

Text: Various
Title: Slavery and the Bible, Parts 1, 2, and 3
Truth: The Bible contains many regulations and prohibitions about slavery.
Date/Location: Sunday February 14, 2016 at FBC; November 4-6, 2016 at Salem Bible

Introduction

The Bible speaks about slavery, regulates the behavior of slaves and masters, but does not clearly or plainly prohibit slavery. Let's study to understand better.

I. Types of Slavery

The primary reason that the Bible speaks of slavery without an outright prohibition of it is that the primary kind of slavery that is mentioned in the Bible is not the same as the kind of slavery that was practiced in the United States up to the 1860s. The chart below identifies the four major types of slavery to help us better understand the topic.

Type of Slavery	Why it was Practiced, i.e. Motive . What Advantage?	Justification – Why it was Thought to be OK?
Chattel Slavery – 18 th -19 th Centuries in U.S.	Economic – Owners make more profit Advantage: Owner	Racial – one race thinks itself higher than another
Forced Labor or Marriage, Sex Trafficking, etc.	Exploitation of slave for labor or personal pleasure of the oppressor Advantage: Oppressor	Just because someone has the power to do it to another?
Indentured Servitude	Economic – Impoverished helped out of debt Advantage: Servant and Master	Economic – Mutual Advantage
Voluntary Servitude	Convenience, Personal Reasons Advantage: Servant and Master	Mutual Consent – Perhaps to elevate servant's status

Perhaps some helpful words to remember these slavery categories are: *property*, *prisoner*, *poor*, and *voluntary*. I am using *slavery* in a general way in the opening part of this message; I include *servanthood* in the idea for now.

A. The various types of slavery can be examined from the perspective of “what is the cause or reason for the slavery?” From the perspective of the slave, it could be that I was a slave because...

- 1. Of my **race**. When in the American culture we hear the word *slavery*, our minds immediately think of the type of slavery that was practiced prior to the Civil War in the 1700s and 1800s. What would a slave then say if you asked,

“Why has this happened to you?” His or her answer would be, “Because I’m black. That’s it.”

2. I was **exploited**. Someone took advantage of me, cheated me, kidnapped me, or otherwise had some advantage that forced me into labor for the master. Perhaps I was a prisoner of war. Slaves were considered spoils of war in many cultural practices.
 3. Of my **economic condition**. Such slaves were generally poor people, but could also include well-educated. Perhaps these folks wanted the security of someone to manage the household affairs, or they needed support because of previous circumstances that impoverished them.
 4. I **volunteered** to be. People in this condition wanted to stay with their master and people in the entire household. Perhaps this was because they could not “make it” on their own, and the skilled management of the household by another was a help to them to live successfully.
- B. The various types of slavery can also be examined from the perspective of “what is the justification for this slavery – why is it thought to be right?” This undoubtedly would be the view of the master or owner.
1. **Race**. The thought was that some races are inferior to others.
 2. **Power**. The master held power over a person because he is stronger, or won a war against them, and he planned to use that power as he wished.
 3. **Benevolence**. Perhaps the master held an attitude that the poor slave needed help (whether he wanted help or not), or perhaps both parties agreed that a mutual benefit would come from the situation.
 4. **Mutual consent**. This amounted to an employment kind of situation where the employer provided more than just wages, but a place to stay, food, etc. Household servants of this sort could become integral parts of the family and even receive inheritance, and have other privileges.
- C. A third way to view it is from the perspective of what the owner/master gained. Perhaps the master was a benevolent fellow, but with property slaves in the United States, the primary motive was economic, not benevolent.
1. By providing very minimal necessities such as shelter, clothing, and food, it was apparently possible to save money that would go to wages to pay for the long hours of work in the fields. But note some data that I found. In 1850, an average slave might cost around \$400 (\$11,700 today); in 1860, about \$800 (\$22,000 or so today). A prime fieldhand was about \$1200 (\$35,000); and a skilled working slave was \$2000 (\$58,800) [4, 7]. Although a slave did not get an hourly wage, the purchase cost plus the cost of providing room and board, and confining the slave, seems like it would make it barely profitable to keep a slave compared to hiring help as needed, unless the slaves had children and the fixed cost of purchase was eliminated. But then again, slaves worked probably one and a half to two times the hours per day than a hired man. So

the master got more work for his money. This reality drove much of the labor market in the south prior to the Civil War, especially in the profitable cotton fields. A Bible example of economic gain from a slave is found in Acts 16:16.

2. Besides economic motivation, masters or slave holders may gain personal pleasure from slaves, as in the human trafficking that is ongoing today.
- D. There is a fourth perspective, and that has to do with the time issue: how long did the slavery last?
1. **Temporary** slavery. This is the case with many economic slavery situations, where the slave is not permanently “out of luck.” We might consider the slave in this situation as “rented” or “leased” until the term of his service was up, or his debt was paid back. In other words, they worked off their debt. The servant would be a *hired servant*.
 2. **Permanent** property slavery. This is also called *chattel* slavery, because that word means *personal property*. It refers to the kind of slavery where one human being treats another as something owned, whether of another race or not. In this kind of slavery, a slave was seen as the property of another person. This property could be bought and sold, passed down through inheritance, etc.

Now, we turn to the Bible’s teaching on slavery. It has quite a few intricacies that are difficult to figure out, partly because of our chronological distance from the culture of the Ancient Near East. We will start with some straightforward points and move to the more difficult ones.

II. The Bible Condemns Race-Based Slavery

- A. The sort of slavery that checkered the history of the United States, justified as it was on the idea that one race is inferior to another, is **prohibited** by the overall theology of the Bible. To be clear, what I mean is this: If you say that you are justified in holding slaves because their race is inferior, then I am saying that you are wrong because **there is no such thing as an inferior race**. It is a false statement to say “the Bible permitted race-based slavery in the past, but we have overcome it now and realize that the Bible was wrong.” The Scriptures *never* permitted that kind of slavery.
- B. Race-based slavery is prohibited by the Bible’s **doctrine of the image of God in man**. God created humanity to carry his image and likeness, starting with Adam in Genesis 1:26 and 5:1. Mankind still exists in that likeness according to Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9. People of any color have share God’s image in common.
- C. Race-based slavery is also prohibited because **God created all people from Adam** and Eve. There is only **one single human race**. Acts 17:26 says that “From **one** man [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth.” God created one man and one woman, and from the one man sin entered the entire race (Romans 5:12). Genesis 3:20 teaches us that Eve was the mother of all people. All people of all ethnicities are equally part of the human race. Slavery

cannot be justified by arguing that one is less human than another, whether because of skin color, eye shape, other matters of appearance; nationality or cultural practices; gender; whether Black, Jew, or Asian; sin patterns; or size, location, level of development, or dependency. Those things don't change the humanity of the person. We have the example of the early church in Antioch which had among its prominent members a prophet and/or teacher named Simon who was also called Niger, which means one who is dark-skinned or dark-complexioned (Acts 13:1). He was a leader in the church!

- D. New Testament teaching emphasizes and amplifies this truth by reminding us that **those who are in Christ are of equal spiritual standing**, whether Jews, Gentiles, men, women, slave, free, rich, poor, etc. (1 Cor. 12:13, Galatians 3:28, Eph. 6:8, Col. 3:11). This equal standing does not diminish the fact that there are different gifts, functions, and assigned roles in the church.
- E. The same teaching applies to genocide (as against the Jews in World War II), or infanticide (as in the "exposing" of infants and modern-day abortion).
- F. The practice of race-based slavery as practiced in the U.S. led to other injustices like forbidding marriage, prohibiting slaves to learn to read and write, and the impossibility of manumission.

III. The Bible Condemns All Human Trafficking

- A. The method of implementing U.S. slavery in history was to kidnap people from their homeland and take them somewhere as slaves. This happens today (ISIS).
- B. Human trafficking is prohibited by the **Bible's teaching against man-stealing, or kidnapping. In the Old Testament this crime was assigned the death penalty.** See Exodus 21:16, Deuteronomy 24:7, 1 Timothy 1:8-10. Both slave trader and purchaser were liable to punishment whether he was actively in possession of the slave or had already sold him. In 1 Timothy 1:10, the word is translated as *kidnapper* by several translations, but the NIV renders it as *slave trader*.
- C. Jacob's son Joseph was sold as a slave by his own brothers. For justice to have been served, Joseph's brothers should have received the death penalty. Joseph later had the power to execute that penalty upon them, but he exercised mercy instead (read in Genesis 37:12-36, 45:1-15, 50:15-21).
- D. What African slave traders did in rounding up slaves to take to the United States was a sin legitimately punishable by death (God directed so; therefore I believe it was a righteous thing to do). That tells you something—that God is serious about protecting the individual's dignity, freedom, family and community connections. Therefore, it is entirely wrong for us to be confused about the Bible's use of the term 'slave' and somehow think that God was ok with "it." What is "it"? "It" was not the man-stealing, kidnapping, buying and selling, property-type of slavery. God was NEVER OK with that, no matter how someone tries to justify it. There are other types of 'slavery' in the Bible, but the kidnapping, chattel, race-based type is not it.

Text: Various

Title: Slavery and the Bible, Part 2

Truth: The Bible contains many regulations and prohibitions about slavery.

Date/Location: Sunday February 28, 2016 at FBC; November 4-6, 2016 at Salem Bible

IV. The New Testament Regulates Slaves and Masters

- A. What led me down this whole path of study was our interaction with slave and master regulations in Colossians 3:22-4:1. Similar teachings are found in 1 Corinthians 7:21-23, Ephesians 6:5-9, and 1 Timothy 6:1-2.
- B. What we must recognize is that, given the previous two sections (in Part 1), it is impossible that the New Testament could give approval to the historical U.S. chattel-based, race-based, human-trafficking slavery. That type was outlawed from ancient times because of the kidnapping/man-stealing component of it and its rejection of the image of God in all mankind. We put that issue behind us, then, and move on to what the New Testament says in its own context. We need to let Scripture speak for itself, and therefore let God speak for Himself.

The reality in Roman culture was that many people were enslaved. The Christian minority could do nothing about that, particularly if they were slaves, and many were. They could not change the law; they could not rise up and kill their masters (in a "Christian" way?); they could not petition the government. Those slave-owners who became Christians also were subject to the laws of the land, but would obviously have more leeway in the treatment of their slaves. In the long run, some equitable arrangement could be made for the owner to manumit the slaves, but some remuneration would likely be necessary so that the slave would pay for his own freedom or citizenship documents. I know, it is not "fair" but no one in life is promised a fair shake. In the meanwhile, the New Testament gives regulations that slaves and masters were to follow so that Christianity would not be reviled, but rather be respected by the society (1 Tim. 6:1-2).

C. Regulations on the Master.

1. Treat slaves with justice and fairness, because you also have a Master in heaven, and you want to be treated well by Him! Justice did *not* require the master to release a slave immediately. I surmise then that the type of slavery envisioned by Paul here is not a cruel bondage of whips and property status.
2. Treat slaves in the same way that you want them to work for you, with a good attitude. Don't threaten them, because you know God is watching from heaven, and he doesn't pick masters as his favorites!

D. Regulations on the Slave.

1. Respect your master so that God's name may be honored, since you profess to be a child of God.
2. Do so all the more if the master is a believer, knowing that those who are benefitting from your service are brothers. Good work on the slave's part

could advance the cause of Christ.

3. Be sincerely obedient to the master, and work hard with a good attitude as if serving the Lord, not men.
 4. Look forward to an inheritance from God, not from men. This attitude can propel you through a lot of life's unpleasant things: life and its injustices are temporary problems, and the "real" life we await is in eternity future.
- E. Freedom for the Slave. 1 Corinthians 7:21-23 is powerful in its teaching about freedom for slaves. The point of the surrounding verses is to say that if you were called into salvation as a circumcised man, an uncircumcised one, or as a slave, it doesn't matter. Continue on as you were. Verse 20 says each person should remain in the circumstances he was in when he became a Christian and not seek to get out of those—necessarily.
1. However, unlike the circumcision situation, Paul says that **if you are saved as a slave and can gain your freedom, you should do so**. The bigger point is that as a slave, you are free in Christ; and as a freeman, you are a slave to Christ. This status—liberty in Christ and a slave to His righteousness—is far more important than any human standing you might find yourself in. However, it is good to be free. Being free provides opportunities for service to God that are not available to the slave.
 2. Furthermore, verse 23 adds that we were bought with a price; we must not therefore become slaves of men. This is a command—do NOT become slaves of men. We belong to someone else (God), **and if we sell ourselves to another person, we diminish our freedom to serve and worship God**. Having another master is going to complicate your life and service to God.
 3. The **application of this is that righteous slaveholders must provide a path to freedom for their slaves**. That may include the slave laboring a certain amount to “pay back” his purchase, or other fair terms. Remember, the master is to treat the slaves with justice: he is not required to create a freeloader. What about the economic disadvantage that the master would experience? Economics aren't the most important part of life—and Christians give up economics every time they offer money to the church. Our faith has to have some real-life implications, including for the pocketbook! Because we are Christians, we have to forgo some money-making opportunities and some benefits in life because we put our money where our faith is.
- F. The Bible does not condone slavery—even of this less severe type. It recognizes the reality of sin in the area of social status and slavery. A similar thing is true of divorce. Divorce is never condoned in the Bible, because it and the circumstances that lead to it are sinful. However, God understands the evil intent of the human heart and knows that people will divorce anyway. Therefore, some further protections are put in place to permit the civil power to regulate sin so there is not a free-for-all, which would be terribly damaging.

V. Slavery in Ancient Rome

To help me understand something of the condition of Onesimus, I read up on slavery in Roman times. French author Jérôme Carcopino writes about the condition of slaves in the city of Rome during the period from the middle of the first century to the middle of the second (about 50-150 AD) [5, pp. 56-61]. I also benefited from a short treatment by Kent in his Colossians commentary [6]. Some key points they raise include the following (which are certainly not without exceptions).

- A. Roman cultural practice and laws (in the main) promoted the welfare of its slaves. There were abuses, as we should not be surprised to learn, because of the sin-cursed nature of mankind. The lives of some slaves were fairly wretched because of their work in mines or galleys or other labor-intensive jobs.
- B. Slaves were often offered incentives toward purchase of freedom. Sick slaves were freed (manumitted). Formalities surrounding manumission were slowly relaxed so it became easier and easier for masters to do so. Becoming freed was a realistic expectation after 10 to 20 years of work.
- C. Slaves were allowed to worship as they pleased.
- D. Masters were not allowed to send their slaves to the amphitheater and the lions without a court judgment; nor to sell them to gladiator dealers. Slaves were protected from masters murdering them, at least at later times in the period under study.
- E. **It was a sign of social refinement and status to treat one's slaves with great care.** They were often important members of the household. **Another sign of social status was the number of slaves you had freed: the more the better.**
- F. Slaves were almost on par with free citizens in many ways. But runaway slaves were not treated well.
- G. One study suggests that about 80% of the population of Rome were emancipated slaves or descendants of such [5, p. 61]. Others suggest a much lower number, but still up to 1/3 of the population [6, p. 177].
- H. Slavery came about from war or kidnapping. Later after such activities were curtailed, breeding of slaves was a common source of more slaves. Abandoned children also could be raised as slaves. Other times, people sold themselves into slavery as a way to better their lot in life because they had provisions made for them, including security, good jobs, and even education.
- I. **Slavery was simply assumed in ancient times.** It was a cultural practice that was fixed in the minds of all in the culture. A much more hierarchical view of one's culture was normal and expected compared to our western and somewhat flatter view of culture.
- J. One of the reasons that I wanted to do this study was to understand what type of slavery Onesimus was in before he left his master Philemon. From what can be

ascertained, it was this Roman type of slavery we have discussed. Details about how he came into that state are unfortunately not available. As a Christian master, we can surmise that Philemon was good to his slave(s), and Paul was encouraging him to treat his slave even better than he deserved after mistreating his master.

VI. The Old Testament Regulated Israelite Servants and Masters

- A. The importance of slave laws is seen in that God spoke of it to Moses in the next chapter after the 10 commandments!
- B. Exodus 21:2-6. A Hebrew servant could be purchased, but only kept for six years. (See also Deut. 15:12-18.)
 - 1. **He was purchased for the value of the labor he could provide the master in those six years.** He did not have to build up a savings fund to pay for his exit, as did Roman slaves, but was automatically released free in the seventh year. See Deut. 15:12, which applies to men or women servants.
 - 2. I believe this means that debt-credit would only be extended up to six years in valuation because that is all that could be gained back from the person if he had to be sold as a servant. This tells us something about the level of acceptable indebtedness that a person could take on.
 - 3. There were additional regulations concerning his leaving with or without his wife and children, depending on their origin (see Gen. 29:20, 27, 30 for a related situation). If he wanted to stay permanently, he could do that, but a special ritual had to be observed before the judges in their area.
 - 4. The six-year release requirement could be waived if the servant testified with witnesses that he loved his master and wanted to stay permanently. Then, after visiting with the city judges, he would have his ear pierced to mark him as a permanent servant.
 - 5. The Law specified that when the slave was released he was to be furnished with supplies and not let go empty-handed. This would serve to give him a good start in his new free life.
 - 6. It is likely that other more "lenient" arrangements could be made if there was mutual agreement by the master, but the laws provided the basic rules or "minimum standards."
 - 7. The people of Israel knew what it was to serve in bondage with rigor in Egypt (Exodus 1:13-14), and God reminded them that they were not to forget that fact in their treatment of their own servants or slaves (Lev. 25:42).
 - 8. The people of Israel disregarded this law and oppressed the slaves by keeping them longer (Jeremiah 34:8-17). God promised to destroy them for this blatant going back on their earlier correction. You oppress servants or slaves? God will "oppress" you!

Text: Various

Title: Slavery and the Bible, Part 3

Truth: The Bible contains many regulations and prohibitions about slavery.

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VI. (cont) The Old Testament Regulated Israelite Servants and Masters

- C. Exodus 21:7-11 deals with the subject of a female slave who would be a wife of the purchaser or the purchaser's son. Coupled with the dowry system of marriage, this could have been an economic benefit to a poor family. In verse 8 the idea of redemption is introduced, by which a female servant-wife could be repurchased by an appropriate "redeemer in the family." However, it raises questions about polygamy, particularly in the case described in v. 10. I believe that God in this Scripture regulates behavior that He knows will happen, but does not condone sinful behavior. I also would add that it is hard for us to understand the cultural context of this. Even if we know a few facts about the culture, we have not grown up in it to understand it very well. It would not surprise me if this law were an advance over the practice current in the culture at the time.
- D. There seems to be a property notion to Hebrew servanthood, as mentioned in Exodus 21:20-21 where it says at the end, "for he is his property."
1. If the master lost his temper, for instance, and killed his slave, then he would be punished. The punishment is called "to be avenged." The nature of the "avengement" is not specified, but vengeance was not a pleasant situation (Gen. 4:15, 4:24; Lev. 26:25; Numbers 31:2). It was not to be carried out individually apart from the objective and level-headed judgment of the law, as that would be too easy to abuse and would not exhibit love (Lev. 19:18).
 2. If the intent was not murder, indicated by the initial survival of the servant, then the penalty for this manslaughter was the loss of the slave. We should also notice the previous two verses, Exodus 21:18-19, as they specify that a man who is injured is to be compensated for his injury. If a servant was injured, the owner lost the use of the servant and the servant had to go free (Exodus 21:26-27). That is, if the master hurt his slave, he was hurting himself, and affecting his own pocketbook.
 3. To the point about the servant being "property," the text of Exodus actually says this: "because his silver/money he is." **The servant is equivalent to money to the master. This is general word for money. It is *not* the word for property (like a property for a burial ground, Genesis 23:4), or personal property (Genesis 34:23). I think this is significant because it recognizes that Hebrews could not "own" other Hebrews as chattel. See Lev. 25:45 for the regular Hebrew word for "property" used of foreign slaves.**
- E. In Exodus 22:1-3 **a thief has to make restitution for his thievery. If he cannot, then he "shall be sold" into servanthood and this will pay the debt to the person**

from whom he stole. Then, he will have to work to pay off his debt. Should he escape, I presume that he would be returned to finish his term of servanthood to pay his debt back. If he stole for a need like food, there was a more righteous way for him to live—and that was in servanthood. In this case, servanthood is a form of punishment. Notice that slavery did not give cause for thieving (as in the case of Onesimus); rather, thievery gave cause for slavery! So what Onesimus did in taking from Philemon was neither a lawful nor a Christian thing to do. We should also note that constraining a thief to live as a servant for a while is a lot better than to sit him in a jail and make everyone else pay his support.

- F. According to Lev. 25:39-43, a man could voluntarily sell himself to escape poverty. This is a last resort, again like bankruptcy but not the shorter-term 6-year kind. Recall that Christians are told *not* to become the slaves of men (1 Cor. 7:23), so this should not be a first option for a modern Christian in the world.
1. The servant was to be released in the Jubilee or 50th year. So the longest time that a man could be in such servanthood would be 50 years, if he started in the year after the Jubilee year. If there were only 20 years left until the Jubilee, then he could sell himself for that remaining length of time.
 2. He could not be treated as a slave, but had to be treated as a hired servant. This was true even if he sold himself to a resident alien—a foreigner who lived in their midst (Lev. 25:47-55). That foreign owner was subject to the Mosaic Law because he was resident in Israel!
 3. The reason for kindly treatment was that **God** "owned" the servants (Lev. 25:55). They belonged to Him, not to a man. This is another principle (in addition to God's image in man and the prohibition against man-stealing) that prohibits slave-owning today. In the Christian era, the righteous view of mankind is not Jew versus Gentile, or any one race versus another. Rather, the proper view of mankind is flat—all people are made in the image of God. That is not "natural" if you look around the world. The "natural" tendency of people is to create hierarchies and abuse power and hold prejudices, but the opposite is way of the people of God (Matt. 20:25-26).
- G. The passage just prior to this one, Lev. 25:35-38, explains that the economic system under the Law was benevolent. Lending was encouraged to help a brother, but it could not be done with interest. This would help a brother avoid getting into a situation where he would have to sell himself into servanthood.
1. I believe that the application of interest-free lending today is that believers should lend to each other interest-free or at most charge interest equal to inflation (which is equivalent to the reduction in value of the face value of money over time in a fiat currency system and thus is effectively "interest free"). The situations where this applies include help to avoid poverty; *not* to purchase a new Mercedes or a big house—those are not needs!
 2. In Deut. 15:11, pure benevolence is encouraged because there would always be poor in the land. This reminds us that poverty will always be with us

because sin is always with us: whether poverty due to a person's own poor choices; or the oppression of another; or a systemic problem that cannot be blamed on an individual. Jesus said we would always have poor (Matthew 26:11).

VII. The Old Testament Regulated Foreign Slaveholding

- A. Leviticus 25:44-46 and Deut. 20:10-18 speak about slaves of other nations (non-Jews). **The Jews were permitted to capture or purchase foreign male and female slaves, and treat them as property, and they were inheritable. Jews were not allowed to treat Jews this way** (in other words, this passage is an exception clause to the preceding law). I speculate that being a slave in Israel was better than being a slave in a foreign land; at least the slave was closer to the true God and would likely be treated more humanely. For example, they got to rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10).
- B. Look at an example of voluntary slavery of this sort: the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:3-27). They choose freely to become enslaved rather than to die at the hands of Joshua's conquering army. (The issue of the conquest raises the hackles of some; we briefly note here that God is a God of justice as well as grace and He can pass a death sentence when He wills. The sin of the residents of that land was so bad that eliminating them would be like taking out Adolf Hitler before the end of World War II—easily justifiable in the consciences of most people.)
- C. We must note the law of Deut. 23:15-16. **A runaway slave who sought asylum with an Israelite was *not* to be turned back over to his master.** This most certainly applied to slaves held by foreign masters in foreign territories who sought help in Israel or even converted to her faith in God. It probably also applied to foreign slaves held by Israelites if inquiry was made and the master was found to be cruel. The Jews knew what hard bondage was all about, and they were not to turn someone over to that fate. God has compassion on the genuinely oppressed. This law is entirely different than the fugitive slave law of 1850 in the United States. Without the ability to recover runaway slaves, the master would have to be very careful how he treated his slaves, lest they leave!
- D. In Deut. 21:10-14, God regulates the taking of a foreign woman as wife who is a captive of war. Notice the length of time and the prohibition against treating her as a slave, which would reduce the sinful excesses of war that are committed in the heat of the moment.

VIII. A Very Bad Way to Justify Slavery in the Bible

- A. Some professing Christians have taught that God cursed Noah's son Ham, sent him to a tropical climate, and darkened his skin in punishment for what he did to Noah. Advocates for slavery have used this argument since early centuries after Christ to justify slavery, linking Ham to all black people. You can read what *actually* happened in Genesis 9:21-27.

- B. This is a *very bad* interpretation of Genesis 9. Review the passage carefully and you will see that (1) Ham did not uncover Noah, but rather Noah did it to himself in a drunken stupor; (2) God did not send Ham to a tropical climate; (3) God did not miraculously darken Ham's skin; and (4) God did not curse Ham at all: rather, Noah wished a curse upon Canaan, the son of Ham.
- C. The Scripture in Psalm 105:23, 27 and 106:22 uses the phrase 'land of Ham' to refer to Egypt. But it is not at all certain that Egyptians were 'black' in their skin color. There is actually evidence that they were relatively fair-skinned in appearance. Because of this, the whole argument falls apart.

We have to read the Bible carefully, otherwise we can get some very crazy ideas.

Conclusion

We understand from all this that God did not condemn all forms of poverty-slavery or even property slavery. There were ways that these institutions could be done righteously in the sight of the law of God. And such arrangements did provide benefit in some situations where utter poverty—because of sin—would be the rule of life without the help of some providing better living conditions. It could also be a beneficial alternative to a people-group being wiped out in a war.

See the MacArthur Study Bible Note in the foreword to Philemon: "The NT nowhere directly attacks slavery; had it done so, the resulting slave insurrections would have been brutally suppressed and the message of the gospel hopelessly confused with that of social reform. Instead, Christianity undermined the evils of slavery by changing the hearts of slaves and masters. By stressing the spiritual equality of master and slave (v. 16; Gal 3:28; Eph 6:9; Col 4:1; 1 Timothy 6: 1, 2), the Bible did away with slavery's abuses.

It has well been said that a consistent practice of Christianity throughout a society would make slavery impossible because of its high view of God and its elevated view of men and women as made in God's image. Its teaching that the laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7, 1 Tim. 5:18) demands that people be paid fairly for their work. Wages must not be withheld from the day laborer (Lev. 19:13, Deut. 24:15). Oppression in this matter is worthy of God's pronouncement of woe (Jer. 22:13, James 5:4, Deut. 15:9). One who has been given riches by God should not then withhold pay or benevolence from the needy.

This notion is similar to the idea that Christianity and all-out sexual immorality cannot co-exist happily in a society forever; nor Christianity and abortion. They will always be at odds with one another. On the Christian's side of this divide, we love those who oppose us, and want them to stop their destructive and immoral behavior. We try to convince them, with God's help, of the error of their ways and their need of the gospel of Christ to live right before God. On the opponent's side, I'm afraid that nothing will mollify them other than silencing or eliminating the Christian witness. As such, Christians are more tolerant than those who preach "tolerance."

We have to put slavery in its proper context. It is an important issue. However, it is not the most important. The most important by far is slavery to sin. To put it another way, there is something worse than being a slave or debt servant. And that worse thing is to be slave of sin, destined for eternal destruction in Hell. It is far better to be a slave of men if you are free in Christ and going to heaven for all eternity, than to go to Hell for all eternity and be free for the few years of your existence on earth.

Although slavery is not eliminated in the world, the chattel type is prohibited in all nations on the earth, thus proving the statement that slavery and Christianity cannot forever co-exist. This does not mean, however, that Christianity must jettison all forms of indentured servanthood, turn a blind eye to the economic/debt problems of those in society, or attempt to solve poverty only through the means of free handouts. The proper handling of such problems in a "Christian" society will have to be the subject of another message.

Unfortunately, very oppressive forms of slavery are making a comeback in certain places. Let us pray that they are not successful.

MAP

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Suggestion

Follow this teaching with a message on the slavery of sin and, perhaps from Philemon, the idea of imputation of sin and righteousness. Notice how Paul wants Philemon to treat Onesimus like Paul. Emphasize the notion of freedom from sin. Make sure that we eschew the idea of salvation as having to do with political or economic oppression (liberation theology).