

# Confronting Christianity

## Week #5

### Small Group Notes

#### Introduction:

*This week we are going to look at the criticism that asks “Doesn’t the bible condone slavery?” The answer can be tricky so let’s see what the Bible actually teaches.*

#### Discuss:

##### 1. Exodus 21

*Explain: As slaves in Egypt, the Israelites lacked basic rights and had little in terms of a governing system among themselves. The exodus is a story of how God freed his people from slavery in order to worship Him as a nation. At the launch of this new nation, Israel needed new laws and guidelines in order for their society to function. In Exodus 21, God gave his people the law regarding slavery. It can be confusing to see how God had freed his people from slavery only to turn around and give rules that seemed to condone it. The law included repeated reminders that they were once slaves, and this was to inform how they would treat slaves, immigrants, widows, and orphans. Taking advantage of others is part of humanity’s sinful nature, and whenever we have power, we tend to abuse it. But God wanted his people to care for one another. To that end, he regulated this relationship so that it would be mutually beneficial. Voluntary, temporary slavery was as much for the servant’s benefit as for his master’s.*

Ask: 2-3 Discussion questions related to the content.

- ❖ **What comes to your mind when you hear the word, “slavery”?**
- ❖ **How would you respond to someone who says that the bible endorses slavery? Have you ever struggled with that criticism?**
- ❖ **What is meant by the term “Hebrew slave” in 21:2?**
  - *(Read Lev 25:39-46)*
- ❖ **How is the slavery described in Exodus 21 different from the slavery of Egypt? What was the unstated purpose of this type of slavery? What is different from American slavery?**
  - *There is a difference between man-stealing and voluntary indentured servitude.*

- *Slave catching was a capital offense: “Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death” (Ex. 21:16).*
- *The slavery/servitude described in Exodus 21 has more in common with a contract worker.*
- ❖ **What specific rules for slavery are mentioned in Exodus 21?**
- ❖ **In verses 2-6, what protections and/or provisions were provided for those who were slaves?**
  - *The slave was to be released after six years and given gifts—unless he or she chose to remain (Ex. 21:2; Deut. 15:12–16).*
  - *There were stipulations to keep the sanctity of families. (v.3-11) They provided protection of women and children (v.7-11) until the freed husband (who had a history of being in debt) proved his financial stability.*
  - *The master could not abuse the slave (see Exod 21:26-27).*
- ❖ **What could persuade a man to renounce his freedom and remain bound to his master? Why might a man not want to leave his master?**
  - *Genuine love. See (v.5)*
  - *Conditions might be better in life-long service.*
- ❖ **Consider (Exodus 21:21;26-27): What emotions do you experience when you read this verse? How should we interpret this verse based on our understanding of God and his character?**
  - *Obviously, these regulations assumed that a master had the right to administer corporal punishment. If a slave refused to obey, then he could be beaten, preferably on his hindquarters. However, a master did not have the right to injure his slave in any way. If the slave died, the master was guilty of murder. Killing a slave was a capital crime. If the slave lived, there was no need for compensation because the slave worked for the master. It was the master’s loss; so, no further payment was necessary. Nor did anything need to be said about medical care because it was in the master’s own best interest to help his slave heal and get back to work. But what if the slave was permanently injured? In that case—whether the injury was as serious as losing an eye or as minor as losing a tooth—the slave was set free. This is the major difference between slavery in Israel and slavery anywhere else. If a master so much as knocked out a tooth, his slave would be set free. The master*

*had failed in his God-given duty to protect his servant; so, he was released from his servitude. This law was intended to eradicate the physical abuse of slaves. Such a law was unparalleled. We know of no other statute from the ancient world that provided similar protection for slaves. But this law is in the Bible because everyone (slaves included) is made in the image of God and thus has a right to his fatherly care.*

❖ **What are some ways in which passages like Exodus 21 have been misused?**

- *Historically, there were Christians who abused and misused texts like this in order to actively support, or passively excuse American slavery. It was wrong.*
- *Equally wrong is to throw out all the bible has to say regarding slavery/servitude.*

2. Philemon, 1 Corinthians 7:21–24, Romans 6:16-19.

Explain: In Jesus' day, slavery was still an accepted cultural concept. Not only was it part of Greco-Roman culture, but the New Testament as well. The Greek word, δοῦλος (pronounced du.los) literally means "slave" and is seen all over the New Testament, including being used by Jesus himself. It occurs a total of 126+ times depending on translation 335x times in the Septuagint.

❖ **How would you respond to someone who claims that slavery may be in the Old Testament but not in the New?**

❖ **(Have a volunteer read some of these examples.) Do these verses condone slavery? Explain your answer.**

- *There are times when doulos is best described as a "bondservant"— (such as in 1 Corinthians 7:21–24); Someone in the Roman Empire officially bound under contract would serve his master for seven years. When the contract expired, the person was freed, given his wage that had been saved by the master, and officially declared free.*
- *There are times when duolos is best described as a slave, when absolute ownership by a master is envisioned. (Such as in Romans 6:16-19.)*
- *There are times when doulos should be described as a "servant"; where the context indicates a wide range of freedom (Such as in John 4:51).*

- ❖ **Have a volunteer read Philemon 12-16. Does it surprise you to read a letter written by Paul to return a runaway slave to his master? Read Philemon 16, especially. does this statement sound at all like American slavery? Why or why not?**
- ❖ **Have someone read Philippians 2:5–11. How does the fact that Jesus is referred to as a slave/servant encourage you?**
  - Our Lord became a slave/servant for us! *Philippians 2:5–11 (NASB95) “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant (δοῦλος doulos), and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”*
- ❖ **How does Jesus redeem the very idea of slavery?**
  - *(Hint: Read 1 Corinthians 6:20)*
- ❖ **APPLICATION: How should these verses influence your treatment of others in today’s world?**
  - *Even though slavery is outlawed, discrimination still exists.*
- ❖ **Consider the criticism: “The Bible condones slavery.” Could you give an “elevator speech” (a concise speech deliverable in a short time on the essence of a matter) answer to this question of slavery in the bible now that you’ve studied it as a group? (As time allows, ask each of your group members to practice their “elevator speech” on slavery in the bible.**

**Close: How can we be praying for one another? How can we encourage one another this week?**