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Is Slavery Acceptable to God?

Proverbs 30:10: (NASB) *Do not slander a slave to his master, or he will curse you and you will be found guilty.*

We are fortunate to live in a country where the stated core belief is that all men are created equal. With such a basis, it is theoretically much easier to identify and condemn the domination of one over another against their will. Yet, slavery in many forms not only has existed for most all of history, it continues to exist in this age of enlightenment. The Bible is full of examples of slavery and full of God's seeming acceptance of this practice. So, does God support the idea of slavery? Stay with us as we endeavor to unravel this very tricky and emotional topic!

Is slavery by God's design?

Slavery is fashioned after the rule of Satan and not the rule of God!

Genesis 2:15-17: (NASB) ¹⁵Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to **cultivate <5647>** it and **keep <8104>** it. ¹⁶The LORD God commanded the man, saying, From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.

Cultivate: Strong's #5647, 1) to work, serve, 2) to labor, work, do work
1b1) to be worked, be tilled (of land)

Keep: Strong's #8104, 1) to keep, guard, observe, give heed, 2) to keep, have charge of

Genesis 3:16-19: (NRSV) ¹⁶To the woman he said, I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. ¹⁷And to the man he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in **toil <6093>** you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Toil: Strong's #6093, pain, labour, hardship, sorrow, toil



Problem of Child Slavery in Benine, Africa, CBS News

- According to Unicef, the overall numbers are staggering. 1.2 million children are trafficked each year worldwide, 50,000 of them in Benine alone. Many are sold by their parents.
- Poverty fuels the slave trade, forcing parents to either sell their children to traffickers on purpose or inadvertently.
- Traffickers often swoop on the poor remote villages, offering money for the children or promising paying jobs in bigger cities...

God's creation was equitable while Satan was a usurper, power hungry, proud and a liar. As a result of the of a choice to not obey God the Creator and instead obey Satan the usurper, the curse destabilized the "would be" (equitable) society. This sets up circumstances for slavery to thrive - the idea of domination of one person over another.

The Ripple Effect

Equality vs. Ruling over another

Blessed is the ground vs. A curse upon the ground because of you

Work vs. Toil

Have charge over a bountiful garden vs. Thorns and thistles as a default product

Eating freely of the garden's bounty vs. Sweat of your face to be able to eat

So, if slavery is not of God's design, then why did he let his people have slaves?

Why wouldn't God just condemn slavery? Here are the guidelines to keep in mind as we look into the treatment of slaves and slavery within the ancient nation of Israel. All of the following laws were part of the blossoming culture of Israel. Many of these texts are general sweeping



statements/principles that would obviously apply as background in the application of specific laws: Exodus 21:16: (NASB) *He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death. This is a general application, very focused on the individual rights of each man.* Exodus 21:26-27: (NRSV) ²⁶*When a slaveowner strikes the eye of a male or female slave, destroying it, the owner shall let the slave go, a free person, to compensate for the eye.* ²⁷*If the owner knocks out a tooth of a male or female slave, the slave shall be let go, a free person, to compensate for the tooth.* The Law inherently contained the warning against all abuse. Slaves were to go free if they were abused. Leviticus 19:9-10: This was a blanket command of compassion upon the less fortunate. Leviticus 19:33-34: There was to be a common respect for all men. God never advocated abuse of another. So when studying the topic of slavery in the Hebrew Law, we need to put it in context of the Scriptures we just discussed.



13 Colonies small part in the triangular slave trade, *Choices Program*

- The 13 colonies were a relatively small proportion of the slave trade - in all about 500,000-600,000. But in Brazil, about 4 million enslaved Africans are imported over the course of the slave trade. Cuba and Haiti in each case were well over a million...If you ask the question from the other side of the Atlantic, "What countries were involved?" The answer is, all of them.*

(For more on the triangular slave trade, see the CQ Rewind Full Edition Bonus Material.)

Is this the same kind of "slavery" that was in the Old Testament? No! Deuteronomy 5:14: Slaves were mentioned twice to make the point of compassion. Even slaves were to rest on the Sabbath. This demonstrates a very specific respect for humanity. Leviticus 25:39: *Slave's service meaning the lifetime assignment of slavery.* Job 31:13-15: Although not part of the Law, here is a principle that is a reflection of the proper common respect for all men. Proverbs 30:10: This shows that the slaves had a right to be heard.

God established sweeping guidelines for how to treat others - they are to be treated with respect.

Did God establish a difference in the treatment of Hebrew slaves and foreign slaves?

Treatment of Hebrew slaves: Exodus 21:1-6: (NASB) ¹*Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them.* ²*If you buy a Hebrew slave, (This refers to someone who sold themselves into servitude.) he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment.* ³*If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, 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 belong to her master, 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 as a free man,'* ⁶*then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.*

If the Hebrew individual serving the master decides that he loves working for him and doesn't want to leave behind his wife and children, he can stay permanently.



Slaves in New Jersey, human trafficking, modern day slavery in America, CNN

- These girls were victims of something hard to believe, something you might never expect, something that happened in plain sight. You are looking at girls who were held as slaves in America. Not for a day or a month, but for year. It was like being trapped, being in a cage. It's horrible. Sometimes there is not enough food for us to eat, no freedom at all...*

There is a great difference between voluntary and involuntary servitude.

On the idea of "buying" people: Numbers 18:15-16: There was a value placed on the life of every firstborn, and there was a value placed on the life of every man, no matter how poor they were when they came to the master.



Observations on Exodus 21:1-6:

- The one who served left servitude in the same state as he came in.
- The individual a choice right from the start, as he also knew the Law.
- The fact that he could choose to be bound to his master for life indicates fair treatment.
- It is all about the man, as he is the one who is liable for wealth protection and all payments.



Building Roman Cities, Slaves of Rome, *History Channel*

- *To build these powerful cities, Rome needed manpower. While many of the people from conquered lands became citizens, many more were auctioned off as slaves. Thousands of these slaves were educated and secured positions as philosophers, musicians, dancers and teachers. But tens of thousands more were forced into brutal manual labor.*

In Jewish history, there weren't big cities built on the blood of slaves.

Deuteronomy 15:12-18: The Hebrews were to be thankful to those indentured servants for the work they did. This allowed people to get out of debt and although it was hard and was at cost to the slave, their treatment was not to be cruel.

What happened to Hebrew women who became slaves?

Hidden in plain sight, human trafficking, Modern Day Slavery in America, *CNN*

- *The girls were forced to work in hair braiding salons, serving customers all day, right out in the open. Their captors took everything they earned, every penny. They worked seven days a week, 14 hours a day. This went on for five to six years. Traffickers held the girls in several houses. They were housed in a typical middle American neighborhood, not where you would expect to find slavery.*

This type of slavery was not allowed in the Hebrew system of servitude.

Exodus 21:7-11: Why would a man sell his daughter?

(Source: McClintock and Strong's Bible Cyclopedia) Again, a father might sell his young daughter to a Hebrew, with a view either of the latter's marrying her himself or of his giving her to his son (verses 7-9). It diminishes the apparent harshness of this proceeding if we look on the purchase money as in the light of a dowry given, as was not unusual, to the parents of the bride...

This does sound harsh, but we don't have a culture based on arranged marriages. Women simply did not have the same rights as the men. Why? Remember the curse on Eve? *Your husband shall rule over you.* This is showing the fulfillment of that curse. This was not the way God originally designed the arrangement.

If the young lady did not end up marrying him, she could be redeemed through the repayment of her dowry. This was not human trafficking. It provided for her rights and human dignity. The servitude of the Old Testament was very different from the slavery in the world today.

(Source: McClintock and Strong's Bible Cyclopedia) In respect to marriage, there were some peculiarities which, to our ideas, would be regarded as hardships. A master might, for instance, give a wife to a Hebrew servant for the time of his servitude, the wife being in this case, it must be remarked, not only a slave, but a non-Hebrew. Should he leave when his term had expired, his wife and children would remain the absolute property of the master (Exodus 21:4, 5). The reason for this regulation is, evidently, that the children of a female heathen slave are mere slaves; they inherited the mother's disqualification....

Exodus 21:20-21: The proper use of a rod was moving back into order. The rod was used as a method of discipline, it was not to be abused. The master could not come to the servant with a sword, an implement of war. The rod was to discipline, not to be cruel.

(Source: Matthew Poole, Biblical Commentator) "With a rod" - a fit and usual instrument for correction, whereby it is implied, that if he killed him with a sword, or any such weapon, he was to die for it. "Under his hand" - i.e. whilst the master is correcting him. He shall be surely punished; not with death, for then it would have been said so, as it is before and after; but as the magistrate or judge shall think fit, according to the diversity of circumstances; and therefore no particular punishment is set down.

What about the treatment of pagan slaves?

Leviticus 25:39-43 Leviticus 25:44-46: This is talking about people voluntarily enslaving themselves. Notice, there is no provision to sell the slave. Why? Citizenship has its advantages as well as the circumstances of war and crime.

Korean women for sex, *Slavery in America*

- *Harris County, Texas - Harris County's Human Trafficking Task Force is carefully orchestrating a sting operation at this Houston massage parlor, renowned for trafficking foreign women. Police are now seeking to better understand how the Korean women got there. When initially questioned, all three women say they have only been in the country a few days and as the team searches the facilities, all the tell-tale signs of human trafficking reveal themselves, from the ATM in the lobby to the cramped living spaces filled with mattresses and personal items. Investigators have no doubt that the owner is exploiting the women by selling sex for cash.*



Was this following action "sanctioned" or "advocated" by God? After all, the pain and suffering increased upon the Hebrews for no other reason than having God's own representative appear on the scene: Exodus 5:15-23: God allowed His people to suffer terrible under harsh slavery and cruelty. It was given to them as a remembrance so that they would not treat other people cruelly. They were reminded of the inequity. God accepted the concept of ancient slavery as long as there was humane treatment, choices, and honor.

What is the New Testament view on slavery and Christianity?



Worked to death, slaves of Rome, History Channel

- I'm standing in front of the Syracuse stone quarries, which were some of the largest stone quarries in the ancient world. The jobs that were most dangerous that no one else would do were jobs that slaves had to do. These were places where people worked and were worked to death. Whenever we think about classical antiquity, whenever we think about what was produced - the wonderful buildings in literature - we have to remember that all of what was produced was based on slave labor.*

The Hebrew approach to slavery was not a national one. It was individual. An individual could sell themselves into servitude. God taught that the master should have compassion.

The New Testament view on slavery: (Remember, this is in the context of the Roman style of slavery, not the Hebrew style under the Law.) Ephesians 6:5-9: Just as there was a constant reminder of Israel's deliverance from bondage and cruelty to focus the Jews on the respectful care of those in their service, so we have a New Testament constant reminder of our accountability to God for our actions - even if we are in a situation that is unjust. **Our accountability spreads through all aspects of our life:** Titus 3:1-2: Christianity was implemented as a change to a person's spiritual life, not to change the existing social structure or government regulations. Its purpose wasn't to overthrow all evil but instead to provide an example of righteousness so that evil could be recognized by comparison. **All in Christ are equal no matter what their earthly status.** 1 Corinthians 12:13: (NRSV) *For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free (the Roman version of slavery, not the Jewish version of servitude) - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.* Galatians 3:28: Your heritage or earthly status no longer becomes the defining factor in your life. Colossians 3:11: (NRSV) *In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!*



Observations about slavery:

- There are widely varied degrees of servitude, some very civil and some utterly cruel;
- God NEVER sanctioned any abuse of, or cruelty to, any servant at any time;
- Men, in an effort to justify their own hard-heartedness, found ways to use the Bible to defend their position.

Jesus was sent to release all captives of sin:

Isaiah 61:1-2: (NRSV) *¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;*

Jesus came to bring good news to the oppressed and proclaim liberty and freedom to all prisoners of sin.

***So is slavery acceptable to God?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions,
Think about it...!***