

# Slavery

## I. Definitions

1. Slavery - *n.* 1. Severe toil like that of a slave; heavy labour, hard work, drudgery. 2. Conduct befitting a slave; ignoble, base, or unbecoming behaviour. *Obs. rare.* 3. The condition of a slave; the fact of being a slave; servitude; bondage.
2. Slave - *n.* I. 1. a. One who is the property of, and entirely subject to, another person, whether by capture, purchase, or birth; a servant completely divested of freedom and personal rights.
3. Servitude - 1. The condition of being a slave or a serf, or of being the property of another person; absence of personal freedom. Often, and now usually, with additional notion of subjection to the necessity of excessive labour. Also, a (more or less rigorous) state of slavery or serfdom.
4. Servant - *n.* A person of either sex who is in the service of a master or mistress; one who is under obligation to work for the benefit of a superior, and to obey his (or her) commands. 1. A personal or domestic attendant; one whose duty is to wait upon his master or mistress, or do certain work in his or her household. (The usual sense when no other is indicated by the context; sometimes with defining word, as domestic servant.)
5. Master - 1. a. *gen.* One having direction or control over the action of another or others; a director, leader, chief, commander; a ruler, governor.
6. Serf - 1. A slave, bondman.
7. Bondman - Cf. bondsman.
8. Bondsman - 1. One who becomes surety by bond. 2. A man in bondage; a villein; a serf, slave.
9. Surety - *n.* II. Means of being sure. 5. A formal engagement entered into, a pledge, bond, guarantee, or security given for the fulfilment of an undertaking. Chiefly in phr. to do, make, find, give, put in, take surety or sureties; in, to, under, upon surety. Now superseded by Security 8.
10. Security - 8. Property deposited or made over, or bonds, recognizances, or the like entered into, by or on behalf of a person in order to secure his fulfilment of an obligation, and forfeitable in the event of non-fulfilment; a pledge, caution. Phrases, to enter (in or into), find, give (in), go, †put in, take security. a. As securing a person's 'good behaviour', his appearance in court at a specified time, or his performance of some undertaking. b. As securing the payment of a debt.
11. Bond - *n.* I. *lit.* That with or by which a thing is bound. 1. a. Anything with which one's body or limbs are bound in restraint of personal liberty; a shackle, chain, fetter, manacle. arch.  
III. Legal and technical senses. 9. a. *Eng. Law.* A deed, by which A (known as the obligor) binds himself, his heirs, executors, or assigns to pay a certain sum of money to B (known as the obligee), or his heirs, etc. A may bind himself to this payment absolutely and unconditionally, in which case the deed is known as a single or simple bond (simplex obligatio): bonds in this form are obsolete. Or a condition may be attached that the deed shall be made void by the payment, by a certain date, of money, rent, etc. due from A to B, or by some other performance or observance, the sum named being only a penalty to enforce the performance of the condition, in which case the deed is termed a penal bond.
12. Bond - *adj.* 1. In a state of serfdom or slavery; not free; in bondage (to).

13. Bondage - 2. The position or condition of a serf or slave; servitude, serfdom, slavery.

II. What does the scripture say about *slavery*?

1. The word "slavery" is not found in the scripture.
2. The word "slave" is only found once in the entire scripture (**Jer 2:14**), and it in no way promotes or condones slavery.
3. The word "slaves" is only found once in the entire scripture (**Rev 18:13**).
  - A. This verse is speaking of wicked Babylon and is certainly not promoting or condoning slavery.
  - B. If anything, this verse would be a condemnation of slavery (**Rev 18:4**).
4. Tyrus "traded the persons of men" in its market (**Eze 27:2,13**).
  - A. This was not necessarily a condemnation of Tyrus anymore than trading silver, iron, tin, lead, horses, and mules was (**Eze 27:12,14**).
5. The N.T. condemns people who make merchandise of other people (**2Pe 2:3**).
  - A. Merchandise - *n.* 1. The action or business of buying and selling goods or commodities for profit; the exchange of commodities for other commodities or for money.
    - B. This is not referring to slavery in context, but rather to false teachers who exploit people with religion.
6. The N.T. condemns rich people who oppress poor people (**Jam 2:6**).
  - A. The N.T. condemns people who do not pay people for their labor (**Jam 5:4**).
  - B. Neither of these censures would apply to people who have sold themselves to be slaves/bondmen because they were in poverty or debt (more on this later).
7. The N.T. and the O.T. condemns menstealing and selling men that were stolen (**1Ti 1:10; Deu 24:7**).
  - A. Steal - *v.* 1. *a. trans.* To take away dishonestly (portable property, cattle, etc., belonging to another); esp. to do this secretly or unobserved by the owner or the person in charge.
    - B. Menstealing is to steal (take away dishonestly) men, which is what we would call kidnapping today.
    - C. Kidnap - *v.* Originally, to steal or carry off (children or others) in order to provide servants or labourers for the American plantations; hence, in general use, to steal (a child), to carry off (a person) by illegal force.
    - D. These verses condemn slavery when a person becomes a slave by being captured (see definition of *slave*).
    - E. It is therefore wrong to buy a person who was stolen and made a slave.
      - i. This would include some despot in another country who claimed to own all of his citizens and could sell them.
      - ii. It was therefore immoral and wrong for people in the US to buy men and women who were stolen and made slaves in Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries.
8. What about bondmen?
  - A. The N.T. does speak of those who are *bond* as opposed to *free*.
    - i. Bond - *adj.* 1. In a state of serfdom or slavery; not free; in bondage (to).
    - ii. Bondage - 2. The position or condition of a serf or slave; servitude, serfdom, slavery.
    - iii. There is no distinction between bond and free in the church (**1Co 12:13**).

- iv. There is no distinction between bond and free in Christ (**Gal 3:28; Col 3:11**).
  - v. These verses show that the N.T. doesn't condemn the fact that a person could be *bond* (in a state of serfdom or slavery) in a general sense, though other scripture does prohibit a person from being a slave by kidnapping.
- B. *Slavery is servitude; servitude is the condition of being a serf; a serf is a bondman.*
- i. The word *bondman* is only used once in the N.T. (**Rev 6:15**), which doesn't promote or condone slavery.
  - ii. The word *bondmen* is never used in the N.T.
- C. *A bondman is one who becomes surety by bond; to be surety by bond is to be a security or guarantee for a debt in which you will become bound to pay, either physically or figuratively.*
- i. This would be like a debtor's prison.
  - ii. The Bible allows for "slavery" in this sense.
  - iii. Jesus taught this in a parable (**Mat 18:23-34**).
  - iv. In the OT, an Israelite woman's husband died leaving unpaid debt and the creditor was going to take her two sons to be bondmen (**2Ki 4:1**).
    - a. The prophet Elisha didn't condemn the action of the creditor, but rather helped the woman to raise the money to pay the debt so that her sons would not have to become bondmen (**2Ki 4:2-7**).
    - b. This was in the OT and is not binding in the NT, but Jesus' parable taught a very similar principle.
  - v. The book of Proverbs gives much warning about being surety for the debt of another, but it nonetheless allows for it and says that people will pay the consequences of it.
    - a. Those who are surety for a stranger will hurt for it (**Pro 11:15**).
    - b. Stupid people become surety for friends (co-signing for a loan) (**Pro 17:18**).
    - c. If you are surety for someone else, you might lose your property (**Pro 20:16**).
    - d. If you have become surety for someone else, then try to get out of that snare (**Pro 6:1-5**).
  - vi. This could include a person who joined himself to another person because he was in poverty (**Luk 15:11-15**).
    - a. Join - v. IV. *trans.* To come into contact, contiguity, company, or union with. *ellipt. for join oneself to* 15. a. To come or go into local contact or association with; to go to and accompany (a person); to come to and take up one's post in (one's regiment, ship, or the like).
    - b. Post - *n.*<sup>3</sup> 1. *Mil.* a. The place where a soldier is stationed; sometimes, a sentinel's or sentry's beat or round. b. *transf. and fig.* The appointed place; the place of duty.
    - c. The prodigal son became the servant of a man out of necessity because he was in poverty.
    - d. He placed himself under that man's control who *sent* him into his fields to feed swine (**Luk 15:15**).
    - e. In this case though, the prodigal son was free to leave his servitude because a debt was not due.

- III. The definitions of the words shows that there is a clear distinction between *slaves* and *servants*.
1. Slave - *n.* I. 1. a. One who is the property of, and entirely subject to, another person, whether by capture, purchase, or birth; a servant completely divested of freedom and personal rights.
  2. Servant - *n.* A person of either sex who is in the service of a master or mistress; one who is under obligation to work for the benefit of a superior, and to obey his (or her) commands. 1. A personal or domestic attendant; one whose duty is to wait upon his master or mistress, or do certain work in his or her household. (The usual sense when no other is indicated by the context; sometimes with defining word, as domestic servant.)
  3. Obligation - 1. The action of binding oneself by oath, promise, or contract to do or forbear something; an agreement whereby one person is bound to another, or two or more persons are mutually bound; also, that to which one binds oneself, a formal promise.
  4. Master - 1. a. *gen.* One having direction or control over the action of another or others; a director, leader, chief, commander; a ruler, governor.
  5. Notice that a servant is under *obligation* to work for the benefit of another.
    - A. An obligation is something that one enters into *voluntarily* and subjects *oneself* to.
    - B. A servant works for and obeys another person (see definition).
    - C. Therefore a servant, in a strict sense, is one who *voluntarily* works for and obeys another person for his benefit.
    - D. A slave, on the other hand, is the property of another and has no freedom or personal rights (see definition).
    - E. Every slave is a servant, but every servant is not a slave.
    - F. Every person who is an employee of an employer is a servant.
      - i. Employee - *n.* a. A person employed for wages; b. (nonce-use.) Something that is employed.
      - ii. Employed - *ppl. adj.* That is in (another's) employ.
      - iii. Employ - *n.* 1. The action of employing a person or making use of a thing; = Employment
      - iv. Employment - *n.* 1. a. The action or process of employing; the state of being employed. b. The service (of a person).
      - v. Employ - *v.* 3. To use the services of (a person) in a professional capacity, or in the transaction of some special business; to have or maintain (persons) in one's service.
      - vi. Service - *n.* I. The condition of being a servant; the fact of servicing a master. 1. The condition, station, or occupation of being a servant. II. The work or duty of a servant; the action of serving a master. 6. a. Performance of the duties of a servant; attendance of servants; work done in obedience to and for the benefit of a master.
      - vii. Employer - *n.* a. One who employs. Const. of. b. *spec.* One who employs servants, workmen, etc. for wages.
  6. The N.T. allows for people to be servants of others.
  7. Servants are supposed to be obedient to their masters (**Eph 6:5; Col 3:22; 1Pe 2:18**).
    - A. Servants should serve their masters as if they are serving Christ (**Eph 6:5-7; Co 3:23**).

- B. God will reward servants who serve their masters as if they are serving Christ (**Eph 6:8; Col 3:24**).
- 8. Servants who are "under the yoke" should honor their masters (**1Ti 6:1**).
  - A. Yoke - III. 8. *fig.* or in *fig. phr.* a. Denoting servitude, subjection, restraint, humiliation, oppression, etc.
  - B. They should not despise them if they are believers (**1Ti 6:2**).
- 9. Masters must treat their servants well (**Eph 6:9**).
- 10. Notice that these servants are to be paid what is fair by their masters (**Col 4:1**).
  - A. If they are to be given what is just and equal, then they therefore have personal property and are not the property of their masters, and therefore they are not slaves.
  - B. They are servants that do service for their masters just like people today who are employees of an employer.
  - C. The employee is the servant and the employer is the master.
  - D. This is not referring to servants who were slaves in the sense of being the possessions of their masters whom they stole or bought (after he was stolen), since they were paid, and since such a thing is condemned elsewhere in scripture.
- 11. God says to abide in the condition we are in when we are called, either as a servant or a freeman (**1Co 7:20-21**).
  - A. There is clearly nothing wrong with being a servant, even if you are a Christian.
  - B. Though these verses contrast being a servant with being free, they are not necessarily referring to slaves (see definition of *servant*).
    - i. If one is a voluntary servant (an employee), he is still not free in the areas and conditions in which he has agreed to serve his master (employer).
    - ii. Employees must obey their employers and are not free to do as they please.
  - C. Even if a servant is a slave which has sold himself to a master due to poverty, excessive debt, or being a surety for someone else's debt, there is still nothing wrong with it.
  - D. In either case (a servant (employee), or a slave), if the person has opportunity to be free, they should opt for it (**1Co 7:21**).
  - E. We are all servants one way or the other, either of men, or of the Lord, or of both (**1Co 7:22**).
  - F. We should never be servants of men in the same way we are servants of Christ (religiously or spiritually) because Christ alone owns us (**1Co 7:23**).

#### IV. Summary of the prohibitions and allowances of slavery or servitude in the NT.

1. The NT forbids kidnapping (menstealing) and therefore prohibits the type of slavery in which a person is stolen and forced into servitude, such as was the case with much of the slavery in the US up to and including the 19th century.
2. The NT does allow for a person to be *bond* (In a state of serfdom or slavery; not free; in bondage). This state of bondage could be the result of:
  - A. selling oneself to be another man's servant because one was in extreme poverty.
  - B. selling oneself (or being sold) to be another man's servant because one was in excessive debt.
  - C. selling oneself (or being sold) to be another man's servant because one was surety for another man's debt.
3. The NT also allows for a person to voluntarily become another man's servant in exchange for compensation, such as an employee and employer relationship.

V. Did the OT allow for slavery?

1. First of all, remember that law of Moses was for Israel and none other (**Psa 147:19-20**).
  - A. The OT was abolished by the death and resurrection of Christ (**2Co 3:6-13; Gal 3:19; Eph 2:15; Col 2:14-17**).
  - B. The NT replaced the OT (**Heb 8:13**).
  - C. Therefore if a law is not reiterated in the NT, then it is not binding on us today.
2. Israelites were able to buy servants who were foreigners for money (**Exo 12:44; Lev 22:11**).
3. Israelites could buy a Hebrew servant, but could only keep him six years and then had to let him go free on the seventh year (**Exo 21:2; Deu 15:12**).
  - A. He wasn't to be sent away empty, but furnished liberally with provisions (**Deu 15:13-14**).
  - B. The master was supposed to send him away gladly and God would bless him for it (**Deu 15:18**).
  - C. If the servant was single when he came, he would leave single, and if he was married when he came, he would take his wife with him (**Exo 21:3**).
  - D. If his master gave him a wife and he had children with her, he would be free to go, but the wife and the children would be the master's (**Exo 21:4**).
    - i. This law would seem unfair to some people.
    - ii. Keep in mind that this servant was a Hebrew and knew the law, so he would not have had to take the wife and have children.
    - iii. He could have waited to marry until after he was free.
    - iv. God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts (**Isa 55:8-9**).
    - v. Let God be true and every man a liar (**Rom 3:4**).
  - E. If the servant loved his master and his wife and children and didn't want to go free, then his master would take him before the judges and bore a hole in his ear with an aul and he would be his servant for life (**Exo 21:5-6; Deu 15:16-17**).
  - F. These laws are not repeated in the NT.
4. An Israelite could sell his daughter to be a maidservant (**Exo 21:7**).
  - A. If she was betrothed to her master and she didn't please him, he could not sell her to someone from another nation, but he had to let her father redeem her (**Exo 21:8**).
  - B. If he gave her to his son for a wife, he had to treat her like a daughter (**Exo 21:9**).
  - C. If the son took himself another wife, he still had to provide her with food, clothing, and sex and if he failed to then she would go free (**Exo 21:10-11**).
  - D. If you don't like these laws which God commanded in the OT, remember **Isa 55:8-9** and **Rom 3:4**.
  - E. These laws are not repeated in the NT.
5. If the brother of an Israelite became poor, he could sell himself to him, but he was not to treat him as a bondservant, but as a hired servant (**Lev 25:39-40**).
  - A. Some servants were hired servants (**Exo 12:45**).
    - i. Hired - *ppl. adj.* 1. Engaged or employed for payment; let out on hire; mercenary.
    - ii. Mercenary - *n.* 1. One who labours merely for hire; a hireling, a mercenary person.
    - iii. Mercenary - *adj.* 1. Of persons: Working merely for the sake of monetary or other reward; actuated by considerations of self-interest.
    - iv. Hired servants were paid and were clearly not slaves.

- v. A hired servant was to be paid and not oppressed (**Deu 24:14-15**).
- B. He was only to serve him until the year of jubile and then he was to be set free (**Lev 25:40-41**).
- C. He was to be treated well and not ruled with rigor (**Lev 25:43**).
- D. If a poor Israelite sold himself to a sojourner or a stranger in Israel, he could be redeemed by a family member or by himself (**Lev 25:47-49**).
  - i. The price of his redemption was calculated according to the number of years from the time he was sold to him until the year of jubile (**Lev 25:50-52**).
  - ii. He was to be treated as a yearly hired servant and not ruled with rigor (**Lev 25:53**).
  - iii. If he wasn't redeemed, he would go free in the year of jubile (**Lev 25:54**).
  - iv. These laws are not repeated in the NT.
- 6. The Israelites could buy bondmen and bondmaids of the heathen which lived around them (**Lev 25:44**).
  - A. They would be their possessions (**Lev 25:45**).
  - B. They would belong to them forever and they would be their children's inheritance (**Lev 25:46**).
  - C. If you don't like these laws which God commanded in the OT, remember **Isa 55:8-9** and **Rom 3:4**.
  - D. These laws are not repeated in the NT.
- 7. God's law regarding the treatment of servants.
  - A. If a man smote his servant with a rod and he died, he would be punished (**Exo 21:20**).
  - B. If the servant continued a day or two and died after that, he would not be punished (**Exo 21:21**).
  - C. The reason for this was that "he is his money"; i.e.: he bought him (**Exo 21:21**).
  - D. If a master hit his servant and he lost an eye or a tooth as a result, the servant would go free (**Exo 21:26-27**).
  - E. A servant that escaped from his master was not to be sent back, nor oppressed (**Deu 23:15-16**).
  - F. There was no Fugitive Slave Act in the OT which ordered the return of escaped slaves.
  - G. If you don't like these laws which God commanded in the OT, remember **Isa 55:8-9** and **Rom 3:4**.
  - H. These laws are not repeated in the NT.

VI. Skeptics, Bible critics, and even some professing Christians who condemn the scripture for permitting servitude are hypocrites.

- 1. They are slaves to sin and Satan (**Joh 8:34; Rom 6:16-17, 20**).
- 2. They are slaves to lies (**Joh 8:32**).
- 3. Some of them are in bondage to their false works-based religion (**Gal 4:3, 8-10; Gal 4:21-26; Gal 5:1**).
- 4. Most of them are slaves to bankers and debt, and they promote a system of debt which enslaves the masses (**Pro 22:7**).
- 5. Many of them are in bondage to the fear of death (**Heb 2:15**).
- 6. Only Jesus can give us true freedom (**Gal 4:4-5; Gal 5:1; Joh 8:31-32**), whether we be bond or free (**1Co 12:13**).