

Entanglement With The Yoke Of Bondage

Slavery

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Given 17-Mar-01; Sermon #492

There has been a lot going on in the news this week, and apparently God is speeding things up—with the economy in the entire world, as well as the devastation to the farms and the cattle growers and all of the killing that is going on. I understand that Britain is about to kill over a million cattle. These things are very serious for nation's economies, and it does not look good for the entire world.

From what I understand, this month is "Women's History Month." I could not help but notice a few articles, over the last few weeks, having to do with how women are being sold into slavery in Pakistan—apparently as sex slaves. This is something that seems to be a problem throughout many of these more backward nations in the world.

Last month, in America, was "Black History Month." I am sure you found, as I did, that the TV, radio, and newspapers were full of stories about the blacks in America. What stuck me was the strong emphasis to slavery that still dominates most stories. With all that blacks have accomplished and been blessed with in the United States, the media insists on instigating and stirring up resentment in the descendants of those people whose ancestors were slaves more than 135 years ago.

I am not trying to downplay the suffering that many experienced while slaves, but express that slavery has been going on, and still does; and it leaves an everlasting impression on those affected—even to the third and fourth generations (as we are seeing here in the United States).

Slavery is an institution based upon a relationship of dominance and submission, whereby one person owns another and can exact from that person labor or other services. Slavery has been called by many names—among which are bondage, servitude, and serfdom. I am sure you can come up with quite a few others as well.

We are all slaves to something, in varying degrees. We are "slaves" to governments, to laws, to employers. (I do not emphasize employers—because, I might add here, I do not feel like a slave to my employer. I feel very blessed in that way.) But, hopefully, we are no longer slaves to sin.

Let us look at some secular history to get a feel for how extensive slavery has been throughout man's history. Then we will take a look at the biblical perspective on slavery. First, we will look at slavery in the ancient western world. The institution of slavery extends back beyond recorded history, and certainly back to Nimrod's time and beyond (in the building of the Tower of Babel).

Now, during the course of history, slaves were acquired in seven different ways. The first was by capture. Prisoners of war were commonly reduced to slavery when captured. The second way is by purchase. In antiquity, slaves were sold among all kinds of other merchandise and from country to country. The third way is by birth. Children born in the house of slave parents became "house-born slaves"—which Scripture also mentions.

The fourth way is restitution. If a convicted thief could not make restitution to pay his fines and damages, funds towards this could be raised by selling him as a slave; and this was a very common way of ending up in slavery. Number five is similar—by default on debts. Debtors who went

bankrupt were often forced to sell their children as slaves or the children would be confiscated as slaves by the creditor.

This has been going on for as long as we have had recorded history. Under the Babylonian king, Hammurabi, who ruled at the time of Abraham, the insolvent debtor himself, as well as his wife and family, commonly became a slave of his creditor. He gave him his labor for three years to work off his debt; and then he was able to go free.

The sixth way that people end up in physical slavery is by self-sale. That is, selling oneself voluntarily into slavery. And the seventh way is by abduction. To steal a person and then to reduce that kidnapped person to slavery was an offense punishable by death in many Semitic lands, but it still remained a problem. And, apparently, it still remains a problem today—because those women who are being sold in Pakistan as sex slaves have been kidnapped. Then they are taken to Pakistan and sold.

So these ills—which mankind have had having to do with slavery for his entire history—continue to plague us. And because of the tendency of such large numbers of people to become slaves, some ancient laws sought to avoid the risk of wholesale population-drift into slavery under economic pressure on small farmers, by limiting the length of service that insolvent debtors had to give to six years. This was very common in the ancient world for nations to limit any slavery to this amount of time. And, no doubt, there was a great deal of influence from what God had given to Israel as laws having to do with slavery.

Slavery was an established institution in Greece during the time of Israel's king David. A large part of the population of the Greek city-states, in latter days, were of the servile class. There were domestic slaves, agricultural slaves, artisans, and workers—but all slaves. In Greece, although not quite as common as in Asia Minor, there were also public slaves. These slaves served in the temples, there in Greece. And on the island of Delos, which was part of Greece at that time, sometimes as many as 10,000 slaves were sold in a single day. So even anciently, many, many people were sold into slavery.

Among the Romans, the lot of the slavers seems to have been more cruel than among the Greeks. In early Roman times, slavery was the same type as in Greece. But by the first century BC, as the Roman Empire began to expand, a form of agricultural slavery called "estate slavery," was introduced on a wide scale. In this form, agriculture was pursued by a large number of slaves and with an impersonal relationship with the landowner, who had absolute power over them. Although they may have appeared to have been workers in the fields with the crops, in every way they were slaves; and there was a limit that they had of their own free will.

The increasing wealth of Rome led to an expansion of domestic slaves, and a servile class grew to great numbers. They were employed in the theater, in the gladiatorial combats, and to some extent in prostitution. (Apparently prostitution has been a common slavery throughout man's history.) Most of the slaves were foreign, and some were highly educated and were employed as instructors. So a family could buy a slave who was very well educated; and then actually have him teach their children at home.

According to Josephus, 97,000 Jews were enslaved as a result of the crushing of the Jewish rebellion by Vespasian and Titus between 66 AD and 70 AD. If you will recall, that is around the time of the destruction of the Temple. In an earlier revolt, 100,000 Jews were enslaved. So looking at the history

of Jews throughout man's history, the Jews have always ended up *en masse* nationally in slavery. We saw that in World War II as well—in the ghettos, the gulags, concentration camps, and whatever else those areas were called.

In the Roman Empire, having a large retinue of slaves became one of the prime marks of luxury. And exotic, especially Asian, slaves were sought. As the number of conquered provinces grew, so did the number of slaves—as slaves were brought from all parts of the Roman Empire. Consequently, emancipation from slavery was common, and freedmen became a significant factor in the Roman social system. So many, many slaves gained their freedom under Rome and actually became citizens—or freedmen.

Neither true Christianity nor Catholicism toward the end of the Roman Empire had any noticeable effect on the abolition of slavery. The Roman Catholic Church, at that time, did not oppose the institution. However, a change in economic life set in and resulted in the gradual disappearance of agricultural slaves. And these agricultural slaves moved from slavery into what later became serfdom. Although they were given their "freedom," they were still slaves to the land and still owed debt on the land. Therefore, whoever owned that land kept them, for all practical purposes, as slaves.

The semi-freedom of serfdom was the dominant form of slavery in the Middle Ages, although domestic slavery (and, to some extent, other forms) did not disappear. The Catholic Church began to encourage emancipation of slaves, while ignoring the fact that many slaves were attached to church officials and church property. So, there again, we see that the norm for the Catholic Church has consistently been hypocrisy.

Islam, like Catholicism, accepted slavery; and it became a standard institution in Muslim lands. One form of Muslim slavery was in the eunuch guardians of the harems. Eunuchs had been widely known in Grecian, Roman, and especially Byzantine times. But it was among the Muslims and in East Asia that they were to survive the longest—because its harems were even around as late as the time of Lawrence of Arabia, when he helped them take over a larger area of Arabia.

In Western Europe, slavery largely disappeared by the later Middle Ages, although it still remained in such manifestations as the use of slaves on galleys. In Russia, slavery persisted longer than in Western Europe, and the serfs were pushed into severe slavery by Peter the Great. So we see there a resurgence of a severe type of slavery in more modern history.

A revolution in the institution of slavery came in the 15th and 16th centuries. The exploration of the African coasts by Portuguese navigators resulted in the exploitation of the African as slaves. And for nearly five centuries, the preying and plundering of slave raiders along the coasts of Africa were a lucrative and important business—conducted with appalling brutality.

The British, the Dutch, the French, the Spanish, and the Portuguese all engaged in African slave trade. Africans were brought back to Portugal as early as 1440. An interesting thing happened there. Portugal brought so many slaves into its country that the slaves became dominant. It began to change the ethnography of Portugal. They actually became the dominant race; and so laws were passed to rid many of the slaves from that area.

It was not in Europe that African slavery was most profitable and widespread, but in the Americas—where European exploitation began at the end of the 15th century. This is the slavery that we are most familiar with in this country. The first people to be enslaved by the Spanish and Portuguese in the

West Indies and Latin American were the Native Americans. (Or, the "American Indians," as I knew them as a child.) But, because the majority of Native American slaves either revolted or escaped, other forms of forced labor—akin to serfdom—were introduced to deal with the Native Americans.

The resistance of the Native Americans to slavery only increased the demand for Africans to replace them. Africans proved to be profitable laborers in the Caribbean islands and the lowlands of the South American mainland. In the colder climates, however, the Native American slaves fared better. I thought that was interesting. Even though the Native Americans did not make all that great a slave, they survived better in the higher altitudes; and so they were used there.

African slaves were introduced to the British settlements on the Atlantic coast with the arrival of the first shipload in Virginia in 1619. And there begins our history of slave use in this country. They were used for the raising of staple crops (such as coffee, tobacco, sugar, rice, and much later cotton); and the plantation economy made the importance of slaves, and the importation of slaves from Africa, particularly valuable in the southern colonies of the United States.

In the United States, slavery proved unprofitable in the northern states, and by the early 19th century had disappeared. Slavery's abolition had been hastened by the work of the Quakers who, as in Great Britain, were staunchly opposed to slavery. They had caused slavery to be ended in the British Empire, by their pushing and their demonstrating and that type of thing. And then they started working on slavery here in the colonies. The small northern farmer also feared slavery as a system of cheap labor for the South, against which it was difficult to compete. Throughout man's history, economics have always come into play—having to do with slavery.

In the South, however, slavery came to be an integral part of the plantation, especially with the introduction of the cotton gin in 1793. While the institution of slavery tended in North America to reinforce feelings of racial superiority on the part of the whites, some historians have argued that the treatment of slaves in the U.S. was more humane than it was in the Catholic and the Latin countries. Generally, history shows that the descendants of ancient Israel have always treated slaves more kindly than the descendants of the Gentile nations. No doubt, this is the direct result of the laws that God gave the Israelitish nations regarding slavery.

In the victory in 1860 of the Republican presidential candidate, Abraham Lincoln, the South saw a threat to Southern institutions. And the southern states, in an effort to secure those institutions, resorted to secession and formed the Confederacy (as all of us in this country should know). The Civil War followed, and the victory of the North brought an end to slavery in the United States. Then Lincoln's *Emancipation Proclamation*, issued in 1863, declared all slaves in the Southern secessionist states "free." It was followed by other legislation—especially the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which is something that we are all familiar with having to do with the institution of slavery in this country.

In the later years of the 1800s, the slave trade was conducted on the East Coast of Africa—with the market being in the Muslim lands, primarily. The emperor of what is now Ethiopia was unable to prevent traffic from that land to Arabia, and a brisk trade went on over the Red Sea. Slavery continued to exist in parts of Asia, the Middle East, and (despite increasingly successful efforts to abolish it) in various parts of Africa in the 1900s.

In Africa, it was blacks selling blacks to other black nations. Also whites selling blacks to other black nations, and whites selling blacks to Islamic nations. So there were many, many different races involved in the selling, and deportation, and buying of slaves—throughout man's history.

By the mid-1900s, slavery was still a problem in various parts of the world. A report prepared for the United Nations in 1966 charged that slavery still existed in parts of Africa and Asia. Although efforts to end voluntary servitude continued throughout the last half of the 1900s, forms of severe slavery still persist today in a number of Third World countries. More isolated instances are occasionally revealed elsewhere—including the slavery involving Asian emigrants in the United States, which occasionally we see reports about in the news, and prostitution (that is, sex slaves), which also appears in the news at times here in the United States among some of the Asian communities.

With this brief history, as you can see, physical slavery has always been alive and not so well in the world. Even the descendants of Israel have shared in it, and even excelled in slavery throughout the history of man.

Let us change our perspective here—from the secular perspective to the biblical perspective. There is such a contrast between the underlying principles of the two that there is just no comparison at all. We will see that, as we go through here.

So what is the Old Testament perspective on slavery? A more humane spirit breathes through the Old Testament laws and customs on slavery. It is a breath of fresh air, comparatively speaking. Of course, none of us want to see slavery of any kind. Even when Hebrew law and custom on slaves shares similarities with the ancient Semitic world, there is this unique care in God's name for the care of slaves, who by status were not 'people.' There was something absent from the law codes of Babylon or Assyria nations regarding the care of slaves.

By and large, the economy of the ancient Near East was never one substantially based on slave labor—as in classical and later Greece, or above all in Imperial Rome. The Old Testament does not regard the possession of slaves to be always, and under all circumstances, a moral evil. Israelites were permitted to impose the punishment of slavery upon heathen nations.

Leviticus 25:44-46 And as for your male and female slaves whom you may have, from the nations that are around you, from them you may buy male and female slaves. Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers who dwell among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for as a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves. But regarding your brethren, the children of Israel, you shall not rule one over another with rigor [or, with slavery].

So God bans slavery between Israelites. Human nature's tendency, combined with Satan's influence to be cruel, makes it very necessary for God to include in Scripture every possible emphasis to oppose cruelty against slaves. Let us briefly look at some of the commands regarding the treatment of slaves. I have listed nine here. There may be others, but these are the nine main ones.

The first command regarding the treatment of slaves is that a man who has purchased a female slave with the intention of making her an inferior wife is not permitted to treat her as a slave. You will find that in Exodus 21:7-11.

The second command is that extreme cruelty to a slave must result in immediate manumission (or, emancipation from slavery). That is also in Exodus 21.

The third way is returning a runaway to his master to become enslaved once more is strictly forbidden. Deuteronomy 23:15.

The fourth command: Though there is a different opinion among commentators with respect to the question of whether all of the kindness to slaves regulations applied to foreign (non-Hebrew) slaves as well as Israelites, the preponderance of evidence is certainly in the direction of the divinely-imposed mandate of, at least, showing fairness and mercy to all—including the foreigner. Thus, for example, definite provision was made for the incorporation of foreign slaves into religious fellowship with Israel, and this by means of circumcision. You will find that in Genesis 17.

The fifth way: Among the Israelites, an impoverished person could sell himself in order to pay his debts. But his condition was, in reality, not that of slavery but, rather that of mild indenture or voluntary apprenticeship. You will find that in Leviticus 25:39.

The sixth command: The basic rule regarding slavery of Israelites in Israel is laid down in Leviticus 25.

Leviticus 25:42-43 For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him with rigor [harshness]; but shall fear your God.

The seventh command regarding the treatment of slaves is that for the Hebrew indentured servant the seventh year was that of emancipation. Or, if the year of Jubilee should arrive before the seventh year, then that year meant freedom. You will find that in Leviticus 25:39-41.

Turn with me to Deuteronomy 15. The eighth command was that, when the Hebrew had served his term, he must not be sent away as a pauper or beggar. On the contrary, Deuteronomy 15 commands that the released slave be given possessions to get him started in his new "free" life. Here is the law that was set down.

Deuteronomy 15:13-14 And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed; you shall supply him liberally from your flock. . .

So it was not just a menial amount of wealth that was given to an ex-slave; but he was to be given to *liberally* .

Deuteronomy 15:14-15 . . . from your threshing-floor, and from your winepress. From what the LORD has blessed you with, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today.

Turn with me to Exodus 21. The ninth command that I have listed here is that, in fact, the probability existed here that, at times, an indentured servant (or, a slave)—when given permission to become a free man—would request not to go out free. Under the Old Covenant, definite provision was made whereby also such a desire could be fulfilled.

Exodus 21:5-6 And if the servant plainly says, "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free," then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

In one sense, as Christians we say this every time we exercise our free will to obey God. This is part of the promise that we are making to God.

But what is the New Testament perspective on slavery? Let us take a look at that. The twelve disciples of Jesus apparently had no part in the system of slavery. They included neither slaves nor owners. The apostles are regularly referred to as God's "stewards" and even "servants" themselves; but they themselves never had any slaves. We find Jesus mentioning slavery frequently in the parables. The regal and baronial households to which slaves belonged supplied a tangible analogy of the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, Jesus stressed the inadequacy of this comparison—between slavery and the Kingdom of God.

Outside of Palestine, however, where the churches were often established on a household basis, the membership of the church included both masters and servants. Slavery was one of the human divisions that became meaningless in this new community in Christ—called Christianity. This apparently led to a desire for emancipation, and perhaps even to the active encouragement of it by some. But Paul cautioned those in subjection to others to honor and to do good service to their masters (their bosses, their supervisors). Let us look at the instruction that he gave to Timothy.

I Timothy 6:1-5 Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which comes envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

Of course, there is the spiritual principle here. But looking at the physical principle, Paul was telling slaves and servants that they were to obey and to serve their masters with *genuineness*—with sincerity of heart. He was not emphasizing here that they should be emancipated, or that they should be freed. But Paul was emphasizing that, no matter what our lot is in life, we must obey God and do the best to treat our fellow man with respect and genuine concern.

Paul was not opposed to the emancipation of slaves, if the opportunity was offered; but he diligently refrained from putting pressure on owners—even where personal sentiment might have led him to do

this. The letter from Paul to Philemon, the slaver owner, is an example of how Paul tactfully applied indirect pressure to the Christian (Philemon) to free his slave (Onesimus), who had become a converted Christian. We will read to see what Paul taught on this issue.

Philemon 10-12 I appeal to you [Philemon] for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, which once was unprofitable to you, but now profitable to you, and to me [since becoming converted]. I am sending him back. . . .

Apparently, he had been a runaway slave before; and this wasn't the first time that Onesimus had run away.

Philemon 12-13 . . . You therefore receive him, that is, mine own heart, whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.

So Paul tells Philemon that Onesimus was valuable to him in service—not in a "slave" way, but in other Christian ways.

Philemon 14 But without your consent wanted to I do nothing. . .

That is, without Philemon's okay or approval, Paul was not going to do anything having to do with the slave Onesimus.

Philemon 14-15 . . . that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntarily. For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever.

Paul is saying, "Maybe God caused Onesimus to leave you, or to run away as a slave, so that he could become more deeply a Christian; and so that you would gain him as a brother forever."

Philemon 16 No longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh, and in the Lord. If you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account. I, Paul, am writing with mine own hand. I will repay it—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.

So the tact that Paul uses is interesting. He is saying, "Spiritually, you belong to me, Philemon; but I don't hold you as a slave. So please release Onesimus." He is calling upon the Christianity that Philemon has learned, so he will release Onesimus. But Paul is not demanding that he do so.

Philemon 20-21 Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do more than I say.

Paul is ending up by hinting that he wants Onesimus released, but he is not telling Philemon directly. Not only was there the minor, practical reason of not laying the church open to unnecessary criticism in the matter of emancipation of slaves, but the main point of principle was that all human stations and conditions are allotted by God. And Paul understood that Onesimus' situation as a slave was something that God had caused—or, at least, allowed.

We do not look at slavery that way. But, if you look at how the Israelite people have gone into slavery as the result of Sabbath breaking and idolatry, and you know that God *caused* Israel to go into slavery as a nation—national slavery. He also causes individuals to go into slavery as well, if He thinks it will cause them to learn a good lesson from it. Who would you rather have in your Kingdom (if you were God)? Someone who had really learned how to be a good, genuine slave—obedient and helpful and wanting to do the best job they can? Or the arrogant plantation owner, who could not be ruled? Of course, you would much rather have somebody who had been a slave than somebody who had been a leader in this world. So God uses slavery to help people to grow in the right character. It is not the best way, but it is *a* way.

Slaves have the same opportunity to obey God, and should, therefore, aim to please God by their service. Colossians 3 makes it clear that all servants must render *sincere service*.

Colossians 3:22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.

Household slavery is the only kind referred to in the New Testament (at least, as the physical type); and it was generally governed by feelings of goodwill and affection between masters and slaves, and vice versa. The legal character of the 'yoke of slavery' was not forgotten, however; and the idea of emancipation and adoption into the family itself was a proud conclusion to the whole idea of physical bondage, servitude, and slavery.

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry out, "Abba, Father."

Remember that word "Abba" is similar to the word "Daddy" or "Dad." It is the familiar form of "father."

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Whether in practice or by analogy, the apostles clearly branded the institution of slavery as part of the order that was passing away. We saw that, spiritually, there in Romans 8. But now let us look at what Galatians 4 has to say.

Galatians 4:4-7 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father." Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Formerly slaves to sin, Christians are now both "sons" and "heirs"—and also, in function and responsibilities, they are "servants" and "slaves." So it depends upon which aspect of our relationship with God we are talking about. Let me explain that with an example. My son, Christopher, is my "heir" and, at times, he is my "servant." (Or, as he feels, more strongly—my "slave.") There are times that he serves me by doing things for me without me asking him—just out of the kindness of his

heart, because he wants to please his dad. For example, watering the bushes and flowers and the lawn. He knows that it is of a great help to me for him to do that; and sometimes he will just go out there and do that on his own. He does not really care for it, but he does it to please me.

There are also times when he is my "slave." (He would probably agree wholeheartedly with that.) That is the times when I tell him to do something and he has no choice as to whether or not he will do it. Rebellion would reap an unwanted and unpleasant penalty. He knows that; and, therefore, he is going to do it—just as any slave would do. Examples of this would be emptying the trash, or washing the dishes, or cutting the grass. These are things he hates to do. I do not know that he has ever volunteered to do them. So he has to be told to do them; and, at that point, he is our "slave."

Physically, my son will cease to have any function as my "slave" when he is an adult. So we can see, in a similar way, how that pertains to our relationship with God. Although we are now "sons" and "heirs," we are still slaves of God and slaves to righteousness (as it should be). I bring this up because in my research into some of the commentaries, there were some who argued that we are not slaves to God. That is, that we have been freed from slavery and we are servants. And that is a correct statement, but what I am saying is that it depends upon the functionality, or responsibility, that you are talking about; and I wanted to clarify that.

In Luke 7, in the attitude of the centurion toward his slave, we find the New Testament counterpart of Exodus 21:5-6. When conditions were ideal, the servant's "I love my master," would be answered by the master's "My servant is precious to me," as mentioned in Luke 7:2. So we will read several verses here to the account of the centurion and his servant, to see that there is a good relationship that should be between a master and his servant.

Luke 7:1-5 Now when He had concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick and ready to die. So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.

So is this not a typical human nature way of looking of it? This was the elders of the Jews thinking, "Well, he loves our nation, he's a patriot, and he's contributed to the synagogue." He is a 'money bag.' It is a shame, but this is the way they looked at it—thinking that this would justify it in Jesus' mind.

Luke 7:6-10 Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel." And they who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.

We see two things here. (1) A loving master to his servant and (2) the right attitude toward Jesus Christ and God—that we are all "servants" and we are all "slaves." Such slavery, as we see in this

example, ceased to be *slavery* at all. The love and out-going concern proclaimed by Jesus Christ extended even to enemies and has had its definite effect on every Christian—free or slave.

Our physical situation has nothing to do with our fulfillment of Christ's command to love others.

In Matthew 5, we will read how every Christian—slave or free—should act.

Matthew 5:43-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' "But I say to you, 'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.' "

So our physical situation should have little effect on our fulfillment of this instruction. Paul stated this truth in Galatians 3.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free. . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

God does not favor masters above slaves. Slaves and servants are to serve their masters as they serve Christ—from a genuine heart. Masters are to treat their slaves and servants as Christ treats them—with good will.

Ephesians 6:5 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ.

This instruction to servants includes slaves, servants, employees, and anyone else who does service for someone else.

Ephesians 6:6-9 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And, you masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven; and there is partiality with Him.

So God has no partiality when it comes to master or slaves, or stations in life. He is fair to everyone. From the perspective of God being no respecter of persons, it is not surprising that Paul mentions (in I Timothy 1:9-10) "kidnappers" or "slave-dealers" in one breath with murderers and sodomites, as those against whom the law of God thunders its denunciations. All of those individuals are lumped together in one breath.

Christianity includes definite guidelines for human action in every area of life. No Christian should ever be afraid to condemn slavery or any other human action that causes suffering. I say this because,

in the last days, people do just that. They are afraid to orally condemn specific evil actions. So we see today even Christians cowering to the thought of stating outrightly that homosexuality, or abortion, is wrong. We all tend to cower in that way.

Neither Jesus nor Paul advocated social revolution to immediately emancipate every slave. Such a sudden upheaval of the entire Roman economy would have resulted in indescribable misery for many a slave who depended on his master for a living. It would have placed an overwhelming obstacle in the way of the propagation of God's truth at that time.

Enforced emancipation has not always been appreciated, even by the slaves. That is hard to believe, but there is historical evidence to that. When Imperial Russia gained control over the Caucasus territory, the viceroy of the Tsar advised the local princes to emancipate their household slaves. When the slaves heard about it, they protested bitterly and insisted that slavery was their hereditary right!

Another similar scene is touchingly portrayed by Susan Dabney Smedes, in one of her essays. It is found on pages 796-800 of *The Heritage of America*. The account concerns the aftermath of the American Civil War. She writes that even after President Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863,

No apparent change took place among the Burleigh Negroes. Those who worked in the fields when out as usual and cultivated and gathered in the crops. In the house, they went about their customary duties. We expected them to go away, or to demand wages, or at least to give some sign that they knew they were free. But, except that they were very quiet and serious, and more obedient and kind than they had ever been known to be for more than a few weeks (at a time of sickness or other affliction), we saw no change in them. . . . At Christmas, such compensation was made them for their services as seemed just. Afterward, fixed wages were offered and accepted. Thomas [the master of the house] called them up now and told them that, as they no longer belonged to him, they must discontinue calling him 'master.' "Yes, marster. Yes, marster," was the answer to this.

So you can see that they did not look at their 'master' as being their slave-owner. Rather, they looked at themselves as having a life in which they could be happy; and they made the best of it. And then, after they gained their freedom, they saw no real need to change what they had been doing.

Even if someone were to object to the value of this example (and it is unique, because the master must have been a man of exceptional character—as he was), it remains true that this example points to the right direction in the solution to slavery, as well as in similar social problems today. What Paul teaches (not only in his letter to Philemon, but elsewhere as well) is that *love*, coming from both sides—masters and slaves—is the only solution.

This love is the response to God's love for His child. Whether that child is black or white, bond or free, makes no difference. It is the love of God that melts cruelty into kindness; and, in so doing, changes oppressors into kind employers, slaves into willing servants, and all who accept God's love (and live by it) into "brothers" in Christ.

The living of God's way of life will do far more to resolve social problems than any number of secular laws, or guns, or riots. But the world rebels against the very way of love that would free them

from their social problems. This rebellion is the reason slavery has continued throughout man's history.

In the end time, in the last days, Israel is prophesied to go into slavery—nationally. But God warns us ahead of time, in Deuteronomy 4.

Deuteronomy 4:27-30 And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations, where the LORD will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice.

So God promises this to Israel. This is the way out of slavery in the end times—by hearkening to the voice of God. In Jeremiah 2, Jeremiah summarizes his charges like a lawyer would in a courtroom. Judah's sin was compounded by rejection of truth and reception of error. The pagan nations had committed the sin of idolatry, often exchanging one superstition for another. But Judah had exceeded them in disobedience in renouncing her own real God to serve nobodies. And you will find that in Jeremiah 2:11-19. For sake of time, we will just read verse 13.

Jeremiah 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Jeremiah's description here is vivid and appropriate. God is called "the fountain of living waters"—the Source of life. This is a metaphor often used in Scripture regarding God, salvation, and Jesus Christ. Water was a rare luxury in Palestine. And water from perennial sources was cherished. On the other hand, cisterns (though needed and used because of seasons of insufficient supply) could only store rainwater. The thousands of them uncovered in archaeological digs attest to their importance. At best, cisterns often yield stagnant water. At worst, they cracked and allowed the water to seep out. The point is that dead gods cannot impart life. That is the point that God is making in Jeremiah 2. They rejected the very God who gives life, for the gods that cannot give life, because they are dead.

Sin inevitably brings its own punishment. God uses two forceful questions to point out the consequences of disobedience. Remember that the servant or home-born slave was the master's permanent property. So when Israel goes into captivity in the last days, they will have no freedom whatsoever.

Since the answer to both questions is strongly negative, why then has Israel become plunder to her enemies as though God could not protect her? Freed from Egyptian bondage, Israel enslaved herself by her sins—this time to Assyria and Egypt. Another set of scriptures that you can look at is Ezekiel 5:11-13. That is where it talks about Israel being scattered. A third part would be killed by war, a third part by pestilence and famine, and a third part into the winds. Throughout history, we can see the example of Israel—that, when they are scattered to the winds, the majority of them went into slavery. So the captivity of almost a third of the Israelitish people will be a penalty that is forced upon them in the tribulation.

I also wanted to touch on the downfall of Mystery Babylon and show you that slaves were a major part of the commerce of Mystery Babylon. This slavery will fall, of course, when Mystery Babylon falls. You will find that in Revelation 18:11-17 (specifically in verse 13); but we will skip over that now, and go on to what more applies to us today.

To what can we be slaves now? Everyone would agree that slavery in ancient Israel was a bitter and unsavory episode in history—as was White American, Black American, Native American, Hispanic American, and Asian American slavery in the U.S. All races have been represented under physical slavery in the last 400 years in North American.

But, though most people in the world do not recognize it, the entire world is in slavery! No one (not you, or I) is excluded. We are all slaves to something. Most of us are slaves to several things in varying degrees. We are "slaves" to our government, its laws, to our employers; but, hopefully, our most important Masters are God the Father and Jesus Christ.

There are three types of slavery that I am referring to here. The first is this world's leaders, economy, and laws—which we could simply call the *physical* essence of the Babylonian system. The second type of slavery is sin—which we can call Satan's way of life or the *spiritual* essence of the Babylonian system. The third type of slavery is that which God calls the "slavery to righteousness"—which we can call God's way of life. So we see the three different types; but, of course, the first two are a dichotomy to the third one (of righteousness).

Nehemiah 5 records that, in about 445 BC, Israel disobeyed God's instruction not to enslave other Israelites. The description here describes another aspect of the first type of slavery today—the physical traits of the Babylonian System, which had influenced Israel.

Nehemiah 5:1-11 And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brethren. For there were those who said, "We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live." There were also some who said, "We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine." There were also those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards." And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." So I called assembly against them. And I said to them, "According our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing to say. Then I said, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? I also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury! Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them."

Most people are enslaved by the second type of slavery—the slavery *of* sin, or the slavery *to* sin. This slavery is more insidious and more oppressive than any physical bondage of ages past. In John 8:34, Jesus declared, "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." The word translated "servant" in the *King James* is the Greek word "doulos"—meaning slave, bondman, or servant.

In II Peter 2:19, the apostle Paul called the ungodly "the slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also is he brought into bondage." Those who yield to sin are its slaves, as it holds them in its clutches. Sin is the master of the rebellious person, who experiences abject servitude under this merciless taskmaster.

We all understand that, in biblical symbolism, Egypt is pictured as a type of sin. Just as God led the ancient Israelites out of the oppressive slavery of Egypt, so has He provided a way out of the *slavery of sin* in a spiritual way. By becoming free of the slavery of sin, we become slaves of another sort. Through Jesus Christ, we can be made free from sin. Through faith in Christ, we can come out of sin, just as "By faith, [Moses] forsook Egypt."

Hebrews 11:24-29 By faith Moses, when he became to age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians attempting to do so, were drowned.

By faith, we can become slaves to the third type of slavery—that is, God's way of life (or, righteousness). We are still slaves, but we have changed masters. We are no longer slaves to sin, having become slaves to God. Thanks to Jesus Christ (if we are called, and if we repent of our sins, and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins), we are no longer slaves to sin but to righteousness—unless we make a habit of sinning again. Each time we sin, we serve Satan's way of life. But the apostle Paul wrote, in Romans 6,

Romans 6:16-18 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness. But God be thanked that though you were slaves to sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

According to *Strong's Concordance*, this word "servant" means to enslave—literally or figuratively. That is, to bring into bondage, or to be under bondage, or given into bondage.

Romans 6:19-22 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now being set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

Jesus made us free from sin so that we could become slaves to righteousness (or "servants to righteousness," if you prefer). Slaves have no choice. Since we have been bought at a price, we have **no choice** in the matter. We *must* live righteous lives. We have been bought with a price, and that purchase price was the shed blood of Christ.

I Corinthians 7:21-23 Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free, is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

As Christians, we must now serve Him, yielding ourselves completely to the way He has set before us because our lives are no longer our own. The yoke of slavery is heavy. Those encumbered by it work in a desolate wilderness, but slavery to Jesus Christ is a beneficent form of bondage. In Matthew 11, Jesus declared, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

We have to keep this firmly in mind, especially during the Passover season. Let us not make the mistake made by the ancient Israelites, whose outwardly hard life of wandering in the Sinai Desert made them forget that God delivered them from forced labor in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land and a servitude to righteousness. We have to strive to maintain the right perspective and not allow ourselves to drift back into that from which we were once delivered—that is, sin. Now, finally, Paul admonishes:

Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

So as we look to Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, we can look to it having the right attitude—an attitude of humility and obedience to our Masters (Jesus Christ and God the Father); so we can have the right attitude in keeping it.