

## Slave

First Century Christian Service

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Did You Know?

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Slavery is dealt with in an incredibly godly way in the Bible. While the institution is allowed in the Old Testament under certain circumstances, and in the New Testament receives part of the “household codes,” it is virtually nothing like what the cultures around God’s people demonstrated in their master-slave relationships. While the Bible doesn’t outright abolish slavery, it certainly humanizes it and makes the relationship much more humane than any other cultural standard. This week, we’re taking a closer look at slavery in the Bible.

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Monday, April 15, 2013

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**Read:** Exodus 21:1-6

**Discuss:** This is just the beginning of a whole chapter of laws about how the Israelites were to manage slaves. Slavery was not necessarily as brutal as it was in American history. Many times a man would sell himself into slavery because of debt. But one of the main differences you will see in this and other biblical texts about slavery is that it was very different from the rest of the cultures around it. The Israelite slave was set free after six years of slavery, unless he chose to stay, perhaps because he started a family. If he chose to stay, the master would then mark him. Without slavery to repay debts, another way of paying back debts would have to exist, most likely death. So while slavery is not an optimum institution, it did solve the problem of debt, and it was humane in Israel.

**Act:** Because of our background in American slavery, where Americans took advantage of other human beings without their consent, some may not understand why the Scriptures didn’t abolish slavery, but it did serve its purposes. The key is to realize that slavery was humane in Israel, not like in America. It’s hard for us to understand, but this kind of slavery was no different from owing a credit card company or the IRS and them garnishing your wages. Plus, slavery actually becomes a way to explain our relationship to sin!

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Tuesday, April 16, 2013

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**Read:** Leviticus 25:39-46

**Discuss:** This section of text makes a distinction between a poor Israelite brother and the other nations. The Israelites are given permission to have slaves from other nations, but there is

a key to the way they treat their slaves in verse 43 to not be ruthless with either hired hands or slaves. That is the humane part you will always see attached in the Bible. For a poor man, it was commanded not to make him a slave, but a hired hand. You'll notice that while someone voluntarily put themselves under slavery in our Exodus passage, the man is free here and goes with whatever he gains.

**Act:** The struggle for us might be in the idea of Israel being able to have slaves of the other nations. We may think, "Why did God not allow it for a poor fellow Israelite, but for the other nations?" I would suggest to you that revelation is clearer with each book and that God met part of the culture where it was at at the time. Let us not think we are beyond this desire to own others as property. There are many indications in our world that this desire is more than present, but alive and well. We must not allow ourselves to desire to control others and take over their lives.

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Wednesday, April 17, 2013  
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**Read:** Ephesians 6:5-9

**Discuss:** Paul includes these "household codes" for wives and husbands, parents and children, and slaves and masters in several of his letters. Roman law did not allow him to outright abolish slavery in the letters. Roman slavery was slightly different, for most slaves were paid, not much, but paid for labor. While the New Testament does not abolish slavery, the rules left in place were unlike any other where both master and slave are held to Christian standards. In practice, obedience to these passages would have nullified slavery.

**Act:** Slavery in Roman times was much like our employer/employee relationship today. The way that the master is told to treat slaves resembles a bill of rules that we have for how an employer can treat an employee today. While we can't get rid of our system of working for others for profit, it can be operated in a godly way, and that is what Paul's commands aim to do in these texts, to make the master and slave equal under Christ.

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Thursday, April 18, 2013  
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**Read:** Colossians 3:22-4:1

**Discuss:** Paul talks a lot about the work ethic of a slave. They should not be working to please their earthly masters as much as please their heavenly masters. When slaves don't obey their masters or rebel against them, it gives the master what he thinks is reason to treat them wrongfully. Also, masters are not given carte blanche control over their slaves in the New Testament. Masters are called to treat their slaves fairly and justly because they also have a master. They're not at the top of the pecking order. You will never see this kind of command in other slave codes!

**Act:** In your job and at your work, do you work as unto the Lord. Even if you don't like your employer, you are an example of Christ. We should have a great work ethic and not work as the world does. We should not be complaining and doing less to get back at employers for wrongs they have committed against us. We must also not become workaholics, ignoring our family and our other responsibilities. Let us work for Christ no matter who gives us a check for our labor!

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Friday, April 19, 2013  
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**Read:** Philemon 8-21

**Discuss:** Here is an example of slavery in action, and of Paul dealing with issues that arise in one of the churches. The master of this slave, Onesimus, is Philemon, a man in the church and a believer. Apparently, Onesimus might have stolen from his master and ran off. But when he became a believer, there was a transformation, and a desire to do right by his master. So Paul helps him with this in his letter.

**Act:** There must first be a desire to change, which happens when God saves us out of sin and death and into His Kingdom. This change is a desire to serve and please Christ, rather than our own selfish desires we used to have. The old life might have created a situation in which we are trying to find a way to make things that used to be wrong right for Christ's joy in us. It is important to find a way to restore what sin has destroyed!

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Saturday, April 20, 2013  
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**Read:** 1 Peter 2:13-25

**Discuss:** While Peter does not explicitly mention masters in his household codes, he does lay down a couple of key principles. I especially like what he says in verse 16 which commands us to live as free people, despite our situation in life. We can be free even when we are earthly slaves! We must be like Christ who was a servant of God and offered Himself readily for God's service. We must be humble like Him! And masters are subject to principles such as verse 17.

**Act:** How can we find ways to represent Christ in an even greater way at work? Do you deal with a ruthless boss or with ruthless overlords in your work? What is a way that you can show them the example of Christ? It may cost you your pride or even something more, but the example of Christ in such situations will shut the mouths of your adversaries! May we all struggle to live like Christ and show others His goodness!

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Sunday, April 21, 2013  
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**Read:** Matthew 28:19-20

**Discuss:** This week, we have special missionary guests who are going to talk about Muslims in Europe! Come ready with questions for them on how to reach Muslims for Jesus!

**Act:** Listen to the word that the missionaries share and ask God how you can best apply it to your life right now.