

This chapter uses the figure of slavery because of its familiarity to the readers. Modern Americans, thankfully, have no direct contact with the institution of slavery and little if any knowledge of slavery in ancient Roman.

Roman slavery was not based on the detestable assumptions of racial inferiority that were used to justify slavery in America. Slaves were a different class but not considered a lower breed of humans. In the early days of the empire, most slaves arrived in Rome as captives from the conquered lands. Many had been soldiers, although the Romans learned the dangers of enslaving fighting men when a slave revolt under Spartacus shook the empire in 73 B.C.

Greek slaves in particular were valued for their learning and assumed the role of tutors in wealthy households. The schoolmaster or guardian used as an example in Galatians 3:24 would probably have been a Greek slave.

Roman slaves were the “employees” of the factories at that time and were often paid wages, which they could use to buy their freedom. Or their masters might outright free them. “Manumission” was common enough that the government had to limit it to keep a suitable supply of slaves. Freedmen were common among the populace and some former slaves even served as top officials under the emperor Claudius.

But many slaves suffered under harsh masters. And even those with relatively humane masters had no freedom. Complete obedience or dreadful consequences was the rule. The appalling practice of crucifixion was reserved for slaves, rebels, or bandits.

The chapter gives you a choice of two masters. One gives the illusion of freedom but actually holds you in terrible bondage. The other master makes you free to cheerfully obey. What are the two masters?

Questions:

1. Chapter 3 lists ways members of our bodies can be presented to sin. Describe a way each of them could instead be presented as an instrument for righteousness.
2. What is the basic function required of any slave, according to these verses?
3. In the figure that Paul uses, we see a slave who does not realize he has been sold to a new master and mistakenly reports for duty to the old master. Who are the masters and how does this apply to the Christian?

4. What is the one act of obedience in this portion that sets us free from sin? What or whom do we obey?
5. What fruit do people think they get from unrighteous deeds? How do they lead to “death”?
6. According to verse 22, what are the benefits or fruits of having transferred our obedience to God?
7. Verse 23 is frequently used as a gospel verse. Is it an appeal to the unbeliever, or is it for believers?