

AUGUST 8th and 9th

GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEATH?

“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” **GALATIANS 3:25-28**

George Washington. Thomas Jefferson. Patrick Henry. Men that are called heroes in our nation's history. And yet, there remains a black eye from history that cannot be erased. Even as the cry for freedom from Britain was preached, the practical implications weren't embodied in the entire new nation. What becomes difficult to explain is Christian heroes that also owned slaves. This devotion isn't a call for us to “cancel” our past leaders or desecrate past memorials. Instead, God calls us to weigh the truth of the Scriptures and the deception that can fill our hearts. What can God teach us from His Word?

It's common to hear people discuss Biblical issues of “silence,” but what do they mean by it? They are talking about something that the Bible is silent on. While black slavery has been settled in the United States, a common argument was that the Bible never outlawed the practice. A measured approach to interpreting the Bible is important here. The Bible's silence does not indicate God's acceptance of behavior and is a poor technique in defending a position. Indeed, it is true that the Bible does talk about slavery, but does not directly oppose it. However, is colonial slavery identical to the slavery described in the Bible? The answer is a definitive “no.” Slavery in the West as we know it was exclusively built upon a people's race, while the Bible's slavery was based upon economic need. In the Biblical world, slaves could own property and could earn their freedom once their debt was paid. It was their choice to submit to a yoke of slavery to pay for debts. In addition, some have concluded that Noah's curse on Canaan (descendent of Ham) in Genesis 9 allows for slavery since God says, “May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.” It's important to note that this passage describes the Canaanites being slaves of the Israelites, which was fulfilled during that time period.

Paul writes a letter to Philemon about a runaway slave named Onesimus. Paul leads Onesimus to Christ and writes a letter on his behalf as he returns to Philemon. Paul claims that he could have kept Onesimus because he was helpful to him but instead sends him back. Verse 15 and 16 state: “For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.” The key here is the status of Onesimus: no longer a slave, but a beloved brother. This turns our Western slavery on its head!

We look back to learn from history's mistakes so we can avoid the potholes going forward. Even as slavery has ended, we still deal with issues of ethics in our world.

Unfortunately, we find that we aren't much different from people from the pages of history. While human equality was argued for independence, the practice of living out that equality caused problems. To set slaves free would disrupt the economic lives of many citizens. Theoretically, all men were created equal, but practically people saw slaves as necessary for their livelihood. They traded truth for what was practical. We can be guilty of the same. For instance, most Christians stand against abortion, but there remain 13,000 to 15,000 children in foster care in our state alone that were given life by their birthparents. Why so many in foster homes rather than adoptive homes? Because it becomes inconvenient and impractical for Christians to adopt children that often carry special needs. This is just one issue that carries weight with what we believe as believers and how we act on those beliefs. May God give us His men wisdom to set the tone for how to approach these issues with humility and godly dependence.

Spend some time asking God for wisdom in approaching complex and emotional issues in our world. Ask God to change hearts to draw people to Himself.

For Further Reading: Philemon 1 (it's only one chapter)