

March 7, 203 AD



<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/perpetua.html>

This is not how American action movies end.

In Roman terms a catechumen was a recent Christian convert in the process of learning the faith before baptism.

March 7, 203 AD in Carthage, North Africa, during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus, staged games to celebrate the birthday of his son Geta.

There were apprehended the young catechumens, Revocatus and Felicity his fellow slave, Saturninus and Secundulus. With them also was Vibia Perpetua, nobly born reared in a liberal manner, wedded honorably; having a father and mother and two brothers, one of them a catechumen likewise, and a son, a nursing child; and she herself was about twenty-two years of age.

These young believers, free and slave, were baptized together in prison. After a series of dreams, Perpetua knew that she would be slain in the arena along with the rest.

The slave Felicity was eight months pregnant and feared that she would not be martyred with her fellow believers, because it was illegal to execute a pregnant woman. After intense prayer of the group she gave birth a few days before the date of the games arrived. Her new daughter was given to another Christian woman to raise. Felicity could now join her brothers and sisters in martyrdom.

Roman tradition included a final meal of the prisoner's request. These young believers requested the elements of eucharist for their final meal together. This is what early Christians called "the love feast".

Now dawned the day of their victory, and they went forth from the prison into the amphitheatre as it were into heaven, cheerful and bright of countenance; if they trembled at all, it was for joy, not for fear. Perpetua followed behind, glorious of presence, as a true spouse of Christ and darling of God; at whose piercing look all cast down their eyes. Felicity likewise, rejoicing that she had borne a child in safety, that she might fight with the beasts, came now from blood to blood, from the midwife to the gladiator, to wash after her travail in a second baptism.

At this point the attendants of the condemned were to help them put on costumes to represent Roman gods. The believers refused.

Perpetua began to sing. Then when they came into Hilarian's sight, the one presiding over the games, they began to say to Hilarian, stretching forth their hands and nodding their heads: You judge us, they said, and God you. At this the people being enraged besought that they should be vexed with scourges before the line of gladiators (those namely who fought with beasts). Then truly they gave thanks because they had received somewhat of the sufferings of the Lord.

But for the women the devil had made ready a most savage cow, prepared for this purpose against all custom; for even in this beast he would mock their female gender... Perpetua was first thrown, and fell upon her loins. And when she had sat upright, her robe being rent at the side, she drew it over to cover her thigh, mindful rather of modesty than of pain. Next, looking for a pin, she likewise pinned up her dishevelled hair; for it was not meet that a martyr should suffer with hair dishevelled, lest she should seem to grieve in her glory. So she stood up; and when she saw Felicity smitten down, she went up and gave her her hand and raised her up.. And both of them stood up together ...she perceived some marks of mauling on her body and on her dress. Thereupon she called her brother to her, and that catechumen, and spoke to them, saying: Stand fast in the faith, and love you all one another; and be not offended because of our suffering.

And when the people besought that they should be brought forward, that when the sword pierced through their bodies their eyes might be joined thereto as witnesses to the slaughter, they rose of themselves and moved, whither the people willed them, first kissing one another, that they might accomplish their martyrdom with the rites of peace. The rest not moving and in silence received the sword. Likewise Perpetua, that she might have some taste of pain, was pierced between the bones and shrieked out; and when the swordsman's hand wandered still (for he was a novice), she set his sword upon her own neck. Perchance so great a woman could not else have been slain ... had she not herself so willed it.

O most valiant and blessed martyrs! O truly called and elected unto the glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ!

We are not told precisely whether Felicity was the slave of Perpetua, but that is the traditional view of the account here as told in one of the earliest Christian manuscripts written by a woman.

One of the most powerful parts of this story is what it does with the gap between these two women. Perpetua was a free, well-off, educated young wife, the kind of person Roman society put on a pedestal. Felicity was a slave, someone that same society treated as barely a person at all. But in prison, and then in the arena, none of that mattered. They suffered together to the end, standing side by side, holding hands, facing death as equals. And that is the promise of Galatians 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.

...there is neither slave nor free

**Can you point to a
Bible verse that
condemns slavery?**



Before this sermon today, I could not answer this question.

1 Timothy 6:1–2

[1] Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. [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.

Let's read our passage for today.

<read>

Paul is telling Timothy to teach and urge the submission of slaves to masters.

Biblical Slavery

1 Timothy 6:1-2



Today we are finishing up the book of 1 Timothy.

I wrestled with this sermon for a month. It was not on my radar when we started this book.

Perhaps you have run into people who say they cannot become a Christian because the Bible supports slavery. Is slavery biblical? History is full of examples where people used scripture to justify lots of things, including slavery. Is there any case for slavery according to the Bible? Was slavery in the Bible the same as slavery in American history? How do we live in the tension between right and wrong? We are going to tackle this head on.

When we discussed this passage as elders, I was planning to do the modern conceptual swap of employees honoring employers. That is applicable to most of us here. But Jack challenged me, “Do you realize how much this passage has been used to justify slavery? This is a popular apologetics topic for Christians today.” Suddenly this turned into a rabbit hole with many twists and turns that became a significant learning experience for me. I assure you that there is much more to this topic than we have time for today, so I want to present you with the

essential points of what we will call, “Biblical Slavery”.

Are you saying slavery is Biblical? Let’s discover the truth together. See your bulletin insert for notes to follow along.

Why are we even talking about slavery? Because it’s the next passage, as we work our way through 1 Timothy.

My name is Ashley McGlone. I am one of the elders at New Song. I love you. We are glad you are with us. Let’s dive in.

1 Timothy 6:1–2

Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor...

Servant – young assistant, household, serving, often debt

Bond-servant – Gr. doulos, slave, owned property, “bonded”

Master – Gr. despotes, absolute ownership & power

There are several words in scripture to describe different kinds of slaves or servants in the context of the cultures where people were living.

In the NT there are various softer words for servants:

A boy or girl like an attendant or assistant

A household servant

Or someone operating on the orders of another

However, the term Paul uses here for bondservant is doulos, the strongest and most popular word in scripture for slave. A bond servant is financially, legally, socially bound to a master.

Here is what the TDNT Bible dictionary says:

Outside Scripture: In secular Greek, δοῦλος was a purely negative, legal-social term — a person's *complete lack of personal rights*, defined entirely by belonging to another. The Greek mind prized ἐλευθερία (freedom) so highly that δουλεία (slavery) was viewed as a degradation of one's humanity; there was *no honor* to be found in the word.

Within Scripture: The NT deliberately inverts this. Paul and others adopt δοῦλος as a *title of honor* — “slave of Christ/God” — precisely because it expresses total,

unconditional belonging to God. What was shameful in the Greek world becomes, in the theological usage, the highest possible relationship: the slave of God has no autonomous will left, and this total surrender is reframed as the truest freedom.

There are two common words for master in the NT. *Kurios* is the typical word for Lord, as in Lord God, father, ruler, widely used. But here Paul uses despotes, the undisputed, absolute ownership and unrestricted authority paired with the slave. About half of the time in the NT this word is used to capture God's absolute sovereignty.

δοῦλος/δεσπότης the slave/maser combo here is the strictest, most legal word pairing — δεσπότης denotes *absolute ownership and uncontrolled power*.

You may have heard the term “chattel” slavery related to America's history of slavery. There are some similarities and differences here.

Greco-Roman slavery here meets the technical definition of chattel slavery: a person owned as legal property, who could be bought, sold, inherited, willed, or given as a gift, with no independent legal personhood of their own. Children born to slave mothers were themselves born as slaves.

But this slavery in the Roman world is different in several ways from the trans-Atlantic slavery of two hundred years ago.

- There is no basis in race at all. Slaves came from war captives, piracy, debt, or birth.
- Emancipation or manumission was routine and expected. Slaves had a pathway to earn their freedom.
- Slaves served a wide range of roles from field workers, to household servants, to tutors and estate manager.
- All were viewed as peer humans, not subhuman.
- Slavery was a public institution, not a secret underground market like modern human trafficking.

So even if these concepts are very similar, Greco-Roman slavery was different than American chattel slavery and modern human trafficking.

To be clear, these Bible passages cannot be twisted into condoning or advocating for slavery as we understand it from American history.

I will repeat.

To be clear, these Bible passages cannot be twisted into condoning or advocating for slavery as we understand it from American history.

Slavery Across History



Our first Biblical references to slavery are from more than 4,000 years ago.

Genesis 9:24–25

[24] When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, [25] he said, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.”

The prophetic curse on Canaan (Ham’s son) that he would be the lowest of slaves. Careful to understand that this is not the Bible instituting slavery. The concept existed already and was predicting the future of Canaan. Slavery was a consequence of sin and did not have a racial component. False teachings became popular around this verse, saying that it explained slavery of the African continent. This was quickly proven false.

Male and female servants are mentioned when Abram is with Pharaoh in Egypt.
Genesis 12:15–16

[15] And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. [16] And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

The first sale of a human in scripture was when Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave to traders bound for Egypt.

Genesis 37:26–28

[26] Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? [27] Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him. [28] Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

The Code of Hammurabi, written in Akkadian cuneiform in Babylon around 1750BC, before the law of Moses, described three classes of society and law: the free elite, the free commoner, and the slave.

Jumping to the other end of scripture...

Revelation 18:11-13

[11] And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, ...

[13] cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls. In Greek this is literally “bodies and souls of men”, treating people as mere substance of no value.

And today... **Modern slavery** includes an estimated **40 to 50 million** people in 167 countries globally, exceeding the approximate 13M people captured and sold as slaves during the transatlantic slave trade. In contrast, ancient slavery was a ubiquitous but smaller-scale institution; for example, in classical **Athens**, slaves comprised roughly **one-third to one-half** of the population, while in **Rome**, the slave population reached nearly **40%** in the 1st century CE.

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Slavery was legally abolished throughout the British Empire by the Slavery Abolition Act 1833. William Wilberforce waged this campaign for decades.

Slavery in the United States officially ended on **December 6, 1865**, when the **13th Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution was ratified by the required three-fourths of the states. This amendment legally abolished chattel slavery and involuntary servitude throughout the entire country.

A few weeks ago I was talking to a missionary in the Czech Republic. She said slavery accounts for over 40,000 in that nation, with about 3/4 of those in sexual

trafficking of women and children. Prague has become a global destination for this sort of sin. Her ministry provides assistance to people who have been rescued out of this forced exploitation.

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### **Key Differences in Scale and Nature**

- **Absolute Numbers:** Modern slavery involves significantly more victims in absolute terms than the transatlantic trade, driven by a larger global population and increased profitability.
- **Economic Role:** Ancient slavery was often a **household institution** where slaves performed domestic services or skilled labor, whereas modern slavery is largely driven by **forced labor** and **commercial sexual exploitation** in the private economy.
- **Permanence and Status:** In the ancient world, manumission (the formal act of a master voluntarily freeing a slave) was common, and slaves could hold high status or wealth; modern slavery is typically permanent, hidden, and involves individuals who cannot legally refuse or leave their exploitative situations.
- **Geographic Distribution:** Modern slavery is present in **167 countries**, with the highest absolute numbers in **Asia and the Pacific** and the highest rates per capita in the **Arab States**.

### **Estimates and Sources**

- **Global Estimates 2021:** The **Walk Free Foundation** and **ILO** estimate **49.6 million** people in modern slavery, including **27.6 million** in forced labor and **22 million** in forced marriages.

**Historical Context:** The **Code of Hammurabi** and **Roman Law** institutionalized slavery, with slaves treated as **chattel** with no legal rights, unlike modern victims who are exploited through coercion and deception despite legal prohibitions.

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# The American Church

In the 1800s



Why did it take this long before modern western nations outlawed slavery? Didn't the church protest slavery?

*Before* you read church history, you have a rosy view of the global church, growing across the earth. Everything just keeps getting better. No problem. Peace and love.

*After* you read church history, you pause, examine your own life, and humbly ask God to help me do better than that. Church history is not rosy on the topic of slavery; rather it is quite ugly. This topic was debated over centuries.

We could talk about how the Catholic church endorsed slavery over those centuries. But let's bring this closer to home.

During the 1800s in America there were raging debates about slavery in the major denominations: Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist. Each one split over this issue, and African American denominations were formed.

For example, this is how the "Southern" Baptist Church became "southern".

## **The 1995 SBC Resolution on Racial Reconciliation**

**When/where:** Adopted June 20–22, 1995, at the SBC's annual meeting in Atlanta — timed deliberately to coincide with the **Convention's 150th anniversary**, since the SBC itself was founded in **1845** specifically because *Southern* Baptists split from *Northern* Baptists over the right to appoint slaveholding missionaries.

**What it did:** It was the **first formal acknowledgment of slavery by the full Convention** in its 150-year history. Passed unanimously by the Resolutions Committee and then overwhelmingly adopted by roughly 20,000–25,000 messengers, with a standing ovation.

**Key language:**

Affirmed that "every human life is sacred... regardless of race or ethnicity...

"We lament and repudiate historic acts of evil such as slavery from which we continue to reap a bitter harvest."

"We apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously or unconsciously."

Asked forgiveness from African-American Christians and committed to "eradicate racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry."

**The response:** Rev. Gary L. Frost of Ohio — at the time the only African-American in SBC national leadership — accepted the apology on behalf of Black Southern Baptists and extended forgiveness.

Remember the "Curse of Ham" earlier with Noah? That became a false doctrine used widely during the slavery debates in the church. The SBC passed a further racial reconciliation resolution in 2015 acknowledging its own ongoing complicity, formally condemned white supremacy in 2017, and in 2018 specifically voted to repudiate the "Curse of Ham" doctrine as a justification for racism.

<https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-racial-reconciliation-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-southern-baptist-convention/>

The SBC went on to also condemn human trafficking in other resolutions and lobby in Washington DC in support of anti-human trafficking laws that were unanimously passed.

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In 1774 John Wesley wrote "Thoughts Upon Slavery" where he says, "Give liberty to whom liberty is due, that is, to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature. Let none serve you but by his own act and deed, by his own voluntary choice. Away with all whips, all chains, all compulsion! Be gentle toward all men; and see that you invariably do unto every one as you would he should do unto you."

Gregory of Nyssa

Commentary on Ecclesiastes – c. 378AD

Augustine – City of God – c. 420AD



But God bless Greg, Gregory of Nyssa, regarding this issue he was a largely ignored voice very early in church history.

In Ecclesiastes Solomon lists many of his pursuits that all ended up in vain folly, among those things, owning slaves:

He learned everything he could.

He built everything he could.

He bought everything he could.

It was all vanity.

Ecclesiastes 2:1–11

[7] I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house.

Gregory of Nyssa in the 4th century, writing a commentary on this passage, makes several arguments against slavery. His most compelling comes from guess where?

...

Genesis 1! What does Genesis 1 say about slaves? Let's turn there...

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Ecclesiastes 2:1–11

[1] I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. [2] I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” [3] I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. [4] I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. [5] I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. [6] I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. [7] I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. [8] I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. [9] So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. [10] And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. [11] Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

[https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/gregoryofnyss\\_ecclesiastes\\_slavery.htm](https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/gregoryofnyss_ecclesiastes_slavery.htm)



## Genesis 1:26–28 Dominion over man?

[26] Then God said, “Let us make **man** in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

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

[28] And God blessed **them**. And God said to **them**, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves [creeps] on the earth.”

Let’s read Genesis 1:26-28. <read>

It’s obvious once you see it. When God commanded mankind to have dominion over creation, that did not include one another. Case closed.

V28 every living thing that moves [creeps] - this is used many places in scripture to speak only of the movement of animals, for example a few verses earlier in creating the animals (not man) it says

**Gen 1:21** So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

About 40 years after Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine would make this same point in his multi-volume work called “The City of God”.

Psalm 8:5–8

[5] Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

[6] You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;

you have put all things under his feet,  
[7] all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
[8] the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Here is what Dr. Wyatt Graham says, “The Bible frequently records humans doing human things, including sin and making mistakes. Paul even tells us that the Old Testament was written so that “we might not desire evil as they did” (1 Cor 10:6). When it comes to slavery, Solomon imposed forced labour on his subjects, and his son Rehoboam threatened to make it worse, and that led to the division of the kingdom of Israel and began the decline into sin and misery..“  
<https://thelogcollege.wordpress.com/2026/04/08/gregory-of-nyssa-on-the-evils-of-slave-owning/>

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible talks about slavery, about working within the fallen human system, but never advocates for it. The OT laws about slavery did not institute it, but attempted to make this fallen, man-made situation more humane than the surrounding nations of Israel. As we have taught over and over in scripture, we must return to God’s design, which did not include men having dominion over men.

For example, in the Ten Commandments – Exodus 20

#5 – Sabbath includes rest for servants

#10 – Covet not your neighbor’s servants

Even in the Ten Commandments we find fair treatment of servants specifically mentioned. The other prohibitions of sin apply equally to masters of servants or slaves (adultery, murder, theft, etc.).

All people are made in the image of God. We belong to God. Human life is priceless. That passage in Revelation we mentioned earlier talks about not just selling bodies, but selling souls. The Sons of Korah in Psalm 49 and Jesus in Mark 8 explain that souls are beyond estimation of worth.

Psalm 49:7–8

[7] Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, [8] for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice,

Mark 8:36–37

[36] For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? [37] For what can a man give in return for his soul?

So this is the answer to our question: can you point to a Bible verse that

condemns slavery? Well, we see from God's design in Genesis 1 that man's dominion was over the created order and not one another.

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Dr. Wyatt Graham - Academic Dean and Professor at Carey Theological College
<https://www.carey-edu.ca/persons/rev-dr-wyatt-graham> PhD from SBTS

Exodus 20:8–17

[8] “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, [10] but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. [11] For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

[12] “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

[13] “You shall not murder.

[14] “You shall not commit adultery.

[15] “You shall not steal.

[16] “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

[17] “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

Exodus 21:16

Whoever steals a man and sells him,
and anyone found in possession of him,
shall be put to death.

So Genesis 1 proves this was not *God's* design. And the OT law advocates for humane treatment of servants in *man's* fall. However, I must point out this one verse that specifically forbids human trafficking. This verse was key in turning the debate inside the church during the time of American slavery.

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In Leviticus 25 and Nehemiah 5 we see that Israelites were not to buy and sell one another, but they could trade slaves of neighboring nations.

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Leviticus 25:35-46

[35] "If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. [36] Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. [37] You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. [38] I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God. [39] "If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall

not make him serve as a slave: [40] he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. [41] Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. [42] For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. [43] You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God. [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. [45] You may also buy from among the strangers who sojourn with you and their clans that are with you, who have been born in your land, and they may be your property. [46] You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever. You may make slaves of them, but over your brothers the people of Israel you shall not rule, one over another ruthlessly.

#### Nehemiah 5:1-8

[1] Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. [2] For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive." [3] There were also those who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine." [4] And there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. [5] Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards."

[6] I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. [7] I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, "You are exacting interest, each from his brother." And I held a great assembly against them [8] and said to them, "We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!" They were silent and could not find a word to say.

## 1 Timothy 6:1–2

Those who have believing masters [ie. *Christians who own slaves*] 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.

So now we return to our 1 Timothy passage:

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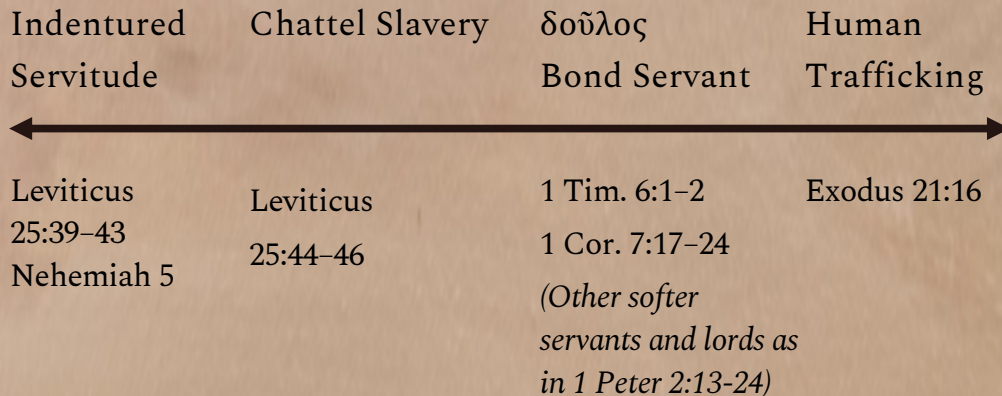
“believing masters”

What?

Christians were slave owners?

We now have enough information to make a clear distinction here...

## The Continuum of Slavery



We must clearly define terms when someone asks whether the Bible addresses slavery. They are likely thinking of the trans-Atlantic trade in American history. Global, historical slavery in the Bible was very different.

For lack of a better name, we will call this "the continuum of slavery".

I have a handout that I compiled from online research that goes into depth comparing these. See me afterward if you would like a copy. They are each very different.

Indentured servitude was a solution for poverty. They were still viewed with human dignity, and for Israelites the term was limited to six years maximum. Chattel Slavery was whole ownership of the person with no path to freedom. This was common in global history, a public and legal economy, and it was not tied to any particular race.

Greco-Roman bond servants were also a public and legal economy, usually permanent unless they could buy their freedom, lowest in society.

Human trafficking is older than Joseph being sold into Egypt by his brothers and is criminal.

In American history...

Many Europeans came to America as indentured servants where they worked off their debt

While Africans came through human trafficking

The OT law restricts indentured servitude and commands fair treatment of chattel slavery.

In the NT servants and bond servants are told to honor their masters.

And human trafficking is flatly condemned under penalty of death.

*See Word doc with comparison of traits and scriptures*



## 1 Peter 2:13-19 Subjects for the Lord's sake: emperors, governors, masters, God

[13] Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution ["men of every sort"], whether it be to the emperor as supreme, [14] or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. [15] For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. [16] Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. [17] Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

[18] Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. [19] For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

In a related passage to 1 Timothy 6, here Peter is saying very similar things as Paul. Peter's context here is servants and lords, a softer arrangement than slaves and masters.

<read slide>

Paul's and Peter's purposes are the same: for the Lord's sake, be subject to men of every sort, specifically emperors, governors, and masters. The translation "every human institution" makes this sound like governments and servitude are all man-made institutions. That would help our argument against slavery. However, digging deeper into the Greek the accurate translation is "men of every sort", and that is more consistent across the NT usage.

Only a few years after the martyrdom of Perpetua and Feclity, Tertullian of Carthage wrote this around 220AD:

Therefore, as to what relates to the honours due to kings or emperors, we have a prescript sufficient, that it behoves us to be in all obedience, according to the apostle's precept. But man is the property of God alone.

From our opening story, both the free and the slave Christians were subject to the whim of the emperor on his son's birthday. Not all that different from John the Baptist at the birthday celebration for Herod. (Matthew 14, Mark 6)

Our American spirit of independence protests at such submission to authority without challenge.

To put this in modern terms, regardless of the human authorities in our lives, we are to "play free". Have you heard that phrase for athletes who play free? "Playing free" (or "playing loose") is sports commentary shorthand for an athlete performing without the mental weight of fear, pressure, or overthinking. No fear or hesitation. Not tangled up in office politics. No second guessing. Nothing to lose. As Peter says here, "live as people who are free, as servants of God". Knowing we belong to the Lord frees us up to rest in his plan and honor others. This was the attitude of Perpetua and Felicity as they walked into the arena.

Peter continues in v20:

1 Peter 2:20–24

[20] For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. [21] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. [22] He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. [23] When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. [24] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

"continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly..." Let's read what Jesus said about that....

# Behold, I am making all things new.

## Revelation 21:5

Isaiah 61:1-4

[1] 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;  
[2] to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,

Luke 4:18-19,21

[21] And he began to say to them, "Today this  
Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
[3] to grant to those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of  
ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;  
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the LORD, that he may be  
glorified.

[4] They shall build up the ancient ruins;  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.

In Luke 4 Jesus is standing in the synagogue at Nazareth, the village where he grew up, and it is his turn to read.

He reads Isaiah 61 but stops mid-sentence. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing", the part about good news for the poor and liberty to captives.

In Revelation 21 "future Jesus" says he is making all things new, and that is where Isaiah 61 continues with the day of vengeance of our God. It was not time for the Zealots to pick up swords and fight the Romans. Just like it was not time for Perpetua and Felicity to campaign against Roman slavery and wicked emperors.

As Peter said, Jesus "continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly..." which would be future Him later on the timeline of eternity. Justice will come, and that is His role.

## 1 Corinthians 7:17–24

[17] Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. [18-19] ...*circumcision*... [20] Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. [21] Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) [22] For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. [23] You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. [24] So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

We don't find any passages in the NT that specifically forbid slavery. Why? Because it was written to people born into a world where servitude was normal for most of human history... although this passage comes the closest. If you are free, avoid becoming a bondservant indebted to another person. It is not abolishing slavery, but advises against that route of debt relief.

You were bought with a price by Christ!

*Note the spiritual and physical dimensions here. Are those mixed metaphors in v23? Bought with a price is clearly spiritual. Is this speaking of a spiritual bondservant to men? Yes. This could be read as a prohibition of physical slavery and also a prohibition of enslaving oneself again to sin.*

A more accurate reading of the verb tenses: "You were bought with a price, stop becoming slaves of men." Free men in Christ should not submit themselves again to spiritual slavery. To prove this point, let's look at Galatians 4:1–9, particularly 8-9:

[8] Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. [9] But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be

known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Here Paul is saying in two letters not to return to spiritual slavery once Christ has paid for your freedom.

And this is a key point: Paul makes both physical and spiritual application to the concept of slavery. When reading these passages, we must understand which one he is describing.

## Colossians 3:18-25; 4:1

[18] Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. [19] Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. [20] Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. [21] Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. [22] Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. [23] Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, [24] knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. [25] For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

[1] Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

We're short on time, so I won't read this parallel passage. It is good. Just a quick mention for completeness.

Basically, whatever authority structure where you *find* yourself, and whatever your *position* in that authority structure, honor others with hearty service as if serving the Lord Christ.

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We can raise this conversation to another level, the level of respecting authority, in whatever context we find ourselves.

As in other letters, Paul is talking about how we relate to authority in all contexts, including Masters or employers or managers

To those submitting to authority:

Husbands to Christ

Wives to husbands

Children to parents

Bondservants to earthly masters

To those in authority:

Husbands

Masters

Love, not harsh, just, fair

Look to your heavenly master

We covered this earlier in 1 Timothy 2 where Paul talks about praying for and giving thanks for all people, for kings, and all who are in positions of high authority.

[1] First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. [3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,

Philemon 1:15–16

For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant 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.

There is a famous story of a runaway slave told in the little letter from Paul to Philemon. This example makes the spiritual parallel abundantly clear. Galatians 3:28 There is neither slave nor free in Christ. In the *economic* system, yes. In the *Spirit*, no. Now slave and master are equals, like Perpetua and Felicity. Paul asks Philemon to forgive his runaway slave and to receive him back as more than a slave but as a brother in Christ.

<read>

This slave, with the lowest standing in society, is now Paul's child in the faith, and precious to God and man.

Philippians 2:3–8 Look to Jesus

[3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus from a position of complete authority laid it all aside to give us an example of serving others first.

<skim>

This is the one who in human flesh gave us the golden rule that backs this up: Matthew 7:12 So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus is our example of humble service. In John 13 he told his disciples:

John 13:12–17

~~[12] When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? [13] You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. [14] If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. [15] For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. [16] Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. [17] If you know these things,~~ blessed are you if you do them.

Regardless of your position of authority in any human relationship, follow the example of Christ to take the form of a servant and put others first.

1 Timothy 6:1–2 So what?

[1] Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled (blasphemed). [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.

Returning to 1 Timothy 6 now:

<read underline>

Husband submit to Christ. Wives submit to husbands. Slaves submit to Masters. Employees submit to employers. Seems like there's a trend here. I can identify with the struggle to submit.

I think about this every day at work. Most of the time I am walking in the fruit of the Spirit and showing love and kindness to all. I enjoy helping others. Many coworkers know I'm a Christian. And I am ashamed to admit that some days my cynical flesh slips through, and especially, at those times, I am concerned about the name of God that I represent as a believer in the workplace. When my *actions* and *words* are not aligned, that is called hypocrisy. Hypocrisy can inspire blasphemy, slander, and reviling of God.

Subordinates push back against authority of all kinds. This is human nature. It offends our freedoms, We label submission to others as “not freedom”, when Paul said to remember we are free in Christ. (Galatians 5:1)

We have all observed people who did not understand how to *use* authority properly or how to *submit* to authority properly. Whether that is at work, government, church, or in the home. Paul was telling us here to respect authority wherever we are under it in this life. As the Centurion told Jesus, “I am a man under authority.” And Jesus commended his faith.

Paul was not advocating to change the system. He is advocating to work within the system as a respectful believer so that authority is honored and God is not slandered.

We should necessarily note here that as in Acts 5:27-29, we “obey God rather than men” when it comes to authorities that countermand God’s will. When commanded to be silent, the apostles continued proclaiming Christ. Perpetua and Felicity refused to worship the emperor or his gods. Jesus said “all authority in heaven and earth have been given to me”, and we recognize His authority as foremost.

If the Bible doesn't outright condemn slavery, then what am I missing?

Matthew 5:38-48



We live in a society that has gone beyond “freedom from tyranny” to “sinful lawlessness”. Paul’s Greco-Roman culture was based on authority; a large part of our culture rejects authority.

As I said at the beginning, I have wrestled with this sermon for a month. I couldn’t find a passage outright condemning all forms of slavery. I kept searching, and searching. <pause> I know I am submitted to scripture, so what am I missing?

I pulled out a 30 year old book from my Bible school days, Gill, Textbook of Christian Ethics. It says that ethics are about living in the tension between right and wrong. On page 181 it clearly says, “the obvious point that nowhere in the Bible is slavery actually condemned”. My suspicions were confirmed. What do you mean the Bible doesn’t condemn slavery?

Augustine in the City of God made it clear that the early church had a martyr mindset. The apostles never told people to campaign against authority.

Where did they get this idea?

If you don't remember anything else we cover today, remember this one point:

Where did the early church get this idea?

They got it from Jesus. Love your enemies. This is why the early church did not rise up against slavery. This is why the early church stood firm in the arena.

Matthew 5:38-46

[38] "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

[39] But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. [40] [41] And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. [42]

[43] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?

Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Jesus made it clear we are to love and serve and pray for our enemies.

We learned that slavery was not part of God's design. Genesis 1 tells us mankind is to have dominion over creation, not one another. And at the same time, Jesus recognized this tension in the fallen world and told us what to do with it.

What about the poor who turn to slavery to meet their needs? Jesus said you will always have the poor with you. Then in Matthew 25 he talked about the reward for those who provided for the poor: food, drink, clothing, shelter.

And the early church in Acts practiced this: Acts 2:44-46

[44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

The body of Christ cared for one another, helping the poor avoid debt and indentured servitude.

But what about abuse and trauma?! Yes, let's make this clear. I will repeat what I said earlier:

These Bible passages cannot be twisted into condoning or advocating for slavery

as we understand it from American history.
Exodus 21:16 explicitly condemns human trafficking.
Even though the Bible does not categorically condemn all forms of slavery, it
does routinely condemn ill treatment of others in any fashion.

And Proverbs 31 says this:
[8] Open your mouth for the mute,
for the rights of all who are destitute.
[9] Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

This is why members of our church work in food pantries and women's shelters.

When the body of Christ is alive and active, it makes a difference in the lives of
the needy, rescuing them from slavery, physically and spiritually.

If you would like to support someone doing work in this area, in your bulletin is
the email address for Melissa Wells. She is the missionary in Czech Republic
helping women coming out of sex trafficking. She would greatly appreciate your
prayers and encouragement. mewissa@hotmail.com

If you want to help locally in one of these ministry areas, we can connect you
with the right people.

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2 Timothy 2

v3 Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

v24 And the Lord's servant must ... patiently enduring evil

# Biblical Slavery?



We have covered a lot of ground today. As you can imagine, it is a challenge to summarize such a complex topic. And we can only do so much in less than an hour. We have covered the major passages and questions about slavery in the Bible, and with your notes you have the substance to hold an apologetics conversation on the topic.

So what is Biblical slavery?

Biblical slavery acknowledges that we are made in God's image, we live under His authority, human slavery was not part of God's design, we operate in a fallen world as spiritually united believers representing God, which means we serve humbly and joyfully while caring for the poor and oppressed, and we live as spiritual slaves of God bought with the price of Christ's blood.

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Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8 - God never intended for mankind's dominion to include fellow men or women. Treating others as sub-human is a violation of the image of God.

Genesis 9:24-25; 12:15-16; 37:26-28 - As hard as it is to admit, various types of slavery have been a part of human history from nearly the beginning.

Exodus 21:16, Psalm 49:7-9, Mark 8:36-37 - The Bible strictly opposes human trafficking. Souls are priceless. (See also Leviticus 25:35-46 and Nehemiah 5:1-8)

Matthew 7:12, 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 6:9, Colossians 4:1 - Even though the Bible does not categorically condemn all forms of slavery, it does condemn ill treatment of others.

1 Timothy 6:1-2, 1 Peter 2:13-19, Colossians 3:18-25; 4:1 - The Bible addresses how we are to honor authority for the Lord's sake and so that God's name and teaching are not blasphemed.

1 Corinthians 7:17-24 - Paul uses absolute slavery as a spiritual parallel to our relationship to God who has entirely purchased us by the blood of His Son Jesus Christ; for this we are forever indebted as slaves to God our benevolent Savior and Master.

Philippians 2:3-8, Matthew 7:12 - Regardless of your position of authority in any human relationship, follow the example of Christ to take the form of a servant and put others first. Love your enemies.

Acts 5:27-29 - When in conflict, we obey God rather than men, as God's authority is over all.

Proverbs 31:8-9, Nehemiah 5 - Speak up for the poor.

March 7, 203 AD



Coming full circle back to the story of Felicity and Perpetua, among a group of six young believers, male and female, slave and free, all martyrs at the whim of the emperor.

Their freedom was in Christ, not in the government or social systems. They subjected themselves to authorities as good examples of believers, drawing the line at denying Christ.

2 Timothy 4:16-18 Paul in prison facing his coming sentence, was not advocating to overthrow the system.

[16] At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! [17] But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. [18] The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

Please remember that we have prayer down front after service.

Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.

May we each honor God this week by honoring those in authority over us. You are dismissed.