

DOES THE BIBLE ENDORSE SLAVERY?

November 11, 2012

For years, critics of the Bible have used the letter written by Paul to Philemon as evidence that God is a myth because of His stand on slavery. These same critics have searched for any shred of proof that the Bible is not inspired, not because of their love for man, but because of their hatred of anything spiritual. The only problem with this line of thinking is that the Bible **does** disavow slavery or any other type of mistreatment that man suffers at the hands of other men.

Paul's letter to Philemon is different from any other letter that he penned because it is written to an individual and deals exclusively with a personal problem. However, by addressing a personal issue with Philemon, Paul was addressing a universal problem that existed then and that still exists in some parts of the world today.

How can one person's situation affect the thinking of the whole world? The answer to this question is simple: Christianity is directed toward individuals, not groups! Yes, we want to save groups of people, but we have to do it one person at a time. Is there any doubt that the world's standards have impacted many in the church today? The answer is of course, "No." However, Christians must endeavor to impact the world with their standards instead of the other way around! This is exactly what Paul was promoting with his letter to Philemon.

Paul was changing the world by changing one person at a time. Everywhere the gospel has gone, mankind's situation has improved and that has been accomplished by improving the individual. The church cannot devote its time and energies to changing the environment and then hoping man changes; instead we must devote our time to changing man, thereby improving our environment and culture.

So, why weren't Paul and the other apostles more vocal and aggressive in the denunciation of such evils as slavery? What would the result have been if the ambassadors of Christ had instigated riots in every city because of the sinful activities that were taking place? If those had been the tactics used, the gospel would not have made it outside of Jerusalem! The Christian must present himself or herself to the world as something that is different. This is the problem with the false religion of Islam; it is no different than any other hateful organization that is bent on the **destruction** of that which it opposes. Islam is not concerned with bettering man, only the propagation of its power over mankind.

In Paul's letter, we see a living example of his statement, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). If Paul and the other apostles had called for an immediate abolition of slavery, the new religion certainly would have died in its tracks. Instead, they called for the freedom of slaves to come from the hearts of Christian men just like all other freedoms do. The real way to stop slavery is to make brothers in Christ of both the slave and the slave owner. Christianity overcomes social evils not by armed force but by the force of love and the gospel of Jesus Christ!

The letter to Philemon is a practical application of all that we read in the New Testament in how to treat each other as Christians and as an example to the world around us. It shows us how the gospel can change people, produce the fruits of the Spirit, and shape the world around us all at the same time. So, did Paul denounce slavery in his letter? Yes, because he said, “For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him forever; **Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved**” (Phil. 1:15-16).