

## **On Homosexuality, Many Christians Get the Bible Wrong**

**By Adam Hamilton, *Washington Post*, 2/13/2013**

[COMMENTS BY PASTOR PHIL LAYTON IN BRACKETS AND CAPS BELOW]

Homosexuality is one of the most divisive issues within churches and across our country today. The issue has become, for some, a litmus test on fidelity to God and the scriptures. The divide is not just between the progressives and conservatives. It is also a generational divide, with younger Christians generally seeing this issue differently than older Christians.

I recently delivered the sermon for the National Prayer Service at the presidential inauguration. While in Washington I took my family to the Lincoln Memorial. This iconic structure stands as a reminder of America's great dream of equality and President Lincoln's role in the emancipation of America's slaves and the abolition of slavery in America. The words to Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address are inscribed on the north wall of the memorial's interior. In them Lincoln noted that at the center of the conflict over slavery were very different interpretations of the Bible. Lincoln said of the two sides in the war, "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other."

Southern preachers and slave owners believed the many references in the Bible permitting and regulating slavery (well over 100 verses), in both the Old and the New Testaments, were clear evidence that the institution was a part of God's social and moral order. Abolitionist preachers argued in their sermons that the verses related to slavery in the Bible were a reflection of the cultural context and times in which the Bible was written and did not reflect God's endorsement of slavery. They argued that there were "weightier" scriptures on justice, mercy and love that superseded those on slavery. This was the position that Lincoln himself adopted.

[ACTUALLY OT PASSAGES THAT MENTION SLAVERY ARE PASSAGES THAT MENTION JUSTICE, MERCY, AND LOVE AS WE'LL SEE IN OUR STUDY TODAY. BOTH THE OT AND NT FORBID UNJUST SLAVERY AS WE KNEW IT IN AMERICA AND THE HUMAN TRAFFICKING TODAY. THE SAME OT THAT SPEAKS AGAINST HOMOSEXUALITY IN AMERICA, I WANT US TO SEE TODAY, IT ALSO SPEAKS AGAINST THE SLAVERY THAT WAS PRACTICED IN AMERICA CLEARLY, EVEN PRESCRIBING THE DEATH PENALTY FOR ANY INVOLVED IN SLAVE-TRADING, CAPTURING, BUYING OR SELLING. WHEN THE WORD SLAVE OR SERVANT IS USED IN SCRIPTURE, WE NEED TO NOT THINK OF THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE, WHICH SCRIPTURE FORBIDS, AS WE'LL SEE IN THIS STUDY TODAY]

At the center of the divide over homosexuality today is the Bible. Conservatives and progressives "read from the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other." There are a handful of Scriptures (five or eight depending upon how one counts) that specifically speak of same-sex intimacy as unacceptable to God.

Conservatives or traditionalists see these as reflecting God's timeless will for human relationships. Progressives look at these same scriptures in much the same way that progressives in the nineteenth century looked at the Bible's teaching on slavery. They believe that these verses capture the cultural understandings and practices of sexuality in biblical times, but do not reflect God's will for gay and lesbian people.

In my own life, it was both reading the Bible's passages on same-sex intimacy in the same light as passages on slavery (and violence and the place of women) and coming to know gay and lesbian people that led me to see this issue differently, particularly children who grew up in my church who loved God and sought to serve Christ. As I listened to their stories I saw that they did not fit the stereotypes I had been taught about gay and lesbian people. The love they shared with others looked very much like the love I share with my wife --a deep friendship and companionship. And their faith was as authentic as that of anyone else in my congregation.

[IF I CAN INTERJECT, IT MAY BE TRUE THAT GAYS IN HIS CHURCH HAVE THE SAME KIND OF FAITH AS NON-GAYS, BUT AUTHENTIC SAVING FAITH IS REPENTANT, TURNING BY GRACE FROM EVERYTHING THE BIBLE CALLS SIN AND SEEKING TO LIVE BY THE STANDARDS OF GOD'S WORD]

For many Christians today, particularly young adults, the handful of Bible verses related to same sex intimacy seem more like the 100 plus verses on slavery than they do the teachings of Jesus and his great commandments to love God and neighbor. Their gay and lesbian friends are people, just like them, in need of love and community. I believe that in the years ahead an increasing number of Christians, not only progressives, but also conservatives, will read the Bible's passages regarding homosexuality as all Christians today read the Bible's passages on slavery ...

[HERE'S THE PROBLEM: HE'S ASSUMING ALL CHRISTIANS READ PASSAGES ON SLAVERY AS CULTURAL BUT NOT REALLY WITH THE TIMES AND THE SAME WITH ANCIENT VIEWS ON HOMOSEXUALITY, BUT I READ PASSAGES THAT CALL HOMOSEXUALITY SIN THE SAME WAY I READ PASSAGES THAT CALL THE MODERN SLAVE TRADE SIN, IN BOTH THE OT AND NT. IT'S TRUE THAT THE BIBLE REGULATES REALITIES IN A SINFUL WORLD (DIVORCE, CRIME, ETC.) THAT GOD NEVER SAYS ARE GOOD. BUT THAT'S DIFFERENT THAN ARGUING THAT SOMETHING GOD ONCE CALLED SIN IS NOW OK.

IT'S TRUE THERE WERE TIMES WHEN GOD ALLOWED ISRAEL TO HAVE PEOPLE OF OTHER NATIONS TO SERVE THEM INSTEAD OF WIPING OUT ALL THE INHABITANTS FOR EVIL/IDOLATRY, BUT EVEN THEN, GOD EXPRESSED HIS GRACE TO THOSE WHO WERE TEMPORARILY FOR A TIME WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH, AND THEY BECAME PART OF ISRAEL'S WORSHIP, AND AFTER A CERTAIN NUMBER OF YEARS, THEY WERE SET FREE. BUT WE'LL GET TO THAT A LITTLE LATER ...]

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[I WOULD ADD TO THAT, HE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GETTING IT WRONG, BECAUSE HIS ARTICLE GETS IT WRONG. HE’S QUALIFIED TO WRITE A BOOK ABOUT GETTING IT WRONG, BECAUSE HE’S AN EXPERT AT IT IN HIS ARTICLE. BUT THE TITLE OF HIS ARTICLE IS ABSOLUTELY RIGHT: “ON HOMOSEXUALITY, MANY ... GET THE BIBLE WRONG.” HE’S ONE OF THEM.]

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## **Slavery in Scripture and History (preached 10/21/2012)**

Our outline today:

1. Slavery in history apart from the gospel
2. Slavery as contrary to God’s law and gospel
3. Slavery as changed by the gospel

### **1. Slavery in history apart from the gospel**

From earliest history, Egyptian temple art pictures slaves. Exodus tells of God rescuing Israel from Pharaoh’s cruel slavery. Slavery could be imposed, like in that case, or for people defeated in a war (like Goliath’s Philistine-Israelite challenge, basically “losers are slaves to winners”). On a smaller scale, people become slaves for debts they can’t pay, or poverty, some sell themselves or family members, others forced. A painting dated 5 B.C. (right around the time Christ was born) from ancient Greece shows slaves in mines, breaking rock with tool, hauling heavy stone, all naked in the sun.<sup>1</sup> As barbaric as that seems to us, they considered others barbarians. Rome thought Greek slavery barbaric, to Jews, Rome’s was harsh and barbaric. And the Jews would have considered the slave trade of America and Europe and Africa to be unthinkable barbaric. It’s a sobering fact of history that slavery in the ancient pagan Roman empire was much more humane in most cases than slavery in the professing Christian empire of America.

Paul is addressing household slaves in a big city, whose experience was different than rural slave labor of historical Greece/Egypt/U.S. I said last week that Romans by NT times tended to view and treat slaves better than the ancient Greeks but all depended on who your master was. Slavery in v. 5 was not the same as OT/early America.

In places where the gospel hasn’t thrived modern slavery still does. A conservative estimate tells us there are 27 million enslaved in the world today. To put in perspective, there are more slaves today than double all slaves taken from Africa in the trans-Atlantic slave trade over 4 centuries. Slavery was legal into 19<sup>th</sup> century, now it’s illegal all around the world officially, but illegal slavery is alive and well, sometimes families becoming enslaved for generations.

Sometimes it's called "human trafficking." The Gospel Coalition blog says the U.N. estimates slave trafficking as 'a \$32-billion industry, with half of the money coming from industrialized countries ... trafficking is occurring in every nation ... According to the U.S. Department of Justice, human trafficking has become the second-fastest-growing criminal industry---just behind drug trafficking...children accounting for roughly half of all victims.'<sup>ii</sup>

According to a group fighting modern slavery, Free the Slaves ([www.freetheslaves.net](http://www.freetheslaves.net)) research 'conducted with the University of California, Berkeley found documented cases of slavery and human trafficking in more than 90 cities across the United States.'<sup>iii</sup>

Many of us aren't aware that even where our star-spangled banner still waves, this "land of the free" for some is "home of the slave." It may include forced illegal labor, trafficked kidnapped youth, etc. But the majority of modern slaves are in Asia, especially Pakistan, India, and Nepal, with involvement of the Philippines (where I was raised), China, Malaysia, Burma, Japan, others (millions in South America, with hundreds of thousands spread across all continents).

'Ramphal and his entire family were slaves in the rock quarries of India for as long as anyone can remember ... "If I would move in my house or out of my house, if I want to sit somewhere, get up, if I want to eat, if I want to drink - anything that I wanted to do - I required permission." ... Freed slaves in the area took in the desperate families ... Legal activists worked to get the slaves out of jail ... The men were freed. Finally the villagers were able to build a new village - Azad Nagar or 'Land of the Free' ... [he says] "I'm just so happy with this new life that I've got and it gives me so much joy, the fact that I can control my own mind, my own thoughts, my own movements. I can't even look back at my earlier existence." Ramphal's children are going to school for the first time. He has dreams of opening his own business ...'<sup>iv</sup>

I show you those pictures from 140-some years ago in this country and other pictures published just this year of modern slaves, not to stir up emotion, but to remind us this is an emotional issue of real people, which has had impact in this country to the present, slavery apart from the gospel. Even among American Christians who had the gospel, even in a country whose founding document references "truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights...life, liberty..."), it took 110 more years before the right of liberty was given to slaves, another 100+ till treated equal (civil rights). Many forefathers cited the Bible to defend our freedom from a British government but not a slaves' freedom from barbaric slavery. Our national anthem was written by a slave-owner who was not consistent or an abolitionist:

Stanza 3: ... No refuge could save the hireling and slave [from Britain] ...  
Stanza 4: O thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand ... conquer we must,  
when our cause it is just, And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave! (F. Scott Key, 1814)  
[1864 addition]...By the millions unchained, Who their birthright have gained  
We will keep her bright blazon forever unstained;  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave (O. Wendell Holmes, Sr.)<sup>v</sup>

The subject of slavery and Scripture is not one I'm approaching academically, it's one we must all face personally (as all of our ancestry in recent centuries had some involvement with slavery) and this is a subject we must approach with sensitivity and not in superficiality. Real people have been and are now dehumanized and brutalized by slavery. The questions some raise in this text and others: Is Paul ok with that? Would Paul join Southerners opposing the Emancipation Proclamation if he was living in the South (as my family's forefathers were at the time)? Does "slaves obey your masters" in Eph 6:5 mean Paul is pro-slavery? If those escaped slaves we saw earlier came into homes of believers, are they to send them back to their masters to obey Ephesians 6:5?

Turn to 1 Timothy 1, and I want you to see the answer is no to all of those questions from the pen of Paul. Paul is not endorsing or extolling slavery in Ephesians anymore than he is pagan emperors when he says we need to submit to government (nor is he saying a Christian could or should never get out of situations that are unjust or unlawful). In fact Paul wrote Ephesians imprisoned unjustly and he appealed to Roman authorities for his release (Acts 21-26). But in his bonds he submitted to authority, and what he calls others in bonds to do, is what Paul himself did. The context of Ephesians is how a Christian relates to those over him or her for the sake of the gospel, while other contexts speak to slave trades and injustice as sinful. Paul also wrote another letter to the same Ephesus church:

1 Timothy 1:3 *As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines...<sup>8</sup> But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully,<sup>9</sup> realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers<sup>10</sup> and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching,<sup>11</sup> according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God ...*

### **Which leads to Point #2: Slavery contrary to God's law and gospel**

Paul speaks of the continuing value of God's Law, listing the sin of "*kidnappers*" in v. 10 or more precisely "*enslavers*" (ESV-footnote "That is, those who take someone captive in order to sell him into slavery.") Several translations use the word "*slave traders*" (NIV, NRSV, NLT) or "*who sell slaves*" (NCV). In the older English versions it was the sin of "*menstealing*." Greek dictionaries say this word means:

- "slave dealer..." from..."a slave captured in war" (Vine's)
- "1A of one who unjustly reduces free men to slavery. 1B one who steals the slaves of others and sells them"-Strong's
- *Complete Word Study Dictionary*: 'man stealer, kidnapper, one who steals men to make them slaves or sell them into slavery ... Both activities are prohibited for Christians'

This is part of a list of things that the end of v. 10 says are *contrary to sound doctrine*, not *according to the glorious gospel*, v. 11. It's a gospel issue to Paul. The glory of the blessed God is at stake, and for a Christian to participate in a slave-trade, buying or selling, or kidnapping people to make them slaves, Paul says that is contrary to sound doctrine, it contradicts, or literally opposes, biblical truth.

But this is not a new implication of the gospel that slave-trading is against biblical teaching, Paul is speaking of the Law in v. 8-9. It's the OT Law, in particular, the 10 Commandments that are in view as Paul writes here:

- v. 9b "*for those who kill their fathers or mothers*" (instead of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment to honor their father and mother)
- "*for murderers*" (6<sup>th</sup> commandment: thou shalt not murder)
- v. 10 "*and immoral men and homosexuals*" (7<sup>th</sup> command is against adultery, married person committing sexual sin)
- v. 10 "*and man-stealers*" (8<sup>th</sup> command: you shall not steal)
- "*liars and perjurers*" (9<sup>th</sup> command: not bear false witness)
- "*and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching*" (include the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment and anything else from God's Law)

It goes without saying that modern sex slavery is also forbidden by this passage, as v. 10 mentions both sexual sin outside God's plan for marriage along with enslavement as both violations of the Law of God that He wrote in stone with His own finger, revealing His moral character. Not only does v. 9-10 cover the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 10 commandments in order intentionally, but it might be argued in the first half of v. 9, he sums up the first half of the 10 commands: *the ungodly and sinners* (1<sup>st</sup> two: no gods before God, sin of idolatry) *the unholy and profane* (#3 and #4 are don't profane the name and don't treat God's day as unholy). Then v. 9-10 is commandments #5-10 in order, with "you shall not steal" applied to people/slavery.

The modern slave trade today is also contrary to international law and therefore what Paul wrote in Romans 13 is enough to say that it should not be and governments should bear the sword against the slave traders today, and businesses should not support slave labor.

Turn back to the 10 Commandments, Exodus 20, and I want you to see God's Law also speaks to slavery (which wasn't against the law in the ancient world or centuries after the NT). When God first gave the Law, and even before, there were principles for servants and slaves, and Scriptures that reveal God's heart. Right in the 10 commandments, ancient Jews understood #8 (*you shall not steal*) included and prohibited slave trades, stealing men for slavery.<sup>vi</sup> The statement from Paul in 1 Timothy should have been enough to end the capture and enslavement of Africans but so should have the OT

Exodus 20:1 *Then God spoke all these words, saying,* <sup>2</sup> "*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, **out of the house of slavery.*** <sup>3</sup> "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*

Pharaoh had acted like their god, and put absolute masters over the Hebrew slaves, but God tells His people no one or thing can be god and God's heart for unjustly enslaved people is right here in the 10 commandments. Was God for their bondage? No, He was for Israel being *brought out of bondage*. The "I Am" is a deliverer, redeemer.

There were servants in Israel, sometimes the poor would indenture themselves (Lev 25:39) but Scripture dignified service (v. 10 says they were to rest and worship with the rest of the people). And v. 15 says: *You shall not steal*. The same word is used verses later: **21:16** *He who kidnaps [Heb. steals, same Hebrew word as in 20:15] a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death.*

So kidnapping or capturing Africans for slavery (or Asians or any person today or in history), selling them, or even just having slaves that were brought in that way, meant your execution in God's Law. How does God feel about the African slave trade? Any capturing and all who sold, bought or owned them deserved the death penalty.

The 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish writer Philo, who didn't believe the gospel, but based on his OT, said: 'every one who feels any admiration of virtue is full of exceeding anger, and is utterly implacable against kidnappers, who for the sake of most iniquitous gain dare to inflict slavery on those who are free by birth, and who partake of the same nature as themselves ... a violation of all rights ... to bring slavery not only upon strangers and foreigners ... [to] sell slaves to slave-dealers ... transporting them to a foreign land ... those who kidnap and enslave those of another nation ... shall be [given] the unalterable sentence of death.'<sup>vii</sup>

What about an owner who beats and harms or injures his slave?

<sup>26</sup> *"If a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye.* <sup>27</sup> *"And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.*

Deuteronomy 23:15 *"You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you.* <sup>16</sup> *"He shall live with you **in your midst**, in the place which **he shall choose in one of your towns where it pleases him; you shall not mistreat him.***

There was to be no segregation or mistreatment of slaves and those who escaped mistreatment were to be protected by God's people. It is in that environment where believing masters loved their slaves and even some slaves loved their masters, that even emancipating masters might hear, in Ex 21:5 *"But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,'* <sup>6</sup> *then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently."*

He was so loved by his master, he loved his master and household so much, that he wanted to serve for life. That's what Paul knew in his Jewish Scriptures and calls Gentiles to in their pagan society.

It is important to know slavery in Israel and in Rome wasn't modern slavery, wasn't race-based; and it was often temporary indentured servitude with a purpose (even as Jacob worked 7 years for Laban). In v. 2 Hebrew slaves were to serve a maximum of 6 years, "... *but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment.*" In first century Rome, bond-service slavery often ended by age 30.<sup>viii</sup>

From the very start of God giving His Law, His heart in regards to slavery is revealed. From the 1st book of the Bible, God's heart for slaves is clear, personally visiting the slave woman Hagar who was mistreated by Sarah (Genesis 16), showing grace to her (21:13-19) and grace to Joseph sinfully sold to slave-traders (Gen. 39, 50:20).

Gal 3:8 quotes Gen 12:3b: *Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU."*<sup>9</sup> *So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer ...*<sup>28</sup> *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ*

### **Which lead to a 3<sup>rd</sup> final point: Slavery changed by the gospel**

Paul in building up to his argument for the spiritual abolition of slave and free distinctions in Christ, calls Genesis 12:3 *the gospel preached beforehand to Abraham*. The gospel said that all nations would be blessed in him, with his Jewish descendants, ultimately through Christ in Abraham's seed to come. All in Christ by grace alone through faith alone are equal in God's sight, Jew and Greek, male and female, and slave and free. We are on the same level as Abraham as believers, and are blessed with him spiritually in Jesus.

In this same chapter Abraham receives slaves and servants from other nations, from Pharaoh as a gift and later Abimelech, and the Lord blesses Abram's Gentile slaves/servants, fulfilling Gen.12:3. Abraham led them in worship, called on the name of the Lord with his household (12:7-8) and the text says souls were being added as he went (12:5 in literal Hebrew, Acts 2:41 uses similar phrase for converts, souls added to the number, from all nations on the earth). By 14:14 servants born in his household were in the hundreds, and all of these from all different nations were blessed with him (12:3).

Slaves and servants given to Abraham were a part of the covenant with him (17:12-13, 27) and part of his household that he taught of God's Word (18:19). They were loyally there at his side in battle (14:14-15) and in worship (12:16, 13:1-4). Some came to trust God and one is entrusted with his family task: finding a bride (Gen 24).

Job lived in the same time, and affirmed dignity/equality of slaves in Job 31:13: *If I have denied justice to my menservants ["slaves" NASB] and maidservants when they had a grievance against me,<sup>14</sup> what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account?<sup>15</sup> Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?"*<sup>ix</sup>

As the gospel story of redemption unfolds in the OT, Moses is sent to Pharaoh to give God's "emancipation proclamation" for Israel: *Let my people go!* As they go, God makes sure in the Passover law for years to come, any slave living among Israel in the future had a law allowing them to join worship with them (Ex 12:44), and many foreigners of various nations ('*a mixed multitude,*' v. 38) were with the nation of Israel in the Exodus, fulfilling Gen 12:3. Dt. 16:11-12 says Israel's worship is for your family "*and your male and female servants...the stranger[foreigner]...remember you were a slave...*"

Deut. 12 also calls whole households to worship together, and households included not just sons, spouses, but servants, slaves, strangers, or sojourners staying within their gates (v. 6-7, 11-12). The clear biblical pattern for worship beginning 3,500 years ago was whole households without segregation by age or sex, stage of life, status in society, singleness, socio-economic background, or servants or slaves, all came under the covenant and God's Word.

In Deut. 29, God has Moses give His covenant to all His people:

<sup>10</sup> *All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD your God—your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, <sup>11</sup>together with your children and your wives, and the aliens living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water. <sup>12</sup> You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath, <sup>13</sup> to confirm you this day as his people...(NIV, including servants/slaves/aliens)*

In Deut. 31:12 Moses passes the future commission on to Joshua: <sup>12</sup> *Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. <sup>13</sup> Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live ... [v. 30 says Moses gave all God's words] ... in the hearing of the whole assembly ...*

Joshua 8 records that he gave God's whole Law to all the people:

<sup>33</sup> *All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant ... <sup>35</sup> There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read **to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.***

That's the same pattern Paul is following in Ephesians (you can go back there) in the same order in the NT assembly: women (5:22), children (6:1), alien slaves (6:5), "alien and citizen alike" (2:13). Paul tells the Ephesians assembly, including both foreigners and slaves in 2:19: "*You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but are fellow citizens...and are of God's household.*"

God's NT house, church worship was for wives (5:22), children (6:1), slaves (6:6), that was always God's will for his people.

His Word and worship was not exclusively for free Jewish men, but it was for all people of all ages and both genders and both slave and free of all nations.

- Women had significant roles, like Phoebe in Cenchrea Paul says was a great help ministering to him personally as was another faithful female minister Mary (Rom 16:1, 6)
- Children were addressed as significant parts of the kingdom and slaves were addressed equally along with them (Eph 6)
- Poor were to be welcomed and seated with the rich (Jas 2)
- On the day the church was born, the diversity of converts included Romans, Persians, Arabs, Africans, Jews and non-Jews (proselyte converts) at Pentecost in Acts 2:8-11, 41.
- On that day Peter says “*this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel ... I will pour forth of My Spirit **on all** mankind; And your sons **and your daughters shall prophesy**, And your **young men shall see visions**, And your **old men shall dream dreams**; **Even on My bondslaves, both men and women**, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And **they shall prophesy**...the promise is for you **and your children** and for **all who are far off**” (Acts 2:16-18,39)*
- So men, women, children, slaves, not only were to worship together with the Spirit but some of each would be prophets
- The early church had in its leadership Greeks and Jews and Africans in Acts 13:1, including one with apparently very dark or black skin as his characteristic and as his nickname (Simeon, whose nickname was Latin for dark or black)
- church leaders in 13:1 included one who had been brought up in the house of Herod, another leader a former murderer
- A saved zealot was among their first church leaders (Acts 1:13). Zealots were known as *sicarii*, assassins of Romans, but supporters called them patriotic guerrillas. Some were radical political activists opposing the Roman government, some were like terrorists, with cloaks and daggers hidden.<sup>x</sup>
- Saved slaves were also ministers alongside Paul (Col. 4:9) and may have made up 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a congregation in the cities
- One runaway slave Onesimus was saved under Paul while Paul was in Rome, and in God’s providence, Paul knew the former owner of Onesimus who was also a Christian named Philemon. Paul writes Philemon to receive back his saved former slave “*no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother ... accept him as you would me ... I know that you will do even more than what I say ... The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit*” (v. 16-17, 21, 25)

Gospel grace transformed slave-master relationships from bondage to brotherhood, a *bond of unity* (Col 3:14), *bond of peace* (Eph 4:3). Paul writes to bond-slaves in Eph 6:5, and Paul was in bonds as a prisoner himself, he says in 4:1, and in 4:3 he says to us *preserve the unity of the Spirit in the **bond** [same Grk root] of peace.*”

Brothers let us welcome all in church, like the gospel does for us!

I don’t just mean let’s not discriminate by gender, age, ethnicity, I mean let’s actively welcome all kinds of people who aren’t much like us outwardly or externally.

I was on a website recently for a church that described itself as “multi-racial” but from the pictures it appeared to be 98% black. I have seen others with multiple ethnicities integrated, but you don’t see anybody but middle-upper class, hardly an old car in the parking lot. I know of churches priding themselves as ‘family-integrated’ (meaning no nursery or SS for kids or youth group) but they’re not at all integrated with families that don’t home-school.

I know of a “family-integrated” church that keeps its membership only with families that don’t participate in public education, which intentionally segregates many families. In fundamentalist circles, others separate over issues like the KJV or rapture views or just not being as separatist as we are. Brothers, let’s keep the gospel central!

I was blessed to preach the gospel at a church in downtown Sac a few months back, on God’s multi-ethnic family plan. It was special to see multiple black-white marriages (descendants of slaves with descendants of slave-owners), mixed families of Asian, Hispanic descent, Russian college students dressed like college students do alongside dressed-up older people near severely handicapped ones who I saw the elders and people spend time talking with, inner city folk along with Little House on Prairie folk, Spanish-speaking in the congregation listening on interpretation headsets, etc. I know it is more diverse in the city than up here, most of ours is by adoption

But I want our church to not just be more diverse or more honoring of wives/moms or more kid-friendly, I want us to be friendly to all sinners who want to hear about a Savior and to worship with other sinners who know they are, too, the homeless or hard-of-hearing, the disabled or disturbed, broken families or beautiful families that think they got it together but are actually messed up, too! Young and old, rich and poor, different schooling choices, different views on end times or secondary doctrines, or people just plain different!

We intentionally don’t have 2 services with 2 music styles to keep the old and young segregated, and we long for the day when we’ll have no separation of our congregation when we’re all in 1 service together in the new building. Pray with us and give as you can, so we can be “one big happy church family” in the household of God.

One thing astonishing about the early church was, as one source explains, ‘it was rumored master and slave ate the same food at the same table and that wives were present along with their husbands [!]. In other words, first-century social decorum was not observed in the church ... we read in the literature of the second century and later of many masters who upon their conversion freed their slaves. ... the implications of [equality in] the kingdom they experienced in church seeped into the behavior of the masters during the week. Paul did in the end create a revolution, not one from without, but one from within, in which a changed heart produced changed behavior and through that in the end brought about social change. This change happened wherever the kingdom of God was expressed through the church, so the world could see that faith in Christ really was a transformation of the whole person.’<sup>xi</sup>

As the gospel's influence spread, changed hearts soon brought changed laws, till one day slavery was ended. But Paul's battle was not with flesh and blood (Eph 6:12) or fought w/ worldly weapons like political activism, the power of the gospel alone could prevail. The one weapon Paul had was the sword of Scripture, the gospel (v. 17). Paul was in chains himself as a prisoner (v. 20) but gospel power can't be chained, it's a weapon of divine power to demolish strongholds and every thought that opposes God's revelation, and one day it would bring down even the mighty fortress of slavery.

MacArthur: 'As the Roman empire disintegrated and eventually collapsed, the brutal, abused system of slavery collapsed with it—due in great measure to the influence of Christianity. In more recent times the back of the black slave trade was broken in Europe and America due largely to the powerful, Spirit-led preaching of such men as John Wesley and George Whitefield and the godly statesmanship of such men as William Wilberforce and William Pitt.'<sup>xii</sup> [but not mere by politics, by preaching, by power of gospel]

One slave trader of the 18<sup>th</sup> century lived a wretched life of sin as he transported captured slaves on a slave ship (the sort of sin that the OT said deserved the death penalty, menstealing/slave-trading). A spiritually, blind, lost, slave to sin *but God* (Eph 2:4) saved him, changed his heart to later abolish slavery. This John Newton wrote:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see  
Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved  
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed<sup>xiii</sup>

In the 1860s my great-great grandpa was part of the government of Kentucky, a slave-owning state with southern sympathies that refused to free their slaves when then President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. The Kentucky General Assembly refused also the amendments to give protection under the law to blacks and give them other basic rights. Kentucky would remain stubbornly pro-slavery and prejudiced for years, as no amount of changed laws in paper can change hearts in prejudice

But Perry Layton's life had been changed by the gospel in counter-cultural ways. It was written of Perry Layton: "An Abolitionist and a Republican, his slaves were freed before the Emancipation Proclamation ... a member of the State Legislature in 1864 ... a very interesting fact is recorded... record is that... Perry S. Layton, Representative ... stood alone in the House [for] ... the freeing of the slaves, [his unpopular view] under the circumstances, throws considerable light upon his character, convictions, and courage."<sup>xiv</sup>

His son Edwin who grew up in Kentucky felt compelled to risk his life and health (and family's) as a missionary to Africa. In his day there were not very many missionaries to that part of the world, and there certainly weren't many whites in Kentucky or South of there eager to lay down their lives for the black Africans, to bring them the gospel. But as I shared in a Sunday evening message last year, the gospel had pierced his heart, the gospel that overcomes generational and racial prejudice by the multi-ethnic multi-cultural multi-colored family plan of Christ who redeems from every tribe!

Edwin moved his family to Congo, my great-aunt was born there, and my family tree saw the gospel pierce that culture as well, as tribes came to know Christ in darkest Africa, in a country that had been the heart of the slave trade 40 years earlier. According to one source, from 1650 through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of the African slaves that came to America, nearly 40% were from Congo and Angola.

I look forward to meeting Edwin and Perry in heaven some day, to introduce my son from Congo, to hear them exchange their gospel stories of amazing grace. It's likely that my son has ancestors who came from Congo to America on slave ships, and likely slaves with roots in Congo were among blacks known to Laytons in Kentucky.

This week last year I brought my boy from Congo to America on an airplane, as my son. At the end of this month his last name will be officially finally Layton. I marvel at God's grace to my family<sup>xv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.freetheslaves.net/SSLPage.aspx?pid=303>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/02/02/the-modern-slave-trade/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.freetheslaves.net/SSLPage.aspx?pid=301>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.freetheslaves.net/SSLPage.aspx?pid=238&srcid=183>

<sup>v</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Star-Spangled\\_Banner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Star-Spangled_Banner)

<sup>vi</sup> 'ancient rabbinic exposition of the seventh commandment (Exod 20:15) ... frequently related Exod 20:15 to kidnapping; cf. *Mekilta Exod. 77b on 20:15* - *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans), 1:95.

<sup>vii</sup> Philo of Alexandria, "Concerning Kidnappers" (Special Laws IV, 13-19), *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), p. 617-18.

<sup>viii</sup> Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 545.

<sup>ix</sup> NIV translation.

<sup>x</sup> See "Zealot" in *Tyndale Bible Dictionary, New Bible Dictionary*.

<sup>xi</sup> "Did Paul Approve of Slavery?" in *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 642-44.

<sup>xii</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 324.

<sup>xiii</sup> John Newton, "Amazing Grace." For an excellent biography of his life, go to:

<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/john-newton-the-tough-roots-of-his-habitual-tenderness>

<sup>xiv</sup> Unpublished memoirs of Edwin Layton. Recorded by Lewis and Richard Collins, *Collins Historical Sketches of Kentucky: History of Kentucky, Volume 1* (Collins & Company, 1874), p. 121 "Annals of Kentucky" records for March 2, 1863: 'Legislature adopts a series of 12 resolutions ... most of them by an almost unanimous vote. The 4<sup>th</sup> "enters this general assembly's solemn protest" against the emancipation proclamation as unwise, unconstitutional, and void. The 6<sup>th</sup> "declines to accept the president's proposition for emancipation ... Jas. Speed, senator, and Perry S. Layton, representative, alone voted against this ... Negroes claiming freedom under or by virtue of the President's proclamation of Jan. 1, 1863, forbidden to migrate to or remain in this state.'

<sup>xv</sup> For more of the story, go to <http://lifatthelaytons.blogspot.com> (start reading in August 2012)