

Slavery and the Supremacy of the Redeemer

Colossians 3:22

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, March 14, 2021

Let's pray: 'Your Word is food for famished ones, Freedom for the slave

Riches for the needy soul, Come speak to us today, Show us Christ...'

Our God, we ask you would reveal your glory through the preaching of your Word, so hearts will confess Christ is Lord. Show us Christ, in His name.

Please turn in the Word of Christ to **Col 3**. This has been a very timely book

- Some of the sermon titles in **Colossians 1-3**: The Gospel Can't Be Locked Down, How to Pray When in Isolation, Reconciliation: Relational and Racial, Why Worship in Church is Essential (applied to We Obey God – Not Man), Racism and How Jesus is Sufficient, Christ's Preeminence applied to Presidents, Pursuing Biblical Unity, Christ's Lordship in Family (issues of gender identity, roles, etc.).
- Today we come to another timely subject that speaks to our world

Col 3:22 ***Bondservants**, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.* There's **several massive subjects** just in this one verse. Work. The **fear of the Lord** is one of the great themes of the Bible and we could do a whole series on that. One of the most convicting studies for me personally has been that phrase "**people-pleasers**," or what it means to fear man and what he thinks of me. That also deserves its own sermon. But I want to start today where this verse starts with what's a huge controversy in our culture and confusing to Christians: *Bondservants* or **slaves** (NAS/NIV).

This is the word for **slaves in bonds**, *servants* can't do it justice. A **doulos** is bound to serve, this is **not a free man**. Many preachers don't spend time here but just gloss over it to apply it to employees, but we need to take time for uncomfortable questions and hard truths. Slavery is a dark reality in the past of our country with effects today, from protests in the present, to the future direction of our nation and education, talk of reparations for the past, school indoctrination and bigger government solutions from the new administration

As Christians we should **recognize racism is a real problem**. But the answer isn't socialism, Marxism or historical revisionism like **The 1619 Project**.¹ It isn't liberal curricula or radical political rallies. We face the issue of slavery not by destroying statues of historical slave-owners or cancelling people in our culture who aren't woke enough. We don't solve it by taking names off schools like SF just did over related issues: Thomas Jefferson, Francis Scott Key, or even Abraham Lincoln and generals from the North (anti-Indian?).²

That was last month, this week the **State Dept. of Education** votes on **Ethnic Studies Curriculum** about the evils of white Christians converting natives from their gods (like an Aztec god of war/child sacrifice that kids would be taught to chant to).³ CA history rewritten as Caucasian colonialism. Culture removes names for past sins, what we need is Christ's name to renew our minds and redeem our past. Schools erase a sinner's name from a textbook, but the Savior can actually erase our sins as He saves us. Jesus won't wipe out names of His people from the book of life, despite great sins we all have

Slavery was an evil not to be minimized, but let's magnify the good news.

What does God say? What happens to those who have done wrong to slaves or show prejudice or partiality? **3:25** *For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.* **4:1** *Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master...*

There's a higher heavenly standard of justice and fairness. Injustice was a concern of God's Word long before our world, and God has real solutions to man's problems. We'll get to those verses next week, but some men see a problem in **Col 3:22**: our world wants to defund authorities, but God's Word here seems to defend the authority of masters? **Col 3** tells slaves to obey, but a 21st century revolutionary would say oppose? Why doesn't Paul write like a 19th century abolitionist would? Is the Bible on the wrong side of history?

You'll hear people argue this book got it wrong on slavery as well as LGBT civil rights issues (and now culture has evolved on both). Are you ready to answer the objection that scripture is for slavery but against homosexuality?

Col 3:22 wasn't written to modern Americans, or about enslaved Africans. There are slaves today, trafficked humans (esp. Asia), Col 3 isn't about that.

We need to **start with the original context before modern slavery concepts.**

Today we'll see slavery in biblical history and Christianity. We don't need Critical Race Theory, what we need is Christ and His gospel truth that frees.

The Bible's focus isn't race (except to say there's only one), the focus is on grace. Message title and focus: **Slavery and the Supremacy of the Redeemer**

Outline:

1. **Slavery in history apart from Christ**
2. **Slavery contrary to the Word of Christ**
3. **Slaves redeemed to be brothers in Christ**

1st Slavery in history apart from Christ.

1st thing to note is the 1st century slavery was different than what we know about slavery in American history:

- Slavery isn't all black and white (in history, not by ethnicity / color)
- Paul isn't talking to agricultural chattel slaves (city, all kinds of jobs)
- Paul here insists on justice and fairness, no partiality or wrongdoing
- No segregated churches in NT, slaves equally addressed, 3:22, 4:16
- Slaves in NT times weren't kept uneducated, some highly educated
- In Roman empire slavery was often temporary, often freed by age 30
- Slavery was a way to become a citizen, Paul's parents/grandparents?
- Biblical slaves could become high govt. leaders (Caesar, Egypt, etc.)
- In Bible times many chose slavery to avoid poverty or death in war
- Indentured service for years sometimes used instead of incarceration
- In a different context (Egyptian) a different word: *Let my people go*
- Slavery apart from Christ isn't a U.S. issue, it was almost universal.
- Black-white slavery is more recent, sadly sold by Africans, but since Bible times there's been far more Arab, Asian, and Caucasian slaves

There's a lot of **myths, misinformation and misconceptions.** It's been said⁴

- 'few facts of history have been so distorted ... it has been estimated there were more slaves in India than in the entire western hemisphere

- China during the era of slavery has been described as one of the largest and most comprehensive markets for the exchange of humans
 - ... slaves were a majority of the population in some of the cities in Southeast Asia at some period or other in history ...
 - for ... most of the **history of the human race**, most slaves were not racially different from those who enslaved them ... Asians enslaved other Asians, Africans enslaved other Africans... a million European slaves [whites were taken by pirates to] Africa, at least twice as many European slaves as there were African slaves transported to the U.S.
 - white slaves were still being bought and sold in the Islamic world decades after blacks had been freed in the United States...'
- [white guilt? also guilt in black and brown to go around]

Thomas Sowell, a black professor at UCLA and later Stanford has written:⁵

- black 'fatherless children has been said by many to be a legacy of slavery, yet most black children grew up in two-parent families even under slavery itself and for generations thereafter. As recently as 1960, 2/3rds of black children were still living in two-parent families
- A century ago, a slightly higher percentage of blacks were married than were whites. In some years a slightly higher percentage of blacks were in the labor force than were whites... whatever the reasons for the [more recent] disintegration of the black family, it escalated to the current disastrous level well over [100 years] after the end of slavery'

American slavery was evil, but it can't be blamed for all evil or on all white people. Sin's impacts are complex but **the gospel answers sin and its effects**.

Look back in the **context at Col 2:8**: *See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ*. So there are philosophies and race theories that actually take people captive, that oppose Christ and His gospel. There's empty deceit in our culture that can enslave. Don't conform to this world's pattern, be transformed, renewing your mind.

Apart from Christ there's great hurt and hate, but in Him there's great hope.

We've seen slavery apart from Christ,

#2. Slavery contrary to Christ's Word

Look at **Col 3:16**: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...* We need wisdom to teach **v. 22**. Superficial answers won't do. We need His whole Word so turn to 1 Cor 7. Col 3:22 says 'slaves, obey,' was Paul pro-slavery? Against emancipation?

READ **1 COR 7:21-23** – MAKE COMMENTS. NOW TURN TO 1 TIM 1

READ **1 TIM 1:9-11** – *ENSLAVERS* (ESV) or *SLAVE TRADERS* (NIV)

- End of **v. 10** says that's contrary to biblical teaching, **gospel** in **v. 11**
- This **list of sins** is from **the 10 commandments**, that start with 'I am Yahweh...who brought you out of the land of Egypt, **out of the house of slavery** [#8] *you shall not steal...* Ancient Jews understood slave trading, capturing or kidnapping was prohibited by that command)⁶
- Chapter after: *Whoever steals* [same word] *a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death* (**Ex. 21:16**)

- So capturing Africans, selling them, or even just having slaves that were brought in that way, meant your execution in God's Law. How would the Lord feel about the African slave trade? Any capturing and all who sold, bought or owned them deserved the death penalty
- Same chapter said Jewish slaves had to be freed after 7 years (21:2) and a female slave who didn't free a master was to be redeemed, v. 8
- If master beat his slave, damaging the eye or knocking out a tooth, the slave had to be free (all in ch after 10 commandments, 21:26-27)
- Next chapter after that: 'You must not wrong a foreigner nor oppress him, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt' (v. 21 NET).
- Next chap, 23:9: 'You must not oppress a foreigner, since you know the life of a foreigner, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.'
- Lev 19:34: *The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt* (NIV)

What about the **justice system** for foreigners or **slaves vs. God's people**?

- Dt 1:16 *I charged your judges at that time: Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly, whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an alien.* (NIV)
- Dt 27:19 *Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien...*
- What about runaway slaves? Dt 23:15 *You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. ¹⁶ 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.
- From the 1st book of the Bible, God's heart for slaves is clear, personally visiting the slave Hagar who was mistreated by Sarah (Gen 16), He gave her special grace and appearances (21:13-19)
- And grace to Joseph sinfully sold to slave-traders (Gen. 39, 50:20).
- Moses is sent to Pharaoh to give God's emancipation proclamation for Israel: *Let my people go!* As they go, God gives a Passover law to welcome future slaves in Israel to worship with them (Ex 12:44)
- Dt. 16 said Israel's future worship in the land was to include equally 'your son and daughter, your male and female slave... as well as the foreigner ... Remember that you were slaves ...' (HCSB v. 11-12).
- Remember Hebrews released every 7 years, all on the year of Jubilee

So go back to Col 3 but we can see on many levels how **American slavery was contrary to the Word.**

#3. Slaves redeemed to be brothers in Christ

The Christmas Carol O Holy night says 'He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace;
**Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,
And in His name all oppression shall cease...**

In Lk 4, Jesus said He came 'to proclaim release to the captives...to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year'⁷ [i.e., the Jubilee].

We have heard the joyful sound. Jesus saves, Jesus saves...
spread the tidings all around... cross the waves...
Sing, you islands of the sea; echo back, you ocean caves;
Earth shall keep her **jubilee**: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

When He does, **Col 3:11**: *Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, **slave, free**; but Christ is all, and in all.*

In Christ, the past doesn't define you. He eclipses political racial categories.

This comes after v. 10, a renewed knowledge after the image of the Creator.

NRSV: *In that renewal there is **no longer Greek and Jew...slave and free...***

ISV: *Where this happens [v. 10 renewal], there is no...slave, or free person.*

Another translation says in this 'state there cannot be...slave or free man.'⁸

HCSB adds the phrase from context: In Christ there is not...slave and free...

NLT: In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are Jew or Gentile...barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

Or the J. B. Phillips paraphrase: 'In this new man of God's design there is no distinction between Greek and Hebrew, Jew or Gentile, foreigner or savage, slave or free man. Christ is all that matters for Christ lives in them all.'

Acts 2 says God's spirit would be poured out on slaves to prophecy

Acts 16 is an example of a slave girl delivered, testifying of God's servants

Acts 13 shows the early church had leaders from Africa (cf. Rev 7)

Col 1:14 says in Christ 'we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins...'

TALK ABOUT REDEMPTION IMAGE, ADOPTED TO BE BROTHERS

Gal 4 says '...when you did not know God, **you were enslaved...**' but God sent His Son 'to redeem...so that we might receive **adoption as sons...you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.**

Gal 3:28 adds 'there is neither slave nor free...you are all one in Christ...'⁹

This was part of our scripture reading from last week in **1 Corinthians 12**:

'we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, **slaves or free** ... God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be **no division** in the body, but that the members may have the same **care for one another**. If one member suffers, all suffer together...'

Where African American Christians have suffered in the past or the present – whether from prejudice or politicians or police encounters – we need to suffer with them. We don't try to score conservative talking points, we try to sympathize. **The body must have no division, all care for one another.**

Col 3:11 says **there's not slave or free in Christ**, **v. 12** says right after that '**put on... compassionate hearts...**' The church needs that love in these times and we need to welcome all in Christ, as **the gospel redeems us to be family.**

As in Heaven podcasts helpful to grow in compassion

Look at **Col 4:9** for a great picture of loving brotherhood as we close: *and with him **Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.***

TURN TO **PHILEMON** FOR MORE ON THIS BROTHER -> read **v. 7-21**

One source says 'we read in the literature of the second century and later of many masters who upon their conversion freed their slaves... 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 ... social change.'¹⁰

As the gospel's influence spread, changed hearts later brought changed laws by the power of the gospel, that demolishes strongholds, even slavery itself.

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.'¹¹ [but not mere by politics, by preaching, by power of gospel]

In the **1860s my great-great grandpa** was part of the Kentucky government Kentucky, a slave-owning state with southern sympathies that refused to free their slaves when 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. Changed laws on paper can't 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."¹²

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, esp. whites in Kentucky or South over there **eager to lay down their lives for the black Africans, to bring them the gospel**. But he knew grace that overcomes generational and racial prejudice by God's 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 grace there too. Tribes came to know Christ in Congo, in the very country that **had been the heart of the slave trade** years earlier. According to one source, from 1650 through the 19th 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, maybe slaves with roots in Congo were among blacks known to Laytons in Kentucky?¹³ God's grace is truly amazing

An **18th century slave trader** lived a wretched life of sin as he transported captured slaves on a ship. Spiritually, blinded, lost, a slave to sin, **God 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...
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed¹⁴

FOOTNOTES

¹ For more on this and Christian responses to it:

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/god-parents-and-the-1619-project-11599759170>

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/quick-to-listen/1619-christian-reformation-catholic-transatlantic-slave.html>

² <https://albertmohler.com/2021/02/02/briefing-2-2-21>

³ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/calif-ethnic-studies-plan-teaches-kids-to-chant-to-aztec-gods.html>

⁴ Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Race*, video summary “Misconceptions of Slavery” at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7gN2EYbtgM&t=398s>

⁵ Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Race*, video summary “Misconceptions of Slavery” at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7gN2EYbtgM&t=398s>

⁶ ‘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.

⁷ v. 17-19 NASB.

⁸ Kenneth Wuest’s Expanded Translation of the Greek NT.

⁹ v. 26-28 NKJV.

¹⁰ “Did Paul Approve of Slavery?” in *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 642-44.

¹¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 324.

¹² 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 4th “enters this general assembly’s solemn protest” against the emancipation proclamation as unwise, unconstitutional, and void. The 6th “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.’

¹³ For more of the story, go to <http://lifeatthelaytons.blogspot.com> (start reading in August 2012)

¹⁴ 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>