

Belonging to God

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Most of us resist the concept of slavery. The word slave sticks in our throat, as well it should if we are speaking of one person being owned by another against his will. But it is absolutely appropriate that human beings should choose to be slaves of the Lord Jesus, whom they love and long to serve all their lives. The book of Exodus includes a scenario that vividly illustrates what it means to be a slave in the spiritual sense.

A Different Kind of Ear Piercing

In Old Testament days, poverty-stricken Jews would occasionally be forced to sell themselves into service to their fellow Jews. The Law required that all servants were to be treated with justice and that they were to be freed at the end of six years. But in Exodus 21:2-6, we find an unusual option for a person who was due to be released from servitude.

Such a servant might have developed a strong, positive relationship with his master and might be grateful for the way he had been treated. And so, even though he was under no obligation to stay as a slave, he might want to stay. He might then make a voluntary decision to become his master's bond slave.

In this case, a servant would not be signing up for another six-year-stint. He would be making a lifetime commitment. He would be surrendering himself and giving up all his rights—permanently—to his master.

The nature of the servant's new relationship to his master would be no secret. The transaction was to be made in a public ceremony where a sharp instrument would be used to pierce a hole in the servant's ear, signifying obedience to the voice of his master.

Furthermore, this decision would be irreversible. Once the servant had gone through the ear-piercing ceremony, he would always be branded as a bond slave. He would always have a hole in his ear to remind him that he was not his own.

Servants of the Servant of the Lord

Apart from the practical relevance of the Exodus 21 scenario for some of the ancient Hebrews, why do you suppose God put this description of voluntary slavery in His Book? I believe it is intended to point us to Christ and to depict our relationship with Him.

Referring prophetically to the atoning death of Christ, one psalmist wrote from Christ's perspective,

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but my ears you have pierced. . .
I desire to do your will, O my God.

(Psalm 40:6, 8, NIV, italics added)

And the New Testament bears out this interpretation of Jesus as a voluntary bond slave.

Philippians 2:7 tells us that when the Lord Jesus came to this earth, He took "the form of a servant." The word "servant" in that verse translates *doulos*, referring to the lowest form of slave. So we are left with an inescapable conclusion: In obedience to His Father's will, and out of love for His Father, Jesus offered Himself to be a bond slave so that He could deliver those who were in bondage to sin.

But that is not all the New Testament has to teach us about being a spiritual bond slave. Not only Christ but also His followers submit to slavery to God.

The apostles Peter and Paul, along with James and Jude, followed in the steps of the Great Bond Slave when each identified himself as a *doulos*—a slave—of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1).

These early followers of Christ provide a pattern for all men and women who want to be like their Lord. We are all to offer ourselves as bond slaves of the Lord.

A Prayer for Piercing

I have come to believe that there is no greater calling than to be marked as Christ's slave—to give my life in the service of the Master I have grown to know and love and trust. For many years, my prayer has been "God, make me a woman with a hole in my ear. I want to be identified as a slave of Jesus Christ."

Now, don't think that makes me some kind of super saint. Nothing God has ever required of me could begin to repay the debt I owe Him. Besides, the heart He has given me ought to be—and can be—the heart of every child of God.

Making it personal

Have you been acting more like a temporary servant of God or like His willing and permanent slave? Go to Him in prayer and commit your whole life, present and future, to Him.