

The δοῦλος of Pauline Literature: Slavery and Freedom in the New Testament Epistles

Patrick Connolly
Theology and Religious Studies

Introduction

In contemporary sociological discourse there is a grievous misunderstanding of Pauline literature, which arises out of the equivocation of authentic Pauline epistles with pseudo-epigraphy in the Pauline corpus. Because of this, Paul appears to support various systemic oppressions in the Roman Empire, particularly slavery. Even worse, this problematic equivocation has been used to support similarly oppressive regimes throughout the history of Christendom. Recent Biblical scholarship that discounts the equivocation of authentic and pseudo-epigraphy, however, devalues the notion that Paul endeavored to employ the gospel message as a means of supporting the illicit system of slavery. If the findings of contemporary Biblical scholarship are true, additional fields of theology immediately benefit from the subsequent reworking of Pauline social theory. This paper, then, will seek to establish a new understanding of the Pauline conception of slavery throughout the Pauline corpus. Furthermore, this paper will endeavor to prove that in the authentic Pauline corpus, the use of the Greek term for slave was meant to seem strange and unusual to his audience, and in fact, Paul disliked slavery due to the tension it created in the community of the gospel message. Thus, deconstructing a common conception of his time and turning it on its head, Paul critiques contemporary Christian communities that professed to be followers of Christ but continued to live hypocritically in oppressive social relationships.

While Paul may not have supported his contemporary iteration of slavery, it provided a ready image for his audience. The δοῦλος (the Greek term for slavery used in the Pauline corpus, pronounced DOO-loss) is a common image throughout the New Testament, but the variety of ways it is used allows for ambiguity. δοῦλος appears 61 times in several of Paul's letters, normally in either its noun form, a contraction, or its verbal form. Certainly, though, Paul's audience would have well understood the horrible implications of slavery in the contemporary New Testament era. Though it has an ambiguous meaning, the use of the term δοῦλος was deliberate and intended to evoke painful images and feelings. This paper seeks to ascertain its meaning in Pauline literature, not only in the authentic Pauline

corpus but also the Deutero-Pauline and the Pastoral Epistles, by combining a study of its historical context, exegetical method, and contemporary scholarly work.

Finally, this paper will seek to begin uncovering the implications of its reworking of the Pauline conception of slavery. Any conclusions reached in the area of Biblical scholarship should provide a new framework in which to discuss Pauline social theory. Thus, new theological methods that seek to rediscover the egalitarian message of the early Jesus groups, primarily liberation theology, will finally have a powerful canonical tool to aid their efforts. Paul's understanding of slavery, having been shown to be subversive towards his contemporary unjust social order, will create a framework for contemporary theologians to subvert oppressive iterations of their social orders, as well.

Distinction between διάκονος and δοῦλος

Whenever speaking of slavery in the New Testament, a distinction must immediately be made between two Greek terms, which the English translation often renders equivocally as servant, διάκονος and δοῦλος.

Διάκονος, from which English derives its modern word “deacon,” would best be rendered as assistant or minister, often one who acts as an intermediary in a transaction for a superior.¹ This meaning is not far from the contemporary English connotation of the word, especially as the term was subsumed and codified within the early Christian movement. “Deacon” denotes one who is an official within the Christian church.² The term δοῦλος, during the period of the first century in the Roman Empire, denotes one who subjects him-or-herself to the authority and will of another person, generally one who possesses a higher rank in the same community, movement, or group. This understanding of the term developed from its prior meaning of a person who served those sitting at table.³ Though this can be a proper place for someone of a certain social class, a δοῦλος is clearly a person in an inferior social, political, or economic position. Regardless, the Judeo-Christian tradition appropriated this notion during the early New Testament period to describe the more communal aspect of love for one's neighbor.⁴ Thus, the more common meaning during the New Testament period comes from this more recent

¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). [BDAG]

² *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2003.

³ Gerhard Kittel and Gerard Freidrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984). [TDNT]

⁴ TDNT

notion of the strong community member, who often stands in place for Christian love.

Contrasting the much more uplifting notion of a disciple or member of the New Testament Jesus-groups as direct minister or assistant for Jesus is the more insidious notion of the slave, or δοῦλος. The δοῦλος is a male slave.⁵ The only legitimate importance of distinguishing that the δοῦλος is a male slave is to recognize that, while not even poor men were necessarily forced into slavery, women and children were always considered property. Furthermore, the δοῦλος is a rarely understood concept in both historical and New Testament scholarship. The most immediate distinction to be made, though, concerns the fact that the δοῦλος is an owned person. Whereas the διάκονος can possess the rights of citizenship and often willingly submits him/herself to the will of another, the δοῦλος does not possess the autonomy to allow for being submitted. Rather, the δοῦλος, by his very nature, must serve and obey a master.⁶

Historical Background of the δοῦλος

The δοῦλος remains a disputed figure in Pauline scholarship, in part because the older, more dominant understanding of the δοῦλος, led by the work of Bartchy, paints a more beneficent picture of the Roman system of slavery, while the newer, minority position of scholarship, begun by Patterson and followed by several others, tends to highlight the more brutal aspects of the system.⁷ The work of Bartchy was the first comprehensive study of slavery done by Biblical exegetes, as many classicists tended to overlook the question of slavery, due to its unsavory nature.⁸ Bartchy, who based his work on Greek, Roman, and Jewish texts influences nearly all subsequent discourse by creating the paradigm within which most scholars debate. Most debates, in fact, seek to further explicate many of the finer points or implications of Bartchy's assertions, better helping the field of exegesis to understand Paul's metaphors concerning the δοῦλος, by contextualizing its historical background.

Many of Bartchy's assertions were based on legal codes and religious texts in the society or tradition of Paul,⁹ but assume many rather contentious claims, including homogeneity in slave conditions, ideal enforcement of laws, and that urban

⁵ BDAG

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ John Byron, Paul and the Background of Slavery: The *Status Quaestionis* in New Testament Scholarship, *Currents in Biblical Research* 3, no. 1 (2004) 116.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 117-8.

slave conditions reflected those of rural slaves. Regardless of these issues and oversimplifications, Bartchy does establish a considerable basis of the conditions and situations of the first century slave.¹⁰ Slavery in the first century was not based on racial factors, though in time periods before Paul, Roman prisoners-of-war were often enslaved. Slaveholders encouraged education and could place slaves in high governmental positions; furthermore, slaves could own property, could participate in religious and cultural traditions like a freeborn, were not prohibited from public assembly, and could anticipate freedom after the age of 30.¹¹ Slaves were not in their own social class, but often reflected that of their masters.¹² The prospect of manumission was true and legitimate for most slaves who could survive until such an age, ensuring motivation for hard work and self-discipline. The good that existed in an otherwise undesirable and unpalatable system helped ensure that it could build the economic wealth and superiority of the Roman Empire in an age eighteen hundred years before the advent of machinery.¹³

Several scholars of various disciplines (including Biblical exegesis, history, classics, law, sociology, and anthropology) have expounded upon the oversimplifications of Bartchy's comprehensive work, ensuring that we have a better understanding of slavery for our mission with Paul. Patterson asserts that slavery was a matter of control through power relations.¹⁴ Furthermore, slavery was brutal since "Slaves were estranged from their family and ethnic backgrounds... undergoing a death experience on a social level," due to the familial nature of ancient culture.¹⁵ Further scholars in the tradition of Patterson, including Bradley, assert that slavery was not palatable in any way, but the likely possibility of freedom and familial life ensured its survival.¹⁶ Glancy reasons that total subjection to the master included sexual exploitation, thus denying slaves even a modicum of their natural autonomy.¹⁷ One redeeming attribute discovered by Brown reminds scholars that, since slavery was an aspect of business, masters had reasons to protect slaves as an investment, just as slaves had reason to promote their master.¹⁸ Though the intention behind this reality is less than charitable, the fact remains that slaves were able to benefit from their master's pragmatic

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹¹ *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 66.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 70-1.

¹⁴ Byron, *Status*, 119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

goodwill. This minority of scholars discovered that, while many of Bartchy's conclusions about slavery were technically true, slavery was never a benevolent system. Rather, slave conditions ensured that slaves could accept some "combination of protection, provision, abuse, and exploitation."¹⁹ Furthermore, as the δοῦλος could have been sold off into another family at any given time, he could not participate in the process of progeny, which dictated the normal direction of the entirety of life for the Roman Empire. In being stripped of what stood as the foundation of familial and social life, the Roman δοῦλος was unequivocally the lowest member of Roman society.²⁰

Pauline Usage of δοῦλος

This paper shall deal with the prospect of the δοῦλος (hereafter referred to by its English translation unless necessary) in all aspects of Pauline literature, including the generally accepted chronology of the authentic letters (1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, and Romans,) the Deutero-Pauline letters (Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians,) and the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.) Since they likely possessed different authors who were not Paul, the placement of the Deutero-Pauline letters and the Pastoral Epistles within an exact internal chronology is not an important task. We must, however, establish a suitable timeline for the chronology of the authentic letters of Paul, if we wish to study the development of Pauline thought on the subject of slavery. Thus, we shall employ the use of the timeline provided by Malina in establishing the authentic letters to begin with 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, and Romans.²¹ In so doing, we will better be able to trace Paul's own development within the Jesus movement, which challenged his pre-judgments concerning the nature of slavery, both as a Roman citizen and a Jew.

1 Thessalonians has only one occurrence of the term slavery, in its verbal form. Paul compliments the people of Thessalonica in their willingness to turn "from idols to serve [be enslaved to] the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9).²² Paul, then, offers the image of enslaving oneself to the just and true cause espoused

¹⁹ Ibid., 134.

²⁰ Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downersgrove: InterVarsity Press, 1989) 881.

²¹ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006) 1.

²² *The Catholic Study Bible*, ed. The New American Bible: Revised Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

by the Jesus-group as a worthy and honorable action. Paul displays his recognition of the radical submission required by obedience to the will of God, by turning the image of slavery on its head, in this manner.

1 Corinthians has seven occurrences of the term slave, in both its verbal and noun form. The first occurrence is an instance of how Paul believes people should relate to one another. Brothers or sisters in the community should not be enslaved into believing (1 Cor. 7:15), for believing in God should bring peace. Furthermore, though some people are slaves when they are called, a Jesus-group member should not be concerned with their state in this manner (1 Cor. 7:21). Believers must recognize the dichotomy caused by service to the Lord. It does not matter if one is a slave in their social station, for they shall be freed in the Lord (1 Cor. 7:22), just as one who is a freed person must be enslaved to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:22). In so saying, Paul reminds the Jesus-group members that the social stations in which they enter the group and are converted cannot be considered to determine how they should relate to one another. The Jesus-group should pull up those who are marginalized by societal forces, while humbling those who would otherwise be honored by societal forces. For God is above the social order, regardless of whether or not the social order is pagan or Christian.

This distinction becomes most explicit when Paul reminds the Jesus-group members of Corinth that they are not to become slaves to human beings (1 Cor. 7:23). Paul also points out that, “though he is free in regard to all,” he has purposefully made himself a slave so that he may win converts (1 Cor. 9:27). Furthermore, Paul enslaves his body, trains it, so that he may be considered qualified to preach (1 Cor. 9:27). Thus, Paul turns his audience’s understanding of slavery on its head. What was so obviously an unfortunate circumstance in which one could exist, Paul now offers it as a voluntary state, which those who serve God shall willingly undergo for the sake of the gospel message. Furthermore, Paul’s willingness to suffer this injustice of being considered a slave, both in his own eyes and the eyes of God, should remind the Corinthians that they should not consider themselves great simply by virtue of possessing the message. Rather, they are to be considered as the lowest members of society, especially within the eyes of God.

2 Corinthians includes only one occurrence of the term slave. Paul reminds the Corinthians, who have chosen to question his authority, what the authority of a true change agent will entail. Any authoritative Jesus-group change agent will preach in a way that glorifies Jesus solely, and humbles the change agents. In other words, Paul reminds the Jesus-group in Corinth that he and his group sought to reveal “Jesus Christ as Lord, and [Paul and his colleagues] as [the Corinthian Jesus-group’s] slaves for the sake of the gospel” (2 Cor. 4:5). The Corinthians should realize that change agents should always be at the service of those members

of the Jesus-group willing to adhere to the message. Additionally, change agents should even be willing to suffer enslavement to people who are completely unworthy, if the gospel should require such suffering.

There are eleven occurrences of some form of the word slave in the letter to the Galatians. Paul questions a claim of the Galatians that he should seek to please members of the Jesus-group, reminding them that to try to please people is to not be a slave of Christ (Gal. 1:10). To be a slave of Christ is clearly a positive state of being, meaning that any desire that runs counter to allowing this submission to occur should be considered negative, including the desire to please people. Paul also discusses the positives that the faith has brought to members of the Jesus-groups, which includes the fact that there are no longer any distinctions or divisions in Christ; “there is neither slave nor free person” (Gal. 3:28). He elucidates upon this claim in his discussion of whether Jesus-group members are slaves or heirs to God. Paul notes that an heir was no different from a slave, if he was not of legal age (Gal. 4:1). In the same way, when the Jesus-group members were not of age, or were incapable of properly receiving the gospel message, they remained enslaved to the powers of the world, as a matter of nature (Gal. 4:3). God, however, in sending the spirit of his Son (Gal. 4:6), ensures that the Jesus-group members should no longer be considered slaves but children and heirs of God (Gal. 4:7). It may be worth noting that this clearly means that Jesus-group members should not consider themselves free to satisfy their desires. Rather, they must seek to please God in a way similar to social and cultural expectations for children, in recognition of their radical dependence, and in honor of their spiritual progenitor who, by his mercy, chose to adopt them.

During the time in which Jesus-group members did not know God, they necessarily became slaves to false gods (Gal 4:8). Thus, Paul exhorts his audience to take advantage of their newfound freedom from the false gods by remaining free and to resist sinking back into slavery (Gal 4:9). Though the audience possesses the knowledge of the gospel message, Paul reminds them that they are not exonerated of the responsibility that he entrusted to them earlier in the letter. Rather, if they should choose to fail in their duties to God, they will no longer be free. Additionally, Paul invokes a metaphor by comparing the slave woman, Hagar, and the free wife of Abraham, Sarah. He points out that Hagar represents Mount Sinai, or the Jerusalem below, as one bearing children for slavery (Gal 4:24). She, and therefore Jerusalem, remain in slavery to the present time with her children (Gal. 4:25). Slavery, then, can also represent the obligations of the law, which Paul discusses in other parts of the letter. By virtue of the Jesus-group message, the Galatians should seek to overcome the obligations of circumcision and the law,

which are no longer required for the freeborn children of Sarah, or the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:26-7).

Finally, Paul concludes his discussion of slavery in Galatians with an appeal to the Galatians about the nature of their freedom. Christ set the Jesus-group members free, that they might be free. Thus, they should stand against the yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1), into which they can so easily slump, once more. Furthermore, there does exist a proper aspect in which one can exercise his/her freedom. Freedom should never be used as an opportunity for the flesh. Instead, Jesus-group members should willingly exercise their freedom to become enslaved to one another through love (Gal. 5:13). Thus, the greatest and most proper decision for a Jesus-group member, regardless of societal standing, is to act towards the good of another in a state of complete and total submission.

The letter to the Philippians begins with Paul's immediate self-identification of himself and Timothy as slaves to all of the holy ones of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:1). This designation poses a rather interesting dilemma for the audience at Philippi because it implies fairly straightforwardly that Paul and Timothy are doing the will of Christ in serving those to whom they submit, and that those with whom Paul and Timothy disagree or those they choose not to serve are not truly holy ones! Thus, in designating themselves as slaves to the holy ones, Paul and Timothy actually assert their authority over and against dissenting members of the Philippian Jesus-group. The next appearance of slave, though, is perhaps the most perplexing in its implications, as it comes during the Kenotic Hymn. Quoted in full, it reads "Rather, he emptied himself, / Taking the form of a *slave*, / Coming in human likeness, / and found human in appearance" (Phil. 2:7). Though the theological implications of even this single verse are vast, we shall concern ourselves with the immediate problems posed by the peculiarity of the inclusion of the term slave. To become a slave is clearly a matter of emptying and humbling, for one so worthy as Jesus, but how does it compare for other human beings? Paul equates the idea of the form of a slave and the likeness of a human. To be human, therefore, is to be a slave. Paul's basic understanding of anthropology is summed up in the implications of this single verse: that the natural state of a human being is in slavery. Finally, to serve as the opposite end of this three-part chiasmic structure concerning slavery, Paul speaks of Timothy's willingness to serve as a slave to Paul, as though he were Timothy's own father, for the sake of the gospel. Thus, human beings, even and especially members of the Jesus-groups, must imitate the example of Jesus in being willing to be a slave for the sake of the gospel.

The letter of Philemon, though about a slave, possesses only two occurrences of the term slave, both in the same sentence. Even though the letter is short, this is a rather strange phenomenon. Through the letter, Paul asks Philemon

to receive Onesimus, no longer as a slave but as something more than a slave, as a brother (Philemon 16). Paul only includes the idea of Onesimus as a slave when referencing how Philemon likely views Onesimus but ought not to view him. In other instances, Paul refers to Onesimus as his child (Philemon 10), his own heart (Philemon 12), as a brother beloved by Paul (Philemon 16), and as a man in the Lord (Philemon 16). Thus Paul deconstructs the inappropriate hierarchies of his contemporary Jesus-groups. A member of the Jesus-group ought to view another ingroup member as a brother, regardless of social standing. Thus, sociologically, Paul views slavery in a negative light, since it validates one ingroup member's active choice to treat another ingroup member in a way that does not properly reflect the charity or fraternity sought within the group.

The letter to the Romans begins unlike any other, in that Paul references himself both as an apostle and a slave (Rom. 1:1). Though Paul often references himself as an apostle when he seeks to defend his authority, or as a slave when he wishes to question the commitment of Jesus-group members, he chooses both titles to introduce himself to the Jesus-group that he does not know, the Romans. Later in the letter, Paul speaks about the common beliefs held between him and the Romans, namely that the old self was crucified in the sinful body for freedom from slavery to sin (Rom. 6:6). Then, he uses seven different slavery words in quick succession (Rom. 6:16-20, 22). Paul defines slavery as being obedient, or a slave, towards the one to whom an individual is obedient (16). Thus, once the Jesus-group members were slaves to sin; since, human beings have always sinned (17). Having been entrusted with the teaching of the gospel message, an ingroup member has been freed from slavery to sin and has become a slave of righteousness (18). Whereas once they presented their bodies as slaves to impurity and lawlessness, now they may present their bodies as slaves to righteousness for sanctification (19). The body then, as asserted similarly in 1 Cor. 9:27, reveals the inner workings and desires of the spirit, in that what one turns towards will be underscored in one's actions. When human beings were enslaved to sin, they believed themselves "freed" from righteousness (20). The gospel message has ensured that, being freed from sin, human beings became slaves of God to be sanctified and have eternal life (22). Slavery exists as the normal state of existence for human beings, thus granting further insight into Paul's understanding of anthropology. The positive-negative differentiation of slavery will only turn on that to which one is enslaved. Jesus-group members should strive to be slaves to God, instead of marinating in their own perceived freedom, which Paul asserts to more closely resemble slavery to sin than any notion of freedom.

This understanding of slavery to sin may also very easily be extended to Paul's discussion of the law. The law was the force that long held captive the Jews,

especially since the law exhibited itself as unnaturally complex and often contradictory. In being crucified with Christ, not only do the Jesus-group members die to sin, but they also die to the law, which exists only for the living (Rom. 7:1). Jesus-group members are released from the law, which held them captive, so that they may once more enslave themselves in the newness of the spirit (Rom. 7:6). Furthermore, Paul recognizes the difficulty that one may have when trying to escape the slavery to which they have been subjected without the help of God. Paul thanks God, through Jesus Christ, that he may enslave himself to the law of God with his mind, even if his flesh should remain enslaved to the law of sin (Rom. 7:25). Again, God did not give the Jesus-group members a spirit of slavery but one of adoption (Rom. 8:15). As pointed out in Gal. 4:7, God no longer treats human beings as slaves who have no relationship to the Father, except one of subjugation. Rather, he grants to them the glory of a spirit of adoption and a special role in the process of salvation, that the entirety of creation might be set free through them (Rom 8:21).

Paul furthers this understanding of creation's natural state of subjection and servitude through the law with the analogy of the story of Esau and Jacob. God granted that from the beginning of the relationship, the older brother, Esau, would be enslaved to the younger, Jacob (Rom. 9:12). For anyone who thinks that this decision by God is something done in an unjust manner, the natural state of slavery for human beings ensures that the only real justice would be to let creation wallow in its own sin. God provides mercy and pity of his own free will to someone regardless of what they have done (Rom. 9:15). Thus, God does not desire that a human being attempts, and Paul does not believe it to be possible, to save themselves by virtue of their works, especially works under the law. It is only through God's grace that one can be freed, and the Jesus-group members must accept that attitude of grace through their faith (Rom. 9:32). Therefore, the Jesus-group members cannot grow slack in their desire, but they must remain fervent in spirit as to enslave themselves to the will of the Lord (Rom. 12:11).

In this way, one must enslave oneself to the other ingroup members who accept the gospel if one seeks to please God and seeks the approval of other Jesus-group members (Rom. 14:18). Even though the Jesus-group members are freed from the obligations of the law, including food laws, they cannot use this newfound freedom as an opportunity for scandal or recreating the social hierarchies that the gospel message seeks to destroy (Rom 14:15). Since the Jesus-group is about unity and accord through love, a proper ingroup member must enslave him/herself to other members of the ingroup, lest he/she fracture the unity of the group. In the same vein of thought, Paul concludes his letter with an assertion that those who enslave themselves to their appetites, and not Christ or, by

extension, other members of the Jesus-group, deceive the hearts of the innocent and create dissension. Paul argues that the only legitimate purpose for being enslaved to, or enslaving oneself to, other ingroup members is to ensure that a Jesus-group member serves God by serving the unity of the ingroup. Never should an ingroup member be enslaved for the sake of preserving lifestyles that are not conducive to the gospel message.

In the authentic Pauline texts of 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, and Romans, Paul has two distinct elements to his understanding of slavery: anthropological and sociological. As first implied in Galatians and Philippians, and further explored in the letter to the Romans, Paul understands slavery to be an inherent aspect of life as a human being. God took the Jesus-group members who were slaves to the elemental forces or their own sin in the flesh and made them heirs worthy of the grace and goodwill of God, though they remained in a natural state of subjection, as does an heir (Gal. 4:1-9). Similarly, the Kenotic Hymn describes the humility of Jesus in becoming human, which requires him to take the form of a slave, equating the idea of human nature and slave nature (Phil 2:7). Slavery to sin is not a state in which God does or an individual ought to wish a human being to exist (Rom. 6:17), and God frees human beings for this reason (Rom. 8:15). God does not free human beings that they might do whatever they wish to do (Rom. 7:6). The freedom attained by the sacrifice of the cross and the gospel message requires a deep, slave-like commitment.

The sociological understanding of slavery for Paul, then, pivots on Philemon. Only in the letter of Philemon does Paul directly address the question of a human being possessing the status of slave, and he does so rather unusually. Paul never once addresses Onesimus as a slave. Rather, he addresses Onesimus with four different titles arising out of the fraternal tradition of the Jesus-group (Philemon 10, 12, and 16). The only time that Paul uses the word slave to describe Onesimus is when he refers to the mindset of a slave-owner, who also is a member of the Jesus-group. Perhaps, then, the interpretive key to Paul's sociological understanding of slavery is the example of Onesimus. Perhaps, a Jesus-group member should not be subjected completely and totally to another ingroup member. Almost certainly, Paul seeks to reestablish the way in which ingroup members ought to relate, eschewing elements of subjugation and marginalization, and addressing the obvious tension of a Jesus-group member who fails to treat all other ingroup members with love. All of the instances when Paul requires the Jesus-group members to enslave themselves to one another apply unequivocally, regardless of perceived social standing in the Roman tradition.

Deutero-Pauline Usage of the *δοῦλος*

Ironically enough, the Deutero-Pauline and Pastoral traditions accept Paul's anthropological understanding of slavery, but they use it to justify a sociological understanding of slavery, which runs counter to Paul's own message.

Ephesians only has one major series of appearances of the term slave (four in all,) and this series also constitutes the first appearance of what has come to be known in contemporary scholarship as the "Household Codes."²³ The author of Ephesians exhorts obedience from slaves towards their masters, with fear and trembling, as to Christ (Eph. 6:5). The only other occurrence of this phrase "fear and trembling" in the entirety of the Pauline corpus appears when Paul seeks to explain to the Philippians the attitude one must take towards achieving salvation (Phil. 2:12). In so equating the two concepts Deutero-Paul asserts that the only way for a slave to work out his salvation is to serve his master as if he were Christ! One must serve their master as a slave of Christ (Eph. 6:6), from within the will of the heart, enslaving oneself to the Lord and not human beings (Eph. 6:7), as if to enslave oneself to a master is not to be enslaved to a human being but to the Lord God. Furthermore, the good that is done will be requited, implying reciprocation as salvation, whether one is enslaved or free (Eph. 6:8). Combining this statement with the following idea, that even the masters have the same Master in heaven as their slaves (Eph. 6:9), ensures that some form of an understanding of the anthropological account of universal slavery survives. There still exists, however, a stark contrast in the forms that slave-like obedience must take. Sociologically, slaves are to show total obedience and submission, which Paul held as only appropriate towards God; while, masters need only show some form of sympathy towards their slaves. The contrast between Paul's sociological understanding of slavery and that of Deutero-Paul results in a clear hierarchy within the community, which Paul constantly argued against in his letters to the Jesus-groups.

Colossians possesses a more fluid and ambiguous understanding of slavery that, while more developed than the Deutero-Pauline one in Ephesians, still stands in stark contrast to the authentic Paul. The Thanksgiving opening of the letter speaks of a slave, Epaphras, beloved in the community (Col. 1:7). Though he is a slave, Epaphras is also a minister within the community, capable and with authority. That he reports to Deutero-Paul and is granted authority within the community appears to offer some hope that the author of this letter possesses a more robust Pauline understanding of slavery. Furthermore, there are to be no

²³ Brad Ronnell Braxton, , *The Tyranny of Resolution: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 239.

distinctions in Christ, even between slave and free (Co. 3:11). This harkens back to the Pauline assertion in Gal. 3:28 that states that Christ is the unifying force of the Jesus-group, such that distinctions cease to exist. Slaves, in their new selves, should not have to reduce their ability to serve God with meaningless and petty distinctions of the present age.

This apparently robust understanding of slavery in the Pauline tradition quickly takes a turn for the worse with the introduction of another series of Household Codes. Slaves must obey their human masters in everything, as in their fear of the Lord (Col. 3:22). To respect and revere God is to serve one's masters in all that they require. Furthermore, due payment of the inheritance shall come from the Lord, if one is a slave to Christ, in this manner (Col. 3:24). The salvation of slaves is held for ransom, and the ransom that each slave must pay is total obedience to an earthly master as if such a master were his heavenly one, in direct contradiction of Paul's claim that to seek to please others is akin to not pleasing God. Colossians, just like Ephesians, possesses a short exhortation from Deutero-Paul towards the slave-masters: that they must treat slaves well, knowing that they both share "a Master in heaven" (Col. 4:1). The same trick occurs in noting that Deutero-Paul has substituted the anthropological Pauline understanding of slavery as a freeing aspect in the sociological state of affairs. Deutero-Paul redefines Paul's ideal relationship structure, enabling him to use an anthropological understanding of universal slavery to God to justify a sociological state of slave-master relationships.

The Household Code of Colossians serves as an interpretive key for the final two occurrences of the letter. Tychius, a beloved brother, trustworthy minister, and slave of the Lord, will deliver this letter and news about the Deutero-Pauline leader of the Jesus-group (Col. 4:7). The clear implication of the term slave is an anthropological one, namely that anyone who serves God in a noteworthy manner possesses the honorific "slave of God." The second occurrence, which once again mentions Epaphras, finished the chiasmic structure of slavery that began the letter. The first full half of the verse says, "Epaphras sends you his greetings; he is one of you, a slave of Christ, always striving for you in his prayers" (Col. 4:12). The grammar for this verse is crucial to its interpretation, though, because it is fully a matter of interpretation for the translator, since Greek manuscripts were written without punctuation marks. Though a possible reading would posit that Epaphras is a slave just like members of the ingroup, another less charitable phrase would be more consistent with the ideas of the Household Codes. The first reading involves Epaphras as a slave in an anthropological sense. The Greek, however, could just as easily be rendered as implying that Epaphras the slave is from Colossus and does

not necessarily denote any sort of equality between him and other Jesus-group members.

The Pastoral Epistles continue the trend begun by the Deutero-Pauline tradition of further devaluing the slave sociologically. Whereas the earlier Deutero-Pauline letters require that slaves be respected at least, regardless of position, 1 Timothy requisitions this requirement, stating that slaves must regard their masters as worthy of full respect (1 Tim. 6:1). Though an immediate issue with this requirement centers upon its unconditional nature as an imposition on the part of Jesus-group slaves, the author himself admits that slaves must only treat their master with full respect in order that Jesus-groups may not be viewed as counter-cultural and subversive (1 Tim. 6:1), though the gospel message must be so by its very nature. Furthermore, slaves with ingroup member masters must not take advantage of their masters as brothers, but the slaves must even treat them better than they would a non-ingroup master (1 Tim 6:2). These slaves must do so because all the community of believers will profit, which most likely means that the upper-class members will be able to partake of the ritual “table of the Lord,” without denying themselves any expected comforts or resorting to hierarchical upheaval. These two verses included several important implications and instances of how the Pastoral tradition of 1 Timothy has chosen to deny even the importance of an anthropological understanding of slavery, while upholding traditional social structures concerning slavery.

The only mention of slavery in 2 Timothy resembles more of an anthropological understanding of slavery than it does a sociological one, since it refers to teachers within the community. Teachers should not waste their time seeking to debate or defeat other members of the Jesus-groups (2 Tim 2:23). Those who consider themselves slaves of the Lord ought to seek out the act of teaching in a gentle manner, with an attitude of tolerance (2 Tim 24). The letter has no real argument about a sociological nature of slavery, as does 1 Timothy or the letter to Titus, nor does 2 Timothy introduce any ideas, which are substantially different.

The author of the letter to Titus introduces himself as Paul, a slave of God and an apostle for the sake of the chosen ones of God (Tit. 1:1). There is an immediate and clear difference between the author of this letter and those within the authentic Pauline tradition, in calling the ingroup members chosen ones instead of holy ones, identifying their electability instead of their actions. For the actions of an elect group need not be rationalized or defended, but those of the non-elect would be viewed with constant suspicion. The author of the letter also exhorts the older women of the community to seek not to be addicted [enslaved to] drink, that they might be capable of training young women (Tit. 2:3). Older women need to remain free from drink, that their example might train women to be under the

control of their husbands, again that the Jesus-group message might not be considered counter-cultural (Tit. 2:5). Additionally, slaves should be under control of their masters in all respects (Tit. 2:9). To refrain from disrespecting their masters would be to adorn the doctrine of God (Tit. 2:10) by refraining from being part of a counter-cultural message in a way that would attract unwanted attention to the Jesus-group message.

The letter to Titus denies the robust anthropological understanding of slavery. The author seeks to elucidate the Christian message as a reason to remain within the boundaries of culture, even if the earlier Pauline tradition sought to be counter-cultural. Only in the finale of the letter does the author of the Pastoral tradition mention that human beings, prior to the arrival and consummation of God's salvific work, were enslaved to their desires and pleasures (Tit. 3:3). The anthropological understanding of slavery reappears as the author recognizes that humans beings without the love of God (Tit. 3:4), which saves human beings (Tit. 3:5), cannot overcome themselves. He does not, however, imply that, being freed from the desires of the flesh, human beings ought to enslave themselves to God.

The traditions of Deutero-Paul and the Pastoral Epistles exemplify the degree to which the Christian message can be watered down and corrupted by Jesus-group members as they re-assimilated to the Greco-Roman society they once detested. Both traditions seek to prove that slavery is a worthwhile and honorable status within the tradition, capable of delivering salvation to those who seek to honor and respect their masters. Nowhere in this sociological understanding of slavery does there arise any implication that slaves should not be subjugated to other ingroup members. Nor does there exist an element of inert-ingroup enslavement, regardless of social status. The only major difference between these two traditions is how the anthropological Pauline understanding of slavery is treated. Since the Pastoral Epistles have only a minute understanding that all human beings are slaves by nature, it does not propose that powerful ingroup members remain slaves to God or their sins. The Deutero-Pauline tradition does suggest that all human beings are slaves by birth, freed from this natural effect by God, but never does it indicate that one should re-enslave one's self to a more honorable cause, be it other ingroup members or God. Thus, in their construction and usage of earlier Pauline images and vocabulary, the post-Pauline epistles validate and provide theological basis for social norms in an effort to preserve the growing acceptance of Christianity in temporality, as opposed to remaining counter-cultural.

Understanding Paul in Conjunction with Contemporary Theology

As most fields of theology have a deep-rooted integration of Paul, anything as radical as a new understanding of Paul's sociological theories would have powerful ramifications. Of all sociological theologies, liberation theology stands to benefit to the greatest degree. Liberation theology arises out of the Gospel "revealing to [human beings] their vocation as children of God...elicit[ing] in the hearts of mankind [sic] a demand and a positive will for a peaceful and just fraternal life in which everyone will find respect and the conditions for spiritual as well as material development."²⁴ In other words, liberation theology attempts to remind contemporary society that a Christianized world would seek the justice and love of the Gospel message for all human beings, without attributing sickness, poverty, and premature death to Pelagian notions of personal sins and failures. In this way liberation theology proves a powerful counter to the Protestant work-ethic and other elements of capitalism in the developed West. Additionally, liberation theology, while not necessarily mainstreamed in the affluent countries of the West, affects theological discourse in traditionally marginalized countries and regions, most notably Latin America.²⁵ What some deem the Catholic version of post-colonialism,²⁶ liberation theology seeks to undo the injustices of the aforementioned forces of capitalism in the West.

One of the major barriers to liberation theology is a traditional and somewhat flawed understanding of the Pauline corpus as written entirely by Paul and, therefore, proof that the Church should seek to defend the social and gender roles or norms each society proposes in its cultural context. With the advent of third wave feminism in the West, particularly its manifestation in the United States, many Scriptural texts were subjected to the historical-critical technique in order to determine whether or not Christianity could exist peacefully with greater autonomy for traditionally marginalized groups, such as women and minorities.²⁷ The results were very hopeful. They affirmed a more liberating understanding of the human person, both within the tradition and the texts themselves.²⁸ In several ways this new phenomenon could be applied to Paul, both in re-interpreting the ways the Pauline corpus has been misinterpreted by those who wished to engender or sustain inhumane practices, as well as to determine how to ascertain Biblical defensibility for modern liberation movements. The discovery of the authentic

²⁴ *Instructions on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation* (Catholic Church: Congregation pro Doctrina Fidei, 1984) 194-204.

²⁵ Fiorenza, Francis Schüssler, *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011) 47.

²⁶ Gutiérrez, Gustavo, *Theology of Liberation* (Orbis Books, 1988).

²⁷ Fiorenza, *Systematic* 48.

²⁸ Fiorenza, *Systematic* 49.

Pauline sociological and anthropological understandings of slavery provides for a more robust understanding of the earlier Christian Church as an institution that sought to undermine hierarchical distinctions embedded within society. Furthermore, the knowledge that the Household Codes existed to counteract the early Roman notions of the strange and counter-cultural nature of Christianity proves paramount to reinterpreting Paul. Christianity in the contemporary sphere can perhaps better enable liberation theologians to undo and deconstruct these societal presuppositions built from misinterpretation of the gospel message by ancient Biblical authors and modern scriptural exegetes. Liberation theology has the most to gain from Paul because it seeks to undermine any “improper Christianity” resulting from poor exegetical discourse, which engenders a theology of marginalization and disregard for the poor and downtrodden members of society.