PAUL AND SLAVERY: A CONFLICT OF METAPHOR AND REALITY

James C. Baker

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

December 2013

APPROVED:

Christopher J. Fuhrmann, Major Professor
Walter Roberts, Committee Member
Laura I. Stern, Committee Member
Richard B. McCaslin, Chair of the Department of History
Art Goven, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences
Mark Wardell, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School

The debate on Paul’s views on slavery has ranged from calling him criminal in his enforcement of the status quo to rallying behind his idea of equal Christians in a community. In this thesis I blend these two major views into the idea that Paul supported both the institution of slavery and the slave by legitimizing the role of the slave in Christian theology. This is done by reviewing the mainstream views of slavery, comparing them to Paul’s writing, both the non-disputed and disputed, and detailing how Paul’s presentation of slavery differed from mainstream views. It is this difference which protects the slave from their master and brings attention to the slave’s actions and devotion. To Paul, slavery was a natural institution which should be emulated Christian devotion. He did not challenge the Romans but called for Christians to challenge the mainstream views of the roles of slavery in the social hierarchy of their communities.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Fuhrmann for shedding light into a period of history I would not have otherwise pursued and Dr. Roberts for giving me the idea of “rhetoric versus reality.” I would also like to acknowledge my wife and all the friends who graciously accepted my repeated rain checks during the writing of this work.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thesis Question</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ROMAN SLAVERY AND THE ISOLATED CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roman Slavery</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About Paul</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>HISTORIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>THE REALITY OF SLAVERY</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul’s Rigid Physical Slavery</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul’s Vision of Slavery</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>THE VISION</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Galatians: True Words against Earthly Bondage under Men</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master and Slave Relationship</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philemon</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paul’s Unified Vision</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Romans</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>WHAT PAUL’S VISION OF SLAVERY DID</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Relationship between Heaven’s Hierarchy and Earthly Communities</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Corinthians: The Perfect Illustration</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ADDRESSING THE DISPUTED WORKS</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Timothy</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Titus</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The writing of Paul is a founding cornerstone for Christian theology, and, in these letters, Paul addresses the social and theological concerns of the fledgling Christian communities he founded across the Roman Empire. Because his writing was intended for the entire Christian population, and because Paul’s communities were founded across the Roman Empire, Paul presents Christianity in a consistent manner with the intention it will be understood by people in different cultures, all while moving these communities’ theological development in a guided direction.

It is in the vision of this specific direction that Paul’s clear, universal vision for slaves in the Christian community lies. He uses a metaphor of the devoted slave in his writing, directly addresses slaves themselves, and goes so far to call himself a slave.\(^1\) He did not present slavery without understanding its current role in Roman society, it was universal across the Empire and known to him through his travels, and he had a clear vision for the status of slaves in Christian communities.

Despite his clear vision, Paul does not present a simple specific goal for the role of human bondage to another human in the Christian community. Paul does present a consistent view on the role that he wants for slaves in the Christian community and this presentation of slavery was innately understood by the contemporary reader and required no further explanation. Paul's presentation of slavery is simple and familiar to his contemporary readers and did not

\(^1\)Paul calls himself a slave in Rom. 1:1, Gal. 1:10, and 2 Tim. 2:24 (The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version.) He uses slavery as a metaphor extensively in Rom. 6, Rom. 7 and 1 Cor. all of which are addressed in this work.
challenge the readers’ view on the institution of slavery.\(^2\) Instead of directly challenging the readers’ view on slavery, Paul presents a subtle, yet consistent, presentation of slavery which placed the slave into the social hierarchy in a manner which improved their status when compared to non-Christian slaves.

A complication for modern readers on Paul’s views of slavery is the ancient world held a foreign view on slavery, humanity, and morality. Slavery was the widely accepted norm, and modern day morality concerning slavery is not appropriate to apply. The morality justifying slavery was rigid in Paul’s time, and Paul’s presentation of the Christian community brought many small ideas of change to the normal structure of society. In the world in which these communities were living any movement improving the life of slaves as a major challenge to the traditional views of Roman society.\(^3\)

**Thesis Question**

Paul's presentation of slavery took slaves from a non-recognized social status to a fully recognized role in his Christian communities. Paul identified himself and good Christians as slaves of God, protected Christian slaves from their Christian masters, gave slaves control over their own salvation, and created a task for slaves to complete in the Christian community, which resulted in social recognition. Paul’s advocacy for slaves is particularly remarkable when one considers that he wrote in a time when almost all other extant sources are either silent on, or exceedingly negative towards, slaves.

\(^2\) We have no surviving letters which explain the questions asked to Paul. But, being that Paul never defends his views on slavery in his response letters, it is safe to say that we have no record of Paul's views on slavery being questioned.

\(^3\) The first chapter of Shelton’s *As the Romans Did* illustrates the complex nature of class in the Roman Empire and their rigid nature.
CHAPTER 2

ROMAN SLAVERY AND THE ISOLATED CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

To understand Paul’s writing it must be put into context of his time. Roman literature, like mainstream Roman culture, typically ignored slaves and when they were addressed it was in a negative light. Paul challenges this presentation of slavery by directly addressing slaves and presenting them in a manner which recognizes their humanity.

Roman Slavery

Slavery was ubiquitous in the Roman Empire. It was seen every day and slaves themselves were commonplace. The first-century Roman culture did not have the morals and philosophical influences which exist in the twenty first century, and slavery cannot be easily compared across cultures or history. Roman ideas of “freedom” and “liberty” were very different than today, and they were more accepting of abuse of slaves. During Paul’s time period, Slave labor was “one of the foundations of the economic system of the world in which Paul worked.” This was especially true in urban areas where “as many as a third of the inhabitants of most large urban centers would have been slaves.” There was a dependence on the work which slaves did and, had there been a mass release of slaves, it could have collapsed the entire economy. Lyall writes, “the social structure and whole economy of the Roman Empire were dependent upon the pool of slave labor” and slaves fulfilled so many functions they “were the machines of their

---

4 Even the word *tapeinophrosyne* which is often translated as “humility” literally means “to act as a slave.” Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 170.
5 Richardson, *Paul’s Ethic*, 47.
7 McGiffert, *History of Christianity*, argues that eventually slavery disappeared because of the economic change giving power to the merchant class away from the landed class.
day.”8 This was especially true in more “dangerous or noxious trades and for large-scale manufacture” where “slave labor was absolutely essential.”9

In Roman society, slavery was physical bondage and torture. To become a slave was to be physically put into bondage and sold. It is suspected that when a person was kidnapped and stolen away to another part of the Empire they could be easily sold as a slave and would then have trouble clearing their freedom.10 This conversion would take a freeman and force a “state of mute and unquestioning docility and obedience, in which there were virtually no limits to the demands of work, punishment, and disposal that might be made of them, and in which slaves’ ability to exercise their will and make independent decision might be completely destroyed.”11

Slavery in first-century Rome was harsh and often deadly. Varro, on writing about farm life and slaves, writes that slaves were the articulate instruments of the farm and Roman slave owners should view slaves as equal to animals.12 This was not a new view of slavery created by Varro. The idea of a natural state of slavery had already been raised by Aristotle in his Politics. This view of slaves meant that society set slaves “on the level of beasts” and “all need to cater to their human sensibilities was removed.”13 Once a free person crossed the boundary to slavery their place in the social world degraded, and society no longer saw them as human with rights or liberty, but instead nothing more than an animal. This is especially true under Roman law where a person was treated as two separate entities in slavery: one the slave and one the freemen.14

11 Ibid., 118.
13 Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave,” 118.
14 William Warwick Buckland, A Text-Book of Roman Law from Augustus to Justinian, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 63-4. Buckland writes there was a clear division between the actions of these two entities and these actions did not carry across the transition from slave to freemen and vice versa, and “manumission released [the slave] from any liability in respect of the slave to the same extent as did his death.”
The treatment of slaves in Roman society often paralleled the treatment of domestic animals. When slaves were bought from the market they were evaluated with the same methods as evaluating livestock. Giving advice about buying a slave, Seneca writes, “When you buy a horse, you order its blanket removed; so, too, you pull the garments off a slave.”15 It is this market which Paul refers to when he writes that a believer has been bought by Jesus.16 Paul uses this metaphor to say that the entirety of the believer is has been exposed to Christ and that Christ has bought them from the auction block. When Paul relates a freeman with the brutality of selling a slave would be obscene and insulting to the reader. Even if this time period was more open to nudity than current post-Victorian views of modesty, the idea of being socially exposed and judged would be insulting to a free person, especially a free person of higher status. By using this metaphor Paul is forcing readers to project themselves as a slave and this forces a level of humanity upon slaves.

The relationship of slaves as animals is shown in the Roman work Metamorphoses by Apuleius.17 Lucius's transformation into a donkey is a parallel of the transformation of a freeman into a slave. The comparison between Lucius and a slave is so accurate that Bradley writes, “any ancient reader of the Metamorphoses therefore might well have thought of the Ass as a slave,” and some of the descriptions during Lucius’s time at the mill use the same language describing caged animals as when describing the human slaves.18 While the story presents slaves and their condition, the change in Lucius's status caused by his transformation is never questioned, and there is no focus on the innate humanity of a human slave. Instead, the story uses the Ass as an instrument to comment on subcultures of the Roman Empire and improvement

16 1 Cor. 6:20.
17 Often referred to as *The Golden Ass* where the main character, Lucius is referred to as the Ass.
18 Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave,” 117.
of the slave’s life is solely based upon escaping slavery. Unlike Paul's metaphor of the auction block, *Metamorphoses* does not place the slave in society but presents a society that rejects the slave.

The sexuality of the slave was not protected by society. Slaves were considered less than human and Roman law allowed their sexual exploitation. The sexuality of slaves was not a moral concern in the Roman Empire and, until its outlaw later in the Empire, it was acceptable to buy and sell slaves as prostitutes. But even with a change of the role of slaves in society, it is unclear what the law changed in Roman social views, because the effect that Roman law had on its society is not universal. Harrill writes, “legal codes, at best, provide only inexact knowledge about social practice and, at worse, can build a highly misleading model of slavery.” While Roman law was one of the few common elements across the Empire and was a binding force in the culture, understanding how Roman laws affected everyday people is complicated by the fact that most of the surviving writings are written by the upper elite of society.

Even the health of a slave was not guaranteed by society. Some slave owners saw no problem with working a slave to death or barely providing enough to keep them alive. When slaves were involved in a legal case, “the ancient system of slavery imposed judicial torture, the legal, physical destruction of the slave’s silence at the expense of his everpresent body.” This was a common practice and “the law was pitiless toward any [slave] who revolted or who fled

---

19 Slave prostitutes are a major lynch pin in 1 Corinthians and are addressed below.
20 Lyall argues the complications of the law spring from the fact the Roman law was not the same single law across the Empire and was instead a “legal conglomeration.” Lyall, *Legal Metaphor*, 23-5.
and tried to pass themselves off as freemen."24 One example of the pitiless view is in Tacitus’ Annals book 14 where the entire household of slaves, all four hundred, is killed because the master of the house was killed by a slave. Roman society saw all slaves guilty of the crime because none of the slaves stopped the murder from happening. This was not just a privilege of the rich for when even the lowest “husband or wife is murdered, the slaves of either may be tortured for evidence.”25 Writing of this event Tacitus advises Romans, “you will not suppress a cesspit like that except by dread.”26 Considering the state of slavery in Paul’s time, Hopkins writes, “Slavery was a cruel and repressive institution, enforced by hatred and fear.”27 Paul’s writing, when calling himself a slave, would be indecent considering the atmosphere in which he was writing. To relate himself, and the Christian movement, to slaves is to relate them to a branch of society which had to be killed because they could not be trusted to tell the truth.

Fear of a slave revolt was one factor that caused this intense hatred toward slaves.28 The Romans were constantly afraid that their slaves would revolt, as they did with Spartacus in the 70s BC, and would ravage and kill their former owners. Two main factors which added to the Romans’ fear of a slave revolt are that there was often more slaves than people who could successfully fight them in one area and also that many slaves from foreign wars were formerly soldiers, which gave them an advantage over their masters.29

Society relied on the work done by slaves and to keep the slave population in check they had to place them at the very bottom of society and deny them their humanity. The slaves were rejected by free people because it was dictated by Roman culture. Roman society had a strong

26 A. J. Woodman, Tacitus the Annals (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 14.44.
28 A work which reviews the fear Romans had of slave revolts is Brent D. Shaw, Spartacus and the Slave Wars (Bedford: St. Martin’s, 2001).
29 Ibid. These two factors varied from region to region in the Empire.
stigma against slaves, and once humans were enslaved society turned against them to keep them out of the hierarchy of Roman society. By pushing them past the edge of society there were no rules applied to the actions against slaves, and the life of the slave was at the whim of Roman society and their master.

About Paul

Paul lived with slaves and slavery. He traveled through the Roman Empire working to found Christian communities and throughout his travels he encountered slavery. The surviving letters written by Paul are one-sided communications with Christian communities, and only a fraction his life and work. Before Paul could write a letter to a community he founded, he had to have met the people and converted them to believe in Christ. These personal conversations which converted people to believe in Christ are lost, and all that remains is the work done by Paul to guide these communities toward his goal for them and their behavior. Among this presentation of Christian culture is Paul's views on the role that slaves would play in Christian communities. While these letters have become critical in the founding of the Christian religion they lacked details about Paul's life, and little concrete fact is known about the man. Most of the information of Paul’s travels comes from Acts and not from Paul’s personal correspondence. Acts adds its own level of complications as “Paul’s role in Act is dictated not primarily by biographical details but rather by the needs of Luke’s theology as well as the circumstances of his readers.”30 Another problem with Acts is “it would appear that there was some friction between Paul and… the surviving companions of Jesus; but this friction was resolved” in Acts but “from certain of Paul’s letters, particularly Galatians, it seems that the friction was more

serious than in the picture given in Acts” which causes the validity of Acts’ portrayal of Paul to be in question and Acts “appears to be partly a propaganda exercise.”31

The context of the culture and society Paul lived in influenced Paul's view on the end social structure of Christian communities. Paul managed his personal views on slavery and worked against the social considerations about how Paul could present his views on Christian society. Paul was concerned with social stability and the end of the known world and both of these ideas influences his writing. The majority of Paul's writing reviews the interior social construction and morality of Christian communities. His advice largely turns inward and calls for a change of the inner believer, not of the external world. At least that is how his directives are usually viewed.

Even if Paul pushed for a change in the external world, he could not call for the complete freedom of all slaves. Roman society was not prepared for the removal of slaves, and the system shock would have unbalanced the Roman economy and its largest source of labor. Paul's writing was not pushing for the removal of Romans or the culture of Roman society, but instead focuses on believers and their behavior within the confines of their communities.

The writings of Paul were influential literature for early Christians and some members were so devoted to the texts that they would die to protect them.32 Paul’s letters were defining to the Christian communities, and he thus created early Christian theology which continued long past his own life. Some of his most important theological arguments are found in letters which addressed slavery in the community, and his presentation of slaves would have been just as defining as his expectations of Christians.33

32 An example would be the development of the early Christian martyrs in the late second century which held dying for the Gospel in the highest regard.
33 Examples are Gal. 5:16-25 and Rom. 8 for illustrations of Paul’s dualistic view of flesh versus spirit.
A key aspect of Paul’s life is he had something to prove to his readers and other Christian leaders. Unlike the twelve original Apostles, Paul was not granted his position because of his relationship with Jesus. Paul had to create his own place in the Christian movement, and, while the four gospels focus on the life and events of Christ, Paul interprets Christian theology for the Christian communities he founded.

Paul never met Jesus in the living flesh and never heard a teaching of Christ in person. In Paul’s conversion in Acts 9, he only meets the spirit of Christ. It was this spiritual encounter with Christ, and Paul’s following conversion, which Paul claimed gave him the authority to start preaching and founding churches.\(^{34}\) When writing on his authority, Paul does not solely rely on the spiritual encounter with Christ and “repeatedly appeals to results as proof or evidence of his apostolicity.”\(^ {35}\)

Another key aspect of Paul’s interpretation of his world was he believed that the world would not last for longer. In 1 Corinthians 7:29 Paul wrote, “the appointed time has grown short.” This belief that the world would soon be changed influenced Paul to not focus on making pointless long-term preparations. Paul referred to this event as “the impending crisis” in 1 Corinthians 7:26, and another example is in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 where in 5:2 Paul wrote, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” Thief is not a reference to the illegal nature of the action but to the surprise of the change as in 5:3 where Paul wrote, “when they say, “There is peace and security,” then suddenly destruction will come… and there will be no escape!” This idea of constant impending change influenced Paul’s writing as he expected, at any moment and without any warning, everything known about the world would suddenly be changed.

\(^{34}\) Gal. 1:1 is a good example of how Paul might have introduced himself to someone new.\(^ {35}\) Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 163. The specific example referenced by Witherington is 1 Cor. 9:1-2 and 2 Cor. 12:12.
Stoicism was a documented philosophy during Paul’s time and there are parallels between Paul’s and the Stoics’ thoughts on slavery. Stoics believed that a person was not defined by his or her physical aspects but instead their mental attitude and their actions. Bradley writes that Stoics were “believing that the distinction between slave and free … was of far less philosophical significance than that between the wise and the foolish” and Stoicism was “the most popular brand of Greek philosophy at Rome.”36 Stoics believed that because slavery was out of the slave’s control, it was not something which should be held against them, which is parallel to Paul’s belief it was only God who could change the place of a Christian. Bradley continues to draw parallels between Stoics and Paul, although there is little evidence that Paul was aware of Stoic literature, and emphasizes that both did little to change mainstream slavery. While Bradley is right that Christianity did not change slavery, this paper lends weight to the argument that Paul was attempting to change slavery and Bradley trivialized Paul’s presentation of slavery.

Although Paul’s letters became a cornerstone for Christian theology, they are written as personal answers and guidance to individual communities. While Paul knew he had authority over these specific communities, he never makes a reference that these letters would become the building blocks of the Christian church or that they should be compiled into one book. On the contrary, Paul seems to act as though each is a separate event and interprets each letter uniquely which gives his letters a level of honestly, and “the idea of a unified provincial or national church is foreign to Paul’s thought.”37 Although each community asks unique questions, Paul is

responding with a consistent presentation of Christianity.\(^{38}\) This consistent presentation is important to unravel Paul's views on slaves in the Christian community. Because Paul was the central figure conveying theology to Christian communities, what Paul presents to one community is relative to all Christian communities no matter their distance.

Paul is working to address the idea of slavery across social and cultural boundaries in the Roman Empire. Each community is loosely bound by Roman culture, but also has its own local flavor which plays a role in their view of slavery. To shape these early Christians, Paul must write a universal message which includes his presentation of the social position and interactions of slaves within the Christian community along with addressing the local concerns of the community. While Paul’s presentation of slaves and slavery does not appear consistent across his writing, when they are compared to the core beliefs presented in his work, Paul’s comments on slavery contain a consistent presentation of the social interactions Paul envisions for these Christian communities.

It is clear that Paul’s vision of Christianity was in conflict with other teachers’ views during his time.\(^{39}\) That is not to say that Paul's idea of calling himself a slave to Christ did not have followers. Colossians 1:7 and 4:12 reference Paul’s slave-to-Christ metaphor to recognize Epaphras, a man who was spreading the gospel to the Colossians. This passage is proof that another Christian leader, who is well known enough that Paul heard of him, took on Paul's mantle of “slave to Christ” and made it a reality.

When reviewing Paul’s letters, the inner workings of a man who was trying to guide his fledgling flock of believers toward a unified system of beliefs is exposed. Many of these letters

\(^{38}\) This idea is crucial because it shows the ability that Paul had to shape these communities. They didn't know each other and he could have approached each community with a unique solution to their problem but instead he is approaching their unique problems with a constant view.

\(^{39}\) Examples which reference outside teachers are The Acts of Paul and Thecla, where there are references to the Gnostics and Titus 1:10-12 which was written in response to critics which Paul believes would lead the community astray. Also there is Gal. 1:7-9 which references outside preachers which go against the teachings of Paul.
are addressed to a single person or community and it is this personal correspondence which gives
the letters a level of honesty; they are open and uncensored views into the beliefs of Paul. Also,
no letters to Paul exist. The intact letters are one-sided correspondence which only give snippets
of Paul’s interaction with these churches, many of which he founded himself and some which he
wrote to multiple times.

The multiple letters separate Paul's views on slavery and there is no clear, defining
answer to questions about slavery, but Paul did have a complete view on slaves, the institution of
slavery, and he guides Christian culture toward one vision of a Christian society which no longer
pushed slaves out of society but instead incorporated them. They were given a place among
believers just as any other Christian had in the Christian community.

Paul's audience was the Christian communities he founded and it was the social
interactions between believer in these communities that he strove to influence. Paul worked to
move the views of these communities away from those of mainstream Greco-Roman
civilization, and he strove to form these communities into “a social and religious subunit within
the larger society.”40 Within this subunit of Roman society, Paul “is less concerned with the
formalities of slave relationships within the state than with Christian relationships within the
church.”41 Paul's letters combine to create a unified view of Christian slaves in Christian
communities which exists outside of the traditional Roman view of slaves. A goal for the
Christian communities was for “the rules and structures of [Roman] society” to be “outwardly
respected, but inwardly rejected.”42 Within Paul's writing “there is no hint that things need to
change outwardly, because slave/free relationships can be understood and redefined within the

41 Richardson, *Paul’s Ethic*, 49.
framework of the Christian community.” Paul is not focusing on changing mainstream views on slavery. Instead, Paul is focusing on the members of the Christian community and how they interpret the roles of Christian slaves. Paul moved to present the Christian subunit as “law-abiding subjects to the emperor,” and command believers to not fight their attackers, but instead change their own behavior.

One way Paul protected the Christian community was by presenting the ideal Christian's family respecting certain Roman views “to insist that Christian families were not at all socially subversive.” Paul presented Christians as a stable subculture by upholding “many of the standard values of his society” while at the same time he challenged other aspects of the traditional Roman family structure, and pressed for “his converts to do everything “decently and in order,” so as not to make outsiders think that the Christians were mad.” For example, Paul makes the master of the house responsible to the people in his household. This is along the family structure of his time but “Paul is setting about to modify patriarchal family structures to make them more equitable for the subordinate members of the household.” This includes placing slaves into the family structure which in turn legitimizes their place in a Christian family. This traditional presentation is challenged by calling for the master of the house to act in a “Christlike fashion” by “requiring that he love and respect the other family members” in a

---

43 Ibid., 51.
44 Christopher J. Fuhrmann, Policing the Roman Empire (Oxford University Press, 2012), 27. These letters are representative of the “Early Christians” Fuhrmann writes about. Both Titus and Colossians give more advice to the community to change their own behavior than to try to change the views of others.
45 Crossan and Reed, In Search of Paul, 118.
47 Witherington, Paul Quest, 175. Witherington is referring to the family structure presented in Col. 3:18-4:1, and Eph. 6:1-9.
48 Examples include Col. 3-4 and Eph. 5-6, which present a view of the Christian community family in detail.
culture where calling for external justification of the actions of the head of the house “would have been offensive, especially among the Greco-Roman social elite.”

This family structure is unique to Paul's vision. His outline for these Christian families “does not appear to be drawn chiefly from the Old Testament, or chiefly from Greco-Roman sources” and removes the totalitarian authority of the head of the household, which is unique for his time. While “most Greco-Roman advice was geared to preserving the status quo and making it tolerable,” Paul works to improve the quality of life for everyone in the house by making the interactions more consistent or equitable. The presentation which Paul makes in Ephesians and Colossians, when he included the slave into the family structure in Ephesians 6:1-9 and in Colossians 3:18-4:1 is “a long way from Aristotle’s or Plutarch’s advice on household management.”

49 Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 175, 190.
51 Ibid., 190.
52 Ibid., 201.
CHAPTER 3

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historiography of Paul's views on slaves can be divided into two major camps. One camp focuses on Paul's continual push of the Roman social status quo and how this did not improve the lives of slaves. The basis of this argument is Paul was not calling for the abolishment of slavery and instead his writing reinforced the place of slaves at the bottom of society. The other camp focuses on the spiritual liberation which Paul speaks of for all Christians and how this was applied to Christian slaves along with Christian freemen. Neither of these arguments take into account the complexity of Paul's message and how he can be supporting the institution of slavery while at the same time improving the status of slaves.

One author in the camp which argues Paul was not improving slavery is Dale Martin. Martin argues that Paul was using slavery for his own gains, to relate to the audience and create a bond between him and them. Dale Martin’s book, *Slavery as Salvation*, reviews Paul’s rhetoric about slavery presented in 1 Corinthians 9:16-18. Martin argues that Paul was relating himself as a servant of Christ to elevate his position in society by associating himself with Christ and with the responsibility which has been given to Paul.

Martin continues this argument with the idea that Paul is using a very specific type of slavery in Roman times which is one where slaves can actually raise their natural position in society because of the relationship to their master and because they are given powers and duty.

Albert Harrill argues against Paul using this personal relationship with slaves and Corinth for only his personal gains. Harrill argues that this relationship is what Paul wanted because this would rearrange the slavery institution for the better and that it was Paul’s goal to revolutionize

---

the institution by reinforcing the standards.\textsuperscript{54} Harrill’s points out the flaws in some of Martin’s key assumptions about Roman society.\textsuperscript{55} Harrill argues Martin's work does not properly address Paul's views on slavery because it claims that social movement is important to Paul, and, instead of using slaves, Paul is showing that he was aware of slaves in Corinth.

Two more writers which focus on the positive aspects of Paul's writing about slavery are James Dunn and Herman Ridderbos. Their work assets that Paul was painting slavery in a negative light and how this was an argument against slavery. In his work \textit{Paul} Ribberbos argues that Paul was not supporting the Roman view of slaves and was instead trying to change the cultural ideas of slavery. James Dunn supports the idea that Paul's writing pushed for Christian liberation from slavery. Dunn argues that Paul saw belief in Christ as liberation from slavery to the Law which was very important to the Greek idea of freedom.\textsuperscript{56} Dunn argues because Paul openly calls for a change in status by a change in faith; this was something which was obtainable by slaves. Not only was this liberating to slaves, but Paul's message of believers removing themselves from slavery to the Jewish law moved the believer toward a better life. Dunn continues that by relating slavery to the Jewish law Paul is painting a negative view on slavery and this negative view of slavery was positive for the slaves.

While James Dunn argues that Paul's message improves life for slaves, he does think Paul using slavery for his own gains could be a possibility because “at the same time to be a slave of an important figure carried a certain status with it.”\textsuperscript{57} The idea is that the people of Corinth would both better relate to Paul because he seems so common and at the same time they would understand that he is someone to be listened to because of his association with Christ.

\textsuperscript{54} Herman N. Ridderbos, \textit{Paul: An Outline of His Theology} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 317.
\textsuperscript{55} Harrill’s argument against Martin in his review of \textit{Slavery as Salvation} is that Martin relies on class warfare as a motivation for social relationships, which Harrill argues was not a large issue for Romans in this time period.
\textsuperscript{56} James Dunn, \textit{The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: a commentary on the Greek text} (William B. Eerdmans, 1996).
\textsuperscript{57} Dunn, \textit{The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon}, 51.
CHAPTER 4
THE REALITY OF SLAVERY

Paul was writing in a time where slavery was prolific through society, but Paul was using the institution for his own metaphor and he presented slaves and slavery in a manner which was the best for his argument.

Paul’s Rigid Physical Slavery

Paul is described as “not a revolutionary in secular matters” but instead “revolutionary in religion.” When Paul addressed the institution of slavery he was not pressing for change, but instead Paul used the institution of slavery as a tool for Christian devotion. Paul's views are “that while the treatment of slaves was recognized as a moral question, the fact of slavery was not.”

Paul urges believers to devote themselves to Jesus just as slaves devote themselves to their masters. This metaphor shapes Paul's presentation of slavery and the institution of slavery. By connecting slavery to Christian devotion, Paul must restrict what he calls for from human slaves in bondage. Paul must refrain from writing a message for human slaves which could be interpreted as calling for an action by Christian believers, as they are to act as slaves. This metaphor restricts Paul from attacking the institution of slavery and directly connects the institution of slavery to Christian devotion. Also, Paul does not use separate language when discussing the metaphor of slavery as devotion and physical human bondage which restricts his responses to human slaves because he cannot easily differentiate instruction between Christian devotion and human bondage.

59 Dunn, Epistle to the Galatians, 306.
60 Two examples are Rom. 6:16-18 and 1 Cor. 7:22-23. While others exist these two are addressed in this work.
There is a debate as to the type of slave Paul is addressing in the Christian community. Martin argues that Paul is addressing an urban slave. 61 These were domestic slaves who were able to take the time out of their life to go to Christian meetings and try to arrange their lives to Christian ideals. During Paul's time these “slaves could be well educated, and if their masters were figures of substantial social significance and power, the slaves themselves could be entrusted with considerable responsibility.” 62 Meeks would agree with Martin’s idea that Paul addresses urban slaves as he argues Paul’s writing flourished mostly in urban areas and these areas are mostly composed of domestic slaves who worked more than menial field positions. 63 These urban and domestic slaves could be educated and “were more privileged and pampered than the tens of thousands of slaves who laboured without realistic hope of freedom in the fields or in the mines” and sometimes “occupied positions of trust and responsibility.” 64 These are also the slaves which are the basis for Paul’s metaphor of slavery as devotion because they have the level of freedom to go out and participate in the community but at the same time they are still completely devoted to their master. Harrill argues that there is not enough evidence to support Meeks’ claims that urban slaves were Paul’s exclusive focus, but overall the weight of evidence is on the side of Martin and Meeks. 65

Despite writing only of one specific type of slavery, Paul does not present the chaos of human interaction when slaves interact with their masters. Paul's view on slavery is it is not a status the slave would want to escape or one where the slave could influence his master. This presentation of slavery is shaped by the restrictions Paul placed in his writing when he wrote of

his metaphor for slavery as a devotion to Christ. Paul’s presentation of a human in bondage is a static slave who does not seek to change his place in life.\textsuperscript{66} Paul presents a human slave which wants to focus his life on devotion to his master above all other things because this is the ideal image of a slave which Paul champions in his metaphor to Christian devotion. But, as Bradley writes, “the relationship between the master and the slave, it follows, could never be as one-sided as that between the master and his livestock” and the human master and slave relationship Paul presents is unrealistic and one-sided.\textsuperscript{67}

When Paul writes of Christian devotional slavery, he cannot have power or influence move from Christian believer up to Christ or God. The movement of power and influence in the relationship with Christ was from Christ to believer. When Paul then writes to a human slave in bondage, he mirrors this Christian believer relationship with God and has influence travel from the master in power to the slave in bondage. An example of this is Colossians 3:22-25 where the slave is commanded to serve his human master just as he would Christ.

Human interaction with other humans, even slaves, is unique between every person and Paul’s writing does not capture unique interactions. In Paul's metaphor, the slave is not a dynamic character who grows. The purpose of the slave is to serve without need of earthly gratification.\textsuperscript{68} While the slave did not have any real power in the relationship between the master and the slave, in reality, there was still a level of human interaction between the two people. As Bradley writes, “Because they were valued as commodities slaves were never altogether powerless, and so the relationship with the owner was one which had to be continually defined, adjusted, and redefined, as their response to slavery manifested itself from moment to

\textsuperscript{66} Paul called for all Christians to not seek a change in their life. An example is 1 Cor. 7:17 where Paul wrote “let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you.”
\textsuperscript{67} Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave,” 120.
\textsuperscript{68} Again note Col. 3:22-25 which speaks that the purpose is to work now to receive gratification later. Also, Rom. 6 where the reward of eternal life will be given to those who act as a slave.
moment.”69 Paul’s writing does not reflect this interaction between a human master and a human slave because his main focus was on the Christian believer acting as a slave to God in his metaphor. In Paul's literature, the slave is an undeveloped character, used only to illustrate Paul's goal for Christian behavior. In the same way, Paul's presentation of the human master was also rigid because Paul only expected the human master to do what was right and treat the Christian slave properly.70

When a slave joined a Christian community, they were not transformed into anything more than a slave in Roman society's eyes. These slaves were not allowed any extra benefits from society or government because they were involved in the Christian community. Christianity in the time of Paul’s writing was not an official religion which could hold any sway in its community and Christians were looked down on.71

However, there is record of Christians accepting slaves into the church and allowing them positions within the community itself.72 When asking for advice, Pliny the Younger, who was a successful imperial official who wrote letters to the emperor Trajan, helps to illustrate the role of slaves in church by writing “Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses.”73 This statement proves that the slaves were allowed to hold positions in the church. Pliny’s nonchalant attitude portrays the slaves’ roles as common. Pliny’s letters 10.96-97 illustrate that while a slave could be allowed in the community and would be able to have a legitimate position, they were still mistreated by the outside community. This particular letter by Pliny is unique because Wilken argues that the community in which Pliny was staying had a large number of Christians, and,

69 Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave,” 121.
70 Col. 4:1 and Eph. 6:9.
71 In The Golden Ass by Apuleius, for example, the Baker’s wife, who cuckolds the Baker, is hinted to be a Christian.
72 Pliny, Letters, trans. William Melmoth, book X.
73 Ibid.
while torturing slaves was routine, Pliny’s behavior appears “impulsive.”74 This strong community, which was the root of Pliny’s problem, allowed slaves to enter into their church and take leadership roles, illustrating the early churches’ acceptance of slaves.75

Not all letters written by Paul address slaves or their masters. Many of them are responses to questions asked by the community to Paul or have Paul responding to a rumor or report he had heard.76 Many of Paul’s letters do not extensively address slaves and this is significant because the communities which did have slaves were not causing trouble. Paul never writes in response to a community's treatment of the slaves among them. Slaves existed throughout the entire Roman Empire and most Christian communities were able to create a balance with slavery which allowed them to follow Paul’s instructions and to avoid his admonition.

To use the idea of slavery as a tool Paul had to have an understanding of slavery in Roman society. This would have required him to observe slaves. The Roman Empire was full of slaves and they formed a crucial labor source in many levels of daily life. Paul’s travels would have introduced him to many different slaves, owners, regions, and the idea of the slave which Paul utilizes was one which he was most familiar with. Looking at Paul’s letters, Paul’s teaching often had the strongest roots in urban areas and he usually writes to communities which are based in cities.77 Because “Paul’s ministry developed in urban areas, the situation of slaves on vast agricultural estates or brutalized in mines was outside his daily experience. His contacts

75 In 1 Cor. Paul writes directly to slaves because there was such a large slave population there.
76 This is parallel to the petition and response system used by the Emperor and illustrated in Pliny and Trajan’s correspondence.
77 Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 64.
were with domestic slaves." Knowledge of mostly domestic slaves shapes his writing and, because domestic slavery was not as brutal as field slavery, he does not address the inherent violence in slavery. This violence was ingrained in the relationships of slaves and their owners in the Roman Empire. Hopkins writes, “the hostility of Roman slave-owners to their slaves, and of slaves to their owners, lay just below the surface of Roman civilization.” Paul's writing assumes when the slaves and the masters are both believers in Christ, both working for the glory of God, and the masters are treating the slaves justly, as Paul demands, there will be no conflict between the two.

Paul’s Vision of Slavery

Paul had a vision for the Christian communities he founded, and guided them toward that vision in his letters. He used his authority as the founder of the community to present changes in their behavior which were counter to Roman society. Paul focused on the behavior of believers toward other Christians within the community and his belief “bears on relationships within the church and not on questions of the structure of society in general.”

Paul's metaphor of slavery created restrictions concerning how he approached human slavery, but Paul had a vision of the end role human slaves would fulfill in Christian communities. To understand Paul’s vision of slavery, it must be understood that in Paul’s writing there are two different types of slavery. One is the physical slavery, which is the relationship between a human slave and their master. A clear presentation of this type of slavery is presented in passages where Paul is making recommendations for the actions of Christians who are slaves

---

79 Hopkins “Novel Evidence,” 5.
such as 1 Corinthians 7:21 where Paul wrote, “Where you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it.” The second is devotional slavery, which is the idea that a Christian should be a slave to Christ. This is the metaphor which Paul uses when he wants to present the appropriate behavior of Christian devotion, and a simple presentation of this is when Paul calls himself a slave such as in Romans 1:1. Without differentiation between these two types of slavery, Paul’s writing does not appear consistent because he casually switches between the metaphor of devotion and writing of real human slavery without making a clear distinction.

Paul’s view of spiritual slavery brought the idea of slavery to the forefront of these Christian communities by openly presenting the institution of slavery as a method of devotion to Christ. This metaphor leveled the social field of Christians by presenting them all as slaves, while as the same time raising human slaves by increasing awareness of their humanity. Paul’s ideas of spiritual slavery are rooted in Jewish history and “just as some Old Testament slaves bound themselves in appreciation to their masters… so Paul willingly bound himself over to serve the Lord.” While Paul is willingly binding himself to slavery, Old Testament law, which Paul would have been familiar with, utilizes slavery as punishment for paying back debts among other things.

Paul’s views of physical slavery are often along the lines of normal social treatment of slaves during his time, and, as for removing the institution altogether, it “may be doubted indeed whether such a thought ever to occurred him.” Paul’s letters pushed for “Christians [to accept]...
[slavery] without question, just as they accepted the state, the prevailing differences in social rank, and common inequalities in economic conditions.”

Paul saw slavery as a natural institution created by God and this was a reason he did not call for the removal of the institution of slavery. To Paul the institution of slavery is ingrained into society and human nature and “to encourage radical change could add to the disorder of an already alienated world.” This idea reinforced Paul’s hands off approach on the idea of human bondage. Paul did not see a duty to try to remove slavery from society and any change in slavery “lay with God, whose ways, though mysterious, are never unjust.”

---

86 Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 15-16. Garnsey is writing of the development of the Church in the fourth century and how they “inherited” this issue. He concludes that these church fathers followed the ideas set by Paul which is that slavery was a natural institution thus it was God’s only to change. The foundation of this idea comes from Aristotle in his work *Politics*.
87 Richardson, *Paul’s Ethic*, 47.
88 Ibid., 15.
CHAPTER 5

THE VISION

Paul’s vision for the Christian communities is summed up in Paul's simplest presentations of the Christian community. Paul’s blueprint for the social relationships in the Christian communities is expressed in 1 Corinthians 12:13 when he wrote, “for in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit,” and in Galatians 3:28 when he wrote, “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” And finally, in Colossians 3:11 Paul wrote, “in that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” Under Christ and within the Christian church, there was freedom from the restrictions external society placed upon social groups. This was also a change which “is to be realized immediately” upon admittance into the community, and these “members of the new community… interact with each other as equals” as all external social restrictions were “erased by” baptism and other “rituals of unity.”

89  Alan Segal, Paul the Convert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 172.

Galatians: True Words against Earthly Bondage under Men

Galatians 4-5 illustrates how Paul saw the institution of slavery as a natural institution only God could change and how the movement of people across social groups was not something which was decided by their own actions. It also illustrates how freedom from bondage to another man was seen as positive in Paul’s eyes.

In Galatians Paul uses the same language to describe human slavery and spiritual slavery. In 4:22 Paul writes of two children, one born to a “slave woman” and one to a “free woman.” He
continues this language in 4:23 where he wrote of “the child of the slave” and “the child of the promise.” Paul is using the same language to describe these slaves as he would any other human slave, but he admits in 4:24 that these references are “an allegory.” This is an example of how Paul uses slavery as a metaphor for his message to Christians. This metaphor of spiritual slavery utilized the same language as describing human slavery. Two passages which illustrate how Paul uses the same language to describe physical slavery and the spiritual slavery of his metaphor are 5:1, “for freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery,” and 5:13, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free.” While both of these passages read as though Paul is writing of physical slavery, he is actually referencing spiritual freedom. In later letters, especially in 1 Corinthians addressed below, Paul presents this dualistic view of slavery in his metaphor that Christians should emulate slaves in their devotion to God.

Galatians 5:1 and 5:13 also show Paul’s belief that a change in freedom, in this case a change of spiritual freedom away from Jewish law, is initiated by God. Both of these factors, that there is a spiritual freedom separate from a physical freedom and that it is God who calls for a change in either, are a creed in Paul’s writing which shape his interpretation of Christian devotion and the institution of slavery.

Master and Slave Relationship

The key relationship to understand Paul’s views on human slavery is how Paul presented the interactions between master and slave. Paul presents the master and slave in a manner which locks in their current free or slave status but, at the same time, the slave is protected because the master is held accountable for his treatment of the slave. In a Roman, non-Pauline slave to master relationship the master is not held accountable for the life of the slave other than in the
sense of maintaining useful property. In first-century society, a slave could be described as “mere chattel of his master.” All that was expected from the master was that he “had only to meet the requirements of sensible proprietorship, as with any other item of livestock.” The life of the slave was subject to the whim of the master and, as Hopkins writes, “slaves’ legal powerlessness” caused them to have “more or less complete dependence on their owner’s favour” in how easy or difficult their life was going to be. Anytime the master was displeased or angry with the slave he could take it out on the slave with little social repercussions. Using the *Golden Ass* as an example of the treatment of slaves, Bradley writes “as with slaves in real life who could pay in no other way, the Ass is answerable to his owners with his body alone.” It was the goal of the master to keep the slave alive because of the amount of wealth that was invested, not because the slave had any right to be alive.

The master had total control over where a slave lives his life. The master could sell a slave or his family at any time or send them off to anywhere else to work he pleased. Again using *The Golden Ass* as an example the Ass changes owners through the entire book and never because of his own decision to be sold. The only actions that the slave has available to him were to either continue to work or to try to flee the master. One way which the master could give slaves power is by granting them freedom though the Roman act of manumission, and a common way to gain manumission was for slaves to gain enough money to buy their way out of slavery. Gaining manumission in this manner could be an act of compassion, or an act of

---

91 Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 50.
92 Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave,” 118.
93 Hopkins “Novel Evidence,” 5.
95 Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave,” 115.
96 This is not to say that all masters were cruel but to illustrate a slave’s position without the morals of the master taken into consideration.
97 Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave,” 116. Although many times he does want to get away.
98 Ibid., 116.
currency and expense. Phillips reviews the act of manumission in early Christian culture, and writes that it “was a pious act” and there are records of saints freeing their slaves, although he quickly points out that these records are inaccurate and “we should not put too much reliance upon such figures.”

Paul did not call for manumission of slaves and never addressed the topic in the remaining letters. This is because the idea of a slave working toward leaving the service of his master undermines Paul's use of the institution of slavery as a model for Christian devotion in three ways.

The first was that the change in status of a slave was up to God and was in God’s hands as in Galatians 5. This was not something which should be called for en masse. Second, the idea of manumission was included in the “natural” state of slavery. Paul saw all people as slaves, either to Sin or to God, so there was no spiritual manumission. Third, calling for the release of slavery through manumission would be calling for the release of Christians from their “slavery” to Christ. To call for masters to release their slaves would interfere with Paul’s model of the perfect Christian because it would seem as though Paul was calling for God to release the Christians from his service, or that there was even an option to be removed from Paul’s system of slavery.

Although Paul did not push to have slaves freed by any human means, his writing focused on the human aspect of slavery and challenged the human master’s power by placing the master under God’s judging eye. The master’s treatment of the slave now had consequences and the flow of power and control no longer ended with the master at the head. Paul's writing

---

100 The review of Phil. below discusses the conviction Paul had for not calling for a change in status.
101 The review of Rom. 7 later in the work addresses Paul’s view of people’s slavery to sin.
102 An example is Eph. 6:9.
forced the human master “to treat their slaves ‘with justice and equality’” and this in turn forces “a higher degree of equality than was normal.”\textsuperscript{103} The mainstream view of the treatment of slaves was “slaves were like pets: good treatment of them was about the masters’ enlightenment, never about the slaves’ inherent equality.”\textsuperscript{104} All Christian masters are now under guidelines provided by Christianity. Looking into Paul’s writing, Ridderbos writes that Paul was calling for a higher justice in the Christian community which took precedence over the Roman judicial system by calling for a personal relationship between the master and the slave which separated the Christian community from the laws of Rome.\textsuperscript{105} Paul’s focus was not on the institution of slavery but on the people within it. Especially in the Christian community where any movement toward giving Christian slaves a higher standing than vocal tools will be an improvement in their life.

Philemon

Philemon gives insight into Paul’s personal reaction to a slave and master relationship. This letter is also unique because, while most letters are instructing a community, the letter to Philemon illustrates Paul’s relationship with a slave. Although Paul's views during the correspondence with Philemon appears to only apply to this one situation, the fact that Paul includes other names in the introduction “suggests that the letter was not ultimately intended to be private” and the presentation within affects the entire Christian community.\textsuperscript{106} Philemon is

\textsuperscript{103} James Dunn, \textit{The Theology of Paul the Apostle} (Eerdmans, 1998), 701.
\textsuperscript{104} Sarah Ruden, \textit{Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in his Own Time} (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 154.
\textsuperscript{105} Ridderbos, \textit{Paul}, 317.
also unique because it addresses the Roman taboo of a runaway slave in literature which is a 
topic Ruden describes as “too shameful for mainstream literature or polite conversation.”

The letter to Philemon is not full of statements which call for Christians to restructure 
society or to abolish slavery, and it does not have instructions for Christian communities and 
their interactions with slavery. What Philemon does have is Paul's views on an enslaved 
Christian’s interactions with his Christian master, and it is consistent with Paul's views on the 
human aspect of slavery. McGiffert writes that Paul's “brief note to Philemon is also significant 
because it shows the attitude which he took toward existing institutions.” Philemon can then 
be viewed as an outline for a Christian’s interpretation of the role of a slave, and what Paul 
expects should be happening between members of the Christian community.

Philemon is a complicated letter because Paul does not bluntly state what he wants 
Philemon to do concerning the status of Onesimus, but his message can be understood by placing 
it in the context of Roman culture and Paul's vision of social interaction within the Christian 
communities.

The authority Paul commands over Philemon mirrors the relationship between a master 
and their slave in the Christian community. While both Paul and Philemon claim control over 
Onesimus, the letter “lacks a single word about the due obedience of Onesimus as slave to 
Philemon as master, but contains multiple hints about the due obedience of Philemon as convert 
to Paul as apostle.” This is a mirror of the relationship presented in 1 Corinthians, where Paul 
is instructing Christian men to not have sex with slave prostitutes. As in 1 Corinthians, Paul 
could place the blame of the situation on the slave, which would be a scapegoat who had no

---

107 Ruden, *Paul Among the People*, 152.
110 See below to this work’s review of 1 Cor. for a more detailed explanation.
ability to argue against this claim, but instead Paul is focusing on the actions of the Christian and, by not reprimanding the slave, Paul is actually defending the position of the slave by voicing the slave’s complaints. Paul is protecting Philemon’s slave from Philemon and, instead of reassuring the devotion of the slave to his master, Paul is calling for the absolute devotion of Philemon to Paul’s authority and to accept Onesimus as an equal in Christian society.¹¹¹ This focus on duty of the master and not reprimanding the slave separates Paul's vision of Christian society from Roman society. Paul could have approached this situation differently and either thrown Onesimus to the mercy of Philemon or he could have directly asked for Onesimus as a gift. Instead, Paul is working for the humanity of the slave and arguing that Onesimus be treated as an equal Christian, “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother” in Philemon 16.

While the personal nature of the letter leads the reader to believe that Paul is writing a letter which only address this one situation, this letter is still instructional on the life Paul envisions for the Christian community. The extended greeting and mentioning the home church in Philemon 2 shows that this letter was to be read to the entire community, and without an actual command for Philemon to follow, the final decision on how to treat Onesimus was not Paul’s but Philemon’s.¹¹² By presenting this letter to Philemon, Paul’s goal was to use rhetoric until Philemon had “internalized Paul’s attitude” so with this understanding Philemon “would know how to handle, not only the present situation, but all future ones as well.”¹¹³ Paul does not use the overtly commanding tone as with letters to Christian communities he has deemed off course, such as in Galatians or 1 Corinthians, and instead he utilized a more subtle approach. Even the

¹¹¹ Phil. 1:16.
¹¹³ Crossan and Reed, In Search of Paul, 108.
command in Philemon 22, where Paul writes, “prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you,” is ambivalent, as it could be seen as a threat (Paul is coming to check that his will be done), or Paul would simply like to visit. Instead of ordering Philemon to do Paul’s bidding, Paul works to create a universal argument which addresses the status of Onesimus in Christian society.\textsuperscript{114} Philemon 16 defines Onesimus’ place by calling him “more than a slave, a beloved brother” and “a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.” This passage creates a division between a slave and a Christian slave, and Paul expects that the Christian community would respond to a Christian slave in a positive manner. This reaction by the Christian community would be a universal Christian action, which would raise the status of a slave to “a brother in the Lord.”\textsuperscript{115} A brother Christian, while remaining a slave to his master, would be more fairly treated by his master than what was demanded by Roman society’s views on slave and master interaction. Paul is also playing the role of a third-party Christian who settles a dispute between Christians as called for by Paul himself in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 where he wrote, “when any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare take it to court… do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another? … to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat to you.”\textsuperscript{116}

The question of why Onesimus was with Paul in jail sets the tone of the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon and the situation that Paul is addressing. Paul is writing to benefit Onesimus, and Dunn argues “the tone and diplomatic language of the letter make it certain that the separation of Onesimus from Philemon did not occur under lawful circumstances

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 108. Paul wielded enough authority he could have forced Philemon to accept Onesimus.
\textsuperscript{115} Phil. 1:16
\textsuperscript{116} This idea is mirrored in Matt. 18:15-17 where Matthew calls for disputes within the church to be handled by individuals first. If that does not work then bring a small group, and if that does not work then the matter should go before the entire church. If no resolution can be found then the offender is to be shunned.
and that Onesimus owed Philemon money.” But, if Onesimus had been a fugitive slave, it would have been too dangerous for Onesimus to travel into a Roman city, through the guards which watched over Paul, and to spend time with the imprisoned Paul. Onesimus’ legal state was probably not a fugitive slave. What is certain is Paul was using his name to protect Onesimus from his master, and this could have dire effects for Paul because “if Philemon was a Roman citizen, Paul, as a fellow Roman, would be guilty of a serious offense subject to a penalty of double the slave’s value.” If this was the case, Paul was risking himself for Onesimus, and he is expecting that Philemon, as a Christian, would not go to the Romans but instead would handle this issue within the Christian community, without outside interference. Paul’s beliefs aside, it would be inappropriate for Paul to directly ask for the slave to be freed because it would be seen as aggressive and invasive into Philemon’s personal business. Witherington argues that Paul placed himself in a position of debt to Philemon to soften the blow to Philemon’s honor when Philemon gave into Paul’s request. Slaves were expensive and freeing a slave was a burden for Philemon “considering the inherent economic loss” of gaining no money back for his investment. The need to place himself in debt with Philemon is a sign that the request Paul was making was not a standard expectation of Christians. If Paul expected all Christians to release their slaves because they were Christian, then he would have no need to give Philemon a reward. Paul is expecting equal treatment, but not unconditional release, for slaves. This mirrors

118 Crossan and Reed, In Search of Paul, 107.
119 Richards, Paul’s Ethic, 48.
120 This idea is illustrated in Paul’s own writing in 1 Cor. 6:10 and was not only Paul’s idea. Matt. 5:25 and 18:15-17 also mirrors this idea. Also, Fuhrmann writes “Christians… banned taking their problems to gentile authorities” and where thus “able to practice their own laws… as long as no one appealed to outside authorities” in Policing, 54-55.
121 Witherington, Paul Quest, 166.
122 Fuhrmann, Policing, 30. Fuhrmann is writing of economic loss when a slave flees his master but, in freeing a slave by request of Paul, Philemon loses the worth of the future labor and initial cost of Onesimus.
Paul's other writings, which challenge the place of the slave in society by protecting them from their master, but do not call for the removal of slavery in Christian communities.\textsuperscript{123} Also, Paul’s method of utilizing a personal relationship with the master to move the master to release the slave gives the passage a feeling of a unique event instead of repeatable guidelines.

Normal Roman law demanded runaway slaves be returned to their masters, which is counter to Old Testament law concerning the treatment of runaway slaves.\textsuperscript{124} In Deuteronomy 23:15-16, it states that runaway slaves are not to be given back to their masters and instead are to be protected. If Paul was concerned with the Old Testament laws then he should not return the slave to his master.\textsuperscript{125} This situation forces Paul to decide between the Old Testament’s view on slavery or the Roman law, and illustrates Paul's personal view of slavery. The Old Testament is a cornerstone in Paul's rhetoric of slavery as devotion.\textsuperscript{126} Garnsey makes the argument that slavery was a defining feature of the ancient Israelites and their relationship with God.\textsuperscript{127} Paul did not create the connection between God and slavery but championed it and evolved the concept into an idea of devotion. Paul was imitating the actual physical slavery of Moses and the conflicts of the ancient Israelites with his idea of devotional slavery which would help free Christians obtain a strong devotion to God.\textsuperscript{128} But, instead of siding with the Old Testament, Paul forges a new Christian response which handles questions of slaves solely within the Christian community and trusts in Philemon to follow his direction from the letter. Paul returns

\textsuperscript{123} Both Eph. 5-6 and Col. 3 place the slave into the family structure in a Christian community.
\textsuperscript{124} Justinian Digest 11.4.1.5 opens with very clear language defining “a man who has concealed a fugitive slave is a thief.” Those in possession of a runaway slave had twenty days to return him or her before they too would be punished. William Warwick Buckland, The Digest of Justinian (The University Press, 1909), 287.
\textsuperscript{125} Theodore Dwight Weld, The Bible Against Slavery (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864), goes into detail about the relationship between the Old Testament and slavery. Given Paul’s background and knowledge of Jewish law, Paul would not be unfamiliar with the Old Testament’s treatment of runaway slaves.
\textsuperscript{126} Witherington, Paul Quest, 187.
\textsuperscript{127} Garnsey, Ideas of Slavery, 18.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, 18.
the slave to his master, but with this personal letter which was designed to protect the slave against punishment and even implicitly asks for his freedom from his master.

This letter is a rejection of Roman society's view on slavery. Onesimus is Philemon’s slave, so only Philemon can give him his freedom. Paul challenges Onesimus' status in the Christian community and, despite Paul’s belief about only God changing a man’s status, Paul pushes Philemon to free Onesimus. He justifies this argument with the belief that a Christian brother should be treated better than his status demands, and overrules society's call for punishment. Paul continues with his message of “don't rock the boat” by tempering his stand for Onesimus’ freedom and returns the slave as a slave, instead of claiming Onesimus' freedom outright. While the outside observer would see this as Paul following Roman law, Paul's letter shows that within the Christian community Christians had their own rules about the status of slaves and slaves deserved to be treated equally among Christians.

Paul’s Unified Vision

Paul’s letters communicate a common vision by which he influenced Christian communities to follow his beliefs on slavery. While Paul was working to enact a change, his presentation of slavery does not always appear consistent. At times Paul presents Christians as slaves to Christ and champions the slave’s work and devotion by comparing himself and Christians to slaves. An example of this is found in 1 Corinthians 6:20 where Paul wrote “you were bought with a price.” During these times Paul portrays a noble slavery which should be emulated and this call for emulation raises up slaves in Christian societies. Examples of this are Romans 1:1 where Paul calls himself “a slave of Jesus Christ,” Galatians 1:10 where Paul again openly refers to himself as “a slave of Christ,” and 2 Timothy 2:24 were the writer calls an ideal Christian “the Lord’s slave.” At other times, Paul presents a social structure of slavery which
locks the slave in place, keeping him down at the bottom of the social order and always a servant to his master. The strongest examples of this portrayal can be seen in epistles whose Pauline authorship is disputed: Titus, Ephesians, and Colossians, which are interpreted below. These two ideas fuse together to create Paul’s dualistic view on slaves which calls for both Christian emulation of their devotion and protection of the human slave but does not call for a social change by freeing the slave, nor a major change in the institution of slavery.

This dualistic view is evident when Paul used the devotion of a slave to his master as the metaphor for the Christian devotion to God, as seen in the examples above. His work does not call for the abolition of slavery; he actually accepts the institution and applies it to Christian devotion. In some letters he begins his work by saying that he is a slave of Christ, and in other letters he writes that Christians have been bought by Christ and that they too must act as slaves. Paul describes the expected behavior of Christians in his letters and he expects Christians to act a certain way, not only in private, but in public life as well. Just like a slave who cannot control his own life, Christians have restrictions on their behavior. He goes so far as to give some communities strict orders to stop certain behaviors, such as the ones listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 which censures “fornicators, idolaters… sodomites, thieves… drunkards… robbers.” At the same time, Paul is keen to remind them to give into authority as in Romans 13:1 which stated “let ever person be subject to the governing authorities.”

Romans

Paul’s Epistle to the Romans has a different feel to it than his other works because it is more of a résumé than it is an instruction to a Christian community. He wrote this letter to explain his theology more than instruct a community, because most likely he had not founded

---

129 Rom. 1:1 and 1 Cor. 6:19-20. They must act as slaves not in the work that they do but in their devotion to the beliefs that Paul is presenting; they are to act as devoted to God as slaves are to their master.
this church or visited it in person. Next Paul “was planning to turn his attention to the west, specifically to Spain,” but before he could do so he “needed the full co-operation and support of the church in Rome.”

While community plays a large part in the work, especially with Paul defining his views on circumcision, there is not the tone of command which the other letters hold. This is evident because “Paul does not seem to be conscious of trying to correct the beliefs and behavior of the Roman Christians.”

Romans begins with Paul stating frankly that he is a slave to Christ in 1:1. Paul is not ashamed of calling himself a slave, and instead uses it like a badge of honor. It was far from an honorable thing to be a slave in normal Roman society. Continuing the metaphor of Christians acting as slaves to God, in Romans 8, Paul softens and clarifies his idea that a true believer should be a slave to Christ. He writes that being a slave to Christ is not like normal slavery but instead is more akin to adoption. In Romans 8:15 he writes, “for you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.” While this clarification does not change his message that believers should think of themselves as slaves, it is said in a manner which illustrates Paul’s dualistic vision between devotional slavery and physical slavery.

Romans 7 presents the strongest evidence which defines Paul’s view of human nature and natural slavery. Paul views slavery as a natural institution put in place by God, and this idea is reinforced by Paul’s view on human freewill presented in Roman 7. Romans 7:4 states that the believer has migrated from Jewish law to now be owned by Christ. They are slaves to Christ in order to please God, and this ownership is a mirror to how a human master owns a slave. In Romans 7:14 Paul wrote, “I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin,” and argued that humans are sinful by nature and are thus slaves to sin. This slavery to sin is central in Paul’s

---

131 Ibid., 211.
interpretation of the institution of slavery. If humans are slaves to sin, salvation can only come through a belief in Christ, and, as argued above, Paul’s view of the proper belief in Christ was for Christians to view themselves as a slave to Christ. Romans 7:25 ends the passage where Paul is writing how he is both a slave to God and a slave to sin. These three passages illustrate Paul's personal views on freewill and the institution of slavery. At all points, humans are slaves, either to their own sinful nature or to God.\footnote{Rom. 7:24-25.} Paul is arguing that to please God, humans must act as slaves to Christ.\footnote{Rom. 7:4 “in order that we might bear fruit for God.”} This is using slavery as a metaphor for devotion, but, at the same time, defines slavery to sin as an evil physical slavery which dictates human action. Paul's personal view is that there is no escaping slavery in this world, and it is better to be a devotional slave to Christ and expect a better afterlife than it is to be a physical slave to sin and expect only a physical death. Paul is presenting his dualistic view of slavery and how the institution of slavery is a permanent human reality.

Romans does not have a direct call for equality extended to the Christian slaves. Instead, Romans presents a view of Christianity which encompasses all of humanity, slave and non-slave alike. Paul is presenting a canonical belief for all Christians, and, by openly writing that there is no escape from slavery and Christians are not bound by law but instead are slaves to Christ, Paul is challenging the social barriers of the time which would restrict the interactions between a slave and his master. Paul is recognizing the equality of humans because of the basic human condition of all humans being slaves to sin. This placed all Christians, slave or free, together on the same level in their slavery to God, which is mirrored in other works of Paul, specifically 1 Corinthians.
Romans 6 shows Paul’s belief that there is no escaping the institution of slavery and acting as a slave is the key to “eternal life.” Romans 6 calls for believers to strive for “righteousness, to be God's own slaves, in order to receive from him eternal life in Christ.” Acting as a community of slaves is the goal for the Christian communities because each should individually act as a slave.

Lyall writes, “a repeated element of Romans 6:12-23 is the concept of dominion, which means ownership.” This idea of ownership is important to Paul’s view of salvation, for it is only through acting as a slave to Christ that Christians are acting as Christ expects them to. Romans 6:16 continues the idea that humans will be slaves no matter if they follow Christ or not. If they are not slaves to Christ, then they will be slaves to Sin. Romans 6:17-18 writes about how Christians have moved from slaves to Sin to slaves to Christ, which is a positive movement for them and reiterates the idea that all humans must be a slave to something. Being a slave in itself is not bad in Paul’s eyes. It is being a slave to an idea which does not benefit God which is negative.

Romans 6:19-23 claims that it is good a Christian acts as a slave to Christ, much as before Christ people were slaves to sin. The lifestyle of a slave is a method of living that should be emulated by Christians. Paul even relates this emulation of slaves’ lives directly to Christian holiness and writes, “so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.” Acting as a slave is the guideline for Christian behavior and is the end goal for the behavior of the Christian communities. Paul is reiterating his idea that a human must be a slave to something, so it is better to be a slave to Christ and receive a reward than be a slave to Sin.

---

134 Rom. 6:22-23.  
136 Lyall, Legal Metaphors, 36.  
137 Rom. 6:22-23. It is in acting as a slave that the reward is “eternal life.”  
138 Rom. 6:19.
Romans does not take the same authoritative tone of letters to communities Paul has founded and instead utilizes an argumentative tone which would be used to convert and instruct non-believers.\textsuperscript{139} This presentation of Paul's beliefs in a philosophical, formal way allows Paul’s consistent view to showcase his personal goals for the Christian communities. Instead of making demands of a Christian community, Paul is working to convince the readers of his own understanding of the world and Romans is the full collection of Paul’s personal views.

\textsuperscript{139} Hagner and Harris, \textit{Pauline Studies}, 211.
CHAPTER 6

WHAT PAUL’S VISION OF SLAVERY DID

Paul’s vision of the role of slaves in the Christian community influenced the Christian communities and did not work against the believers but solidified the roles of each Christian in the Christian community.140 These communities, such as Corinth, Colossae, and Ephesus, were openly accepting slaves into their ranks, and, in turn, Paul incorporates slaves into his message. In doing so, he provides the Christian community guidance on how to address human slaves in bondage in the community and not just advice on how a Christian should act as a devotional slave.141 The manifestation of this vision is a Christian society where the incorporation of slaves protects Christian slaves from abuse from their Christian masters by calling for the slaves’ treatment to be the repercussions of the slaves’ actions and not the whim of their masters.142 The masters are expected to be fair in their treatment of the slaves, because if a master treats a slave unfairly by punishing a slave without reason then the master will be treated unfairly by God their master.143 The idea of punishing slaves when they deserve to be punished is not unique in Roman society, but the demand that the masters act completely fair, and not act on a whim to abuse the slave, is unique. To threaten the behavior of the master and to imply that mistreatment of slaves will be punished by God is not part of mainstream views on master and slave interactions.

The Relationship between Heaven’s Hierarchy and Earthly Communities

---

140 Examples of this are below in the reviews of 1 Cor., 1 Tim., Titus, Col., and Eph.
141 The section on 1 Cor., Titus, Eph., and Col. below focuses on the role of slaves in the Christian community. Specifically 1 Cor. 7, 1 Tim. 6, Titus 2:9-10, Eph. 6:5-9, and Col. 3:22-4:1.
142 The reviews of Eph. 6:5-9 and Col. 3:22-4:1 below give examples of subtle threats to the masters.
143 Examples are Col. 4:1 “masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven” and Eph. 6:9 “for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.”
Paul's presentation of the relationship between Christian believers and Christ defined the relationship between Christians in the Christian community. Paul grouped all believers together in their requirement of slavery to Christ as a key to “eternal life.”\(^{144}\) They were all to treat each other as if they were on the same social level because in Paul's eyes all Christians shared a “common salvation.”\(^{145}\)

Another aspect of these communities was their size. While these communities were mostly in large urban areas, the communities themselves may have averaged more than “a dozen or twenty people” at a smaller house meeting and “forty or fifty people” in a larger gathering, and while “most city groups of early disciples would have included at least some higher-status members,” Dunn argues that “the majority of any group of converts in any city was likely to be illiterate, lacking in influence and lowborn.”\(^ {146}\) It would have been the elite members which would be most likely to bring a slave to a meeting and, as masters and members of upper levels of Roman society, they would have been the focus of Paul's vision of a perfect Christian community which ignored external social relationships, such as master and slave, to focus instead on what that person could bring to the Christian gathering. An example of Paul focusing on what a Christian could bring, and not focus on who they are outside of the Christian faith, is in 1 Corinthians 12:4-13 and specifically in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 where Paul wrote, “just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

This same social level applied to Christian slaves and their Christian masters, and another passage which removes the restrictions between the free master and the slave is Galatians 3:28:

\(^{144}\) Rom. 6:22-23.  
“There is no longer Jew of Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” This is the foundation for the Christian community and, when put into context of the time period, it is a groundbreaking statement. The context of this passage is directly challenging the power the master holds over the slave and obliterates it by putting them on equal social standing within the Christian gatherings. Paul sees all of humanity in a position below Christ as his slaves, and, among themselves, they are not to have any difference between those that are free and those that are slaves. Paul creates his idea of “equality among Christians over … the hierarchical normalcy of Roman society” and this equality improved the position of slaves in society.147

Paul creates his Christian community after the structure in heaven. Just as God is the ruler of heaven with Christ as his connection to believers as servants, so should the Christian communities remember their communal place as believers below Christ.148 It is not about who is at the top of the community but that the community as a whole is under God, and, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 1:10, “in agreement and that there be no divisions among [Christians], but that [Christians] be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” No matter the Christian believer’s past, they are now on the same footing in their place as slaves under God.149

This is empowering to the slaves who were underneath all other believers in the social structure. Paul’s hierarchy makes all believers socially equal and calls for the believers to focus on acting as slaves to Christ, not abusing their control over other believers.

An example of how Paul views the social classes and division in a Christian community is Colossians 3:11 where Paul wrote, “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and

148 Rom. 6:11. Christians act as servants to Christ because they are alive to God through Christ.
149 Specifically he addresses the idea that the circumcised and non-circumcised are one the same level but as Gal. 3:28 reads he does include slaves into those who have their social class removed.
uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free.” This passage is Paul’s view that all Christians are on an equal level in the hierarchy and that Christian should reject society's view of class ranks. The passage works to erase all different backgrounds of the believers, and instead focuses on their common place under Christ which places slaves on the same level as the free. While Roman social status did not change in Roman society, within the Christian community these “distinctions, marking racial, social and gender differentiation . . . no longer have that significance.”

1 Corinthians: The Perfect Illustration

1 Corinthians addresses many of Paul’s views of slaves in the Christian community because there was an active slave population in the Christian community at Corinth. Along with Philemon and the disputed works, 1 Corinthians is one of the few letters of Paul which directly addresses slaves and gives insight into the social complications of his metaphor of devotional slavery and the reality of human slavery. This direct communication to slaves is important when looking at the psychological aspects of Paul's writings to Christian communities and “in addressing slaves directly, as members equally of the church and as responsible Christian individuals” Paul “goes beyond the contemporary parallels” which only instruct the master to treat the slave in a humane manner but do not communicate to the slave directly. The people in the Corinthian Christian community “occupied extraordinarily weak positions” as perhaps “one-third of the total population of Corinth was in slavery.”

---

150 Dunn, *Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 207.
151 This idea of an active slave population is reinforced by Paul directly addressing slaves. He does this in 1 Cor. which means slavery was a reality Christians in Corinth had to address.
152 Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 700.
addressing had to cope with being in bondage while trying to find their place in the Christian community.

The key passage in Corinthians which illustrates the complexity of Paul’s views on slaves, the institution of slavery, and Christian communities is 1 Corinthians 7:17-27 and 1 Corinthians 7:29, which addresses slaves who are now in the Christian community. 1 Corinthians 7:17-27 and 1 Corinthians 7:29 reads,

17 However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. 18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. 20 Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called. 21 Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever. 22 For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave to Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. 24 In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God. 25 Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. 26 I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 29 I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none.

The tone of acceptance of slaves into Christianity is set by 7:21 and acknowledges the conflicting issue of human slave but Christian believer. In 1 Corinthians 7:21, after recognizing the slaves, Paul then tells them to not be bothered by their placement in society. This is traditionally a complicated passage because it seems to counteract itself, but when Paul's views of slavery are applied, the meaning of 7:21 becomes clear. There are three aspects of

---

154 Lyall argues that 1 Cor. 7:21-22 is a presentation which mimics Roman law and this gives extra authority to Paul’s words. Lyall, Legal Metaphors, 29.
155 1 Cor. 7:22.
Christian community’s society which are evident in 7:21 and are evidence of the changes Paul’s views on society call for.

The first is that Paul must approach this in a nonthreatening way so his writing will not be interpreted as literature pushing for an insurrection by the slaves. He does not push a slave to seek freedom, but he does mention, with unthreatening language which would not worry slave owners, if a slave does have an opportunity for freedom, he should take it. To be branded as an insurrectionist would be the end of Paul, would be the end of the church in Corinth, and possibly would give fuel to a serious anti-Christian movement by authorities, because to be branded as a slave insurrectionist would mean certain death. The Romans had a heavy hand toward slave rebellions. This is a mirror of the changes which Paul expects in the Christian community. They are to be changes which create new relationships with slaves, but are not so extreme that Roman authority sees the Christian community’s treatment of slaves as a threat.

Second is Paul's belief of God's control over Christians’ social status. The fear of retribution by society is less important than his belief that it is not in the Christians’ power to change their situation, and that a believer is in a place for a reason. As Romans 6 and 7 illustrate, it is Paul’s belief that slavery is a natural institution and as such only God should change a believer’s status. Thus, he is not pushing the Christian slave to rise up and try to change his situation and is instead telling the slave that if God does make an opportunity for them to gain their freedom they should go for it. Christian communities should not then press

156 An example would be Spartacus in the 70s B.C.
157 Examples of Paul not being afraid of getting in trouble with the Roman law is Paul’s arrest in Acts 21 and the difficulties Paul endured are shown in 2 Cor. 11:24-27.
158 As written above Paul saw slavery as a natural institution and thus was not in man’s power to change. This is also presented in Rom. 8:28 where a believer’s purpose is directly tied into God’s love.
159 It is this belief which created the phrase in 1 Cor. 7:21. Paul was in the middle between the two ideas of “freed slave Christians” and “a believer’s place had meaning” and blended the two ideas together by placing the creation of the event in God’s hands but the actual act in the believer’s hands.
for the change of status of slaves to free, but if that opportunity does appear they should not reject their freedom.

Paul's writing in 7:21 illustrates the tight rope that Paul walks in Christian society when addressing slaves. He does not lock the slaves in their position and gives them the freedom to leave slavery if freedom is offered by God. But, at the same time, Paul reassures the slaves that they do not need to escape slavery to be Christians and they do not need to worry that their social status as slaves will affect their salvation.\textsuperscript{160}

1 Corinthians 7:22 gives justification to the slaves and their position in Roman life, and incorporates their status in Roman society into Christian society. This same verse empowers the position of a slave in society by reversing the position of the slave in the afterlife. This reversal is nothing like what Roman society offered slaves and illustrates that Paul was concerned with Christian slaves and understands their humanity as a fellow believer in Christ. This is a call for Christian communities to reject mainstream society's views of slavery and to instead create their own views based on Paul's views of the institution of slavery and devotional slavery. The first half of 7:22 reads that a Christian believer, who is a slave, is freed because of his or her belief in Christ which parallels his idea in the second half of 7:22 that a free Christian believer becomes a devotional slave to Christ with his or her belief. Both are slaves, just as Paul viewed there was no escaping slavery, and both are promised freedom from their individual slavery when the world ends.\textsuperscript{161} Christian community is not based on who is free and who is enslaved but instead the Christians should view themselves as all enslaved, at the bottom of the social ladder, and waiting for their freedom. This presentation of society is counter to traditional Roman society, which would focus on the inferior social status of the slave.

\textsuperscript{160} As reflected in Rom. 6 and 7 slavery to Christ is the preferred status of the Christian.  
\textsuperscript{161} Rom. 7 explains how Paul thought all people are slaves to something.
Paul continues to write against the human institution of slavery and indirectly supports the slave with 7:23. This sentence is against Christians becoming the slaves of other humans and illustrates the difference between human bondage and slavish devotion to God. Paul utilized the institution of slavery as devotional slavery in his works, and so he cannot write against the idea of slavery, but at the same time, Paul is not for a Christian serving two masters if God calls him or her to be free. By beginning 7:23 by reminding the reader of Paul’s spiritual metaphor of slavery to Christ, Paul is reminding the reader that Jesus paid the price on the cross with his death and believers should not become slaves to human masters. The term “human masters” is what makes the division in this passage from spiritual in the beginning to human slavery in the end because if Paul was still writing of spiritual slavery he would have not used “human masters,” but instead would have written “slaves to sin” as he does in Romans 7:14: “I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin.” There is no evidence of Christians submitting themselves to human masters, but it is proof that because Paul continued to use the same language for devotional slavery and human slavery, Paul had to clarify his message or else his metaphor of slavery could be confusing.

Proof of this confusion is expressed in three interpretations of 1 Corinthians 7:22-23. A literal interpretation of 7:22 might lead an enterprising Christian to think that a short human slavery (Paul writes in 7:29 that the world will end soon), would be worth the idea of an eternity free and thus might to become a slave. A second literal interpretation is Paul was knowledgeable of Jewish law and wrote this statement against the Jewish idea of voluntary, six-year slavery to be released from debt presented in Exodus 21. A final interpretation, and the strongest, is all Christians “must avoid carnal enslavement to others.”¹⁶² This in turn illustrates Paul’s belief in

the separation of the institution of human slavery and a spiritual slavery to God or sin, and both
had their own individual rules governing them. These two sentences continue to give insight into
Paul’s complex views about slavery. He casually switches from writing against the human
institution of slavery to writing for the metaphor of Christian slavery without giving clear
indication to the readers. This shows, to Paul, there was no clear division between the language
and actions of the two presentations of slavery. This lack of division is one reason why Paul
does not call for the removal of human slavery. While he appears sympathetic to the plight of
human slaves, he champions the idea of a religious slavery to Christ, and his calling for
Christians not to be slaves could be parallel to the idea a Christian can serve only one master.163

1 Corinthians 7:24 reinforces the status quo because of his view that only God should
change a Christian’s situation. Paul was answering the question “whether Christians are not also
under urgent obligation to prove themselves Christian by abolishing religious and social
relationships within the church.”164 His answer was to not to tell the believer to stay in the
position against the will of God, but specifically mentions that they should be happy to stay in
the position which God called them. He is not reinforcing the idea of slavery but that believers
should act as slaves and stay where they are placed. This is also illustrated in 1 Corinthians 7:17
where Paul writes that believers should stay where God placed them.165

Another interpretation of Paul’s expression of slavery presented in 1 Corinthians is
presented by Dale Martin. Martin argues that Paul was referencing a specific slavery to actually
improve his standing with his audience.166 The idea is that Paul was depicting himself as a slave
of Christ for two reasons. One was that to directly associate himself with Christ and elevate his

---

163 Matt. 6:24 is the more famous passage but there is no evidence that Paul is relating his idea to Matthew.
164 Bornkamm, Paul, 209.
165 The argument that Paul was reinforcing the status quo also relies on the idea that Paul was creating a rigid
system. God could call to a new position at any time, and it was God who defined a Christians place outside of the
community.
166 Martin, Slavery as Salvation, 66-68.
position in society by reminding the public of his responsibilities. This would remind the readers that he did have interactions with Christ although he was only a lowly slave. The second was that as a slave the people of Corinth would relate to Paul because he was only a lowly, common slave, something they could relate to, instead of some lofty, elevated figure. Also, Paul was referencing a specific type of slavery in Roman times which is one where the slave can actually raise their natural position in society because of the relationship to their master, and the readers would listen to him because of his association to Christ.

There are a few problems with Martin’s interpretation of Paul and his motives. One is that this idea focuses on class warfare to promote Paul’s personal agenda, something that there is not concrete evidence to support was happening in Corinth during this time. The real root problem with this interpretation of Paul is it claims that social movement is important to Paul, which goes against his understanding of the institution of slavery as a natural institution of God. 1 Corinthians itself dispels this goal of social movement within 7:21 as reviewed above.

1 Corinthians is Paul's response to the complications in Corinth and its Christian community which includes slaves and freemen. Glancy’s work, “Obstacles to Slaves' Participation in the Corinthian Church,” addresses the issues of slave’s sexuality in 1 Corinthians. Her biggest question is how Corinth handled slaves, who could not deny the sexual demands of their masters, joining their ranks. These slaves would have been at the mercy of their masters and, more importantly for the community, forced to follow their master’s morals. The Christian community could have either “excluded slaves whose sexual behavior could not

---

167 In Harrill’s “Slavery as Salvation” the key argument against Martin is he relies on class warfare as motivation for social relationships which Harrill argues was not a large issue for Romans in this time period. Acts 18, which addresses Paul visiting Corinth, makes no mention of class conflict. Although, looking at 1 Cor. 11:17-22, there were division in the Corinthian community.
conform … or the community tolerated the membership of some.”\textsuperscript{168} Glancy argues that the community must have come to a decision if these slaves could still be considered non-sinning Christians, because the slaves were allowed to mingle in the community.\textsuperscript{169} Paul's writing to Corinth, which focused on slaves and sexuality, shows that Paul was aware of this situation and his response, which focused on the person with power in the interaction, addresses it.

While it is clear that slaves were in the church, Glancy argues that “Paul’s logic” in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 “implies the incompatibility of prostitution with the Christian life. Enslaved prostitutes… would thus have been excluded from membership in the Christian body.”\textsuperscript{170} There are two main arguments against Glancy’s interpretation of Paul’s presentation of the role of slave’s sexuality and prostitution.

First is that Glancy assumes Paul would condemn all parties to the sexual exploitation, which he would not. Instead, as in 1 Corinthians 6:15 where Paul wrote, “should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” Paul focused on the person committing the act, the Christian, and not on the prostitute.\textsuperscript{171} It is most likely the prostitute Paul is referring to would have been a slave and unable to control the situation. Paul did not argue against the servitude of slaves, he actually champions it as behavior which should be emulated, but he did argue against having sex with prostitutes in 1 Corinthians 6:15 where Paul wrote, “Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” 1 Corinthians does not blame the prostitute for the situation but does blame the Christians who are in control and indirectly the master who places the slave into prostitution.

\textsuperscript{168} Glancy, “Obstacles,” 482-3.
\textsuperscript{169} Applying Ruden’s interpretation of Philemon to the question of Corinth, she might argue that it was Paul’s focus of surrendering “to the grace, peace, love, and faith” which would make this acceptance of social change happen. Ruden, Paul Among the People, 167.
\textsuperscript{170} Glancy, “Obstacles,” 483.
\textsuperscript{171} This is interpretation reinforced by Hans Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). In it, Conzelmann argues that Paul’s focus is not on those who can do nothing in society but on those which have the freedom to control their actions.
The repercussions to the Christian in control of the situation are worse if the prostitute is a Christian. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 is another passage which focuses on sexuality between Christians and can be applied to the life of Christian slaves. In 4:6 Paul wrote “no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister [with lustful passion], because the Lord is an avenger in all these things.” Paul is specifically writing against a Christian taking advantage of a Christian. Combined with Thessalonians 4:2 where Paul wrote that Christians should “abstain from fornication” and the similar message in 1 Corinthians 6:18, Paul does not want believers to have sex with each other. Because slaves were property to be used by their owners, Paul is defending the sexual rights of a believing slave from their fellow believing master by commanding the master to not have exploitative sex. Paul routinely wrote it is the job of the slave to obey their master, especially in Ephesians and Colossians below, and he was not commanding Christian slaves to go against their masters but instead commanding the masters to not force the slaves into having sex. Just like in 1 Corinthians 6:15-16 the focus of Paul’s message is not the slave but the master who commands the slave. Paul recognized the idea of a master's complete control over a slave’s body, but indirectly subverts that control by placing restrictions on the will of the master. This restriction of what a master was allowed to demand of his or her slave, even in an indirect message, went against mainstream views of slaves and their role in the household.\footnote{This idea is again brought up in the review of Eph. 6:9 and Col. 4:1 below where Paul goes so far so the threaten the master if they do not treat the slave as consistently as any other Christian.}

If a Christian master is forcing his slave into prostitution, which forces that slave to go against two of Paul’s commands to Christians, and the slave also does what Paul calls for, which is to obey his or her master, it would be the master at fault for the situation not the slave. The response from Paul was written in 5:9 where Paul commanded the church “not to associate with sexually immoral persons,” which would have pointed to the master, not the slave being thrown
out, as in 5:13 where Paul wrote, “drive out the wicked person from among you.” Looking at Colossians 4:1 where Paul wrote “masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven,” and Ephesians 6:9 which states “for you know that both [slaves and masters] have the same Master in heaven,” the punishment against the master would have been worse. Paul wrote that masters will be judged by God their master for their treatment of their slaves, and if the master is forcing the slave to violate the ideals in place by Paul then the slave would not be at fault but actually in the right for obeying his or her master while the master would be judged for the acts forced upon the slave.

Another aspect which protects the slave is Paul openly tells the believers of Corinth that they are slaves in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Unlike other references where Paul subtly makes his metaphoric parallel between the good Christian and a slave, here he directly tells the community that they are slaves, and they should act like slaves. Combine 1 Corinthians 6:15 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and Paul is telling the believers to stop taking advantage of the sexuality of slaves and especially of slave prostitutes because they too are slaves to a different master.

This is directly in line with Paul’s belief that Christian slaves should be consistently treated fairly, and the institution of slavery cannot be changed. The slave himself is protected from unjustifiable abuse from other Christians and the institution is left unchanged by Paul because he could not write against the forced duty of a slave without undermining himself. A key factor of Paul’s silence is Paul’s inability to challenge the institution he utilizes in his own instructions to Christians. An example of Paul utilizing slavery for his own message is the passage 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 where Paul uses the metaphor of slavery to instruct the community.
A common criticism of Paul is by keeping silent on the institution of slavery Paul was not challenging the institution. While this could be a flaw in Paul personal views, and a missed opportunity to change the history of slavery, there are reasons which might have influenced Paul to stay silent. One is by seeing the institution of slavery as a “natural institution,” as shown by Paul’s utilization of the institution in his own writing, Paul might not have felt he had the right to challenge it. Another, and perhaps major influence for all of Paul’s actions, is that he did not see this world lasting much longer. This is seen when Paul wrote “I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short” in 1 Corinthians 7:29. This is directly after he addresses the place of slaves and changes in marital status in 1 Corinthians 7:21-27. Both of these passages instructed believers to not worry about what the future will bring, either freedom or a family, because Paul is convinced that the world will not be around for much longer.

Another aspect as to why Paul did not challenge slavery in Corinth is that he might have felt he did not have the power. Paul routinely concerns himself with instructing Christian in their own community, especially in Ephesians and Colossians, and instructs them to not concern themselves with the outside world; another example is in Titus below. Paul could have felt the outside world and its utilization of the institution of slavery were outside of his scope of power. He could have felt he did not have the power to address slavery, and he could have been afraid of the consequences from the world of attacking the institution of slavery. Remaining silent on the institution of slavery was not a message which would have raised eyebrows in Roman society, but the act of calling believers slaves and the idea that the slaves deserved a level of consistent treatment might have been as far as Paul felt he could push the subject without being lynched. These reasons may not justify Paul, but one should understand his thoughts in their original historical context.
CHAPTER 7

ADDRESSING THE DISPUTED WORKS

To complicate the study of Paul, a historian must keep in mind that some letters accredited to Paul are suspected of being from another author or tampered with. Tampering can be identified by studying the oldest manuscripts and comparing them to later ones, while some questions of the authorship are raised when a review of the grammar and the vocabulary used shows major differences between letters.173

For this work 1 Timothy, Titus, Ephesians, and Colossians will be regarded as disputed works. This section will address how these letters present slavery, but will not exhaustively debate if they were written by Paul. The fourth edition of \textit{The New Oxford Annotated Bible} describes Titus, and 1 and 2 Timothy as “debated” work which “most scholars today regard… as pseudepigraphical.”174 The many differences between Ephesians and other works of Paul leads \textit{The New Oxford Annotated Bible} to claim that “many scholars hold that Ephesians was written in the late first century by a Jewish-Christian admirer of Paul.”175 The authorship of Colossians is also disputed. \textit{The New Oxford Annotated Bible} writes “some scholars conclude that Colossians was written in Paul’s name.”176

The disputed works of Paul have value in understanding Paul's view on slavery no matter who wrote them. If these disputed works were not written by Paul, these letters illustrate how Paul’s writing has been interpreted by a Christian writer without Paul’s consistent presentation of slaves. If they were written by Paul, they illustrate a shift in his presentation of the hierarchy of

---

173 Despite these two arts, there is not a perfect consensus as to what has been added over the years. \textit{The New Oxford Annotated Bible} will be used in this work to define what letters are disputed.
Christians from grouping believers together to breaking them down into their own separate classes. In other letters of Paul, he works to “support important theological points on the basis of scriptural exegesis,” but abundant scriptural references are lacking in the disputed works.\textsuperscript{177} The presentation of slavery in these epistles gives weight to the argument that these works were not written by Paul. These letters illustrate three major changes in Paul’s thinking which counter Paul’s theological thought in “classic” Pauline literature. One is the focus on organizing these communities into long-term social structures, something which Paul was not focused on in his other letters. Another is there is no mention of impending apocalypse which motivates Paul in his other letters. Finally, Colossians presents a break from Paul’s focus on faith by basing the salvation of slaves on their work.

While the disputed letters illustrate how slaves were becoming incorporated into society, the overall presentation of the Christian communities in these letters “deliberately muted the radicality of Paul’s Christian equality back to inequality.”\textsuperscript{178} Instead of pressing the social equality which Paul emphasizes in his other letters, the disputed letters “emphasize general family values that would be quite acceptable across contemporary Roman social theory and practice.”\textsuperscript{179}

\textbf{1 Timothy}

Like 1 Corinthians, another letter which addresses both slaves in the Christian community and the relationship between slaves and their owners (Christian and non-Christian) is 1 Timothy. While the name Paul will be used as the author of this piece, there is debate that Paul himself wrote it. Despite this, 1 Timothy has elements of slavery which can be analyzed as if

\begin{footnotes}
\item[178] Crossan and Reed, \textit{In Search of Paul}, 74.
\item[179] Ibid., 118.
\end{footnotes}
they were written by Paul. 1 Timothy 6:1-2 directly addresses slaves in the community when Paul wrote, “Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are members of the church; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved.” Paul’s mention of a yoke in 6:1 is a reference of the act of passing captured soldiers under yokes which symbolized their progression into slavery. The division between slaves who have Christian masters and those who do not is seen in 6:2 where Paul addresses a different type of slave than in 6:1. These slaves in 1 Timothy 6:2 have masters who are believers, and creates a division between the slaves mentioned in verse 1 who do not have believers as owners. Verse 1 advises the slaves whose masters are not believers to act well so the community is not looked down upon. This illustrates a community which must address the slave without the protection offered by the Christian community because they claim that slaves’ behavior has a direct consequence on those outside of the community. While this forces the slave to follow a non-Christian master, it also shows that the slaves were incorporated into the Christian community and were not pushed to the extremes of Christian society. This passage could have as easily cast aside slaves who did not have Christian masters but instead they were legitimately incorporated into the community so much that their behavior became a reflection of the community.

1 Timothy 6:2 takes a different approach to slaves with masters who are believers, and keeps both the slave and the master in line while protecting the slave from the master. The writer reminds slaves that they should treat their master with respect, even if both parties are Christians.

Not only does this statement does not allow the slave any special physical benefits because they are a Christian, but “Paul” expects a Christian slave to work harder for a Christian master. While this does appear to be harsh on the slave, this inclusion of the slave into the structure of Christian organization does offer an innate protection of the slave. Incorporating slaves into the Christian community means the slaves, and the masters, must act accordingly to Paul's guidelines, which protect the slave from undeserving abuse. Because the language in the passage makes a clear difference between a slave with a Christian master and a slave without, the community which Paul was writing to had to deal with Christian slaves who did not have Christian masters.

These two verses illustrate how Paul’s views challenge the normal social position of slaves. This letter brings slaves into the community, and by doing so gives them rights of a “fair” interaction with other members. These slaves are protected against unwarranted abuse and while a Christian slave under a Christian believer is expected to work harder they might have a better standard of living because their situation is more stable.

Also, these two sentences highlight the division between what a slave to a non-believer can expect and what a slave under a believer can expect, and shows how a slave with a Christian master expects to be rewarded for good behavior and punished only for bad behavior not because of a master’s whim. While slaves to the non-believer are not given any extra protection from their master, and instead is left to do nothing more than keep the Christian God from looking bad by following their master, slaves under Christian believers are given the chance to live a better life because their master will not abuse them without cause. If a Christian slave follows their Christian master they do not expect any unfair treatment. Just like how the Christian is locked into receiving either salvation or damnation from their active belief, the slave is expected to receive reward or punishment from their own action and not the whim of their master.
Titus

Titus is a disputed letter to a Christian community in Crete which has incorporated slaves, and can be analyzed as if it was written by Paul. After advising the main groups by gender and age, Paul includes commands to the slaves of the community in 2:9 where he wrote “tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect.” While it appears these commands are directed at the masters of the slaves, Paul wrote this letter to Titus himself and not to the entire community. While Paul’s instructions to the slaves in 2:9 shows that the slave has a submissive role in Christian society, Paul directly connects the role of the slave to God himself in 2:10 where he writes “in everything [slaves] may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior.” Paul does not view these slaves as mere tools to be used and disposed of but relates their humble servitude as a piece of the “doctrine of God.” Not only does this break from the mainstream portrayals of slaves but, in Roman society, it was the masters who would be instructed and they would command the slaves as an entity under the master's control. This message challenges that control by directly addressing slaves instead of commanding the “masters to tell slaves to obey.”¹⁸¹ Directly addressing the slaves is a sign that they are legitimized in the community as an individual and more than just an extension of their master. These slaves are also given a role to play in the spiritual success of the Christians in Crete, which is in line with Paul’s belief that different roles in the Christian community are granted by the Spirit, but each role is important to the church as a whole, as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 12.¹⁸² They now have a responsibility to the entire community instead of just their master, just like any other Christian, and this inclusion into the group raises their position in the community.

¹⁸¹ Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 199.
¹⁸² 1 Cor. 12 was reviewed above in the 1 Corinthians section.
“Paul” continues to legitimize slaves in the Christian doctrine were he instructs Titus to “tell the older women… not to be… slaves to drink” in 2:3. Not only did Paul relate a free person to a slave, something that could have been seen as a harsh comparison, but he also illustrates that physical freedom does not grant spiritual freedom to a Christian. Christians who are not in physical bonds must resist the mental bondage to their desires. He continues this thought in 3:3 when he reminded Titus that “for we ourselves were once… slaves to various passions and pleasures.” Paul is not saying that he or Titus were in physical bonds, but that they were once in mental bonds to their desires. Paul did not believe himself or Titus to ever be free men, on the contrary, Paul opens the letter to Titus by calling himself a slave in Titus 1:1. Instead, Paul is writing of his dualistic view of slavery, and Christians must be aware of slaves who lack physical freedom but have a direct duty to God and their own physical freedom which must be restrained to act as a slave to God.

Ephesians

The authorship of Ephesians is disputed but the presentation of the hierarchy in Ephesians is a mirror of the hierarchy presented in Colossians with some critical modifications. Like Colossians, Ephesians presents an inside look into a Christian community’s values, but, unlike Colossians, Ephesians presents the internal relationship of the Christian household. Ephesians 5 addresses the relationship of the wife and the husband but, unlike Colossians which focuses on works, Ephesians relates the interactions of the social groups to Christ and his relationship with the church.

Ephesians, along with Titus and Colossians, presents the hierarchy of the community as divided up into different parts along family relationships but all under Christ. Banks argues that Paul was creating unity in the community but “in this unity diversity is preserved,” and this
diversity is illustrated by the division between the three different social groups presented in Ephesians 5:21-6:9. When comparing the different members of the hierarchy in Ephesians, there is a parallel between the husband in Ephesians 5 and the slave in Ephesians 6. Both the husband and the slave have the longest passages when compared to their social partners and require the most explanation in how to perform their role in the Christian structure.

Ephesians presents slaves in the same manner as Colossians but with two differences. One is that the slaves are not threatened. Instead of including that the bad behavior of the slave will be punished, Ephesians 6:8 focuses on the reward of good behavior. The relationship shown in Ephesians distances itself from the standard Roman interactions with slaves because it works to soften the blow delivered to the slave, which shows respect and humility to the slave.

Ephesians differs from Colossians because Ephesians expresses more of “the mutuality of the relationship between slave and master,” which challenges the placement of the slave by raising them higher than they would be in Roman society. Placing the slave on a mutual ground was very different than the normal views of a society where “the master had the *ius vitae necisque*, the power of life and death over his slaves, and he always had the power of reasonable chastisement.” While Ephesians’ presentation of the Christian family is more akin to the Roman standard, adding consequences to the legal use of a master’s abilities is giving slaves more protection than under Roman law. The Christian slaves could have been threatened in the normal brutal ways but, instead, the slave is shown respect and given an explanation which helps to justify why the slave is asked to submit.

Ephesians 6:9 commands masters to “stop threatening [slaves], for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven,” which protects the slaves and improves their place in society.

---

183 Banks, *Paul’s Idea*, 118.
The presentation of the slave in 6:9 gives weight to the idea all Christians are on the same level in the Christian community because the received social equality through their unity in Christ.186 The slave is given support while the master is threatened in the letter. Unlike Colossians where only the slave is threatened, Ephesians 6:9 places the masters on the same level as all other Christians. The master must work to treat the slaves consistently, and this strengthens the slave in society by weakening the absolute control the master had over the slave.

Colossians

The authorship of Colossians 1 is disputed, but it addresses Paul’s belief that God calls Christians into slavery not by their own will but His when the author writes “I became [the church’s] slave according to God’s commission” in Colossians 1:25. Paul wrote of a spiritual slavery to God which fulfills both what Paul was called to do by God and Paul’s role in the body of the church as all Christians are called to do in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul does not write that he rejected his role as a slave to Christ but instead describes his actions in a way which parallel his advice to slaves in Titus 2:9. In Colossians 1:29 “Paul” writes that “for [his role given by God] I toil and struggle with all the energy that [God] powerfully inspires within me.” Paul expects the same behavior from himself as from a slave who Paul wrote is expected “to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect” in Titus 2:9. This direct parallel between the actions of the slave serving his human master in Titus 2:9 and Paul’s own expectations of himself as a Christian slave serving Christ in Colossians 1:29 show Paul’s dualistic view of slavery and how his own presentation of himself raises the role of slaves in Christian groups by calling for their submissive behavior to be emulated by all Christians.

186  Banks, *Paul’s Idea*, 118.
Addressing slaves shows that Colossians has an accepted view of the place of slaves in their society. While verse 3:22 reads, “slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything,” reflecting the ideal relationship between a slave and master yearned for in mainstream society, adding the command to master in 4:1, “masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly,” improves the slaves’ life by placing restrictions over the masters’ behavior. “Paul” goes farther than just placing restrictions by subtly threatening masters in 4:1 which continues, “masters… for you know that you also have a Master in heaven,” reminding masters that there are consequences for their behavior. Compared to the reality of slavery as a brutal and deadly institution, giving the slave a fair life is a major step in recognizing their humanity, and is one way that the Pauline epistles challenged the social structure in the Christian society.

Colossians also illustrates that the slaves have a recognized place in the Christian community, which is more than they would receive if they did not have Christian masters. Colossians gives a warning against “human tradition” and “spiritual forces” and, just like instructions to the church in Crete in Titus 2, shows a Christian community which must have all groups, including slaves, band together.

Slaves are not only told to follow those who are above them but the reason for their submission is because they should act as though they are laboring for Christ and their reward is after this life.187 The promise of a reward empowers the slaves. They are no longer on the fringe of the society, and are instead being given a place in the Christian community. Also, they are recognized as a benefit to the society and their ability to decide to obey or not is recognized. It is presented as an easy choice, with the fear of their insubordination being punished, but it recognizes that the slaves make a conscious human decision to obey. This is contrary to

187 Col. 3:22-25 explains to the slaves that they are to work for God not their masters because their reward is heaven for their beliefs.
mainstream views of master-slave relationships, which focused on masters’ duties to keep their slaves in line by brutal force. This choice recognizes Christian slave's humanity, and the Christian’s slaves are being addressed as humans and restrictions placed on the master's actions. Also, this choice is a decision a human makes and not a decision a slave who is viewed as an animal could ever make in Roman society.

Colossians 3:22-25 is a section where “Paul” diverges from his views on salvation in non-disputed works and relates the obedience of a slave to that slaves’ salvation. The presentation of salvation in this passage is a stark contrast to Paul’s presentation of salvation in his other works, specifically Romans, and weighs heavily that at least this section was not a theological argument made by Paul. Colossians 3:22-25 reads,

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, 24 since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward you serve the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality.

While 3:25 presented a subtle threat to the slave, writing that “the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done,” meaning that slaves who did not obey would be punished, 3:24 does clearly state that the Christian slave who obeys his earthly master “will receive the inheritance as [the slave’s] reward.” This declaration of reward for their obedient behavior places the salvation of a slave into that slave’s own hands, and removes the salvation of the slave from the power of the master or any other human. Instead, 4:22 writes that the slave is only given salvation if they work for their “earthly masters in everything… wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.” While this locks the slave into servitude to his or her master, the slave’s salvation becomes something personal and owned by the slave alone. This is counter to mainstream views of slaves where they are nothing more than the property of their masters. Paul presented
Christian slaves as not just an extension of their masters, but as thinking humans which have their own freewill and consequences to their decisions.

Unlike 1 Timothy, Colossians’ presentation of slaves and their masters in 3:22-4:1 does not answer the dilemma of slaves who have non-believing masters, and, although the authorship is disputed, this presentation can be reviewed as if it was written by Paul.\(^{188}\) A slave who is under a non-believer master must still “obey [their] earthly masters in everything” which continues the question of a slave’s forced sexual relations with a non-believing master.\(^{189}\) While this is an issue in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians, Colossians’ avoidance of the question is unique. The church in Colossae was incorporating slaves, but Paul did not need to address Christian slaves which did not have non-believing masters because “the advice given… assumes a Christian household” where all members of the family were Christian.\(^{190}\) These Christian households were bringing slaves into their religion, but unlike other works, the slaves were given options on how they wanted to behave as Christians. This was unlike Roman society which did not give options to slaves and instead commanded their obedience.

Horsley argues Colossians 3:18-25 reinforces the status quo of the mainstream views on how a family should behave.\(^{191}\) Meeks agrees, and writes, “it is also important to notice that these admonitions are within the context of advice for maintaining the proper – hierarchical-structure of a household.”\(^{192}\) But, Colossians 3:18-25 goes beyond the human interaction of the system, and strengthens the relationship of the master to the slave. The slave is no longer looking at their human master as the patron for their life, but with Jesus as the head of the

\(^{188}\) Reference the review of 1 Corinthians above which also addresses this problem of believing slaves with non-believing masters.

\(^{189}\) 1 Col. 3:22.

\(^{190}\) Witherington, *Paul Quest*, 190.


\(^{192}\) Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 64.
relationship, which removes the human master from the equation completely. While Christian slaves are locked into working under human masters, the focus of their work is their spiritual master God. While this does lock the slave into their placement in the society, they are also incorporated into the spiritual society of the Christian community. This legitimates and recognizes the role of the slave in the working of Christian society, which rejects the common hierarchy of the mainstream household.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Paul’s presentation of Christian slavery challenges the current social position of slaves in his time period and his writing walked a fine line. While “Paul's theology contained the potential for social revolution,” Paul did not press for the complete reconstruction of Roman society, but for the creation of a closed Christian community which held its own social views counter to mainstream society's, and it is within this community that Paul pushed for change. 193 While it can be argued that Paul was “too accepting and unquestioning of slavery as an institution” he used the institution of slavery as a tool for devotion while at the same time creating a Christian society which had a legitimate place for slaves, which in turn protected them again unjust behavior by their Christian masters.194 Despite the debate about the authorship of the disputed works, Paul’s views on slavery are evident in them and the analysis of the non-disputed works of Paul can be applied with positive results.

Paul has a clear vision of the direction he wanted Christian communities to go and his writing protected slaves within the Christian community. These communities were not to move to abolish slavery, but instead embrace slaves and masters into their ranks. However, they were to regulate the interaction between the two; the masters were to remember that they too were slaves and had God as their master, and the slaves were to treat their human masters with absolute respect. This protects the slaves from undue punishment from their masters. Paul champions the devotion of a slave to a master in his metaphor of devoted Christians who were slaves to God. He created a dualistic image of slavery, one form which was slavery between two humans, and one which was slavery between a Christian and Jesus. Both were to act the same

193 Sanders, Paul, 12.
194 Dunn, Theology, 698.
way, both to humble themselves to their master. This in turn created a community which was on the same social level; they were all to see themselves as slaves. This level social field protected the human slaves because it shed light on their role within Christian groups, championed their behavior, and reminded masters that they too were just slaves to Christ, who could punish them at any time. This was not common in Roman society, and Christian communities were to stand apart from Roman society, but not anger society to the point they would be punished.

Despite this, Paul does not have a completely human presentation of the slave and master relationship, because his focus was not on protecting the slaves but on saving souls. But, looking at Philemon, the personal letter by Paul which directly addressed slavery, it appears that Paul wanted Christian believers to be free but did not want to force this change. In Philemon, Paul is pushing for Onesimus to be free yet leaves the decision up to Philemon. But Paul does not let his personal view dictate his advice to the communities.

He also created a trap with his metaphor of Christian slavery to God. Once he started making a parallel between slavery and Christian devotion, he traps himself into his rhetoric he created about Christian devotion to God and its parallels with slavery, and despite any personal abolitionist leanings, he was forced to support the institution of slavery to some degree. Paul was able to use this support of the institution by placing Christian masters into slavery to God which reviewed their treatment of slaves and evaluated a punishment for the master if they mistreated their slave. This is most evident in the disputed works which show implementation of Paul’s view by the Christian community.

There is no historical evidence that Christians changed the lives of slaves, but reviewing Paul's letters to Christian communities, it is clear that Paul was challenging mainstream social
norms and calling for Christians to treat their slaves in their communities in a better manner than others in the Roman Empire.

Also, Paul was dealing with his feelings that the world was soon to end, so it was better to stay as you were than to try to make your life into something else. For Paul to try to make sweeping social changes “in such circumstances would have been like tinkering with the engine of a sinking ship.” Moreover, Paul sometimes seems to have thought that one’s status was set by God, whose will should not be challenged lightly.

The acceptance of slaves into the Christian community illustrated the change in the social level of the slaves. This acceptance also helped to create a new role for local slaves and give them a position in the community, which gave the slaves an aspect of humanity and personality which is key in changing mainstream views on the humanity of slaves. Within the Christian groups, this new level of humanity attracts some attention to the slaves, which allowed slaves to work with the church as equals in the Christian community planted seeds for people to start to change their views of slavery. Even if it does create a division between Christian slaves and non-Christian slaves, in a society which is known for valuing tradition, any movement or change for a social group is an event with resounding effects.

Paul’s vision of Christian community did not remove slavery, and instead locked the institution into the foundation of the community. However, his view of the community was one which had all Christians together on the same social plain, without the restrictions of class or position, which extended protection over slaves. They were not to be abused, unless they misbehaved, but that same rule applied to all members of the community. All Christians were to continue to go through the motions of daily life, and not let their place in society bother them, while the real focus was their work at their position as slaves of Christ.

195 Ziesler, Pauline, 125.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bible Edition and Translation, and Other Ancient Sources


Modern Scholarship


