

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

338

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with slavery. According to the Global Slavery Index there are approximately 40.3 millions slaves in the world today. Here are the top ten countries with the greatest number of slaves: N. Korea, Eritrea, Burundi, Central Africa Republic, Afghanistan, Mauritania, S. Sudan, Pakistan, Cambodia, and Iran. The International Labor Organization estimates that 26% of these slaves are children.

Many modern historians conveniently overlook the fact that Arab slave traders were enslaving Africans centuries before the white Europeans did. While statistics vary, some historians estimate that between A.D. 650 and 1900, 10 to 20 million Africans were enslaved by the Arabs. Others give higher estimates and state that on the trans-Saharan route alone over 20 million African slaves were delivered and sold in the Islamic world. Unfortunately the journey across the desert was difficult and many died en route. In fact, Dr. John Alembellah Azumah in his 2001 book *"The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa"* estimates that over 80 million Black Africans died on that route. Wikipedia also notes: *"The Arab slave trade typically dealt in the sale of castrated male slaves. Black boys at the age of eight to twelve had their scrotum and penis completely amputated. Reportedly, about two of three boys died, but those who survived drew high prices."*

Slavery, as you know, was rampant in the Roman world when the church was born. The followers of Christ fought slavery but sought to end it without bloodshed. The solution was simple! Masters were taught to love their slaves and slaves were taught to love their masters. Paul's letter to Philemon illustrates the success of this strategy. Philemon was a Christian who owned a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus ran away to Rome but apparently robbed his master before doing so. Paul was a prisoner in Rome at the time and somehow met Onesimus and converted him to Christ. Paul then asked Onesimus to return to his master and entreated Philemon to **"receive him back for good – no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me and even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord"** Then, assuming that Onesimus had wronged his master, Paul continued: **"So, if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back . . ."** (Philemon 1:15-19).

In America we used a different strategy. We ended slavery with the Civil War. Unfortunately, this resulted in the death of 655,000 soldiers. This was, by far, the most costly war America has ever fought regarding the loss of American lives. The largest and most deadly battle in the Civil War was fought at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania from July 1 – July 3, 1863. During these three days 23,000 Yankees and 28,000 Confederates were killed, wounded, or captured. On Nov. 19, 1863 President Lincoln was present for the dedication of the Soldiers National Cemetery at Gettysburg. As a matter of trivia the major speech on that historic occasion was delivered by the Hon. Edward Everett. It was two hours long and contained 13,607 words. President Lincoln's remarks, by contrast, lasted only two minutes and contained a mere 271 words. It is interesting that virtually no one remembers Everett or what he said. Lincoln's Gettysburg address, however, is one of the most famous speeches of history. Here it is:

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated,

can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

One common Greek word for “slave” is “doulos”. It comes from “deo” which means “to bind”. Strong in his Exhaustive Concordance states that it is used 126 times in the N.T. Scriptures. It is variously translated as servant, slave, bond-servant, bond-slave, etc. Here are seven uses of “doulos” in the Scriptures that will give you some idea of how the word was used. For the sake of clarity I will use “slave” in each instance even though some versions translate “doulos” as “servant”.

- Jesus took upon Himself the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7).
- Jesus told His disciples that whoever wants to be first must be a slave (Matt. 20:27).
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man going on a journey and entrusting property to his slaves (Matt. 25:14).
- Paul considered himself a slave of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1).
- James was a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (Ja. 1:1).
- Peter was a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:1).
- Jude was a slave of Jesus Christ and the brother of James (Jude 1:1).
- Etc.

Obviously, slavery isn’t always bad. In fact, it is a wonderful thing to be a slave of Jesus. Nobody forces us to do this. We do it voluntarily because we love Him (Ex. 21:5-7). Slavery to Satan, by contrast, is terrible. Sadly, many are slaves to Satan without even realizing it. Paul said it like this: **“Don’t you know that when you offer your selves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Rom. 6:16).** Paradoxically, Satan offers freedom and makes you a slave and Jesus offers you slavery and makes you free. **“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn. 8:36).** Choosing to be a slave of Jesus is one of the smartest decisions you will ever make!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce