

Paul... God's Bondservant

Romans 1:1-2

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1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,

The introduction of the Pauline Epistles virtually always begin with a proclamation of the authority of Paul to address the recipients of the given letter. The point is to establish both his authority to address them and his qualifications to do so. He often does this by citing the Lord Jesus Christ as the One Who has called him to the office he fulfills.

Here, Paul speaks of himself in four fashions as he describes himself as the author of the epistle,

¹ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,

- We can say at least 4 things about what Paul says about his mission for the Lord here in these first two verse:

1. The Sender of the Epistle

***1** Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,*

Just to start we ought to note that “Paul” would have been regarded as a sort of “surname” or second name at the time of the writing. It was an added name, and can be regarded as derived from his occupation or other aspect of his circumstances. In our present time we think of the surname as a name borne in common with other members of ones’ common family, but it can also be a name given as a second name given to someone such we find in Mark 3:16 where Jesus speaks Peter in this fashion:

¹⁶ Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter;

We see a couple of things about this matter before we go on. First, we ought to see the “giving” of the surname. The name of “Paul” was given to him sometime during his first missionary journey (Acts 13:9).

⁹ Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him

We're not exactly sure of the exact moment or circumstances that resulted or was taken to give him the surname. However, it is fairly certain that it was the preaching trip at Cyprus that provided the time that it occurred. Just to give some context to help our thinking, both Salamis and Paphos were cities/towns on Cyprus at the time. Historically, we're told that, at the time in view, Emperor Sergius Paulus had before him a man named "Bar-Jesus" who the Bible says was a "sorcerer". Just to note, a "Sorcerer" was one who at least dabbled and even used the "supernatural" arts. Bar-Jesus's name was also give (or translated) as Elymas. Verse 9 of Acts 13, referring to the new name given to Bar-Jesus, goes on to speak of the fact that Saul's name had now been added to, he was now Paul and was filled with the Holy Spirit and went on to rebuke Elymas/Bar-Jesus and declared that God would make him blind. As a result, we see, in verse 11, that "...a dark mist fell on him and he went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand, not seeing the sun for a time." It seems that mist on his sight did indeed immediately fall.

And so we should also note that his first name was Saul which fit the fact that he was of the tribe of Benjamin from which the first king of Israel came whose name was Saul. Just think for a moment about what a contrast these two Sauls were; one started well and ended badly, the other started badly and ended well.

Further, in verse 1, we see that...

2. *He Presents himself as 'bondservant' in his personal relation to Jesus Christ,*

¹ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, ...

The word used here for "Bondservant" is the word "*Doulos*", and comes from a word that has the basic meaning "to bind". It is the common NT word for servant. One of the really interesting things about this word is that it is not "servant" in the common modern sense of working for another. It virtually always carries the sense in Gr. culture of the involuntary, permanent service of a slave. It is clear from the other uses in the NT that the believer who voluntarily takes the position of servant/slave to Christ is seen to have no rights or even will of his own. He does always and only the will of his Master. For that matter, it is the assurance of the NT that the relationship of slave/Master that sees our Lord bind Himself to care for His servant/slave. In Deuteronomy 15:12-18 we read what we could say is "The Law Concerning Bondservants":

¹² "If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. ¹³ And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed; ¹⁴ you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. From what the LORD has blessed you with, you shall give to him. ¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the

LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today. ¹⁶ And if it happens that he says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, ¹⁷ then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise. ¹⁸ It shall not seem hard to you when you send him away free from you; for he has been worth a double hired servant in serving you six years. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.

We can rest assured that the Law is equally binding on both Master and servant/slave. Now, Paul elevates this word by using it in its Heb. sense to describe a servant who willingly commits himself to serve a master he loves and respects.

⁵ But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' ⁶ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever. (Exodus 21:5-6)

This idea of being a slave of God/Christ was conditional upon one being entirely given over to Him, and separated from the pleasing of men...Gal. 1:10

¹⁰ For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

It is interesting that there is a contrast here between those who seek to please men and those who conduct themselves as a “bondservant of Christ”. Remember that “bondservant” is a word that speaks of one who is not making the decisions and is not directing the actions involved in the matter. Remember also that this is not speaking of one who was seized against his will, though there is some sense of a decision made in eternity past involved in the whole salvation matter. But we MUST remember that with BOTH coming to Christ and likewise in service to Him there IS the matter of surrendering the will to the call of God. Admittedly, it is a difficult and complex matter to think you way through, but it is something we need to consider. This is referred to in the next portion of verse 1...it was “according to” one’s acknowledgement of the truth of the Word of God and what it says about how one serves godliness... In Titus 1:1 we read much the same statement, modified just a bit...

Greeting

¹ Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness,

So, it seems to have been a conditional servitude, especially in the OT, (though it surely followed over in the NT fulfillment of those prophecies. Genesis 26:24:

²⁴ And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake."

Virtually all of God's OT servants and Prophets could be seen as God's slaves in their involuntary service to Him. It is not so much that, in the human sense, speaking of their will, they had no say in their part in the service of God; BUT, that they were clear and followed through in giving themselves over to the yielding of their will and in obedience to His will and commands. In Numbers 12:7 this distinction is made fairly clear:

*⁷ Not so with My servant Moses;
He is faithful in all My house.
(Cf. 2 Sam. 7:5; Is. 53:11).*

No matter what "part" or aspect of God's house, Moses was "faithful" in following through and doing what it was God commanded. This the classic view of Moses. I don't think any believer can take a view of Moses struggling with what God had told him to do, torn and swiveling between on side and another of the issue, struggling with what decision to make. Not at all! If God told him to do a thing - that settled it! He immediately went and did it. Now, this is not to say that Moses never, ever failed or disobeyed. He surely did, like all of Adam's progeny, he struggled with sin and failed, at times, in the struggle. BUT, the Bible portrays him, in very uncertain terms, as a "servant", a slave of God.

The idea is that of servitude, complete and unrelenting. There are many, many people who see the idea of servitude, of one taken into the service of God, as a parallel to the kind of slavery that is present all around the world today, and of that which so shamefully was a part of our own history here in the US. But this is not so. It's not so for a couple reasons.

1. The instances of servitude that we see in the Scripture, except when specifically mentioned as voluntary are ALL denounced. For instance, in Genesis 37:25–28 we see that Joseph was sold into slavery in a plainly labeled negative, even abominable thing.

²⁵ And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt. ²⁶ So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh." And his brothers listened. ²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and

lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Though it is clear from later passages, that this was something that was in the hand of God and that He used for His purposes. Ultimately, of course, we know that it led to an even greater “slavery”, that of the people of Israel, the entire nation, to the nation of Egypt. That, in turn, led to several more HUGE actions by God that made great use of this terrible action by Joseph’s brothers and the Midianites.

1. The birth of the child Moses, and ultimately, the calling of that great Prophet of God.
2. Moses, of course, we know, was used by God to confront Pharaoh concerning his terrible act in taking, holding and using God’s people in this fashion.
3. Moses was used to demonstrate the great miracles in Egypt that convinced (or perhaps, convicted?) Pharaoh to let God’s people go.
4. Moses was used to lead Israel through the wilderness to the border of the Promised land. (Remember that Joshua actually led them INTO that land).
5. Moses was used by God to be the vessel by which God gave the Law.
6. We know also that Moses wrote all 5 of the Books of the Pentateuch.
7. We know also that, contained within the pages of the Pentateuch, are a great number of Prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, His life, death, and eventually His second coming to establish His Kingdom.
8. Moses also acted as the pattern for all of the following Prophets in the OT era.

Not to excuse, by any means, the horror of slavery, present throughout the centuries and exercised by men, all of those “owning” slaves every bit as wicked as was Joseph’s brothers, the Midianites and the Pharaoh of Egypt. Our point here is NOT to excuse human slavery in any of its many forms. Not by any means.

The presence of the awful nature and view of human slavery was very likely the reason why virtually ALL human translators of the English Bible have rendered the words used in the OT and the NT as “servant” rather than what the original writers intended, the word “slave”. The intention of the writers of Bible was to convey the idea of service taken by the one who is served, NOT of a service taken by the individual in view.

This was the case with Paul.

¹ Paul, a bondservant of God...

The word “bondservant” conveys exactly the idea we are speaking of. It is not so much that Paul undertook the servanthood spoken of. Rather, it is referring to a servanthood, pretty much a “slavery” to which God drew Paul in order to use him in the many ways in which He ultimately did so. Though it surely involved Paul’s willingness and effort to fulfill this calling; that does not

mean that the power and purposes of God were set aside until Paul went ahead and “agreed” with Him. as with many other matters in which men are involved and participate in the works of God, it is God Himself Who initiates and empowers that work with men simply taking part in the working out of that id and will of God for His creation.

There is little doubt then, that Paul identified himself as a “bondservant”, a slave of God. He knew that God had done the work needful to place him where he was, in that esteemed position that he goes on to describe.

He next speaks of himself as...

3. He Speaks of himself as an ‘Apostle’ in his official relation to the Lord Jesus

¹ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God (Romans 1:1)

Whereas the word used already, “bondservant” speaks of being selected by God and drawn into what we should understand as slavery to Him. We can actually see this as referring to a form of servitude in which we have little to say about what it is that we do (spiritually speaking and in the “how” about it is done). HE is the Master and Lord and we are but the hands which He uses to accomplish His desires in the world.

Now, he moves on the fact that he has been “called to be an Apostle”. Whereas “bondservant” spoke of his personal relationship with Jesus as he served and worked for the Lord; “Apostle” refers to his official relationship. Notice that ties this second idea is tied to the identity of the message that was entrusted to him as the bondservant and Apostle. The term “Apostle” is one that is used in the NT to refer to one who, in the service of God has the measure of authority over the Church that Christ gave to His 12 disciples in preparation for His departure. We know a couple things about those referred to as “Apostles” in the NT:

1. They were specifically called by Christ (Matt. 10:1-7; Acts 1:24-26; Gal. 1:1).
2. They had each personally seen the risen Lord Jesus and had not merely “heard of Him” (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7-9).
3. They established and governed the whole church as a unit, under the Lord Jesus Christ. They were not limited to a single church or area. They also had the authority speak and write the very words of God, held to be equal in authority to the OT (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Cor. 13:3; Gal. 1:8-9; 1 Thess. 2:13; 14:15; 2 Pet. 3:2; 15-16).

We can see that Paul received his call when Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road (Acts 9; 22; 26; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8-9; Gal. 1:13-17) and it seems sure that it was the unusual timing of that calling that caused him to conclude that no more Apostles would be chosen after him (1 Cor. 15:8).

It is interesting that at the very beginning of this great Epistle (as well as in many other of Paul's Epistles) that Paul mentions that he is an Apostle "...separated to the Gospel of God". The word "Gospel" is the Greek word 'euangelion' which essentially means "good news". It is clear, from its' many mentions and contexts in the NT that this "Good News" includes not only the matter of initial salvation by grace through faith; but actually can be seen to speak of the entirety of Paul's message about the Lord Jesus and how His saving activity in a person's life transforms all of parts and aspects of life and, in a larger sense, all of history.

We should note that in its' verb and noun form it appears some 60 times here in Romans. Mark, in Mark 1:1, speaks of Jesus as the "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Jesus, when He came to earth and began His ministry and mission here was beginning the "good news" from God. Historically, it seems that Rome used the idea of "good news" into its' idea of Emperor Worship, though I not too sure how this demand of its people exactly brought good news? It seems that the town herald would use this word (euangelion or 'good news') to begin important or favorable announcements about the emperor - such as the birth of a son.

But we note that this "good news" was not from the emperor but, Paul says, "of God"; that is, it originated from the Master of the universe. The word is a Greek word and would, in the natural concept, refer to the Greek concept of God. It is the word used in the NT to take the place of the Hebrew word "Elohim". It is also used, often to translate the major word "Yahweh" in the Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint.

And so, we can conclude that Paul here, as one who was a Pharisee and would have had a very full knowledge of the Hebrew OT used this word deliberately and was speaking of the OT concept of God and not some new concept with which he was just now coming up. He (Paul) intends for us to understand that he was speaking of the "Good news" that was his message to the Romans and which was sent from God via his message.

He next refers to himself as...

4. Then as one 'set apart (or separated) for or unto the gospel of God' in relation to the message committed to him,

Separated, of course, adds to the idea of his Apostleship. This selection by God to one of the leaders of the New Covenant body brought about in the first century means that he was separated from all the other "religious" leaders present at that time. We remember that Paul was a Pharisee and was a part of the religious body present in Palestine then. He was "separated" from then and we should also note that he was separated from the body of all men, redeemed and unredeemed as well. Paul was unique among virtually other men at that time. Surely, there were other Apostles at that time, but even among them he was unique. Among all of those whom God used in the first century, Paul stands as, perhaps, the greatest. This would include Peter, whom many think of, falsely, as the first "pope" or leader of the new church. If anyone was the most

significant of the Apostles, it was Paul, the most prolific and the evangelist with the greatest tangible results. He viewed himself (and is seen in the rest of the Bible) as one who was “set apart” from all others.

5. *And then He also ties himself to the historic message of God given by the OT Prophets of God.*

¹ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, (Romans 1:1–2)

He builds on the end of verse 1, that he was “*separated to the gospel of God*” by tying that to the idea that this “good news” or “Gospel of God” was promised by “He”, that is, the “God” mentioned before in verse one. Remember that He is the same God referred to in the OT as Elohim and Yahweh. In the Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint, the word used here is used to render those words for God in that Greek version of the OT.

The point Paul is making here is that the “Gospel”, the “Good News” was, or at least ought to be seen as a good and welcome thing to those to whom it was preached. We need to remember that Palestine in that era, with very few exceptions, was filled with those who had set themselves against the Lord Jesus and ultimately gave consent to His crucifixion. The group that had stood themselves against the Promised Messiah had also become antagonists to the preaching of the Gospel by Jesus’ disciples as well as the Apostle Paul. Surely, there were some who, upon hearing the preaching of the Gospel, believed and pursued godliness in following the Lord Jesus. This multitude of Jewish antagonists accused him (Paul) of preaching a revolutionary new message that was, according to them, unrelated to Judaism (Acts 21:28).

²⁸ crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.”

They chose the exact references that they knew would raise the greatest outcry from the average person in Israel. But the OT is replete with prophecies concerning Christ and the gospel which the NT writers refer to (1 Pet. 1:10–12; cf. Matt. 5:17; Heb. 1:1).

- 1 Peter 1:10–12

¹⁰ Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, ¹¹ searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹² To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to

you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

- Matthew 5:17 records for us the truth that one of the true things about the life of Christ was that He fulfilled the Law:

¹⁷ “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

We should note that this fulfilling of the Law was ESSENTIAL to Christ being able to die for the sin of His people. This walking in complete and utterly successful obedience to the Law of God was what qualified, at least to the greater degree, our Lord as the Perfect Lamb of God Who could then act as an acceptable offering on the altar of God, Calvary’s cross.

Paul’s point is that Christ’s action was entirely prophesied by the OT and thus it can be rightly said that, as Paul did, that his message of Christ’s life, death, burial and resurrection were completely in concert with what God had promised by the mouths of the OT Prophets.

² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,

Paul has already underscored his authority by calling himself an “Apostle” and now he draws a further underscore and emphasis by saying that his preaching is entirely consistent with what those Prophets had said. His reference to “**His prophets**” should be understood to speak of all the writers of the OT. The “Law and the Prophets” constitute all the OT (Acts 24:14)

¹⁴ But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.

Just to clarify, the law - or the Pentateuch - was written by Moses, whom Scripture also calls a prophet (Deut. 18:15). Note also the reference to “*the Holy Scriptures*”. There were quite a number of rabbinical writings popular in the first century - and often studied more diligently than Scripture itself - actually may not have taught the gospel of God, but the divinely inspired OT certainly did (cf. Luke 24:25, 27, 32; John 5:39; Acts 3:18; 7:52; 10:43; 13:32; 26:22, 23). The entire OT, and especially the prophets spoke clearly of a New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–27; cf. Heb. 8:6–13) and of the Messiah whose sacrifice would make it possible (Is. 9:6, 7; 53:1–12).

Just to close this point, this idea was especially important to Paul who wanted to see his readers, the Romans, come to understand and embrace it. Unless they saw how powerful and true this Gospel, this good news was, they could never come to know the Lord Jesus in the New Covenant fashion and thus never receive the redemption that Christ came to achieve for those who would believe. Remember that the Old Covenant was fulfilled and set aside by the

work of Christ. It was no longer a saving mechanism, one had to embrace the New Covenant!

It was this that God's Bondservant, the Apostle Paul, held to his heart and spoke out with in such a clear and definite voice. Would that you and I would follow his example and give ourselves over to service for our Lord and Master in the same fashion. We will not be able to claim that we have been called to be Apostles, as God, after Paul, called no more Apostles. Once the Word of God was completed and set, the need for these NT versions of Prophets was gone. The written Word of God did His speaking for Him. But we CAN yield ourselves over to His service, as Bondservants, slaves to render to Him whatever service he requires of us. There is no greater or more profound thing available to those who know the Lord in this day and age.

I know that many would argue that there are Prophets/Apostles called today, but this is a dream launched of pride and a haughty desire to be more than a servant/slave of God. Many today wish to hold position in the family of God that some selected Old and New Testament leaders held. We CAN be, and OUGHT to be bondservants however. There is nothing greater for modern believers. Even for those who are called to teach and preach... they must still, first of all, be Bondservants. It might well be humiliating, lessening, so to speak, but then, humility is one of foremost character traits that believers can develop. There is absolutely NOTHING wrong about being a servant/slave of God and EVERYTHING right about fulfilling that position in God's purpose and plan.

I say again that this is in no way an endorse of the terribly evil manner in which the idea/practice of slavery has been used in human history. Men have made a terrible twist and sickening mess of this Biblical truth. We ought stand high and sure in our condemnation of human slavery. But service to God as His servant/slave is another matter. God, man's Creator and ultimate Master and Authority has the right and privilege of asking His creation to function in such a fashion. The sooner we get this idea in our minds, the better of we'll be and the better and truer we'll understand the Bible when it speaks of such things.

What we might note, just to sum up this idea, is that the matter of slavery in the OT and NT era was a given in the OT world and especially in the Roman culture. The Bible does not endorse this truth, but rather it seeks to protect those who were captured and regulate the way that a slave owner was responsible to treat those who they "owned". Again, this is not permission to have slaves, but simply the recognition that men do evil things and the seeking to cause those who did own slaves to treat them in a godly and merciful fashion. The regulations in the OT and in the NT result in that which is tantamount to causing their release.

As we noted, virtually every mention of slavery in both testaments is either very harshly regulated (aimed at protecting the servant/slave) or an utterly negative one (aimed at showing the sinfulness of those who took and kept them).

If we add to this the fact that the OT especially speaks of Israel, as a nation, headed into slavery.

For instance, in Jeremiah 2:14–25 we read Jeremiah’s prophecy of Israel and her coming slavery as a nation:

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- ¹⁴ “Is Israel a servant?
Is he a homeborn slave?
Why is he plundered?*
- ¹⁵ The young lions roared at him, and growled;
They made his land waste;
His cities are burned, without inhabitant.*
- ¹⁶ Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes
Have broken the crown of your head.*
- ¹⁷ Have you not brought this on yourself,
In that you have forsaken the LORD your God
When He led you in the way?*
- ¹⁸ And now why take the road to Egypt,
To drink the waters of Sihor?
Or why take the road to Assyria,
To drink the waters of the River?*
- ¹⁹ Your own wickedness will correct you,
And your backslidings will rebuke you.
Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing
That you have forsaken the LORD your God,
And the fear of Me is not in you,”
Says the Lord GOD of hosts.*
- ²⁰ “For of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds;
And you said, ‘I will not transgress,’
When on every high hill and under every green tree
You lay down, playing the harlot.*
- ²¹ Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality.
How then have you turned before Me
Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?*
- ²² For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap,
Yet your iniquity is marked before Me,” says the Lord GOD.*
- ²³ “How can you say, ‘I am not polluted,
I have not gone after the Baals’?
See your way in the valley;
Know what you have done:
You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways,*

*24 A wild donkey used to the wilderness,
That sniffs at the wind in her desire;
In her time of mating, who can turn her away?
All those who seek her will not weary themselves;
In her month they will find her.*

*25 Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst.
But you said, 'There is no hope.
No! For I have loved aliens, and after them I will go.'*

Here, Jeremiah speaks of the terrible effect of Israel surrendering herself to sin and rebellion against God. It is quite dramatic and heart breaking. But, that is the very nature of sin and rebellion against God.

Likewise, we read of the awful nature of Israel's experience in Egypt in Exodus 1:8-22. It was terrible and increasing in the horror of the experience. BTW, we are forced to conclude that, in the case of Israel in Egypt as well as in Babylon and Assyria; not to mention the generalized description of the awful effects and destructive result of sin and everyone's lives are a matter that God has either caused or allowed. We can conclude, given the gathering of all of the passages in the Bible that address the topic, that slavery in the Bible is a form of suffering that God allows and uses to give people the opportunity to live for His glory and bring them the occasion serve Him as beacons of His light.

How sobering! we can all think for a moment and, very often, we realize that many have the view of God as One and have this good and kindly old man perception and idea of God as He wants nothing but a pleasant enjoyable life for us. Now, it is true that God's ultimate goal for those who are His, at the very least, is for joy and peace, at the very minimum, the ability to undergo the more unpleasant experience of life with that joy and peace.

Now, though we must definitely and fervently admit that God is a God of love and mercy, we also must acknowledge that He is One Who is sure in His desire for justice and righteousness. This was the focus of the NT Gospels. All of those who know anything of the OT, and especially of the Later Prophets, know something of the wrath and judgment of God due for the sin and the rebellion of God's chosen people. That truth is shown again and again as one moves throughout the context of the OT.

I find it very interesting that this great Apostle and messenger of the NT message, the Gospel, defines himself, first of all, as a slave who was also called as an Apostle and separated to bear the Gospel to the nations by preaching the New Covenant truths that made up that Gospel. We should note, as well, the profound impact of Paul's identification and contrast in calling himself these things. In NT times, there were quite literally MILLIONS of slaves, in the very most unpleasant sense of the word, that existed in the Roman world. The VAST majority of this, history tells us, were those who were forced into this state either by military action or by Law. It was also the Law that kept them in this terrible state. Some of them had been had been both educated and had become skilled in

various fashions and had come to hold very significant positions in a household or business. There were even some very powerful persons in Caesar's own household who functioned as if virtual family.

But most slaves were treated much like any other piece of personal property belonging to the "owner" considered as little more than work animals. They had virtually NO right under the law and could even be KILLED with impunity by their Masters/owners.

It is interesting that there was some significant difference between the perception of slavery in the OT and that in the NT. Some commentators argue that because of the great difference between Jewish slavery as practiced in Old Testament times and the slavery of first-century Rome, Paul had only the Jewish concept in mind when speaking of his relationship to Christ. Many of the great figures in the Old Testament were referred to as servants.

- God spoke of Abraham as His servant (Gen. 26:24; Num. 12:7).
- Joshua is called "the servant of the Lord" (Josh. 24:29), as are
- David (2 Sam. 7:5) and Isaiah (Isa. 20:3).
- Even the Messiah is called God's Servant (Isa. 53:11).

In all of those instances, and in many more in the Old Testament, the term *servant* carries the idea of humble nobility and honor. But as already noted, the Hebrew word behind *servant* was also used of bond-slaves.

In light of Paul's genuine humility and his considering himself the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), it is certain that he was not arrogating to himself the revered and noble title of servant of the Lord as used in the citations above. He considered Himself Christ's **bond-servant** in the most unassuming sense. He was God's "slave" in the lowest human sense. Not that it wasn't a privilege for him to serve as thus, but, after all, a slave is a slave Biblically speaking.

There is, of course, an honor and dignity attached to all of God's true servants, even the most seemingly insignificant, and Paul was very much aware of the undeserved but real dignity God bestows on those who belong to Him. Yet he was constantly aware also that the dignity and honor God gives His children are purely from grace, that *in themselves* Christians are still sinful, depraved, and undeserving. He wrote to the Corinthian church, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one" (1 Cor. 3:5). Here Paul uses the term *diakonos* to describe his position as servant, a term commonly used of table waiters. But as in his use of *doulos*, the emphasis here is on subservience and insignificance, not honor. Later in the same letter he asks his readers to regard him as a galley slave (4:1). The term used here is *hupēretēs* ("servants") which literally means "underrowers," referring to the lowest level of rowers in the large galley of a Roman ship. This was perhaps the hardest, most dangerous, and most demeaning work a slave could do. Such slaves were considered the lowest of the low.

Because he was called and appointed by Christ Himself, Paul would never belittle his position as an apostle or even as a child of God. He plainly taught

that godly leaders in the church, especially those who are diligent in preaching and teaching, are “worthy of double honor” by fellow believers (1 Tim. 5:17). But he continually emphasized that such positions of honor are provisions of God’s grace.

Our conclusion then, is that Paul, an Apostle of God and called in the manner of the OT Prophets, as one who would preach the Gospel promised long before would go on and begin to identify and develop just what it is that God has called him to do, that is, to preach. We’ll develop this in coming posts.