

Hermeneutical Survey Of Ephesians 6:5-9: Towards Building Altruism In Relationship Between Child Domestic Workers And Their Masters In Nigeria

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Abstract

Child domestic work is a phenomenon in Nigeria which have for along time has continued to exist. Despite governmental and non governmental efforts, child domestic work is not yet not curbed in Nigeria. Government child protective legislations have not been effective enough neither has wide spread poverty rate helped the cause of poor families in Nigeria. Therefore, millions of children are trapped in the shackles of child domestic work in Nigeria in search of better life. This work found out domestic child workers are abused and denied their fundamental human rights. They equally face a lot of hazards. Against this backdrop, this paper examined the biblical guidelines for master/servant relationship in Ephesians6:5-9. This paper strongly showed that only when there is an ultraistic relationship between child domestic workers and their masters will various various inhuman treatments seen in child domestic work curbed in Nigeria.

Introduction

Child domestic workers are children involved in domestic work within the households. They are children under the age of 18, working in households of people other than their families. They do domestic chores, of all types. These include caring for the elderly or children within a household, cleaning and washing dishes, laundering of clothes, running errands and sometimes, helping their employers run small businesses. In a wilder perspective, child domestic work is a child labour issue. The International Labour organization considers child domestic work as one of the largest single largest employment category of children especially girls under the age of sixteen¹. Child domestic work is equally considered by the International Labour Organization convention 182 “a form of slavery in modern times”²

Among developing countries of the world, child domestic work has been found to be more prevalent. In Nigeria, child domestic work has become an issue. It has attracted both the attention the government and non-governmental organizations. The UNICEF says there are over 15 million children engaged in child

labour in Nigeria.³ Though, the hidden nature of child domestic work makes it impossible to obtain accurate data of children involved in it, The UNICEF admits that a large number of Nigerian children are involved in child domestic work.

Child domestic work is much undervalued in Nigeria. It poses a lot of hazards to children. The issue of domestic violence, sexual, verbal and physical abuses, is just a tip of the “iceberg” of the hazards child domestic workers face. Child domestic workers are in most times, treated as a common piece of property owned by their employers. They are also denied their fundamental rights. In all, child domestic workers loose a lot in Nigeria.

On the other hand, the effectiveness of child protective legislations aimed at protecting children and preventing child labour of any kind in Nigeria is still being questioned. The high number of children trapped in child labour testifies to the above said. Different non-governmental organizations are equally in the struggle to curb child labour in Nigeria but their efforts are not just enough. There is, therefore, a need to approach the issue of child domestic labour in Nigeria from a new approach. In this regards, the principles for master/ servant relationship given in Ephesians 6:5-9 will form the ground work of this paper’s approach to initiating a better relationship between child domestic workers and their masters.

This approach will not only harmonize a better relationship between child domestic workers and their masters, but will reduce various inhuman treatments meted on child domestic workers in Nigeria. It is also a call to Nigerians to show love, tolerance and fairness to children in domestic servitude in Nigeria.

Exegetical Study of Ephesians 6:5-9

One of the methods in biblical exegesis is the synchronic method. Synchronic method of exegesis is a concerned with the final form of a biblical text. It studies a biblical text as it stands. In other words, this method of exegesis is not concerned with prehistory of a biblical text, oral traditions, earlier versions or written sources of biblical text.⁴ Synchronic method of exegesis is not concerned with the above mentioned rather it analyzes a biblical text as it is written.

This method of exegesis is what is applied here in this exegetical study of Ephesians 6:5-9. The text of Ephesians 6:5-9 belong to a section of the book of Ephesians which deals with man’s social relationship. In other words, George .E. Harpur designates this pericope of Ephesians as marks of new life in Christ.⁵ This new social relationship which Ephesians 6:5-9 set forth, are indeed fruit of new life in Christ. They deal with master/servant relationship; how servants should relate with their masters and how masters should relate with their servants. Apostle Paul, is proclaimed the author of Ephesians who set forth, this master/servant relationship in Ephesians 6:5-9. In Vs 5 of this pericope, Paul instructs servants to be very obedient to their masters. The Greek word Paul used here for servants is **doulos**.

Kurt Alland etal indicates that $\delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ (**doulos**) means a “slave or a servant”⁶. The Greeks used **doulos** as an object and servile term for slaves or a person who was bond as a slave. **Doulos** was equally used to refer to a person who was bond to his master or a person who serves his master to the disregard of his interest. In this

sense, the meaning of **doulos** as shown in Kurt Alland’s observation above is right. The New King James Version of the Bible renders **doulos** as “bond servant”. So also do other commentators.

In the context of this paper, it is assumed that Paul used **doulos** to refer to both slaves and servants. This is to say, that **doulos** as used in the context of Ephesians 6:5-9, is used in an inclusive sense which refer to any person who is serving a master to the disregard of his own interests. Such a person may be a slave or an ordinary servant. In this same verse (5), Paul advised servants to obey their masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling in sincerity of their hearts as to Christ. The Greek word used for obedience here is **ὑποακούετε** (**hupakouete**).

ὑποακούετε is a compound word which is a combination of **ὑπο** (agency means or under) and **ακούω** (physical hearing or apprehension)⁷. **Hupakouete** is in the present imperative active of **hupako** which means “obey”. Masters are also designated here in Greek as **κύριος** (**kurios**) which refers to those who rule over the servants. **σακὰς** (**saka**): according to the flesh, is equally used here to distinguish between earthly masters (of servants) from that of heavenly master of all men, who is Christ. **Μετα φόβου καὶ τρόμου** (**Meta phobou kai tromou**): with fear and trembling, as used here in Vs 5, is meant to teach servants not to come short of discharge of their duties. It is not meant to be understood as dread of one’s master. Rather, it denotes a genuine respect and reverence for a master’s authority over a servant. This “genuineness” and “reverence” is further given definition by Paul’s use of the Greek words **ἡπλοῦτες καρδίας** (**haploteti tes kardias**): sincerity of heart. **Haploteti** means uprightness or the virtue of one who is free from pretence. It equally signifies no taint of duplicity.

In verse 6, servants are further urged not to be “men-pleaser” in terms of rendering “eye service”. They are advised to do their work as “servants of Christ” Eye service is rendered in Greek as **ὀφθαλμοδουλία** (**ophthalmoudoulia**), is a feminine noun. Its usage here signifies what Kurt Alland et al calls “service rendered merely for the sake of impressing others (masters)”⁸. **Ophthalmoudoulia**, is a service rendered only for appearance sake. In other words, it is a service rendered to make an impression in the presence of one’s master. This may not be truly from the heart.

The above understanding finds further meaning in Paul’s use of the Greek word **ἀνθρωπορέσκων** (**anthropareskoi**) in advising servant to not just work merely to impress their masters. **ἀνθρωπορέσκων** (**Anthroparskos**), the singular form of anthropareskoi, refers to a person who merely acts to please others. It, therefore, has the same meaning with ophthalmoudoulia. Instead of engaging in this type of service described above, servants are advised to see their service as being rendered to Christ. Better put, servants are to understand themselves as servants of Christ also. Through their service to their earthy masters, servants should understand that they are equally doing the will of God, not that of

men. This in no way, means that Paul was saying that it is the will of God for servants to continue serving their fellow human beings rather, Paul was telling servants that while their servitude lasts, they should see it as a means of serving God also.

Verse 7 is a continuation of the idea in vs 6. Here, Paul further stresses on $\square\square\square\square\square\zeta$ **euvoias**): good will, with which servants are to render their service. Servants are meant to know that they should render their service with good will. This is based on the fact that they are doing the will of God and not that of men. This idea is further explained in the preceding verse 8. These ideas in verse 6 and 7, hang on the fact that there is reward from the Lord according to what every one does. This principle of reward is applicable to both masters and servants.

In Paul's thought, this should be a good motivation for servants to serve "whole heartedly" since they will be rewarded by God. The injunctions given in verse 9 are very important. They are meant squarely for masters (of those who serve). Though Paul did not give specific instructions to masters here, he advised them to $\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\zeta$ **auta poiete pros autos**): do the same to them (servants). This means, as Bob Deffinbaugh says, "masters are not given a separate set of instructions/ principles. They are called upon to act on the same principles which Paul has set down for the servants"⁹ Paul's use of the Greek verb **poiete** is in the second person (plural) indicative sense of $\square\square\square\square\square\square$ **poieo**). It means "do". **Ta tauta** is a phrase used here by Paul which means "the same thing". **Pros autos** means "to them". The whole of Verse 9, put together, refer back to the instructions given by Paul in previous verses (cf 5, 6, 7 and 8). Masters, here in Vs 9, are to behave with the same spirit which Paul had earlier evoked in the servants. Paul strongly forbids masters to be "threatening" when dealing with the servants. The Greek word which Paul used here is $\square\square\square\square\square$ **(apeile)**. It means threat or threatening. Masters are instead advised to $\square\square\square\square\square\square\square\zeta$ **(avientes apeilen)**: relax, loose or cease from threatening, when dealing with their servants.

The above should not be interpreted to mean that masters are not supposed to punish wrong doings of servants. It is meant to guard against that which masters are so much exposed to in their conditions, a fretful, dissatisfied temper.¹⁰ This disposition makes masters to govern by terror rather than love. In other words, Paul wants masters to understand that "love and kindness" might as well be a substitute for threats, harshness and strips. This is further given impetus when the masters are reminded that they (masters) and servants equally have an overlord master in heaven.

The above underscores the fact that Paul wants to show a sense of equality between masters and slaves before God. After all, this idea above, is further defined when Paul "tells both masters and servants that they all have God in heaven as their master". This is also meant to warn masters that they are responsible to God.¹¹ This will make them treat their servants with love and kindness. The essence of these principles given by Paul to both servants and masters in this pericope is meant to

initiate Godly relationship which is motivated by love, kindness, sincerity fairness and good will.

The Concept of Child Domestic work

According to United Nations conventions on the right of a child, a child is “a human being below the age of 18...”¹² Various International conventions, likewise, define a child as “a person below the age of 18years.”¹³ Though differences exist in legislative laws of countries of the world pertaining particular minimum working age for persons, in Nigeria, the minimum working age is 18 years.¹⁴ Hence our definition of child domestic workers as children below the age of 18years, who work in other people’s house holds other than their closest families, is very relevant.¹⁵ In otherwords, child domestic workers are children who are not yet 18years, who do domestic work in other people’s households. It is pertinent to point out here that in this paper, child domestic work is used synonymously with child domestic service. This is because both terms mean the same. The work of child domestic workers is not usually defined. In addition to domestic duties, child domestic workers are expected to do any kind of work their employers demand from them. Some are sent to the streets to hawk wares while others, help their master run small businesses. Child domestic workers are paid either in cash or in kind. Since most child domestic workers work within the house holds, they are hidden from the public eye. In other words this means that the very nature of child domestic work encourages abuse of all kinds.

As already pointed out, child domestic work is a child labour issue. But there is more to child domestic work than being a child labour issue. Cecilia Flores-Oebanda has rightly pointed out that:

Child domestic work is a child labour issue, a children’s rights issue, and a gender issue. It is a child labour issue as it involves economic exploitation and hazardous working conditions. It is a children’s right issue because the nature and conditions of the work is unfavourable for a child’s development. It is a gender issue as it relates to sexual abuse, risk of sexual assault and family and family perceptions about the limited value of girls education.¹⁶

From the above standpoint, it is quite clear that a lot of issues are involved in child domestic work. In addition, this work considers child domestic work a moral evil since it involves treating children in an immoral way.

In Nigeria, a lot of children are trapped in child domestic work. UNICEF Nigeria has pointed out that child domestic work is rampant in Nigeria and it occurs in semi-formal and informal businesses where hundreds of thousands of young children mainly work hundreds of thousands of young children mainly work for prosperous Urban families.¹⁷ In the same vein, Popoola, Ayodele and Ajayi equally indicated that children are employed as domestic servants in city streets, motor

parks, high ways and other public places.¹⁸ It is therefore evident that child domestic work has been an issue in Nigeria. Admittedly, there are child right protective legislations in Nigeria. The passing of child right act in 2007, the child labour law of 1974, the signing of memorandum of understanding with ILO/IPEC in eliminating worst forms of child labour and the introduction of Universal Basic Education in 1999, are all child protective oriented legislations and initiatives. However, despite all these, the fact remains that child domestic work still flourishes in Nigeria.

Locating the Causes of Child Domestic Work in Nigeria

The causes of child domestic work in Nigeria are multi-facet. This means that a lot of variables are responsible for child domestic work in Nigeria. According to studies, prominent among these variables, is poverty. Poverty is a staggering phenomenon in Nigeria. The World Bank estimates that over 70% of Nigerians live below poverty level. In other words, most Nigerians live below one dollar (1\$) a day.

In Nigeria, a lot of families are without steady income. Most families have dependent children. There is equally a high level of unemployment in Nigeria. A study carried out by Education for all in Nigeria, has blamed the problem of child domestic work in Nigeria on poverty¹⁸. In the same vein, Popoola, Ayodele and Ajayi pointed out that poverty is a huge cause of child domestic work in Nigeria.¹⁹ Equally, UNICEF Nigeria says that children in Nigeria generally work because of poverty and demand on them to contribute to family's income.²⁰ It is therefore clear that poverty is a huge push factor of child domestic work in Nigeria.

Other variables like cultural exploitation cannot be over looked. An example, in the above regards, is the exploitation of child fosterage in parts of Nigeria. Child fosterage is the traditional practice whereby children are allowed to grow up in households or families other than theirs. This practice is not adoption.²¹ This practice is not adoption. In most cases, foster parents/guardians are usually relatives of children who are fostered. Some times, these foster parents/guardians may only be known to the parents of a child who is fostered. In Nigeria, a lot of unscrupulous child traffickers hide under the cloak of "child fosterage" and sell unwary children into domestic servitude in many cities of Nigeria. Variables like illiteracy (of parents), age and sex of children, number of adults in a household, gender of household head, family expectations, death of parents/loved ones, limited choice for women, inadequacy of good schools equally contribute to child domestic work in Nigeria.

Consequences of Child Domestic Work on Children in Nigeria

There is a debate among scholars concerning work suitable for children. In other words, the question is, "are all work done by children child labour?" Answering this question demands giving definitions to child labour and child work. While social scientists differ in opinions on what kinds of work are suitable for children, UNICEF 1997 seem to define child work as work that are beneficial to children.²²

That is to say, work that promote or enhance children's development without interfering with their schooling, recreation and rest. Child labour, on the other hand, lacks a generally accepted definition. But one definition of child labour is considered important of this work. This definition says that all work which interfere with the right of a child to full-time, formal education or hazardous to children, encompasses child labour.²³ Child labour is therefore exploitative and injurious to the development of children physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and educationally. It puts children in harm's way.

In the above regards, a scholar like Oloko strongly argues that "working generally exposes children to physical danger, sexual abuse and other forms of harassment"²⁴ Oloko's view is quite apt as it relates to child domestic workers in Nigeria. Working under hazardous working conditions, child domestic workers in Nigeria are exposed to various kinds of hazards. Most child domestic workers, equally, miss out in education.

This is why scholars like Falayayo, Makoju, Onugha and Olubodun have pointed out that children who combine school and work have thin chances of doing well in school.²⁵ This equally relates to the result of finding of a study carried out by Popoola, Ayodele and Ajayi, in Ekiti State in Nigeria which showed that school children who combine work with schooling perform poorly in school.²⁶

It therefore, needs not to be doubted how injurious child domestic work is to children's educational pursuit in Nigeria. Consequently, by loosing out in education, child domestic workers find it difficult to break the vicious cycle of poverty. The issue is sexual molestation and risk of contacting sexually transmitted diseases involved in child domestic work cannot, equally, be brushed aside. As the result of a study by UNICEF Nigerian showed most child domestic workers in Nigeria are sexually molested. Using Lagos as a case study, it was found out that among young domestic workers, one half of those employed in Lagos said they knew of sexually molested domestic servants²⁷

The above is truer than lie especially when considered in line with the observation earlier made in this work by Cecilia Flores-Oebanda. Other consequences of child domestic work on children include exposure to prostitution, domestic violence which may have lasting psychological effects and health problem like Vesco Vaginal Fistula. Exposure to truancy and risks of meeting with untimely death are also consequences of child domestic work on Nigeria children. These, in more ways than one, mar the future of the Nigerian child domestic worker.

The Hermeneutics of Ephesians 6:5-9 in the Context of Child Domestic work in Nigeria

The analysis done on child domestic work in Nigerian showed that it has become an issue. The question then is, what lessons are both child domestic workers and their masters to learn from the periscope of Ephesians 6:5-9. This pericope speaks to both domestic servants and their masters alike. Admittedly, child domestic workers are always at the receiving end of various inhuman treatments. There is also no

denial that in most cases, child domestic workers work more than their strength. All these notwithstanding, child domestic workers sometimes do not serve their masters whole heartedly. Ephesians 6: 5-9 therefore speaks to child domestic workers. They are to understand that it is important for them to serve with all sincerity of heart, faithfulness and uprightness. This means they are not just to be pleasers of their masters only when they are around. They should rather do their job knowing they are serving the Lord through it. This pericope also remind child domestic workers that God is not insensitive to their plight. Rather God will reward them according to how well they served their masters. This, therefore, should be a motivation for domestic workers to serve sincerely. More importantly, Ephesians 6: 5-9 speaks directly to employers of child of child domestic workers in Nigeria in a special way.

In Nigerian context, it is shown in this paper that child domestic work is an embodiment of inhuman treatment. These inhuman treatments are meted out on child domestic worker by masters of these child domestic workers. Sometimes, these masters lord it over child domestic workers that they inflict heavy injuries on them. These injuries, sometimes, lead to death of child domestic workers or permanent disability.

This shows a clear overbearing attitude of masters of child domestic workers in Nigeria. Against this, Ephesians 6: 5-9 advises these masters against a disposition to govern their servants with a fretful dissatisfied temper. Likewise, employers of child domestic servants are not to be unduly harsh or threatening when dealing with their domestic servants. They are to treat child domestic workers with love, kindness and justice.

As these masters are lords over child domestic workers, Ephesians 6: 5-9 reminds them that, they too have a higher master who's God in heaven. Equally, as they (masters) treated these domestic workers, so will God reward them. This is because God is not partial. This goes to remind these masters about the law of God and nature: you reap what you sow (cf matt7:2). With this in mind, masters should avoid treating child domestic workers in a negative way. They should avoid putting these child domestic workers in harm's way by making them work in hazardous environments. They are also to give what is due to child domestic workers. Avoidance of all these inhuman treatment of child domestic workers, on the part of masters of child domestic workers, is to be motivated by love. This is because if masters show love to these child domestic workers, they will definitely show them the same love back by serving in all sincerity. In all, Ephesians 6:5-9 advises both masters and child domestic workers to relate with each other with love, sincerity, uprightness, justice, fairness and equality. It is only this condition will ensure an understanding relationship that is devoid of injustice, harsh treatment, insincerity, unfairness and denial of basic rights (on the part of child domestic workers). This understanding relationship, above all, will be pleasing to God who is our highest master in haven.

Recommendations

Considering the fact that child domestic work has become a very serious issue in Nigeria and the important of the import of Ephesians 6:5-9, these recommendations are hereby given:

- i. Employers of child domestic workers should also understand that child domestic workers are human beings who deserve to be shown love. This, not withstanding their plight as servants.
- ii. With the above mind set, this will motivate employers of child domestic workers to give them what is due to them as human beings with rights.
- iii. The church as a conscience of the nation, should step up their campaign against treating children in a negative way. Especially, as it concerns different evils meted out against child domestic workers in Nigeria.
- iv. The church should also establish vocational training centres for ex child domestic workers who have nobody to help them out. This will help reintegrate them into the society and also enhance self reliance.
- Vi. The Nigerian government should initiate realistic programmes aimed at curbing child domestic work in Nigeria. In the above regards, establishment of correctional vocational centres and skill acquisition centres specifically for child domestic worker or ex child domestic workers is highly important.
- V. The Nigerian populace should always show love, fairness, tolerance and equality to all children who are domestic servitude in Nigeria

Conclusion

It was shown in this paper that child domestic work has become an issue in Nigeria. Child domestic work involves a situation whereby children under the age of 18 are employed as domestic workers. It was also shown in this paper that child domestic workers are abused and maltreated in Nigeria. They are treated as a common piece of property owned by their masters.

However, despite governmental and non governmental interventions, child domestic work has not been curbed in Nigeria Coupled with the above, different inhuman treatment and abuses matted against child domestic workers are also not yet curbed. It is therefore against this backdrop that this paper delved into exegetical analysis of Ephesians 6:5-9. This exegetical study was geared towards initiating a better relationship and understanding between employers and child domestic workers. It was found out that in the pericope of Ephesians 6:5-9 both servants and masters are given sets of principles they are to work with. These principles show that both servants and masters should relate with each other in love, sincerity, justice, fairness, equity, kindness and good will. This paper also recommended that employers of domestic workers in Nigeria, should follow these principle set in Ephesians 6:5-9.

It is only on the basis of these principles, are different inhuman treatment and abuses meted on child domestic workers in Nigeria curbed.

Endnotes

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