

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

Servant or Slave?

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: GTY129

I want to talk to you about a word, okay? A word in the Scripture, and I just finished a book. I can't predict the sales of a book; I never even think about that. But I...I feel that this book, no matter whether this book is purchased or not--purchased by lots of folks, or a few--says something that has not been heard in the church in America, or the English speaking part of the world. And I'm in shock, really, that it hasn't.

I was on a flight one night from Los Angeles to London, I was flying to Leicester, England to the University of Leicester to speak for a week to young people and ministers at The Banner of Truth Conference with Iain Murray. It was on that all-night flight that I was studying this word, and by the time I got to the end of the flight, it had captivated my mind and my heart to a profound degree. That's several years ago, now--two and a half. And that word has really dominated my thinking ever since. It is the word *slave*, *slave*.

Now if you look at your English Bible, you won't find that word very often. If you look at the Old Testament in the King James, you will find the word "slave" once. But the Hebrew word appears 800 times in the noun, and nearly 300 in the verb. There is a word in the Old Testament for "slave" that appears eleven hundred times, but in your English Bible it's translated "slave" once.

If you go to the New Testament, you will find the Greek word for "slave" about 150 times in all its forms. And you will find it actually translated "slave" only a few of those 150 times. The New Testament translators only translate the Greek word for slave "slave" when it's referring to an actual physical slave, or when it's referring to an inanimate object, like "slaves of sin" or "slaves of righteousness."

So there is this concept of slavery in the Scripture that has been completely hidden to the English reader. Now this was by design because the word "slave" is the most important, all-encompassing, and clarifying word to describe a Christian used in the New Testament, and yet whenever a Christian is in view, it's not translated "slave." The word is *doulos*. Have you heard that word? The word is *doulos*. In the Greek, that word means "slave"--never means anything but "slave." It doesn't mean "servant"; it doesn't mean "worker"; it doesn't mean "hired hand"; it doesn't mean "helper." There are six or seven Greek words that mean "servant" in some form. *Doulos* never means "servant." A servant is someone hired to do something. The slave is someone owned. Big difference--huge difference--and yet all through the New Testament the word "slave" is masked by the word "servant,"

or some form of the word “servant.” Truly a remarkable thing.

When I started doing the research on this word, I found 22 English translations of the New Testament, 22. There was only one of them of all the translations of English New Testaments going back to the King James--up until today--there was only one of those 22 that translated *doulos* “slave” every single time, even though everyone knows it means slave and only slave. In fact, the most formidable of all Greek dictionaries, Kittel, says, “The word *doulos* means slave, the meaning is so unequivocal, no study of history is necessary.” It always means slave, and yet it’s not translated slave.

Recently there have been a few new translations. Only one of them translates the word *doulos* “slave” every time. It’s called *The Holman Christian Standard Bible*. But up until that one a few years ago there was only one, and that’s the Goodspeed translation. You ever heard of it? Edgar Goodspeed was a cutting-edge Greek scholar in the 1930s at the University of Chicago. But everybody knows what *doulos* means. Why don’t they translate *doulos* “slave”?

For the answer to that question, you have to go back to the first English Bibles, back to the sixteenth century, back to Calvin and John Knox and other translators putting together the Geneva Bible, who made a decision not to translate *doulos* “slave.” The reason? There’s too much stigma with the concept of being a slave. It’s too strong a downside. It’s too humiliating, too belittling. So they opted to cover the word by replacing it with “servant,” “bondservant,” and eliminated the word “slave,” except when the New Testament talks about an actual, physical slave, or an inanimate object, as I said, like slaves of sin or righteousness. They said it’s just too negative.

They thought that was negative in the sixteenth century? Slavery for all intents and purposes was abolished in the fourteenth century. What were they afraid of? And if they think there was some stigma in the sixteenth century with the concept of a slave, how about in the first century when the writers of the New Testament used the word? There were as many as twelve million slaves in the Mediterranean world. One out of every five people in the Roman Empire was a slave. And if you study the history of the slavery, it was everything that any kind of human relationship could be. There were places in relationships in which it worked very well, and there were others in which it was horrendous and abusive and demeaning. But nonetheless, the Holy Spirit inspired the word *doulos*, *doulos*. Since we don’t see that word in our English Bible, we are missing a paradigm in which to understand our relationship to Christ. Frankly, I started doing research. I found one book from about ten years by Murray Harris. I found an article in the 1960s by Doug Yamauchi on this issue of slave. And they were saying exactly the same thing I’m saying. And I said, “Why didn’t anybody pick this up? Why hasn’t anybody responded to this?”

Just a couple of illustrations to show you how important it is. Jesus said, “No man can serve two”...What?...“masters.” Well, you could if you were a servant, right? You could serve two people,

couldn't you? You could have a day job and a night job. A lot of people work for more than one person, but you can't be a slave to two masters because you can only be owned by one.

Jesus talked slave talk all the time. The writers of the New Testament talked slave talk all the time. But we don't see it because it's not there in our English text. The Russian Bible has it right. Other international translations have it right. We don't. This was how Christians referred to themselves in the early church. There's a story about a man named Epheneus who was imprisoned by the Romans for his commitment to Christ. And then he was brought into some inquisition, and they asked him to answer their questions and to recant his devotion to Christ and swear his allegiance to Caesar. Every question they asked him got the same answer. He said this, "I am a slave of Christ. I am a slave of Christ." And for that, he was executed.

When you think about terms used to describe Christians in the New Testament, we're called children of God, right? We're called heirs and joint-heirs. We're called members of the body of Christ. We're even designated as branches, sheep. And you don't want to mix all those metaphors because each of those gives you a facet of understanding and aspect of our relationship to Christ. But the dominating word inside of which our full understanding of salvation is best seen as this word "slave."

Now there's a corresponding word that I want to mention as well, and that is the word "master," right? If I were to ask you...let me ask you a fundamental question: "What is *the* foundational reality that defines what it means to be a Christian? What is the fundamental reality that distinguishes the believer's relationship to Christ? What is our great confession in three words?" Jesus is Lord.

In fact, if you want to be saved, Romans 10:9 and 10 says, "You confess Jesus as Lord." *Kurios* is the corresponding word to *doulos*. *Kurios* is "lord and master." *Doulos* is "slave." You can no more eliminate *doulos* from the believer's relationship to the Lord than you could eliminate *kurios*.

For years I have written books dealing with the issue of the Lordship of Christ to try to help people who think you can become a Christian without acknowledging Jesus as Lord, which is an impossible thing; but nonetheless it's advocated. And the simple answer to that is this. If He is Lord, which is to say He is Master, then I am His slave. There's no such thing as a master with no slaves or a slave with no master. And 1 Corinthians 12:3 says, "We call Jesus Lord by the Spirit of God." We like to talk about Jesus being a personal Savior. And I understand that. But that is so ambiguous. What do you mean "a personal Savior," like a personal butler? What are you talking about? People say, "You have Him as your personal Savior." Well, I understand that it's not a corporate thing, I understand what's being stated there. But the ambiguity of that phrase suits the contemporary vagueness of the gospel. Like Jesus is my own genie who jumps out of His little bottle when I rub it and ask Him for what I want.

You have to understand, everybody on the planet has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, everybody. And for most people it's not a good one, but it's very personal. We have lost this incredibly important concept of Jesus as Lord and I am His slave. We have a man-centered emphasis in the church. We have man-centered theology that dominates evangelicalism, in which we talk about Jesus coming along as a kind of a buddy who loves you and wants to satisfy all your desires and give you everything you want. But that's not what the New Testament teaches. What the New Testament teaches is not that you're lord and He's your slave; it's that He's Lord and you're His slave. That's the center of all New Testament teaching. It is inherent in saying Jesus is Lord that you are a slave who understands that obedience is the necessary response. The reality of Christ's lordship has been obscured by hiding the word "slave."

Turn to John 15, and I can't say everything that's on my mind about this because I just finished writing a whole book on it, so...I'm just touching lightly on it, but the book will be out in December. It will change...it will absolutely change how you view salvation and your life and your relationship to Christ, and your identity as a believer. Listen to this, John 15, verse 14, okay? Verse 14, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." Does that strike you as an odd thing to say? What? What kind of friendship is that? If I come up to you and say, "I want to be your friend."

"Ah, I'd love to be your friend, John."

"Yeah, I just have one requirement. You can be my friend if you do exactly what I command you."

What kind of a friendship are you talking about here? I never heard of a friendship like that.

Well, that kind of a friendship must assume another prior relationship, right? If I'm in charge of you and I command you and you obey me, you're a slave. But you're a slave who is also given the privilege of being a friend.

Look at the next verse. "No longer do I merely call you slaves, I'm taking you beyond that. I have called you friends." And what's made the difference? The assumption is that we are slaves; He says that. What's the difference? The difference is, you've become my friends. Well, what is the distinction between just being a slave and being a slave who is a friend? Here it is: a typical slave doesn't know what His master's doing. He has no reason--he's not given a reason; he's not given a motivation; he's not given a big picture. A slave is simply told, "Do this, do this, do this." The Lord of the slave doesn't have to give Him his agenda, his motivation, his purpose, his strategy, or his plan. But once he becomes a friend, a slave who is a friend, he says, "All things I've heard from My Father, I've made known to you. I let you in on the inside secrets."

So, we're slaves who have been given the privilege of being friends. What does that mean? It means He is in charge. He commands, we obey; but He commands us with full disclosure of all the reasons,

marvelous, glorious reasons for doing what He's doing.

There are two critical things to understanding the believer's identity. One is Jesus is Lord. *Kurios*--"one who has the power," "one who is the owner" is what the Greek word means. One who has an absolute right to command. It is synonymous with another word. In Jude this other word is used, and this is a good comparison. You'll remember this in Jude. At the end of verse 4, it talks about ungodly persons who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Do you hear the slave talk there? Our only Master and Lord; you can only have one, right? No man can serve two masters. He is our only Master and Lord. What I'm driving at is the word "master." "Lord" is *kurios*. Master is used here as a synonym, and the Greek word is *despotes*, from which we get the English word *despot*. Now we use it as an adjective. We say somebody who is overbearing, totally in charge, dominating is despotic. That's exactly the word that's used. It means an absolute ruler, a sovereign ruler. He is our only despot. He is our only master--extremely powerful words, extremely narrow words.

That is why, when our Lord offers the invitation to follow Him, He says this: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." You're no longer in charge; you're no longer in charge. "Take up your cross and"...What?... "follow Me." That's what it means to become a believer. You just became a slave of Jesus Christ.

Our life is not defined by our own wants, our own will, our own desires, our own ambitions, but by His will, His desires, and His purposes. This is the basic truth of Christianity--Jesus is Lord.

When I say I'm a Christian, I am saying Jesus is the sovereign over my life. Whatever He wants, I submit to that. That's the first great understanding of Christian life. Second...first, Jesus is Lord; two, Christians are slaves. We are *douloi*, that's the plural. It means we're owned.

Now if you expand on that, I only have a few more minutes to kind of whet your appetite a little bit on this. It's really, really amazing. You start to study slavery, how did it work? The slave market, right? Slave market. Slaves are on a block, for sale. You want to buy a slave; you go into the slave market. You pick your slave and then you pay for your slave and then you own your slave, and then you control your slave, and then you provide for your slave, and then you protect your slave, and then you discipline your slave, and then you reward your slave. That's slavery. Think about that with salvation in mind. The Lord went into the slave market of sin, didn't He? And He chose, and then He paid the redemption price, and it wasn't silver and gold. What was it? Precious blood. And we are not our own; we are bought with a price. And now He is our Lord and He said this, "Whoever obeys Me, he is My child." Another metaphor, but the same concept.

So we have been chosen. We have been bought. We are owned. We are provided for: "My God shall supply all your needs." We are protected, are we not? We are disciplined. We are rewarded--"Well done, good and faithful slave." All those concepts within the magnificent realm of what it means to be a Christian are tied to the concept of being a slave.

You say, "Wow! This is a pretty hard pill to swallow." Put yourself in the position of the early church, okay? Listen to this. "Go into the world and preach the gospel." Okay, let's go to the Gentile world; let's go to the Roman world. That's where they went. And here's your message, a crucified Jew--crucified by Romans--is God incarnate. What? Yes, He's not only the Messiah of Israel; He's the Savior of the world. Do the Jews believe that? No, the Jews do not believe that. They were the ones who sought His death and the death of Jesus was final proof that He wasn't the Messiah and that is why the preaching of the cross to the Jews is a stumblingblock. It's a stumblingblock to the Jews, but to the Gentiles it is foolishness. What are you talking about? A crucified Jew executed in an obscure place in Palestine is God in human flesh to be worshiped? If you're near the Circus Maximus in Rome, you can look behind some bars that have been there for a long, long time and you will see what is remaining of an etching in a wall that pictures a cross and hanging on the cross is the body of a man and the head of a jackass. And a man below is bowing down in worship and the inscription says, "*Elix asinus* worships his God." What a joke. A crucified man is God, and mock it by giving Him the head of a jackass. That's what the Gentiles thought. Sell that gospel. Sell that gospel when you get to Rome.

Oh, and by the way, not only do we ask you to acknowledge that this crucified Jew rejected by His own people and executed as a criminal by the Romans in an obscure place in the Middle East, but we are expecting you not only to acknowledge Him as God, but to become His...What?...slave? If you think slavery had a stigma in the sixteenth century, how about the first? You think they had a little uphill climb in evangelism? You say, "Well, you know, we've got to adapt the gospel or people will never believe it." But that's exactly what they preached. Jesus is Lord, not Caesar; Jesus is Lord. You must become His slave.

You go in the book of Acts and that's what they preached, that's what they preached. You...this is what's so hard...you aren't going to see it there because the word is not translated "slave." Acts 4:29, "And now, Lord, take note of their threats and grant that Your bondservants may speak Your Word with all confidence." No, "That Your slaves may speak Your Word with confidence." Colossians 1 talks about being slaves; Colossians 4, and many other places. You see in the pastoral epistles Paul referring to himself, Philippians 1:1, as a servant of Christ. In the Greek it's "a slave." In Romans 1:1, "slave of Christ." Titus 1:1, "slave." James, the half-brother of our Lord; it doesn't say, "James, the half-brother of Jesus." He says "James the slave." Peter, not to be outdone (2 Peter 1:1), "Peter the slave." "Jude the slave." Revelation 1:1, "John the slave." Every one of them identifies himself as a slave of Christ--chosen, bought, owned, subjected, dependent, disciplined, rewarded, provided for, protected, and obedient--and obedient. It was a very offensive message. And that is why 1

Corinthians 12:3 says, "No man calls Jesus Lord but by the Holy Spirit." Only the Holy Spirit could overcome the natural resistance that the sinner has in his heart.

Dear friends, we do evangelism, we preach the truth, we preach the message, but only the Holy Spirit can change the heart. Now, I was doing a pastors' conference with African-American pastors in North Carolina, and the subject came up. We were having a great time. We were in the football stadium at Wake Forest; it's really kind of a neat place. We were up in this beautiful football complex with a glass window overlooking the football field; all these pastors were there. One of them said, "How in the world am I going to tell my congregation? How am I going to tell my congregation this message about slaves when it has such a stigma? What am I going to tell them?"

And I said, "Well, I've got good news for you. You have a loving Master who is all-wise, compassionate, generous, powerful, resourceful, protective, kind, merciful, forgiving, who takes you from being just a slave to making you a slave that is also a friend...Are you ready for this one?...and takes you from being a friend to a son, and not just a son but a joint-heir. And if you follow the rest of the count in the New Testament, you become a citizen of His Kingdom. Do you understand that no slave in the Roman Empire could be a citizen? Couldn't own anything? Didn't have any rights? Couldn't give testimony to a court of law? Couldn't be defended in court? This is a different kind of slavery. He provides everything you need; makes you an intimate friend and gives you full disclosure of everything that's on His heart. First Corinthians 2:16, "We have a mind of Christ." He's revealed it to us on the pages of Scripture, and He makes us sons, and He makes us heirs and joint-heirs with His own Son and He--we could go on--He makes us reign with Him, citizens of His glorious kingdom.

In John 13 He who is in the Upper Room--Jesus was--and He was looking at His block-headed disciples who struggled to understand things and were so selfish. They were always fighting about who would be the greatest in the kingdom, right? James and John even got their mother to go and beg. What man would do that? The strange part is they were the sons of thunder. At one time they're praying down fire on people's heads and Jesus has to calm them down. The next time they're hiding behind their mother's skirt. But there was always this thing about who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom, and they have no thought for what He's about to suffer. He's told them day-after-day that He's going to suffer and die. And they're just into their own thing. And in John 13 when it says, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them" *is telos*--"He loved them to the max." This is a Master who loves with a perfect love, with a complete love, with an everlasting love.

You will never understand your relationship to Jesus Christ until you see it in this sense. Jesus is Lord, I am His slave. You say, "I still have a problem. It seems demeaning."

Turn to Philippians 2, Philippians 2; there's a lot more I could say about this. That's what your pastor always says when he's just run out of material. Philippians...How do I know that? Ha-ha, I'm not saying. Philippians 2, verse 3, you know this: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with

humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves and do not merely look out for your own personal interest, the interest, but the interest of others.”

This is humility, right? Okay, humble yourself. “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.” Christ is the model of humility, now watch this,” who though existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself, taking the form of”...Guess what?...“a *doulos*.” How far down did He come? In the likeness of men, humbled all the way down, verse 8, “To become obedient to the point of death.” What kind of death? The worst--“even death on a cross.”

So if you're having a little trouble thinking it might be beneath you to be considered a slave, better think again 'cause Jesus was a slave gladly. What did Jesus say? “I do what the Father tells Me to do. I do what the Father shows Me to do. I do what I see the Father doing, not My will, Yours be done.”

When You confess Jesus as Lord, you confess yourself to be a slave--a slave who was a friend and a son and an heir and a joint-heir and a citizen of that eternal kingdom, and who is loved, having been captured, enslaved. His captor is a despot of love and a master of mercy, and one day He'll gather us in, Matthew 25:21, and say, “Well done, good and faithful slave.”

I close with Luke 17, Luke 17. Once you understand this, you'll start to see this unfold as you go through the Scriptures and the gospels and through the rest. You can go through the book of Revelation, there are references to believers in every age up until the last age before the return of Christ, and we're identified as slaves. So it's a long-lasting identification. Luke 17:7, “Which of you having a slave”...This is because it's the actual slave in this little illustration; it's translated correctly...“Which of you having a slave plowing or tending sheep will say to him when he comes in from the field, ‘Come immediately and sit down to eat?’” No, no; would he not say to him, “Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself”...Go get cleaned up...“and serve me while I eat and drink and afterward you may eat and drink.” That's what slaves did, right? They served their masters. He doesn't thank the slave 'cause he did the things commanded, does he? He's not like above and beyond the call of duty to be obedient, is it? To do that which pleases your master?

“So you too,” verse 10, “when you do all the things which are commanded you, say this, ‘We're’...What?...‘we're unworthy slaves, we only did what we should have done.’” Wow! Kind of deals a death-blow to the self-esteem notion, doesn't it?

You say, “Well, I thought we were free in Christ.” You are--you are free to do what your Master desires.

Father, it's been wonderful to think about this tonight and great fellowship and we thank you for being able to fellowship around the truth. We confess Jesus as Lord and we confess that we're His slaves. What a privilege. As slaves in the Roman Empire who happen to have the privilege of being slaves of Caesar, which speak frequently of the dignity and the honor, being slaves of the one who reigned. We speak with honor and dignity, being chosen and bought to be slaves of the One who reigns over all, King of kings and Lord of lords. May we be obedient slaves, may we be slaves who do what our Lord commands and in all things endeavor to be pleasing to Him, the One who chose us, the One who bought us with His own precious blood.

Lord, thank You for this great high calling. Thank You that we're Your friends, and we have Your Word, and we know Your mind. Thank You for the promise of eternal reward, which we will enjoy in Your presence. May we be faithful to bear the name, a slave of Christ. We desire to honor You in all we do, and we thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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