

## **NO LONGER A SLAVE**

“The Epistle of Philemon has become an important text in regard to slavery, being used by pro-slavery advocates as well as by abolitionists; in the Epistle, Paul returns Onesimus, a fugitive slave, back to his master Philemon, but Paul also entreats Philemon to regard Onesimus as a beloved brother, rather than a slave.”

(Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery by John R. Mckivigan) and (God Against Slavery, pg.140, by Geo. Cheever, DD)

The Bible has become used historically by both pro-slavery advocates and by slavery abolitionists to support their respective views.

By 1840, slavery began to divide denominations and weaken social ties between the Northern and the Southern states. During this time of tension between the North and the South, the Baptist denomination split. In 1845, the Southern Baptist denomination was formed in Augusta, Ga.

**This lesson will study five aspects of Paul’s doctrine of No Longer a Slave but a beloved brother.**

### **1. Many Bible historians believe that slavery may date back to Nimrod.**

Nimrod was a “mighty hunter” who expanded his territory by warfare (Gen.10:6-14).

We know that human slave trading was practiced among Hamitic nations such as Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon.

Egypt (Mizraim) was engaged in human slave trade in the story of Joseph (Gen.37:25-28) as well as in the story of the slavery of Israelites (Ex.1:5-11; 3:9-10). While the Egyptians used slavery of the Israelites for economical reasons, the Scriptures called it **affliction or wrong** (anah/ Ex.22:21; 23:9) **and oppression** (lachats/ Ex.22:21; 3:9-10).

“And it shall be when your sons ask you in time to come, saying, ‘With a powerful hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.’” (Ex.13:14; Deut.5:15)

### **2. Human slave trade was considered such a violation of human freedom that it carried the death penalty in the Mosaic Law (ML).**

“And he who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, he shall surely be put to death.” (Ex.21:16)

Human slave trading violated the Divine Institution of freedom (DI #1)

(Gen.1:26a) “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image in Our image according to Our likeness.’”  
[tselem demuth]

“Philo argued that it was a wicked violation of nature, which was opposed to the equality in which mankind was created.” (On the Contemplative by Philo)

The NT classified human slave trading among the most despicable sins listed in 1Tim.1:8-10. It is described as contrary to Sound Doctrine.

**3. Many believers have difficulty in justifying point 2 with point 3 so pay special attention. The ML allowed economical slaves (poor) several options of freedom: Kinsman redemption; 7<sup>th</sup> Sabbath; and 50<sup>th</sup> Sabbath.**

Economical slavery was designed to help the poor – “Now in case a countryman of yours becomes poor.” (Lev.25:35a)

It was permissible for a poor person to voluntarily sell himself or members of his family in economical slavery (**ebed**) [hired servants] for a fixed period of time based on the amount owed or until kinsman redemption or until the 7<sup>th</sup> Sabbath or until the 50<sup>th</sup> Sabbath-Jubilee (Lev.25:35-46).

**They were forbidden to sell these people into the human slave trade** – “For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt’ they are not to be sold in a slave sale.” (Lev.25:42)

**They were forbidden to be treated cruelly** – “You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to revere your God.” (Lev.25:43, 53) In fact, they were included in the personal injury section of the ML (Ex.21:20-27).

A **kinsman** could pay their debt and be released (Lev.25:48-54) or he would automatically be released at Jubilee if the debt was so high – “Even if he is not redeemed by these means, he shall still go out in the year of Jubilee, he and his sons with him. For the sons of Israel are My servants; they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” (Lev.25:54-55)

If the slave wanted to remain with the master’s family, and if it was possible, then he/she had the freedom to choose and a special ear-ring was placed in their ear (Deut.15:12-18).

Whenever the slave was freed from the debt, he was given severance pay (Deut.15:12-15). “It shall not seem hard to you when you set him free, for he has given you six years with the double the service of a hired hand; so the Lord your God bless you in whatever you do.” (Deut.15:18/ 24 hours rather than 12)

**4. The Church Age and the New Covenant take a different approach to economical slavery because of the spiritual redemptive work of Jesus Christ on behalf of members of the human race (Gal.3:26-28).**

All members of the human race are born in the **slave market of Adamic sin**.

(Rom.6:17-18) “But thanks to God that though you were **slaves to sin**, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became **slaves of righteousness**.”

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” (Rom.5:12; Gen.2:17; Rom.3:23)

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.” (Eph.1:7; 1 Pet.1:18-19; 1 Cor.6:20)

**5. However, in the case of Onesimus, some Christians were still practicing the practice of economical slavery in the first century AD (Philemon 16-17).**

Paul understood the dilemma and gave doctrinal advice to both the slaves (hired servants) as well as to the masters (debt holder) (1 Cor.7:20-24; Eph.6:5-9; Col.3:22-4:1).

The Great Spiritual Awakening was the source of uniting Christians to preach Paul’s advice to Philemon in our lesson text. This message was preached by men like Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, Charles Finney, and Theodore Weld – “**No Longer a Slave BUT A BELOVED BROTHER.**” (Gal.5:1, 13)