

NIGHT TWO

Opening: We are so glad you are joining us, whether you are in the room with us, or joining us on the other side of the screen online. Over the next four weeks we will explore some of the tough questions that confront Christianity. This is an exploratory process and one that will hopefully encourage you and edify you as we wrestle with these questions in light of Scripture, history, philosophy, and culture. Maybe these barriers to belief in Jesus are actually signposts. Maybe tough questions are healthy and help us pursue God and truth. This handout and Rebecca Mclaughlin's book will provide the content to help us go deep.

1. Session 3 | Ch.10 Doesn't The Bible Condone Slavery?

- a. **Recap of last week** the goal here is not just to gather Information, but to discover truth and meet God so that we can know Him and trust Him, which inevitably leads to our Transformation. The goal is to progress from Belief -> Truth -> Knowledge -> Faith. With the notion that all roads lead to God, there are too many problems with this position that would allow us to adopt such a claim. It's disrespectful, it throws out truth, it goes against history, it blows off conversions, and it does not account for Jesus and His exclusive claims.
- b. **Intro Douglass** Read intro p.175 "This I sought to do; and though for weeks I was a poor, broken-hearted mourner, traveling through doubts and fears, I finally found my burden lightened, and my heart relieved. I loved all mankind, slaveholders not excepted, though I abhorred slavery more than ever. I saw the world in a new light, and my great concern was to have everybody converted." - Frederick Douglass
 - i. As we go through, we'll see the horrors of slavery but also how biblical ethics radically undermines human slavery and creates a whole new paradigm, within which every Christian is both a slave and deeply free.
- c. **The God Who Sees** Basic story of the first slave described in the OT seems to confirm our worst suspicions: the patriarch Abraham slept with his wife's slave girl. This seems like clear endorsement by the Bible of slavery. Yet, as with many OT narratives, we need to look at the entire story to get the real meaning.
 - i. From Genesis 3 onward, the Bible describes human sin and it is clear that *description* is not *prescription*, as the Bible's heroes make terrible mistakes.
 - ii. Abraham and Sarah were old and infertile and instead of trust what God had promised (descendants that would outnumber the stars), Sarah urged Abraham

to sleep with her Egyptian slave girl Hagar. Quick note that in ANE culture sleeping with a slave girl would not have been immoral at all. Becoming an additional wife of Abraham was a status raise for Hagar. In the narrative, Abraham and Sarah clearly go against what God wills and reveals their lack of faith. Hagar conceives, Sarah begins to deal harshly with Hagar and she flees. Then an angel of Lord appeared to Hagar and made promises to this escaped slave girl that actually mirrored God's promises to Abraham himself. This is crazy! Hagar is then the first person in the Scriptures to name God: So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." (Gen 16:13) Later in Gen 21 when Sarah's son Isaac is born, Sarah drives Hagar away again. Again, God appears to her. He takes care of her and her son, Ishmael, and reiterates his promises. We don't know Hagar's full story, but it is clear that what Abraham and Sarah did was wrong and they did not trust God and God looked after Hagar, who was the victim.

d. Slavery in the OT A long line of slave narratives in the OT. Joseph (Abraham's great grandson), who was sold into slavery by his brothers, is redeemed by God, leading Joseph to become a ruler in Egypt. With Hagar and Joseph in mind, Three major differences between ancient slavery and its more modern incarnations:

- i. Ancient slavery was not attached to racial hierarchy. Hagar was an Egyptian slave to Hebrews; Joseph was a Hebrew slave to Egyptians.
- ii. It was actually common for people to sell themselves into slavery. It was a form of employment and preferable to destitution.
- iii. Many slaves suffered brutality and exploitation, but advancement was also possible within slave status and even to the point of becoming a civil servant.

After Joseph, we get the story of Moses and the Exodus. Here is an early and pivotal story of the plight of God's people in bondage and terrible slavery and how God emancipated them from slavery. Later as God gives his people the law, there is repeated reminders that they were once slaves and how they should now treat slaves, immigrants, widows, and orphans. Exodus 21:16 says "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death." Israelites were also commanded to offer refuge to escaped slaves: "You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him. You shall not wrong him." (Deut 23:15).

The OT invites us to see the world through enslaved eyes: from Hagar to Joseph, to the whole people of Israel. In the Law, slave-catching is banned and slaves had many protections. But the OT does not outright ban slavery itself. What about the NT.

- e. **Paul's Letter to Philemon** Paul's letter written to return a runaway slave to his master. What?!! Paul writes from Rome where he meets an escaped slave, Onesimus, and he is sending Onesimus back to his master, Philemon. After analyzing the letter, here are some conclusions:
1. Onesimus is a beloved brother
 2. Paul calls him his son
 3. Philemon should receive Onesimus as if it was Paul himself.
 4. Paul is basically commanding him to do this but even more
 5. Letter is also written to other believers, so that Philemon can be held accountable
- f. **Jesus, the Slave** When his disciples were jostling for position in the future kingdom, Jesus replied "It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matt 20:26-27) Jesus came to be a slave and that is what enabled His Kingship. He became a ransom for all. Jesus also demonstrated this when, during the Last Supper with his disciples, He performed a foot washing which was usually a role performed by slaves. He said, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (John 13:14)
- g. **Christians as Slaves** In NT terms, every follower of Jesus is a slave of Christ. In the first century, a slave would be known by his belonging to someone. Paul constantly applies the Greek word *Doulos* to himself: "Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus (Rom 1:1); Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:1). Peter, James, and John also introduce themselves as slaves in their letters.
- i. Why the slave language?
 1. To communicate the utter belonging to Christ (not our own, bought with a price in 1 Cor 6:19-20)
 2. Slave title communicated the cost of following Jesus. Persecution, marginalization, and suffering were a part of the deal.
 3. Certainly, another reason is that many early Christians were slaves. Hearing leaders refer to themselves in this way must be encouraging, showing equality of all.
- h. **Slaves as Christians** Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- i. "The New Testament argues against slavery...by cutting the legs out from under it. Jesus inhabited the slave role. Paul calls himself a slave of Christ, loves a runaway slave as his very heart, and insists that slave and free are equal in

Christ. With no room for superiority, exploitation, or coercion, but rather brotherhood and shared identity, the New Testament created a tectonic tension that would ultimately erupt in the abolition of slavery.” (p.183)

i. Has the Church Endorsed Slavery?

- i. As followers of Jesus were wielding more political power they began to speak up. In the 4th century onward. In the 7th century you see large scale abolitionism taking hold and over time, the Christianization of Europe effectively eliminated slavery. Many, however did remain silent about slavery as well.
- ii. A specific race-based slavery exploded onto the world stage with European colonial expansion from the 1500's-1800's.
- iii. We must be careful not to assume the horrors of slavery were the fruits of Christianity. William Wilberforce, a strong Christian, abolitionist, and member of British Parliament spent many years fighting against slavery by appealing to the Christian conscience of Britain. Christian influence had waned during this time. Wilberforce was often seen as a Christian fanatic. Wilberforce believed he had been called by God to shipwreck the slave trade which after decades, he did.
- iv. “Turning our gaze to America, it is a tragic irony that a country founded on the “self-evident” truth that “all men are created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” including “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” so radically failed to deliver on these ethics. (p.186) It has taken some of our greatest heroes and our worst war to begin to make real, those founding principles that are based on a Biblical view of the world.

j. The Miracle of the Black Church

- i. “If slavery is the founding sin of America, the existence of the black church is perhaps its greatest miracle. Many Christian leaders failed to denounce slavery. Many abusive slave owners called themselves Christians. Yet Christian faith penetrated deeply into slave communities. Some whites invested in and encouraged the faith of their slaves. Others banned their worship gatherings and punished those who participated. Many slave churches met in secret. The Jesus of the Scriptures – who cared for the oppressed and marginalized, embraced a slave role, spoke truth to power, and suffered torture, rejection, and death – appealed to slaves. Seeing through the hypocrisy of their oppressors, many found hope in the knowledge that they were loved,

redeemed, and treasured by an everlasting God, who would one day bring justice.” (p.190)

- ii. We have seen that the Bible undermines slavery and pulls the legs out from under it. The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords Himself took the form of a servant and humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a Cross. Jesus inverts slavery by removing the ability to have power over others. Those that want to rule or lead, must serve and love as He did. Slavery as the fallen and broken world has created it, is simply impossible in God’s Kingdom and the rule of Jesus. The Bible is actually a weapon against the forces of slavery and the evils in the world.

- iii. Let’s remember Frederick Douglass, whose conversion made him abhor slavery more than ever, but whose “Great concern was to have everybody converted.” (p.192)