

## **SLAVE IS OUR HIGHEST PRIVILEGE**

(We Have Been Bought with a Price as Slaves of Christ)

Luke 17:7-10 (NASB) Matthew 25: 13-30 (NASB) I Cor.6: 19-20, 7:22-23 (ESV)

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The truth of Christ's glorious Gospel is what has set us free from the law of sin and death. We read in Romans 8: 1-2, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." Paul continues in I Corinthians 6: 19-20, saying, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body." Further, in I Corinthians 7: 1-24, Paul wrote to explain how human relationships work, once we come to Christ. He speaks of what to do if you are married to a non-believer, what to do if you are a virgin, what to do if you if you are a married couple, what to do if you have lost your spouse, should you remarry, or not. This chapter is all about relationships once we are born-again believers in Jesus. Paul wrote, in I Corinthians 7:21-23, "Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. But if you gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise, he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men."

Only recently, as I have read the Scriptures, have I noticed that one particular Greek word – **doulos** is a word that is exceedingly difficult for translators to call what it is. Most all versions of the Bible had translators that so hated slavery that they struggled to call **doulos** slave, but rather they opted for bondservant or just servant. **Doulos** is a Greek word in the Bible that has only one true historical option for an accurate translation into English, which is **slave. It literally means to be owned by someone for a lifetime.** This word is found at least 127 times in 119 verses in the New Testament scriptures. It is used in the context of human slavery, which, sadly, was very common throughout ancient history, on down into the ancient Roman Empire for hundreds of years, and as you know, slavery has been one of the worst words to consider when we study our past in America. In America, slavery with its unspeakable torturing, killing, abusing, and separating families as property, and not people, still casts a dark shadow over our country today. We rejoice that the slaves were freed in the Emancipation Proclamation in 1865. We thank God for raising up President Abraham Lincoln who stood against the evils of slavery. Our nation fought one of the bloodiest of wars, the Civil War to determine if slavery was to remain legal or if it must end and end immediately.

Yet, though slavery has been a sinful and evil practice in our nation, the Lord inspired His holy Word to use the word **doulos**, and different forms of it, **doula**, **douloi**, and **sundoulos**, to describe sinners as being spiritual slaves to sin. This profound truth is foundational towards understanding the redemptive work of Christ, which is the Gospel story of God reaching down in love, through God's Son, Jesus' sacrifice, and setting souls free by God's gift of faith, from the bondage of our sin, by being ransomed by Jesus' blood, and being bought with a price so

that we are called **doulos** of God. I don't have any hard words against versions of the Bible that translate the word slave as servant or bondservant, but I am compelled today to let us know that the word **doulos** that Paul, Peter, James, and Jude is most accurately and precisely translated slave. I even listened in on twelve of the ESV Bible Translators debating the way they translated **doulos** in their 2007 version: they voted 9-3 to use "bondservant" in the newer ESV version of 2011.

Though slave is the most precise meaning of **doulos**, bondservant is close to slave, and servant, is not a bad translation. Yet this week, I have kept thinking about who I am and who you are as born-again Christians. We have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus. What does it mean for me to be blood bought as Paul says in I Corinthians 6: 19-20 and 7: 21-23? Most of us know that the difference in a slave and a servant is that the two words hinge on the concept of legal ownership. A slave is owned by someone and serves his Master because he is owned. A servant is not owned, but works voluntarily, and can stay or leave his work when he chooses. No matter what our birth or heritage or vocational standing or financial situation or political leanings, only the truth of the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ sets us free. A disciple of Jesus, set free from the law of sin and death, is a disciple called to holiness. We are disciples set free from bondage to the world, to Mammon, to the constraints and controls that unsaved people live under.

You and I, when we were saved, were freed from the slave-market of sin and Satan. We daily honor the Lord Jesus who bought us with His own blood. We remember Jesus' words in John 8: 34 where He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin/practices sin is a slave to sin." In John 8: 32-33, Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." God's kingdom in some ways is the Upside Down Kingdom of God, where the calling of God shames the wise, as God chooses the nothings or nobodies of this world, and where the last will be first and the first last. Paul says in I Corinthians 7:22-23 that if you are called as a slave, you are the Lord's freedman, and if you were free when God called you, you are the slave or bondservant of Christ. Whatever Jesus means, I believe He has led me by His Spirit to think out loud with you all today about the word **doulos**. In Matthew 20: 26, Jesus said, "But whosoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave."

Being a spiritual slave of Christ may be the best way to define a Christian. What is our relationship to Christ? How are we to understand it? The Greek word **doulos** has five characteristics, whether you like the precise translation, slave, or the word more often used, bondservant, or servant. These 5 descriptions of who we are, in Christ, will clarify our identity, sanctify our identity, and explain understandably who we are in Jesus, as His slaves, His bondservants, and His servants. What are the 5 Biblical characteristics that describe our personal relationship to Jesus?

**AS GOD'S DOULOS, HE HAS EXCLUSIVE OWNERSHIP OF US.** (I.) This ownership of us as God's slaves, bondservants, or servants is all over the Word of God. In I Corinthians 6: 19-20, we read, "Or do you not know that your body is a

temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price, so glorify God in your body.” Paul adds in Romans 14: 8, saying, “For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. Psalm 100: 3 tells us, “Know that the Lord, he is God! It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, and the sheep of his pasture.” Paul says in I Corinthians 7: 22, “He who was free when called in a slave of Christ.” Isaiah 33:1 adds, But now thus says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine.” We read in Romans 8: 15, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” Any idea of spiritual slavery that would send us backwards into fear is not from God. Yet, there are about thirty major translations using established English translations of the New Testament, about twenty. Only one of them, only one of them always translates **doulos** slave, only one and it is a translation of the New Testament written by a scholar in New Testament Greek in 1935. He studied the original papyri, and his name was Edgar J. Goodspeed. I have his translation.

I looked up my subject of the meaning of **doulos**, and John MacArthur has many messages on this same discovery God showed me. I am indebted to this great man of God for the encouragement of knowing I was not alone in my discovery in the Word of God. The writers of the New Testament were not adverse, frightened, or ashamed to take this designation of their personal relationship to Jesus as their first and foremost connection. First of all, they were **doulos** of God. Goodspeed well translated Romans 1: 1, “Paul, a slave (**doulos**) of Jesus Christ, called as an apostle, set apart to declare God’s good news.” Peter in II Peter 1: 1, said, “Simon Peter, a slave (**doulos**) and apostle of Jesus Christ.” They knew what slavery to Jesus meant. They only wanted to do what pleased their Master. Paul said in II Corinthians 5: 9, “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him.” We read in Philippians 1: 1, “Paul and Timothy, (**douloi**) slaves of Christ Jesus.” Paul said in Galatians 1: 10, “If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a **doulos**, a slave/servant of Christ.” In Titus 1: 1, we read, “Paul, a slave of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” Look at James, the half brother of Jesus, who didn’t mention that. James 1: 1. We read, “James, a **doulos**/slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Jude, another half-brother of Jesus, in Jude 1: 1, said, “Jude, a **doulos**/slave of Jesus Christ, and brother to James.” Epaphras in Colossians 1: 7 is called **sundoulos**—our fellow slave. Paul adds in Colossians 4: 12, “Epaphras, a **doulos**, a slave to me.” Paul added in II Timothy 2:24, “The Lord’s slave must not be quarrelsome.”

Whatever you want to translate **doulos**, the New Testament writers owned this identification to Jesus. We belong to Jesus. Morgan J. Clayton, in Hymn # 538, wrote, in 1938, “Jesus my Lord will love me forever, From Him no power of evil can sever: He gave His life to ransom my soul, Now I belong to Him...Joy floods my soul, for Jesus has saved me, freed me from sin, that long had enslaved me, His precious blood He gave to redeem, Now I belong to Him! Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me, not for the years of time alone, But for eternity.”

**AS GOD’S DOULOS, HE HAS OUR COMPLETE AND CONTINUAL OBEDIENCE AND AVAILABILITY.** (II.)

Notice Ephesians 6: 5-8, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.” In Christian thinking in America today, our language about knowing Jesus is often, anything but slave or bondservant language. It is about freedom to do what we desire, health, wealth, prosperity, finding our own fulfillment or dream, and finding our own purpose. God does love us unconditionally, but the promise that He will fulfill our every ambition, every desire, every hope, and every dream, is not from the New Testament. Thank God there are songs written that speak to us about abandoning our lives and hearts and will and obedience to God and God alone.

Chris Tomlin in 2010 wrote about what it is like to be a **doulos** for God. “I Will Follow” is a Scriptural portrait of being God’s **doulos**—slave/bondservant or servant. “Where You go, I’ll go Where You stay, I’ll stay When You move, I’ll move I will follow All Your ways are good All Your ways are sure I will trust in You alone Higher than my side High above my life I will trust in You alone. Who You love, I’ll love How You serve I’ll serve If this life I lose, I will follow You I will follow You Light unto the world Light unto my life I will live for You alone You’re the one I seek Knowing I will find All I need in You alone, in You alone Where You go, I’ll go Where You stay, I’ll stay When You move, I’ll move I will follow You Who You love, I’ll love How You serve I’ll serve If this life I lose, I will follow You I will follow You. In You there’s life everlasting In You there’s freedom for my soul In You there’s joy, unending joy And I will follow.”

**AS GOD’S DOULOS, HE HAS OUR DEVOTION TO OUR ONE AND ONLY MASTER.** (III.)

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, asked the most telling question about whether or not we are His true **doulos**—love slaves. Jesus asked, in Matthew 6: 46, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I tell you?” It is oxymoronic to say, “No, Lord,” to our Master. Jesus said in Matthew 7: 21-23, “Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to Me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name? And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.” As a college freshman, I sang in the Men’s Glee Club, one song that always cried out. The words, “You call Me the Way, and walk Me not! You call me the Life and live Me not! You call me Master and obey Me not! If I condemn you, blame Me not. You call Me Bread and eat Me not! You call me Truth, and believe Me not! You call Me Lord and serve Me not! If I condemn you, blame Me not.” Jesus also said in Matthew 6: 24, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” What will happen in heaven? In Revelation 22: 3-4. We read, “His **douloi** will worship Him. They will see His face, and His name

with be on their foreheads.” In heaven we will be God’s faithful **douloi**. In I Cor. 4: 2, we read, “Moreover it is required of stewards, that they be found faithful.” In Matthew 25:21, will we hear, “Well done, good and faithful slave/servant!?”

### **AS GOD’S DOULOS, HE HAS OUR COMPLETE DEPENDENCE ON HIM FOR ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING.** (IV.)

This is the crucified life of a **doulos**. Our motto ought to be Galatians 2: 20. “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” In our world today, we have a score of crutches that we so often lean on. For God’s **doulos**, Jesus’ love slaves, He wants us to depend on Him alone as Lauren Daigle sings in “I Will Trust in You.” Letting go of every single dream I lay each one down at Your feet Every moment of my wandering Never changes what You see I’ve tried to win this war, I confess My hands are weary, I need Your rest Mighty warrior, King of the fight No matter what I face, You’re by my side When You don’t move the mountains I’m needing You to move When You don’t part the waters I wish I could walk through When You don’t give the answers As I cry out to You I will trust, I will trust I will trust in You Truth is, You know what tomorrow brings There’s not a day ahead You have not seen So in all things be my life and breath I want what You want, Lord, and nothing less You are my strength and comfort You are my steady hand You are my firm foundation The rock on which I stand Your ways are always higher Your plans are always good There’s not a place where I’ll go You’ve not already stood When You don’t move the mountains I’m needing You to move When You don’t part the waters I wish I could walk through When You don’t give the answers As I cry out to You I will trust, I will trust I will trust in You I will trust in You I will trust in You.”

### **AS GOD’S DOULOS, HE HAS OUR SUBMISSION TO HIS LOVING DISCIPLINE AND OUR EXPECTATION OF HIS PROMISED REWARDS.** (V.)

Submission is the crowning characteristic of a love slave. Paul says in Ephesians 5: 21, it first is “Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, then wives to their husbands in 5:22-24, then husbands to Christ in loving our wives as Christ loved the church, as a **doulos**, willing to die for our wife. 5: 25-33, then as children to our parents, 6: 1-3, honoring our father and mother, then fathers, submitting never to provoke our children to anger, 6: 4, then slaves to our masters, 6: 5-8, and masters, submitting to our Master in heaven by not threatening our slaves or employees, 6: 9. As I was preparing this message, I opened a new magazine that came in the mail, “Bible Study Magazine.” Never seen it before. As I looked at the articles, I saw a title called, Navigating Tough Texts, and the title was, of all things, “Why is “slave” the highest privilege of all” Romans 1: 1. What made me know God was at work was that I looked at the writer. He taught me Greek for ten weeks – 6 days a week for 10 weeks, eight hours a day, two weeks after Jinny and I were married on June 16, 1967. Dr. Murray J. Harris was teaching his first class after graduating (as a Dr.) from Cambridge University in England. He was compassionate, and I learned under his tutelage. He opened the class by saying in a soft voice, “This is going to be tough, but I will help each of you that want help, and we will make it through.” We did. Let me read a bit from his words.