

Colossians 3.22-4.1 – Christianity and Slavery

Introduction

1. Coming to the text of Scripture without 21st Century Notions
2. Freedom, Liberty, Democracy did not exist in 1st Century Greo-Roman world
3. Onesimus and Philemon (**Philemon, Col 4.7-9**)
4. Skeptics use this passage to claim the Bible is morally inferior to our current culture – we need to be equipped to answer such a charge

Main Idea: Christ Jesus is my Master. All other masters are subordinate to Him. So, wherever I find myself, I will serve Christ with all of my being.

Slavery in 1st Century Rome

1. Slavery was an integral part of the social and economic world of the first century
2. The ideas of freedom and liberation was not an idea relevant to the first century mind
3. Slavery in the first century was not necessarily by force like it was in antebellum America
4. Slavery in the first century was not based on race as it was in antebellum America
5. Legal freedom for first century slaves was not necessarily positive for the slave
6. Christians were not powerful to overturn political systems
7. Early Christians did not understand their calling as a call toward social justice and change, but evangelism

Does the Bible Condone or Condemn Slavery?

1. **Earthly realities were seen to be infinitely insignificant in contrast with eternal spiritual realities (1 Corinthians 7.17-24)**
2. **Old Testament: God's People, the Israelites, were commanded to protect the poor and the servant**
 - a. Exodus 21:2, 16 (see 1 Timothy 1.8-10)
 - b. Leviticus 19.9-10

- c. Deuteronomy 15
 - d. God was preventing poverty and the temptation to institutionalize slavery among His people
 - e. The Ancient Near East: This is a Foreign Concept
 - f. Israel was to be set apart from the nations as holy, and were given a law embodying a perfect ethic
3. **New Testament: Neither Condemns or Condone Slavery**

Principles and Counsel Gleaned From Colossians 3.22-4.1

1. Paul does not endorse the status quo

- a. He raises the status of the slave by addressing him in the formal context of the Church
- b. Paul does not endorse or approve slavery by addressing slaves and revealing the Lord's will to them
- c. In Philemon, Paul seems to be pressing for freedom for Onesimus (**See Phmn 17-18**)

2. The Bondservant/Slave (Colossians 3.22-25)

- a. The Manner of Service is hearty obedience grounded in the fear of Christ (**Col 3.22-23**)
 - i. Service to Christ Not at Odds with Service to Earthly Masters
 - ii. Work has Dignity and Value because God Asks Us to Work for Him
- b. The Reward: Inheritance (Kingdom of God) (**Col 3:23-24; see also 1 Peter 1.3-5**)
- c. The Penalty for Unfaithful Service: God Pays Back without Partiality (**Col 3.25**)

3. The Master/Lord (Colossians 4:1)

- a. Brief but Radical Command
- b. Authority and Power Not Eliminated, but subjected to the Judge, King Jesus
- c. Scripture Lays the Foundation for the Eventual Abolition of Slavery