

## **Joshua Anderson – Grasping Gods Word Assignment 6.1**

### Practice of Slavery in New Testament times

Despite what might be thought as diametrically opposite to the teachings of Jesus based on liberty, love and freedom, the Church in the New Testament didn't condemn slavery. Jesus didn't advocate for or against it but rather used the well-known institution as an example of how He thought of Himself to others, as He expects of His disciples – to be “as the one who serves” (Luke 22:26-27 ESV). As for the Apostles, Peter and Paul taught, for converts who were slaves to obey their masters, exhorted masters to treat their slaves with kindness & consideration. Also teaching that spiritually in the body of Christ “there is neither slave or free” (Galatians 3:28 ESV) – that social ranks were now removed. The practice of slavery in New Testament times within the church was challenged by the light of the gospel as Household's came to faith in Jesus, permanent foreign slaves (as permissible under mosaic law) now became brothers in Christ.

The practice of slavery in New Testament Times in the Roman world differed greatly from the already higher standard of welfare and care the Jews were obligated to provide for both foreign & Israelite alike from antiquity. The Roman slavery system had no regard for skin colour or ethnic/racial origins and rarely was a slave be distinct in clothing or appearance of that of a free born, yet they were none-the-less considered as property not people. One

would find themselves in such a position by reason of capture in war, by birth, sale by impoverished parents or self-sale reasons, where their master would have total control over their slaves' bodies – often with brutal misuse.

Despite a slave's position in the empire with status universally despised with no honor, the socioeconomic pyramid left space for one group lower, the impoverished free person, who had to seek work as day labourers with no guarantee of being hired nor their next meal. The position of a slave being seen desirous in these cases where one's food, shelter & clothing were always provided for under a master's "care" with living conditions subjectively better.

Interestingly a large number of slaves could anticipate being set free often by the age of thirty. They would be released as a reward for good and faithful work or having earned a small allowance to ransom themselves, with the majority were freed because it served directly the owner's personal, financial, and legal interest.

Resources:

- The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts, Joel B. Green & Lee Martin McDonald
- American Tract Society Bible Dictionary, Edward Robinson
- Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, Walter A. Elwell
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary, Don Fleming