

## Slave – Our Fundamental Christian Identity (Titus 1:1)

[MENTION PURPOSE STATEMENT SHEET IN BULLETIN]

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Titus.

If you're not as familiar with Titus, it's before Philemon and Hebrews and it comes right after the other books that begin with "T" – Thessalonians and Timothy. Titus is a small book (2 pages or less on some) and often gets overlooked after the much bigger 1 & 2 Timothy, the other parts of the Pastoral Epistles (in fact it's hard to find a commentary just on Titus, it's usually tacked onto the end of 1 & 2 Timothy studies). *How many of you have ever heard a preacher teach through the book of Titus verse-by-verse?*

I told you last week we will be going through this book of Titus in the weeks and months ahead (next week one of my pastoral friends Curt Jones will be here and after that, we will be going through this book each week in a detailed fashion). Titus may be a little book, but it has big truths. It has an enormous message that was critical for the churches it was written to then, and a massively important message that our church needs to hear just as much in our day.

In verse 4, Paul mentions Titus who is the original recipient of this letter that bears his name in our Bible. Verse 5 gives us the purpose or reason why Titus had the assignment he did, to set the church in order and to establish biblical leadership and ministry. We'll get to learn about Titus himself in a future lesson and get a proper introduction to what this book is about and why it was written.

But for today, we're not going to look at the recipient of this book. We need to introduce the author first and how he introduces himself in verse 1, which contains a monumental lesson for us.

**"Paul, a slave of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness," (Titus 1:1, *Holman Christian Standard Bible*)**

We're not going to get beyond the opening verse today, in fact we won't even exhaust the first half of the first verse, because there is a truth here that has been consuming my attention and my spirit and thinking, a vital truth that will not let me go, a truth that is one of the most important and also one of the most underemphasized and even unknown truths for a Christian's understanding of self.

## PRAY

Titus 1:1a is our text today: **Paul, a slave of God** (*we'll stop there*)

These first 5 words of this book are:

- very similar words to how many of the NT books begin
- words we have read over in our translation numerous times
- words we often skip over in our familiarity with them
- words that are so basic and elementary that we don't even pay attention to them but we quickly move to the rest
- words that were a standard expression for how Christians introduced and viewed themselves and each other

I pray that God will open our eyes this morning to NOT miss the import of what is being said here, and that we will not look on these words the same way again. All Scripture is inspired, every word is God-breathed and profitable, and deserves our attention. And some words or truths in particular can revolutionize the entire way you think, can turn upside-down or right-side-up your understanding of the whole of scripture. They can change your life and the way you read the Bible and live the Christian life.

For me, God's glory is one such truth, the understanding of what that word "glory" entails in scripture is a paradigm-shifting mind-transforming ministry-shaping all-consuming eye-opening soul-satisfying truth that is the motive behind everything God does and I pray it will be the passion and aim for everything I do in life.

Another word in the Bible that can turn your whole world upside down is "sovereignty" – like the word "glory" it is very familiar to Christians but when God opens your eyes and heart to understand and apprehend and comprehend truly what that means and just *how* sovereign God is and that GOD IS GOD, when you by grace grasp what that means for Him to be absolute ruler and in charge of every molecule in the universe, and that His sovereign plan extends to man's salvation and includes man's sin and will, from eternity past to the present and future, all things done by creatures and creation are in His hand and used for His glory and the good of His children ... that changes everything! That opens up a whole new world in your understanding of God and His Word and like the truth of His glory you begin to see it on virtually every page, in places you never noticed it before when you just casually read your Bible. It transforms your everyday trust in a truly Almighty God.

In the first 5 words of this book of Titus, we encounter another word that can rock your world and life in a similar way. It's not a new word, not a big word; it's a word we've all read many times, but perhaps have never dwelt on or meditated on the depths of.

THE WORD IS "SLAVE" – SLAVE. "*Paul a slave of God*"

Of course we know who Paul is. He is the converted rabbi Saul who once persecuted the church, even there calling for the death penalty of men like Stephen, but who by God's sovereign saving grace was chosen and rescued and converted when God opened his eyes (spiritually as well as literally after being blinded by God's glory). Paul was his Roman name, the new name he assumed thereafter rather than his Jewish name from his former life.

We're very familiar with Paul. We're also very familiar with and have a good understanding of what the word "God" means in this verse and who He is, at least I pray you know God this morning. But a word and concept that I'm afraid that almost all Christians misunderstand or miss altogether is this fundamental self-identity as a slave. I have only recently begun to understand this myself. John MacArthur gave a gripping message on this at Shepherd's Conference which he really was just awakened to after decades of teaching God's Word (cf. revised *Gospel According to Jesus* intro)

Part of the problem is that most translations shield us from it:

- The KJV has "Paul a **servant**" (& ASV, NIV, RSV, ESV)  
\*at least ESV has footnote "or slave"
- The NKJV & NASB uses the word "bondservant" here which at least distinguishes it from the normal word for servant, but it really doesn't make clear or consistent the original meaning translated "slave" elsewhere
- Only a few translations have the literal "Paul a **slave**" (HCSB, NET, NAB, NLT, Goodspeed, Jay Adams, Wuest)

The Greek word is *doulos* (D-O-U-L-O-S). The noun appears about 130x in the New Testament, and if you count other words from the same root, it appears over 150x. The Greek language had 6 other words that could refer to types of "servants" but *doulos* was not one of them. ALL the original language lexicons and ancient sources say this word *doulos* always refers to a slave, it's a slave.

- NOT a servant who is a volunteer or an employee
- NOT someone who is paid, but someone *paid for, owned*

One standard Lexicon (Grk dictionary) defines *doulos* as ‘one who is a slave in the sense of becoming the property of an owner’<sup>1</sup>

The *Complete Word Study Dictionary* defines this word as ‘A slave, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other (Matt. 8:9; 20:27; 24:45, 46). Generally one serving, bound to serve, in bondage (Rom. 6:16, 17) ... involuntary service, e.g., a slave as opposed to a free man.’<sup>2</sup>

An analytical lexicon says *doulos* was used: ‘of being in a servile condition *enslaved, performing the service of a slave*; figuratively, of unquestioning obedience, in either a good or bad sense *subservient, enslaved, subject* (RO 6.19) (1) generally, as one who serves in obedience to another’s will, *slave* ... opposite [of the word for] (*freeman*) and ... (*citizen*) ... [and the verb form meant] literally, as requiring absolute obedience *enslave, make someone a slave* (AC 7.6); figuratively *gain control over* someone; with ... one who gives up personal rights for the sake of others *make oneself a slave, submit oneself to* (1C 9.19); passive *be enslaved, be subject to* (GA 4.3); *be under obligation, be bound to* (1C 7.15)<sup>3</sup>

The most authoritative lexicon (BAGD) tracing all the ancient Greek usage of *doulos* and defines the word as undisputably meaning slave or ‘*slavish, servile, subject ... in slavery to ... subservient ...* (‘servant’ for ‘slave’ is largely confined to Biblical transl. and early American times [s. Murray, New (Oxford) Engl. Dict. s.v. servant, sb., 3a and b]); in normal usage at the present time the two words are carefully distinguished’<sup>4</sup>

None of the Greek writers or writings used *doulos* to refer simply to a servant, interestingly it’s only some English and American times and translators that wrongly use “servant” instead of “slave”

Sadly the original KJV always mistranslated the word simply as “servant” and *never* translates it accurately as “slave” - never NKJV does use “slave” 30x out of 130 and “bondservant” 17x for when one of the NT writers refers to himself as a *doulos*  
 ESV has “slave” 44x in the NT  
 NIV translates “slave” 57x  
 NASB has “slave” the most of major translations, 104x of 130  
 But only a few translate it consistently and accurately as “slave” everytime (HCSB, NET, Goodspeed, Jay Adams NT, Wuest’s)

Kittel's 10 volume TDNT takes up an entire shelf on the wall – it's the massive definitive work on ancient Greek words. It says:

'All the words in this [*doulos*] group serve either to describe the status of a slave or an attitude corresponding to that of a 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 of the group [!]. Distinction from synonymous words and groups ... is made possible by the fact that 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 ... he has to perform whether he likes or not, because he is subject as a slave to an alien will, to the will of his owner.'<sup>5</sup>

If the meaning of *doulos* is so universally recognized by all the technical sources as meaning slave and not servant, why the inconsistency in the English versions? Why do almost none of the translators use "slave" when Christians write about themselves being *doulos* of God or *doulos* of Christ? The better modern translations will use "slave" when it clearly addresses actual physical slaves or slavery, or when it clearly refers to some kind of bondage to an inanimate reality. But when it refers to a personal relationship, very few translators are willing to translate it as "slave." And in so doing, they marginalize and minimize and obscure a vital and fundamental N.T. image of who we are.

According to one website, when one chairman of a major translation was asked about the choice of "servant" instead of "slave" for *doulos*, he said that it was shameful and difficult because of the history of slavery in America.

It's true that slavery is not a pretty part of America's past up to 150 years ago, but when the N.T. writers describe Christians as slaves it wasn't a pretty part of *their present lives in the 1<sup>st</sup> century*. We know its shameful servile non-flattering image from our history textbooks – the N.T. readers knew it first hand from their actual experience. The word has never been a flattering or dignified title. If we find it hard to swallow that we are nothing more than slaves of Christ because we're thinking of its humiliating harsh reality from a few generations ago, imagine how hard this truth was for NT Greek audiences to embrace right in the midst of real slavery!

I've heard of another conversation with one of the scholars of a modern translation where he was asked "what did you do with the word *doulos*?" The guy hung his head and said "servant. We had a lot of discussions and we all know it means slave, but that's offensive." Offensive? There's a lot of things in the Bible that are offensive. Christians identifying themselves as lowly servile slaves of their Lord may not pump up our ego, it may not be flattering, it may not be politically correct, but it's biblically correct, and yes, it's supposed to be very offensive to you and your pride.

Listen, this word was extremely offensive to the Greek world when it was written, this was not a politically correct word, this was not an easy concept for the Greeks to swallow, and this is exactly the word that the Christians used to describe their identity in the Lord.

The Roman world in the area of the New Testament had over 10 million slaves – in some places the population was a slave to every two freemen. Some masters were good and loving, but everyone knew that the *title of slave* was not dignified - it was a demeaning disdaining degrading lowly position to both free Jews and Greeks.

The Kittle article goes on tell us:

'The Greek finds his personal dignity in the fact that he is free. Thus his self-awareness stands out sharply from anything which stands under the concept [*doulos* where] human autonomy is set aside and an alien will takes precedence of one's own ... What is repudiated is service after the manner of the *doulos*, who not only has no possibility of evading the tasks laid upon him but who also has no right of personal choice, who must rather do what another will have done, and refrain from doing what another will not have done ... Hence the Greek can only reject and scorn the type of service which in inner or outer structure bears even the slightest resemblance to that of the slave.'<sup>6</sup>

Some Jews in ancient times were known to begin their prayers as "I thank you God that I am not a slave." They viewed slaves as lower levels of humanity, ethically inferior in OT times and Jewish practice. To the Rabbis, the word "slave" was one of the worst insults you could hurl at another, and you could excommunicate someone who called his neighbor a slave.<sup>7</sup>

And this is precisely the offensive humiliating word that Paul uses to *call himself* as the fundamental Christian self-identity.

There is a ton of Greek religious literature out there, but never in the very religious language of the ancient Greek world do we find them using this word *doulos* to describe the relationship between a worshiper and his God. The word they used was *philos*, friend. They liked to think of themselves as friends of their God, but not slaves. Listen, that word slave may make you *uncomfortable* – to Greeks it was absolutely *unfathomable* to stoop to refer to yourself with a word so scorned, a position repulsive, repugnant, revolting to anyone who loved freedom. But that’s exactly how Paul often introduces himself. Not with lofty language, but with the lowliest title in their vocabulary, a stunning shocking self-identity!

Romans 1:1 “Paul, a **slave** of Christ Jesus”

*A Christian describing himself as slave wasn’t rare; after Romans, the first epistle we have in the N.T., every other N.T. writer that we know by name introduces himself as a doulos, as a slave*

Philippians 1:1 “Paul and Timothy, **slaves** of Christ Jesus”

Twice in Colossians, Epaphras is introduced as Christ’s slave

*What about James, the great leader of the Jerusalem church?*

James 1:1 “James, a **slave** of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”

*What about Peter, the prominent voice of the original 12?*

2 Peter 1:1 “Simon Peter, a **slave** and an apostle of Jesus Christ”

*What about Jude, the brother of Jesus?*

Jude 1 “Jude, a **slave** of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James”

(notice he was the brother of Jesus, same mother Mary, but he calls himself brother of James, slave of Jesus)

*What about the apostle John, the one Jesus loved and was most intimate with, the one blessed to live to end of century and receive the final revelation of Christ? In John’s typical humility he does not even name himself in 1-3 John but Revelation identifies him:*

Revelation 1:1 (NASB95) “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His **bond-servants**, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His **bond-servant John**”

“His slave John” receives this final revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave Christ to show to His slaves. This is pretty clear, folks: the greatest men of faith in the New Testament had for themselves a fundamental identity and relationship of a slave to Christ, and we are all called slaves of Him. This is the foundational Christian reality – we are slaves of our Lord. This is how they introduced themselves often, mentioning this title before any others.

John describes himself in this verse as “slave John” almost as if that’s part of his name. We might refer to each other as “brother Phil” or “brother Dave, etc.” (which is fine and good) but the early church might also have referred to each other as slave John, slave Timothy, slave Paul, and so on. The N.T. writings speak of believers as slaves:

- *far more than it calls them Christians!*
- the word “slave” is used more times than servant, saint or even believer, or just about any title we use of Christians
- the epistles don’t even use the word “disciple” which was common in the gospels and Acts, but in the rest of the N.T. one of the most dominant words and images for everyday believers was a slave. This is basic to the N.T. message.

Is this the most basic understanding of your personal relationship with Jesus? Is this the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of yourself in relation to God and His Son Jesus Christ?

I would venture to say that if before this message I gave every one of you a piece of paper and asked you to write down the words most basic to your understanding of who you are in Christ, and what words describe your relationship with him, there would be no one listing slave first and very few (if any) who would even have the word “slave” anywhere on the list! Perhaps none of us think first of slave, and most of us would never dream of introducing or describing ourselves to others first and foremost “a slave of God.”

*Friends, Christianity has lost this most basic truth that undergirds and permeates so much of the New Testament, and the church including our church desperately needs to recover this!!*

John MacArthur: ‘Being a slave of Christ may be the best way to define a Christian. We are, as believers, slaves of Christ. You would never suspect that, however, from the language of Christianity. In contemporary Christianity the language is

anything but slave language. It is about freedom. It is about liberation. It is about health, wealth, prosperity, finding your own fulfillment, fulfilling your own dream, finding your own purpose. We often hear that God loves you unconditionally and wants you to be all you want to be. He wants to fulfill every ambition, every desire, every hope, every dream. In fact, there are books being written about dreams as if they are gifts from God which God then having given them is bound to fulfill. Personal fulfillment, personal liberation, personal satisfaction, all bound up in an old term in evangelical Christianity, a personal relationship. How many times have we heard that the gospel offers people a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

What exactly does that mean? Satan has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and it's not a very good one. [But it's very personal!] Every living being has a personal relationship with the living God of one kind or another, leading to one end or another. But what exactly is our relationship to God? What is our relationship to Christ? How are we best to understand it? ...

Do you remember these words, Matthew 25:21? "Well done, good and faithful....." That is not the word for servant. That is not any of the six words for servant, that is *doulos*, well done, good and faithful slave. And the NAS is true to that translation. "Well done, good and faithful slave." Why? Because it's drawn out of a parable taught by our Lord about a man who had slaves. So whenever, in a sense, the New Testament is forced sort of to acknowledge that the metaphor, the analogy or the object of the statement is in fact a slave, then they will maintain that slave language. But in other cases, they will change ...

Now the problem with this is that it shuts out the clarity and the power and the richness of this metaphor. You would understand that. When you give somebody the gospel, you are saying to them, "I would like to invite you to become a slave of Jesus Christ. I would like to invite you to give up your independence, give up your freedom, submit yourself to an alien will, abandon all your rights, be owned by, controlled by the Lord." That's really the gospel. We're asking people to become slaves. I don't hear a lot of that slave talk today, do you? We have by playing fast and loose with the word *doulos*, managed to obscure this precise significance and substantial foundation for understanding biblical theology.'<sup>8</sup>

As Mark Freeman shared with the Doctrines Sunday School class last year, it may not sing as well:

“Well done, good and faithful sla-ave”

Or as we sang earlier in our service:

“Make me a sla-ave, humble and true”

In fact, because Bible translations are only more recently using the word “slave” more and still few think in such terms, it’s almost impossible to find songs and hymns of the past that even use the word slave to refer to a Christian’s relationship with Jesus.

In fact, I did a search on CyberHymnal, a website that hosts nearly 7,000 “Christian hymns & Gospel songs from many denominations” and there are no songs with Slave in the title and there’s only one I found that even uses the word slave in a lyric to refer to a Christian’s identity, an obscure Irish tune written by Emily Crawford in 1896: “The Master Comes: He Calls for Thee”

The Master calls! Shall not thy heart  
 In warm responsive love reply,  
 “Lord, here am I; send me, send me,  
 Thy willing slave, to live or die—  
 An instrument unfit indeed,  
 Yet Thou wilt give me what I need”

This truth that we are slaves of our Lord may not be popular, but it is profoundly important to understanding who you are. A Christian is a slave of God. You are a slave to the Lord Jesus Christ. And you better get used to the idea now, because we will still be in this role even beyond this life to eternity.

If you’re still in Revelation, turn toward the end: Chapter 19.

Revelation 19:1-2 (NASB95)

1 After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God;

2 because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His **bond-servants [lit. slaves]** on her.”

Revelation 22:1-6 (NASB95)

1 Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb,

2 in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

3 There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and **His bond-servants [slaves]** will serve Him;

4 they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

5 And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

6 And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to **His bond-servants [slaves]** the things which must soon take place.

That's an interesting picture in verse 4 that His slaves will have His name on their foreheads. In ancient times if a slave tried to get away, one of the punishments to the slave was marking him with their word for fugitive. We as slaves will have something on our forehead, but it won't be fugitive or our name or something from our past, it will be the name of the Lord who owns us and bought us, the wonderful Lord that we serve as slaves and always will.

*TURN BACK TO 1 CORINTHIANS 7*

This may not be the message of modern Christianity, but it's a dominant message in God's Word and it's there all over the place whether or not you've missed this your whole life:

- Paul speaks in Ephesians 6:6 of being "as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (yes, God wants heart obedience, but He is still our Master and we are His slaves)
- In the NASB translation, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:22 that even someone free when saved is "Christ's slave"
- And the next verse says "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men." (v. 21 says be free if you can)

Notice there the Bible does not command and commend we be part of human slavery, but it does borrow this vivid image from the ancient world and when you understand this slavery theme, the whole N.T. opens up to you in a new way like a flower, like a whole new paradigm, a whole new world, and a lot of passages you've read dozens of times now all of a sudden make more sense.

"You were bought with a price" – you mean like someone who would go to the slave market to buy a *doulos* with a price? Yes!

One chapter earlier, 1 Corinthians 6:18-19, Paul gives a major reason why sexual immorality is wrong, and it only fully makes sense when you understand that a slave was not his own, and was not a servant who could quit or give his two-weeks notice. The Master had bought the slave with a price, the Master owned the slave. A slave didn't have his own rights and freedoms, no will of his own, not even in control over his own body.

1 Cor. 6:19-20: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

When you understand the word "slave" you finally understand the familiar saying of Jesus that is traditionally translated "No man can serve two masters." That's not true if Jesus is talking about serving or working for two different bosses, or having two different jobs – many of you can serve two masters or employers in fact some of you did that this week. If you're a waiter you could be servant to a whole bunch of different people during your shift.

But it's literally "No one **can be a slave** to two masters." You cannot be totally owned by two different people as a slave, and you cannot give complete and constant availability and obedience to more than one master, singular devotion can only be to one.

Sounds kind of like the greatest commandment - with singular devotion love the LORD with all your heart, soul, mind, strength.

Understanding our slavery also opens up to you that word LORD, this LORD we are to be 100% devoted to. A Lord (*kurios*) is the other side of the *doulos* relationship. The word "Lord" by itself requires someone who has slaves. You are not called Lord or master if there's no slaves under you, and if you are a lord, then you must have slaves. Now we're into the heart of the gospel:

"Whoever calls on the name of the **LORD** shall be saved" (Acts 2:23)  
 "Believe on the **Lord** Jesus Christ and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31)  
 "that if you confess with your mouth **Jesus is Lord**, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:9-10)

To a first century reader of the New Testament, professing Jesus as your Lord or Master by itself communicated to them that they would now be slaves of Jesus. This helps you see from now on when you read "Lord" (over 700x in NT) think you're His slave.

Lordship is all over the Bible. Just one of the Hebrew words translated “LORD” in English appears over **7,000 times**.

This is the Bible message. This is what separates Christianity from all cults and false religions – the fundamental confession that Jesus is Lord - which doesn’t just mean that He is God and He is in charge, but also that He is *in charge of you as a Master to a slave*.

The fact that no one likes to view himself as simply a lowly slave before an absolute sovereign Lord who owns Him and whose will now replaces our autonomy and our desires, making everything we do and think subservient to this Master-Lord, this helps us to now understand why the Scriptures say no man can just decide on his own to truly say Jesus is Lord. Impossible, unthinkable. 1 Cor. 12:3 says “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”

This message of a crucified Messiah delivered by His own religious leaders and killed by Gentile soldiers on a cross, the declaration that this same man must be your Lord, implying you must become His slave – you now understand why Paul says that message is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks.

But it’s the biblical gospel. I heard someone give the gospel a few weeks ago, and he said “just believe that Jesus died for your sins on the cross and you can be saved. Believe He is your Savior.” I kept waiting for him to say Jesus is Lord, but he never said it, and he never used the word *trust* or explained what saving faith is (not just intellectual assent) and he didn’t use the word “repent” either.

To not present Jesus as Lord who you must bow to is not presenting the fullness of Jesus in the Bible. To intentionally not present Jesus as Lord in evangelism, as some non-Lordship teachers advocate, is irresponsible and dangerous. To actually deny the Lordship of Jesus is heresy.

And the legacy of all these years of people not seeing the word “slave” in the Bible as describing the Christian’s personal relationship to Jesus is that His Lordship is not fully understood.

Lordship and slavery means the end of our self, our will, our control, our life – that helps us understand why Jesus said “If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself.” That’s slave talk. It’s the end of you, and everything is about the Lord now.

Either Jesus is Lord of all, or He's not your Lord at all.

If you've never bowed and surrendered your life and will and soul before Jesus as Lord, the Sovereign Almighty Master of the universe this day commands you to repent and believe the gospel, deny yourself, confess He is your Lord, and you become His slave. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord— if you don't in this life, you will in the next before this same Sovereign Lord who will send to eternal hellfire all who reject Him

Maybe you're an unbeliever here this morning, and you're not so sure you like this idea of being a slave.

Guess what? *You already are a slave.* Every human is a slave, it's only a question of who or what is their master.

Jesus said "whoever commits sin is a slave to sin" and the book of Romans teaches we are all slaves of sin, totally depraved and in inescapable bondage and so badly enslaved, we don't even know it

Sin is a horrible slave master, but our Christ is a loving Lord and merciful Master. He's not a harsh tyrant, He's not abusive like some human slave-owners were, He's a gracious King who condescends to rescue those enslaved to sin. He Himself comes to the slave market of sin and purchases us with a price, the highest price, the death of His only begotten Son in exchange for slaves that hated Him, while they were yet sinners, Christ died to buy back with His precious blood these elect slaves as His own possession, for His own glory. The slaves God chooses of His own will and pleasure He also redeems, which is language of buying back a slave. And all these slaves will be taken to His house, they

- are exclusively owned, no rights of their own
- no independent living apart from their Master's direction
- constantly available to the Master's will, not their own
- singularly devoted in obedience
- completely dependent upon their Master for everything (provision, protection, etc.)
- knowing that discipline and reward come from Him
- and your only goal in life is to please your Master.

Galatians 1:10 says "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a slave of Christ." (you can't serve two masters, Christ and the pleasure and approval of man. It's Christ or man, can't be both)

When Paul wrote Titus 1:1 beginning with “Paul a slave of God” – everyone knew what that meant.

The responsibility of a slave is summed up in Luke 7:8 “I say to my slave ‘do this,’ and he does it.” Whatever our Lord tells us to do, we do it.

The attitude of a slave is summed up in Luke 17:10 “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’ ”

The value of a slave’s humble service in God’s sight is recorded in Mark 10:43-45: “whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

This is perhaps the most staggering truth of all – not only did God’s Son give His life as ransom for many slaves, paying in full to redeem them from the slave market at the price required, but:

- He who called His disciples slaves, in John 15 also calls those believers His friends
- After the resurrection He called them His own brethren
- He frees all His slaves from eternal bondage in hell, forgives all the sins we were enslaved to, gives us the grace to conquer the sins that still so easily entangle us
- God takes His slaves and also makes them sons (as some benevolent Romans did) and gives us all the rights as sons
- God adopts us into His own family
- God calls us joint-heirs with Christ

As my former pastor said ‘God takes us to heaven where we rule and reign from His own throne and He pours out all the lavish riches in His possession forever and ever and ever for our own unmitigated joy and His own glory. Who wouldn’t want to be a slave under that master? What a joy to be a slave of Jesus Christ ... I submit to Him for all my needs, I’m dependent on Him as my protector and my provider and I submit to all His discipline of my failures and my disobedience that He might conform me more to His will and I submit to Him some day for that reward which He determines is suitable to give to me when I come before Him and hear, “Well done, good and faithful slave.” Let Him give me what He will.’<sup>9</sup>

It is this Jesus who says “deny yourself and follow me” – the same Lord says “Take my yoke upon you because my yoke is ... (what?) – easy, and my burden is light.” You’re not free from any yoke, you’re free from oppressive sin and the enslavement of false religion like the legalistic Pharisees. You do obey the commands of your Lord, but John says *His commands* are not burdensome.

It is this same Lord who calls us to be slaves, this Jesus practiced what He preached here on earth.

There was a vivid lesson the Lord gave His disciples before He went to the cross, at the Last Supper He was their *doulos*. He performed the duty of a slave as an example of what true ministry looks like, as He took off His outer garments, put a towel around Himself, and filled a basin where He stooped to wash the feet of His disciples. It’s been well-said: it’s “love of God that brings us to our brother’s feet; it is the *grace* of God that fills our basin for service.”<sup>10</sup>

Christ was not only an example of a *doulos* in His life, but especially in His humiliating lowly death on a cross like a cursed slave or common criminal.

#### Philippians 2:3-11 (NASB95)

3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a **bond-servant [slave]**, and being made in the likeness of men.

8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Let this truth stagger you. Let it affect how you live and how your view yourself. Let it humble you and make you bow all the more. The only One who had rights gave them up. *To the Glory to God. Jesus is Lord. We are His slaves.* God has spoken this morning.

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<sup>1</sup>Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1989). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains* (2nd edition., 1:740, 87.76). New York: United Bible societies.

<sup>2</sup>Zodhiates, S. (1992). *The complete word study dictionary : New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1401.

<sup>3</sup>Friberg, T., Friberg, B., & Miller, N. F. (2000). *Vol. 4: Analytical lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Baker's Greek New Testament library (120). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

<sup>4</sup>Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1979). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian* (205). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>5</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 2:261.

<sup>6</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 Edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 Compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 2:261-262.

<sup>7</sup>TDNT, 2:271.

<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, "Slaves of Christ," Grace to You Message 80-321, available at <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Transcripts/80-321>  
Much of my sermon is indebted to this message.

<sup>9</sup> MacArthur, *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter : The Way of the Cross*, The Bible speaks today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 180.