



A new creation focus through Colossians ...

Slaves and Masters

As loathsome as it is, God has allowed the practice of slavery throughout the history of mankind. God has also allowed murder, thievery, lying, coveting, and adultery. Since man has free will, then all kinds of evil are allowed until Jesus comes and puts an end to it all. So slavery is a part of human existence. Slavery is usually thought of in terms of a slave master owning one or multiple slaves. But there is slavery on a larger scale than this, where the master is not an individual but a government. Under the yoke of the Babylonians, then of the Persians, the men of Nehemiah's

day noted in their prayer to the Almighty, "But they [their ancestors in Israel] in their own kingdom, with Your great goodness which You gave them, with the broad and rich land which You set before them, did not serve You or turn from their evil deeds. Behold, we are *slaves* today, and as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty, behold, we are *slaves* on it. And its abundant produce is for the kings whom You have set over us because of our sins; they also rule over our bodies and over our cattle as they please, so we are in great distress" (Nehemiah 9:35-37).

Just as God uses physical death to teach a message about spiritual death — both a first and second death — He also uses physical slavery to teach about spiritual slavery. Jesus, in discussing this with the higher ranking Jews, commented, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34). Once enslaved, the question would be, how can a person be set free? "If therefore the Son shall make you free," Jesus adverted, "you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). The Son of God, of course, died and rose again to set men free from their slavery to sin. This becomes actuated on an individual basis, however, at the time of a person's obedience to the gospel. In immersion, the old self is buried and a new self is resurrected, "that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, for he who has died is freed from sin" (Romans 6,7). That is freedom indeed!

- **Treatment of slaves** — Because so many of the early Christians were slaves, there were instructions for those slaves regarding their conduct. But in order to have slaves, it is clear that there must also be masters. Some early Christians, then, would also be slaveholders, such as Philemon. "Masters," comes Paul's instruction, "grant to your slaves justice and fairness" (Colossians 4:1). Very few experiences on earth are more frustrating than those where there is injustice or unfairness. When the boss has "pets, who can't do anything wrong," there is tremendous agitation among the rest of the workers. Before punishment is to be meted out, the master needs to be certain of the guilt. Furthermore, the punishment needs to match the severity of the offense, or the sentencing is still injustice. And the slaves need to be treated fairly; the boss or master has to reward or punish based on the individual's performance (or lack of it) in relation to what he can do. Jesus was directly talking about slaves when He laid down this principle: "From everyone who has been given much, much shall be required" (Luke 12:48).
- **Remember the ultimate Master** — "Great and small," the line reads, "God made them all." Even though slave masters have a higher standing on an earthly basis than their slaves, there is a great leveling before the King of Kings. Masters, then, are to be "knowing that you too have a Master in heaven." Earthly masters will give an accounting of how they treated their slaves, servants, or employees.

All men will ultimately stand before the judgment throne of Christ, and they will be judged according to the things written in the books. The key, whether a person be slave or free, is whether his name is written in the Lamb's book of life. Better to be a slave on earth and enter the courts of glory than to be a master and be thrown into the lake of fire.

All men, slave or free, will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

JAY WILSON