

## Son or Slave?

### R12.2 August 2025 Blog

**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.**

**(John 1:12 NASB1995)**

**Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.**

**(Ephesians 6:5-8 NASB1995)**

Most Christians will easily acknowledge the truth in John 1:12. Once they received Christ, not only were the penalties for their sins paid in full, but they also became an adopted child of God. They are now seen differently by their Heavenly Father. They have a loving relationship with Him in this life as well as in eternity.

Something else happens with this conversion, though. Ephesians 6:6 says that we also are to live our lives as slaves or servants of Christ, depending on the translation. In our hearts, we now have no choice but to do the will of God just as a servant had no choice but to do the will of their earthly masters.

How can we be both an heir to Our Lord and His slave? Those two ideas don't fit well in today's culture or language. However, it is important that we understand and live out both truths.

'Heir' has a very positive connotation and is generally culturally and grammatically the same now as it was when these words were written. 'Slave', on the other hand, has a justifiably negative connotation to it in today's world. However, we don't want to be shy about God's Word, and we certainly don't want to change it to accommodate current culture. We want to present it with the proper context and clarity to avoid any misunderstandings.

The Greek word Paul used is 'doulos'. It is translated as slave, servant, or bondservant depending on the verse and translation. Strong's defines the word as *"a slave (literally or figuratively, involuntarily or voluntarily; frequently therefore in a qualified sense of subjection or subserviency): - bond (-man), servant."* Today, our modern American ear hears a negative word describing a person subjected to terrible captivity, bigotries and atrocities. We have trouble imagining the use of the word for any other relationship.

But as we study God's Word, our focus should be on the Greek word, 'doulos', and its meaning as a form of obligatory servanthood keeping it separate from our American history experience. You will see that I've used the words 'slave' and 'servant' interchangeably throughout this blog just as 'doulos' is translated as both words throughout all common Bible translations.

Being an 'heir', called a child of God, feels good. It's encouraging. There is this overwhelming feeling of security in believing this truth. But often, we are too quick to claim just our sonship at the exclusion of being His slave/servant. I see it throughout the church.

Why are we so reluctant to call ourselves slaves of Christ, to see ourselves as His slaves, and behave as such?

In the Old Testament, when the appropriate time came to be free, a Hebrew slave could choose to remain a slave because they loved their master (Exodus 21:2-5, Deuteronomy 15:12-16). Being a servant doesn't sound like a pleasant life, title or experience. And truth be told, who wants to refer to themselves or see themselves as a slave? Is it that we can't comprehend what a slave is? Is it too uncertain and consequently results in fear? Is there too much at stake?

I don't recall the writers of the New Testament referring to themselves as a son of God. Undoubtedly, they knew that as believers in Christ they had become sons of God. But they also refer to themselves as a prisoner as well as a slave/bond servant for Christ. Is this level of subjection or subserviency too much for us to endure?

We have been bought with a price. Romans 6:16 declares that we are either slaves to sin or slaves to obedience resulting in righteousness. We never cease being slaves. Only our master changes. Everyone is a slave to either sin or Christ. Let that sink in.

It's easier to call ourselves children of God. But we must be servants, too. How else will we be obedient in forgiving when forgiveness is the last thing on our mind and not what we think the other person deserves?

I hear people say: I obey God because I love Him. Did you love your parents? Did you always obey them? Do you love your wife and your kids? Have you ever lied to them?

If Biblical love is our only motivation for obeying God, do we fully understand it? For instance, do we fully understand Paul's admonitions in 1 Corinthians Chapter 13? There's one that feels like I'm groping blindly in the dark: "love is not provoked" (1 Cor. 13:5b). What?

If I don't truly grasp Biblical love, how can that be the only guide for my actions? How can I, as a son, obey my dear Lord and Savior based on my love for Him during a difficult situation in which obeying Him is the last thing that I want to do?

Have you ever been unwilling to pay the price of obedience? A slave has no rights except those given to him by his master. This is a paradigm shift. It's a critical change in our thinking that puts us in the safest place we could ever desire. A place where obedience to your Lord is the only option. If you leave me to it, I will reason myself out of a difficult act of obedience.

I realize at this point some of you may say, "Rubbish, Scripture tells you that you're a son and that's what you are!" And because Scripture says it, I have no problem with that statement.

I've noticed that my team at work usually only give me the best-case and medium-case scenarios when they make proposals. They seldom give me the worst-case scenario. I must remind them that we cannot enter a business deal without being willing to accept the worst-case outcome. It may still have merit, but you must be ready for the worst.

As a son of the living God, what could be the worst-case outcome? I don't know. But we know what it was for our Lord and Savior, the one and only Son: accusations, insults, humiliation, sweat like blood, desertion, unimaginable physical pain and separation from His Father. His response: "yet not My will, but Yours be done," (Luke 22:42b). Sonship comes with a price you may not be willing to pay unless you obligate yourself to be His slave.

Here is how I reconcile being both an heir and a slave. He loves me as a son. I refer to Him as Father. The best that I can hope for is to love my Master enough, like that Hebrew slave, so that I want to be His slave. I can't be anything but His servant. I think and act as He directs me. I wake up every morning reminding myself of who I am, purposing to obey His will and not my own. To quote Jerry Bangert: "the best aspiration a man can have in this life is to be the obedient slave of Christ."