

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Slaves of Christ

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: GTY112

Now you could check every Greek lexicon there is and you will find no usage of that word other than the word "slave." What is remarkable about this is though this word is used about 150 times in the New Testament in one form or another, 130 times *doulos* itself, and then *sun doulos* in the verb form, *douloo*, though it means slave, always means slave, only means slave, out of the 20 English translations of the New Testament, there are essentially 20 English translations of the New Testament, only one of them always translates *doulos* slave, 19 of them equivocate and do not do that. They even invent a hyphenated word for which there is no parallel in Greek, bondservant. There are only two options in Greek...servant or slave. There's no middle concept.

The only New Testament translation that always translates *doulos* slave is the Goodspeed translation. From 1923 to 1937, E.J. Goodspeed was a professor of Greek at the University of Chicago. He is a storied Greek genius, pioneer in lexicography of the Greek language. And you probably are familiar with Goodspeed translation though it's a little bit obscure. He has the integrity to stick with the meaning of *doulos* everywhere it appears in the New Testament. There is a multi-volume set of lexicography about that long on my shelf called Kittel, have you heard of it? K-i-t-t-e-l, it is the last word, the consummate word, more than you ever need to know or care to know about every Greek word. Every single Greek word has an article and the articles go on for page and page after page, after page, after page to fill up that much space just dealing with the Greek words in the New Testament.

In the article on *doulos*, this is what it says in Kittel, "There is no need to trace the history of this word, there is no need to discuss the meaning of this word, it has never meant anything in any usage but slave."

That is just very rare in that kind of vast lexicography because they will give you every possible nuance every possible translation in classical Greek or in Koine Greek, or in any other usage biblical, non-biblical. This is the universal meaning of the word *doulos* and it is the word which most uniquely describes the believer's relationship to Christ. In fact, to press the issue a little further, it has a companion word, a necessary companion word without which *doulos* doesn't make sense and the companion word is *kurios*. *Kurios* means Lord. There's no such thing as a Lord or Master without a *doulos*. So this is the dominant paradigm in which we are to understand our relationship to Jesus Christ. He is Lord, and we are His slaves. There is no other way to be faithful to the text.

And so, you're saying to yourself, "Why did they change it? Why did they change it? Because in so doing they obscured the clarity of this dominant paradigm in the New Testament."

And the answer, I suppose historically, is because of the stigma that surrounded slavery and wanting to mitigate that because of abuses and all of those kinds of things, they stole from evangelical church and from all of us in the English language and pretty much the world in its languages in the Bible followed suit, this very simple, very clear, very dominant and very defined understanding of our relationship to the Lord.

I can't tell you how many through the years, books I've written, messages I've preached defending the lordship of Jesus Christ. There's a Lordship controversy. That lordship controversy shouldn't exist if one understands the significance of *doulos* in the New Testament. If we are slaves, then it goes without saying that He is Lord means He has sovereign, dominant control over us. And yet, when you come to the New Testament in any of these English versions, you will only find slave translated slave when it refers to a slave... a slave slave, or when it refers to an inanimate kind of slavery, slaves of righteousness, slaves of sin, that kind of thing. But when used to refer to a believer, it will be translated servant or bondservant, thus moving away from the clarity of the definition of a believer as a slave.

Now, there are a couple of places where they can't get away with it...such as in Ephesians 6 verse 5, you'll remember this, "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters." Now you're talking to slaves about how they conduct themselves with their master so you've got to call them slaves and masters are masters. Wherever you have a master, you have to have a slave because those two words go together. And so having established that, the next verse then says, "Not by way of eye service as men pleasers, but as slaves of Christ." And the reason you have *doulos* translated slave there is because the metaphor demands it because it's connected to what was just said to an actual slave.

Apart from that, there's a great reluctance to use that word slave. I think sometimes we might understand that. A few months ago when I was first thinking through some of these things, I was at a Pastors' Conference at Wake Forest, in fact we were in the football stadium there, and they had taken the football club room and filled it up with 400 pastors, local Christian radio station and we were having a luncheon and I was doing some Q&A and a really neat black pastor stood up and he said, "How am I going to tell my people that the dominant New Testament metaphor for our relationship to Christ is that of a slave?" And he said, "That's fraught with so much stigma from our history."

And I said, "Now you've put your finger on the real issue here. But the bottom line is two things, one, we've got to let God say what God said. We've got to be faithful to the intent of the text and the revelation. And secondly, we've got to understand that this kind of slavery isn't anything like the

abusive kind of slavery that you find in this unregenerate world. Now it should be said that the Bible never condemns slavery, never. And if Jesus and the Apostles came to abolish slavery, they failed miserably. They didn't come to do that. The Bible never condones slavery, it simply recognizes that it exists. And it just happens to be the best way to describe a believer's relationship to Christ and that's why it becomes this dominant paradigm.

If you think that this is a problem, if you think this is a problem for us with a distant memory of what slavery was, if you think that's a problem for us, think of what a problem it was in the New Testament time. There are about twelve million slaves living in the Mediterranean world. To any free Greek, or free Roman, slavery was viewed with disdain. It was a despicable way to live. The supreme virtue for a Greek or a Roman was freedom...freedom. They despised slavery.

Why? Slaves had no freedom. Slaves had no rights. They could not defend themselves in a court of law, nor could they go to a court of law to seek justice. They couldn't give testimony in a court of law. They couldn't be citizens. They couldn't join the military. They could not own property. And in pagan religion, no follower of any deity ever called himself a slave of his God. The Greeks referred to their relationship as *philos*, not *doulos*. *Philos* means friend. They were a friend to the God. The idea of being a slave to anyone, even to a deity, was despicable in the Greek world.

So here is another component in what Paul in 1 Corinthians talks about, the foolishness of the cross...the stumbling block that it was to the Greek mind. We're trying to convey a gospel of a crucified Jew who wants to make you his slave. You couldn't have come up with a more difficult message to communicate to people who honored freedom and had nothing but disdain for slavery. And yet it's in that kind of environment...and I'll just give you a quick little run down, I brought my bigger Bible so I could see what I was reading, I was having a hard time last night. Listen to this. Romans 1:1, "Paul, a bondservant of Christ Jesus," this says, there's no such word in the Greek, "Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus." And that's the launch point, "Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus...not Paul, an apostle and preacher, incidentally, also a slave....Paul, a slave."

In Galatians 1, verse 10, he says, "I am... am I now seeking the pleasure of men or of God?" Now you're getting to the heart of slavery, right? It's not about seeking the favor of men, it's about seeking the favor of God. "Am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a slave of Christ."

Why? "Because one principle of slavery, everybody understood. Jesus put it this way. "No man can be a slave to two masters, that is an impossibility." Paul says, "I can't therefore be the slave of man and the slave of God." In Philippians again he identifies himself this way, only with his companion. "Paul and Timothy," right off the starting point, "slaves of Christ Jesus." Epaphras, you remember Colossians 4:12, "Slave of Christ." James 1:1, "James, a slave of Jesus Christ." First Peter 1, "Peter, a slave of God and of Christ," *doulos, Christu doulo theo*. "Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ."

To stretch this a little bit, the book of Revelation...let me just give you...let me just track through this if I can remember all these things. "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show to His bondservants the things which must shortly take place, He communicated it by His angel to His slave, John." Paul's a slave, Timothy's a slave, Epaphras is a slave, James is a slave, Jude is a slave, Peter's a slave, John's a slave...they got it, right? They knew it. They were slaves and they knew exactly what slavery meant. They lived in a world of slavery. There was no vagueness about that. It wasn't a distant memory, as it might be to us. And it was fraught with abuses at least the equal of the kind of abuses that are known to us in a more modern world.

But further in the book of Revelation, just to broaden it a little bit, chapter 7, "Do not harm," says the angel, "the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the slaves of our God on their forehead." In the future in God's promise, there's going to come a time of great, horrible tribulation, but there's also going to come a time of great proclamation of the gospel and God is going to use 144 thousand converted Jews to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. They are called slaves of our God. So in the past, those who belong to Christ were slaves. In the future, those who belong to Christ will be slaves as well. This is then a permanent designation.

Tenth chapter of Revelation, "In the days of the seventh angel's voice, when he's about to sound and the mystery of God is finished, as he preached to...as He preached to His slaves the prophets." Looking back the prophets were slaves, the Apostles were slaves. Looking forward, the preachers in the time of tribulation to come will be slaves.

Chapter 19, chapter 19 has a couple of uses of it, I think it's verse 2...yes, it says that in the future when the Lord comes in power, of course, His judgments are true and righteous. He judges the great Harlot, corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His slaves... He has avenged the blood of His slaves. Verse 5, "Give praise to our God, all you His slaves, you who fear Him, the small and the great."

Chapter 22 verse 3, "The river of life," describing heaven, "there shall no longer be any curse, the throne of God, the Lamb shall be in it and His slaves shall serve Him." Slaves in the past, slaves in the present, slaves in the future, we are inevitably and always slaves.

This is so defining to me to understand the role that I have, to submit myself to my Lord. Now what are the components of being a slave? Just draw these for you for a minute or two. Slaves were purchased. There are in the New Testament about six words for servant, maybe seven if you include *misthios*, but at least six words, *huperetes*, *diakonos*, *pais*, things like that, they all refer to servant. There are ample words for servant. A servant is someone who performs a function for a wage and is free to quit. A slave is very different. A slave is purchased and owned and that's the distinction of being a slave. That fits us perfectly, does it not? Peter says, "You are not redeemed with corruptible

things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ," 1 Peter 1. In Acts 20, Paul says, "The church of God which He bought with His own blood." This is slave language. We have been bought. You are not your own, you are bought with a price, purchased. That's slave language.

The second element of being a slave, therefore, and the consequential one is you are owned...you are subject to an alien will. If you looked in any definition of what it is to be a slave in any dictionary, there would be this indication, a slave does not function on his own will. He is at all times subject to an alien will. That is to say he has no freedom to do what he wants to do. We are owned because we are bought.

The third thing is we are bound, therefore, to submission and obedience. Nothing could define the Christian relationship to the Lord more clearly than that. What did Jesus say in the great commission? "Go out and teach them to observe...what?...everything I have commanded you." This is about yielding up. This is not about, "God, come into my life and fulfill my dreams." That is not the language of the New Testament. The language of the New Testament is Luke 9:23, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." It's the end of you, virtually. That, by the way, means in the Greek to refuse to associate with. It is to come to Christ and say, "I refuse to associate with the person that I am, I abandon myself." Jesus expanded that. He said, "If you don't hate your father, hate your mother, and yes hate your own life, you can't be My disciple. You better count the cost, like the man who goes to war, you better count the cost like the man who is going to build the tower, make sure you have what it takes to complete the job. And what does it cost? It costs you everything, deny yourself, hate yourself, it's the end of you."

Coming to Christ doesn't make God your slave, it makes you His slave. And so you say, "I'm willing to deny myself," that's the hurdle that makes the gospel so difficult because that goes against the grain of the unregenerate heart, right? We spend all our time building ourselves up and the gospel comes along and says, "Die...die, abandon everything, yield up everything, give away all your ambition, all your freedoms so that you have no ambition but to be pleasing to Him." Right? Second Corinthians 5:9, we have it as our ambition to be pleasing to Him. That's it. You deny yourself, take up your cross, which means it's a denial to the end of death. It's total denial, even if it costs you your life and follow Me. And that's repeated in Matthew as well as Luke. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, refuse to associate with the person he is, take his cross up and a cross was not some kind of mystical thing, and it wasn't his mother-in-law, or his wife or his boss, the cross to those people meant execution." So the picture is you give yourself up, even to the point of death if necessary, and you follow Christ. That's the New Testament picture. We live in complete submission and obedience to Him. That's what it means when you hear Paul say, if you confess Jesus as Lord, Romans 10:9 and 10, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be... what... saved. But confessing Jesus as Lord is tantamount to confessing yourself as slave... slave.

The Christian life is very simple for me in terms of concept. I have no desire to get God in on my plans, I just want to be a faithful slave. I want to be the guy in the parable to whom Jesus says, "Well done, good and faithful slave."

Now, a couple of things to think about also on the maybe more positive side of it, although it's all positive. Slave was purchased, owned, submissive, obedient, also dependent. He had no place to live, no food to eat, no clothes to wear that weren't provided by his master. My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. He lavishes grace upon grace, does He not? Calls us to His throne of mercy in time of need, promises to meet every need we have. We don't have anywhere else to go. We only have one master. We are fully dependent on that master for all our provisions.

And the second element of that side of it is protection. A slave not only had provision from his master, and a good and kind and loving and generous and compassionate master would make life the best possible life. Being a slave of the right master would be better than anything. All your needs met with love and compassion and generosity and protection to boot. Listen, living in a very difficult world, living in a wild world in ancient days, everybody for himself, everybody on his own, you need to be protected. And if you had the right kind of master, he was your protector. And that certainly defines our relationship to the Lord, doesn't it? I'll never leave you or forsake you, I will guard you, I will watch you. This is what the Bible talks about, like a good shepherd cares for his sheep. Our master provides everything that we have. We have nothing that he doesn't provide and he protects us and promises to protect us and one day bring us to glory.

Status? How could a slave get status? Only one way. The only status a slave ever enjoyed came because of the master that he served. For example, if you were a slave in Caesar's household, you were at the top of the slave ranks because of who your master was. That's why Paul doesn't hesitate to say, "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ." Because he gets the reflected glory of his most honorable master. I hope we're thrilled to be able to say I'm a slave of Jesus Christ. He's the best master. And before you think anything negatively of this, just remember this. He is a Master who loves His slaves perfectly. He is a Master who seeks the best for His slaves. He is a Master who turns His slaves into sons and then gives them a full inheritance making them joint heirs with Jesus Christ of all that belongs to Him. And then takes His slaves having made them sons and joint heirs and seats them on His own throne in eternal glory to reign with Him. And then lavishes on them forever and ever and ever all the gifts of His grace eternally.

I can take that kind of Master. I can live with that kind of relationship. But really I think the capstone in all of this and there's a lot more to be said, that's what the pastor always says when he's just run out of material. "Brethren, we could go on and on," he's got no more thoughts and no more notes,

nothing. "Oh, the time is gone," has bailed out a lot of guys.

Anyway, Philippians 2, listen to this, I love this. Lest you think this is somehow demeaning, listen to this. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus who although He existed in the *morphe* of God, the form and essence of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be held on to, grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave." It's good enough for Him, good enough for me.

And what did Jesus say? "I only do what the Father shows Me to do. I only do what the Father tells Me to do. I only do what the Father wills Me to do. And in the Garden, in the crisis of the moment in the Garden,"...people say, "Why did Jesus say not...why did Jesus say let this cup pass, why did He say let this cup pass?" That may be the single greatest evidence of His perfect holiness in all the pages of Scripture. A perfectly holy person had to say that. A perfectly holy person had to be repulsed by the thought of sin bearing. Anything less than that and you might call into question His holiness. That is the only possible response. But even in the midst of that, what does He say? "Not My will but Yours be done." He took the form of not a bondservant, whatever that is, a slave and being made in the likeness of men being found in appearance as a man, humbled Himself in becoming obedient. That's what a slave does. You humble yourself, you become obedient even to the point of...what?...death. And we're right back to Luke 9, even death on a cross. He is a living model of denying yourself, taking up your cross and following the will of God. The perfect model of the perfect slave. And what was His in return? "Therefore also God... what... highly exalted Him and gave Him a name which is above every name and that name is not Jesus, that's not a name above every name, a lot of people have that name. The name above every name is the name Lord. He is the slave who became Lord." And we are the slaves who will one day be raised to share His throne.

As you read the New Testament from now on, you may be a little frustrated every time you see the word "servant." But I hope this opens up an understanding of this rich truth.

Father, we thank You for the Word. It is such a joy to our hearts and such a treasure to our souls. We pray, Lord, as we think about these things we might rejoice in the fact that before the world began, before the foundation of the world, You determined to set Your love upon us. Make us Your slaves and raise us to be sons who would share Your eternal throne. What a privilege. We thank You for this privilege and make us to be faithful and one day to hear, "Well done, good and faithful slave," amen.

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