

What Lessons Can We Learn From Slavery in the New Testament?

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The early New Testament Church was in some ways a "minefield" of trouble. Now, follow me in this history lesson in a way in this statement I just made. Because God began calling people at the establishment of the New Testament Church, He began calling people out of Judaism into this new way of life, into Christianity. That, in itself, was a big transition, obviously. And then eight years later, the unthinkable happened! The Gentiles were called into the Church. These people that the Jews wouldn't even rub elbows with—or, if they did, they had to go home and bathe—now were coming into the Church. And in Acts 11, we're told that many, many Gentiles came into the Church.

So now, all of a sudden you have people coming out of Judaism. Then those very people were sitting in congregations where Gentiles were coming in. And the Church was growing exponentially. And, obviously, this could be a source of friction and misunderstanding and all of that.

Then there was an equally big source of potential conflict that I think I certainly didn't appreciate before I did the research on this sermon. I think most of the people in God's Church have not appreciated over the years. And that is the fact that masters of slaves and slaves were called into the Church.

If you were a slave-master—and we'll get into the details of that, but this is by way of introduction. If you were a slave-master, remember how we were when we were first called? We tried to convert our relatives and our friends and anybody that would listen to us. Well, if you were a slave-master, guess what you would do? You've got these captive slaves in your home or on your farm. You're going to start preaching to them because now you're going to require them to keep the Sabbath. And so, in zeal and enthusiasm the masters began to preach to their own slaves.

The slaves, then, talked among themselves or the slaves talked to the slaves in the next building down, the next home down, or the next farm down. So, the slaves began talking among themselves about this new way of life, this new religion. And, all of a sudden, many slaves started coming into the Church.

In the western world today, and certainly in the Greater Church of God, we don't understand and we do not appreciate the role slavery played in the New Testament Church because there are two reasons.

1. Slavery is not something we deal with everyday. It's not something that we're accustomed to. It's not something that we rub elbows with. So, yes,

it happened in the United States centuries ago, but it's not something we deal with everyday.

2. Another reason is the fact that certainly the King James and the New King James translations obscure the meaning by the way they translate a single word.

And that single word is translated in the King James as "servant." And we read right over it as a servant. We just think of it's a household servant like a maid or somebody like that. And we read right over it.

The New King James gets a little closer and they translate this word as "bondservant."

The New International gets it right and they translate it the correct way as "slave."

So, that Greek word—again, this is all by way of introduction—is Strong's #1401. And it's the Greek word *doulos*. In English it is spelled "d-o-u-l-o-s." And, as I said, in the King James it's translated "servant," but the definition means the following:

a slave (literal or figurative; involuntary or voluntary)

It should have been translated as slave in both the King James and the New King James. Zodhiates' says the following about *doulos*:

a slave, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another

I'll say it again: "One who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another." Now, notice this.

... his will [meaning the slave's will, his will] being altogether consumed in the will of the other [meaning the master].

"His will being altogether consumed in the will of the other." He goes on to say:

... a slave as opposed to a free man.

So everywhere *doulos* is used, it is referring to a slave. Not a servant in the sense we would think of a servant today in the western countries.

And when it is translated "servant," it hides the true meaning and we can just read right over it. The fact that we are unfamiliar with slavery, we just pass on by it when we read the New Testament. Hence, we don't fully comprehend the meaning of these New Testament Scriptures.

So, it leads to a very important question. And that's the title of the sermon today.

What Understanding and What Lessons Can We Learn From Slavery in the Early New Testament Church?

Now we'll have several points. The First One is we're going to talk now about **Slavery in the Roman Empire** at the time Christ walked the earth, at the time the apostles walked the earth and the early Church was being formed.

With the growth of the Roman Empire (And it was a world ruling empire; no question.), with the growth of the Empire, the number of slaves grew rapidly—exponentially in some cases. Estimates run as high as a third of the population around the Mediterranean. One-third of the population around the Mediterranean was slaves. In Italy, it was much higher. And, in fact, some historians say that the population of Rome was 75% slaves. Now think about that.

There are several ways you could become a slave in the Roman Empire.

One was failure to repay a loan. If you borrowed money and you were unable to repay that money, then you became a slave to the one that you owed money to. And it was a permanent situation. So, obviously you had to be very careful about borrowing money.

A second way is failure to pay your taxes. If you did not, could not pay your taxes, you became a slave to the Roman government.

A third way is that people, as strange as this may seem but it happens today too, people sold their children as slaves to the wealthy for money. This happens in Thailand today. It happens in Southeast Asia where they sell their young girls into sexual slavery for money. But this happened in the Roman Empire back then. You had eight or ten children and you couldn't feed them all. You sold some into slavery to be able to feed the rest of the family and at least keep these kids alive.

But by far the most numerous source of slaves were those who were defeated in battle. And, as you know, the Roman Army was a force to be reckoned with and it was all-conquering. Victorious Roman Generals sent back those who were defeated in battle (they and their families), sent them back as slaves. Thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands captured in battle were turned into slaves. Julius Caesar's campaign against the Gauls, which is modern day France, that campaign lasted from 59 B.C. to 51 B.C. He captured over a million people who later became slaves. A million out of France were shipped to other parts of the Roman Empire as slaves.

And what happened is that slave traders followed the Roman Army. When the Roman Army would capture people in battle or they would conquer a town or a city, they would take the soldiers that were captured or the townspeople and their families and turn them over to the slave traders. The slave traders would pay money, hard money, on the spot to the Roman Army. Then the slave traders began to arrange for these slaves now to be transferred, transported to other parts of the empire where slaves were needed—back to Rome, back to other major settlements in the Roman Empire where they could be sold as slaves.

Now prisoners were taken then to slave markets where they were paraded naked in front of potential buyers. And they had a placard around their neck stating their strengths and their weaknesses, or their skills, what they might be skilled at. And, in fact, the information on those placards, if it was found out later that that information was incorrect, the buyer could sue the seller. This was a very organized enterprise. So, slaves then were taken back to the cities and towns of the Roman Empire and they were sold into slavery.

Slave prices depended upon how many slaves were available. After a successful military campaign where tens of thousands of slaves were coming on the market, then the price for each slave would fall. On the other hand, if there was a period where there was no war and the number of slaves coming on the market was minimal, then the price for the slaves would go up. It was a supply and demand situation.

To extend the Roman Empire, as it expanded into Western Europe and around the Mediterranean, more and more men were needed—Roman citizens for the army or to be administrators in conquered lands, to be governors, be bureaucrats in the conquered territories. So, there was a huge demand for slaves to do the things that these men did before—farmers and such.

It was common practice then to have slaves work in teams of ten, say on a farm. And they were branded on their foreheads. So, it was hard to miss a slave. You knew exactly who a slave was. And they were chained together and they were guarded by foremen with whips. It was not very common for a slave to escape, and if they did escape, with a brand on your forehead, where were you going to go?

The Roman government also owned hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of slaves. And they were used to provide government services, public services. They built roads, maintained roads. They build bridges, maintained bridges. They built and maintained the aqueducts. They built the bath houses, maintained the bath houses. They logged forests and they worked in the mines and quarried the mines. They did all of that labor for an expanding Roman Empire. In fact, the Roman emperor of those days commonly had more than twenty thousand slaves at his disposal to use as he saw fit.

Now rich families could afford slaves. A wealthy landowner, history shows a wealthy landowner could have up to 500 slaves to work the land. And they were used as not only just working the land, but bodyguards, cooks, waiters, doormen, cleaners, gardeners, hair dressers, dressmakers, maids, farm workers. Slaves were used in wealthy families for all of those functions.

And the fact is that Greek slaves were highly prized, highly valued and regarded because they were well-educated. They were used by the rich as teachers, as doctors, as librarians, as private artists, private musicians for the wealthy. And they brought a premium—highly educated Greeks.

A skilled slave would fetch about 2,500 denarii. And that was about four years' wages for that particular skill that that slave might have. Today, 2,500 denarii would be worth about \$375. For an attractive young girl, a rich Roman would pay about 6,000 denarii or ten years wages or about \$900 in today's money because many of these young women, these young girls became concubines for the rich masters or concubines to the rich masters' sons, as bad as that was.

Now, once purchased a slave was a slave for life. Now think about that. Their life was altered. Once they were defeated in battle, brought back to the Roman Empire (wives, sons, daughters), they were slaves for life.

Aristotle defined a slave as "One who does not belong to himself but to someone else."

Seneca, who was a Roman statesman, an author and philosopher said, "A slave is one who does not have the power to refuse."

Their life was not their own. And as we read the definition, they had to be totally absorbed in the will of their master.

Now, there were only two ways a slave could get his or her freedom.

One, if it was given by the owner, and sometimes in the will of the master when he died and in his will he would free his slaves or free a favorite slave. And then the slave, indeed, was free, never to go back into slavery again. Another way of gaining freedom was if a slave could buy his freedom. What the slave had to do was to come up with the money that was the equivalent of what the owner paid in the very beginning for the slave. Obviously, this was virtually impossible given that they were slaves unless they had a benefactor or a helper in some form or fashion.

Now, if a slave was married, got married after they became a slave and had children, the children were automatically slaves also. In fact, some children were killed by their slave parents so that they would not become slaves. If the master was harsh or cruel, there are records where the slaves when they had their little kids, they would kill them rather than have them live as they were living.

Runaway slaves were harshly, harshly punished because if caught—now think with the logic here—if caught, they were guilty of theft because they were their master's property. So, they were a runaway property and if they were caught, they were guilty of actually stealing from the master. The things that they were stealing were themselves. If they were caught, they were tortured horribly in front of the other slaves to frighten them so that they would not do that again. (That happened in the South before the Civil War.) And Romans were particularly adept at torture and they made an example of slaves who ran away.

Now, not all slaves were treated badly because a good master learned to take care of a good slave because it was in his best interests. Number one, if you harmed them or hurt them, you had to replace them. And sometimes a replacement was hard to find. And sometimes it was very expensive. So, in self

interest, a good master would treat a slave reasonably well. In fact, the master of an African slave named Terrance in Rome, his master was so impressed by Terrance's intelligence that he educated him. The master educated Terrance and then set him free. And Terrance became one of Rome's most important writers, a black African.

Some Romans believed that you could get more work out of a slave if you treated them well. And it would be to their best interests. In other words, what they would do sometimes is pay a small allowance into a fund for the slave so that as the slave got older, at some point that fund would be enough where the slave could buy his own freedom. That happened sometimes. But if the slave misbehaved, then the owner would stop paying money into the fund. And so, that was another impetus for the slave to behave himself and to obey the owner. It was a good way of achieving complete obedience.

Now, the bottom line is that: **The master owned the slave and the slave was his property.** We have a hard time with that, understanding that today, but the slave was as much his property as the land or the house or the furniture. The slave was living property of him. And the fact is the economy of the Roman Empire would have collapsed without slavery.

Now, most importantly for the discussion today is that: **Christians had slaves.** Now think about that. Christians had slaves. And both masters and slaves were coming into the Church. It doesn't take a stretch to understand that there might be problems with that. Think today of masters and slaves just walking in the door!

So, we've covered the First Point. It's kind of an **Overview of Slavery at the time of the Roman Empire** and set the stage now for the fact that masters and slaves were coming in droves into the Church, the New Testament Church. So, the Second Point we're going to make is that:

II. The New Testament authors/writers addressed the conduct of slaves and masters.

They had to. And again, it's obscured by the fact of the translation of words, but we're going to translate them as they should be as we go through this to see that the New Testament authors had to deal with this problem. God called both slaves and their masters in just as He called Jews and Gentiles into the Church. And it was a potential source of trouble.

Now think today in an average Church, in walks a well-dressed master and his family, newly converted Christians. Then in walk, trailing behind, his slaves, maybe not so well-dressed. And the master comes in and wants, is accustomed to the best seats and then the slaves, they're over in the corner or they're sitting on the floor when they come into Church for the first time.

And you can see here that this had great potential for division within the new Church—great potential! Because of this, slavery was addressed in letters to the Churches of Corinth, Galatia, Colossae and Ephesus. It was written about by

Paul and Peter and John. We're going to see that as we go through the sermon today. So, what we're going to do is cover four areas under this second part, four areas that were addressed by God about this potential problem of slaves and masters coming simultaneously into the Church.

The first area, if you like to outline, this is Point A.

A. God told the slaves to be obedient to their masters with a pure heart.

God told the slaves to be obedient to their masters with a pure heart. Now, let's go to Colossians 3 and verse 22. We're going to see here that God gave instruction through the apostles to several different Churches and to other ministers so that they would understand that slaves had to be obedient to their masters. Colossians 3 and verse 22, now, the very first word is *doulos*, #1401. It's translated "servants" in the King James. It should be translated "slaves." Colossians 3 verse 22, it says:

Colossians 3:22. *[Slaves], obey in all things your masters... (KJV)*

Colossians 3 verse 22:

Colossians 3:22. *[Slaves], obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice [meaning not superficially], as menpleasers [meaning obey them in their presence]; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: (KJV)*

Obey them.

Now let's go to Titus and look at Paul's letter to Titus. Paul is instructing Titus to teach slaves to be obedient to their masters. Titus 2 and verse 9, I'll read it out of the NIV because it translates *doulos* as it should be translated. Titus 2 and verse 9, notice what Paul says to Titus. He says:

Titus 2:9. *Teach slaves [doulos, #1401] to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, (NIV)*

Not with a smart mouth, but with humility please your master.

Now, let's go to 1 Timothy chapter 6 and see that Paul is instructing young Timothy, an elder, about this very subject. We'll read the first two verses of 1 Timothy 6. I'll read it out of the King James, but we will translate *doulos* properly. 1 Timothy 6 verse 1:

1 Timothy 6:1. *Let as many [slaves, doulos, #1401] as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine not be blasphemed. (KJV)*

In other words, "How can you call yourself a Christian and, then, not honor your master?"

Verse 2:

1 Timothy 6:2. *And they that have believing masters [masters who were converted], let them not despise them, (KJV)*

The Greek word for "despise" means to think against or to dis-esteem them, to show them a lack of esteem or to speak against them, gossip about them or think badly about them.

1 Timothy 6:2b. *... let them not despise them, because they are brethren; (KJV)*

Now think about this! Your master is your master, but in the same token, he's your brother. Now, that took some conditioning for people to get used to this. He says, "But understand they are your brethren."

1 Timothy 6:2 continued. *... but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit [meaning salvation]. These things teach and exhort. (KJV)*

He tells Timothy, "Tell it to all the Churches. Slaves be obedient to your masters with a pure heart."

Now, notice what Peter says about the subject in 1 Peter 2 and verse 18. I will read this out of the New King James. Notice Peter takes it even a step further. 1 Peter 2 and verse 18, he says:

1 Peter 2:18. *[Slave, doulos, #1401], be submissive to your masters with all fear, (NKJ)*

But notice this!

1 Peter 2:18b. *... not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. (NKJ)*

Now, that would take great character on the part of the slave—to be submissive to a harsh master, a cruel master, a master that yelled and screamed and maybe even beat them. But he says "Be submissive to your masters with all fear," especially, "but also to the harsh."

Now let's go to Paul's letter to the Church in Ephesus. Ephesians 6 and we'll read verses 5 through 7. Paul takes it now a step further. Not only to the good be obedient and to the harsh be obedient, but he tells them how they should be obedient. Ephesians 6 verses 5 through 7, notice what he says. In verse 5, he says:

Ephesians 6:5. *[Slaves, doulos, #1401], be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; (KJV)*

"You should obey them as you would obey Christ," he says.

Verse 6:

Ephesians 6:6. *Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers [not superficially]; but as the servants [There's doulos again. The slaves] of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;*

7) With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: (KJV)

He says, "You should obey your master as though your master was Jesus Christ. The way you would honor Christ, you honor your master."

Now, this is very clear. We could have more Scriptures, but for the sake of time it's very clear that a servant should be obedient, conscientious, honoring their master as they would Jesus Christ.

Now, this is very difficult because, understandably, some slaves as they came into the Church resented their masters. They resented the fact that they were slaves. They didn't like it. And maybe their master was cruel and harsh. So, they had to have an attitude adjustment. They had to have a perspective adjustment as they came into the Church in how they viewed their masters, who sometimes were their brothers in Christ. It took the holy spirit to do this on the part of the slave to give them an attitude of being obedient with a pure heart. Now, think of the transition that the slave had to undergo.

Now, that leads us to Point B. In Point A, **God told the slaves to obey their masters with a pure heart.** Now, in Point B:

B. God told the masters to treat their slaves fairly.

Let's go to Ephesians, Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We were just there in chapter 6 verses 5 through 7. Look at verse 9. He says:

Ephesians 6:9. *And, [you] masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master [referring to Jesus Christ] also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him. (KJV)*

Christ doesn't respect any man over another man. And he says, "I'm telling you masters you better treat your slaves fairly and not disrespect them and look down on them because Christ doesn't. And you need to treat all of your slaves fairly and equitably."

Let's go to the letter to the Church in Colossae, Colossians 4 and verse 1. Paul is getting across this same concept but to a different Church. And, obviously, as we go through this, you see letters to different Churches that this was indeed a problem and needed to be addressed. Colossians 4 verse 1:

Colossians 4:1. *Masters, give unto your [slaves] that which is just and equal; knowing that [you] also have a Master in heaven. (KJV)*

What he's saying to them is, "You masters, you converted masters, need to treat your slaves the same way you want Christ to treat you. You better treat them—if you want Christ to be good and kind and gentle to you and not yell and scream at you and not beat you and not oppress you, then you had better not do that to your slaves. You better treat them with fairness, with justness, with equality and patience and kindness." It took God's spirit to do that. Because a master coming into the Church might have lived for forty years as a master with slaves and he might have abused them or treated them badly. And now all of a sudden he walks into the Church and he's got to have an attitude adjustment and it takes God's spirit to do that.

So, God instructed the slaves. God instructed the masters.

The third point, Point C is that:

C. God had to educate the Church that masters and slaves were equal in God's eyes, in His eyes.

God did not view masters as superior to slaves. Let's understand that. Let's go to 1 Corinthians chapter 11. This we refer to often prior to the Passover. And it addresses the Passover Service, but understand it also has to do with slaves and masters. We're going to read verses 18 through 22 of 1 Corinthians 11. Now let's read this with the understanding of slaves and masters being there for a Passover Service.

1 Corinthians 11:18. *For first of all [Paul says], when [you] come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; (KJV)*

The Greek word for "divisions" is *schisma* (*skhis'-mah*), where we get the English word "schism." And it means a "tearing apart."

"There's a tearing apart among you. There's a division among you," and he says:

1 Corinthians 11:18b. *... and I partly believe it. 19) For there must be also heresies... (KJV)*

Now the Greek word is *haireisis* (*hah'-ee-res-is*), where we get the English word "heresy." And it means a divergent opinion, a different opinion.

He said:

1 Corinthians 11:19. *For there must be ... heresies among you, that they which are approved... (KJV)*

We've covered this before. That's the Greek word *dokimos*. It refers to coinage. This talks about legitimate coinage. And in this case, "that they which are approved" meaning legitimate Christians.

1 Corinthians 11:19b. ... may be made manifest among you. (KJV)

We've covered that in detail several times before. But notice in context now with slavery and the keeping of the Passover. Verse 20:

1 Corinthians 11:20. When [you] come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. (KJV)

"You don't come to Passover Service," he's saying, "to have a big banquet or to have a meal." And that's exactly what they were doing.

Verse 21:

1 Corinthians 11:21. For in eating every one [takes] before [the] other his own supper: (KJV)

Now think about this. You come to Passover Service and the wealthy master brings a meal. He lays out a spread for he and his family coming into the Passover Service. It could be a rich master.

1 Corinthians 11:21. ... eating every one [takes] before [the] other his own supper: and one is hungry [most likely a slave], and another is [drunk]. (KJV)

Most likely a rich landowner that had slaves that brought in several bottles of wine and started drinking the wine prior to Passover Service thinking they were keeping the "Lord's Supper."

Verse 22, Paul says:

1 Corinthians 11:22. What? have [you] not houses to eat and to drink in? (KJV)

He says, "You should do the eating and drinking at home. We're not coming here to have a banquet, where some people have a wonderful meal and other people are sitting there hungry, rich wealthy masters and slaves." He says:

1 Corinthians 11:22b. ... or [do you] despise the church of God, (KJV)

And notice this at the latter part of verse 22.

1 Corinthians 11:22 continued. ... and shame them that have not? (KJV)

Now, who is likely to "have not"? Obviously, it's a slave.

1 Corinthians 11:22 continued. What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. (KJV)

You see the better we understand slavery the better we can understand Scripture like this because he's referring in the main to masters and slaves.

Now, look at the next chapter, chapter 12 and verse 13. He's trying to get across now that slaves and masters were equal in the eyes of God. 1 Corinthians 12 verse 13, he says:

1 Corinthians 12:13. *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, (KJV)*

That was a problem before.

1 Corinthians 12:13b. *... whether we be bond [meaning a slave] or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (KJV)*

All are equal in God's eyes.

Now, with that in mind, let's go to Galatians, another Church. He was teaching the Corinthians here. Now, notice Galatians. We're going to chapter 3 and verse 28. This was a monumental education job to show the people that slaves and masters were the same in God's eyes. Galatians 3 and verse 28, notice what he says.

Galatians 3:28. *There is neither Jew nor Greek [Jew or Gentile], there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for [you] are all one in Christ Jesus. (KJV)*

There is no class system in the Church.

Unfortunately, in the days of the Worldwide Church of God when we came in, there was a class system. Ministers were up here (above), all the rest of us were down here (below). And for some reason, the Worldwide Church of God and the leaders of the Worldwide Church of God didn't take to heart these Scriptures.

We are all one in Jesus Christ—slaves/masters, Jews/ Gentiles, men/women. There is no class system in the Church of God.

Let's go to another Church, Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 8. Paul in writing these letters has to get across this concept that in God's eyes, contrary to the world of that day and the world today, **all men and women are equal in His eyes.** Ephesians 6 and verse 8:

Ephesians 6:8. *Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man [does], the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. (KJV)*

If a slave does a good deed and obeys God, he gets the same reward as a master who obeys God and does a good deed. In other words, there is no cutting of slack by God because of somebody having an office or a position, wealth, power, class, office of some sort.

And I can remember an evangelist who was caught in a compromising situation a number of days ago in the Days of Worldwide. And the reporter asked him, "Well, how can you be in a place like this?" And he basically said, "God understands my value to the Church. God understands what I do for the Church. Therefore, he cuts me slack. He winks at it."

That's not what the Bible says. And we cannot even think about going there! **God holds everyone to the same standard**—ministers/ members, male/female, bond/free, Jews/Gentiles.

Now let's go to the Church in Colossae, chapter 3 and verse 11. Paul is getting this same point across to another Church. Colossians 3 verse 11, notice what he says. He addresses the Jew/Gentile question first. He says:

Colossians 3:11. *Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond [slave or] free: but Christ is all, and in all. (KJV)*

All are the same. **In God's eyes slaves and masters were the same, had the same value, had the same potential and were offered salvation regardless of whether they were a master or a slave.**

The lesson for us today, obviously, is that: **All people are God's Children.** All people will be offered salvation. All people are equal in God's eyes—Muslims, Hindus, black/white, red/yellow, young/old, men/women, educated/uneducated. It makes no difference. So we need to learn that. And the Church was being taught that slaves and masters were equal in God's eyes because, obviously, there was a tendency for people to favor the wealthy master and put down the slave.

Now the fourth point, Point D—God had to teach the Church that they were equal—God also, Point D:

D. God told the Brethren to treat masters and slaves within the Church the same.

The Brethren had to treat people the same. They could not be a respecter of persons.

The apostle James addresses this. Let's go to James chapter 2. Now, read this—I know we've read it many times before, but read it with the understanding that it is addressing the issue of masters and slaves as well as the general concept of respect of persons. James chapter 2, we'll read the first four verses and then jump to verse 8. James says—he's educating the Brethren.

James 2:1. *My brethren, [He says, "Don't] have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. (KJV)*

You can't do that! You can't respect one better than the other. Verse 2:

James 2:2. *For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, (KJV)*

Now who would that likely be? A wealthy slave owner. He says:

James 2:2b. *... and [then] there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; (KJV)*

That could be a slave who works in the mines. It could be a slave who is a logger, or a slave with a brand on his forehead that works in the field. They don't have clothes. They might even smell coming into Church because they don't have the opportunity to bathe.

Verse 3, he says:

James 2:3. *And [you] have respect to him that [wears] the gay clothing, (KJV)*

(Chuckle.) The English language has changed mightily since this was written. And obviously it would be written differently today. It shows you how words change.

He says:

James 2:3. *[If you] have respect to him that [wears] the gay clothing [or the wealthy or the flashy clothing], and say unto him, [Oh, hey!] Sit here in [this] good place; and [then you] say to the poor, [We want you to] Stand [up in the corner], or sit here under my footstool: (KJV)*

Meaning: "You sit here. You kneel at my feet."

And he says in verse 4:

James 2:4. *Are [you] not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? (KJV)*

Now jump to verse 8:

James 2:8. *If [you fulfill] the royal law according to the scripture, [You shall] love [your neighbor] as [yourself, you] do well:
9) But if [you] have respect [of] persons, [you] commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.
10) For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (KJV)*

That can happen even in the modern Church. We've had issues where people wanted reserved seats at the Feast. Just demanded reserve seats at the Feast as though somehow they were better than the average person walking in the door. It still happens.

Now, Peter also mentioned this subject. We won't turn there, but in 1 Peter he addresses the subject of respect of persons.

The fact is, you see, we can't show favoritism to somebody because of their worldly status, education, money, job, whatever. We cannot do that. In fact, the Bible says just the opposite.

Now, talk about an attitude adjustment, let's go to Philippians chapter 2 and verse 3 and read a very familiar Scripture. But read it in the context of masters and slaves and Church Brethren treating masters and slaves within the congregation. Philippians 2 and verse 3, notice what Paul says to the Church in Philippi. He said:

***Philippians 2:3.** Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem [others] better than themselves. (KJV)*

This includes slaves. This includes slaves. A master should esteem his slave better than himself. And Brethren should esteem slaves better than themselves.

You might have as free man in the Church. He's a merchant. He's not a wealthy landowner with a bunch of slaves, but he might be a merchant. And God is saying, "I want you to treat the slave in the Church with the same respect as the master." **And this is quite an attitude adjustment for the Church.**

The lesson for us today is that: **We should treat all our brothers in the Church the same and we should treat people out in the world the same and not be a respecter of persons.**

Now the Second Point we made is that God instructed the Church on how to deal with problem. Notice now, the Third Major Point.

III. The apostles did not get involved in speaking out against slavery.

They did not get involved in attempting to abolish slavery. They didn't do that. They didn't get involved in speaking against slavery or attempting to eliminate slavery.

Now, understand the times. Slaves in Christian households in these days were viewed much the same way that servants were viewed in England during the 1700 and 1800s. Because you had the nobility class in England, and then you had the servant class. There are a lot of TV shows that talk about the relationship between the nobility and the servants within the big mansions in England in the 1700 and 1800s. This was taken for granted in England in the 1700 and 1800s. There were nobles and there were servants. They weren't slaves; they were servants, but they were different classes and the two didn't mix. And it was just the way life was. It was taken for granted.

Similarly, at the times that we're referring to here in the times of the apostles and the early New Testament Church, slavery was a way of life. It was taken for granted in the New Testament Church. There is no New Testament record that

the apostles attempted to overturn the curse of slavery. And there's no question—**Slavery is a curse**. But you cannot read in the New Testament where they attempted to rebel or incite rebellion against slavery. It's just not there. They, the apostles, accepted it as part of the world that they lived in. And the apostles had spiritual matters on their mind. They had salvation on their mind and they didn't go into this area.

Look at 1 Corinthians 7 and verse 21 if you want to see this nail hit right on the head. 1 Corinthians 7 verse 21, Paul is talking to slaves. He asks the question. 1 Corinthians 7 verse 21, he says:

1 Corinthians 7:21. *[Are you] called... (KJV)*

Meaning: Were you called into the Church...

1 Corinthians 7:21b. *... being a [slave, doulos, #1401]? (KJV)*

He's asking the question: "Were you called, coming in being a slave?" What does he say? Does he say, "Fight against it. Rebel against it."? No, he said:

1 Corinthians 7:21 continued. *... care not for it: (KJV)*

"Don't let it bother you!"

1 Corinthians 7:21 continued. *... but if [you may] be made free, [go ahead and] use it.... (KJV)*

"If you can be made free, please do. But don't care about it. Don't worry about it. Don't stress about it. Don't fight about it. Don't rebel against it," he said.

And it's interesting in the Church today. I get e-mails from all over the country, all over the world, especially in this election year in the United States. And I get e-mails wanting to change the government. I get e-mails praising the Republicans and skewering Obama and the Democrats. "We've got to vote these scoundrels out of office." Then occasionally I'll get an e-mail praising Obama and just bashing the Republicans. And it's from Brethren who want to change the government, who want to write letters, who want to send chain-mails, who want to start petitions in order to change something they don't like about the government. They forget a simple fact.

Let's go to Daniel chapter 4 and read verse 17. The apostles understood this and, obviously, we need to understand it today. Daniel 4 and verse 17, we're breaking into the context of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Nebuchadnezzar described the dream. Then, Daniel later interpreted the dream. What we're going to cover, was covered—I think—three times in Daniel 4. We'll just take one verse. Daniel 4 verse 17, it says:

Daniel 4:17. *This matter... (KJV)*

Meaning: This dream and the lesson from the dream.

Daniel 4:17b. ... is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High [rules] in the kingdom of men, and [gives] it to whomsoever he will, and [sets] up over it the basest of men. (KJV)

The margin says, in the King James, "the lowest of men."

God determines who is going to hold government, who is going to hold the reins of government.

Notice what Christ said. Let's go to Mark chapter 12 and we're going to read verses 13 through 17. This is a situation where the Pharisees and the Herodians came together. The Herodians were those who supported King Herod. And normally, Pharisees and Herodians did not rub elbows together, but in this case they joined forces in an effort to trip up Jesus Christ. Mark 12 verse 13:

Mark 12:13. And they [sent] unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.

14) And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that [you are] true, and [you don't care] for [any] man: (KJV)

Meaning: "You're not a respecter of persons."

Mark 12:14b. ... for [You regard] not the person of men, but [teach] the way of God in truth: (KJV)

Now, what they're doing is sucking up to Christ in order to try to trap Him. And, it says:

Mark 12:14 continued. Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?

15) Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he [Christ], knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why [do you test] me? bring me a penny, that I may see it.

16) And they brought [Him the penny]. And he [said] unto them, Whose is this image [is on this penny] and [whose] superscription [is on this penny]? And they said unto him, Caesar's.

17) And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marveled at him. (KJV)

It's very clear what Christ is saying. He's saying, "Do what Caesar requires as long as it doesn't conflict with God's Law, with My teaching."

Now, this would be a perfect opportunity to condemn the Roman Government, perfect opportunity to condemn slavery and all the injustices of the Roman Government and the oppression and the religious persecution. He could have done all of that at this moment in time, but He didn't. He could have incited a revolt against the Roman System—easily could have done it. But He chose not to and the lesson is:

Neither should we as God's people.

If God wants Obama to be president, that is going to happen. If God wants a Mormon to be president, we're going to have a Mormon as a president. **It's whatever God wants.** And we can stew and write and petition and pray and all of that, but God is going to do what God is going to do because **He is Sovereign and that is His choice.** It is not ours.

So, as with the apostles, our focus should be on spiritual matters, on salvation. Not on overthrowing the government. So, the Third Lesson that we have to learn is that **the apostles didn't go after slavery.** They accepted it as a part of the world they lived in at the time. And they focused on spiritual matters, on salvation.

The Fourth Point and Final Point—and this is probably the most important point!

IV. God used slavery to teach us about our relationship with Jesus Christ.

God uses slavery to teach us about our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, remember in the Roman culture, the master owned the slave and the slave was the master's property. Now once we are called and once we are baptized, guess what? We're going to find out, **Christ owns us and we are His property.**

Now, there is a difference because we are **volunteer slaves.** We weren't forced into it at the point of a spear with the Roman Government. But we are volunteer slaves. Remember the definitions, one of the definitions of *doulos* was voluntary or involuntary slavery? Now, they were involuntary slaves. We are voluntary slaves. **We enter into this relationship as slaves of our own free will and we do so with a clean heart because we want to be a slave of Jesus Christ.** We are slaves to both God and to Christ.

Let's go to Romans chapter 6 and we'll read verses 16 through 22 and see that for ourselves. Romans 6 verses 16 through 22. Now, let's understand that if these [Scriptures] were written back in these days, the Brethren in the Church read these and having slavery all around them, they understood exactly what was meant. Romans 6 verse 16:

Romans 6:16. *Know [you] not, that to whom [you] yield yourselves [slaves, doulos, #1401] to obey, his [slaves you] are to whom [you] obey; (KJV)*

They perfectly understood what he was talking about. We don't so much today.

Romans 6:16b. *... whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?*

17) *But God be thanked, that [you] were the [slaves]of sin, but [you] have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.
(KJV)*

Meaning: The Gospel.

Notice verse 18.

Romans 6:18. *Being then made free from sin, [you] became the [slaves] of righteousness.*

Now this is a slightly different word. Instead of #1401, it's #1402. And it is the Greek word *douloo* (*doo-lo'-o*), which is a derivative of *doulos*.

He says, "You are now slaves of righteousness." Verse 19:

Romans 6:19. *I speak after the manner of men... (KJV)*

Meaning: "I'm using the analogy of slavery to teach you something."

Romans 6:19b. *... because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as [you] have yielded your members [slaves] to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now [He's making an appeal to them.] yield your members [slaves, again doulos] to righteousness unto holiness. (KJV)*

Verse 20:

Romans 6:20. *For when [you] were [slaves] of sin [doulos], [you] were free from righteousness.
21) What fruit had [you] then in those things whereof [you] are now ashamed? (KJV)*

When you were a slave of sin, as Dr. Phil would say, "How did that work for ya?" It didn't work very well. And he's trying to point that out to them. "You are ashamed of it now." He says:

Romans 6:20b. *... for the end of those things is death.
22) But now being made free from sin, and become [slaves, #1402] to God, [you] have your fruit unto holiness [not to sin, but to holiness], and the end everlasting life. (KJV)*

Now if you read this to the Brethren back in the early New Testament Church, they would know exactly what Christ meant because there were slaves sitting in the congregation reading that letter. There were masters sitting in the congregation reading that letter. And, when we read it today, if we don't understand it in the context of slavery, we miss the main focal point of it all.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians, now chapter 7 and let's read verses 21 through 23. We read verse 21 earlier, but we'll just take it through in context. 1 Corinthians 7:21, we read:

1 Corinthians 7:21. *[Are you] called being a [slave]? care not for it: but if [you may] be made free, use it rather. (KJV)*

Notice verse 22.

1 Corinthians 7:22. *For he that is called in the Lord, being a [slave, doulos], is the Lord's freeman: (KJV)*

If you are a slave coming into the Church, being baptized, accepting Christ as your Savior makes you a freeman in God's eyes. You're free from sin.

1 Corinthians 7:22b. *... likewise also he that is called, being free, is... (KJV)*

Guess what?

1 Corinthians 7:22 continued. *... Christ's [doulos, Christ's slave]. (KJV)*

Verse 23:

1 Corinthians 7:23. *[We] are bought with a price; (KJV)*

And what is that price? **The death of our Savior Jesus Christ.**

He says:

1 Corinthians 7:23b. *... be not the [slaves, doulos] of men. (KJV)*

Even if you are a physical slave, don't be a slave up here (pointing to the head). Don't be a slave to Satan. Don't be a slave to sin.

And Christ set the example. We won't turn there but in John 6 and verse 38, what did Christ say?

John 6:38. *I came down from heaven, [WHAT?] not to do [My] own will, but the will of him [who] sent me. (KJV)*

And remember that part of the definition of a slave is to be totally immersed in the will of your master. Christ said, "I didn't come down to do what I want. I came down to do the will of the Father."

And remember what He said in the Garden of Gethsemane? We won't turn there again, Luke 22:42). When He was out praying by Himself and He was sweating drops of blood, He said, "Father, if You're willing, would You please remove this cup from Me?" But He said, "Nevertheless." Remember what He said? "Not My will, but Your will be done." In that sense, Christ was the Slave of the Father to do the Father's will and not His own will.

The apostles followed Christ's example. Let's go to Philippians 1 and verse 1. Paul at the very first introductory sentence, notice what he says about his relationship with Jesus Christ (him and Timothy). Philippians 1 verse 1, notice what he said.

Philippians 1:1. Paul and [Timothy], (KJV)

Who are Paul and Timothy:

Philippians 1:1b. ... the [slaves, doulos] of Jesus Christ, (KJV)

Now, if Paul can be a slave to Christ and Timothy can be a slave to Christ, we obviously should be a slave to Jesus Christ.

He says and he's addressing the letter to:

Philippians 1:1b. ... to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops [the overseers] and [the] deacons: (KJV)

But Paul says, "I'm a slave of Jesus Christ." Just like Christ said, "I'm a slave to Your will not My will."

Remember one of the definitions of *doulos*. I'll read it again. We read it earlier.

One who is in a permanent relationship of servitude to another; his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other.

Paul did it. Timothy did it. Christ did it. Peter did it.

Let's go to Ephesians 5 and verse 14. We'll read verses 14 through 18. This tells us that we should be consumed not with our will **but with the will of the Father and Christ.** Ephesians 5 verse 14, notice what he says:

Ephesians 5:14. Wherefore he [says], Awake [you] that [sleep], (KJV)

Remember all ten virgins were asleep. We don't want to be asleep.

Ephesians 5:14b. ... arise from the dead, and Christ shall give [you] light. (KJV)

To see, to understand.

Ephesians 5:15. See then that [you] walk circumspectly, (KJV)

That means very carefully, cautiously.

Ephesians 5:15b. ... not as fools, but as wise, 16) Redeeming the time, (KJV)

All of us have wasted time. We should have been praying. We should have been studying. We should have been doing good deeds and we've wasted time. He says:

Ephesians 5:16. *[Redeem] the time, because the days are evil. (KJV)*

Verse 17, this is the key.

Ephesians 5:17. *Wherefore be [you] not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. (KJV)*

How can we be a slave to God and Christ and be immersed in Their will if we don't understand what Their will is.?

Ephesians 5:18. *Don't be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be [you] filled with the [Holy] Spirit; (KJV)*

The only way we can understand the will of God is to be filled with God's spirit to have the mind of Christ and then we will be motivated to do the will of God **as a slave**. Let's understand that. So, the lesson for us is that apart from God's spirit we are lost. We don't know God's will; we don't know God's purpose for us if we separate ourselves from God and His spirit.

But **as slaves**, let's understand that we are bought and paid for by Jesus Christ and we are owned by God the Father as slaves. And that as slaves we should be as the definition of *doulos* tells us—**altogether consumed by the will of the Father**. Do His will as a slave. We will be blessed. We will be happy. We will be in harmony with God. There will be no friction between us and Jesus Christ and God the Father. And there will be no friction between us as Brethren because we're all doing the will of God from the heart.

Let's conclude now.

What is the relevance for all of this for the Church today? Well, we've seen already plenty of relevance for the Church today.

When the New Testament Church read these letters (Corinthians, Colossians, Ephesians, and so on) when they read these letters in their day, there was no misunderstanding. They knew exactly what was being referred to when the subject of slaves/masters, being a slave to Jesus Christ. They understood all of that because they were rubbing elbows with slavery everyday. Maybe they had slaves. Maybe they were slaves. They came to church with slaves and masters. They understood. They knew precisely what was meant when the word *doulos* was used.

But today because of our culture that has no slavery in the Western World and because these Scriptures were translated as "servants" rather than slaves, we can just blow right past them and not understand the deeper meaning. So from now on when we read these Scriptures about slavery, let's remember the context of what was actually happening in the New Testament Church during those

times. **And most importantly, let's use our understanding of slavery to better comprehend our relationship with Jesus Christ.** The better we understand slavery the better we understand our relationship with Jesus Christ.

And, then, let's be thankful that in our relationship with Jesus Christ, yes, we are slaves but as He tells us **we are more than slaves.** We read this on Passover evening. Let's go to John 15 and verse 15. The blessing is that we are more than slaves. John 15 and verse 15, notice what Christ says. He says:

John 15:15. *Henceforth... (KJV)*

That means "From this day forward." He says:

John 15:15b. *I call you not [slaves, doulos, #1401]; for the [slave knows] not what [his master] his lord [does]: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (KJV)*

Now, you see they understood this because they understood that a master would just order the slaves around. He didn't tell them the big picture. He didn't tell them why he was doing something. He didn't explain all the reasoning. He just says, "Go do this and go do that."

And Christ says, "From this day forward, I'm not going to treat you that way because I'm going to tell you everything that the Master tells Me."

We're not called in God's Church, just as in the Worldwide Days, unfortunately, it was pray and pay. You don't need to know; you don't need to be involved; just pray and pay." Well, that's not what this verse says. Rather, we are **friends.**

Now the Greek word for "friends" is **Strong's #5384.** It's *philos* (*fee'-los*). And guess what that word means. It means "loved" and it means "dear."

And Christ is saying, "From this day forward, I'm not calling you slaves. I'm calling you loved and I'm calling you dear. Yes, you are slaves to Me, but you are dear slaves. You are loved, beloved slaves."

And as a master, as we read earlier, could free his slaves if he chose to do so, we need to be eternally thankful that Christ bought and paid for us with His life and He has made us free from sin, from slavery to sin. On top of that, He calls us "loved and dear friends."

So, let's learn the lessons of slavery in the New Testament and let's apply it to our lives today in the Greater Church of God.