

Scripture Truth



Inside:

All prayer at all seasons
Slavery in ancient Israel
At the feet of the Lord Jesus

Leading little ones to God
Celebrating the Lord's Supper
The gospel of the grace of God

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Editor: Theo Balderston

Editor's e-mail: editor@scripturetruth.org.uk

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Leading little ones to God (2)

“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old...We will not hide them from our children, telling the generations to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength and his wonderful works that He has done” (Psalm 78:1-4).

In the above text “law” clearly means “instruction”. In this psalm the people of Israel pledged themselves to teach their children not just the commandments (as in Deuteronomy 6:4-7), but also the lessons taught by the divinely inspired record of their national history, a record that didn’t flatter them, but bore witness to God’s abiding faithfulness. Thus it sang the LORD’s praises.

We too should *teach our children the Old Testament*. Firstly creation, not as a myth but as fact – so important when a “morality” that contradicts God’s creatorial design is taught even in reception classes. We should also teach them the history of the children of Israel – the wonderful history of God’s deliverances, but not neglecting the dark histories of their failures (as in this psalm). And time should not fail us to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah (older children perhaps!). Time should not fail us either to tell of Deborah, of Sarah and Rebecca, Miriam and Ruth, the widow of Zarephath and the woman of Shunem. We should not pass over the failures, for the Old-Testament is a great lesson-book of God’s dealings with individuals. Making the Old Testament a living book to our children is a vital part of equipping them for the life of faith.

To do all this effectively, we have to know the stories intimately, and think very prayerfully about their lessons. We will need a firm grasp of the dispensational ways of God if we are to answer questions regarding the morality of Old-Testament war, etc., that the modern world will plant in little minds.

And in it all we should use these stories to point, in various ways, up towards the Lord Jesus, just as Psalm 78 leads up to the anointing of David.

THEO BALDERSTON

At the feet of the Lord Jesus

J. T. Mawson

To be at the feet of the Lord Jesus is to be in the most blessed spot in God's universe. It is there that every problem is solved, and every question answered: whether of sin, service, sorrow or self. There is no place like it for the guilt-laden sinner, no place like it for the perplexed or happy saint.

The Lord Jesus is greater than our sins

The first great truth that dawns upon the soul as we come into this place of blessing is that He is greater than our sins. It was this that the sinner of the city discovered in Luke 7. He had said: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, KJV). It is more than likely that this tired woman had heard these words and, attracted by them, had followed Him to Simon's house. Should she enter it? What right had she to do that? The frowns of the Pharisee and his guests would have driven her from the door if the One whom her soul sought had not reclined just within it, in the lowest seat at the feast. Her need of Him was greater than her fear of them, and two forces were at work which were greater than their hostility; these combined to bring her to His feet. His love drew her, her need drove her, and pressed by the drawing of His love and the driving of her need, she took the one step across the threshold that brought her to the spot where her weary, burdened heart could find relief and rest.

At His feet she wept out her repentance for a sinful life, and mingled tears of gratitude to Him with those penitential tears for the welcome He gave her. Simon would not have permitted her to touch him, his guests would have spurned her, but the lowly Jesus, mighty Prince of Life, was not like them; He was the friend of sinners. She discovered that He had a heart of infinite tenderness, that could feel even for her, and that when He opened His mouth He spoke as no other man ever did or could speak: He spoke of forgiveness; of salvation, of peace; and surely of all things on earth or in heaven none could meet the longings of her weary soul like these. Her sins were not too great or too many for His forgiveness; where her sin had abounded His grace did much more abound. His words lifted the burden from her conscience and heart; in Him she found her salvation and her peace. She heard Him say, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." And who can describe the blessedness of the one who has heard and believed such words as these? David could describe it; and so can I; and so can all who have come conscience-stricken, sin-laden, honest at last to the feet of this great Saviour. They know the relief from the

burden, the peace after the storm; the deep, holy calm that fills the heart as the sense of forgiveness steals over the soul. Only at His feet can this be known. It all comes in and through Him, “in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Ephesians 1:7).

The Lord Jesus is greater than our service

I do not say that the beloved Mary of Bethany was the woman of the city – some have done so and made out a good case for their view – I merely point out that she dearly loved the spot where that woman’s burden rolled away, and that every time we read of her she is at the feet of Jesus. The first of these instances is in Luke 10:38-42. We often admire Mary for taking the place of the disciple instead of the servant on this occasion, but may we not waste admiration upon her that ought to be bestowed upon the Lord? He it was who drew her into that place of subjection and blessing; she did but respond to His drawing, as the needle responds to the magnet. Happy woman! He at whose feet Mary sat at rest and without fear was none other than He before whom the angels veiled their faces, and cried, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts” (cp. Isaiah 6:3), but she knew Him in the revelation of His grace, as the One who had come into the world not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). She had discovered that His heart found a peculiar and unspeakable joy in filling up the vacancies in human hearts with the knowledge of His Father and Himself: it was His meat and His drink. She realised that it pleased Him more to have her there listening to His word, than any service she could have rendered to Him would have done. And she knew that she could only serve Him intelligently and well as she sat as a learner at His feet. He values our service and will most surely reward it, but He loves our company more, and we may neglect Him while we serve. He



*The
Lord Jesus
is
greater than
our sins*



*The
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is
greater than
our service*



has more to say *to* us and do *in* us, than to say *through* us and do *by* us. He should be more to us than all we can do for Him, and we show that we know this as we sit at His feet and hear His word. There and then He can sanctify and cleanse us by the washing of water by His Word, and can nourish and cherish us and fashion us according to His own good pleasure (cp. Ephesians 5:26, 29).

The Lord Jesus is greater than our sorrows

The sisters at Bethany were bewildered and broken by a sore bereavement. They had hoped that their Friend, who loved them so dearly, would have hastened to their help and healed their brother of his sickness when they appealed to Him, but He had not done so. It seemed as though He had failed them in this great crisis of their lives, for He had spoken no word, and their brother had died and now lay within a sealed sepulchre; and they sat at home without hope. It was then that He came to them. Martha went out to meet Him and stood upon her feet and talked, but when He called for Mary and she came to the place where He waited for her, she fell at *His feet* and wept. Behold her prostrate at His feet. Listen as she pours out her grief before Him. See her as she looks up through her tears into His face. What wonder must have filled her soul as she beheld tears upon His cheeks! How beautiful He must have seemed to her that day! What a revelation of His heart were those tears! How His sympathy must have swallowed up her sorrow! What intimacy with Him did her sorrow yield her! Would she ever forget it? Then He walked by her side to the resurrection of her brother, and in His company, with Himself so near, her heart must have said, All is well. Sorrowing saints of God, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever!

Presently His voice of power broke through the power of death and set the captive free, and the multitude beheld and wondered; but Mary had learnt something more wonderful than the power that amazed them. His sympathy had poured its comfort into her soul. She had learnt that He was greater than her sorrow. Never would she have known how much He loved her, or how tender His heart was, or how all-sustaining was His presence, had it not been for her great sorrow.

The Lord Jesus is greater than self

The last we read of Mary is in John 12, and it is fitting that her life's record should close there. The pound of "spikenard very costly" would have distinguished her among her acquaintances. It was the sort of thing those eastern women reserved for the greatest day in their lives. She had not even poured it on her brother at his death, much as she loved him, but she poured it out upon the feet of Jesus, well knowing that He was going to death and burial. The

world had nothing to give to Him but a cross of shame and a grave with malefactors, and she only among all His disciples realised this, and she said by her action, "He is worthy of the best that I can give Him; all I have that would distinguish me shall go into His grave." The Lord interpreted that action as no man could have done, and said, "Let her alone: against the day of My burying hath she kept this" (v.17) and, "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matthew 26:13). What she had done showed what the knowledge of His love could do. It had made a woman forget the beautifying of herself, and all that would distinguish her, it had made her risk the criticism and scorn of her friends who did not understand. To her henceforward Mary was nothing and Christ was everything. Mary wanted no place for Mary in a world that did not want her Lord. It was to this point that Paul was brought when he said, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14). And to this point the Holy Ghost would lead us all. Soon every ransomed saint of God will bow before Him in His glory above, and cast their crowns at those feet that were once pierced in death for us, and worship and adore Him there for He is worthy. We shall cast our best at *His* feet in the day of His *glory*, Mary cast her best, and herself also, at His feet in the days of His rejection and sorrow. If He will be worthy *then* to fill our hearts and vision without a rival, He is worthy *now*, for "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever."

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*The
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our sorrows*



*The
Lord Jesus
is
greater than
self*



The gospel of the grace of God

Acts 20:24

Ian Britton

If you were saying goodbye to some good friends and knew that you would never see them again, what would you say? Maybe there would be apologies and regrets. Perhaps best wishes and promises of lasting friendship. In Acts 20:16-38 we find Paul, hurrying back from Macedonia to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost, saying his goodbyes to the Christians of Ephesus.

The occasion is too earnest for either regrets or best wishes. Paul begins by recalling his manner of life among the Ephesians. I'm not sure how I would summarise my life over the last few years, but I am afraid I could not really claim, like Paul, to have been "serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials" (verse 19, NKJV). But Paul has to remind them of this, because many would come along after he left, trying to wean the Ephesian Christians away from his teachings by slandering his memory (cp. vv. 20, 29-30). And this was serious, because chief among the teachings committed to Him by the Lord was "the gospel of the grace of God" (verse 24).

So what is this gospel that was more dear than life itself to Paul? I am going to answer this by borrowing the six interrogatives from Rudyard Kipling's well-known poem:

I have six honest serving men
They taught me all I knew,
Their names are What and Where and When,
And How and Why and Who.

I will use each of these interrogatives to ask two questions.

I. What is the gospel?

The word "gospel" means, simply, good news. It offers the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 2:12). But, much more this, it is everything that God can give to those who believe on His Son (Romans 8:32). There is only one gospel. It is not just unique in the sense that nothing else is quite like it, but also because it is the only possible gospel. Anything else is a fake, and not a gospel (Galatians 1:6, 7). The gospel is the arrival of God in His own world to save His creatures. It is God's love, mercy and grace. It is the only possible escape route from the grip of sin and death. It is an incredible transforming power. It is new life. It is heaven brought down to men and men brought to heaven.

2. What are its results?

This gospel not only results in sins forgiven (Acts 13:38-39), but also explains that the root problem of sin itself is judged in Christ (Romans 8:1-4). This is what gives it the power to transform. Paul himself was a wonderful example of this. Saul of Tarsus had been the worst kind of “religious” man, a murderous bigot (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2). But God pursued him and transformed him completely to be His humble servant.

And the results go much further than the forgiveness and transformation of men and women. The book of Romans is probably the closest thing we have to Paul’s definition of what the gospel of the grace of God is. It shows that *God* is glorified in the gospel. His righteousness is vindicated, as He is shown to be “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 1:16-17; 3:26). And out of all that a bride suitable for God’s own Son is being formed (Ephesians 5:25-27).

3. Where did it come from?

It is the gospel of *God* (Romans 1:1). The heart and mind of God are its only possible source. No one but God can reveal God, and God is revealed in the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:6). Nobody else could even imagine it; nobody else could ever deliver it. All of history has been leading up to it. It is not God’s “plan B”, hastily devised after the fall of humanity, but His original and ultimate goal. The gospel is certainly not the result of human philosophy, developed from men’s ever-evolving religious ideas. This is the reason it can never be superseded or surpassed; and, while we always need to ensure that we tell it in ways that people can understand, the gospel never needs updating or “reinterpreting for today.”



*God
is
glorified
in the gospel*



*His
righteousness
is
vindicated*



4. Where will it take me?

Into the very presence of God Himself! (Romans 5:2b; Hebrews 6:20; 9:24; Revelation 22:3-4) Not heaven as a beautiful, safe, happy place to be, but the literal presence of an infinitely holy God. That is quite some place for a hopeless sinner like me to be at home! This is what the grace of God will do. Of course I am encouraged to enter into the presence of God even now (Hebrews 10:19), so that heaven will not be such a change for me.

Even just considering the question terrestrially, Paul also found that the gospel took him all over the world; and into and out of many dangers. Who knows where it might take you and me?

5. When did it begin?

This depends on what the questions means. We could say that it began back in eternity with “a lamb ... foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19-20). In the mind and plan of God this gospel was always His design, and everything led inexorably towards it. In this sense all of the Old Testament, from Adam to the Law and the prophets, laid the groundwork for the beginning of the gospel of the grace of God.

The Lord Jesus Himself is stated to have preached the gospel of God (Mark 1:15, ESV). However what He preached “in the days of His flesh” was not the gospel as summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Even when the Lord alluded on earth to the saving significance of His death, it could only really be understood retrospectively (John 3:12-19; 6:48-59; 12:27-33). The gospel in its fulness was first freely preached after the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (Acts 2:22-41; cp. Hebrews 2:3-4).

6. When will it end?

We could say, never! God’s grace, and the results of it, will last for all eternity; that is the purpose and the glory of the gospel (Ephesians 2:4-9; cp. 1 Peter 1:23-25). However, the short answer to the question is that the preaching of it will end when the Lord returns “at the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). This is confirmed indirectly by Romans 11:25-28. Verse 25 says “that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fulness of the gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved” (NKJV). Thus the bringing in of the full number of the gentiles will be the trigger for the salvation of Israel. However verse 28 says that “concerning the gospel [Israel] are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved...” Thus “all Israel” will not be saved in the gospel age, but by another means, i.e., by actually seeing the One whom they had pierced (Zechariah 12:10ff). The gospel is preached in the time of Christ’s

absence from this world, to faith. Salvation by sight will be another thing (cp. John 20:29).

Notwithstanding what has just been said concerning “all Israel,” no-one who has refused the gospel now will get a second chance after the Lord comes (Luke 13:25ff).

7. How did Paul receive it?

Certainly not as a tradition handed down by men. When converted, Paul did not consult with the apostles to get the details of what he should preach. God made it known to him directly (Galatians 1:11-20). He speaks in Romans 16:25 and 2 Timothy 2:8 about “my gospel.” It was not just “his” because he spent his whole life preaching it. It was “his” in a special way, because God used him to reveal so many parts of it in the epistles he wrote. This was special to Paul. But we can learn a lesson from it. In a different sense, each of us also needs to make the gospel “my gospel.” We have heard the gospel from human preachers and been taught its truths by human teachers, and we should certainly thank God for such people. However, we need to welcome it “not as the word of man, but as it in truth is, the word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13), and constantly go back to God’s word in God’s presence, and ask Him to show us directly from the Bible just what the gospel of His grace involves. When I pass on the gospel to others I will do it so much more effectively if I have made it “my gospel” by study and meditation. This should shine through as I speak.

8. How do we receive it?

By repentance and faith! (Acts 20:21) “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” was his simple answer when the Philippian gaoler asked, “What must I do to be saved?” (16:30-31) Paul wrote that the gospel “is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Why is this the only way



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to receive the gospel? Paul answered this in Romans 4:16: it is “of faith, that it might be of grace.” The gospel of the grace of God must be received by faith alone. Why? This leads to my next question.

9. Why was it needed?

Nobody meets God’s standard (Romans 3:20, 23) and so all are shut up to a gospel which offers salvation by repentance and faith alone. This is the message of the first four chapters of Romans. People might like to think that humanity is steadily advancing. In fact the whole of human history, apart from God’s interventions, has been a retreat from God, and a descent into further pride and rebellion and the resulting corruption. Centuries of trial by conscience, government and divine law have proved our complete inability to move towards God or to meet His righteous demands. God was kept at a distance from me by my sins. But “the grace of God” meant that He could never be at rest until He resolved the impasse by sending His own Son to die for me. “The gospel of the grace of God” is the good news that God has made a way to remain righteous and yet bring sinners like me right home into His presence forever. Without it nobody could be saved, creation would be damaged forever, God would have been defeated by sin, and God’s love for us would have been forever frustrated!

10. Why not the gospel of the love of God?

Nothing would budge Paul from his commission to testify to the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24; cp. also Romans 5:15, 17, 21). Why didn’t he describe it to the Ephesian elders as the gospel of the mercy of God, the love of God, the righteousness of God or the peace of God? It is indeed all these, but here he emphasized *grace* (as also in his great epistle to the Ephesians, 2:5ff). Grace is central, because it tells me how *God* is revealed in the gospel. It tells me that God cares. He is not a God consumed by anger and eager to judge the hell-deserving sinners that we all are. His love makes Him want to bless *the sinner*. The grace of God suggests a God with His arms full of gifts that He is longing to give to the undeserving.

In the opposite sense, the gospel reveals what I am too. It reveals to me my undeserving. We could not rely on God’s justice; that, we must agree, would rightly condemn us. If God was ever going to save and bless us, it had to be on the basis of grace – a generous provision that is thoroughly undeserved. How we should thank God that His gospel is a gospel of grace!

11. Who is it for?

When the gospel was originally preached it was “to the Jew first” (Romans 1:16, etc.). This is no longer needed: evangelists are not now required to reach out to

Jews before reaching out to gentiles. Yet it was only as in place after place the main body of Jews chose unbelief and stumbled at the proclamation of their crucified, risen, and ascended Messiah, that Paul “turn[ed] to the gentiles” (Acts 13:46ff; 18:6; 28:28). Paul’s preaching “to the Jew first” proved that in this gospel age no distinction can be drawn between Jew and gentile, because all have sinned (Romans 3:22-23); and by turning to the gentiles the full implication of “Whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” became apparent (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; 16:31; Romans 10:12-13).

Therefore one of the supreme beauties of the gospel is its universal scope (John 3:16). We all like to think that we are special. Marketing experts know they can appeal to us by giving us “exclusive” offers, or telling us we have been “specially selected to receive” some bargain. “Common” is not a very attractive label, but it applies to the gospel of the grace of God. Of course it is precious beyond measure and purchased at indescribable cost, but it is on offer to every single human being on the planet and you can’t get more common than that! This is just as well because every human being needs it desperately. Good people and bad, pleasant people and difficult, religious and worldly. To offer salvation literally to “*Whoever* believes in Him” (John 3:16) is Godlike. Only *God’s* heart of grace is *that* wide.

12. Who can preach it?

The job of spreading the good news falls on all of us who are saved. Remember the story of the lepers outside the city of Samaria after the Syrian siege had been broken by God? You can read it in 2 Kings 7. They knew it was a “day of good tidings,” and that keeping the good news to themselves would have been positively wrong. The same applies to us. But how do we do it?



*One
of the
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scope*



Undoubtedly one of the chief ways that Paul passed on the gospel was that he lived it! Everybody that Paul came into contact with, from governors and kings to the low ranking soldiers chained to Paul the prisoner, not only heard him speak the gospel of the grace of God, but saw him put it into practice.

But of course Paul spoke it as well as living it. He was a great preacher – think about the sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17:22ff. You may not be a preacher at all. He travelled thousand of miles to tell all kinds of people the gospel, when travelling was really tough. The chances are that you are not a missionary either (although maybe God might yet call you to be one). But God is certainly calling every one of us to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). We are not limited as to method but can proclaim it in all sorts of ways provided that they are honourable (2 Corinthians 4:2) and God-glorifying.

Conclusion

Paul could speak confidently to the Ephesian elders about the work that he had done among them. We might never have Paul’s responsibilities, but let us honestly assess our service to ensure that we too are ready to “serve the Lord with all humility.” May we too be ready to face trials with a willing spirit and may we speak about the gospel, whenever we have opportunity, so that we are “innocent of the blood of all men” (Acts 20:26). Then we too can look forward to one day finishing our race with joy.



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Celebrating the Lord's Supper

Part II. What wine? When?

Philip Nunn

Why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper? What is non-negotiable in regard to the celebration of it? In what aspects are individual Christian congregations left liberty, perhaps in view of local circumstances? These questions began to be answered in a previous article, especially with reference to the bread: here we shall focus on the wine and on the frequency with which the Supper is celebrated.

We saw in the last article that whereas the Lord's Supper was inaugurated at the Lord Jesus' last celebration of the Passover, it is, nonetheless a distinctively Christian symbol. It is not an adaptation of a Jewish rite. It is a positive new symbolic act initiated by the Lord Jesus himself. The symbolism revolves around Christ and his sacrificial death. A study of the Old Testament, and particularly the Passover, will enrich our understanding and appreciation of Christ's sacrifice – but for guidelines as to *how* to practice the Lord's Supper, we must look exclusively to the New Testament. In the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) we are told *how* the Lord Jesus instituted this symbol. In the Acts we read about *how* the early church responded to Christ's request to “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). And in the rest of the New Testament we find insights into the meaning and value of the Lord's sacrificial death at Calvary.

The wine

When the LORD God gave Moses instructions about the Passover meal, no mention was made of cups and drinks. Yet in time the Jews incorporated four different symbolic cups with wine into the Passover feast. Historians tell us that these cups are based on the four promises of God to the children of Israel recorded in Exodus 6:6-7, “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them [*the cup of judgement or deliverance*], and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment [*the cup of redemption*]. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God [*the cup of sanctification*]. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians [*the cup of praise or restoration*].’”

The Lord Jesus must have used one of these four cups when He instituted the Lord's Supper. Grape juice was in those days difficult to keep since the fermenting process would begin within days. Furthermore, we know that wine (with a lower alcohol content than is common today) was then a very common drink. We can be fairly certain, therefore, that the liquid used for the Lord's Supper was grape wine with alcohol. The early church most certainly also used this readily

available wine (1 Corinthians 11:21). Does this mean that Christian congregations today should also use wine?

With or without alcohol

The New Testament has two Greek words for wine: *oinos* is the general term which implies fermentation (Ephesians 5:18) and *gleukos*, which denotes “new wine” or musk (Acts 2:13). Luke tells us that John the Baptist did not drink any *oinos*, that is, “wine” (Luke 1:15). John tells us that at a wedding, the Lord Jesus turned water into *oinos*, that is, “wine” (John 2:9). It would be very natural for Matthew, Mark, and Luke to use a word for wine when describing the Lord's Supper – but they didn't. They purposefully avoided both Greek words for wine and instead used the expression, “fruit of the vine” (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). As noted above, the apostle Paul received instructions about the Lord's Supper directly by revelation. Here again the Greek words for wine are avoided in favour of the word “cup”. We conclude that, by consistently choosing to avoid the common words for “wine” and using instead the expression “fruit of the vine” to explain what was in the “cup”, the Holy Scripture intends to give some liberty in the type of “fruit of the vine” used. Each Christian congregation is at liberty to use either a grape-based wine (with alcohol) or alcohol-free wine, or grape juice.

Should we use 'one cup'?

Some ask, is the fact that the Lord Jesus took “one” cup significant? Does the symbolism lose anything if we were to use two or eight cups, or have a small cup for every participant? After eating from the bread, the Lord Jesus then “took *the cup*, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it” (Mark 14:23). Paul later explains, “Is not *the cup* of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16) The Lord used “one cup” when He instituted the Supper and, from Paul's comments, it appears that the early churches also used “one cup”. But nowhere do we find any symbolic or theological significance attached to the oneness of the cup – as we do to the oneness of the bread (1 Corinthians 10:17). If a congregation is greater than a certain size, it may well be practical to have more than one cup. By giving every participant his or her own small cup, the act of “sharing together” will be less. But the use of multiple cups does not violate any explicitly stated Biblical symbolism.

The timing

When the Lord Jesus instituted this symbolic meal, Luke tells us that He added, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). This suggests that the Lord expected His disciples to repeat this symbolic meal. Mathew and Mark do not mention this. In 1 Corinthians 11 we find twice the expression “do this in remembrance of me” (11:24-25), and twice the relative adverb *hosakis*, translated “as often as” or “whenever” (11:25-26). The only other occurrence of this

word is found in Revelation 11:6, where the Lord's two witnesses will have power to do some miracles "as often as they want." From here we can safely conclude that the Lord's intent was that this symbolic supper should be repeated periodically, but, unlike the Jewish feast, the Lord chose not to give rules about "how often."

Weekly? On a Sunday? In the evening?

The Lord Jesus and His disciples celebrated the breaking of bread for the first time on a Thursday in the evening – the night before He was betrayed. Responding to the Lord's instructions to "do this in memory of me" and do this "whenever", the first generation of believers gathered frequently to celebrate this symbolic meal together, perhaps even daily (Acts 2:46).

On his way to Jerusalem, Paul stayed seven days in Troas. "On the first day of the week [Paul's last day at Troas], when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them... until dawn; then he left" (Acts 20:7-11, NRSV). By this time, at least in Troas, it seems to have become a practice to celebrate the Lord's Supper on "on the first day after the Sabbath", that is, on a Sunday. Many see here a *hint* towards a weekly celebration. The fact that Paul continued preaching throughout the night suggests that the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the evening. Should the pattern suggested by this occasion at Troas (every Sunday, in the evening) be taken as normative for all congregations worldwide today? Probably not.

A Biblical example should not be lightly dismissed but neither should it be made a norm. Examples can be suggestive. But there may be good local reasons to adapt things somewhat. For example, in most Western countries for centuries it has been more practical to celebrate the Lord's Supper on Sunday morning. In many Arab lands it is more practical to celebrate it in the evening. There may be a good reason to sometimes celebrate the Lord's Supper on a day that is not Sunday, such as on a Thursday or Friday evening before Easter, on the first day of the year – as a beautiful way to begin the year together. Some special circumstance may necessitate the cancellation of a celebration of the Lord's Supper, such as personal travel arrangements or a collective special event. In doing so, it is good to remember that no Biblical norm is being broken. Scripture is not being violated.

If a congregation today views the celebration of the Lord's Supper as a mechanical ritual they need to perform because it's in the Bible, they will be inclined to lessen its emphasis. If a congregation discovers, as did many Christians in the early church, the joy, strength and renewed passion of setting time apart to celebrate this symbolic meal while making Christ the centre of its attention, I think it will settle quite happily for something close to a weekly pattern. In Acts 2:42 we learn that the early Christians "devoted themselves", "persevered" or

“continued steadfastly” in the Breaking of Bread, giving it as much emphasis in the church as teaching, fellowship and prayer.

Technicalities in perspective

In some parts of this planet, bread and grapes are not available. Could alternatives be used? Such dear Christians are usually recommended to find two elements which come as close as possible to bread and fruit of the vine. Sometimes numerical growth, the presence of believers with a weakness for alcohol, or a contagious disease may require some practical changes in the local arrangements. How do you respond to such changes? We all have our preferred ways of doing things. That is fine. It is normal. But be careful not to use Scripture to make solid your views, customs and preferences. Given the freedoms Christ offers in Scripture, it would do us all well to focus our attention away from ourselves towards the needs of the weaker believer and the needs of the congregation as a whole. In making changes and adjustments, the following Biblical principle will help the congregation move *together*: “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up” (Romans 15:1-2). Are you among the strong? If so, the Lord expects from you greater flexibility.

Conclusion

The Lord's Supper could have been designed as a “once only” event, like baptism. But knowing how we are, Christ chose a symbol that should be repeated regularly. If you have been a Christian for a number of years, you know how easy it is for Christ to lose that central place in our hearts. We can enjoy the blessings and slowly forget the One who blesses. We can get absorbed in work, studies, and family life. Our passion for Christ can even be replaced with love for doctrine or enthusiasm for some ministry. The Lord's Supper is a time set apart where Christ is central in our hearts and minds. In this time of relative stillness, the Spirit of God desires to rekindle love, gratitude and passion in the hearts of redeemed men and women. We choose to stop, to re-focus, to remember, to thank, to worship. Do you? How are you responding to the Lord's invitation to “do this in memory of me”?

Clearly every local church must make practical arrangements in order to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Decisions must be made on type of bread, on wine, grape juice and number of cups, on timing and frequency. The big picture should not be lost in the details of the arrangements. Where practical and possible we should seek to stay as close as possible to Biblical symbolism, but “true worshippers”, those that “worship the Father in spirit and truth” are “the kind of worshippers the Father seeks” (John 4:23). Does He find one in you?

All prayer at all seasons

F.B. Hole

“To the neglect of prayer much of our spiritual weakness and inefficiency is to be traced.” These words, written in a “season” of national calamity, challenge us in our “season” of spiritual calamity.

The rendering of Ephesians 6:18 in Darby’s New Translation is rather striking – “Praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching unto this very thing with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” It throws up into relief the fourfold repetition of the little word, “all”.

As one result of the fearful calamities which have smitten Europe during the past months¹ there has sprung up some revival in the practice of prayer, for which we may well be thankful. It is to our shame however, in the light of the above scripture, that any revival should have been necessary. To the neglect of prayer much of our spiritual weakness and inefficiency is to be traced. In 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5 Paul makes it plain that our warfare and its weapons are not carnal but spiritual: in Ephesians 6:12 he also shows this, but adds the fact that in the struggle there are involved against us evil powers of a spiritual nature who have access to heavenly places – the world-rulers of this darkness. Against these we can only stand if clothed with the whole armour of God, and if maintained in that continual dependence on God which expresses itself in prayer.

The degree in which we are conscious of this conflict depends upon the measure in which we enter into our heavenly position, as unfolded in the epistle to the Ephesians, and upon the measure of our identification with the work of setting forward the gospel, as well as the “mystery of the gospel.” Paul was filled with ardent zeal for both and hence he was engaged in this conflict continually.

In all ordinary times of war among the nations Christians have been driven to their knees in prayer, but it would be hardly possible to treat such prayer conflicts as belonging to the kind contemplated in Ephesians 6. We believe however that the present war is an exception; and for this reason: [...] ² There is a very definite spiritual side to the present terrible war, and saints do well to

¹ Written in the early months of the Second World War.



² In the omitted matter Hole reports the opinion of Sir Nevile Henderson, British ambassador to Berlin just before the war, that Hitler acted as directed by a “Voice”. I’m not sure whether subsequent research has validated the ambassador’s opinion, but that the War had a spiritual dimension I have no doubt. [Ed.]

recognize it, and call very fervently upon God for the sustainment of His tried and oppressed saints, the maintenance of the open door for the gospel, and for His hand to restrain the aggressor to this end. The demonic power in control can only be countered by the power of God. We recognize of course that it may not please God to act in restraint but to translate the church to heaven, thereby closing the gospel door, withdrawing His ambassadors, and declaring war on the rebellious earth.

But now look at our verse. The character of the prayer contemplated is this – “in the Spirit.” It is to spring not from the flesh and its desires, but from the Spirit and His desires. Now the Spirit indwells the saints in order that He may not only teach them but also control their thoughts and desires, moulding them in mind and heart after Christ. The flesh is still in us of course, and very easily we may be governed by it, so that our prayers become but a crying out for just the things which an ordinary unconverted person would cry out for under similar circumstances. Let us search our hearts as to this first point, lest our prayers become powerless by reason of their being but fleshly desires. If our minds are *well furnished* with the Word of God which unfolds to us His purposes and ways, and *well governed* by the Spirit of God, so that the flesh in us is judged, we shall be able to pray in the Spirit. Our prayers then will bear the right character.

But this spiritual prayer may take varying forms; so the word is, “*all prayer and supplication.*” God is our Father and we may freely approach Him with our requests. There are times when our feebleness and insufficiency are specially borne in upon us, and then we draw near with a special sense of abasement and peculiarly urgent desires – we become suppliants in our prayers. Then, this may mark us in our private prayers, or on public occasions when we assemble together. Even in private prayer differences may occur. Sometimes we may

 *God is our Father and we may freely approach Him with our requests* 

 *We are not to be satisfied with prayer of one special kind. We are to practice prayer in all its wide variety* 

✿ If each brother in Christ would sit down and ask himself how many times he has been guilty of going to a prayer meeting and opening his mouth to ask for things of a general and indefinite nature, he might reach the conviction that he knew very little of what real prayer is ✿

have a season of quiet, even a long one; and sometimes our cry may be shot up to God like a flash of lightning, as was the case with Nehemiah (see 2:4). We are not to be satisfied with prayer of one special kind. We are to practice prayer in all its wide variety.

Having done so, we are to watch unto the very things we have requested with *all perseverance*. Here are two tests, and we shall find it spiritually very wholesome to apply them to ourselves carefully. When prayer is thoroughly real and fervent our souls are all alive on the matter, and we are bound to be in a watchful spirit so that we do not miss the answer, and while waiting for the answer we persevere with our request. If each brother in Christ who reads this paper would sit down and ask himself how many times he has been guilty of going to a prayer meeting and opening his mouth to ask for things of a general and indefinite nature – often at such great length as to weary all the others in the meeting – so indefinite that half an hour afterwards he would be unable to remember himself what he had really been asking for, he might reach the conviction that he knew very little of what real prayer is. When a real burden is on our hearts it moves us, like Habakkuk, not only to cry out to the Lord but also to stand upon our watch to see what the answer is going to be (Habakkuk 2:1).

Very often the answer does not come immediately. By delay God tests our sincerity. The more earnest and sincere and instructed our requests the more we shall persevere. A full measure of these excellent qualities will mean “all perseverance.” On this point we have the Lord’s own teachings in Luke 11:5-10 & 18:1-8. The latter passage is specially to the point for us, as it contemplates His second Advent and the trials of His saints just before He comes. God’s elect, chosen for earthly blessing, will have a time of unparalleled tribulation, and He will bear long as to them, being slow to strike in final judgment. They will persist in their cries and eventually He will avenge them. “All perseverance” will mark them as it is to mark us; but in our case it is not a cry for vengeance, but supplication for all saints.

Nothing less than *all saints* is the scope indicated. The epistle has instructed us as to the place of privilege into which we, whether Jews or Gentiles, have been introduced. Both have been reconciled “unto God in one body by the cross” (2:16), and therefore a vital link exists between all saints, producing vital and mutual interest in one another. The fact that the scope includes all does not militate against prayer for each or any, as the next verse shows, where Paul desires their prayers for himself and his service. We pray of course more particularly for those that we know, while never allowing our thoughts to be narrowed below the limits of the whole church of God. This also is of much importance to us to-day, when over vast parts of the earth the saints are oppressed by tyrants, scattered, and often persecuted.

Lastly there is the time factor. So long as we are here we are to pray at all seasons. We are certain to pass through a variety of seasons. In the earliest days of the church there were times of persecution, but after a few years the record runs, “Then had the churches rest” (Acts 9:31). So it seems to have been throughout, but there is far more danger of growing slack in prayer during times of rest than in times of trouble. In this favoured land we have now had an almost unprecedentedly long period of rest; and have we not grown slack? A season of dire stress is now upon us. Had we not grown so slack in times of outward prosperity, we should be more practised in prayer in these days of adversity.

There is no season which is not a season for prayer, since it is to be in “all seasons.” In seasons of sorrow, and seasons of joy; in seasons of spiritual revival, and seasons of spiritual deadness; in seasons of gain, and seasons of loss; in seasons when the cause of one’s country seems to be crashing about one’s ears, in seasons when its cause is prospering; in seasons of gathering into the church, in seasons when the saints are being scattered and oppressed, and doors for the gospel are closing. *All seasons* should call us to our knees in prayer. To prayer of this sort the apostle Paul calls us in this verse.

This is a season of dire need. Let us heed his exhortation, and give ourselves to prayer.

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*✿ There is no season
which is not a season for prayer,
since it is to be in “all seasons.” ✿*

Slavery in ancient Israel

Theo Balderston

How can Christians defend a Bible which plainly tolerates slavery?

People no longer show the deference to the Bible that they once did. In fact criticism of Old-Testament morality has become a common way of attacking Christianity. Richard Dawkins has made much of it. Often the criticisms are ignorant, but sometimes they are well-informed. We need to think these matters through.

The Bible's attitude to slavery is a common point of attack. Exodus 21:2-6 yield a lovely picture of the Lord Jesus becoming a servant for ever in the accomplishment of our redemption, but in its literal meaning it sanctions slavery even whilst regulating it. Why did the Law of Moses not prohibit it?

And yet unquestionably the Bible considered slavery the most degrading of conditions. This is supremely shown in its description of the Lord Jesus as taking the form of a slave (Philippians 2:7, 8). Even so, the Bible cannot idolise "freedom," as the opposite to "slavery," in the way modern thought does. It doesn't put the freedom to do what one pleases on a pedestal. Such freedom is itself slavery. "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34, NKJV). The more free time people have, the more chance of their becoming enslaved to sin, especially in this age of the internet. To talk up the human idea of "freedom" would undermine this basic message of the Scriptures. Secondly, the Christian is free in one sense, liberated from the slavery of sin; but s/he is to be a slave in another sense, a slave to righteousness (Romans 6:19-20). The free man is Christ's slave (1 Corinthians 7:22).

Another reason is that slavery and freedom are ends of a continuum, and not binary opposite states of existence. For increasing numbers of people freedom is very part-time. The job is not what they would have chosen. The greed of others condemns them to lives of drudgery. Double-earning middle-class couples, doing jobs they love force up land and house prices and condemn others to drudgery so that they can meet unreal housing costs. To call this the opposite of "slavery" is an illusion. The Bible doesn't pander to illusion.

Nevertheless: slavery *is* one end of the continuum. In slavery everything, in the end, needs the master's permission, even marriage.

So why does the Old Testament sanction slavery at all? This question boils down to "What sort of slavery is implied and hence sanctioned by the Law of God, and why?" What man may have perverted this into is another matter.

The Law provided for the care of the vulnerable in a way that did not tax the compassion of the better-off too hard

Some issues are perplexing, like Solomon's conscriptions of labour (1 Kings 5:13-15; 9:21-2). These cannot be dealt with here.

A social safety-net

The *causes* of Hebrew slavery must be understood before judging it. A Hebrew would usually become a slave as a matter of survival – his own or his family's. True, the LORD had said that if Israel diligently hearkened to His voice, there would be no poor with them (Deuteronomy 15:4, RV, ESV). But the condition for this was obedience (v.5), and so He immediately went on to regulate the care of the poor who “shall never cease out of the land” (vv.7ff, 11). And so, analogously to divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1ff; Matthew 19:8), the Law provided for the care of the vulnerable in a way that did not tax the compassion of the better-off too hard. Recollect that the Law could only instil the knowledge of sin; it could not impart virtue; the Law was given to Israel despite, or even because of the stubbornness of their hearts (Deuteronomy 9:4-6; 10:12-16). The LORD had no illusions regarding the character of His chosen people!

When an Israelite farmer fell on hard times the Law expected a wealthier neighbour to take him and his family into his house (Leviticus 25:35-38). Quite a common cause of this would be when the poor farmer's debts forced him to alienate his farm. ¹ When his debts exceeded what he could realise on the farm, then in order to pay his creditor he would sell himself to someone who would give him and his family shelter in return for work (vv. 39-43).² In Leviticus 25:40 Moses describes such self-selling Israelites as “hired servants” or

¹ The pervasiveness of debt in ancient Israel is reflected in the frequency of warnings not to become surety for others (e.g Proverbs 6:1-3; 11:15; 17:18).

² That some compassion was usually involved is suggested by Deut. 15:18, “...and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.” Possibly it would always have been cheaper to rely on hired service than help out bankrupts in this way. Perhaps it also needs to be pointed out that ancient Israel was not a “fiscal state” capable of meeting the cost of welfare relief out of taxation.

“sojourners” [“temporary residents”], rather than as slaves. (However for convenience I shall include them in the term “Israelite slaves”.) Such people were to be taken into the purchaser’s household and be given tasks; and they were not free to leave till the year of jubilee, when the alienated farm would revert to them.

Exodus 21:2ff and Deuteronomy 15:12ff contemplate cases³ where the person purchased worked for the purchaser for six years and in the seventh “went out free.” It has been suggested that Exodus 21:2ff regulates the sale of a son to pay off pressing family debts (cp. 2 Kings 4:1?), and 21:7ff the case of a daughter sold as a concubine for the same reason. And since Deuteronomy 15:7ff regulates the treatment of the – presumably landless – poor, it has been held that 15:12ff regulate the case of landless men and women who had to sell themselves. Thus it seems that Leviticus 25:39-43 deals with farmers who have had to alienate their inheritance, and their release is bound in with the year of jubilee; whereas Exodus 21:2ff and Deuteronomy 15:12ff deal with other cases, for which the jubilee legislation is irrelevant. The longer period of service required of the farmer if he sold himself more than six years before the next year of jubilee presumably reflects the likelihood that he had borrowed more, as he could offer as security not just himself but his farm; the more distant the next jubilee, the more he should be able to borrow, but the longer he would have to spend in servitude if he could not otherwise repay the loan.

The six-year rule makes no sense unless all buyers of slaves were “first-time buyers.” It could not be the case that every time a slave was sold on he had to work a further six years. The rule therefore implies that there was to be no market in Israelite slaves (cp. Amos 2:6; 8:6). This seems to be laid down in Leviticus 25:42.

Those who criticise ancient Israelite debt-slavery must explain what alternative they can suggest in such a precarious agrarian economy. The institution of debt-slavery allowed the Israelite to use himself or a family member as security for his loan. We may deplore this, but without debt-slavery there would have been precious little interest-free credit for the poor when they fell on hard times. What the Law did was to limit the period a debt slave could be forced to work for his purchaser. Upon release the landless poor were to be furnished with livestock, grain and wine (Deuteronomy 15:14).

³ Other writers regard Leviticus 25:39ff as regulating an identical case to Exodus 21:2ff and Deuteronomy 15:12ff. But then they must explain the discrepancy between the release at the year of jubilee in the first case and after six years in the second and third.

A final case of Israelite slavery is where a thief was sold to pay for the reimbursement of his victim (Exodus 22:3).

Foreign slaves

The “social safety-net” argument does not explain, however, the acquisition of foreign slaves (Leviticus 25:44f), persons who had not necessarily sold themselves into slavery. One major source of such slaves in the ancient world was war. However the morality of war and the treatment of enemy women would be a subject for another article. The Law also permitted Israelites to purchase foreign slaves, as slaves for life (Leviticus 25:45).

Suppose it had instead prohibited the acquisition of foreign slaves. This would have created the anomaly that bankrupt Israelites could find themselves in slavery, but no gentile could – the opposite of the difference intended in verses 42-44.

The text of Leviticus 25:44-46 suggests the main motive for buying foreign slaves was as an investment. We recoil from such a motive. But what other outlets for investment were there? Land was ruled out by the reversion of all land in the year of jubilee to the families of its original owners. This was an excellent way of maintaining equality of wealth distribution, something the modern secularist should surely applaud, but the principle, if observed (see Isaiah 5:8-10), ruled land out as an investment. Loans are another conceivable investment, but not loans to Israelites since they bore no interest (Deuteronomy 23:19-20, etc.) and were liable to cancellation every seventh year. This left interest-bearing loans to foreigners, but only certain Israelites would be in a position to invest in these. For most, if investment in foreign slaves had been banned, livestock would have been the only avenue of investment left. Investment in slaves is repugnant, but we moderns should “cost” our criticism of those investors who diversified into slaves by imagining that our pension funds were exclusively invested in livestock and there was an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Modern condemnation of slavery is usually cost-free to the condemner.

And what is held as an investment will tend to be looked after. This especially applies to the children born slaves, those “born in the house.” We may deplore this, but otherwise selfish owners would have no incentive to treat non-productive children tolerably. It was better to permit foreign slaves to be an investment than not.

This point brings out that in the case of slavery what the Law’s regulations were designed to do was to deflect the cruellest effects of the instincts of the natural man. A distinction is perhaps to be drawn between what the Law prescribes

(“Thou shalt”) and what it permits (“Thou mayest”). This distinction was drawn by the Lord Himself in relation to divorce (Matthew 19:8). Much of the permissive legislation of the Law was formulated to this end and not as an ideal ethic. The Law was not intended as a paradigm for the idolatrous nations round about to copy. It was designed to test the man after the flesh, but in such a way that he did not need to be the moral superman of his time to pass. It was formulated as a rather ordinary test, so that the result – even Israel with all its blessings failing it – brought the whole world under the judgment of God (Romans 3:10-20) and shut it up to the wonderful manifestation of His righteousness. Unless we understand the dispensational function of the Law, we will not understand either it or its attitude to slavery properly.

And, on the other hand, we must recollect that the world’s idea of freedom is actually slavery. According to Isaiah 14:1-2 & 61:5 foreigners will serve the Israelites in the millennium as recompense for the years of Israel’s oppression. But they will be serving masters who have God’s Law and God’s Spirit in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:27). Whereas the flesh doubtless domineered in ancient Israel, all rule will be beneficent in the coming kingdom, because it will be under Messiah and in the context of all the gentiles being blessed in serving Him (Psalm 72:8-17). Freedom, as the world conceives it, will not exist then. All will be subject to Him. The unbeliever might deplore this prospect, but the believer should rejoice at it.

Treatment of slaves

Leviticus 25:43, 46, 53 may mean that Israelite slaves received greater consideration, or merely that these were not bondmen for ever.

Being a slave under the Law meant being absorbed into someone else’s household. This conferred some of its privileges (see Exodus 12:44-45; 20:10; Leviticus 22:10-11). But slaves were subject to household discipline, which could involve corporal punishment (Proverbs 29:19). The Law penalised masters who injured their slaves (Exodus 21:20-21, 26-27), but slightly oddly. If a slave died under the rod, the owner suffered punishment, presumably death (v.12).⁴ But if an assaulted slave survived a day or two, the owner escaped punishment. His loss was his penalty: he had paid good money for him.⁵ But if the

⁴ The word for “punish” in Exodus 21:20f is one generally translated “avenge”.

⁵ Note that owners had typically only a few slaves. In the case of an Israelite slave the owner would presumably also have to invoke the law of manslaughter (Numbers 35:11ff).



The most remarkable stipulation of the Law regarding slaves is that runaway slaves were not to be returned to their owners, but to be free to settle wherever they wished in Israel



slave lost even a tooth at the master's hand, he or she was to be set free! The owner was not to benefit from a slave he had injured.



A striking but generally overlooked testimony to the fair treatment of slaves in ancient Israel resides in the silence of the prophets regarding their condition. Modern Christians applaud the prophets' so-called "social critique" of the injustices of their times (e.g. Isaiah 1:23; 3:15; 5:7-10, etc): well, they never found it necessary to denounce the treatment of slaves. The only references I can find to slavery in Isaiah to Malachi are (i) Jeremiah (34:8-22) condemning the rich for reneging on an undertaking made during the siege of Jerusalem to observe the six- year rule regarding Israelite slaves; and (ii) Amos (2:6 & 8:6) condemning the selling on of Israelite slaves in slave *markets*.

Job's *gentile* standard for the treatment of slaves (31:13-15) was a high one.

Liberty to abscond

The most remarkable stipulation of the Law regarding slaves is, however, that runaway slaves were not to be returned to their owners, but to be free to settle wherever they wished in Israel – they did not have to flee abroad (Deuteronomy 23:15,16; cp. 1 Samuel 25:10)⁶ It seems that the runaway had first somehow to notify the community (“...which is escaped from his master *unto thee*”, RV, italics added). This “thee” is corporate – see “within one of thy gates” (v.16). This “escaped unto thee” suggests that the community gave him some sort of protection from the ire of his master. However, finding employment in the same district might not have been easy, so he was given the right

⁶ However Nabal's jibe does not have to mean that runaway slaves were by definition outlaws. The “debtors” among the motley crew that gathered themselves to David in 1 Samuel 22:2 were seemingly those who preferred outlawry to selling themselves.


*The Law nowhere positively compels anyone
to return a runaway slave*


to settle anywhere in Israel (though finding employment in other districts might not have been easy either: see Proverbs 26:10, RV or NIV!). Thus the lot of the absconder would not have been an easy one. Nevertheless the right to abscond must have served as a constant check on the cruelty of masters.

So extraordinary is this liberty to abscond that commentators prefer to follow the Targums (Jewish paraphrases of the early A.D. period), and restrict the meaning of the verse to runaways from foreign masters. This restrictive interpretation is defended on the grounds that if the “thee” of verses 15-16 denotes the community of Israel the absconder must be outside that community. Note that on identical reasoning Muslims demand that the “prophet from among their brethren” of Deuteronomy 18:18 be a prophet from the “brethren” of the nation of Israel as a whole, that is, a member of a kindred people such as the descendants of Ishmael – i.e., Mohammed.

The restrictive interpretation really turns on a particular conception of “unto thee,” as if only a runaway from abroad could be said to escape “unto thee.” This is a rather wooden reading. The “thee” unto whom the slave has escaped, is also the “Thou” who can take the decision not to return him. It must be Israel, viewed as corporately capable of making such a decision. It must therefore be some sort of law-court. Once one has granted this, then we have a “thee” to whom the absconding Israelite slave can also run for protection.

And even the restrictive interpretation must at least concede that the Law nowhere positively compels anyone to return a runaway slave.⁷ But if Moses had meant it, he surely would have expressed himself more clearly.⁸

⁷ The only [?] runaway slaves actually mentioned in the OT seem to be the concubine to whom the Ephraimite spoke kindly, and the two runaways who left Shimei, not to find freedom, but superior service with the king of Gath (Judges 19:3; 1 Kings 2:39-40).

⁸ Paul did not consider himself to be under the Law. Nevertheless, the fact that he did not feel *duty-bound* to return Onesimus to Philemon (see vv.13,14) might conceivably be testimony to my interpretation of Deuteronomy 23:15.

If the forcible reclamation of runaway American slaves had been prohibited, and they had been free to settle even south of the Mason-Dixon line, that appalling blot on the history of Christendom would never have occurred! By contrast, however, in ancient Israel a stable slave economy was compatible with liberty to abscond, because the alternative employment opportunities were so unappealing. Urban employments were few. Though the status of the agricultural “hired servant” was personally superior to that of the slave (he had his liberty), it was probably not materially superior. So poor were hired servants that not to pay them *by the day* was a cruelty (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:15). The “bread enough and to spare” of Luke 15:17 seems to be testimony only to that father’s generosity. Israelites had to be commanded not to oppress hired servants (Deuteronomy 24:14; cp. Malachi 3:5); it is striking that (I think) there is no parallel commandment regarding slaves.

Conclusion

Not every aspect of the law of slavery has been discussed here; but sufficient has been explained to show that key stipulations were made to protect the poorest in a poor and selfish world, and yet not subject the selfish to a discipline impossible for the natural man. We must recollect that, “The law is not made for a righteous man but for the lawless and unruly...” (1 Timothy 1:9). It was “added because of transgressions” (Galatians 3:19), and was “a *paidagōgos* [i.e, a slave put in charge of the child of a wealthy family] unto Christ” (3:24). This aptly sums up the Law of slavery. It was designed to keep the Israelites from worse.



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Concerning Himself by J T Mawson

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Christianity is all about Christ, and unless He is the all-absorbing Subject of each Christian's life then, as John Owen wrote in *Christologia* as long ago as 1679, "whatever outward ornaments may be put upon its exercise, it is but a useless, lifeless carcass".

But where do we learn of Christ? On the opening page of the first issue of *Scripture Truth* in January 1909 its joint editors, J. T. Mawson and H. D. R. Jameson, were certain as they wrote,

"The Scriptures will always be prized by the children of God, not only because they come from God, but because they speak of Christ, and indeed it is only as this is seen, and Christ is loved, that they are understood. We shall endeavour, as time and space permit, to draw out from the Scriptures the things concerning Christ, believing that the surest way of preservation from the seductive movements, doctrines, and spirits that abound, is occupation with that which is good; for 'who is he that shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good' (1 Peter 3:13)."

Over more than 30 years, as he edited and contributed to *Scripture Truth*, J. T. Mawson was as good as his word, 'drawing out from the Scriptures the things concerning Christ'. The present volume contains thirteen inspirational articles on exactly this theme. They first appeared as a series entitled "Things Most Surely Believed" in Volumes 26-27 (1934-35) plus an additional article in Volume 28 (1936), and were revised and published in book form in 1936.

In this new edition, Scripture references have been checked and amended where necessary, and references have been added for some other verses quoted. Details of publications referred to in the text have been added at the end of the book.

"The Holy Scriptures are the Word of God to us; to them we turn for light and instruction as to Christ and His work. Old and New Testament bear their united testimony to Him, and the revelation that they give is wholly satisfying" (*from the Author's Preface*).

"The Word of God is the only authority upon which I base the assurance with which I have written of these things, and by the Word of God alone what I have written must be tested and judged" (*from the Author's Preface*).



One for all and all for One!

Come ye saints of God most high,
let men hear your cheerful cry,
“One for all and all for one!”
'Tis the cry that God hath won.
One for all, the Saviour died!
One for all, now magnified!
See Him on God's throne above!
Know the wonder of His love!

One for all, our Shepherd lives!
feel the care that He now gives!
One for all, our Advocate
pleads our cause at heaven's gate!
One for all, the church's Head,
takes away all fear and dread!
makes the Jew and Gentile one
through the work that He has done!

Come ye saints of God most high,
let men hear your cheerful cry,
“One for all and all for one!”
'Tis the cry that God hath won.
All for one, we must rejoice
when a heart lifts up its voice!
all for one kneel down to pray
as a soul is tried today!

All for one, our tears we shed
as we see deep sorrow spread!
All for one, we gladly give
that the poor may surely live!
All for one, doubt's load we lift
from the soul that's gone adrift!
All for one, we work this way,
God's own glory to display!