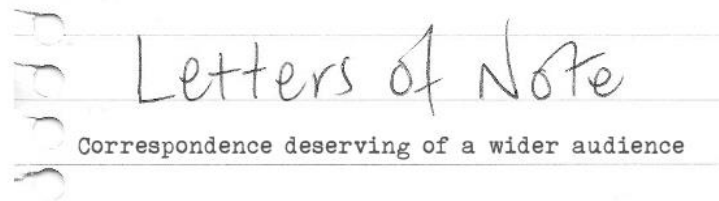


WE ARE SLAVES WHO ARE FREE!

by David Lee Burris



Letter from freed slave to his former slave-master draws public attention



ca. 1860's, USA.

Freed slaves in Southern town shortly after the Civil War. © Bettmann/CORBIS

A newly discovered letter from a freed former slave to his onetime master is creating a buzz. [Letters of Note explains](#) that in August of 1865, a Colonel P.H. Anderson of Big Spring, Tennessee wrote to his former slave Jourdan Anderson, requesting that Jourdan return to work on his farm.

In the time since escaping from slavery, Anderson had become emancipated, moved to Ohio where he found paid work and was now supporting his family. The letter turned up in the August 22 edition of the [New York Daily Tribune](#). Some excerpts:

Sir: I got your letter, and was glad to find that you had not forgotten Jourdon, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else can. I have often felt uneasy about you. I thought the Yankees would have hung you long before this, for harboring Rebs they found at your house. I suppose they never heard about your going to Colonel Martin's to kill the Union soldier that was left by his company in their stable. **Although you shot at me twice before I left you**, I did not want to hear of your being hurt, and am glad you are still living. It would do me good to go back to the dear old home again, and see Miss Mary and Miss Martha and Allen, Esther, Green, and Lee. Give my love to them all, and tell them I hope we will meet in the better world, if not in this. I would have gone back to see you all when I was working in the Nashville Hospital, **but one of the neighbors told me that Henry intended to shoot me if he ever got a chance.**

On the "good chance" offered by the former slave owner:

I want to know particularly what the good chance is you propose to give me. I am doing tolerably well here. I get twenty-five dollars a month, with victuals and clothing; have a comfortable home for Mandy,—the folks call her Mrs. Anderson,—and the children—Milly, Jane, and Grundy—go to school and are learning well. The teacher says Grundy has a head for a preacher. They go to Sunday school, and Mandy and me attend church regularly. We are kindly treated. Sometimes we overhear others saying, "Them colored people were slaves" down in Tennessee. The children feel hurt when they hear such remarks; but I tell them it was no disgrace in Tennessee to belong to Colonel Anderson. Many darkeys would have been proud, as I used to be, to call you master. Now if you will write and say what wages you will give me, I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.

And then Jourdan explains that anything his former master could offer, he's already earned on his own. Other than some back wages:

As to my freedom, which you say I can have, there is nothing to be gained on that score, as I got my free papers in 1864 from the Provost-Marshall-General of the Department of Nashville. Mandy says she would be afraid to go back without some proof that you were disposed to treat us justly and kindly; and we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you. This will make us forget and forgive old scores, and rely on your justice your friendship in the future. **I served you faithfully for thirty-two years, and Mandy twenty years. At twenty-five dollars a month for me, and two dollars a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to eleven thousand six hundred and eighty dollars. Add to this the interest for the time our wages have been kept back, and deduct what you paid for our clothing, and three doctor's visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to.** Please send the money by Adams's Express, in care of V. Winters, Esq., Dayton, Ohio. **If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense.** Here I draw my wages every Saturday night; but in Tennessee there was never any pay-day for the negroes any more than for the horses and cows. **Surely there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the laborer of his hire.**

And after a few more jabs about how his children are now happy and receiving an education, Jourdan concludes his letter with:

Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him for taking the pistol from you when you were shooting at me.

The Slave before “Elohim” in Exodus 21:1

Exodus 21:1–6 describes the potential situation in which a household slave desires to remain with his master rather than go free under the Israelite law mandating release each sabbatical (seventh) year.

¹ “Now these are the rules that you shall set before them.

² When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. ³ If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, 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 be her master’s, 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 free,’ ⁶ then his master shall bring him to God [elohim], and he shall bring him to the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.

The Hebrew word translated “God” in verse 6 is *elohim*. While *elohim* is plural in its formation, its meaning in the Old Testament is usually singular, and it frequently refers to the God of Israel. The simplest reading here is thus that *elohim* is singular and points to the God of Israel, and the two Israelites perform the brief ceremony “in the sight of God,” so to speak, similar to a modern wedding in which the minister notes that everyone has been gathered “in the sight of God” to witness the couple’s joining in marriage.

However, some argue that *elohim* here is plural in meaning as well in order to find scriptural warrant for the idea that Israel's elders and judges were present at the ceremony and thus that those men could have been called *elohim*. They then apply this proof text to Psalm 82, arguing that the *elohim* of Ps 82:1, are really men, not divine beings. However, neither judges nor elders are found in Exod 21, and the Old Testament never uses the term *elohim* for human leaders anywhere else. Many presume that Exod 18 refers to the elders as *elohim*, but the text never makes that equation. *Elohim* there refers, as usual, to God. A comparison of Exod 21:1–6 with its parallel in Deut 15:12–18 further weakens this argument.

As noted above, *elohim* in Exod 21:6 could quite coherently refer to the singular “God”—but not to a group of humans. However, a comparison with Deut 15:12 raises the possibility Exod 21:6 refers to a group of beings.

¹² *If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.* ¹³ *And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed.* ¹⁴ *You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him.* ¹⁵ *You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore, I command you this today.* ¹⁶ ***But if he says to you, “I will not go out from you,” because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you,*** ¹⁷ ***then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever.***

And to your female slave you shall do the same.¹⁸ It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you, for at half the cost of a hired servant he has served you six years. So, the LORD your God will bless you in all you do.

One question remains: If the reference in Exod 21:6 is indeed plural, what “gods” does this Israelite law refer to? **The most likely answer is *teraphim*, which were *genius* household figurines, likely of one’s deceased ancestors. In Genesis 31, Rachel takes her father Laban’s *teraphim* when fleeing Haran with Jacob (Gen 31:19, 34–45). David also apparently had *teraphim* in his house (1 Sam 19:13, 16).**

Teraphim may have served a similar purpose to modern remembrances of the dead today. Bereaved people leave flowers or other items of intimate connection at gravesides, presuming the dead are appreciative—that a connection between living and the dead remains. When others adorn their houses with photographs of deceased loved ones, it helps them remember them. The same can be said of *teraphim*. Leaving offerings at graves, or depositing them before *teraphim*, may simply have been the ancient Israelite equivalent of contemporary expressions of grief or respect.

Therefore, when a slave wanted to join the household out of love for his master, as in Exod 21, it would have been entirely appropriate for him to appear before the household’s ancestors (*elohim*). Failure to do this would have, in fact, been deeply disrespectful to the dead.¹

¹ Heiser, M. S. (2017). [The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms](#) (pp. 62–66). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

PATRIARCHAL SLAVERY

We meet slavery as an established domestic institution among the patriarchs of the Jewish nation. The Hebrew term employed here and throughout the Old Testament generally for servants, is not necessarily degrading, like our *slave*; on the contrary *ebhed* means originally *laborer, worker*, and work was no disgrace among a people whose kings and prophets were called from the flock and the plough. But in its usual literal sense it is universally understood to mean *bond* servants in distinction from the *hired* or voluntary servants, who were comparatively rare among the ancient nations and are but seldom mentioned in the Old Testament.

The slaves here spoken of were either born in the house (*jelide baiith*) or purchased by money (*miknath cheseph*, Genesis 17:23), and owned in large numbers by patriarchs and the patriarchal Job without sense of guilt or impropriety on their side, and without a mark of disapprobation on the side of God. Their usual enumeration and collocation with the sheep, oxen, asses and camels, although less degrading than Aristotle's definition of a slave as a "living tool," or "animated possession," is very offensive to our modern ear and to our Christian taste, and shows the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, where they are never mentioned in such connection.

In one passage the servants are even put between the he-asses and the she-asses, in another between the cattle and the camels, and in a third between the gold and the camels.

We have no right at all to infer from this fact that the patriarchs regarded and treated their servants no better than their favorite animals. Their whole character justifies the opposite conclusion. They bought, but, as far as the record goes, they never sold any of their slaves. There is no trace of a slave traffic in the Old Testament.

Patriarchal servitude was free from the low mercenary aspect, the spirit of caste and the harsh treatment, which characterized the same institution among all the heathen nations. It was of a purely domestic character and tempered by kindness, benevolence and a sense of moral and religious equality before God. This appears from the high confidence which Abraham reposed in Eliezer (Genesis 15:2: 24:2 ff.), and all those slaves whom he entrusted with arms (14:14: comp. 32:6; 33:1), and still more from the significant fact that he circumcised them (Genesis 17: 23, 27), and thus made them partakers of the blessings and privileges of the covenant of Jehovah by divine direction (v. 12, 13).

JEWISH SLAVERY

Between the patriarchal and the Mosaic period the Jews were themselves reduced to hard involuntary servitude in Egypt. The introduction to the ten commandments reminds them of their merciful deliverance “out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage,” that they might be grateful for so great a mercy and show their gratitude by cheerful obedience to his will, and merciful conduct towards their servants (comp. Deut. 5:15; 15:15).

Moses, or God through him did not either establish nor abolish slavery; he authorized and regulated it as being an ancient domestic and social institution, which could not be dispensed with at that time, but he also so modified and humanized the same as to raise it far above the character of slavery among the gentiles, even the highly cultivated Greeks and Romans. The moral law which is embodied in the decalogue, mentions “men-servants and maid-servants” twice, but evidently and most wisely in such general terms and connections as to be equally applicable to hired servants and bond servants. The fourth commandment protects the rights of the servants by securing to them the blessings of the Sabbath day.

The civil law makes first an important distinction between the Hebrew and Gentile servants. It regarded freedom as the normal and proper condition of the Israelite, and prohibited his reduction to servitude except in two cases, either for theft, when unable to make full restitution (Ex. 22:3), or in extreme poverty, when he might sell himself (Levit. 25:39). *Cruel creditors sometimes forced insolvent debtors into servitude* (2 Kings 4:1: Is. 50:1: Nehem. 5:5: comp. Matth. 18:25), but this was an abuse which is nowhere authorized.

The Hebrew servant moreover was not to be treated like an ordinary bondman, and regained his freedom, without price, and with an outfit (Deuteronomy 15:14), after six years of service, unless he preferred from attachment or other reasons to remain in bondage to his master.

The remembrance of Israel's bondage of Egypt and his merciful deliverance by the hand of the Lord, should inspire every Israelite with kindness to his bondmen. The jubilee, or every fiftieth year, when the whole theocracy was renewed, gave liberty all slaves of Hebrew descent without distinction, whether they had served six years or not, and made them landed proprietors by restoring to them the possessions of their fathers. Consequently, the law, in permitting the Hebrew to be sold, merely suspended his freedom for a limited period and guarded him during the same against bad treatment, and provided for his ultimate emancipation. This is clear from the passages bearing on the subject.

“If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: then his master shall bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.” Ex. 21:2.

“And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bond-servant: but as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubilee: and then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. For they are my servants which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. Thou shalt not rule over him with rigor: but shalt fear thy God.” Levit. 25:39–43. Comp. Deuteron. 15:12–18.

Concerning the heathen bondmen who constituted the great majority of slaves among the Hebrews, the law was more severe, and attached them permanently to their master and his posterity.

“Both thy bondmen and they bondmaids, which thou shalt have shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen forever: but over your brethren, ye shall not rule one over another with rigor.” Levit. 25:44–46.

But the Mosaic dispensation nowhere degraded even the heathen slave to mere property, or a thing, as the Roman law. It regarded and treated him as a moral and religious being, admitted him to the blessings of the covenant by circumcision (Genesis 17:12, 13, 23, 27; Exodus 12:44), protected him against the passion and/or the cruelty of the master and restored him to freedom in case he was violently injured in eye or tooth, that is, according to the spirit of the law. Finally, it numbered kidnapping, or forcible reduction of a freeman, especially an Israelite, to servitude in time of peace, among the blackest crimes, and punished with death. Take the following passages which refer to all slaves:

“If a man smite his servant, or his maid with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished. . . . If he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his money.” Exodus 21:20, 21.

“If a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish, he shall let him go free for his eye’s sake. And if he smite out his servant’s tooth, he shall let him go free for his tooth’s sake.” Exodus 21:26, 27.

“If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandize of him, or selleth him; then that thief shall die.” Deuteronomy 24:7.

Such guarantees contrast very favorably with the Roman slave code which knew of no civil and religious rights of the slave, reduced him to the level of mere property and gave the master authority to torture him for evidence and to put him to death. Hence, we never read of slave insurrections among the Jews, as among the Greeks and Romans. The difference in treatment was the natural result of different theory. For the Old Testament teaches unity of the human race, which is favorable to general equality before the law, while heathen slavery rested on the opposite doctrine of the essential inferiority of all barbarians to the Greek and the Romans and their constitutional unfitness for any of the rights and privileges of freemen.

If we consider the degraded condition of the idolatrous heathen tribes, with whom the Jews in their early history came into contact, slavery would be a training-school from barbarian idolatry and licentiousness to the knowledge and worship of the true God.

This would explain the more easily Deuteronomy 23: 15ff:

“Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee: he shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him.”

It must refer, as all good commentators hold, to foreign slaves only, who escaped from heathen masters and who, if returned, would have been punished with cruel tortures or certain death. Extradition, in such cases, would have been an act of inhumanity repugnant to the spirit of Judaism.

Protected by the Mosaic legislation, guarded against various abuses, every returning jubilee made an end to Jewish servitude. Slaves of heathen descent were not to be included in the blessing of jubilee. Their exclusion would have to be explained on the ground of the particularism of the old economy, which was intended merely as a national training school for the universal religion of the Gospel. But on the other hand, the fact that all slaves in Jewish families seem to have been circumcised (Genesis 17:12, 13, 23, 27), at least if they wished it (comp. Exod. 12:44), and were thus incorporated into the Jewish church, seems to justify a more general application of the blessing of jubilee to all slaves.²

² Schaff, P. (1861). [*Slavery and the Bible: A Tract for the Times*](#) (pp. 7–15). Chambersburg, PA: M. Kieffer & Co's Caloric Printing Press.

GREEK AND ROMAN SLAVERY

The ancient republics of Greece and Rome had no idea of general and inalienable rights of men. They consisted in the rule of a small minority of freemen over a mass of foreigners and slaves. The Greeks and Romans looked with aristocratic contempt upon all other nations as barbarians and unfit for freedom. Their philosophers and lawgivers regarded slavery as the natural, normal and perpetual condition of society and assumed a constitutional or essential difference between the free-born and the slaves. Aristotle calls a *doulos* or slave “an animated tool, just as a physical tool is a soulless slave.” Occasionally slaves would distinguish themselves by great talent or special merit, and were then used as teachers, or were emancipated, or they bought their liberty. But these were exceptions, which confirmed the rule. The great mass remained in a degraded and wretched condition, human beings from every tongue and clime were offered for sale, general as nature and with a scroll around their neck, on which their good and bad qualities were specified.

The Romans made no distinction between race and color in this respect. All captives of war, also insolvent debtors and criminals were generally sold into slavery. During the Jewish war, Josephus tells us, ninety seven thousand Jews were made captives and either sold to individuals as cheap as horses, or condemned as slaves of the State to hard work in the Egyptian mines.

Slavery extended over every province and embraced, according to Gibbon's low estimate, sixty millions, or at least one half of the entire population of the empire under the reign of Claudius; but according to more recent calculations the slaves outnumbered the citizens three to one. Many wealthy Romans possessed from ten to twenty thousand slaves for mere ostentation. Roman ladies of rank and fashion kept up to two hundred for their toilet alone. The slaves did all kind of work in the house, the shop, and the kitchen. The Latin language has a great many names for the various classes into which they were divided according to occupation.

In the eyes of the Roman law the slaves were in the fullest sense of the term the property of the master and reduced to the level of the brute. A commentator on the Roman Civil Law described their condition thus: "Slaves were in a much worse state than any cattle."

Cato the elder expelled his old and sick slaves out of house and home. Roman ladies punished their waiters with sharp iron instruments for the most trifling of offences, while attending half-dressed to their toilet. Such legal degradation and cruel treatment had the worst effect upon the character of the slaves. They are described by the ancient writers as mean, cowardly, intemperate, hard and cruel, when placed over others.

It is true, self-interest, natural kindness, and education had due effect even among the heathen and prompted many masters to take proper care of their slaves.

Legislation also began to improve the life of the slave in the second century and transferred the power over the slave from the master to the magistrate. But at that time the humanizing influence of Christianity already made itself felt upon even its pagan enemies.

Roman slavery was far worse than Jewish servitude. It regarded and treated slaves as chattles and things, while the latter respected them as persons, provided for their wants, and cheered with hope of deliverance.³

³ Schaff, P. (1861). [Slavery and the Bible: A Tract for the Times](#) (pp. 15–18). Chambersburg, PA: M. Kieffer & Co's Caloric Printing Press.

The ancient world recognized degrees of slavery.

Though much of their literature present freedom and slavery as exact opposites Greek and Roman culture support many degrees in between. The lowest slaves worked in unskilled manual labor. If someone was punished with slavery this is the kind of work they would likely be condemned to. Mines, mills, porters, bearers, etc. These slaves had no rights and few privileges. They were human beasts of burden. These slaves had the smallest chance of gaining their freedom. It's difficult to impress the master when all you do is haul things around and perform one mundane activity over and over again. But has already been pointed out by others there were also privileged slaves. These were the ones who often lived away from the master and rendered a payment (paramone) to the master. They were skilled workers like slave bankers, craftsmen, overseers, and the like. Though everything they earned legally belonged to the master it was customary that the master receive this paramone and not everything that the slave earned. The slave could then save up their earnings to eventually earn their freedom. Because they often lived away from the master or worked along-side him, they had better chances of being granted freedom for their good work and were more in control of their own lives. Those that lived away from the master were in control of their own movements and lives with the exception of the payment to the master. These individuals functioned much like subcontractors.

Even slaves who gained their freedom often lacked all of the freedoms that society could offer. Freedom did not mean citizenship so freedmen could not participate in politics and were excluded from other activities. When a slave bought their freedom it was fairly common that the agreement be sealed with a sort of contract. The slave would agree to render a fixed amount and often agree to perform services for their master at the former master's request. This obligation to provide for the former master could last until the master's death and, rarely, even afterward. If the obligations proved to be too burdensome a freedman could offer suit in Athens and if he won would be given unconditional freedom (not citizenship), but if he lost he would re-enslaved. The stigma of having been a slave lasted for life and severely limited future opportunities.

Some points about Classical slavery: It was customary in Rome to free a slave after he had reached the age of 30 if he had rendered good service. This practice was far more common with domestic and skilled slaves in the city than with agrarian or unskilled slaves.

It was recommended that a master in Ancient Athens immediately discuss with a slave what would be that required of them to buy their freedom and how they would earn it. The master would try to arrange a marriage with the slave and have him start a family. If a slave knew what was required of him to gain his freedom & his freedom lay before him a real possibility why risk rebellion or escape, especially if the slave had family also owned by the master. It was to encourage productivity and reduce rebellion or flight. **It was recognized that slaves were human beings. It was just also recognized that these people were property.** As such, slaves were to be treated with a certain level of decency (not hubris). Now many masters clearly had no compunctions about ruthlessly beating their slaves, but literary evidence from Rome and court records from Athens suggest that there was an expectation (and law) to treat slaves as people even if only to avoid rebellion.

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Processual Approach: Patron-Freedman Relationship Transitioned Into Patron-Client Relationship By Way Of Self-Sale & Self-Purchase

Contractual Self-Sale. The phenomenon of free persons entering voluntarily into slavery, in order to pursue those commercial opportunities unavailable to the non-enslaved—and who, after garnering economic success through the Roman institution of the *peculium*, regain their freedom through “self-purchase” with “their own funds” (*suīs nummīs*), emerging economically and socially enhanced as “freedmen.” *The cycle is complete:* from an impoverished freedom to slavery—from slavery to a prosperous freedom. Contractual arrangements between slave and master include those providing for ultimate self-purchase of liberty by originally free individuals who had voluntarily entered into slavery pursuant to agreements governing the terms of their enslavement.

Household Management. Whether a domestic unit or institution, the Roman Household is a the focal point for a comparative investigation since it is the site at which slavery is articulated and marked, where slaves status is created and transformed, and where boundaries between slavery and non-slavery was negotiated/transcended. **Trust networks of ‘extended *familiae*’ (including freedmen) were particularly suited for purposes of agency/partnership. The use of slave agents was widespread.**

Formal Family Transition. Slaves could intimately participate in the procreative growth of the family (concubines, midwives, 2nd wives) or eventually become family members by way of apprenticeship, adoption, or marriage.

Contractual Self-Purchase. Roman manumission did not necessitate a replacement of services lost, because freedmen remained tied to the *familia*. *Liberti* were strongly expected to still serve their ex-master in a number of ways as their client. They were expected to show *obsequium* – obedience, and reverence – to their ex-master always and were also to carry out work (*operae*) for their master when it was requested.

Name Only Adoption. The freed slave often took the first two names of their former master, illustrative that manumission was rare, as the family name held great importance in Roman society so that only the most trusted individual would be allowed to 'wear' it.

Freedom could be absolute or more than likely it was limited to include certain obligations to the former owner such as inheritance rights and/or the payment of a portion (*statuliber*) of their earned assets (*peculium*).

Through the patron-freedman relationship was ensured continuity of this ideal after manumission by constructing ex-slaves as their patron's children *sine natura*. This fiction helped perpetuate a dynamic of authority and dependence, while at the same time integrating freedmen into the *familia* in a way that legitimated their proximity to power as agents of the ruling orders. – *Internet*

The Honor-Shame Societal Setting of Reciprocity Obligations:

The Social Context of Grace

Today, *grace* is primarily a religious word, heard. It has progressed through millennia of theological reflection, developments and accretions (witness the multiplication of terms like “justifying grace,” “sanctifying grace” and “prevenient grace” in Christian theology, systematizing the order of salvation). For the actual writers and readers of the New Testament, however, *grace* was not primarily a religious, as opposed to a secular, word. Rather, it was used to speak of reciprocity among human beings and between mortals and God (pagan literature, gods). This single word encapsulated the entire ethos of relationships.

First, *grace* was used to refer to the willingness of a patron to grant some benefit to another person or to a group. In this sense, it means “favor,” in the sense of “favorable disposition.” In Aristotle’s words (*Rhetoric* 2.7.1 [1385a16-20]), “Grace [*charis*] may be defined as helpfulness toward someone in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper himself [or herself], but for that of the person helped.” In this sense, the word highlights the generosity and disposition of the patron, benefactor or giver. The same word carries a second sense, often being used to denote the gift itself, that is, the result of the giver’s beneficent feelings. Many honorary inscriptions mention the graces (*charitas*) of the benefactor as the cause for conferring public praise, emphasizing the real and received products of the benefactor’s goodwill toward a city or group. Finally, *grace* can be used to speak of the response to a benefactor and his or her gifts, namely, “gratitude.” Demosthenes provides a helpful window into this aspect in his *De Corona* as he chides his audience for not responding honorably to those who have helped them in the past: “But you are so ungrateful (*acharistos*) and wicked by nature that, **having been made free out of slavery and wealthy out of poverty by these people, you do not show gratitude** (*charin echeis*) toward them.” (*De Corona* 131). *Grace* thus has very specific meanings for the authors and readers of the New Testament, meanings derived primarily from the use of the word in the context of the giving of benefits and the requiting of favors.

Responding with Grace

According to Cicero, while initiating a gift was a matter of choice, gratitude was not optional for honorable people, but rather an absolute duty (*De Offic.* 1.47–48). Receiving a favor or kindness meant incurring very directly a debt or obligation to respond gratefully, a debt on which one could not default.³⁶ Seneca stresses the simultaneity of receiving a gift and an obligation: “The person who intends to be grateful, even while she or he is receiving, should turn his or her thoughts to returning the favor” (*Ben.* 2.25.3). Indeed, the virtuous person could seek to compete with the giver in terms of kindnesses and favor, trying not merely to return the favor but to return it with interest like the fruitful soil that bears crops far more abundant than the seeds that were scattered on it.³⁷

Ingratitude is something to be avoided in itself because there is nothing that so effectually disrupts and destroys the harmony of the human race as this vice. For how else do we live in security if it is not that we help each other by an exchange of good offices? It is only through the interchange of benefits that life becomes in some measure equipped and fortified against sudden disasters. Take us singly, and what are we? The prey of all creatures. (*Ben.* 4.18.1, LCL)

Responding justly to one’s benefactors was a behavior enforced not by written laws but rather “by unwritten customs and universal practice,” with the result that a person known for gratitude would be considered praiseworthy and honorable by all, while the ingrate would be regarded as disgraceful. There was no law for the prosecution of the person who failed to requite a favor, but, Seneca affirmed, the punishment of shame and being hated by all good people would more than make up for the lack of official sanctions.⁴² **Neglecting to return a kindness, forgetfulness of kindnesses already received in the past, and, most horrendous of all, repaying favor with insult or injury—these were courses of action to be avoided by an honorable person at *all* costs. Rather, gifts were always to be remembered, commemorated first of all in the shrine of one’s own mind, and always to be requited with gratitude. The social sanctions of honor and shame were its bulwarks.**

Manifestations of Gratitude

“Returning a favor” could take on many forms, depending on the nature of the gift and the relative economic and political clout of the parties concerned. Cities or associations would show their gratitude for public benefactions by providing for the public recognition (honoring and increasing the fame) of the giver and often memorializing the gift and the honors conferred by means of a public inscription or, in exceptional cases, a statue of the giver or other monument.

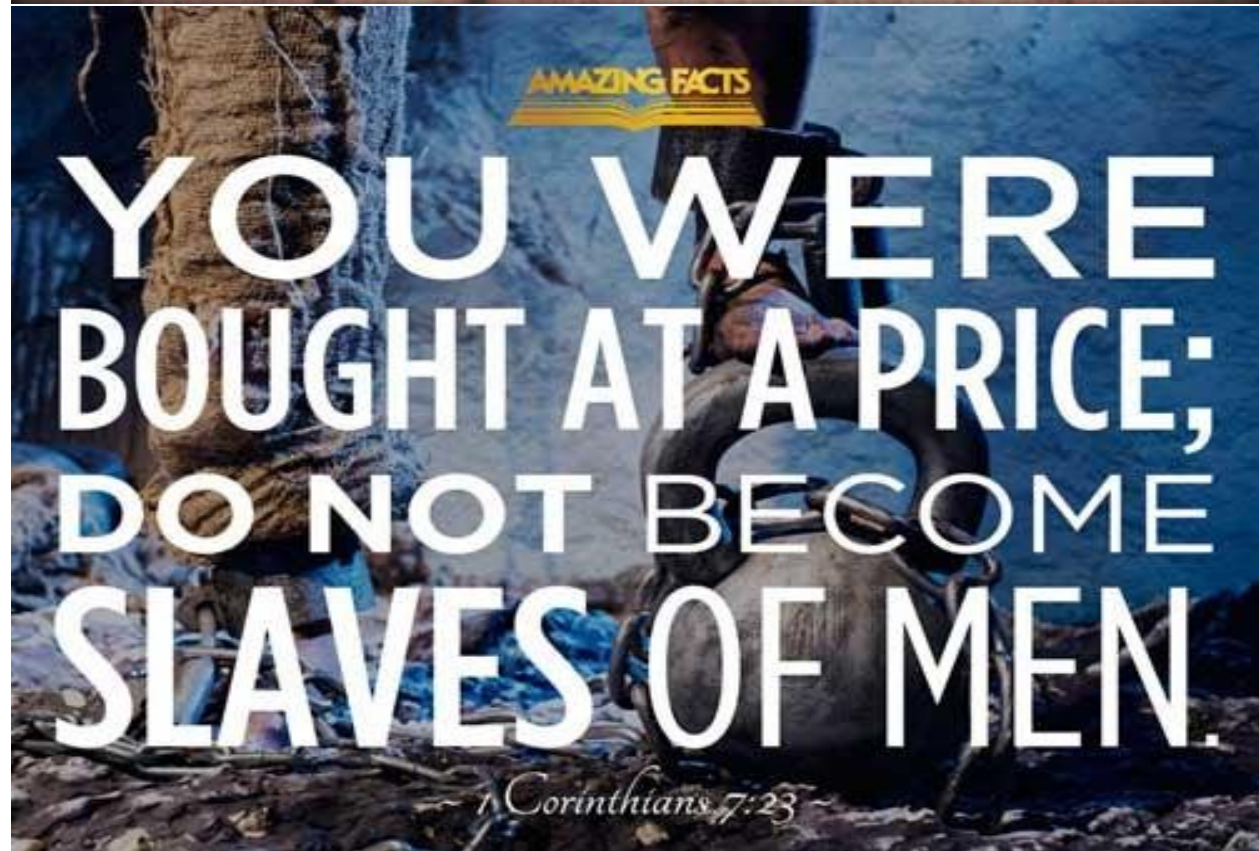
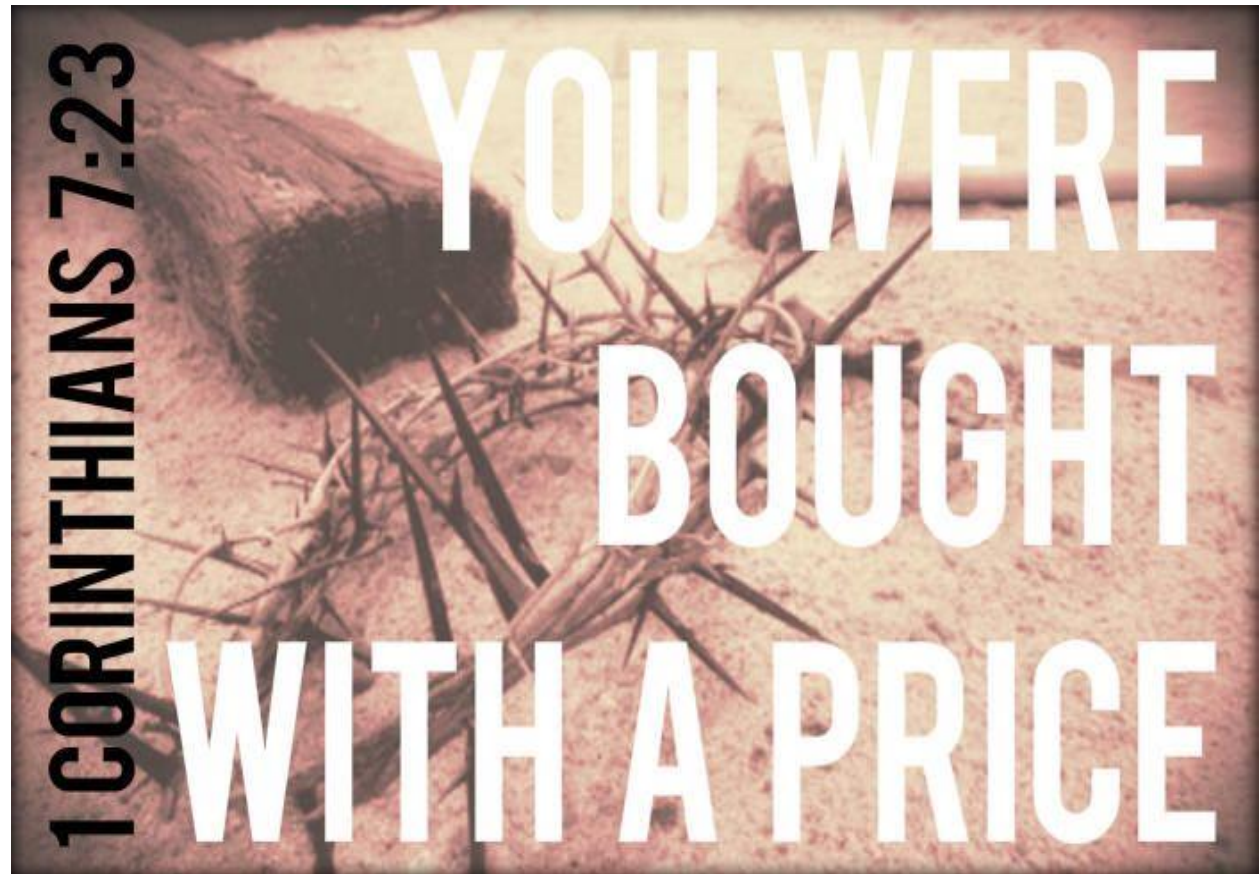
A second component of gratitude that comes to expression in relationships of personal patronage or friendship is **loyalty to the giver**, that is, showing gratitude and owning one’s association with the giver even when fortunes turn, and it becomes costly. Thus Seneca writes about gratitude that “if you wish to make a return for a favor, you must be willing to go into exile, or to pour forth your blood, or to undergo poverty, or, . . . even to let your very innocence be stained and exposed to shameful slanders” (*Ep. Mor.* 81.27). Wallace-Hadrill writes that despite the fact that, in theory, clients were expected to remain loyal to their patrons, in practice, if a patron fell into political trouble or if his or her fortunes began to wane, the patron’s entourage of clients would evaporate.⁵¹ Such practice, however, was contrary to *the ideal of gratitude, according to which a person would stand by (or under) the person’s patron and continue to live gratefully even if it cost the individual the future favors of others, or brought him or her into dangerous places and worked contrary to self-interest. The person who disowned or dissociated himself or herself from a patron because of self-interest was an ingrate.*

The principal of loyalty meant that clients or friends would have to take care not to become entangled in webs of crossed loyalties. Although a person could have multiple patrons, to have as patrons two people who were enemies or rivals of one another would place one in a dangerous position, since ultimately the client would have to prove loyal and grateful to one but disloyal and ungrateful to the other. “No one can serve two masters” honorably in the context of these masters being at odds with one another, but if the masters are “friends” or bound to each other by some other means, the client should be safe in receiving favors from both.

The Dance of Grace

Such mutually contradictory rules (forgetting and remembering, being silent and bearing witness, and the like) are constructed so as to keep the giver's mind wholly on what is noble about patronage (generosity, acting in the interest of others) and the recipient's mind wholly on what is noble for the client (namely making a full and rich return of gratitude for favors conferred). They are devised in order to sustain both parties' commitment to acting nobly within the system of reciprocity. The ultimate goal for these ancient ethicists, after all, was not perfect systematization but virtuous conduct. Grace, then, held two parties together in a bond of reciprocal exchanges, a bond in which each party committed to provide what he or she (or they) could to serve the needs or desires of the other. Though often profitably compared to a dance that had to be kept "grace-full" in a circle of giving and receiving, these relationships were far more than ornamental or recreational (as dances are). They formed the bedrock of society, a person's principal assurance of aid and support in an uncertain and insecure world."⁴ (Source)

⁴ deSilva, D. A. (2000). [*Honor, patronage, kinship & purity: unlocking New Testament culture*](#) (pp. 94–119). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



The Greek language has several terms for the various kinds of servants:

1) *misthios / misthotos* mean a *hireling*, and are so translated in the five passages of the New Testament where they occur. They may be slaves or hired or they may not.

2) *doulos* is more frequently used than all other terms put together. We find it, if we made no mistake in counting, one hundred and twenty-three times, namely seventy three times in the Gospels, three times in the Acts, thirty three times in the Epistles, and fourteen times in the Apocalypse. It is uniformly translated *servant* in our English Bible, except in seven instances in the Epistles and in Revelation, where it is rendered either *bond or bondman*. *Doulos* (originally an adjective, *bound*, from the verb *deo, to bind*), like the Latin *servus*, means properly a *bond* servant, or a *slave*, especially one by birth, and is opposed to *eleutheros, free-born, or freed, made free*. Yet, like the Hebrew *ebhed*, of which it is the Greek equivalent in the New Testament, it is not necessarily degrading, but simply a term of government and may signify a subject from the highest to the lowest ranks. Ammonius, an ancient writer on Greek synonyms, of the fourth century, gives the word this general sense.

The Holy Bible frequently uses the word of the highest and noblest kind of service, the voluntary service of God, which is perfect freedom, as Augustine says: *Deo servire vera libertas*. Moses, the prophets, the apostles and all Christians are called *douloi* or servants of God, as being entirely and for life, yet voluntarily devoted to his service. The Apostle Paul glories in this title, and so does the Apostle Peter, James, Jude, and John. It would be improper in any of these passages to substitute *slave* for *servant*.

3) *andrapodon* means always a *slave*, especially one *enslaved in war*. This term is degrading in its etymology and neuter gender, and is used in the vile and abject sense, when slaves are statistically enumerated or otherwise represented as mere property, or chattles, or things. Now it is a remarkable fact, that the New Testament, which so frequently uses the term *doulos* and about half a dozen words more or less resembling it in meaning, never employs the term *andrapodon*, except once in the derivative compound, *andrapodistes*, a *man-sealer*, or *slave-trader*, and then in the worst possible company with murderers, whoremongers, and other gross sinners. It suggests to us two different conceptions of slavery, the one represented by the word *doulos*, the other by the word *andrapodon*, the one prevailing among the Jews, the other among the heathen; the one which still regards and treats the slave as a person, the other which degrades him to mere property; the one recognized by the apostles, the other disowned by them as irreconcilable with the spirit of the Gospel.⁵

⁵ Schaff, P. (1861). [Slavery and the Bible: A Tract for the Times](#) (pp. 18–32). Chambersburg, PA: M. Kieffer & Co's Caloric Printing Press.



Southside Church of Christ

FORT MYERS, FLORIDA

What is the best way to describe the Christian? Who is he really? We might start with the word **Christian** itself. It means one who follows Christ. It is close in meaning to the word **disciple** – a learner. I read recently about one of the early martyrs of the second century – a young man named Sanctus. He lived during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, when being a Christian was illegal. He was brought to trial in the city of Lyons, on that charge and commanded to renounce his faith. But no matter what question they would ask him his answer was always the same 4 words... ***"I am a Christian"***. Eusebius, (church historian) tells us that he refused to tell his accusers his name, his nationality, his educational status, or whether he was bond or free. He only answered, *I am a Christian*. He was sentenced to death; He was *"forced to run the gauntlet, subjected to wild beasts, and fastened to a chair of burning iron."* Those were the only words he uttered. That is who he was.

But the followers of Jesus were not called Christians until 10 to 15 years after the church began. (Acts 11:26 – called Christians first at Antioch of Syria) Before that they were referred to as *disciples, believers, brethren, or those of the Way*. The word Christian is only found 3 times in the NT.

The word Christian has been so diluted in its use today that it does not carry the impact or meaning as it did in the days of Sanctus, and the early Christians. It leisurely used as an adjective to describe everything from rock music to amusement parks.

The Bible uses other metaphors and descriptive terms for God's people: *pilgrims, soldiers, lights, branches on a vine, joint heirs with Christ, ambassadors, athletes in competition for a crown, citizens of the kingdom, members of the body of Christ, sheep in His flock, and even friends*. Each of these terms describe a certain characteristic or responsibility of the relationship we have with Christ. They help us understand what it means to be a Christian.

Yet the Bible uses one metaphor more frequently than any other. It is a powerful word that presents a picture we might not expect. It challenges us as much as anything we can learn about being a Christian.

I. A Slave of Jesus Christ – Throughout the scriptures the followers of Jesus refer to themselves as slaves. To the church of the first century to be a Christian was to be a slave of Christ.

• **Rom 1:1** – *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus*; **Phil 1:1** – *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus*; **Titus 1:1** – *Paul, a servant of God*; **Col 4:12** – *Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus*; **James 1:1** – *James, a servant of God*; **2 Peter 1:1** – *Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ*; **Jude 1** – *Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ*; **Rev 1:1** – *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John*; **Rev 22:3** – *No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.*

A. The fruit of a mistranslation? The original Greek word that appears in all of these verses (and about 130 times in the NT) is the word, **doulos** (doo'-los). This word unequivocally means, **slave**. It designated one half of the slave-master relationship. But is that a prevalent picture of the disciple in the pages of the English versions of the NT. No, it is not. The reason is simple.

1. The word *doulos* is almost universally translated (or mistranslated) as being **servant** in the English translation. This is true even though the Greek language has at least 6 words that can mean servant. The word *doulos* is not one of them. It only means "slave". *"The meaning is so unequivocal and self-contained that it is superfluous to give examples of the individual terms or to trace the history groups... The emphasis here is always on "serving as a slave". Hence, we have a service which is not a matter of choice for the one who renders it, which he has to perform whether he likes it or not, because he is subject as a slave to an alien will, to the will of the owner."* – *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

a. While the slave is certainly a servant (serves another), not every servant is a slave. A key distinction between the two terms is that a servant is *hired*, but a slave (*doulos*) is *owned*.

b. The word **doulos** appears 124 times, yet it is only correctly translated as "slave" **one** time in the KJV. The other major translations follow suit. The ASV sometimes uses "bondservant" (which is a little closer – a servant under bondage), but the simple translation of "slave" is avoided whenever possible. (only the Goodspeed translation and the recent Holman Christians Standard Version consistently translate *doulos* as "slave".) **Why?**

1) Many English translations followed the Latin version which translated *doulos* with the Latin term, *servus* (servant). It was an easy transition to use the English word, servant.

2) We have almost an allergic reaction to the word “**slave**”. The word has connotations and conjures up images that disturb us. – an oppressed person in chains. How can such an image be associated with our relationship to our loving Savior? There is very little room for accommodation in this word, unlike the word, servant. But despite this, the NT uses *doulos* to describe the Christian. The Christians of the 1st century, and beyond, used the word to describe themselves.

B. The Slave in the Roman World – Slavery in the world of the New Testament was so commonplace that its existence as an institution was never seriously questioned or denounced.

1. Slaves constituted a large section of the population, and were made up of all types of trades and occupations. I am told that 20-30% of the empire were slaves – up to 12 million individuals – many becoming slaves through military conquest.

2. The slave was used in many occupations, not just for physical labor. From shopkeepers to doctors to teachers to cooks. Might have been hard to spot the slave from the free person in the street.

3. Some slaves were treated horribly (worst life possible), others as members of the family. Although there were side social and economic benefits (provided food and shelter) the life of a slave was difficult.

4. He had no personal identity, no legal status, no voice, and no ability to direct his own life. He was the property of another person.

5. A slave’s life experience depended on the character of his master. If his master was cruel and uncaring, his life was miserable. If his master was good and kind, his life could be rewarding.

C. The Slave in Hebrew History – The NT metaphor of the slave cannot be fully understood apart from the image and presence of slavery in Hebrew history. The Hebrew word meaning slave, **ebed** (eh’-bed), appears in the OT 799 times. It is never translated as slave in the KJV, opting again for servant or man-servant.

The Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures), however, translates *ebed* as *doulos* more than 400 times! The early Hebrew scholars understood what *ebed* meant – it was a slave (*doulos*).

1. The image of slavery runs deep in Israelite history. In Genesis 15 God told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land. That prediction was fulfilled after Joseph was sold into Egyptian slavery. Although God exalted Joseph out of slavery to a position of power in Egypt, when another Pharaoh arrived Abraham's family were enslaved to hard labor in Egypt. God heard their cry and delivered them with a strong hand, as told in Exodus.

2. The Exodus did not end slavery for Israel. The text would indicate that they entered into a new type of bondage. They were once the property of Pharaoh, but now they are the property of Jehovah. **Ex 19:4-6** – *'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." They belonged to God. Later God told Moses... **Lev 25:55** – *For the Israelites are My slaves (ebed). They are My slaves (ebed) I brought out of the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. (HCSB)* The covenant demanded that Israel obey their only Master, Jehovah, in all things. To be an Israelite meant to be a slave.

3. Historically Israel refused to obey God. God warned them that if they failed to obey Him, they would be enslaved by their enemies once again. Centuries later, after much longsuffering and prophetic warning by God, the nation was removed from the land once again taken into captivity.

4. Neh. 1:6-11 – *"please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. 7 We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. 8 Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are not faithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.' 10 Now these are Your servants*

and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. 11 O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” For I was the king’s cupbearer. Do you see the slavery imagery here? – verse 10 They were set free in order to become slaves of God.

D. The Slave in Apostolic Preaching: The apostles understood the concept of slavery and utilized it in their preaching. They understood it in terms of both the Roman society and Jewish History.

1. As a Jew, they recognized that to be a slave of God was an element of the covenant the people of Israel made with God on Sinai, when they proclaimed, “*All the words the Lord has spoken we will do*” (Ex. 24:3) They also recognized the all the great men of faith; Abraham. Moses, David, and the prophets, were previously identified as the slaves, or servants (ebed) of God.

2. From the standpoint of the first century Roman culture, they understood the powerful picture that slavery presented for the spiritual relationship between Christ and His people. The Lord did not have to explain the concept or reality of slavery to them. The slave was in complete subjection to the master. The slave did not live for himself, nor did he work for his own good. He did not have an identity apart from his master’s will. The fact that they understood it (better than we ever could) did not remove the shock contained in the image. But the image was there, and provided a fitting self-designation for these disciples. Nothing else mattered except pleasing the Master.

3. What we might find compelling is that the image of the slave of Christ was not reserved for the “common believers” only. The apostles themselves took up this shocking appellation for themselves. What does it tell us to see this?

a. James could have boasted on the fact that he was the brother of the Lord, but instead he introduced himself in his writing as *James, a slave of God* (James 1:1) Later in his epistle he tells us that the Christian does not look at his life through the perspective of individual freedom – *Come now, you who say, “Tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”;* but rather he ought to say *if the Lord (Master) wills we will live and do this or that* (James 4:13; 15) Do you see the slavery image in that admonition?

b. Peter, Jude and John all designated themselves as “slaves of God”.

4. But the image of the slave of Christ is preached in context of the gospel message. Jesus has redeemed His people, and adopted them into the family of God. They are not just slaves, but joint -heirs. To be called a slave of God is proclamation of the greatest hope of all men. Look at the slave picture in the book of Revelation:

- **Rev 1:1** – *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His **servants (doulos)** – things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His **servant** John,*

- Later in Rev. 7:3 he refers to the 144,000 who are sealed as the possession of God as the **slaves (doulos)** of God.

- The prophets are referred to as the slaves of God (**10:7**), as are the martyrs in **Revelation 19:2**.

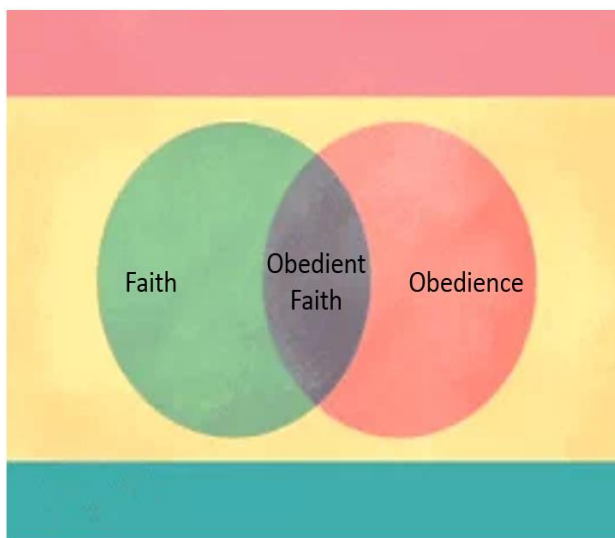
- Then at the end of the book, all the collected believers are described in these words... **Rev 22:1-5** – *And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His **servants (doulos)** shall serve Him. 4 They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. 5 There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.*

Conclusion: There is very little that appeals to us in slavery. Who would want it, who would give up all identity and live completely to please another person? What type of life is that? For the Christian it is the only life that presents hope. It is life, and life abundantly. **To live *is* to live as a slave of Christ. Will you submit?**

AT THE NEXUS OF GRACE & GLORY

Five Steps For Saving:

- HEARING:
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27
- BELIEVING:
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- REPENTING:
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- CONFESSING:
- Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37
- BAPTISM:
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 – 38



O That Will Be Glory

2. *Who that will be glory for me, e grace,*

I an Glory for me, glory for me; ce,

When by His grace I shall look on His face, e

That will be glory, be glory for me. me.

