

## What Does the Bible Teach About Slavery?

1. The issue of slavery is not something that we have to deal with in our culture, here in America. At one time it was a major issue. Thank God, it is not today. But, this is still an issue in many cultures even in the world today.
2. The word “slavery” does not appear in the King James Bible, but the concept of compulsory service of one person to another **does** exist. For the most part, the King James Bible uses the word “servant.” Jesus Himself took on Him the form of a servant.
3. Servanthood was embedded in the culture of Bible times. It was extremely common. It was not a racial issue, but an issue of a person's social and financial status. It wasn't uncommon for even doctors, lawyers, or politicians to be operating under the servanthood of another person. There was a caste system embedded in the culture.
4. Servanthood in Bible days and culture, for the most part, was not the same as the wicked slave trading that took place in the 17th and 18th centuries here in America. The compulsory service that we see in the Bible was not based on race or skin color.
  - Many times, compulsory service in the Bible was similar to people today going into the military. Once they sign on the dotted line, they become the property of the military, and they are told exactly what they must do and where they must go. Their service is compulsory. They cannot just choose to come and go, or leave when they want to. They are under the authority of the officer that is over them.
  - Illustration: A person commits crimes and has court-ordered community service. It is compulsory service.
5. As we will see, many times compulsory service in the Bible was an act of mercy to provide for the poor rather than an act of exploitation.

## What were some reasons why people may have found themselves to be servants?

1. You sold **yourself** to be a servant.
  - If you were poor and unable to provide for yourself and your family, you could choose to basically sell your services to another person. You became their property and gave up your rights. But, in turn, your family would be provided for.
  - A Jew could actually do this, and sell himself to another Jew under the Old Testament law. Leviticus 25:39-41
  - Israel could buy the services of foreigners, also. They couldn't go and kidnap them, and force them to be bondmen, but they could go and purchase their service (Leviticus 25:44-46). Exodus 12:45 speaks of foreigners and hired servants.
  - God even made provision for these bondmen to become proselytes into Israel if they so desired. They could be circumcised, participate in Israel's festivities and Passover, and were also given the weekly Sabbath rest.
  - A Jew could also sell himself to serve a rich Gentile. Leviticus 25:47

2. You stole from another person. Exodus 22:3
  - If you were a Jew and stole from another person, you had to make full restitution according to the Old Testament law. If you could not make it right, you became a servant to that other person until it was made right.
  - The longest a Jew could serve another person was 6 years, and in the seventh year (the year of jubilee), all servants were set free.
3. You could not pay your debts. Exodus 21:2-6
  - If you borrowed money and could not pay it back, you didn't just file bankruptcy and walk away from it under Old Testament law. You became a servant to the person you owed. Remember the verse, "*The borrower is servant to the lender?*"
  - Again, six years was the maximum you would be required to serve.
4. You simply chose this life.
  - If you were a servant to somebody else, but you found it to be a good life, and you were well provided for, you could choose to remain a servant to that person. Deuteronomy 15:16-17
  - This is why the word "servant" in the Bible does not **always** carry the idea of compulsory service. The word "servant" definitely carries the idea of subjection or subservience, sometimes involuntarily, but sometimes voluntarily.

#### **What are some biblical warnings about the issue of servanthood?**

1. A person could not be kidnapped and forced into slavery or sold as a slave. This was strictly forbidden, both in the Old and New Testaments. Kidnapping was punishable by death. Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7; 1 Timothy 1:10
  - Slave trading is associated with the heathen, and with Satan's policy of evil. Revelation 18:12-13
2. Foreign slaves who ran away from their Gentile masters were to be welcomed in Israel, and not returned to their masters. Deuteronomy 23:15-16
3. Servants were never to be treated with cruelty. Exodus 21; Ephesians 6:9

#### **What did the apostle Paul teach about the issue of servanthood?**

- As we said earlier in this lesson, Paul lived in a day and culture in which it was very common for people to have servants working for them.
  - Some of the reasons were legitimate (theft, unpaid debt, etc.), but some may not have been. Therefore, Paul gave guidelines and principles that would help a believer to show forth Christ whether he found himself a servant or free.
1. Glorify Christ and reflect His grace no matter your social status. 1 Corinthians 7:20-22
    - Every believer is **free** in Christ, and every believer should be a **servant** of Christ. So, no matter your outward social status, reflect the grace and life of Who you belong to, Jesus Christ!

- What is the application of this? You may be a CEO with 100 people working and serving under you, or you may be flipping burgers for minimum wage, but regardless of your outward position, both of you can reflect the same Jesus to those around you.
  - We are all saved under different situations and with different backgrounds. Some believers are called upon to serve the Lord in tough circumstances. Paul taught that your social status is not the issue. Christ in you is the issue.
2. Treat those who serve under you fairly and with respect. Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1
  3. If you are a servant, serve with a right attitude and a right work ethic, as if Jesus is your boss. Colossians 3:22-23; Ephesians 6:5-7; 1 Timothy 6:1-2 (yoke: you are forced to serve out of law or obligation); Titus 2:9-10

### **How does Paul's gospel impact the issue of servanthood?**

- The Bible approaches many cultural issues from an inside-out approach. The way you change culture is by changing the hearts of the people within the culture. This is what the gospel of grace and the doctrines of grace do. They change the way people think and act.
  - Paul gets to the very root of the issue by dealing with the overriding issues of love, grace, patience, kindness, etc. Here are some of the doctrines that Paul taught that would greatly impact the way a person thought about servanthood:
1. Paul taught that there are **no** social distinctions in the body of Christ.
    - There is no caste system. The ground is level at Calvary.  
1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11
  2. Paul taught that when a servant is saved, he should be treated not as a servant, but as a brother in Christ. Philemon 15-16
  3. Paul taught that God is no respecter of persons, and eternal rewards are given on an absolutely equal basis. Ephesians 6:8-9
  4. Paul taught that Christ was a servant (Philippians 2:7) and that he himself (Paul) was a servant (Romans 1:1; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Galatians 1:10; Philippians 1:1), and that all believers are ultimately servants of Christ, not men. 1 Corinthians 7:22-23

### **Concluding Thoughts:**

- All of these doctrines would ultimately lay an axe at the root of slavery and help to abolish the evils of slavery.
- When one reads Paul's writings, you will not find a verse calling for the abolition of slavery, just as you will not find a verse calling for the abolition of drugs, alcohol sales, pornography, or lewd nightclubs.
- Paul could not just command all servants to flee from their masters and all masters to liberate their servants. Many times, servanthood was due to unpaid

debts, crimes committed, or because a person was poor and **chose** to sell himself as a servant.

- Imagine the chaos and the reproach it would bring upon Christ if all the servants were rebelling and fleeing, and all the masters were kicking out their servants who had no way of providing for themselves.
- Rather than doing this, Paul dealt with the issue from the inside out. His passion was to get people saved and then ground them in sound doctrine. When Christ lived in them and they were rooted in the doctrines of grace, they would begin to demonstrate Christ's grace and reflect it to one another, and do what is right and godly. Many of the cultural issues would, in turn, take care of themselves.