

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

During the days of Paul, there were both slaves and masters among those “called in the Lord.” One such was Onesimus, a slave of Philemon. At some point Onesimus escaped from Philemon, perhaps having also stolen from him, and somehow came into contact with Paul who was bound in chains in Rome. After his conversion, Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter, saying:

PHILEMON 1:10, 15-16 I [*Paul*] appeal to you [*Philemon*] for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while* in my chains, ... 15 For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose*, that you might receive him forever, 16 **no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother**, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Paul was acutely aware that slaves were often harshly treated by their masters and the animosity it caused between them. Several times in his writings Paul admonished slaves to obey their masters as they would Jesus Christ and masters to treat their slaves knowing that they themselves were in bondage to Jesus Christ:

EPHESIANS 6:5-9 **Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ;** 6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but **as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,** 7 **with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord,** and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free. 9 And you, **masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven,** and there is no partiality with Him.

COLOSSIANS 3:22 **Bondservants, obey in all things your masters** according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.

COLOSSIANS 4:1 **Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair,** knowing that **you also have a Master in heaven.**

The bible mentions slaves, bondservants, and servants (or housemen and maids). These are all different roles in biblical times even though they are all usually translated from the same Greek word *doulos* (G1401). Context in Scripture determines the correct translation.

**DEFINITIONS:**

- 1) **Slaves** were forced into servitude and were considered to be purchased property having no personal rights or freedoms.
- 2) **Bondservants** were similar to slaves but were often those who voluntarily chose to remain in servitude even after being offered their freedom.

3) Servants were free persons who were hired help that could leave their service anytime. Those who served a 'household' (referring to hired hands in general, not specifically a butler or maid) are an example of servants.

In the above verses, *master* is always translated from the Greek word *kurios* (G2962), which is mostly translated *lord* elsewhere. In the context of slaves and bondservants, *kurios* refers to the slave *master* who had authority over them. However, there is another word translated *master* and it is used only ten times in the Bible. It ALWAYS refers to the master of slaves, bondservants, or servants:

1 TIMOTHY 6:1-2 Let as many **bondservants [G1401 = doulos]** as are under the yoke count their own **masters [G1203 = despotes]** worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and *His* doctrine may not be blasphemed. 2 And those who have believing **masters [G1203 = despotes]**, let them not despise *them* because they are brethren, but rather serve *them* because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

TITUS 2:9 Exhort **bondservants [G1401 = doulos]** to be obedient to their own **masters [G1203 = despotes]**, to be well pleasing in all *things*, not answering back,

1 PETER 2:18 **Servants [G3610 = oiketes]**, be submissive to your **masters [G1203 = despotes]** with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

The Greek word for *master* is *despotes* in the verses above, from which is derived the English word *despot*. A despot literally means a ruler in a position of absolute power. Although despot is usually associated with a ruler who is cruel and oppressive, that is not part of the strict meaning. However, notice the verses that use *despotes* outside the context of slavery:

LUKE 2:25-29 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the **Lord's [G2962 = kurios]** **Christ**. 27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed **God** and said: 29 "**Lord [G1203 = despotes = God the Father]**, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word;

ACTS 4:24 So when they heard that, they [*Peter, John, and others*] **raised their voice to God** with one accord and said: "**Lord [G1203 = despotes = God the Father]**, **You are God**, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,

2 TIMOTHY 2:21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the **Master [G1203 = despotes = God the Father]**, prepared for every good work.

REVELATION 6:9-10 When He [*Jesus Christ*] opened the fifth seal, I [*John*] saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the

testimony which they held. 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, **O Lord [G1203 = despotes = God the Father]**, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

In all these verses, whether translated “Lord” or “Master,” *despotes* refers only to God the Father, NOT Jesus Christ. In fact, they would be better translated *Master* because *despotes* means absolute ruler. There are many, many scriptures where Jesus Christ is called by the title of Lord (*kurios*) and a fair number where the same refers to God the Father. So, *kurios* can point to either one. However, outside of the context of slavery, despot ONLY refers to God the Father. Notice another verse where *kurios* refers to Jesus Christ and *despotes* refers to God the Father but both are translated *Lord*:

JUDE 1:4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only **Lord [G1203 = despotes] God [the Father]** and our **Lord [G2962 = kurios] Jesus Christ**.

If there is still uncertainty, notice the last verse that contains *despotes*:

2 PETER 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the **Lord [G1203 = despotes = God the Father] who bought them**, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

*Lord*, as Despot or Supreme Ruler, always points to God the Father because HE paid the price to liberate people who were in bondage to sin:

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *that is* in you, whom you have from **God [the Father]**, and you are not your own? 20 For **you were bought at a price**; therefore glorify God in **your body and in your spirit, which are God's**.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:23 **You [pl. = ALL of you] were bought at a price**; do not become slaves of men.

The price or wages for sin<sup>1</sup> is death. The ransom that God the Father paid was the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>. Why is God the Father called a Despot? Because *despotes* refers to the owner or master of a slave or bondservant. It is derived from *deo* which means to bind. Slavery was common in times past and slaves had no rights. Slaves were the PROPERTY of the master and could be bought and sold according to his will.

But there is another form of slavery in which every single person on earth is or has been held captive without even knowing it—sin. All are or have been slaves of sin<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 6:23.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 53:6-11; Rom. 8:32; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 9:14; 10:5.

<sup>3</sup> John 8:34.

It was from the bondage of sin that God the Father ransomed people and made them HIS bondservants:

ROMANS 6:16-20, 22-23 Do you not know that **to whom you present yourselves slaves [or bondservants] to obey, you are that one's slaves [or bondservants] whom you obey**, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that *though* **you were slaves of sin**, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And **having been set free from sin, you became slaves [bondservants] of righteousness**. 19 I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* **slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness**, so now present your members *as* **slaves [bondservants] of righteousness** for holiness. 20 For when you were **slaves of sin**, you were free in regard to righteousness. ... 22 But now **having been set free from sin, and having become slaves [bondservants] of God**, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because most translators do not understand the distinction of slave, bondservant, and servant, they are seemingly used rather randomly. However, it would be better to refer to those in bondage to sin as *slaves* and refer to those ransomed by God as *bondservants*. This is because a slave has no choice in his service; whereas, a bondservant is a former slave who was freed and then chose to remain in servitude. Neither are the begotten children servants because they are not hirelings.

But how are God's children bondservants? They are children of God<sup>4</sup> but they are only BEGOTTEN, not yet born of spirit and inheriting all things<sup>5</sup>:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-44, 50 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. **The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption**. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. ... 50 Now this I say, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

Flesh and blood cannot be full children of God—that requires a spirit body. Only when resurrected as spirit beings will they be true children of God:

MATTHEW 5:9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers, for **they shall be [future tense] called sons [or children] of God**.

LUKE 20:35-36 “But **those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead**, neither marry nor are given in marriage; 36 “nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and **are sons [or children] of God, being sons [or children] of the resurrection**.

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<sup>4</sup> Gal. 3:26.1 John 3:1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. 21:7.

The begotten children of God were slaves ransomed (“bought with a price”) from sin. They belong to God but are still flesh and blood battling an existential spiritual war against a powerful, wicked spirit being and fighting temptations of the flesh<sup>6</sup>. The only path to victory is to “submit to God”<sup>7</sup> as humble bondservants:

1 PETER 2:16 as free [*men and women*], yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but **as bondservants of God.**

People are liberated as slaves to sin so that they can choose to become bondservants of God, choosing Him as Master—The Despot with absolute, supreme authority. Unlike human despots, God is full of mercy, compassion, and lovingkindness. By His love, God’s children will not always be bondservants:

ROMANS 8:20-21 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him [*God the Father*] who subjected *it* in hope; 21 because the creation itself also **will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.**

The last thing that happens is flesh and blood will be liberated from the bondage of corruption—DEATH, “the last enemy *that* will be destroyed.”<sup>8</sup> The children are delivered through the resurrection unto spirit and they will no longer be bondservants:

GALATIANS 4:1-7 Now I say *that* **the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave**, though he is master of all, 2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. 3 Even so we, when we were children, were **in bondage under the elements of the world.** 4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 **to redeem those** who were under the law, that we might receive the [appointment] as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” 7 **Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son,** and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

God speed that day!

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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<sup>6</sup> Eph. 6:12.

<sup>7</sup> Jas 4:7.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. 15:26.