pensions, or other benefits guaranteed to slaves. Because they are seen as properties of the owner, it is believed that there is no need for the slaves to have benefits, once a slave died he/she will be replaced and nothing will be given to the family (Zimmerman, 2014:189). Hegemony, subordination, exploitation of the slaves during the Roman Empire by their owners seem not to have ended. Furthermore, this research examines and addresses some questions as they are related to God and dignity of labour concerning Nigerian society. What are the factors that inhibit some people from having joy and esteem in their work? Why is it that people are being victimized in their work? How is the government exploiting the teachers and making allusions that as Christians they are to obey those in authority?

### **Forms of Modern-day Slavery in Nigeria Teachers Service**

Paul's admonition in Ephesians 6:5-9 has been misinterpreted with the Nigerian context of modern-day slavery in the public primary school teachers; one will find the subordination of employees with the way Paul presented them. Three verses are dedicated to slaves because they are inferior. Religion has been used and still being used to subordinate primary school teachers in Nigeria. Even though those in power are seen as secular employers, religion plays a major role as a means of exploiting those under their authority, and as a means to silence the teachers that are oppressed. The public primary school teachers in Nigeria are also made to feel subordinated by some state governors such as that of Kaduna state who sacked 21,780 teachers in the year 2017 (Carl Umegboro, 2017). Mei-Ling Ellerman (2017:191) argues that some forms of power are more easily recognized as subordination, particularly those that are evident, too exacting, excessive in scope, demeaning, or that involve immoral conduct. Recognizable subordination may generate anger and indignation, but depending on the individuals, their situation, the intersectional forms of oppression that they experience, and other factors could motivate them to act or gradually discourage and disempower them. The recognizable subordination of slaves in Ephesians often takes the form of direct control.

In Nigeria, an employer (government) can dictate what a teacher must do by directing how they work the intensity or length of time they work and their free time. Controlling teachers' activities and how they carry them out constricts their already limited autonomy, since they must not only carry out these tasks but change their methods of doing their jobs. The teachers are to sign the register at the resumption to work which latest is 8:00 am and the employers are to come at any given time.

P.G. Kirchsclaeger rightly asserts that at present, millions of human beings are still victims of modern forms of slavery. To avoid a misunderstanding that "modern slavery" is substantially different from slavery in ancient times which is not the case, it must be clearly stated that "modern slavery" still includes exploitation, coercion, wrongful deprivation of personal freedom, suppression, violence, abuse, and so on. The term "modern slavery" is used to ensure that new forms of slavery are also covered (2016:79-80). The experience of slavery is one of the greatest manifestations in the history of human misery (Kobia, 2003:22). Slavery is not a new issue to humanity; it has been there since time immemorial. Slavery is an act where people are oppressed, denied, molested, and treated as if they are not humans. Lisa Kristine (2017) states that,

40.3 million people are in modern slavery across the world  
10 million children are in slavery across the world  
30.4 million people are in slavery in the Asia-Pacific region, mostly in bonded labour  
9.1 million people are in slavery in Africa  
2.1 million people are in slavery in America  
1.5 million people are in slavery in developed economies  
16 million slavery victims are exploited in economic activities  
4.8 million people are forced into sexual exploitation  
4.1 million People in slavery are exploited by governments

Considering the above statistics, 40.3 million people are in modern-day slavery across the whole world, while 4.1 million are people whom the government are exploiting through lack of payment of salaries. The common saying by some government officials in Nigeria is that “rewards of teachers are in heaven” (Yemisi Adegoke, April 20, 2016).

The admonition of most Christian government officials is to keep reminding the teachers on the need to be obedient to those in authority/government, this includes even when they are not paid for months. In the words of Pat Utomi, “the dignity of the human person is tied very closely to work. And when we work well, when we recognize the dignity of other human beings as they work, we essentially elevate the ordinary to the level of the engagement of the divine” (2004:29).

To illustrate the misinterpretation of the household code in Ephesians, some Christian governors in Nigeria like to quote Ephesians 5:22 (“wives, submit to your husbands”) out of context, much the same way they refer to Ephesians 6:5 to their teachers. This normally happens when the government does not want to pay the outstanding salaries of their teachers, then they quote verses like that or make comments like, “Christians are to obey authority/government”, and “the reward of teachers is in heaven” (Yemisi Adegoke, April 20, 2016). Most are denied freedom of expression, movement and leading to mental and physical abuse to some, especially to the vulnerable people as observed by Rebecca Akinremi (2018). As Charles (2007:156) rightly puts it that

We live in a world of large institutions that profit from the exploitation of free wage labour. The individual labourer is used, discarded, paid, underpaid, and manipulated by the media, which sees him or her only as a consumer from who profit is to be made. The rich get richer, the poor are left behind, and the middle class is squeezed to death. The workers' time is consumed by a comprehensive schedule that calls for total absorption into the company to increase profits. The best workers are virtually slaves, at the mercy of large institutions.

Considering the situations that most teachers in Nigeria are facing today, Charles is right, the rich are getting richer and the poor are busy contributing to the rich. Most of the state governors in Nigerian are the emperors while the teachers are oppressed and subjugated. That is why most of the teachers end up having other businesses they are doing or end up opening their own private schools. It is in Nigeria where teachers are not paid salaries for more than 12 months in some of the states and the politicians are getting paid always, most state governors will threaten to sack them if they do not report to work. Having teachers work without payment has become a norm in most states in Nigeria. Lastly, one can see hegemony where most Christian politicians in Nigeria read Ephesians 6:5-9 through the lens of the traditional interpretation of the text. Trying to maintain the status quo of hegemony by the leaders is a misunderstanding and one-sided interpretation of Ephesians 6:5-9. Re-reading Ephesians 6:5-9 from a postcolonial lens and with it, transformative potentials will give better insight on how teachers' service will better be handled in Nigeria by Christian governors which can apply to the rest of the states and nation at large.

### **Postcolonial Transformative Potentials of Ephesians 6:5-9**

In the first three chapters of the letter, unity is presented as a fact. God has made us one not minding our social class, race, ethnicity nationality and so on.

In the last three chapters, unity is presented as a daily goal that human beings need to work towards. It is something Christians must live out and work toward. If the first three chapters emphasise what God has done for humanity then the last three chapters emphasise what we need to do as human beings with given responsibility from God. Paul moves from the indicative to the imperative to command in the last three chapters (Mark Dever, 2005:241). The transformative potentials of Ephesians 6:5-9 rest on the facts that God treats people equally whether slaves or masters, like the golden rule "do to others what you want them to do to you", this is applicable for the teachers' service in Nigeria. As Markus Barth put it, before the Lord and before one another, masters and slaves occupy the same position: all must *ὑπακούετε* "obey". In this, both masters and slaves are equal and how they want to be treated so they should treat others (1974:756).

Michael Parsons (1988) notes that masters are to treat their slaves in the same way (Ephesians 6:9) providing what is right and fair. This is articulated in the context of community, not in the context of the individual's rational acceptance of his/her role. In the same way, each is to treat the other as responsible human beings in a relationship that they are entirely equal before God the creator of all people. Equality is not dependent upon social status, but upon creation reasserted in re-creation.

At the same time, Paul's exhortations in Ephesians 6:5-9 seems to burden the weak and support the more powerful. In four verses, Paul commands slaves to obey their masters in fear and to do good work; but one verse is written warning their masters. For the obedience of slaves comes with a promise and vision of noble employment which can serve as a consolation and make more tolerable the position of slaves, that include nothing that will stop injustices or change a humiliating situation of slaves. Paul makes slaves as responsible for a good social order as those who wield, or presume to possess, superior power, as pointed out by Markus Barth (1974:757). As one can see in the leadership of Nigeria as stated above where teachers have not been paid for several months and the state government expects them to go to work. If the government will see those under them as part of their responsibilities, then they need to treat them as human beings and pay them.

Keener Craig (2014:553) observes that "Paul urges Christian slaves, like wives, to submit to the head of the household as if to Christ, but this duty is again reciprocal". What the slaveholders did not bother to quote was the context, which goes on to say, "Masters do the same to them" (6:9). That is, if slaves have to obey their masters, masters also must obey their slaves. Because slaves have their needs and will also want their masters to give a listening ear and grant their request. For public primary school teachers in Nigeria, the fact that the government wants them to obey, and the government also needs to listen and obey the teachers by meeting their needs because they are also human beings like those in government. Keener (2014:553) further maintains that some early Stoic philosophers had advocated human equality, but Stoics had backed off from this and those who could afford it had slaves. Paul certainly agreed with Stoics in principle: he affirmed that slaves and slaveholders share the same master in heaven (Ephesians 6:9). But his instruction, "Do the same things to them," goes beyond theory to practice which applies to government and teachers in the Nigerian context.

Pauline writings became part of the Christian canon, how they were read was determined by their larger canonical context, from Genesis to Revelation. Considering the creation account in Genesis 1, God made male and female equally, but after the fall of humanity, one can see the subordination of the woman to the man, in contrast to the fact that God made male and female equal (everyone in God's image and likeness). The same thought applies to slavery. In the creation, there is no hint about slavery. Slavery is not part of God's intention from creation but can be interpreted as the result of the fall (Talbert, 2007:155). Considering what the public primary school teachers are passing through under some state governments as noted above, telling them to obey their employers is more of telling them to keep on enriching their government and remain poor. Their children are without hope of schooling, presenting another means of exploitation and slavery and this is expressed in the Nigerian saying "*monkey dey work Baboon dey chop*", this is a pidgin saying meaning, "the less powerful are working while the person at the top is eating" without feeling the pains, hardship, agony, humiliation, that those under them are passing through. The teachers who have not been paid for several months have had their human dignity abused, it is inhuman and not God's desire that people pass through such situations.

Therefore, the admonition to "masters to do the same to them" is in the context of mutual submission to God who treats humanity equally. Considering the social structure of the society in the empire, Paul is now encouraging the believers in Ephesus, even though the law has given the master the right on the slave, you should know that you are accountable to Christ for those working under them. Paul's reference to *Κύριός* in verse 9 is not referring to earthly masters but God who is the Master of all humanity.

Lincoln points out that the assertion of Christ's impartiality is part of the warranty that grounds the exhortation to masters, reminding them that their higher social status gives them no advantage in Christ's eyes and that they are to treat their slaves (those working under them) as they would want Christ to treat them (1990:424). Best further observed that "the conclusion of verse 8 provided the transition and the first clause of verse 9 continues the linking of slaves and owners in some kind of equality which applies to Nigeria" (1998:580). The argument in this paper is that both the masters and the slaves relationship with Christ will transform how the government relates with their teachers and the other way round in the Roman society and also in the Nigerian context.



When human relationship with Christ is good, the relationship between the government and teachers will be transformed and it will impact the society at large.

### **Conclusion**

The household code in the epistle to the Ephesians as this paper has shown is a relationship that is possible through treating others under one's authority as equal in the eyes of God our creator. Paul is understood not to have spoken for the abolition of slavery, but advocated for just and fair treatment of the slaves by their masters. In other words, Paul Christianised the practice of slavery by alluding that they should be treated fairly by their earthly masters. But considering the nature of neo-slavery in the Nigerian context of teacher's service, it is obvious to see that there are other forms of exploitations and slavery in Nigeria. A postcolonial re-reading of Ephesians 6:5-9 with its transformative potentials shows that both masters and slaves are commanded to obey one another and are equal before God. Teachers should be given their due payments and the government should refrain from lack of payment for several months which is causing some teachers not to be motivated to teach effectively. Finally, God is not partial, God will reward human beings based on how we treat each other, including those in positions of authority. Paul certainly agreed with Stoics in principle: he affirmed that slaves and slaveholders share the same master in heaven (Ephesians 6:9). But his instruction, "Do the same things to them," goes beyond theory to practice which shows that slaves have equal right before God with their masters.

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