

MBC - 1/10/2010 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"Slave and Masters - pt. 1"
 1 Timothy 6:1,2

As we come in our study of 1 Timothy to ch.6, I want to back up to show you Paul's train of thought:

- 1Ti 3:14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that,
- 1Ti 3:15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

The Gospel that brings us forgiveness from our sins, also brings us into the *family of God!* Whoever we were before, whatever our status used to be, now we are part of a supernatural, eternal family. We all share in the very life of God and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. Paul said in Ephesians that we have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." There is a radical equality in Christ's church:

- Gal 3:26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.
- Gal 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
- Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

But our equality in Christ doesn't erase all distinctions and roles. We've seen this since chapter 2 where Paul says that men and women, who equally bear the image of God, nonetheless have different roles in the church and in the family, and there is no contradiction in that! It's just like our human families: we treat each other with equal love and dignity, but we treat each other *differently*:

- 1Ti 5:1 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers,
- 1Ti 5:2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.
- 1Ti 5:3 Honor widows who are truly widows.

And now look at:

- 1Ti 6:1 Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.
- 1Ti 6:2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things.

How can Paul say that there is no more "slave/free" in Christ, we are all sons of God in Christ, all equal, all members of the same family - and then give instructions on how slaves and masters are supposed to get along? How are you *one* with a person who owns you?

- Most pastors come to a passage like this and just say, "That was then, this is now, the application for us is how employees should submit to their bosses. Let's talk about your job."

But I couldn't get that far. One of the biggest problems that unbelievers have with the Bible and Christianity is right here in this passage: the Bible seems to condone slavery. Why doesn't Paul just *abolish* slavery - say that it's evil and no Christian can own a slave or needs to be a slave? Here's his chance. He doesn't do it. Why not?

And then someone might add that Christians in the South at the time of the Civil War used the Bible to *support* slavery (I'll show you where in a minute). To the Northerners, this was the war against slavery, but to many Southerners, it was a war to uphold God's Word *on* slavery! Christian against Christian, and both said the Bible supported their position.

And unbelievers look at this and say, "Christians are unenlightened hypocrites, and the Bible is barbaric." I read a lot of that this week. How do we respond? Hopefully, thoughtfully and with humility, because it's not that easy to answer.

So this morning, before we even get into how this passage applies to you and me at our jobs - and it does, in a powerful way - I want to look specifically at what God's Word has to say about the kind of slavery that existed in this country for more than 2 centuries. Now the slavery that Paul was dealing with 2,000 years ago was very different than slavery in America, but the African slave trade is the first thing that comes to the minds of people today, and how does what Paul says, deal with that? We need to have an answer.

And there's another reason this is an issue: there are so-called "neo-confederate" Christians today who want the South to secede from the union - literally - and are revising history to say that slavery in this country, in the South wasn't all that bad, as a matter of fact, most slaves loved being slaves and were better off than the common working man in the North:

- "Slavery as it existed in the South was not an adversarial relationship with pervasive racial animosity. . . it was a relationship based upon mutual affection and confidence. There has never been a multi-racial society which has existed with such mutual intimacy and harmony in the history of the world."

That is a quote from Doug Wilson in a booklet he wrote entitled, "*Slavery as it Was.*" I've read it, I've read the rebuttals, and to me, Wilson is on par with those who deny the holocaust. But he has a huge influence through his books and homeschool materials. So the first response to a person who wants to know how Christians could ever support slavery is:

I. "Guilty as charged:" Slavery in America was wrong.

A. *All racism is sin.*

(PCA) "Racism is an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races."

- Act 17:26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

There is only one race, and that is the human race. Anyone who says that the Bible teaches that the one race is superior to another race, that the races should remain separate, or not intermarry, is wrong. The slavery of the Old and New Testaments was not based on race, but slavery in America was. Blacks were seen as an inferior sub-species cursed by God to be a race of slaves. And this was supposedly based on the Bible—

The curse on Ham:

The enslavement of blacks has been justified for centuries by appealing to the so-called curse on Ham's son, Canaan:

- Gen 9:25 he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers."

The argument is that Ham's descendants were cursed with being slaves, they were black, so blacks are doomed to be slaves. I read passages from many sermons this week using this as justification for enslaving blacks. Get this:

- From the 1917 Scofield Reference Bible: "A prophetic declaration is made that from Ham will descend an inferior and servile posterity."

This whole interpretation is bunk. First of all, the curse was not on Ham, but his son, Canaan. Canaan's descendants were not the black race but the Canaanites who were largely wiped out. And this is what Dr. Daniel Heimbach - Jim's brother, says in the back of the ESV Study Bible:

- "It is simply not possible to connect this curse of Canaan's descendants with people of dark skin, or with the members of any contemporary portion of the human race."

But how could anyone read Scripture and think that it actually teaches that the black race in an inferior race, doomed to be slaves when it also says that all men bear the image of God, and we are to treat others as we would have them treat us?

The Bible doesn't contradict itself. It's inexcusable that God's people would ever be so blind and hard-hearted to think that the Bible could teach such a thing. But many did. I want to read to you from what people during this time period said - supposedly Christian people:

He the Negro is but a grown up child, and must be governed as a child, not as a lunatic or criminal. The master occupies toward him the place of parent or guardian. We shall not dwell on this view, for no one will differ with us who thinks as we do of the Negro's capacity, and we might argue till dooms day in vain, with those who have a high opinion of the Negro's moral and intellectual capacity.

Secondly. The Negro is [irresponsible]; will not [save] in summer for the wants of winter; will not accumulate in youth for the [demands or needs] of age. He would become an insufferable burden to society. Society has the right to prevent this, and can only do so by subjecting him to domestic slavery. In the last place, the Negro race is inferior to the white race, and living in their midst, they would be far outstripped or outwitted in the chaos of free competition. Gradual but certain extermination would be their fate. We presume the maddest abolitionist does not think the Negro's habits and money-making capacity at all to compare to those of the whites. This defect of character would alone justify enslaving him, if he is to remain here. In Africa or the West Indies, he would become idolatrous, savage and cannibal, or be devoured by savages and cannibals. At the North he would freeze or starve. (Source: Fitzhugh, George. *Sociology for the South; or, The failure of a free society* (Richmond, Va., A. Morris, 1854).

I.e., "We are doing these people a favor by enslaving them." On March 4, 1858, Senator James Hammond from South Carolina gave a famous speech to the U.S. Senate:

In all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life. That is, a class requiring but a low order of intellect and but little skill. Its requisites are vigor, docility, fidelity. Such a class you must have, or you would not have that other class which leads progress, civilization, and refinement. It constitutes the very mud-sill [or foundation] of society and of political government; and you might as well attempt to build a house in the air, as to build either the one or the other [without] this mud-sill. Fortunately for the South, she found a race adapted to that purpose to her hand. A race inferior to her own, but eminently qualified in temper, in vigor, in

docility, in capacity to stand the climate, to answer all her purposes. We use them for our purpose, and call them slaves.

We do not think that whites should be slaves either by law or necessity. Our slaves are black, of another and inferior race. The status in which we have placed them is an elevation. They are elevated from the condition in which God first created them by being made our slaves. None of that race on the whole face of the globe can be compared with the slaves of the South. They are happy, content, unambitious, and utterly incapable, from intellectual weakness, ever to give us any trouble by their aspirations.”

Slavery in this country was rooted in racism, and that is shameful and wrong. Here’s another reason it was wrong:

B. Man-stealing is a sin.

The 8th of the 10 commandments is “You shall not steal.” Meaning, you shall not take what rightfully belongs to another, Exo 21:16 is even more direct: “Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.”

Kidnapping and selling another person was a capital crime, and owning the stolen person was also a capital crime. Now you might argue that this is Old Covenant law, and we can’t apply it to us today, and I would ask, “does the New Testament give evidence that this law still applies?”

- 1Ti 1:9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,
- 1Ti 1:10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, *enslavers*, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,

Enslaver means a “slave stealer,” more literally, “to grab by the foot.” And notice that slave stealers are lumped in with murderers and homosexuals, and pretty bad company. In Paul’s day, often children were kidnapped and sold as slaves or sex objects - that still happens today, and it is a horrible sin in God’s sight.

To take away the liberty of another person is wrong in the sight of God. In Genesis 1, God gave man dominion over the earth, over all creation - but not over other people created in the same image of God. In Gen.9:6, the penalty for killing another man is death, because he is an image-bearer, and that is the same reason, one man is not to own another man as his property. As John Milton said: “*man over man he made not lord.*”

I bring this up because some people are arguing today that slavery in the South before the Civil War was like Happy Days or Leave it to Beaver - slaves loved their lives: Listen to this propaganda from a defender of slavery:

The Negro slaves of the South are the happiest, and, in some sense, the freest people in the world. The children and the aged and infirm work not at all, and yet have all the comforts and necessities of life provided for them. They enjoy liberty, because they are oppressed neither by care nor labor. The women do little hard work, and are protected from the despotism [tyranny] of their husbands by their masters. The Negro men and boys work, on the average, in good weather, not more than nine hours a day. The balance of their time is spent in perfect abandon. Besides' they have their Sabbaths and holidays. White men, with so much of license and liberty, would die of [boredom]; but

Negroes luxuriate in [physical] and mental repose. With their faces upturned to the sun, they can sleep at any hour; and quiet sleep is the greatest of human enjoyments.

I read testimony after testimony of former slaves this week - none of them sounded like that. Yes, there were loving masters and contented slaves who had much freedom, but if the one thing they couldn't do was - leave - that's slavery, that's evil. People are not property to be owned.

- Doug Wilson asks in his booklet, "If slavery was so bad, then why weren't there more uprisings and rebellions?" For one thing, there were hundreds of uprisings, and slaves tried to escape constantly at the risk of their lives. That is like saying, "If the death camps were so bad, why didn't the Jews just leave?"

And another pro-slavery argument that I found was this: "the slave trade is wrong, stealing people is wrong - but you see, I got mine second hand, so that's OK," or, "my slaves were born here, from slaves who were born here - I'm clean."

So you had many Christians who preached against slave-trafficking, who owned slaves, and they saw no contradiction. I read a lot of this. But what does the passage in Exodus say? "any-one found in possession of him" is to be put to death. We all know it's not OK to have stolen property.

Now let me tell you about one of my great heroes of the faith, Jonathan Edwards, who owned slaves. From everything we know, he treated them well, he shared the Gospel with them, but he still owned them as property.

There was a situation in a neighboring town where the congregation was ready to throw out their pastor because he owned slaves, so this pastor, Benjamin Doolittle, called on Edwards to defend him. Edwards didn't even like this guy - he was an Arminian! But because he owned slaves too, he couldn't say no, or his congregation might start questioning him next. So Edwards came to Doolittle's defense by saying that his accusers were hypocrites because if they had their way, all the slaves would be freed, and they knew that their economy depended on slave labor, and they profited from that labor too . . . so there . . .

That's a dumb argument.

- The truth is, my hero had a huge, sinful blindspot! And the bottom line is that in that day, pastors were part of the upper crust of society, and the upper crust all had servants. It was a status thing, and for a man of Edwards' stature not to have slaves would have been very demeaning.

Now another part of Jonathan Edwards' blindspot was that even though he defended slavery as a necessary evil that would eventually be done away with, he vigorously opposed the slave trade: stealing people from their homeland and transporting them like animals across the ocean. That was wrong and evil - but it wasn't wrong to buy them and own them once they were here!

*That's like the hypocrisy of so many people today who are all for locking up the drug-dealers who tempt our children, but they have a stash of pot in their drawer, or a bag of cocaine: it's wrong to sell that stuff, but not wrong to buy it! And what is true about the drug trade today was true of slavery then: the reason we have the evil of supply is because we have the sin of demand.

I wonder if Edwards read John Wesley's tract that he wrote at this time, over in England? Probably not, since Wesley was an Arminian! Listen to John Wesley:

- "And this equally concerns every gentleman that has an estate in our American plantations; yea, all slave-holders, of whatever rank and degree; seeing men buyers are exactly on a level with men stealers. Indeed you say, "I pay honestly for my goods; and I am not concerned to know how they are come by." . . . You know they are procured by a deliberate series of murders, of all kinds; by the blood of the innocent poured upon the ground like water. Now, it is your money that pays the merchant, and through him the captain and the African butchers. You therefore are guilty, yea, principally guilty, of all these frauds, robberies, and murders. You are the spring that puts all the rest in motion; they would not stir a step without you; therefore, the blood of all these wretches who die before their time, whether in their country or elsewhere, lies upon your head. "The blood of thy brother" (for, whether thou wilt believe it or no, such he is in the sight of Him that made him) "crieth against thee from the earth," from the ship, and from the waters. O, whatever it costs, put a stop to its cry before it be too late: instantly, at any price, were it the half of your goods, deliver thyself from blood guiltiness! Thy hands, thy bed, thy furniture, thy house, thy lands, are at present stained with blood. Surely it is enough; accumulate no more guilt; spill no more the blood of the innocent! Do not hire another to shed blood; do not pay him for doing it! Whether you are a Christian or no, show yourself a man! Be not more savage than a lion or a bear!"

Go John Wesley!

I believe my hero was wrong. Edwards and other Christians, like George Whitefield, who also owned slaves, said that slavery was OK as long as you treated your slaves well and evangelized them. And Edwards and Whitefield did that. At least one of Edward's slaves named Leah, became a Christian, and he had 9 slaves who were full members of his church in Northampton in 1736. Edwards didn't make any distinction between black and white in his preaching, and he died as a missionary to the Indians.

The issue isn't how slaves were treated, but that they were slaves to begin with!

- There is something inherently contradictory about offering the Gospel to people you own, and hold in bondage, as the direct or indirect result of man-stealing!

Listen to what Jonathan Edwards Jr. said about his father's position:

- "Should we be willing that the Africans or any other nation purchase us, our wives and children, transport us into Africa and there sell us into perpetual and absolute slavery? Should we be willing that they . . . should entice our neighbors to kidnap and sell us to them, that they should hold in perpetual and cruel bondage, not only ourselves, but our posterity through all generations? Yet why is it not as right for them to treat us in this manner, as it is for us to treat them in the same manner? Their color is indeed different from ours, but does this give us the right to enslave them?"

How can Christians say that because so many slaves became Christians, that justifies slavery? The end doesn't justify the means! There is another way to bring the Gospel to heathens besides enslaving them - it's called missions. So if an unbeliever asks you about the issue of Christians and slavery, the first answer is, "guilty as charged." Christians aren't perfect people, they are sinners who have received grace from God, and they don't always show that same grace to others.

But there is a second answer to the question of why didn't Jesus or Paul just abolish slavery:

II. The Gospel would eventually cause slavery to die out.

We need to realize that there were something like 30 million slaves in the Roman Empire. If Jesus or Paul had said, "No more slavery!" Not only would the economy have collapsed, but those slaves who walked away from their masters in the name of Christ would have been put to death, and it would not have been seen as a great Christian testimony to their masters!

This is why Paul says, "Work within the system for now. If you are a slave, be the best Christian slave you can be, if you are a Master, be a Christ-like Master" - but how long could you try to be a "Christlike slave owner," before you said to yourself, "Wait a minute!"

Christianity would put an end to slavery, not from the outside in, but from the inside out, through the transforming power of the Gospel.

John Newton:

Slavery was so entrenched as an institution in the economy and in people's thinking that it took years before people woke up to what they were doing to fellow human beings. And the same thing was true with the African slave trade. Let me give you an example in the life of someone you know - John Newton.

Most of you know that John Newton was a debauched slave trader who became a Christian, wrote "Amazing Grace," also, "Let us Love and Sing and Wonder," and was a godly Calvinist pastor. But when God saved John Newton, He didn't sanctify him completely overnight! He actually continued to be the captain of a slave ship - as a Christian. He started treating the crew and slaves better, but he would still hold communion on the deck with the crew while all the slaves were in chains below!

It took years before Newton repented of his part in buying and selling human beings.

William Wilberforce:

And some of you know the story about how John Newton had a part in abolishing slavery in England through William Wilberforce. Wilberforce went to Newton's church when he was just 13 - about the time of the American Revolution, but the gospel didn't penetrate his heart, and he became a member of the Parliament and was known for his poker playing and being a playboy and party animal until God saved him. It was such a radical change that he considered stepping down from the Parliament to be a preacher himself.

In 1785, at night, he had a secret meeting with his old mentor, John Newton, to get his advice. And John Newton said, "Stay right where you are! God has raised you up to serve His church and this nation!" Two years later, Wilberforce began his campaign to abolish slavery. He had threats against his life. But he persevered for the next **46 years**, until finally, slavery was abolished in England, 3 days before he died.

- And let me say this, if you don't know anything about William Wilberforce: he wasn't some bleeding heart, liberal, do-gooder! He was a solid Christian who believed what we call the doctrines of grace, and to him, slavery wasn't primarily a horizontal issue - it was vertical: it was a sin against the Creator God who had made all men in His own image. (Recommend John Piper's, "*Amazing Grace in the life of William Wilberforce.*")

My point is that sometimes God allows the Gospel to work slowly, changing lives and society - like a little leaven mixed into a lump of dough, Jesus said. And even if the New Testament didn't come right out and say, "OK, enough's enough, no more slavery, period," it planted the seeds for the abolition of slavery. Where the Gospel changes men, it will change their society, and slavery will disappear.

How could slavery continue in light of—

- Php 2:3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ?

Or how could one person claim to be the Master and owner of another person in light of what Jesus said to His Disciples in:

- Mat 20:26 But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,
- Mat 20:27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,
- Mat 20:28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

And I have a homework assignment for you: Go home and read the one chapter book of Philemon (right before Hebrews). Paul is returning a runaway slave, Onesimus, who had become a Christian, to his Christian master, Philemon. Paul doesn't command Philemon to set Onesimus free, but ask yourself, "how could Philemon read this letter and continue to keep Onesimus in bondage?" And then read the insert I gave you where John Piper gives 11 things in this letter that point away from slavery.

We have much more to say but we will pick it up later.