

Introduction:

Good Morning!

In in the third message that we talked about in Ephesians, I said that it's hard to cover all the different topics that come up in the Bible, because some of them don't come up very often. Well, today we are jumping down another rabbit hole into another topic. This week we are talking about slavery in the Bible.

Ephesians 6:5 says: ⁵ **Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.**

⁹ **And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.**

Now for the sake of brevity and staying on focus, It easy to relate that relationship to an Employer/employee relationship today. It's not exactly the same, but not entirely different, because the slavery describe here is not "Chattel Slavery -race based, people as property type of slavery, but rather more of contractual serving sense. But I know for me – I would want a pastor to at least address slavery when it comes up. So I really wrestled if I should spend some time on it, or even a lot of time on it. I decided that I wanted to not just have a throw away platitude about it, one a one line apologetic, pretending that is good enough. So here we are. **DIL**

Before we jump in, some disclaimers:

- I'm not an expert on the topic. I will be sharing what I have learned, but admittedly I have a lot to learn on this topic. This is less than me telling you all the answers and more about contributing to the conversation.
- Slavery is evil. It is not part of God's design, and even when discussion nuances of slavery, I hold the view that it is wicked, and am not a slavery apologist.
- God is always good, righteous, and perfectly just. Always.

ME:

- I didn't really wrestle much because:
- -satisfied by the simple pat answers
- -doesn't affect me much (sad but true - we often only care when we are the ones affected - this is a big part of the problem!
-
- I hear it mentioned in increasing measure. I wanted to learn how to articulate a solid Biblically honoring response.
- -it was hard to see the reality of the really difficult passages that exist about slavery in the Scriptures.
- I'm going to say something inflammatory. Not to be edgy or disruptive just for the sake of being an irritant, rather I want to acknowledge a truth that Christians tend to overlook, or ignore. And the result is that questioning people read the Bible, and see Christians being intellectually dishonest and dismissive.
- **God condones slavery in the Bible. Not just in one place, but through the whole thing. However, that's not a bad thing.**
- Now I've made everyone mad and defensive!

- The word condone – is not the same as endorsement. What I mean by condone is that God accepts and allows the morally evil practice of slavery to continue. Anyone who teaches you differently hasn't read the passages or is trying to cover them up and make them palatable.

*When we are **not** honest about the challenging parts of the bible, we set people up for a massive crisis of faith. When we walk through the difficult stuff together in community, making it safe to discuss, disagree, and wrestle together, then we teach each other how to have honest, productive dialogue. Remember the belt of truth? Let's buckle up.*

WE:

- The issue of slavery is one of the most common objections to the Bible that I have heard in the past couple of years: People can't reconcile that God is good, and allowed slavery to continue. They find it impossible that good God would not only allow people to be owned as property, but to give instructions on how to do it better.
- When apologists give oversimplified answers, it feels like gaslighting, - it's not a big deal, it was different then, or a different kind of slavery. But that does little to someone who is asking legitimate, hard questions about it.
- It's okay to read and wrestle with topic like this.
- Let's begin with some common answers we hear that are used. Now, these are all true, but each is not without some pushback.
 1. It's regulated, not endorsed, never commanded. (why not say no slaves)
 2. Slaves were treated better in Israel than other groups (doing a bad thing nicely, doesn't make it good)
 3. Slaves were part of a large economic system. Normal. Hard to disrupt. Israel wanted to go

back to Egypt!

normative in Egypt – 1/3 of Roman Empire were slaves – not until the 7th century when we see the Quran say “Freeing slaves is presented as a **noble, difficult, but virtuous act**, part of true righteousness.” And not until the 17th century when we see the first real advocacy by the Quakers for abolition of slavery.

– (Holy-called to be set apart)

- 4. Different kinds of slavery back then: Bondservant, indentured servitude (true in part, but people as property is also present – and is one kind of slavery morally okay today?)
- 5. Redemptive trajectory/progressive revelation (5000 years though?)
- These are all true responses, the reason I present it that way is not to make these reasons seem flimsy or untruthful, rather to show that no single one just clears all objections.

But don't be alarmed just because questions are still there. It's okay to ask hard and deeper questions, because it lead us to a full and deep understanding. We want to build our house on a solid foundation rather than on sand.

So let's take a wholistic look at how God has approached this issue. We will be bouncing around in scripture, but this list is found at the back of your bulletin so you will have the references later.

Lets build this together.

Foundation – Bare minimum – ideal behavior – the redemptive plan

GOD:

Not the OG design. Not in creation. Not in the end.

We see Adam and Eve in creation. There's no sign of slavery or dominance between them in the creation account. Adam and Eve are both created to work the land together. They start as equals in every description: Eve is made from Adam's side, described as his own body – flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones. Both are described as created in God's image, and that is worded in a way that links them together:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them."

And the verse that says

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

The word used for 'helper' or 'help meet' in no way implied servant or slave. The Hebrew word is Ezer (ay-zer), and is used 21 times in the Old Testament, which gives us a strong and consistent understanding of how the author intended it to be understood. 16 of which are used to describe God, and 3 times used to describe military aid. Never is it used to describe a servant, rather it's always used to describe help in the form of rescue. "God is my help in times of trouble"

It's not until sin enters the scene and the curse is laid down, that we see an indication of a power struggle between two people.

This sin continues to run rampant.

Sin is real, and it stinks. Therefore, God provides Concessionary Law. (floor)

- Consider the law 'do not murder'. That's the bare minimum
- Love your neighbor as yourself is the ceiling, the ideal.
- In a similar way, God knows the normative nature of slavery and how ingrained it is, and he sets the low bar. At the very least, treat them well, let them go after 7 years, if not earlier etc.
- So the reason he has these rules is not to say it's okay or to advocate for slavery, but rather to mitigate the damage that can be caused by abusing that practice.
- Therefore, in the Old Testament, the primary way slavery was practiced was indentured servitude: A person chooses to sign a contract to work for someone in exchange for food, shelter, or repayment of debt. Etc
- Also set severe rules in place, like if a master injured their slave, they would be free. If you killed a slave, or kidnapped someone to be a slave, or practiced slave trading, that was all punishable by death.
- That's the floor, but not the ideal principle.

Progressive Revelation (ceiling)

- God provides details in progression through scripture.
- The Messiah is a great example of this
- While slavery is normal and common, they know that the practice is full of abuse, and they know to not perpetuate that mistreatment.
- God set them free from slavery in Egypt, then reminded them
 - Therefore they KNEW it was bad and that freedom was good and the ideal – because it was their STORY!

- Jesus quotes Isaiah 61 to say he is the fulfillment of it, and it says: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;”
- Beautiful! They knew that the messiah would set them free, they just thought it was going to be from the oppression of Rome!
- Again, it shows that they knew slavery would not be part of the story forever. Nor is there any indication there will be when God restores creation!
- And while Paul doesn’t outright say “no slaves” in the New Testament, we see him drawing the connection that in Christ, in the Christian community, there is no slave or free, that all are one and considered the same under Christ. Galatians 3:28.

Christ following community

- The Christian community was to treat one another in love (love your neighbor as yourself)
- The letter to Philemon is a letter to a slave owner about his slave – he is told by Paul what to do. He says “I am bold enough in Christ to command you do WHAT IS REQUIRED ...you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother.”
- These words were instrumental in the abolition of slavery movements. People used all these verses to transform the planet to be in line with the ethic that God was showing the whole time!
- The goal has always been freedom!

But so what?

You may say to yourself – ah good to know. Good information. But I don’t have slaves, so this doesn’t really have any practical benefit for me.

- Here's the thing. When we look back at all the oppression and abuse. We see all the ways people twisted verses to defend the practice of slavery against those who advocated against it, we have a deeply unique hindsight.
- It seems so obvious to us that slavery is a bad thing and should have been stopped.
- And yet nobody spoke up about it in a major way until the 17th century
- It's an obvious thing in hindsight, but something my sister said kind of drove it home for me: as parents we don't lay out every single possible rule, rather we give guidelines to live by and hope they make good decisions. We say be nice to your sister and expect that they also understand they shouldn't punch your sister in the nose, even though you didn't specifically say it.
- So this is our call as the Christ following community – to speak up for the oppressed. You may not see it. Or you may see it a little bit. Or there's a situation right in front of you. You don't need to wait for God to write another scripture verse to tell you to stand up and Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; to fight for the rights of the afflicted and the destitute.

Rescue the weak and the needy;

deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

- Unless you really believe this world has no problems or oppression, in that case you are like the Pharisees [“Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things... Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.”](#)
- Jesus is like “did I stutter?”
- So ALL of us have a deep privilege to look for and help those in need.
- It's hard when we are not the ones affected by it
- On that note, I have to make a confession: I lied a little bit. Or at least, didn't tell the whole truth...

- I said I wasn't directly affected by slavery. And while not affected by racial slavery, to say I wasn't affected by slavery is not entirely true.

Gospel Call:

- When I was a teenager, myself and some friends started dabbling into the occult.
- Even though it was masked in good life principles, no matter how much I tried to be a good person, I would constantly fail. I knew that if I just stopped making bad decisions, then life would be a lot easier.
- I couldn't do it. I remember being grounded again, and realizing that there was no way I would ever be free from this life of pain, frustration, and hopelessness.
- I was a prisoner. A slave to my own sin. I tried to stop, but like a dog returning to it's own vomit to eat it, I would return to my sin.
- I would learn later on that this is the human condition. All of us have this struggle of what Paul calls – being a slave to sin.
- Here is some of what Paul says in Romans 7. Let me know if you can identify and relate to his struggle:

“The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate.

¹⁸ And I know that nothing good lives in my sinful nature.

I want to do what is right, but I can't. ¹⁹ I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.

²¹ I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. ²² I love God's law with all my heart. ²³ But there is another power^[e] within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. ²⁴ Oh,

what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? ”

- Can you relate to that? We are all at one time slaves to our sin.
- But Jesus wants to set us free! He is the answer to the evil and wickedness on the earth!

The verse continues:

²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.^[a] ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you^[b] free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin,^[c] he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.

- So that's the question my friends. Does the Spirit of God dwell in you? If you have placed your trust in Jesus as your savior, then God gives you the holy spirit, and the battle against sin now shifts direction from one of all hope is lost, to the battle has already been won.
- You are a slave to sin, but Jesus will set you free!
- If you want freedom – then pray! Seek God and he will answer you.

Pray , then join us at the front so we can encourage you an pray with you. Or answer any questions

Let's pray.

Benediction

This is what Jesus came to do, and what God want's from us as followers of Christ. We're not all talk, but we take action to help the oppressed.

Isaiah 61:17 says:

¹⁷ Learn to do good.

Seek justice.

correct oppression;

bring justice to the fatherless,

Fight for the rights of widows.