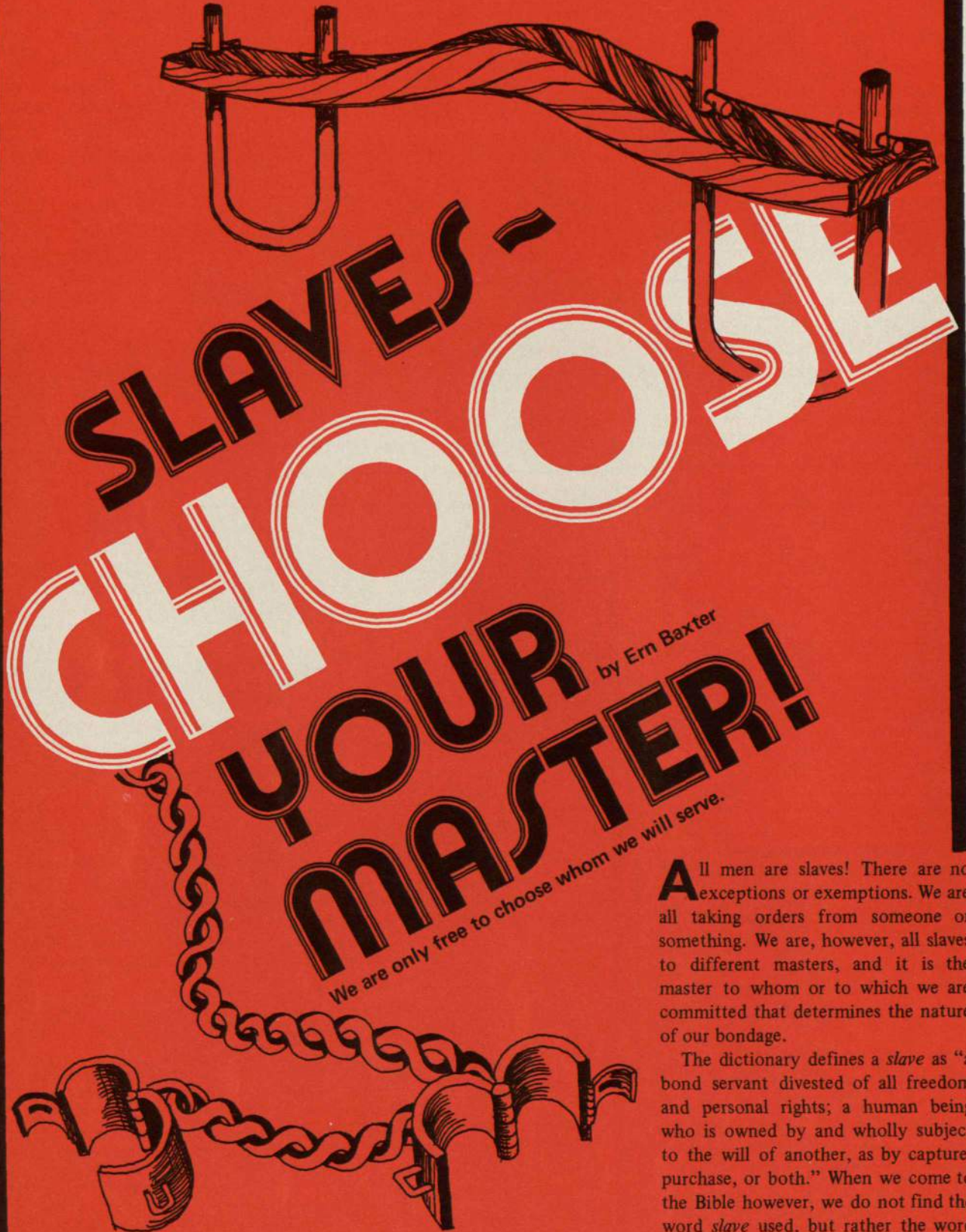


First in a series of two articles on "Serving."



by Ern Baxter

YOUR MASTER!

We are only free to choose whom we will serve.

All men are slaves! There are no exceptions or exemptions. We are all taking orders from someone or something. We are, however, all slaves to different masters, and it is the master to whom or to which we are committed that determines the nature of our bondage.

The dictionary defines a *slave* as "a bond servant divested of all freedom and personal rights; a human being who is owned by and wholly subject to the will of another, as by capture, purchase, or both." When we come to the Bible however, we do not find the word *slave* used, but rather the word *servant*. In our modern thinking there is a considerable difference between

the two. Again looking at the dictionary, we find it defining servant as "a person employed to perform services, especially household duties, for another or others." It gives as a secondary meaning *a slave*. In most of our minds we do not associate the word *servant* with *slave*. Therefore, when reading the authorized version of the Bible, and reading the word *servant*, we are going to think of it in terms of its modern usage. Some of the newer translations, such as the *New American Standard Bible*, have restored the original meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words, by translating them *slave*.

When God spoke to Israel through Moses concerning their deliverance out of Egypt, He said, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2, NAS). It is interesting that in the next chapter, among the very first things that He deals with in establishing legislation for the redeemed nation, is the matter of slaves. Everything in the divine ordinance concerning slavery is designed to guard against cruelty and abuse by those who are in the position of master. However, there is no question that one who is a slave, for whatever reason, is completely subject to his master's word. It is because of this complete authority, that God has to warn against its misuse on the part of the master, who could be cruel and unfair to his slave. It is not our purpose here to discuss the nature and propriety of slavery as such, but rather to see it as a fact, and be aware of the true nature of slavery as practiced historically among all nations, including Israel with its divinely given laws dealing with the matter.

Many stories have come to us out of the past, telling of extreme cruelty by masters to their slaves, and other stories that tell us of a real affection developing between the slave and his master. The fact which we want to underline and which remains unchanged in either case, is that a slave was one who belonged completely to his master, and was bound at all times to do his master's bidding.

THE SLAVE ANALOGY

It is only as we understand the true meaning of slavery, that we can understand what the Word of God would teach us when the word *slave* is used. The Bible uses the slave analogy to describe the human condition. It teaches very simply, that men are either slaves to righteousness or slaves to unrighteousness. Jesus said that "Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34, NAS).

In an extended section where Paul uses the slave analogy, he starts out by telling us of the entrance of sin into the world through Adam. So all men are born slaves to sin. Thank God this is not the whole story, but that part of the story which we will pursue at this point. He speaks of men as those who present their "members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness" (Romans 6:19, NAS). Speaking of the pre-conversion life of Christians, which is the nature of the life style of all those who are yet slaves to sin, he says, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, *enslaved* to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another" (Titus 3:3, NAS).

In speaking of the entrance of sin into the world, Paul tells us that it was "through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (Romans 5:19, NAS). This of course takes us back to the book of Genesis and the account of the first man's disobedience to God as he capitulated to the subtle and seductive allurements of the serpent. This establishes as the basis of sin, man's disobedience. The children of Adam are spoken of as "the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2, NAS).

Since Satan played a part in the first act of disobedience, it follows that he would try to maintain an involvement in the on-going disobedience of the

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human family. That this is so, is the record of Scripture. Therefore, Paul, speaking of the Galatian Christians in the days prior to their coming to Christ said, "However at that time, when you did not know God, you were *slaves* to those which by nature are no gods" (Galatians 4:8, NAS). Speaking to the Ephesians of their condition before coming to Christ, Paul writes, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the *spirit that is now working* in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:1,2, NAS). Here it is clearly taught that men are not only slaves to sin in all its aspects, resulting from disobedience to the law of God, but because of separation from God, they are vulnerable to, and indeed, slaves of satanic powers. The New Testament has much to say about the power of Satan, and as we read of the ministry of our Lord, we find Him daily confronting these diabolical powers and dealing with them. While Paul says that these satanic powers are "by nature no gods," he is simply stating that they do not have the authority and nature of the one true God. He is not denying that they can exercise a dire and destructive influence on men who choose to be enslaved by sin, and thereby subject to demonic influence. It is significant that in the great event of conversion, the apostle refers to it as a turning "from the dominion of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18, NAS).

This is not a pleasant picture. History corroborates the Bible record, and only the blind would deny that man has been enslaved by destructive forces. The Bible makes it clear that man is a slave to sin, to Satan, and indeed to the tendency in his own nature to self-gratifying behavior. This has birthed a horrible harvest of heartache, treachery, murder, and all the associated miseries that belong to lives lived apart from a right relationship with God and one another. What a tragedy if this were the whole story. To many it seems to be, as we see the literature market glutted with books

and articles, spelling out in sordid detail the tragic story of lives lived in slavery to sin, and in mental and moral squalor, as they move toward the inevitable final chapter of their self-chosen tragedy.

REDEMPTION FROM SLAVERY

It is against the background of the analogy of slavery, that the whole act of God's redeeming mercy and love is given one of its several definitions. "Redemption" is a word that has to do with slavery, among other things. We have already made reference to the fact that Israel had been a nation of slaves. God had spoken to them through Moses saying, "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their *bondage*. I will also redeem you . . ." (Exodus 6:6, NAS). After having brought them out of Egypt, He declares again to them, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of *slavery*" (Exodus 20:2, NAS). While the deliverance of Israel out of "the house of slavery," involved a manifestation of God's power in working the miraculous through Moses and Aaron, and then in the passing through the Red Sea, with all the subsequent miraculous provision; it is important to remember, that the first act in bringing the people out of Egypt involved the shedding of the blood of the Passover lamb. Redemption always has within it the aspect of purchase and payment. The Psalmist bears witness to this when he prays "Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast *purchased* of old, which Thou hast *redeemed* to be the tribe of Thine inheritance" (Psalm 74:2, NAS). In other places where the word redemption is used, it can refer to redeeming things by the payment of money or material. However, when the matter of sin against God is in question, the price of purchasing the "sinner/slave" is always blood. The redemption of Israel from Egypt, which serves as a type of the higher redemption of God's people from the guilt of sin, required the shedding of

blood. Therefore, Israel came out of Egypt because blood had been shed, giving God a legal basis upon which to bring His people into a whole new relationship to Himself.

When God spoke to Israel about the matter of slaves, they had no problem, in the light of their national deliverance from Egypt, in understanding that a slave could be redeemed by the payment of a price. Since the question of sin is not involved here, the slave could be purchased with money. There are several scriptures touching on this, but one will suffice. In Leviticus we are told concerning the slave, that "one of his brothers may redeem him, or his uncle, or his uncle's son may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or if he prospers, he may redeem himself" (Leviticus 25:48, 49, NAS). It is interesting to note that the slave was to be redeemed by one who was his relative. This has significance as we consider redemption as it has to do with our Lord Jesus Christ and mankind. Our Lord became as one of us in the Incarnation, that being one of our human kinsmen, He would qualify to redeem us. One other thing to be noted here is that, if the slave prospers, "he may redeem himself." It was possible that a slave by frugal living could save enough from his meager earnings and gifts of money to buy his own freedom. The contrast is obvious to the Bible student. We as sinners could never amass enough of the kind of currency which could buy our redemption, and are totally dependent upon the purchasing power of our kinsmen-Redeemer, who has paid the price of our ransom from slavery, such price being His "precious blood."

One of the meanings of the word *redemption*, is to "buy in the market." The slaves in ancient times were bought in the open market, and one would buy a slave from another. Such purchase did not always augur well for the slave who was being bought. He may have been sold by a relatively good master, to a wicked and cruel master. The nature and condition of his slavery would depend largely on the kind of master who purchased

him. When this idea of redemption is brought into the New Testament, it is used to inform us of what transpires when we are brought out of slavery to become subject to a new Master. We have cause for rejoicing, that the one who purchased us is none other than the God who is love, who bought us that He might deliver us from all of the evil of our old bondage, and release us into all the blessedness of submission to a Master who desires and wills for us His best and our highest good. It is quite likely that Paul has the redemption of the slave in mind, when he writes, "For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20, NAS). This redemption from slavery is the theme of the song of grateful adoration ascribed to the Lamb in the book of Revelation, when the symbolic representatives sing, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst *purchase for God with Thy blood* men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9, NAS).

A NEW KIND OF SLAVERY

We now come to consider more specifically what we have been referring to. It is the blessed paradox that we have exchanged one bondage for another. We have come out of the old slavery into the new slavery. This happy paradox is perhaps best seen in Paul's dealing with the Christian's new life in Christ in relation to his human vocations and relationships. Speaking of one who was a slave under a Roman or a Greek master, Paul says, "For he who was called in the Lord while a *slave*, is the Lord's freed man; likewise he who was called while free is Christ's *slave*. You were *bought with a price*; do not become slaves of men" (1 Corinthians 7:22, 23, NAS).

Both masters and slaves were coming to Christ. Paul is stating here, as he states in other epistles, that "in Christ there is neither slave or free man" (Galatians 3:28, NAS). The slave and his "free man [master]," are equal before God redemptively, but con-

tinue to be functionally different. In the human situation the slave continues to be a slave, and the "free man [master]" continues to be the master. However, when they both come to Christ, while the slave continues to be a human slave he enters into the freedom of his new relationship with Christ, and while the master continues to be a master he becomes a slave to the new bondage of love, in the Kingdom of God. Both slave and master are "bought with a price," and are, "in Christ," equal before God. This new relationship with God through Christ, however, will alter the human-social relationship between the slave and the master, as is so beautifully portrayed in Paul's letter to Philemon. Does this not strongly indicate, that only the love and grace of God can adjust and correct human prejudices and inequities?

Because the whole concept of slavery was so vividly a part of the life pattern of society in Bible days, and indeed continues to be on a more sophisticated scale in our own day, God uses slavery as a metaphor or analogy of our relationship to Him. We have moved from one type of slavery to another. This analogy is followed in Romans 5 and 6. All men who are born into the Adamic society or "body" are "sons of disobedience" (Romans 5:19; Ephesians 2:2, NAS). As such they are slaves to the "disobedience order" which is characterized by "sin," and are referred to as "slaves to sin" (Romans 6:6, NAS). Paul picks up the slave analogy with which to describe all men who are born of Adam's seed. In this same section he introduces the other Adam, Jesus Christ, who is marked by "obedience" as against "disobedience," which was the character of the "first Adam." Men are in Adam or in Christ. Paul says, "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22, NAS). Here we have a body of people who are referred to as "in Adam all," and another body of people referred to as "in Christ all."

In Romans; chapter 6, the apostle speaks of men moving out of the

Adamic society into the Christ society. In the New Testament this transfer or "translation" is declared in baptism. So Paul speaks of the change from the one order to the other, saying, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Jesus Christ have been baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3, NAS). By this act we make declaration that we have been cut off from the Adamic order. Paul continues, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4, NAS). Here we have an immersion into death, speaking of the cutting off from the old Adamic order, and in verse 4 we have an emersion, where we come out of the waters of baptism, which is a declaration of our being brought into the new life of the new order in Christ.

The apostle then states that we must "know" something, and that is, "that our old man was crucified with Christ, that the sinful body [of the old man] might be destroyed, that we might no longer be the *slaves* of sin" (Romans 6:6, Conybeare). The old Adamic order spoken of as "the old man," consisting of all of those who are of the "body" of Adam, has been legally put to death in the cross of our Lord, and we, through faith in Christ as declared in baptism, have come out of that old order, and it has no longer any legal grip upon us. We have come into a new order where we are under the reign of a new Master, Jesus Christ. The "body" of Adam; the corporate Adamic society; the old order marked by disobedience has no longer any legal right to force us into its thought and behavior patterns. It has been legally dealt with by Christ in His cross, so that we "should no longer be slaves to sin." We are no longer under any legal bondage or indebtedness to the old Adamic order with its way of life. Christ dealt with it in His cross, and through our faith and obedience, we are set free from its authority, and need no longer be enslaved to its patterns of behavior.

As a result of this teaching, some

were misunderstanding Paul, and saying "If this is so, and I am no longer under the slavery of the old Adamic order, then I am free to do my own thing." Paul's reply to this is, "No, you do not understand what I am saying. Freedom from the old Adamic order does not constitute freedom to do our own thing. Rather it constitutes freedom to function in relation to God, and to bring all of our redeemed faculties under His sway, that they may be restored to the function of the divine intention."

To make this clear to the Roman Christians, and all Christians of all time, Paul continues to use the slave analogy, giving his reason for doing so by saying, "I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh" (Romans 6:19, NAS). He realizes that since they understand the slave analogy so well, he will continue to use it to teach them what is meant by coming out of the Adamic order, and into the Christ order. He says, "Sin shall not be master over you" (Romans 6:14, NAS). "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as *slaves* for obedience, you are *slaves* of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were *slaves* of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became *slaves* of righteousness" (Romans 6:16-18 NAS). He presses the analogy yet more vigorously, saying, "For just as you presented your members as *slaves* to impurity and lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as *slaves* to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. For when you were *slaves* of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things for which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and *enslaved* to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome eternal life" (Romans 6:19-22, NAS).

THE MASTER/SLAVE RELATIONSHIP

It is the nature of the master that influences the response of the slave. This may be a generalization, but we believe it to be fairly applicable. Under the old order the master was sin, backed up by satanic deception, delusion, and destructiveness. This would produce in the slaves what was to be found in the masters. Therefore, the slaves, like their masters, were sinful and deceptive and destructive. However, in coming into the Christ order, the new Master is one characterized by righteousness, love, and truth, and His slaves are being molded in the likeness of their Master.

This is beautifully portrayed for us in the Old Testament law concerning slaves. Undoubtedly there were, even in the covenant Hebrew nation, masters who could be demanding, unkind, and often cruel; even though the law forbade this, and masters were subject to punishment if they inflicted undue cruelty on their slaves. However, over against the kind of master who would make the life of his slave miserable, were other masters who were men of righteousness and compassion. Such masters undoubtedly were humbly aware that the roles might well have been reversed, and so treated their slaves with genuine affection.

In Exodus 21:1-6, we have the moving account of a slave who came to the end of six years of service, when according to the law he had a right to go free. However, during the six years of his servitude to his master, there developed a love relationship between slave and master. At the end of the six years the law made provision for the slave to enter into a life long submission to his master. The ordinance declared that "if you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,' then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an

awl; and he shall serve him permanently." (Exodus 21:2, 5, 6, NAS).

When a slave who loved his master, "plainly" declared it at the time when he was free according to law to go from his master's house, he submitted to a very meaningful ceremony. The master, having received the declaration of love, and being in agreement with it, would then take him before the judges of the community, who were God's representatives in jurisdictional matters, and there the servant would submit to the piercing of his ear, as it was pressed against the doorpost of the house. This suggested several things. First of all, that what was being done, was being done sincerely as before God. There was no superficiality or hypocrisy about this act.

Furthermore, he was associating himself with the house of his master, if that is the doorpost which is referred to. Some say that it was the doorpost of the sanctuary, which would make it all the more meaningful, for the servant would be saying, "I am relating permanently in love to my master, in terms of God's covenant house." In any case, he was associating with the master and his household. Also, the piercing of the ear spoke of the complete dedication of his hearing and obedience to his master for the rest of his life.

Many years ago I suffered a painful inner ear infection. During a period of enforced retirement from activity, I had time to meditate and think. Naturally, one of the things I thought a great deal about was my ear. I then considered how important my ear was, and began to question myself as to how faithfully I had "taken care how I heard." As a result of these times of meditation during my illness, I wrote a little verse. It may not be the highest form of poetry, but at least it expresses what seemed to be the Spirit's impression upon me at that time.

My ears shall hear no other voice
Than His, for I'm His slave.
To own His command, my gladsome
choice,
Who died my life to save.
All other voices are but din

That clamor for the soul;
And none need hope my love to win,
For He has full control.

We cannot consider this meaningful ceremony of love commitment on the part of a Hebrew slave to his master, without thinking of a number of scriptures which point out the supreme importance of having an ear that is singly and totally devoted to the voice of our Master. We think of such expressions as "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear." This phrase alone gives meaning to all other references to the pierced and anointed ear of the Christian love slave. It obviously is not speaking only of our physical ears, but of the deep inner moral hearing and response, that is the duty and privilege of the one who has entered into a love relationship of life-long obedience to Jesus Christ, the best of masters.

When we speak of Jesus Christ the best of masters, we are again reminded of another blessed paradox. He who is the best of masters, was in the days of His flesh the slave supreme. Did He have the Hebrew love slave with the pierced ear in mind when, in the prophetic word, He said upon coming into the world, "Sacrifice and meal offering Thou has not desired; my ears Thou hast opened [dug, or possibly pierced - margin]" (Psalm 40:6, NAS). His whole relationship as the perfect slave of His heavenly Father is contained in the statement, "The things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world. . . I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:26, 29, NAS).

Not only did He have an ear attuned to His Father's voice as the ideal slave, but He also ideally fulfilled the role of a slave in His conduct. His absolute obedience to the Father's will was a constant example of the slavery of the love relationship between the Son and the Father. He by example showed His disciples what it meant to be a true servant. ♡

In the second article of this series, we will look more specifically at Jesus' teaching on being a servant, and examine the distinctive characteristics of a love slave.