

Adult Bible Study | Christ the King

Handout for Book of Philemon

Slavery in the Bible

(Quotes from Lutheran Study Bible, p.101)

“The Scriptures do not endorse or promote the practice of holding other human beings as personal property. The Bible typically treats slavery in a negative light. “Freedom” through God’s saving grace is a dominant theme in both testaments.”

Slavery in the Old Testament

- Most prominent: Israelites’ ~430 years of Egyptian slavery, from which God rescued
- In Israel:
 - o **Genesis 17:12-14** ¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, ¹³ both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”
 - o **Exodus 12:43-45** ⁴³ And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, ⁴⁴ but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. ⁴⁵ No foreigner or hired worker may eat of it.
 - o **Exodus 21:1-11** “Now these are the rules that you shall set before them. 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. ⁵ But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ ⁶ then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.
⁷ “When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. ⁸ If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her. ⁹ If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. ¹⁰ If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. ¹¹ And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.



Slavery in the New Testament

- *“In the Roman world, slaves could serve in a variety of positions (from chain gang to cook, from hairdresser to obstetrician). Roman slaves quite often held positions of great power and responsibility.*

“Slavery in the Roman world was not associated with the oppression of any particular race. Slaves were most often prisoners of war taken from foreign lands or non-Roman individuals sold by their families to repay a debt. Fair-skinned Britons and blond Germanic peoples were included in their number.

“Typical Roman slaves hoped for release (manumission) at age 30, the usual age for discharge. While in service to their master, slaves could earn wages, buy and sell property, enter into contract, and own slaves themselves. Frequently, Roman free persons sold themselves into slavery in order to pay debts, while non-Roman persons sold themselves in order to eventually obtain Roman citizenship.”

- In Scripture:
 - **I Timothy 1:8-11** 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, ¹¹ in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.
 - **I Corinthians 7:21-24** 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.
 - **Ephesians 6:5-9** 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, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 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.

