

# DOCTRINE OF SLAVERY

- I. Preliminary considerations.
  - A. Slavery has existed as an institution from the most ancient of times and has not been confined to any one particular part of the world.
  - B. The first mention of concept of slavery is found in the prophecy that Noah uttered with respect to Canaan. Gen. 9:25-27
  - C. Although slavery existed on a widespread basis in the ancient world, there is little indication that it was primarily motivated by race.
  - D. Egypt engaged in the practice of slavery, often enslaving the African nations to their south; further, they enslaved other races that they defeated in battle and purchased slaves from those involved in buying and selling of slaves.
  - E. This was how Joseph ended up in the land of Egypt. Gen. 37:28
  - F. Following the fall of the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty of Egypt, the descendants of Joseph were enslaved by the Egyptians until such time as they were delivered under Moses. Ex. 1:8-14
  - G. The Word of God makes it plain that Jews, from the time of Abraham onward, could and did own slaves. Gen. 18:7, 24:2; Ex. 20:17
  - H. Slavery was fully institutionalized in Greece by the time of Homer (~8<sup>th</sup> Century AD, according to Herodotus); slaves were involved at every level of society and functioned as domestic servants, shopkeepers, agricultural workers, factory workers, and on the crews of ships.
  - I. Slavery was quite prevalent in ancient Rome, with slaves making up as much as 40-50% of the population at times.
    - 1. When the Romans conquered the Mediterranean, they took millions of slaves to Italy, where they toiled on the large plantations or in the houses and workplaces of wealthy citizens.
    - 2. Slaves were considered property; they had no rights and were subject to their owners' whims; however, they had legal standing as witnesses in courtroom proceedings, and they could eventually gain freedom and citizenship.
    - 3. Masters often freed loyal slaves in gratitude for their faithful service, but slaves could also save money to purchase their freedom.
    - 4. Public slaves were owned by the state and served magistrates, priests, and cared for public buildings and works. They would also function as firemen, jailers, and executioners.
    - 5. Private slaves (a moderate income usually afforded about 10 slaves) were employed in the personal service of their master, worked in the household or fields, and could even function as pedagogues.
    - 6. The practice of slavery also has a documented history in Babylon, Assyria, and many other ancient empires.
  - J. The modern slave trade flourished in the early middle ages, as early as 869 AD, especially between Muslim traders and western African kingdoms, whose kings would often sell their people in exchange for Muslim goods.
  - K. Later in history, (following 1400 AD) slavery was practiced by Spain and Portugal (which used Italian venture capital to enslave Africans to support their sugar plantations.)
  - L. Although Britain outlawed slavery in 1807, between 1680-1786 over two million slaves were imported into the British colonies and the West Indies.

- M. It was common to Central and South America, and was apparently introduced into North America by the Dutch in 1619 at Jamestown.
- N. Therefore, people should understand that slavery has existed from the earliest times, has been a regular feature of human history, continues to exist today, and will exist until the Second Advent. Rev. 13:16, 18:13

## II. Vocabulary.

### A. Hebrew vocabulary.

1. עָבַד ('abhadh), verb, 1096X, to labor or work; to do work for another, to serve as a slave. This family of words deals with the physical aspect of the work that a slave performs.
  - a. עֶבֶד ('ebhedh), noun, a servant or slave.
  - b. עֲבֹדָה ('abhodhah), noun, 145X, the labor, work or service that a slave performs.
2. אַמָּה ('amah), f.noun, 56X, a female slave, a handmaid.
3. שִׁפְחָה (shiph chah), 63X, f.noun, this term appears to refer to a female house servant that had a somewhat more exalted position than a normal slave, although always still recognized as a slave. Gen. 16:1, 30:4
4. There are other Hebrew terms that are translated by the English terms servant or service, which do not strictly belong to this vocabulary. These would include the concepts of hiring someone (Ex. 12:45), serving as a minister before God (Lev. 7:35), or serving someone as a prisoner. Dan. 1:4

### B. Greek vocabulary.

1. δουλεύω (douleuo), verb, 25X, to be a slave under the absolute authority of another person, whom the slave was required to serve with no regard for his own personal interests.
  - a. δουλεία (douleia), 5X, f.noun, the state or condition of slavery.
  - b. δοῦλος (doulos), 124X, m.noun, a slave, a male or female without freedom in the civil realm; one that was owned by another and must serve the interests of his master exclusively.
  - c. δουλόω (doulōo), 8X, verb, to make someone a slave, to reduce them to bondage and the will of another.
  - d. This family of words focuses on the abject position of the slave; it encompasses the fact that slave is the property of another, under his authority, and functions in a servile position.
2. διακονέω (diakoneo), 37X, verb, to be a servant to another, to act as an attendant, to be a domestic slave. This word was originally used to denote the serving of tables with food or drink.
  - a. διακονία (diakonia), 34X, f.noun, the act of serving or ministering; used particularly of those that execute the commands of others.
  - b. διάκονος (diakonos), 29X, m.noun, one that executes the commands of another, a servant or attendant. It is used technically in the New Testament to denote the office of deacon. ITim. 3:8
  - c. This family of words focuses on the work of the slave, that which he performs.
3. οἰκέτης (oiketēs), 4X, m.noun, a domestic servant, a slave that operated within the household of his master. The οἰκετεία (oiketēia, 1X) referred to the entire complement of household slaves. Matt. 24:45 These terms focus on the slave's place of service.

- III. Definition and description.
- A. Webster defines a slave as a person that is held in bondage by another, one whose person and services are under the absolute control of his owner or master.
  - B. A slave is further defined as one that is actually owned by another person; the slave was the property of his master and had no personal freedoms, unless he was granted them by the master.
  - C. The term slavery can be used as follows.
    1. The practice or institution of owning or keeping slaves.
    2. The condition of one that is a slave.
    3. The hard work or labor that is performed by slaves.
  - D. The institution and practice of slavery in most nations is marked by the following concepts.
    1. The absolute authority of the owner or master over the slave.
    2. The absolute lack of freedom on the part of the slave.
    3. Since the above two factors were part of slavery, the slave could be bought, sold, or traded at the will of the master.
    4. The fact that obedience was not an option, it was demanded; when it was not rendered willingly, it could be coerced.
    5. Hard work was generally the lot of the slave; very often the work could be tedious, menial, boring, or demeaning.
  - E. Although slaves were not always treated well by their masters, on the whole they were often better off than day laborers.
  - F. Slaves had their food, clothing, and housing provided, which provided a good deal of security for the slave; sometimes this was accompanied by a small wage as well.
  - G. When one subtracted the costs of food, clothing, and housing from the wages of a day laborer, he was often left in a worse condition than a slave.
- IV. There were various ways in which one could be reduced to the status of slavery.
- A. The earliest and most common means of procuring slaves was through the principle of warfare and military conquest. Gen. 14:12; Deut. 20:10-14
  - B. Slaves could be purchased domestically, or could be acquired from surrounding nations that engaged in slave trading. Ex. 21:2; Lev. 25:44
  - C. One could be born into the condition of slavery. Ex. 1:7ff, 21:4
  - D. The citizen that became insolvent for any reason and could not pay his debts could be sold into slavery. II Kings 4:1; Neh. 5:3-8
  - E. One could be sold as a slave in order to make the appropriate restitution for a crime that he had committed. Ex. 22:3-4; Matt. 18:25
  - F. One could voluntarily sell himself into slavery. Gen. 47:18-19; Lev. 25:39
    1. If a Jew sold himself into slavery to another Jew, he was to be treated somewhat differently than a foreign slave.
    2. He was not to be subjected to forced labor, but treated like a hired man and released in the year of Jubilee.
  - G. Slaves could be received from someone else as a gift. Gen. 29:24
  - H. Slaves, like other property could be inherited. Lev. 25:44-46
  - I. One could be kidnapped and sold into slavery. Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7
  - J. It should be evident from the Mosaic Law that kidnapping people and engaging in slave trading was prohibited. This is further confirmed by Paul as being activity that is opposed to sound teaching. I Tim. 1:10

- V. Although the Word of God does not condemn the institution of slavery, it does prescribe legislation for both the master and the slave.
- A. Even though the Bible does not forbid slavery, God has provided guidelines for both the master and the slave in order to prevent abuses.
  - B. The guidelines set forth in Scripture for the master/slave relationship may be legitimately applied to the employer/employee relationship.
  - C. Biblical guidelines and commands with respect to slaves/employees.
    1. The first and foremost requirement for the slave is the command to be completely obedient to his master. Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22
    2. Do not be argumentative. Tit. 2:9
    3. Do not steal from your master/job. Tit. 2:10
    4. Treat your boss with courteous respect, being submissive even if he is unreasonable. IPet. 2:18
    5. Absorb any undeserved suffering that may come your way, patiently controlling your mental attitude, tongue, and overt demeanor. IPet. 2:18-20
    6. Do not do your job in order to be noticed by men, gain their approbation, or seek personal recognition as **men-pleasers**. Eph. 6:5
    7. Therefore, you should do your job honorably at all times, not merely when people are observing you. Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:22
    8. All believers should do their jobs **from the soul, as for the Lord rather than for men**. Col. 3:23
    9. All slaves/employees should focus their attention on the fact that the Lord monitors such diligent applications and has promised to reward them appropriately. Col. 3:24
  - D. Biblical guidelines and commands that apply to masters/bosses.
    1. The first and foremost command for the masters is that they treat their slaves in a righteous and fair manner. Col. 4:1
    2. It was readily understood that the master could legitimately punish disobedience; this was a normal and recognized part of the master's prerogatives. Gen. 39:19-20; Prov. 29:19; IPet. 2:20
    3. However, if a master abused his authority in such a way that he caused bodily injury or permanent harm, the master could suffer civil reprisals. Ex. 21:20,26-27
    4. Abusive masters were not always the norm, and righteous master often granted their slaves certain rights that included:
      - a. Spiritual rights under the Mosaic Law. Ex. 12:43-45, 20:10; Duet. 16:10-14
      - b. The right to marry. Ex. 21:3-6
      - c. The right to accumulate property. Lev. 25:47-49
      - d. The right to manumission (liberation from slavery). Ex. 21:1-2; Deut. 15:12ff
  - E. There were a number of provisions in the Mosaic Law by which a slave could gain or regain his freedom.
    1. All Hebrew slaves were to be set free following six years of service. Deut. 15:12
    2. All Hebrew slaves were to be set free in the year of Jubilee. Lev. 25:54
    3. Hebrew slaves could be freed from their bondage under the law of redemption. Lev. 25:47-54
    4. In certain cases of physical abuse, the master was required to give the slave his freedom. Ex. 21:6-7

- VI. Slavery in the spiritual realm.
- A. All members of the human race, except for Jesus Christ, are born into a three-fold spiritual slavery.
    1. All men are born into the condition known as spiritual death by virtue of the possession of the genetic sin nature. Rom. 5:12-14
    2. The sin nature itself enslaves mankind. Rom. 6:17,20
    3. The human race is enslaved by Satan, his demons, and human viewpoint through various religious systems and doctrines. Gal. 4:8-10; ITim. 4:1-3
    4. Beyond these things, when people continually engage and operate under the STA, they become slaves of the very sins they commit. Jn. 8:33-34; IIPet. 2:19
  - B. Just as slaves in the physical realm were helpless to free themselves (apart from some provision in the law, or the intervention of another free man), even so, spiritual slaves do not possess the necessary resources to procure their freedom. Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10
  - C. Therefore, absent the intervention of Jesus Christ on the cross, they are destined for a lifetime of slavery. Heb. 2:14-15
  - D. God has offered the potential for freedom to the entire human race through the sacrifice of His Son. Jn. 8:34; Rom. 3:24
    1. The Greek term ἀπολύτρωσις (apolutrosis—redemption) denotes a release that is effected by the payment of a ransom.
    2. This term was used to denote the liberation of a slave through the payment of a required ransom price. Ex. 21:8
    3. All mankind, which possesses the genetic sin nature, is viewed as slaves. Rom. 7:14
    4. However, mankind under the STA could be redeemed for a price. Rom. 3:23-24; ICor. 6:20, 7:23
    5. The purchase price, which was required to redeem us from spiritual death and the power of the sin nature, was the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. IPet. 1:18-21; Rev. 5:9
    6. This work forms the bases for forgiveness of sins. Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14
  - E. The work of Christ on the cross positionally cancelled the power of the forces involved in enslaving the human race.
    1. The power of Satan. Heb. 2:14-15
    2. The power of the STA. Rom. 6:6
    3. Demonic and human viewpoint. Gal. 5:1
  - F. However, Ph<sub>1</sub> freedom is contingent upon positive volition toward the gospel (Gal 3:13-14), while ongoing Ph<sub>2</sub> freedom is only enjoyed by those that are positive toward Bible doctrine in time. Rom. 6:17; Jn. 8:31-32
  - G. While it should be evident that unbelievers ruled solely by the sin nature and living in spiritual death are slaves of Satan, those that reject sound teaching will find themselves serving Satan once again. IITim. 2:24-26
  - H. The irony that exists within spiritual slavery is that freedom from Christ is slavery of the worst kind, while slavery to Christ constitutes true freedom. Jn. 8:34-44; Rom. 6:20-23
- VII. Concluding observations.
- A. The physical institution of slavery has existed from the earliest times of human history, has continued to be a reality through history, exists today, and will continue to exist.
  - B. Again, the Bible does not condemn the institution of slavery; however, it does regulate it through principles of righteousness.

- C. While people have bemoaned the plight of slaves and decried the existence of the physical institution, there exists a far more pervasive and dangerous form of spiritual slavery in the world.
- D. Although all humanity (save Jesus Christ) was born into slavery to the sin nature, all are offered the potential for spiritual freedom through the gospel.
- E. Ph<sub>1</sub> freedom is available to all and is accessed simply through one act of faith in Jesus Christ.
- F. Ph<sub>2</sub> freedom is available to those that are positive to Bible doctrine and continue in His Word.
- G. While all unbelievers are slaves to Satan, the sin nature, and various forms of human viewpoint, believers can return to that state by rejecting sound teaching and embracing fallacious concepts. IITim. 2:24-26
  - 1. In fact, the Bible makes it quite clear that there are believers that create problems in local churches by advocating and propagating doctrines in opposition to what the pastor-teacher espouses. Rom. 16:17
  - 2. Paul makes it quite clear that these believers are not serving Christ at all; they are slaves to their own emotions. Rom. 16:18
  - 3. One method for discerning these types of believers is to pay close attention to how they approach you. Rom. 16:18
- H. The adjusted pastor-teacher is viewed as a slave to the Lord, demonstrating that fact by serving those allotted to his charge. Phil. 1:1; Rom. 1:9; IICor. 11:8
- I. Liberal false teachers in the last days are viewed as slaves to the corruption that they espouse, up to and including attacks on the unique nature of Christ. IPet. 2:1-2,19
- J. Paul sets forth the Divine viewpoint for those that found themselves under this institution in the first letter to the Corinthians. ICor. 7:20-24
- K. Eliezer, the slave of Abraham, demonstrates the fact that a believer can have great positive volition and make the necessary adjustments (particularly the maturity adjustment), in spite of being part of the servant class. Gen. 24:1ff
- L. The Bible makes it quite clear that certain peoples and nations were judged by God (Gen. 9:25-27) and reduced to slavery by virtue of their personal and national degeneracy. Josh. 9
- M. One important principle, which was taught by Jesus Christ, that is quite germane to the master/slave relationship is recorded in the book of Matthew. Matt. 10:24 –25a
- N. The humble and adjusted believer recognizes that even when he has applied Bible doctrine to the maximum, it is truly no credit to him; the merit is not in the slave but in the grace of God. Lk. 17:7-10