

LIVING AS EXILES

WORDS OF GRACE FOR TROUBLED TIMES



CONCERNING SLAVES
AND SLAVERY

1 PETER 2:13-25

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Introduction

- The difficulty of this passage re: slaves
- The reality of present cultural issues, as well as a history of America stained with the blood of African slave trade
- These verses (also Eph6:5, Col3:22, 1Tim6:1, and Tit2:9) have been used to (1) justify slavery, (2) sooth the consciences of masters, and (3) keep believing slaves in submission
- One version of the Bible published with potentially difficult verses removed (anti- or sympathetic)

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- This is understandably a major stumbling block in our day in regards to the authority of the Bible and the history of the church, and so is worthy of our time to dig deeper
- A question that arises is why, if God is not for slavery, and the Bible is God's Word, the Bible does not outright condemn it
- Let me assert clearly that the Bible indeed does, by command and example, outright condemn the involuntary and dehumanizing race slavery practiced in America

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- Why then do the above named passages, some of which include instructions to Christian masters, not outright address the issues and condemn slavery?

Two deeply significant questions:

1. What is being spoken about with the term “slavery” in the OT and NT? (the same word fallacy - correct English word?)
 2. In what circumstances are these passages written?
- Now to some absolutely necessary digging (buckle up!)

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Old Testament Law

- The Old Testament Law of Moses legislates slavery, but not in terms we are familiar (conflation)
- Slavery is not the best term - more accurately indentured servant or bond-servant (legal agreement or contract)
- This was voluntary with both parties
- The laws are intended for the protection of the servant, who maintained rights and was not the property of the master
- The contractual “ownership” is more akin to military service, sports teams, artists bound by law to fulfill terms, contract workers

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- Israel’s laws were concerned about controlling, regulating, and preventing abuse in a non-ideal situation - it was an inferior work arrangement which was induced by poverty and entered into voluntarily
- Essentially, this was a form of debt and poverty relief - and debt itself was discouraged, thus frequent commands to lend freely to the poor, yet not charge interest
- Debts were also to be cancelled every 7 years
- Servanthood was for the benefit of the servant, not the master (contrary to ante-bellum slavery in America)

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- Release terms were regular (6 years) at which time they were free to pursue their own livelihood without further obligations
- There were rights, including sabbaths, being included in the household, embedded in the safety of Israel from outsiders, obligation of physical care
- In contrast to other forms of slavery in the ancient world which was largely defined by (1) slaves as property, (2) ownership total and absolute, and (3) stripped of identity

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God didn't want there to be any poverty in Israel (Deuteronomy 15:4). Therefore, servant laws existed to help the poor, not to harm them or keep them down. (Copan)

- Contrary to surrounding cultures which saw only nobility and kings as gods' image, Genesis 1 and following affirms all human beings as created in image of God, including non-Israelites, both genders, all nations.
- Frequent call to remember Israel's slavery and call for compassion

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3 Key Laws

1. Release of injured servants, and forbidding abuse with possible death penalty (Ex 21:20, 26)
2. Anti-kidnapping laws, both selling and purchasing kidnapped persons, punishable by death (Ex21:16)
3. Responsibility to harbor, protect, and provide a life for runaway slaves from other nations (Dt 23:16)

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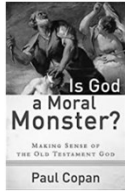
Difficult Texts: Case Law

What about the “property” passage? (Exodus 21:20)

What about the life and children behind? (Ex21:2ff)

What about foreign servants?

What about escaped servants?



- Link to Youtube video by Copan to be sent out in mid-week roundup.

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Slavery in America

- There is absolutely no biblical justification for the kind of nation-race based, kidnapping, non-voluntary, perpetual slavery practiced in America
- There is every reason to have opposed it and see it as a moral crime against God and humanity
- There is also reason to see ongoing consequences to this human atrocity and God's judgement in the unfolding history of our nation, as was in Israel (Amos 8:6)

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Slavery-Servanthood in NT Times

- The difficulty of diversity of slavery during Roman Empire
 - A spectrum of what was meant by the term and the system
- The context of the small, marginalized, persecuted Christian community in the Roman Empire
- Not addressing the question of what to do if in power and influence (as middle ages, America, etc.) to build a civilization based on biblical principles
- Rather, it is pastoral care for oppressed people in a cultural with relative non-influence with harsh punishment for uprising

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Instruction to Servants (18-21)

Servants,
 be subject to your masters with all *respect*,
 not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.
 For this is a *gracious* thing,
 when, *mindful of God*,
 one *endures sorrows* while suffering unjustly.

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For what *credit* is it if,
 when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?
 But if when you *do good and suffer* for it you *endure*,
 this is a *gracious* thing in the sight of God.
 For to this you have been *called*

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Jesus Christ as the Model of Suffering (21-25)

because Christ also suffered for you,
 leaving you an example,
 so that you might follow in his steps.
 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he
 was reviled, he did not revile in return;
 when he suffered, he did not threaten,
 but continued *entrusting himself*
 to *him who judges justly*.

15

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree,
 that we might *die to sin* and *live to righteousness*.
 By his wounds you have been healed.
 For you were straying like sheep,
 but have now returned
 to *the Shepherd and Overseer* of your souls.

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Application

- To us as “servants” of those we work for
- To those of us who are “masters” of others
- Sympathize with a people who have this as their story
- Using our influence for the good of those who are treated unjustly, embracing suffering as a means
- To those who are stuck in oppressive situations
 - Use the God-given avenues to seek the good and just
 - The need to embrace potential suffering if/when we lose influence and continually entrust ourselves to the God who judges justly, who will bring a judgment day to all, and ordains even our suffering to bring about His glory

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P.S.: Modern Day Slavery

- [Wikipedia] Contemporary slavery, also known as modern slavery or neo-slavery, refers to institutional slavery that continues to occur in present-day society.
- Estimates of the number of slaves today range from around 22 million to 46 million, depending on the method used to form the estimate and the definition of slavery being used.
- The International Labour Organization estimates:
 - over 40 million people are in some form of slavery today
 - 24.9 million people are in forced labor
 - 4.8 million persons in forced sexual exploitation
 - 4 million persons in forced labor imposed by state authorities
 - 15.4 million people are in forced marriage.

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