

The Bible and Slavery

Mt 22:37-40. If you're visiting with us, welcome to our church. We're glad you're here. And if you're joining us via livestream (especially at our West Campus), it's good to be connected.

Last weekend, Becky and I had the privilege of visiting Radius International. One of our global partners in Tijuana, Mexico.

It's a school designed to equip cross-cultural workers to plant churches among unreached language groups. Quite a set-up.

And while there, we were able to spend time with Josh and Ally. One of our own.

Who will be graduating next week and returning here to raise support.

So we had a pretty special time. And thank God for such quality partners.

➤ That said, we're going to take a break from our study of Acts, to focus on an issue with a long and sordid past in our country. Racism.

An issue that keeps rearing its ugly head and never seems to go away.

One that some make too much of, and others not enough.

A cultural sin and cultural stain that continues to leave its mark. (**Intro**)

So we're going to spend several weeks on it and start with one of its worst forms – slavery. *The Bible and Slavery*. And I want to do so for 4 reasons:

1. I want to highlight the issue. Because it's not just something of the past.

It's estimated that 27 million people are currently subject to some form of slavery in the world. Right now. From forced labor and sex trafficking, to inheritable property. 80% of whom are women and girls. With 200k coerced every year right here in the US. It's a *current* issue. And needs to be highlighted.

2. I want to defend the *Bible*. Some say that because the Bible doesn't explicitly *condemn* slavery, or do so in *all* cases, it condones it. And therefore isn't worth much.

I want to *defend* the Bible against such accusations, and bolster your *trust* in it.

3. I want to dispel your doubts. About how God *feels* regarding slavery. And what he says. Because a cursory or *surface* reading of the Bible could lead you to wonder. And doubt whether Christianity is all that good.

4. I want to counter false narratives. Like the thought that because people wrongly used the Bible to support *slavery* in our country's past . . .

They're now using it wrongly to condemn homosexuality. Or transgenderism.

I want to counter such narratives. Because they're false. 4 reasons.

➤ So let me start with the bottom line: the Bible doesn't allow for slavery. Period. Doesn't. Cover to cover. Because first of all, love doesn't.

Love doesn't allow for slavery.

God's love for the *world*, God's *command* to love, our love for *God*, and the *gospel* of love. 4 parts here. (**God's love for the world**)

Jn 3:16 says *God so loved the world*. Referring to us. The whole lot of us.

In which case there's no way we can legitimately subjugate someone. Enslave them.

How can you hate, or *treat* as though you hate, those whom God loves? You can't. Not justifiably. So God's love for the world doesn't *allow* for slavery.

And neither does **God's command to love**. His command to love our neighbor. Mt 22:37.

Responding to a question from a lawyer about the great commandment . . .

[Jesus] said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Love your neighbor as yourself Jesus said (39). As in, love them as *if* they are you.

Treat them as you want to be treated. Do unto them as you'd have them do to you.

You know how much room that leaves for slavery? Nada. Zero. Zilch.

Would you willingly subject *yourself* to slavery? Of course not.

Neither then, should we subject others to it.

3rd, **our love for God** doesn't allow for slavery.

1 Jn 4:20. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

Our love for God doesn't *allow* for slavery, because you can't hate your brother at the same time. Doesn't work. ****

And make no mistake, we're *all* brothers and sisters. God *made from one man every nation of mankind* (Acts 17:26). So if you love *God*, you'll love people.

In which case love doesn't *allow* for the hate of slavery.

And 4th, **the gospel of love** doesn't allow for slavery. The gospel, referring to the good news of Jesus that starts at the foot of the cross. Where the ground is *level*.

And *all* fall equally short of Christ. *All* have equal access to Christ. *All* are equally loved by Christ. And all are set *free* in Christ.

The gospel of love, with all its equality, doesn't allow for the *inequality* of slavery. That's the first reason the Bible doesn't allow for it. It's incongruous with love.

2nd, is that . . .

The Apostle Paul's teaching doesn't allow for slavery.

First of all, b/c **he condemned slave trading**. The very *foundation* of chattel slavery that was practiced in our country. Chattel slavery referring to the practice of . . .

Buying, selling, and *owning* people like commodities. He condemns it.

Saying in 1 Tim 1:10, that *enslavers*, those who take a person captive in order to sell them into slavery, are among those who are . . .

Lawless, disobedient, ungodly, unholy, profane, and sinners.

I'd say that qualifies as a condemnation.

And not just for those who captured and *sold* slaves. It's a condemnation of the institution as well. Because you can't separate the 2.

You can't separate the sin of slave *trading*, from the sin of slave-*ry*. One requires the other.

Just because a slave owner only *held* slaves, that he inherited let's say, or just because he generated more slaves only by enslaving their *children* . . .

Doesn't make it right. Doesn't skirt what Paul condemns.

That would be like buying a stolen diamond ring from a pawn shop, and saying that your possession of it is just fine.

Or buying a pair of stolen race horses, and justifying the profit you make from breeding them. I don't think so.

Paul's condemnation of slave *trading*, doesn't allow for slave-*ry*.

2nd, he tells us to count others more significant.

Ph 2:3. *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

Pretty hard to humbly value somebody more than yourself, while enslaving them against their will. Pretty hard to avoid selfish ambition, when using others to fulfill it.

3rd, he encourages slaves to gain their freedom.

That's 1 Cor 7:21. Where Paul asks . . .

Were you a bondservant when called [when saved]? Do not be concerned about it. [Don't worry. You're no less a Christian.] (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) Get out.

It's an instruction that undermines the very *institution* of slavery.

And then, in v23, he says – *You were bought with a price* [the blood of Jesus; to be *his* bondservant]; *do not become bondservants of men.*

He not only encourages freedom, but he *discourages involvement*.

A 4th reason Paul's teaching doesn't allow for slavery.

And 5th, he appeals for the release of a slave.

That's what the entire book of Philemon is about. And I'd like for you to turn there.

Philemon is a letter Paul wrote to a slave owner by that name, who is now a Christian. And Paul appeals to him to release his runaway slave, Onesimus.

[8] *Accordingly [Paul says to Philemon; or in light of your love for the saints], though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, [9] yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus [he was writing from prison in Rome]—[10] I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. [His spiritual father. He led him to the Lord.]*

[15] *For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, [16] no longer as a bondservant [a slave; same word in Greek] but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. [17] So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. IOW receive him as a free man, and do so without delay.*

Paul's teaching doesn't *allow* for slavery, because Paul appeals for the *release* of slaves.

➤ Now, that begs the question, "What about the "household codes" in Scripture? Those passages where Paul commands slaves to *conduct* themselves well. And masters too.

Doesn't he actually *endorse* slavery in those? Like Eph 6:5-9? Where he says . . .

[5] *Bondservants* [same word as Philemon; covering all kinds of servitude; from hired servants, to indentured servants, to slaves], *obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ* . . . [8] *knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord* . . . [9] *Masters, do the same to them [treat your slaves well], and stop your threatening.*

Isn't that an endorsement of slavery? No.

Because not all servitude in Paul's day was *chattel* slavery. *Ownership* of people. Most of it wasn't, in fact. Most was indentured servanthood.

Where people *voluntarily* sold themselves into servitude, and received wages. Or goods and services. Often times owning property and advancing socially.

So for the most part, Paul's not talking about slavery, but indentured servanthood.

But even if it *was* slavery of the worst sort, and sometimes it was in that day, Paul's words are not an endorsement of the *institution*, but an encouragement to the *individual*.

An encouragement to make the *best* of their situation. Complete with a reward. *Whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord.*

It's an encouragement to do what's right, even in the midst of what's wrong.

Not unlike his encouragement to endure suffering in *general* as believers.*****

➤ But why doesn't Paul just tell the believing masters to *release* their slaves? Like he did Philemon? Why just warn them to behave?

Apparently, because he's more concerned with their *testimony* than their situation. More concerned with their witness, than their circumstances.

It would be like those who were drafted to fight the Vietnam War. Especially Christians. Could they have refused because the war was poorly conceived and poorly run? Even immoral in some cases? No. Not legally. Not righteously.

What they *could* do, was conduct themselves in a God-honoring manner. What they *could* do, was be a soldier for Christ. *Rendering service as to the Lord.* (Eph 6:7)

And thereby magnify their witness all the more, by making the best of a bad situation.

So it's not as though Paul didn't *care* about the gross immorality of slavery, as we see by his *other* teaching, but that his *first* priority was the fame of God's name.

The Apostle Paul's teaching doesn't *allow* for slavery, but his primary concern is our testimony. 3rd . . .

The Apostle James' teaching doesn't allow for slavery.

Love doesn't allow for slavery, Paul doesn't allow for slavery, and neither does James.

Referring first of all, to his condemnation of partiality. **He condemns partiality.**

James 2:8-9 – If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. [9] But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. Sin-ners.

Could there be a more egregious example of partiality than slavery? I think not.

In which case James' teaching doesn't allow for it.*****

And neither does his condemnation of fraud. When it comes to wages.

He condemns the withholding of wages. Found a few chapters later. **James 5:1-6.**

[1] *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you [the judgment you can expect] . . .*

[4] *Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. [5] You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. [6] You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.*

He can't. He's oppressed and dead.

First is his condemnation of wage fraud, and second (**He condemns abuse**) is his condemnation of abuse.

You have condemned and murdered the righteous person he says. (6)

That's abuse. Of the worst sort.

And if those 2 condemnations don't fit the practice of slavery, I don't know what does. So in addition to Paul, the teaching of James doesn't allow for slavery either.

In fact . . .

Even the Old Testament doesn't allow for slavery.

True. Similar to the New Testament, most of what is referred to as slavery in the Old, was indentured servanthood. Probably even more so.

But chattel slavery did exist among the Israelites. Sometimes with prisoners of war in lieu of killing them, and sometimes as a fulfillment of God's curse on the *Canaanites*. Let me see if I can explain.

➤ Back in Gen 9, right after the flood, Noah cursed the Canaanites due to Ham's sin.

Noah's son. A curse sometimes erroneously called "The Curse of Ham."

And *part* of that curse involved the Canaanites being enslaved by the Israelites in the Promised Land. Which God affirms to Moses in Leviticus 25.

One of the stickiest passages in all the Bible regarding slavery.

And you'll get completely messed up by that passage, if you don't remember . . .

That it was limited to the Canaanites.

The Old Testament doesn't allow for slavery, because first of all, it was limited to the Canaanites. That's the *context* of Lev 25:44-46.

B/c God says in v38 – *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan.*

And then proceeds with more instructions for when they get there.

Saying in v44 . . .

[44] As for your male and female slaves whom you may have: you may buy male and female slaves from among the nations that are around you [nations comprised of Canaanites; very important] . . . and they may be your property. *[46] You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever.*

You can have slaves God says, but only from the Canaanite nations. That's the implication of the context.

➤ And the *reason*, was Canaan's curse. Found in Gen 9.*****

This is right after the flood, as I mentioned earlier, when Noah's son Ham dishonors him. And as a result, Noah curses Ham's *son*, Canaan.

Referring to the *nations* he fathered. The Amorites, the Jebusites (Gen 10). Nations that would occupy the Promised Land and *multiply* Ham's sin. It started here. V20.

[20] Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. [21] He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. [22] And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. [23] Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

[24] When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him [whether he violated him sexually or just dishonored and humiliated him], [25] he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants [a slave] shall he be to his brothers."
[26] He also said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem [the father of the Israelites]; and let Canaan be his servant. [27] May God enlarge Japheth [the father of the Philistines and others to the north and west], and let him dwell in the tents of Shem [benefit from Israel's protection and provision], and let Canaan be his servant."

As a result of Ham's behavior toward Noah, God cursed him. As in, prophesied judgment in the form of *servitude*, toward one of his sons. Canaan.
And the many nations who came from him.

None of whom by the way, have anything to do with black Africans. They're the offspring of Cush. Another of Ham's sons. (Gen 10:6)

So the infamous "Curse of Ham" that was used by pro-slavery advocates back in the day, or those who use it in our day to justify racist *attitudes*, is bogus.
Completely wrong. Wrongly labeled and wrongly applied.

But for the Canaanites, it was spot on. And *affirmed* in Lev 25 (44-46).

So the reason God allowed for a limited run of slavery, was to fulfill the curse on Canaan found in Gen 9.

➤ But it's important to understand, even *that* ended. Along with all the *other* promises God made to ethnic Israel. **It was rescinded with Israel's disobedience.**
When they failed to obey and *follow* God, he *withdrew* their privilege and blessing.
Including their right to enslave the Canaanites. (Is 5:1-7; Ez 15:1-8; Mk 12:1-12)
Canaanite slavery ended with Israel's disobedience to the Law.

Other than that, other than the limited slavery of the Canaanites . . .

It was punishable by death.

The Old Testament doesn't allow for slavery, b/c apart from the Canaanites, slavery was a capital offense. Ex 21:16.

Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death. It wasn't allowed. Exemplified by Israel's release from slavery in Egypt.

And last but not least, **it was condemned by Isaiah.**

"Is not this the fast that I choose [God says in Is 58:6]: *to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?*

Is not *this* the expression of devotion I'm looking for God says? It is.

Condemning slavery in one sentence. Even in the *Old Testament*. (**Summary**)

So we need not worry about false narratives, we need not fret about false accusations, and we need not agonize over doubts.

Cover to cover the Bible is clear. Slavery's not allowed.