

Slavery in the Bible

Because the issue of slavery is so very important to our culture in assessing the validity of the Bible as God's Word, it must be addressed. The other arguments are quibbles, but this one is not.¹

The logic has been applied: If the Bible was wrong about slavery, then it is also wrong about homosexual sex, ordination of women,² divorced clergy, and other innovations. It has been noted internationally in nonreligious scholastic works that the Anglican Church is seeking to find ways around explicit statements in the Bible condemning homosexuality, when the Church Missionary Society chose to not vigorously oppose slavery, while yet condemning polygamy which was widespread among the patriarchs of the Old Testament.³

So there is no misunderstanding, the Bible consistently distinguishes between a slave and a hired servant.^{4 5} The role of the slave is to perform forced labor.^{6 7} I began this study with the axiom that all slavery is evil. I did not find any scripture that explicitly declared the institution of slavery itself as evil. I did, however, find scripture that clearly spoke against the form of slavery we had in America.

The Bible does not, and did not, *require* slavery. (The Bible also does not require us to go to war, even though the Hebrews were directly told to do so in the past.) Slavery was in the culture of the world throughout the time that the Bible was written. God chose to regulate it. The Bible permitted slavery of foreigners. While the Bible does not condemn the institution of slavery, it does consistently condemn *oppression*. It is the *oppression* that made American slavery evil. Just as God heard the cries of the Hebrew slaves after 400 years of serving Egypt, God heard the cries of the American slaves, God punished our land with a civil war, and God set the slaves free.

Hebrews were permitted to have foreign slaves. The Bible is not consistent with respect to whether or not one Hebrew is permitted to have another Hebrew as a slave. Regardless, this was resolved by the prophet Jeremiah, who declared that everyone was to set free his Hebrew slaves.⁸ The Israelites obeyed, but then took back their slaves. For this reason, God condemned the Hebrews to the sword, pestilence, and famine, to make them a horror to all the kingdoms on the earth. The report of the fall of Jerusalem in 68 AD by Josephus described the horror endured by the Jews from the Romans, and done by the Jews to each other (including cannibalism). The world again beheld horrors suffered by Jews during World War II under the Nazis.

¹ Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenze, "The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work", in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Letty M. Russell (editor), Westminster Press (1985), pages 125-136.

² A. Ted Mollegen, "On How to Use (And Not Use) the Bible in Understanding God's Will, and On God's Will Today" (28 September 1990).

³ J. F. Ade Ajayi, "The Anti-Slavery Movement and Domestic Slavery", page 3 in *Unfinished Business: Confronting the Legacies of Slavery and Colonialism in Africa*, http://www.african-century.com/acphp/ac_show_article.php?path=ajayi_reparations&page=3, 06 August 2002.

⁴ Leviticus 19:13

⁵ Job 7:2

⁶ Genesis 49:15

⁷ Joshua 16:10

⁸ Jeremiah 34:8-22

What the Bible Says About Slavery

The first mention of slavery in the Bible is when Noah condemns Canaan to be a slave of his brothers as a punishment.⁹ It was Joseph who made slavery a nation-wide institution under Pharaoh, and those slaves were predominantly Egyptians.¹⁰ The Hebrews were slaves of the Egyptians for 400 years.¹¹ It is true that the Levitical Code does not outlaw slavery. In fact, the very first ordinance given after the Ten Commandments, that does not deal with worship, is about slavery.¹² Throughout the Bible, slavery is taken for granted as an institution of man. Even the Hebrews, right after escaping out of slavery from Egypt, had slaves.¹³ People were permitted to sell their daughters¹⁴ into slavery. An Israelite may not sell himself as a slave, but may sell himself as a hired servant.¹⁵ Hebrew men and women could be sold as slaves.¹⁶ Slaves of Hebrews had some protection and rights.^{17 18 19} A slave had more rights than a hired servant.²⁰ A slave could be an heir to the master.²¹ A man could give his daughter to a slave so that the man could have an heir.²² Hebrews were not permitted to treat another Hebrew harshly.²³ A slave was required to rest on the Sabbath.²⁴ A Hebrew could only remain a slave for six years,²⁵ unless that slave declared a desire to be a slave for life.²⁶ The slave is clearly considered property²⁷ of the master. A slave was not considered less human than the master, but rather fully worthy of partaking with the master's household in a covenant relationship with God.²⁸ When a slave is set free, the slave is to be given what is necessary to restart life.²⁹ A slave who escapes is not to be returned to his master.³⁰ However, see a contradictory example in Paul's letter to Philemon concerning Onesimus.³¹ Stealing a fellow countryman and enslaving him is a capital offence.³² On the Day of Judgment, the slave and the prince will be judged with equal justice.³³

The phrase, "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt", is often used by God to remind the Hebrews to be compassionate and to obey his statutes.^{34 35 36 37} This is the brother of the

⁹ Genesis 9:25

¹⁰ Genesis 47:18-25

¹¹ Genesis 15:13

¹² Exodus 21:2

¹³ Exodus 21:7

¹⁴ Exodus 21:7

¹⁵ Exodus 25:39, 42

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 15:12

¹⁷ Exodus 21:20-21

¹⁸ Exodus 21:26-27

¹⁹ Leviticus 22:11

²⁰ Leviticus 22:10-11

²¹ Genesis 15:3

²² I Chronicles 2:34-35

²³ Leviticus 25:46

²⁴ Exodus 20:9-10

²⁵ Exodus 21:2

²⁶ Exodus 21:5-6

²⁷ Exodus 21:21

²⁸ Genesis 17:23

²⁹ Deuteronomy 15:13-14

³⁰ Deuteronomy 23:15

³¹ Philemon 12

³² Deuteronomy 24:7

³³ Isaiah 24:2

³⁴ Deuteronomy 15:15

³⁵ Deuteronomy 16:12

³⁶ Deuteronomy 24:18

³⁷ Deuteronomy 24:22

Golden Rule; do not do unto others as was done unto you. Remember what it was like. God redeemed the Hebrews from slavery, and thus the Hebrews became the property of God.

In the New Testament, Jesus tells us that the pathway to honor in the Kingdom of God is to be the slave of all, not the master.^{38 39} We are told of the compassionate centurion who sought Jesus to heal his slave.⁴⁰ The story of Peter cutting off the ear of Malchus, the slave of the High Priest,^{41 42 43 44} finds its meaning in the *Code of Hammurabi* (which predates the Bible, and is based on even earlier Sumerian law), “If the slave of a freed man strike the body of a freed man, his ear shall be cut off”⁴⁵, and “If a slave say to his master, ‘You are not my master’, and they convict him, his master shall cut off his ear.”⁴⁶ This is one of the few events that is recorded in all four gospels. Jesus is rejecting his rights as a free man over a slave, and his rights as “master of the universe” over a slave. Paul frequently refers to slavery in talking about being a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness.^{47 48 49 50 51 52 53} Paul also addresses the conduct of Christian slaves and masters.^{54 55 56 57}

The Bible does not condemn the institution of *slavery* as morally evil. It condemns making slaves of your own countrymen. (Remember Jesus’ question, “Who is your neighbor?” Using this, you can extend the prohibition to others.) Overall, compared to the Code of Hammurabi, the Bible provides a more humanitarian regulation of slavery, although even this can be challenged on one point. The Code of Hammurabi requires a slave to be set free after four years; the Levitical code requires a slave to be set free after six years. (Recall that the Jews had the concept of the Sabbatical Year.)

In the United States of America, we clearly have concluded that American slavery was evil. How can we make our understanding consistent with what we read in scripture? The answer is **oppression**.^{58 59} When Jesus announced the beginning of his ministry, one of his three keys was to **free the oppressed**.⁶⁰

“And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.”⁶¹ “Then we cried to the Lord the God of

³⁸ Matthew 20:27

³⁹ Mark 10:44

⁴⁰ Luke 7:2-3

⁴¹ Matthew 26:51

⁴² Mark 14:47

⁴³ Luke 22:50

⁴⁴ John 18:10

⁴⁵ Code of Hammurabi, law 205, The Avalon Project at the Yale Law School, L. W. King (translator)

⁴⁶ Code of Hammurabi, law 282, The Avalon Project at the Yale Law School, L. W. King (translator)

⁴⁷ Romans 6:16-22

⁴⁸ Romans 8:15

⁴⁹ I Corinthians 7:23

⁵⁰ Galatians 4:1-7

⁵¹ Titus 2:3

⁵² Titus 3:3

⁵³ Galatians 5:1

⁵⁴ Ephesians 6:5

⁵⁵ Colossians 3:22 – 4:1

⁵⁶ Titus 2:9

⁵⁷ I Timothy 6:1-2

⁵⁸ Ecclesiastes 4:1-3

⁵⁹ Ecclesiastes 5:8-9

⁶⁰ Luke 4:18

⁶¹ Exodus 3:9

our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.^{62 63 64} It was the cries of **oppression**^{65 66} that the Lord heard from the American slaves that moved his heart to act to bring about their freedom.^{67 68 69 70 71 72} Isaiah prophesied that there will be a reversal of roles.

*They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.*⁷³

The oppression suffered by American slaves distinguishes them from American indentured servants, which were also used earlier for labor in the colonies. The one who is guilty of oppressing his neighbor is obligated to restore ill-gotten gain, plus another fifth.⁷⁴ Justice will prevail, and the sons of the oppressors will bow down to those who were oppressed.⁷⁵

Scripture also offered hope, temporal and eternal, to those in bondage. Slaves had the examples of the Hebrews in Egypt and Babylon. They had the prophetic voice of Moses speaking across the ages, “Let my people go!”⁷⁶ They found companion anguish in the Psalms⁷⁷ and in Revelation.⁷⁸ They found the gracious compassion of God revealed by our Lord.⁷⁹ They saw that Christ came to set us free.⁸⁰ They saw the promise of salvation⁸¹ and of blessing for those who die in faith.⁸²

The Condition of American Slavery

The history of American slavery has enough evil to condemn everyone who engaged in the enslavement, trade, or use of slaves. It is estimated that about 13 million Africans were shipped by sea for Europe and the New World. Almost 13 percent did not make it to their destination.⁸³ While Europeans captured some Africans, most were captured by Africans,^{84 85}

⁶² Deuteronomy 26:7

⁶³ 1 Samuel 12:8

⁶⁴ Jeremiah 50:33-34

⁶⁵ Jeremiah 22:13-17

⁶⁶ Ezekiel 22:6-7

⁶⁷ Psalm 76:9

⁶⁸ Psalm 103:6

⁶⁹ Psalm 146:5-7

⁷⁰ Joel 3

⁷¹ Amos 9:13-15

⁷² Psalm 94

⁷³ Isaiah 14:2

⁷⁴ Leviticus 6:2-5

⁷⁵ Isaiah 60:14

⁷⁶ Exodus 5:1, 7:16, 8:1, 8:20, 8:21, 9:1, 9:13, 10:3, 10:4

⁷⁷ Psalm 6, 13, 35, 62, 79, 80, 82, 89:46-52, 90, 94, 119:81-88

⁷⁸ Revelation 6:9-11

⁷⁹ Matthew 5:3-11

⁸⁰ Romans 8:15-25, Galatians 5:1, 1 Peter 2:16

⁸¹ Revelation 7:9-17, 21:1-22:5, 22:20

⁸² Revelation 14:13, 20:11-15

⁸³ Hugh Thomas, Appendix 3, “Estimated Statistics”, *The Slave Trade. The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*, Simon and Schuster (1997). Pages 804-805.

⁸⁴ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade. The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*, Simon and Schuster (1997). Pages 792-793.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey C. Stewart, *1001 Things Everyone Should Know About African American History*, Doubleday (1996). Page 10.

and sold to Arabs and Europeans by other Africans.⁸⁶ The first English capture of Africans for slavery occurred in 1564.⁸⁷ While some of the Africans transported to America were slaves of Africans in Africa, born in captivity,⁸⁸ most were ordinary farmers and members of families.⁸⁹ While Africans sold Africans into slavery,⁹⁰ this was not like the brothers of Joseph. It was more like Romans capturing and enslaving Greeks.⁹¹ Slavery in Africa was not the chattel⁹² or plantation slavery that flourished in the Americas.⁹³

Comments are in order. It is wrong to justify your own evil by demonstrating someone else did that same evil, possibly to an even greater extent. Just because Africans enslaved Africans, that does not justify other people enslaving Africans, whether they are Portuguese, Spanish, or Muslim. The claim that the Moors treated Africans badly is not a valid justification for performing the same basic evil.⁹⁴ These justifications were used in proslavery literature.

Slaves had few rights in practice. They did not have rights of citizenship. Reports on access to courts vary. Before the American Revolution, some slaves did petition courts for freedom.⁹⁵ In the years leading up to the Civil War, the Dred Scott decision by the U.S. Supreme Court disallowed suit, claiming that free Negroes are not citizens of the United States, and therefore may not sue in a court of the United States, even though they may be a citizen of a State.⁹⁶ Slaves could be tried by jury for capital and lesser offenses.⁹⁷ Justices of the Peace tried offenses having punishment not affecting life or limb.⁹⁸ They could not own property,^{99 100} which also means any money they earned belonged to their master and not to

⁸⁶ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade. The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*, Simon and Schuster (1997).

⁸⁷ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade. The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*, Simon and Schuster (1997). Page 156.

⁸⁸ Daniel P. Mannix, Malcolm Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865*, Penguin Books (1976). Page 43.

⁸⁹ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade. The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*, Simon and Schuster (1997). Page 794.

⁹⁰ J. F. Ade Ajayi, "Unfinished Business: Confronting the Legacies of Slavery and Colonialism in Africa", http://www.african-century.com/acphp/ac_show_article.php?path=ajayi_reparations&page=1, 06 August 2002

⁹¹ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade. The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*, Simon and Schuster (1997). Page 793.

⁹² Daniel P. Mannix, Malcolm Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865*, Penguin Books (1976). Page 44.

⁹³ James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History*, W.W. Norton and Company (1981). Page 12.

⁹⁴ Howell Cobb, "A Scriptural Examination of the Institution of Slavery in the United States" (1856) Page 59. *Making of America Books*, <http://www.hti.umich.edu> 10 August 2002

⁹⁵ Herbert Aptheker (editor), *A Documentary History of The Negro People in the United States*, The Citadel Press (1969). Pages 1-4.

⁹⁶ "Dred Scott, Plaintiff in Error v. John F. A. Sandford, December Term, 1856", <http://www.tourolaw.edu/patch/Scott/> 09 August 2002 [Dred Scott decision, U.S. Supreme Court]

⁹⁷ *Codification of the Statute Law of Georgia*, William A. Hotchkiss (Attorney of Legislature) (1848). <http://www.udayton.edu/~race/02rights/slavelaw.htm> 09 August 2002.

⁹⁸ Howell Cobb, "A Scriptural Examination of the Institution of Slavery in the United States" (1856) Page 122. *Making of America Books*, <http://www.hti.umich.edu> 10 August 2002

⁹⁹ J F Ade Ajayi, "The Uniqueness of the Atlantic Slave Trade", in *Unfinished Business: Confronting the Legacies of Slavery and Colonialism in Africa*, http://www.african-century.com/acphp/ac_show_article.php?path=ajayi_reparations&page=2, 06 August 2002.

them. Because they could not own property, they could not inherit.¹⁰¹ They could not hold patents.¹⁰² They could not enter into contracts.¹⁰³ They were treated harshly. Whipping with a leather whip to instill fear and for minor infractions or below average production was routine.¹⁰⁴ They were treated as being less than human.¹⁰⁵ Slaves were not permitted to be taught how to read or write.¹⁰⁶ State laws protected, in theory, slaves from extreme abuse and loss of life.¹⁰⁷ There was no time limit on the period of servitude.¹⁰⁸ A child inherited slave status from the mother.¹⁰⁹ However, some slaves did purchase their own freedom,¹¹⁰ and some who were freed purchased the freedom of others.¹¹¹ Manumission was rare.¹¹² Laws on manumission varied.¹¹³ For example, New Jersey once required bond to be posted as surety that the freedman would not become a public burden. That was later relaxed to not require bond on people freed between ages 21 and 35.¹¹⁴ In Virginia, a person freed from slavery had to leave the state within one year.¹¹⁵ A runaway slave had no legal sanctuary in the South, and none in the North in the later days.^{116 117} Unlike manumission laws in some other states,

¹⁰⁰ "North American and South American Slavery", <http://www.rit.edu/~nrcgsh/bx/bx03b.html> , 10 August 2002.

¹⁰¹ "North American and South American Slavery", <http://www.rit.edu/~nrcgsh/bx/bx03b.html> , 10 August 2002.

¹⁰² John H. Lienhard, "Engines of our Ingenuity, No. 1076: Slave Inventors", <http://www.uh.edu/engines/epi1076.htm> 10 August 2002.

¹⁰³ "North American and South American Slavery", <http://www.rit.edu/~nrcgsh/bx/bx03b.html> , 10 August 2002.

¹⁰⁴ Herbert Aptheker (editor), *A Documentary History of The Negro People in the United States*, The Citadel Press (1969). Pages 246-250.

¹⁰⁵ J F Ade A jayi, "The Uniqueness of the Atlantic Slave Trade", in *Unfinished Business: Confronting the Legacies of Slavery and Colonialism in Africa*, http://www.african-century.com/acphp/ac_show_article.php?path=ajayi_reparations&page=2 , 06 August 2002.

¹⁰⁶ "Twenty-Sixth Question", Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Committee, *Slavery and the International Slave Trade in the United States of America*, London: Thomas Ward And Co. 1841. *Anti-Slavery collection*. <http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/927.htm> , 11 August 2002.

¹⁰⁷ Howell Cobb, "A Scriptural Examination of the Institution of Slavery in the United States" (1856) Pages 124-140. *Making of America Books*, <http://www.hti.umich.edu> 10 August 2002

¹⁰⁸ "North American and South American Slavery", <http://www.rit.edu/~nrcgsh/bx/bx03b.html> , 10 August 2002.

¹⁰⁹ "North American and South American Slavery", <http://www.rit.edu/~nrcgsh/bx/bx03b.html> , 10 August 2002.

¹¹⁰ Herbert Aptheker (editor), *A Documentary History of The Negro People in the United States*, The Citadel Press (1969). Pages 66-67.

¹¹¹ Herbert Aptheker (editor), *A Documentary History of The Negro People in the United States*, The Citadel Press (1969). Pages 54-55.

¹¹² Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law*, University of North Carolina Press (1996), reviewed by Keith E. Whittington in *The Law and Politics Book Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (January 1998), Pages 9-11. <http://www.unt.edu/lpbr/subpages/reviews/morris98.htm> , 10 August 2002.

¹¹³ Alonford James Robinson, Jr., "Free Blacks in the United States", http://www.africana.com/Utilities/Content.html?&..&cgi-bin/banner.pl?banner=Education&..&Articles/tt_331.htm , 10 August 2002,

¹¹⁴ Gary K. Wolinetz, "New Jersey Slavery and the Law", *Rutgers Law Review*, Volume 50, Pages 2227-2258 (1998). <http://academic.udayton.edu/race/index.htm> 10 August 2002.

¹¹⁵ Albert A. Muchka, "Thirty Dollars Down and a Lifetime to Buy", *LORE magazine*, Volume 43, Number 4 (December 1993). Pages 5-9.

¹¹⁶ The Fugitive Slave Act 1850, The Avalon Project, Yale University. <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/fugitive.htm> 09 August 2002.

¹¹⁷ "Dred Scott, Plaintiff in Error v. John F. A. Sandford, December Term, 1856", <http://www.tourolaw.edu/patch/Scott/> 09 August 2002 [Dred Scott decision, U.S. Supreme Court]

the Pennsylvania law did not restrict black immigration, nor did it require that freed blacks leave the state.¹¹⁸ Freedmen were not guaranteed that their status would be honored elsewhere, or at a later time.¹¹⁹

Examination of the Charge Against the Bible

The critical charge against honoring the authority of the Bible is that Christians used the Bible to justify slavery. We saw sufficient examples above that the whole counsel of Holy Scripture offered ample support for abolition of American slavery. God's Word is not lacking.

The misuse of the Bible is to the condemnation of the (ab)user, not of the Bible.

The Baptists split specifically on the issue of slavery. The Methodists started with abolition with good intentions,¹²⁰ but those rules were short lived.¹²¹ Before the abolitionist movement became widespread, none of the denominations opposed slavery on moral grounds. (This is a tautology. The abolitionist movement consisted of opposing slavery on moral grounds!)

The proof-text method of using Holy Scripture in arguments was rare on either side of the abolitionist movement in the beginning. Absence of using the proof-text method of argument does not mean Holy Scripture was not the foundation for justification of the argument. While Holy Scripture is always true for all people (whether they believe it or not), because it is God's Word through which the mind of God is revealed, it has persuasive power only in people whose hearts have not been hardened against God's Will. A proof-text method of presentation would not be effective for convincing an audience of slaveholders or non-believing politicians to change their minds and free their slaves.¹²² The case against the Atlantic slave trade was ineffective in the case of Wilberforce, who considered himself a Christian, until he reached a point of committing his life to Christ.¹²³ John Wesley's use of proof-text argument in his sermon on "Salvation by Faith"¹²⁴ was for an audience whose hearts had already been prepared by God to receive it. Wesley chose to not use a proof-text argument when he wrote "Thoughts Upon Slavery"¹²⁵, because the audience was different. That does not diminish the fact that the same well of the Spirit that inspired "Salvation by Faith" also inspired "Thoughts Upon Slavery". In our abortion debates today, the counsel of

¹¹⁸ "Cato's Letter and Petition to the Pennsylvania Assembly" (1781).

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h73.html> 10 August 2002

¹¹⁹ Patricia Reid, "When Property Speaks: Re-Negotiating the Legal System in Annapolis, Maryland, 1810-1830", Chapter 3 in *Living in a Diasporic Community: Becoming African American in Annapolis, Maryland 1790-1860*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Iowa (2002).

http://www.law.columbia.edu/law_culture/ssi_2000/Short%20Version/Reid_short%20version.doc 10 August 2002.

¹²⁰ Nathan Bangs, "1780, Questions 16 and 17", *History of the Methodist Church*, Volume I, Book 2, Chapter 2, Page 107; Chapter 3, Pages 178-179, The Master Christian Library, Version 5, AGES Software (1997)

¹²¹ Nathan Bangs, *History of the Methodist Church*, Volume I, Book 2, Chapter 3, Pages 179-180, The Master Christian Library, Version 5, AGES Software (1997)

¹²² Matthew 13:14-15

¹²³ "July 26, 1833, Slaves Liberated", Christian History Institute,

<http://www.gospelcom.net/chi/ARCHIVEF/07/daily-07-26-2001.shtml> , 11 August 2002.

¹²⁴ John Wesley, "Salvation by Faith", Sermon 1, Preached at St. Mary's, Oxford, before the University (18 June 1738), in *The Complete Works of John Wesley, Volume 5, Biography and Sermons 1-59*. The Master Christian Library, Version 5, AGES Software (1997)

¹²⁵ John Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Slavery", , in *The Complete Works of John Wesley, Volume 11, Thoughts, Addresses, Prayers, Letters*. The Master Christian Library, Version 5, AGES Software (1997)

Holy Scripture is completely ineffective in convincing pro-abortion activists, who insist that murdering children before they are born is a good act, to change their mind.

Those who misused the proof-text method of argument from Holy Scripture to support American slavery did so in the same fashion that Satan quoted scripture to Jesus during the temptations in the wilderness.¹²⁶ They did not apply the whole witness of Holy Scripture. Those Christian preachers in the South (and the North, as well), who did understand the full witness of Holy Scripture, who failed to challenge the oppression of slavery were gutless or evil.

Yale Divinity School of the 1850s was presided over by pro-slavery Nathaniel W. Taylor¹²⁷ and produced pro-slavery graduates.¹²⁸ His defense of slavery is summarized by Yale by the argument “*Does the greatest good of the greatest number justify the continuance of slavery in the South?*”, which is not based on the Bible. This is an argument from Utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham.¹²⁹ Bentham’s friend and disciple was the radical atheist, Francis Place.¹³⁰ This was the popular philosophy of that day. John Stuart Mill’s philosophy in 1861 also was utilitarian, though not identical to Bentham’s.¹³¹

Taylor led the Yale Divinity School Rhetorical Society to the following conclusions:

- (1) *It is not right to assist a slave to run away.*
- (2) *Slavery in this country was, on the whole, not evil.*
- (3) *The Fugitive Slave Law was not contrary to the Law of God.*
- (4) *Uncle Tom’s Cabin was not a valid argument against slavery.*

This is a very good example of a theological seminary training future generations of preachers that evil is “good”, basing arguments upon the popular philosophy of the day.¹³²

On the other side of the Atlantic was Isaac Milner, instrumental in the abolitionist movement in England, who occupied the Lucasian Chair at Cambridge during 1798-1820 in Mathematics and Chemistry. This is the same academic post held by two others famous writers in Christianity, Isaac Newton (1669-1702, Mathematics and Physics) and William Whiston (1702-1710 in Mathematics, who translated *The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus*).¹³³ Milner was an evangelical Christian, and it is he who began to persuade William Wilberforce to commit his life to Christ. John Newton completed the task of motivating Wilberforce to championing the abolitionist cause.¹³⁴ Isaac Milner’s work did not stop there. He added two volumes to the three existing volumes of *The History of the Church of Christ* written by his brother, Joseph Milner.¹³⁵

¹²⁶ Matthew 4:6

¹²⁷ “Yale, Slavery, and Abolition: Nathaniel W. Taylor”

<http://www.yaleslavery.org/WhoYaleHonors/taylor.html> 10 August 2002

¹²⁸ Luke 6:39-40

¹²⁹ Jeremy Bentham, “An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation” (1789).

¹³⁰ Herbert Schlossberg, “Church Renewal Brings Cultural Transformation: The English Revolution of the Early Nineteenth Century”, *Theology Matters*, Volume 4, Number 3 (May/June 1998).

¹³¹ John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism” (1861).

¹³² Habakkuk 2:18

¹³³ Lucasian Chair, <http://web.fccj.org/~ethall/lucasian.htm> , 11 August 2002.

¹³⁴ “July 26, 1833, Slaves Liberated”, Christian History Institute, <http://www.gospelcom.net/chi/ARCHIVE/07/daily-07-26-2001.shtml> , 11 August 2002.

¹³⁵ “Milner, Joseph”, *The 1911 Edition Encyclopedia*, <http://69.1911encyclopedia.org/M/MI/MILO.htm> , 11 August 2002.

From these two examples, we observe that it is very important to choose your teachers and friends carefully. As St. Jerome said, “After the holy scriptures you should read the writings of learned men; of those at any rate whose faith is well known. You need not go into the mire to seek for gold; you have many pearls, buy the one pearl with these.”¹³⁶

Eugene Genovese studied Southern proslavery clergy. He made three observations.¹³⁷

- (1) “Most Southern theologians had the good sense to limit their claims for slavery.”
- (2) “Evangelical clergy were more outspoken than historians recognize. They championed slave literacy (for reading the Bible), legal integrity of families and marriages, shielding slaves from inhuman cruelty, starvation, and other perils, and granting protections in the courts.”
- (3) “He draws a distinction between the proslavery clergy with their inerrant Bible and the defenders of undisguised racism in the postwar period. ... With the Holy Scriptures silent as death about the moral rankings of human races, Genovese notes, the post-emancipation clergy adopted the views of the scientific racists.”

The reviewer of Genovese’s book noted that “scattered pulpit references to correcting evils cannot hide the suspicion that, in the vast number of sermons preached, few addressed the slave issue at all.” Notice, again, that evil (in this case, racism) was adopted by clergy on the basis of popular philosophy and speculation unwarranted by Holy Scripture.

The first effective Christian opposition to the Atlantic slave trade was by Calvinist theologians who were asked by the West Indies Company directors in the 1570s to consider the moral dimension of slavery. (Their position was unusual even for Calvinists of that time.)¹³⁸ Unfortunately, the decision by the Dutch West Indies Company was changed in 1624.¹³⁹ The abolitionists were evangelical Christians.^{140 141 142}

Conclusions:

¹³⁶ Jerome (lived 342-420), “To Furia”, *The Letters of St. Jerome*, Letter 54, Chapter 11, in *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, Hon. W. H. Fremantle, M.A. and Rev. G. Lewis, M.A. (translators) (1892), in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Volume 6, Philip Schaff (editor), The Master Christian Library, Version 5, AGES Software (1997).

¹³⁷ Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), reviewed by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Journal of Southern Religion* (1998-1999).

¹³⁸ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade. The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*, Simon and Schuster (1997). Page 162.

¹³⁹ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade. The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*, Simon and Schuster (1997). Page 170.

¹⁴⁰ John Wesley, “Thoughts Upon Slavery” (1774), in *The Complete Works of John Wesley, Volume 11, Thoughts, Addresses, Prayers, Letters*, The Master Christian Library, AGES Software, Version 5 (1997).

¹⁴¹ John Wesley, “A Calm Address to Our American Colonies”, (1775), in *The Complete Works of John Wesley, Volume 11, Thoughts, Addresses, Prayers, Letters*, The Master Christian Library, AGES Software, Version 5 (1997).

¹⁴² John Wesley, “Some Observations on Liberty”, (1776), in *The Complete Works of John Wesley, Volume 11, Thoughts, Addresses, Prayers, Letters*, The Master Christian Library, AGES Software, Version 5 (1997).

1. Holy Scripture can be trusted to reflect the mind of God. The reason American slavery was evil was because of *oppression*, not because of the Biblical institution of slavery. This conclusion is politically incorrect, but I do not see a consistent alternative. Even so, we arrive at the same practical conclusion: American slavery was evil.
2. Popular philosophy, not Holy Scripture, was the driving force of clergy calling evil “good”. Yale trained future clergy to make decisions *based on Utilitarianism*, not Holy Scripture, to conclude that the slavery in the South was good.

Oppressive Servitude Today

We have a situation in the United States today that parallels earlier American slavery, our use of migrant workers from Mexico. Technically, the situation is close to that of the hireling, sojourner, or person who sells himself into slavery for a fixed period of time. If these people are oppressed, God will surely hear their cry. The Bible is very clear that the sojourner is to be governed with the same law as the Hebrew. In our own context of the United States of America, this is equivalent to saying that all legal immigrants must have the same obligations and privileges as citizens by birth.

And if a stranger is sojourning with you, or any one is among you throughout your generations, and he wishes to offer an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the Lord, he shall do as you do. For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the sojourner be before the Lord. One law and one ordinance shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Numbers 15:14-16