

4) Slaves Of Christ & Righteousness

- A) The clear appeal of Scripture is for followers of Christ to be "slaves to righteousness." Our relationship with Jesus Christ is to produce fruitful obedience, which replaces our own selfishness and self-will (Romans 6:16-19).

- B) The slavery to which Paul refers in Colossians 3:22 & 4:1 is clearly cultural, part of the time period.[†] Within our culture, the "employer/employee" relationship should be kept in mind.

- C) Applying these principles to the vocation in which we find ourselves, and doing so in a manner which serves Christ first and ("the") man second is clearly in mind (Colossians 3:23).

- D) In our vocational service (what we do at work), we are to serve "not with external service" (NIV, "when their eye is on you" obscures (ironically) the concept). The idea is that we are to serve from the inside of our hearts, not on "just what the eye can see" (Colossians 3:22).

- E) Our motivation is not to be working for a paycheck, or working to please another person, or even working to please ourselves, but simply to find satisfaction in pleasing the Lord with a sincere heart (3:22).

- F) This motivation is intensified when we work for an employer who doesn't know Jesus Christ (Colossians 4:5).

[†] The relationship is *κατὰ σάρκα*, "according to the flesh," as in Ephesians 6:5 (cf. Philemon 16, *ἐν σαρκί*). It belongs to the world-order which was present at the time of Paul. In the higher and abiding relationship which is theirs in Christ, believing slaves and masters are brothers. This is the new relationship which swallows the old. (Compiled from various sources, especially *Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians*, by F.F. Bruce, pg. 168, from *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*.)

Vocational Worship

Long Beach Alliance Church • October 14th, 2007 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**WHATEVER YOU DO, DO YOUR WORK
HEARTILY, AS FOR THE LORD RATHER
THAN FOR MEN, KNOWING THAT FROM
THE LORD YOU WILL RECEIVE THE
REWARD OF THE INHERITANCE. IT IS
THE LORD CHRIST WHOM YOU SERVE.
~COLOSSIANS 3:23-24 (NASB)**

1) Does The Bible Condone Slavery?

- A) After speaking to wives (Colossians 3:18), husbands (3:19), children (3:20), and fathers/disciplinarians (3:21), the next family relationship which is addressed is to "slaves" (3:22).

- B) Since there are only instructions to slaves, and no rebuke or condemnation toward the institution of slavery, does this imply that God condones slavery?

2) Jesus Christ And Slavery

- A) Jesus Christ used slavery in his illustrations (e.g. Matthew 13:24-30) and his more direct ethical teaching (Luke 17:7-10, Matthew 10:24-25). Jesus also used slavery to illustrate personal relationships (Mark 10:44).

- B) Notably, Jesus used slavery to illustrate the sinful heart (John 8:34), and servanthood in God's Kingdom (John 13:12-16).
- C) Jesus Christ also emphasized that His disciples/followers were "no longer slaves" because of their new relationship to God through Jesus Christ (John 15:13-15).
- D) Clearly though, slavery was a common part of Jesus' world (Luke 7:2ff). Even the religious establishment of Jesus' time supported and participated in slavery (Mark 14:47). There is a sense in which slaves and servants were interchangeable terms (Luke 7:7-10).

3) Post-Gospel Teaching On Slavery*

- A) The Apostle Paul, who wrote the bulk of post-Gospel material in the New Testament, normally referenced slaves/slavery in relation to sin or righteousness (Romans 6:16-19).

* Slavery in biblical times was very different than the American slavery of the late 1700's to mid-1800's which was rooted in racism. A basic problem with American slavery is that it violated the fundamental biblical truth that every person is created in the image of God. Supporters of slavery sought to relegate Africans to a lower status of humanity than themselves. This is clearly inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture (detailed in our outline). What was biblical slavery? Glad you asked... In biblical times individuals became slaves in a number of ways. They were taken captive in battles, they were enslaved because of their inability to pay their debts, they were born to parents who were slaves, or they sold themselves as slaves. Under the Mosaic Law an individual could obtain freedom from slavery in a number of ways... The law prescribed five ways for a Hebrew slave to obtain his freedom: (1) A defaulting debtor was to be freed in the seventh year (Exod 21, Deut 15); (2) one who had sold himself into slavery was to be released in the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:3); (3) a freeborn girl who had been sold by her father on condition that her master marry her or give her into marriage to one of his sons must be freed if the master should refuse to live up to the condition of the sale (Exod 21:7-11); (4) any Hebrew could be freed at any time if purchased by a near kinsman (Lev 25); and (5) if a slave received an injury to his person he was to be released (Exod 21:26-27). In the New Testament several passages set forth guidelines for believers regarding slavery: 1 Corinthians 7:20-24; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; 1 Peter 2:18-21. These verses helped present a spiritual perspective to an established social institution. The passages basically challenged servants or slaves to be submissive to their masters and masters to treat their slaves with justice and fairness. (Compiled from various sources, especially *A Biblical and Cultural Study of the Problem of Racism*, by Larry A. Mercer, pgs. 91-93 from *Bibliotheca Sacra Journal*, Volume 153, Number 609 (January 1996).

- B) Paul also recognized the institution of slavery in society, and regularly provided instructions for slaves (Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3:22, 1st Corinthians 7:20-24, etc.).
- C) While Paul called on followers of Christ to be "slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:16-19), he also noted (like Jesus) that when a person is brought into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, they are not brought as a slave, but adopted as a son/daughter of the King (Galatians 4:4-7).
- D) One of the best sources of information on a Christian perspective on slavery is the short book of Philemon. Philemon was a follower of Christ in Colossae who owned a slave named Onesimus (cf. Colossians 4:9).
- E) Onesimus ran away from Philemon, and then became a believer under Paul's ministry (Philemon 10-12). Onesimus probably stole money/goods before he fled (Philemon 18).
- F) Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon, but appeals that Onesimus is now more than just a slave, and should be treated as a "beloved brother" (Philemon 13-16). In essence, Paul appeals for Onesimus' freedom (Philemon 19-20).
- G) Paul's appeal for freedom is based on the understanding that all men have equality in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11). While Scripture's focus is on equality in God's Kingdom (and not on Satan's earthly kingdom), the clear teaching of Scripture is on this perfect ideal.
- H) To summarize, the Bible recognizes slavery as a social institution, but God's design is freedom and equality.