

Doesn't the Bible Condone Slavery - Philemon 1:8-22
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

There are many questions that people use to discredit The Bible and God Himself, often citing the horrors historically present in our world as a way to question the existence and goodness of the one true God of The Bible. One such question is how The Bible, and ultimately God, responds to the notion of slavery. Does God forbid slavery in The Bible, or does He condone it? Furthermore, why should we believe in a God whose people were complicit in using The Bible to support slavery and oppress so many people?

This is an extremely common line of questioning used by skeptics and atheists these days to tear at the fabric of Christianity, pointing to passages or verses that mention slavery to defame or question the character of God, saying He does not measure up to His own moral code. As Americans, it is only natural for us to think of the period of TransAtlantic slave trade in our country first - and that's entirely understandable. Our country has a deplorable history centered around the subject of slavery that has caused ripples of havoc likely to continue for generations to come, and individuals claiming the name of Christ as part of the American church have been complicit in using the Bible to support their own selfish motives with regard to slavery.

While people tend to look for black or white responses to these questions, there is perhaps a deeper premise at work in the gospel when you consider the whole counsel of God found in the scriptures. Slave owners in America were known to use passages of scripture out of context in order to make slaves more pliable to their masters, while at the same time leaving out passages with any mention of the believer's freedom in Christ to ensure they were not emboldened to attempt to gain their freedom. Examples of "Slave Bibles" have been found that include as little as 14 books of the 66 found in the canonical Bible, leaving out passages such as Galatians 5:1 (For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. -ESV Translation) Esau McCaulley helps us to understand Old Testament passages used to support the notion that God condones slavery (e.g., Exodus 21, Leviticus 25) when he says: "There's a difference between laws that reveal what God wants us to be and those that limit the damage we do to one another in a fallen world."

Slavery is not a creation of God, it is the product of a broken world under the effects of sinful man. God didn't establish these laws to limit or regulate good things, but rather to mitigate sin. His heart is perhaps more clearly shown in bringing the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. When we turn to the New Testament, the overall context of passages including slavery shifts to Christians under the rule of Rome, where slavery was deeply woven into the fabric of society such that roughly one third of the Roman population were slaves. In the deceptively short book of Philemon, we see a practical application of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of slavery that effectively blows apart any preconceived notions of a God who condones slavery. The apostle Paul writes to Philemon, a member of the Colossian church, regarding his relationship with Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave. Under Roman law, Onesimus was a fugitive slave who could be returned to his master and subsequently beaten, even killed. But as Paul notes, Onesimus received grace, and through the power of the Holy Spirit believed, making him Paul's spiritual son. Paul subsequently encourages Onesimus to return to Philemon, and writes this letter to encourage Philemon to receive Onesimus back not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ.

This text shows us the heart of God amid slavery, reflecting His character displayed in creation and the gospel. Paul is asking Philemon to recognize that Onesimus has been set eternally free from sin in being reconciled to God through the blood of his savior Jesus Christ. This eternal spiritual freedom applies to Onesimus just as it does to Paul and Philemon; he now has a Heavenly master who has paid the price of his sin and receives him as an adopted son forever.

This also means Onesimus has been welcomed into the family of Christ, and Paul is asking Philemon to receive him not as a bondservant, but as a brother. God has delivered Onesimus from the domain of darkness and transferred him into the kingdom of His beloved Son in equal standing with Paul and Philemon. And as such, God has now made Onesimus a fruitful, useful beacon of hope in the gospel for those around him. Paul points out that he is now useful for God's purposes, in the ministry of the gospel. This is God's heart for slavery. He knows fallen people will sin; He is not surprised by our historical failures in slavery. Yet He makes His love and mercy known by giving all people the opportunity to be set free from enslavement to sin through His reconciling gift of salvation in the blood of Jesus. And that work of reconciliation blows apart any social constructs by making all believers equal in the family of Christ forever, and that allows them to receive passages that call for bondservants to obey their masters knowing that while their earthly position may be hard, it is a temporal thing that will pass; they are free forever in Christ. God has also made each member of His family useful for the purpose of gospel ministry as an evangelist for freedom in Christ to those enslaved by sin.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Joshua 23	Joshua 24	1 Thess- alonian 1	1 Thess- alonian 2	1 Thess- alonian 3	1 Thess- alonian 4	1 Thess- alonian 5

Reading from this past week: Philemon 1:8-22

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Mark 10:1-12

Family Worship

Song - *God So Loved*

https://youtu.be/PK9pljv_s-A

Gospel Project

Unit: The Teachings of Jesus

Story: Jesus taught about God's Love

Big Picture Question: What did Jesus teach when He was on earth?

Answer: Jesus taught about

God and His kingdom. He taught that all

Scripture is about Him.

Scripture: Luke 15

New City Catechism

Question #30: What is faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer: Receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.

Verse: Galatians 2:20

Scripture

Philemon 1:8-22

- What are some of the scriptures people have used in support of slavery, saying The Bible condones it? How do creation and the gospel show God's heart in response to this use in each case?
- What does Paul ask Philemon in this letter? Why does he ask this?
- How do we see the gospel applied in this letter? How does this show God's heart toward slavery?

Prayer

*Pray that God would help us answer tough questions being asked by the world.

*Pray for our partners seeking to reach college student on campuses around the United States and around the world through campus ministries and campus church planting.