

Slavery

The year was 1863. Our nation was in the middle of a civil war. On a cold November day, President Abraham Lincoln addresses a crowd gathered to dedicate a cemetery at Gettysburg.

President Lincoln began that speech with a very obvious but hotly disputed truth.

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Thus began one of the most famous speeches in all of American history, the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln's call for equality was a direct affront to the practice of slavery that dominated the Confederate South, what some would even call the "Christian South."

The truth that all men were created equal by God was clear in Scripture. All were created by God in God's image. It was indisputable theologically. And yet...

Pastors and church members across communities in the South were buying, selling, trading, using, and even abusing predominantly African slaves. This was, without question, one of the darkest periods of American Christian history.

Many of you know that I am a Civil War buff. I am particularly intrigued by the role that Pastors played in framing, supporting and most likely causing our Civil War.

In America at that time, Christianity dominated public discussion, opinion and actions. We were truly a nation that professed and pursued the teachings of Jesus. Pastors were like modern day celebrities.

Their sermons were published in the Newspapers. The power of their words literally shaped our country for good or bad. In fact, I think it is obvious that the Civil War could not have happened unless the Pastors of our nation supported and promoted it.

Particularly in the immediate years leading up to the Civil War. The Pastors of our nation shaped the discussion around slavery and inspired their congregants to fight what they considered was a righteous and Holy War.

At a minimum the Pastors of our nation gave permission and endorsed Christians to join in this Holy War for God. They were not defending the South or the North, they were not fighting for or against slavery, they were not fighting for or against State's Rights....they were whipped up in enthusiasm because the nation's religious leaders were calling them to fight for God.

The problem was that both sides believed that they had a duty to fight and die for their religious cause. The reason the Civil War was so bloody and deadly was that both sides believed God wanted the other side destroyed and the nation would only be cleansed by the shedding of the nation's blood.

Before the Abolitionist John Brown was hanged for treason he summed up this very truth.

"I, John Brown, am now quite certain," portended the condemned man in his final note, slipped to a jailor on his way to the gallows, "that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away, but with blood."

Our nation was deeply divided and the division was primarily Spiritual. Both sides of the war believed that they were fighting a righteous cause...that God would win for them even if it meant sacrificing their lives.

The Southern Baptists, the Southern Methodists, and all denominations of the South...were ready to kill their Northern brothers and sisters in Christ because they believed that God told them to.

The war dragged on for several years because Pastors of the South preached that it would be better to die a martyr for the cause than to return home having failed God.

How is this even possible? How did the religious leaders of the time use God's Word to promote such a thing? How could God have both sides fighting against one another but yet for Him?

In His Second Inaugural Address Lincoln summed up the problem....."Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes"

Abraham Lincoln would later say, "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."

The Civil War was caused, in my opinion, by the failure of the Southern Pastors to preach the word in season and out of season. They allowed their political opinions for shape their presentation of God's Word. When they should have been defending the rights of all men to be equal...they were defending the concept of slavery as a biblical mandate from God and manipulating Scripture to do so. They used the Words of God to stir up the South for a "Holy" War.... And back then, the words of Pastors carried enormous power.

That is why you will never hear me make political comments from God's pulpit. We preach the Word of God and nothing else. We pray for whomever God chooses as President. But the truth is that God's Word has a great deal to say about Slavery, bondservants and Masters. It was a significant concern at Ephesus as the Jewish perception of Slavery began to be shaped by that of Romans and Pagans.

This dark period of our history makes our passage today all the more sensitive. The most important perspective on this issue is not man's opinion but God's Word. Here in our passage Paul briefly addressed the issue of slavery.

1 Timothy 6:1–2 (ESV) 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.

As soon as they come across Paul's reference to slaves in verses 1–2, many Christians begin to wonder whether the apostle Paul was promoting slavery. Other passages in the New Testament that deal with slavery. For example.

Colossians 3:22–4:1 (ESV) 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.

These passages make us very uncomfortable.....they leave us wondering about Paul....about God....Then we turn to the Old Testament and things seems worse. It forces us to deal with the question.... "Does God support slavery?" Clearly the Scriptures, as many Southern Pastors taught, seem to support slavery and even told Masters and Slaves how to act in order to Honor God.

History of Slavery in the World

The question of slavery is one of the most significant questions posed to Christianity, particularly in light of the kinds of slavery practiced by Christians in Europe and America in previous centuries. That's why we need to understand what the Bible has to say on this issue and, more specifically, why Paul would write what he did in 1 Timothy 6

World history is filled with various types of slavery, which means we should be careful when we talk about this subject. When you hear the word slavery, it's likely that certain images immediately pop up in your mind, images that represent abuses and injustices. While many of these images may be historically accurate in certain contexts, not all forms of slavery have looked the same in their respective era or location. Consider below four different ways in which slavery has been practiced in history.

First, we have the model of Hebrew servanthood

When we look at God's laws for His people in the Old Testament, we see a system of Hebrew servanthood that was set up for impoverished Israelites to become servants. This servanthood was designed to provide for poorer Israelites and their families

Even though Deuteronomy 15:1–18 tells us that God desires that none of His people are poor, He nevertheless makes provision for those in poverty, since poverty is a reality in a sinful and imperfect world. Leviticus 25:35–43 helps us understand more about God's perspective on slavery:

Leviticus 25:35–38 (ESV) 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.

Leviticus 25:39–43 (ESV) 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.

This passage describes a system of servanthood in Israel whereby someone could sell himself into slavery in order to escape poverty. Such an individual was to be treated not as a slave but as a hired servant, a worker. The individual would basically enter into a contractual agreement with an employer, working until he could establish himself as a free and full citizen again.

Now there were certainly unjust and abusive slaveholders among God’s people. Israel’s sin was, after all, apparent throughout its history. However, cruelty was not God’s intention for slavery in Israel, for the slavery He chose to regulate was extremely different from the pre-Civil War slavery in the southern United States. In His mercy God even provided a reprieve for slaves by instituting sabbatical years when they had to be released

Exodus 21:2–4 (ESV) 2 When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. 3 If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out alone.

So the Jewish idea of Slavery was steeped in Scriptures and designed and orchestrated by God. He didn't choose slavery, but man's Sins brought it forth and He shaped it with god rails.

But as the gospel message moved outside of Jewish areas....the concept of slavery was much different. Most of the world did not even know about God's directions regarding Hebrew Servanthood...

Second, we’ll consider Roman slavery

Slavery was deeply ingrained into the Roman Empire and its economy. Some scholars estimate that over one-third of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves—that’s approximately 50 or 60 million individuals! Out of those 50–60 million slaves, there were a variety of different practices of slavery in this era of history

Some slaves were simply employees who did a variety of different kinds of work: teachers, craftsmen, managers, cooks, and even government officials. Many slaves owned slaves themselves. It's also important to recognize that Roman slavery was not fundamentally based on ethnicity or skin color but on economic and social status

In order to gain Roman citizenship and thus enter into Roman society, many people would sell themselves into slavery. In many cases slavery was beneficial for poorer individuals, providing security and stability for slaves in a variety of different venues. There were also opportunities beyond slavery, for many slaves were released by the time they were 30 years of age, as they had become capable of providing for themselves at that point.

Despite the more humane practices of slavery in some cases, we don't want to paint an idealistic picture of slavery. After all, a slave was still a slave—marginalized, powerless, and often prone to disgrace or insult. While some slaves were indeed salaried employees with great responsibilities, others were subjected to grueling labor and harsh treatment, including sexual abuse.

Slavery could be and sometimes was extremely degrading and destructive. Yet we shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that all slavery in the Greco-Roman world was inhumane. This system, which was so ingrained into the economy of the Roman Empire, was in many ways different from the slavery of the antebellum South.

A third form of slavery we need to consider is indentured servitude

This form of slavery was more common in colonial America, as many could not afford to come to the new country on their own. They would contract themselves out as indentured servants and agree to work in certain households in apprentice-type roles until they could earn enough money to pay off their debt.

Historians estimate that over one-half to two-thirds of European white immigrants who came to America came as indentured servants. This picture of slavery is much closer to Hebrew servanthood than anything else.

Fourth and finally, there is the picture of slavery connected to the African slave trade

This last example of slavery was promoted across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such that millions upon millions of Africans were traded and sold across Europe. They were transported in cruel, grueling conditions that would leave many of them dead before arriving at their destination

Upon being sold into slavery, these slaves were subjected to harsh working conditions as well as physical abuse, sexual abuse, and torture. Frederick Douglass, a leader of the abolitionist movement in the 1800s, wrote the following about his first slave-master, Captain Anthony:

He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slave-holding. He would at times seem to take great pleasure in whipping a slave. I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a

joist, and whip ... till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayer, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. (Douglass, Narrative, 3–4)

Though I hesitate to share such an awful account, I cite this for two reasons. First, this account reminds us of the horror of what took place in slavery in our own country not that long ago. And second, we need to be reminded that this is not the kind of slavery Paul was addressing in 1 Timothy 6.

While some slaves had unbelieving and sometimes cruel masters, this passage will be confusing to you if the only picture of slavery you have is the African slave trade. Some of the slaves the apostle was addressing were likely sitting in the church amid Christian brothers and sisters who loved them, cared for them, and were commanded to provide for them as fellow members of the body of Christ. Though Paul was not ignorant of the evils of slavery in his day, he was by no means condoning the mistreatment of slaves.

Now that we've looked at world history, we also need to consider biblical history. Biblical history is filled with various perspectives on slavery

Slavery is not a part of creation (that is, God's original created order); it is a product of sin. Genesis 1–2 speaks of the distinction between male and female, but there is no distinction between slave and free persons, since slavery was not a part of God's creation.

And if you move forward to the new creation in Revelation 21–22, you see once again that there is no distinction between slave and free in the new heaven and new earth. Heaven will have no poverty that leads to indentured servanthood and no class warfare that leads to a Greco-Roman type of slavery. And certainly there will not be any abuse and mistreatment like what took place during the African slave trade. Sin and slavery will be no more.

The fact that slavery is ultimately connected to sin in Scripture means specific situations in a sinful world warrant specific instructions to a sinful world. The instructions in the Old Testament and in 1 Timothy that speak of slaves are addressing specific circumstances surrounding slavery at a specific time. When we understand this context, we see that biblical instructions concerning slavery do not imply biblical approval of slavery.

Slavery is not God's ultimate design. It is a product of sin. When Paul addressed slavery, he was not endorsing it; he was helping shepherd people who were trapped in a sin-tainted economic and social system that produced the need for slavery.

Consider how Scripture deals similarly with other issues. Was divorce a part of God's original creation? No, absolutely not. Divorce is clearly a result of sin entering the world; yet Scripture addresses divorce by giving us guidelines and regulations for this less-than-ideal reality (Deut 24:1–4; Matt 19:3–9). We see something similar with slavery. Even though slavery was a product of sin, God addressed it at different times and in different ways throughout Scripture.

The most important question we need to answer is this: What does Scripture say about slavery?

To begin with, there are some clear ways in which the Bible condemns slavery. Specifically, the Bible condemns slavery that undermines God's creation.

Genesis 1:27 should shape our thinking here: "So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female." Based on this truth we have equal dignity before God, but slavery undermines this dignity by functionally denying it. Remember, it wasn't President Lincoln who came up with the idea that all men are created with equal dignity; God did.

Job implies this when he talks about why he refuses to mistreat his servants. He asks, "Did not the One who made me in the womb also make them? Did not the same God form us both in the womb?" (Job 31:15).

We see this same perspective in the New Testament. Our equal dignity before God can be seen

Galatians 3:28–29 (ESV) 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. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

In other words, even though we have differences, we all have equal dignity before God, and as believers we have an equal position in Christ. This equal dignity is also the basis James uses for arguing against favoritism in the church

James 2:1 (ESV) 1 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

In these and other examples, the Bible is not expressly prohibiting all forms of slavery, but it is definitely ripping apart the core foundations behind many forms of slavery. As we think about these biblical texts, we need to be reminded that the first-century Roman slavery of the New Testament period was not based on ethnicity or skin color like the African slave trade. The New Testament vehemently opposes any form of ethnic or racial superiority.

Just as all individuals have equal dignity before God, as believers, we are equally submissive to God. When Paul addresses slaves or their masters, he says that everything they do ought to be done in submission to Christ and in reverence for Him.

In Colossians 3:22 Paul gives the following exhortation

Colossians 3:22 (ESV) 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.

Ephesians 6:5–7 (ESV) 5 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man,

Colossians 4:1 (ESV) 1 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

One reason we are to submit equally to God is that we will receive equal justice from God. In Colossians 3:25 Paul tells us that God is impartial,

Colossians 3:25 (ESV) 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

Ephesians 6:9 (ESV) 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

In other words, earthly masters have a Master in heaven who will act with perfect justice in response to how slaves are treated. As for Christian slaves, even though they may endure temporary injustice, eternal justice awaits.

So we've seen that the Bible condemns slavery that undermines God's creation; next we see that the Bible likewise condemns slavery that violates God's Word. In clear, unequivocal language the Bible speaks against slavery in two specific ways

First, the Bible denounces physical abuse

This prohibition would apply to many forms of physical abuse but particularly when this abuse is associated with the institution of slavery

Exodus 21:26–27 (ESV) 26 "When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. 27 If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.

Odd that this passage was never quoted in Southern Churches in the 1860's.

In verse 20 of the same chapter, we read that if a slave died as a result of physical abuse, then the owner was to be punished. In short, physical abuse of any kind by masters of slaves was directly condemned by God.

Exodus 21:20 (ESV) 20 "When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged.

Second, we know slavery is condemned because the Bible denounces human trafficking

Exodus 21:16 (ESV) 16 "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

Kidnapping a slave is punishable by death, and that death penalty applies to the one selling the slave and the one buying the slave.

We're reminded at this point about what Paul said earlier in 1 Timothy concerning the need for the law to restrain evil

1 Timothy 1:8–10 (ESV) 8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 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, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,

Note how enslavers are included in this list.

Anyone who kidnaps people in order to sell them as slaves is “lawless and rebellious ... ungodly and sinful ... unholy and irreverent”

I have emphasized the evil of human trafficking for two reasons.

First, if these truths had been embraced and obeyed by Christians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slavery never would have existed as it did in the South. The Bible is not at all silent on this issue, and it in no way tolerates the kind of slavery that took place in this country

Pastors and church members who used God’s Word to justify the practice of slavery were living in sin. Paul clearly considered the kind of practices promoted in the African slave trade as abominable, a violation of God’s Word, and a denial of God’s gospel.

Second, the issue of human trafficking is important to think about because it is so prevalent around the world today. There are an estimated twenty-seven million slaves in the world today, which is more than any other time in history

Human trafficking, which includes buying, selling, trading, and exploiting people for forced labor or for sex, is the second largest and fastest growing industry in the world today. The statistics are staggering

Approximately 80 percent of trafficking victims are women and girls, and half are minors. • According to UNICEF, 30 million children over the past 30 years have been sexually exploited through human trafficking. • Over 10,000 Nepali girls as young as nine have been sold into India’s red-light district over the last decade. • Over 10,000 children between the ages of six and fourteen are currently in brothels in Sri Lanka.

Human trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises because it is relatively low risk with high profit potential. Criminal organizations are increasingly attracted to human trafficking because, unlike drugs, humans can be sold repeatedly

According to the U.S. State Department, human trafficking is one of the greatest human rights challenges of this century, both in the United States and around the world. As followers of Christ, we cannot ignore these horrific tragedies. We need to see that this is a reality in the world today and that the Bible condemns it. We are called to stand up against these evils

Ephesians 5:11 (ESV) 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

We've seen that the Bible condemns human trafficking and other forms of oppression. Next we need to understand that the Bible regulates slavery.

As we saw in Exodus 21 earlier, God mandates physical protection for slaves. Slaves abused by their masters were immediately to be set free and compensated for their injuries (Exod 21:16, 26–27). In addition, God requires financial provision for slaves. Leviticus 25:39–40 talks about impoverished Hebrew servants who sold themselves to a master, and it says the master must provide ample provision for the servant.

Likewise, 2 Samuel 9:9–10 talks about the economic rights of slaves, including the right of slaves to have other slaves. Many of these passages communicate a similar idea, namely, God ensures caring supervision of slaves

Leviticus 25 prohibits masters from ruling ruthlessly over their slaves, even giving slaves the right to enjoy the Sabbath. The Old Testament also gives us examples of close, caring relationships between slaves or servants and their masters

Finally, we see that God promotes (and in some ways guarantees) eventual freedom from slavery

Several passages in the Old Testament prohibit masters from keeping slaves for more than six years, unless the slave consented to it

All the slaves in Israel would be released in the seventh year of each seven-year cycle so that slavery would not be a perpetual state for anyone. God provided other ways to keep people out of slavery:

He commanded the poor to be provided for during harvest times . • He commanded Israelites to lend generously to the poor without interest . • He instructed that all of a person's debts be canceled in the seventh year in order to guard against poverty .

God's promotion of freedom for slaves is a foretaste of the coming heavenly reality when, in the new creation, slavery and the poverty that fuels slavery will be no more. For that reason Paul encouraged slaves in 1 Corinthians 7:21 who could become free to avail themselves of the opportunity.

1 Corinthians 7:20–24 (ESV) 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.

With that context lets look again at our passage today.

1 Timothy 6:1–2 (ESV) 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.

When Paul addresses Timothy in verses 1–2, he is writing to the pastor of a church where there is likely tension between slaves and masters. The Bible encourages slaves who are forced to live in this imperfect situation in several ways. They are to honor unbelieving masters

That Paul is referring to non-Christian masters in verse 1 is clear from the fact that he made a contrast between unbelieving masters and Christian masters in verse 2. Slaves should treat their unbelieving masters as “worthy of all respect”; after all, they too are created in the image of God

The word “respect” here might also be translated “honor,” and it comes from the same root as the command in 5:3, where Paul said to “honor widows”

Paul wanted slaves to honor their masters. Slaves were to honor unbelieving masters “so that God’s name and His teaching will not be blasphemed”

Let’s break this purpose clause down into two parts. First, slaves act this way for the glory of God.

This is the motivation that drove Paul, and it drives all of Scripture (1 Cor 10:31). In 1 Timothy we’ve already seen this in several forms. For example, we pray for all people, and we honor widows because this pleases God (2:3; 5:4). Elders must have a good reputation so that God’s name is not brought to disrepute (3:7).

Paul’s deepest concern in addressing the conduct of slaves was for the glory of God to be made known, particularly before unbelieving masters. These unbelieving masters should see the grace of God in the lives of slaves who had become followers of Christ.

There’s a sense in which Paul’s words apply to all followers of Christ who have unbelieving employers. If you profess to follow Christ, you should honor your employer so that they might see the glory of God in you. Everything you do at work is a representation of your God, so work hard and work well. Even when it’s not easy, we are to obey, for Peter said elsewhere,

1 Peter 2:18–20 (ESV) 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. 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.

Whether you’re a student or an employee, remember that every time you turn in a project, hand in an assignment, make a decision, or take an action, you are to reflect the glory of God.

There is another related goal in the way slaves honor masters: for the advancement of the gospel

Titus 2:9–10 (ESV) 9 Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

This is a beautiful way to describe the goal of obedience—so that we may “adorn” the gospel. Paul’s exhortation has a missionary motivation. Unbelieving masters should see the hard work of believers and be drawn to the glory of God and the fruit of the gospel. Christians should view their jobs as serving this great purpose.

These greater purposes that Paul speaks of remind us that Christianity is not primarily aimed at social reform

If the purpose of Christianity was to change societal structures, then we would not expect Paul to speak like he has been in this letter or his other writings. Instead, we would expect him to exhort the Ephesian church to work against the system of slavery, but Paul told slaves to live for the salvation of their masters

That’s because Christianity is primarily aimed at personal redemption. So that, as people are redeemed, societal structures begin to be transformed.

The primary focus of God's Word is not how to make a sinful world perfect by fighting social wrongs in a fallen world....God's Word is focused on how men and women surrendered to God can bring Glory to God in the midst of those societal wrongs. We are not here to fix every societal sin, we are here to show a sinful society the way home....

The key is the heart of the people. That is the primary way the Bible addresses slavery—by aiming for personal redemption and personal transformation.

Redeemed individuals are formed into a community of believers who are one in Christ, who love and support one another regardless of whether they are Jews, Gentiles, slaves, or freemen

When the gospel begins to transform people like this, slavery is seen in a much different light. As one writer put it, the gospel lays “the explosive charge ... that ultimately—although sadly, belatedly—leads to detonation, and the destruction of slavery” altogether (Harris, *Slave of Christ*, 68).

If slaves are to adorn the gospel in the way they treat their unbelieving masters, how should they treat a master who is a believer? It seems that some slaves were taking advantage of their Christian masters, thinking that they no longer had an obligation to keep their agreements to serve. But Paul says that having a believing master is all the more reason to serve him with joy and hard work

In verse 2 the apostle says that instead of being disrespectful to believing masters, slaves “should serve them better, since those who benefit from their service are believers and dearly loved.” Slaves are to work wholeheartedly in such situations and avoid slacking off

The same holds true for Christian employees in our own day. They should not take advantage of brothers and sisters in Christ who have authority over them in the workplace. Instead, they are to serve selflessly. This kind of selfless service is a fruit of gospel transformation

Ultimately, given everything we've seen so far, the Bible redeems slavery. By that I mean that God's Word takes slavery, a product of sin, and turns it into a powerful image of God's goodness

It is particularly important that we understand clearly what God meant when He spoke of slavery, because it defines something about our Messiah and defines our relationship with Him.. Jesus emptied Himself and became a man....well look at what the Scripture really says.

Philippians 2:5–7 (ESV) 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.

The word “slave” in Philippians 2 comes from the same word we see in 1 Timothy 6:1—*doulos*. Christ took the form of a slave. Jesus took this posture in John 13:4–5 when He wrapped a garment around His waist and washed His disciples' feet. And Mark 10:45 says something similar with regard to the purpose for Jesus' coming:

Mark 10:45 (ESV) 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

That is the gospel in a nutshell. Jesus willingly emptied Himself and came to serve and ultimately die for us. He was while on earth, a bondservant of the Father.

Consider the beauty of Christ and the gospel reality that our Master has become a servant. Once He dies for us, all authority on earth is given to Him and He is Lord of all.....

The essence of Christianity is that our Master came to serve and so, in turn, we gladly become His slave. Not against our will but our choice....fully surrendered as His slave until the day we are all set free.

The word Paul often uses to describe himself at the beginning of his letters is this same word—*doulos*—translated as “servant” or “slave.” A slave is one who belongs to another and is under the authority of another.

Romans 1:1 (NASB) Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

That was the way Paul wanted to be identified, and it's the way every follower of Christ should want to be identified. We are slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ, and unlike the sinful pictures of slavery we see in the world, slavery and service to the Lord Jesus is glorious freedom!

But the reality is that we are all slaves...slaves to something or should I say someone.

At the end of the day, the question is not whether we are slaves but whose slaves we are.

John 8:34–36 (ESV) 34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Romans 6:10–11 (ESV) 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Either we will serve sin and Satan or we will serve the King of kings. But the result of our sinful nature is that we will choose to become slaves to something or someone. We can choose God or we can choose the cafeteria plan that Satan offers, you can be slaves to money, pride, power, influence, materialism, sexual desires, substances, arrogance, alcohol....Satan doesn't care which one you pick...just don't choose to be a slave to Jesus and honor Him.

The very role that Jesus outlined for our relationship with Him is one of the Master and Slave. Nothing like America in 1860. Our Master is one of love....who only plans the best for us....who dotes over us...who loves us unconditionally and gave His life for us.

Jesus is our Master....we have chosen to be His slaves. He is benevolent, kind, generous, gracious, merciful and outpouring love.

So when we read the Bible and see slavery, we must not be theologically ignorant like Southern Pastors. Southern Slave owners used Scripture to keep illiterate Christian men and women under forced bondage and torture. Southern Pastors were for the most part deplorable.

The power of the pulpit in the 1860 was huge. So influential that they are largely responsible for stirring up the emotions of slave owners, generating fear, promoting racism and causing the Civil War. People enslaved to Satan will do horrible things and try to justify them by claiming God supports them. That is what false teachers do.

Obviously this was a problem for the early Church at Ephesus. When the Scriptures were written, no one could fathom what Satan had planned for the 1860's and expanding through today in the sex trade industry.

Many false teachers in Ephesus and today were claiming to be surrendered to Christ....but actually they are slaves to Satan.

So when people ask me..."You have studied the civil war...does God approve of slavery?" My answer is always....Yes and I am honored to be His slave. But, I tell them, what we experienced in the Civil War era was not slavery. It was the racially driven kidnapping, oppression, torture and often murder of a people carried out by those who are enslaved themselves to Satan.

To use the term slavery for what happened in our nation in 1860 is too kind. What happened here was pure unadulterated hatred based on racism and that has never been supported by God.

The entire story of the Jewish Nation began with God freeing His people from this type of racially driven oppression in Egypt.

God is always against oppression and particularly racially driven oppression. He was against it in Egypt...in Rome...In the Confederacy...in Germany...in the Red light districts across the world...This type of slavery has various forms...but it all comes from one source...Satan. And God not only opposes him but has destroyed him.

Jesus came because He hates the spiritual oppression of God's people

Jeremiah 30:8–9 (ESV) 8 “And it shall come to pass in that day, declares the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off your neck, and I will burst your bonds, and foreigners shall no more make a servant of him. 9 But they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.

Luke 4:17–19 (ESV) 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

All Christians should always strive to set at liberty those who are being oppressed. That is what the preachers of the South should have been preaching...they should have led the nation to abolish racial atrocities and instead caused one of the greatest. God’s word is crystal clear.... All men are created equal, and Jesus came to set all men free.

John 8:36 (ESV) 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Let's Pray