

Paul, a Slave of God (Titus #1)

Titus 1:1
ABC 10/25/20

America is often referred to as a Christian nation. There may be some debate as to whether that was true at the start of our nation, but it seems no one would now argue that we're still a Christian nation. In practice, we're a thoroughly pagan nation. Since this is the culture we live in, we face the question, *How can we live as God's holy people in such a pagan world?* Paul's short letter to Titus addresses this problem. Sometime after his 1st Roman imprisonment & before his 2nd & final imprisonment, Paul might have visited Crete with Titus & left him there to help resolve some problems in the churches there & help them get a foothold in their pagan culture. The people of Crete had a notoriously bad reputation in the Roman world. Paul cites one of their poets, Epimenides, in 1:12, **Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons**. This is the famous *Liar Paradox*, where if the Cretan making the statement is telling the truth, then he is lying. But if he's lying about Cretans always lying, then Cretans don't always lie. Paul seems to use it tongue-in-cheek, but it shows their reputation. In fact, the Cretans were such notorious liars the Greek language coined a word, *kretidzo*, meaning *to play the Cretan*, which meant, *to lie*.¹ But the seed of the gospel had sprouted there. Cretans had been present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, where they heard the disciples speak in their own language of the mighty deeds of God (Acts 2:11). Probably some of these Hellenistic Jews were converted when Peter preached & later went home to Crete & got together in home churches. But the Gentiles who got converted brought with them a lot of baggage. &, as vs 11 indicates, some of the Hellenistic Jews were promoting false doctrine as well, making for a difficult situation. Titus had a good track record of dealing with some difficult problems in Corinth. So Paul left him in Crete to get the church there on solid footing. He wrote this letter to him & the churches to give instruction on how to be the people of God in that pagan culture. Although Titus is one of Paul's shorter letters, it contains one of his longer introductions. Vss 1-4 are a single sentence. All of the themes he deals with in the book are here. Perhaps since Paul intended for the churches to read this letter (not just Titus), he may have felt it necessary to

¹ Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott, rev. by Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p 995

spend more time giving his own credentials & the nature of God's salvation. Titus may be a little book, but it has big truths & an important message that was critical for people then & an important message for us today. This morning, we're not going to get very far into this book. Instead we're going to focus on the 1st 5 words & how Paul introduces himself in it. But let's read the 1st 4 vss to begin. **1-4**

How does Paul begin? **Paul, a slave of God.** Your translation probably reads **servant** or **bondservant**. We'll get to that. These 1st 5 words are similar to how many of Paul's letters begin. They're words we've read many times & often skip because of our familiarity with them. In the 1st 5 words in English (3 words in Greek) we come to a word that disgusts us. **Paul, a slave of God.** We know who Paul is. He's the converted Saul who once persecuted the church, but by God's grace was chosen & converted when God opened his eyes to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. *Paul* was his Greek/Roman name. We're familiar with him. We're also familiar with & understand what the word **God** means & who He is. But a word & concept we often misunderstand or miss altogether is Paul's self-identity as a **slave**. Part of the problem is that most translations soften it for us. The KJV has **Paul a servant** (& ASV, NIV, RSV, ESV). The NKJV & NASB uses the word **bondservant** which distinguishes it from the normal word for *servant*, but it doesn't make clear or consistent the original meaning, which is *slave*. Only a few translations have the literal, **Paul a slave** (HCSB, NET, NAB, NLT, Wuest), but that's what it is. The Greek word is *doulos* (D-O-U-L-O-S). The noun appears about 130x in the NT. The Greek language had 6 other words that refer to types of servants but this wasn't one of them. All the lexicons & ancient sources say it always refers to a slave. Not a servant, a volunteer, nor an employee. This isn't someone who's paid, but someone who has been paid for & is owned. One Greek dictionary defines *doulos* as *one who is a slave in the sense of becoming the property of an owner.*² The *Complete Word Study Dictionary* defines it 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* (Mt 8:9; 20:27; 24:45-46)... *One serving, bound to serve, in bondage* (Rom

² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*, 1:740, 87.76

6:16-17)... *involuntary service, e.g., a slave as opposed to a free man.*³ An authoritative lexicon tracing all the ancient Greek usage of *doulos* defines the word as undisputably meaning slave, *slavish, servile, subject, in slavery to, subservient.*⁴ None of the Greek writers or writings used *doulos* to refer to a *servant*. But many English translators wrongly translate it as *servant* instead of *slave*. Kittel's 10 volume, definitive work on ancient Greek words says this:

*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 & self-contained that it is superfluous to give examples of the individual terms or to trace the history of the group.... 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.*⁵

If the meaning of *doulos* is so universally recognized as meaning *slave* & not *servant*, why the inconsistency in English versions? Basically because of the history of slavery in America, which was a racial thing unlike in those days. But by mistranslating it they marginalize, minimize, & make murky a fundamental NT concept of who we are as Christians. It's true that slavery isn't a pretty part of America's past, but when the NT writers describe Christians as slaves it wasn't a pretty part of their present lives either. We know it's a humbling, non-flattering image from our history textbooks. The NT writers & readers knew it from their actual experience. The word has never been a pleasant or honorable title. If we find it hard to swallow that we are slaves of God because we're thinking of its harsh reality in our country, imagine how hard this truth was for NT audiences to embrace in the midst of ongoing slavery! I've read of a conversation with one of the scholars of a modern English translation where he was asked, *What did you do with the word doulos?* The guy hung his head & said, *servant. We had a lot of discussions & we all know it means 'slave,' but that's offensive.*⁶ There's a lot of things in the Bible that are offensive. Christians identifying themselves as slaves of their Lord may not boost our ego, be flattering, or even politically correct, but it's biblically correct. & yes, it's supposed to be offensive to us & our pride. (tech world master/slave designation) This word was offensive when it was written but it's the word Christians

³ Zodhiates, S. *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*, p 1440

⁴ Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament & other early Christian*, p 205

⁵ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley & Gerhard Friedrich, 2:261

used to describe their identity in the Lord. Some masters were good & loving, but everyone knew the title of *slave* wasn't dignified, it was a demeaning, disdaining, & degrading. Some Jews in ancient times were known to begin their prayers, *I thank you God that I am not a slave*.⁷ To the Rabbis, the word *slave* was one of the worst insults you could hurl at another. & someone could be excommunicated for calling his neighbor a slave.⁸ But **slave** is the offensive, humiliating word Paul uses to call himself as his essential identity as a Christian. There's a ton of Greek religious literature out there, but never in it do we find them using *slave* to describe the relationship between a worshiper & his god. The word they used was *philos*, friend. They liked to think of themselves as friends of their gods, not as slaves. The word *slave* may make you uncomfortable but that's how Paul often introduced himself. We talked briefly about this when we began our study on Romans & on James. How does Paul begin Romans? **Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus (1:1)**. In Phil 1:1 he writes, **Paul & Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus**. What about James, the great leader of the Jerusalem church? Js 1:1, **James, a slave of God & of the Lord Jesus Christ**. What about Peter, the leader & voice of the earliest church? 2 Pt 1:1, **Simon Peter, a slave & an apostle of Jesus Christ**. What about Jude, another ½-brother of Jesus? Vs 1, **Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ, & a brother of James**. Don't you love that? He was the ½-brother of Jesus but calls himself **a brother of James & a slave of Jesus**. What about John, the one Jesus loved & who received God's final revelation? In John's typical humility he doesn't even name himself in 1, 2, or 3 John but Revelation identifies him. The 1st vs says, **The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His slaves, the things which must soon take place; & He sent & communicated it by His angel to His slave John**. **His slave John** receives this final revelation of Jesus that God gave Him. This is pretty clear. The greatest men of faith in the NT had for themselves an identity & relationship of a slave to Christ. This is the basic Christian reality: we are slaves of our Lord. This is how they introduced themselves, mentioning this title before others. The NT speaks of believers as *slaves* far more than it calls them *Christians*! The word *slave* is used more times than *servant*, *saint*, *believer*, or just about any other

⁷ Sen Sendjaya, *Leadership Reformed: Why Leaders Need the Gospel to Change the World*

⁸ TDNT, 2:271

title. The epistles don't even use the word *disciple*, which was common in the gospels & Acts. In the rest of the NT one of the most dominant words & images for everyday believers was a *slave*. Is this your understanding of your identity with Jesus? Is this the 1st thing that comes to your mind when you think of yourself in relation to God & His Son Jesus Christ? I'd guess that if, as you arrived today, I gave you a piece of paper & asked you to write down the words most basic to your understanding of who you are in Christ & what words describe your relationship with Him, no one would list *slave* 1st & very few (if any) would even have the word *slave* on their list! & yet this concept permeates much of the NT. John MacArthur writes,

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 & 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 & 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, Mt 25:21? **Well done, good & faithful.....** That is not the word for servant. That is not any of the 6 words for servant, that is doulos... **Well done, good & 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 NT 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 it...*

*Now the problem with this is that it shuts out the clarity & the power & the richness of this metaphor... 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 been playing fast & loose with the word **doulos**, managed to obscure this precise significance & substantial foundation for understanding biblical theology.⁹*

⁹ *Slaves of Christ*, www.gty.org/Resources/Transcripts/80-321

This truth that we're slaves of our Lord may not be popular, but it's profoundly important to understanding who you are. A Christian is a *slave of God*. You are a slave to the Lord Jesus Christ. & you better get used to the idea now, because we'll still be in this role even beyond this life. Rev 19:1-2 tells us,

After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation & glory & power belong to our God; because His judgments are true & righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, & He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants (literally, *slaves*) on her.

Rev 22:1-6 goes on & says,

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God & of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing 12 kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; & the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; & the throne of God & of the Lamb will be in it, & His bond-servants (*slaves*) will serve Him; they will see His face, & His name will be on their foreheads. & there will no longer be any night; & they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; & they will reign forever & ever. & he said to me, "These words are faithful & true"; & 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.

Even in eternity we will still be the slaves of God. Did you catch the picture in vs 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 was marking him with their word for *fugitive*. We as slaves will have something on our forehead, but it won't be the word *fugitive* or our own name, it'll be the name of the Lord who owns us & bought us; the wonderful Lord that we serve as slaves & always will. This may not be the message of modern Christianity, but it's a dominant message in God's Word & it's throughout it. Paul speaks in Eph 6:6 of being **as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart**. Yes, God wants heart obedience, but He's still our Master & we are His slaves. The Bible doesn't command & commend we be a part of human slavery, but it does borrow this image from the ancient world & when you understand this slavery theme, the whole NT opens up in a new way & a lot of passages you've read many times all of a sudden make more sense. **You were bought with a price** (1 Cor 6:20). *You mean like someone who'd go to the slave market to buy a **slave** for a price?* Yes! When you understand the word *slave* you understand the familiar saying of Jesus that is usually translated, **No man can serve two masters** (Mt 6:24). That's not true if Jesus is talking about serving or working for 2 different bosses or having 2 different jobs. Many of us have done that. But it's

literally, **No one can be a slave to two masters.** You cannot be totally owned by 2 different people as a slave. You cannot give complete & constant availability & obedience to more than one master. Understanding our slavery also opens up to us the word **LORD**. A **Lord** (*kurios*) is the other side of the slave relationship. The word *Lord* requires someone who has slaves. You aren't called *lord* or *master* if there are no slaves under you. If you're a *lord*, then you must have *slaves*. This is at 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 & you shall be saved** (Acts 16:31). **If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, & believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved** (Rom 10:9-10). To a 1st century reader of the NT, professing Jesus as your Lord or Master communicated that you would now be a slave of Jesus. This helps us see from now on when we read **Lord** (over 700x in NT) we're to think, *I'm His slave*. This is the biblical message. This is what separates Christianity from all cults & false religions, the confession that Jesus is Lord, which doesn't just mean He is God & in charge, but also that He's in charge of you as a Master to a slave. No one likes to view himself as a slave before an absolute sovereign Lord who owns Him & whose will now replaces his own self-rule & desires. This makes everything we do & think subservient to our Master/Lord, which helps us understand why the Scriptures say no man can decide on his own to truly say, *Jesus is Lord*. 1 Cor 12:3 says, **No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit**. This message of a crucified Messiah delivered up by His own religious leaders & killed by Gentile soldiers on a cross, the declaration that this same Man must be your Lord, implying you must become His slave helps us understand why Paul says this message is a stumbling block to Jews & foolishness to Greeks (1 Cor 1:23). This is the biblical gospel. Lordship & 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** (Lk 9:23). That's slave talk. It's the end of you & everything is now about your Lord. Either Jesus is Lord of all or He's not your Lord at all. If you've never bowed & surrendered your life, will, & soul before Jesus as Lord, today is the day to repent & believe the gospel. Deny yourself, confess He is your Lord, & become His slave. Every knee will bow & every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord. If you don't in this life, you will in the next (Phil 2). Maybe you're an unbeliever here this morning,

& you're not so sure you like this idea of being a slave. Guess what? You're already 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** (Jn 8:34) & the book of Romans teaches we're all enslaved to sin, totally depraved, & in bondage to sin, so much so that we don't even know it. Sin is a horrible master but Jesus is a loving Lord & merciful Master. He's not a harsh tyrant. He's not abusive like some slave-owners were. He's a gracious King who stoops to rescue those enslaved to sin. He Himself comes to the slave market of sin & purchases us with a price, the highest price, His own death in exchange for slaves that hated Him. While we were yet sinners, Christ died (Rom 5:8) to buy back with His own life & death, His elect slaves as His own possession & for His own glory. The slaves God chooses of His own will & pleasure He also redeems, which is language of buying back a slave. & all these slaves are exclusively owned by Him & have no rights of their own. They're constantly available to do the Master's will, not their own. They're completely dependent upon Him for everything, knowing that discipline & reward comes from Him. Our only goal in life is to please our Master. Gal 1:10 says, **If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a slave of Christ.** When Paul says he was **a slave of God**, everyone knew what he meant. The responsibility of a slave is summed up in Lk 7:8, **I say to my slave 'do this,' & he does it.** Whatever our Lord tells us to do, we do it. The attitude of a slave is summed up in Lk 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 Mk 10:43-45: **whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; & 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, & 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 Jn 15, also calls them His friends. After the resurrection He called them His own brethren. He frees His slaves from eternal bondage, forgives all the sins we were enslaved to, & gives us the grace to conquer the sins that so easily entangle us (Heb 12:1). God takes His slaves & also makes them sons (as some benevolent Romans

did) & gives us the rights as sons. He adopts us into His own family & calls us joint-heirs with Christ. He will take us to heaven where we rule & reign from His own throne & He pours out all the lavish riches in His possession forever & ever & ever for our own complete joy & His own glory. Who wouldn't want to be a slave under that Master? What a joy to be a slave of Jesus Christ! We must submit to Him at all times. We're dependent on Him as our Protector & Provider. We submit to His discipline so that He might conform us more to His will. We submit to Him for that reward which He determines is suitable to give to us when we come before Him & hear, **Well done, good & faithful slave** (Mt 25:21, 23)! It's this Jesus who says, **deny yourself & follow Me**, & also says, **Take My yoke upon you because My yoke is what? Easy, & My burden is light** (Mt 11:28-30). Jesus wasn't only an example of a *slave* in His life, but especially in His humiliating lowly death on a cross like a cursed slave or common criminal. Phil 2:3-11 says,

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 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 (slave), & 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. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, & bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven & on earth & under the earth, & that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Let this truth stagger you. If you're a Christian, like Paul, you're a slave of God. Let that truth affect how you live & how you view yourself. Let it humble you & make you bow before Him all the more. If you're saved, you're saved to serve as a slave of God. Not just a servant but a slave. We're saved to serve as slaves of our loving Lord. That isn't only what we're to do, that is who we are. Like **Paul**, we are **a slave of God**. Do we live like it? As we begin to study this letter to Titus, let's do so as slaves being given orders by our loving Master. We have no choice but to obey. As Charles Hodge wrote years ago, *All Christians... were bought with a price. That is, purchased by Christ with His most precious blood (1 Pt 1:18-19). You belong to Him; you are His slaves, & should therefore act accordingly; & not be the slaves of men. The slave of one master cannot be the slave of another.*¹⁰

¹⁰ *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p 125

Because of this, our slavery to Christ has implications for how we think & live. We've been bought with a price. We belong to Christ. We're part of a people for His own possession. Understanding all of that changes everything about us. True Christianity isn't about adding Jesus to my life. Instead, it's about devoting myself completely to Him, submitting wholly to His will & seeking to please Him above all else. It demands dying to self & following the Master, no matter the cost. In other words, to be a Christian is to be Christ's *slave*.¹¹ To think that we, who were once the slaves of sin, the subjects of Satan, & the sons of disobedience, are now & forever the slaves of Christ, the citizens of heaven, & the children of God. This is the joy & wonder of salvation. As His enemies, we didn't even deserve to be His slaves. Yet, He's made us both His slaves & His children. The incomparable reality of adoption is this: If God is our Master, then He is also our Father. As Alexander Maclaren, explained, *If we are slaves, then we are sons & heirs of God through Jesus Christ*.¹² In Christ, we're no longer children of wrath & disobedience but are instead children of righteousness, submitting ourselves to our heavenly Father, whose holy character we're called & empowered to imitate (Mt 12:50; Jn 12:36; Eph 5:1, 8; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pt 1:14–16). Through Christ we've been set free. We're no longer slaves to sin, to the fear of death, or to the condemnation of the law (Jn 8:34–36; Rom 8:15–17; Gal 4:3–7; Heb 2:15). But we have been made slaves *of God, for Christ, to righteousness* (Rom 6:18; 1 Cor 7:23; Gal 5:24; cf Js 1:1; Rom 1:1). This is true freedom. We are simultaneously *sons & slaves*. The 2 realities aren't mutually exclusive, even if the metaphors are different. Forever we will be part of His family. Forever we will be in His glorious servitude (Rev 22:3). & we must begin today.

¹¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. *Slave: The Hidden Truth About Your Identity in Christ*, electronic edition

¹² *Expositions of Holy Scripture, the Acts*, p 149