

Religious Hucksters Use Their Environment of Freedom as a Veil for Evil but Its Intended Use Is to become a Willing Slave of God, 1 Pet 2:15; “Doulos,” Often Translated “Servant,” Is Best Rendered “Bondslave”; Deissmann’s Etymology of the Term

The veil not only refers to establishment freedoms but also as the façade of an apparently legitimate Christian organization doing the work of the Lord. Behind visual and rhetorical veils, the huckster conceals while advancing his hidden agenda: to line his pockets by deluding the dimwitted.

The proper use of the believer’s environment of freedom concludes the verse beginning with the alternative conjunction **ἀλλά, alla**: which marks opposition, antithesis, or transition and is translated “but.”

The concept of using one’s environment of freedom to serve the Lord ends the verse with the words **δοῦλος, doulos**, plus **θεός, Theos**: “servants of God.”

The question arises as to how one can be free and still be a slave. It all has to do with the environment in which men function. We must be subject to one of two states of function: (1) the state of dictatorship as is imposed by the tyranny of the sin nature and utilized by Lucifer to achieve his nefarious ends or (2) the state of freedom that is made available through Christ and after whom we must follow in order to realize His greatest desire for us not only in time but also in eternity.

This concept of a slave manumitted from the tyranny of the Dark Side into “His marvelous light” is a concept Paul and Peter developed from the culture of the time in which they wrote. They used a common custom of the heathen world to illustrate our Lord’s purchase of the lost out from the slave market of sin. Details are provided by Adolf Deissmann from his *Light from the Ancient East*:

Recent discoveries have made it possible to reconstruct large portions of Hellenistic popular law, which was previously known only in miserable fragments, and this gives us an uncommonly valuable means of judging some of the figurative religious language of primitive Christianity. It has of course long been known, and monographs have been written to prove, that Paul was strongly influenced by legal ideas; but the fact was not sufficiently accounted for by comparisons either with Roman or with Jewish law. We now receive help of a far different order from the law that was alive in the popular consciousness up and down the Hellenistic area in which the New Testament originated. A few examples will confirm this statement. (pp. 318–19)

The stupendous force of dogmatic tradition, and the fact that the word *slave* has been translated *servant*, to the total effacement of its ancient significance, in our Bibles, have brought it about that one of the most original and at the same time most popular appraisals of the work of Christ by Paul and his school has been only vaguely understood among us. I refer to the metaphor of our redemption by Christ from the slavery of sin, the law, idols, men, and death—a metaphor influenced by the customs and technical formulae of sacred manumissions in antiquity. I would like to illustrate a little more particularly this instance of Paul’s having been influenced by the popular law of the world in which he lived. (pp. 319–20)

Inscriptions at Delphi have been the principle means of enlightening us concerning the nature and ritual of manumission with a religious object in ancient times. The French archaeologists have discovered and published a large number of records of manumission relating to several different centuries, and particularly to that one which gave rise to the New Testament. After two thousand years the records stand to-day almost uninjured on the polygonal retaining wall of the temple of Apollo [at Delphi], the blocks of which seem, despite their bulk, to have collectively the effect of a poem in stone. Climbing greenery and blue blossoms greet you from the joints of the stone if you read the texts in springtime. (pp. 320–21)

But these are not records of something peculiar to Delphi. Manumission on religious grounds was practised all about Parnassus \pär-na'-sas\ and probably throughout ancient Greece, and it even made its way into Jewish and Christian ecclesiastical custom. We find this sacred kind of manumission among Jews ... in two stone records from Panticapaeum \pan-ta-ka-pē'-am\, the first of which can be certainly dated 81 A.D.; and there is a record of great interest from Gorgippia, 41 A.D., referring to the cult of “the Most High God.” These Jewish and Judaeo-pagan records are of great importance in our problem, as sure proofs of the influence of the pagan rite on Jewish Hellenism in the time of the apostle Paul. Finally, it has long been recognized by experts that “manumission in the church” was nothing but a Christianised form of the old Greek custom. (pp. 322–23)

But between the Greek usage and the practice of the early Church there stands Paul, who made the ancient custom the basis of one of his profoundest contemplations about the Christ.

What was this custom? Among the various ways in which the manumission of a slave could take place by ancient law we find the solemn rite of fictitious purchase of the slave by some divinity. The owner comes with the slave to the temple, sells him there to the god, and receives the purchase money from the temple treasury, the slave having previously paid it in there out of his savings.

The slave is now the property of the god; not, however, a slave of the temple, but a protégé of the god. Against all the world, especially his former master, he is a completely free man.

The rite takes place before witnesses; a record is taken, and often perpetuated on stone.

The usual form of these documents must have been extremely well known, because they are so numerous. It is like this:—

Date. “N.N. sold to the Pythian Apollo a male slave named X.Y. at a price of—minae¹, for freedom (or on condition that he shall be free).” Then follow any special arrangements and the names of the witnesses. (p. 322)

Another form, which occurs less frequently, is “sale to the god as trustee.” An inscription of 200–199 B.C. on the polygonal wall at Delphi may serve as an example:—

¹ “μνᾶ, [mna], a sum of money, also = 100 drachmae. (Semitic word, cf. Hebrew *maneh*)” (Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* [Chicago: Oxford University Press, 1968], 1138).

Date. Apollo the Pythian *bought* from Sosibius of Amphissa \am-fi'-sa), *for freedom*, a female slave, whose name is Nicaea, by race a Roman, *with a price* of three minae of silver and a half-mina. The purchase Nicaea hath committed unto Apollo, *for freedom*.

Paul is alluding to the custom referred to in these records when he speaks of our being made free by Christ. By nature we are *slaves* of sin (Romans 6:17, 20), of men (1 Corinthians 7:23), of death (Romans 8:20f); the Jew is furthermore a *slave* of the law (Galatians 4:1–7), the heathen a *slave* of his gods (Galatians 4:8, 9). We become *free men* by the fact that Christ *buys* us. And He has done so:—“Ye were bought with a price,” says Paul in two places (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23), using the very formula of the records, “with a price.” Again, “For freedom did Christ set us free (Galatians 5:1), ... you were called for freedom” (Galatians 5:13)—in these words of Paul we have literally the other formula of the records. (pp. 323–24)

Christians cannot become slaves of men because they have become “slaves of Christ” by purchase, and have entered into the “slavery of God: or “of righteousness” (Romans 6:22, 18). But, as in every other case of purchase by a god, the slave of Christ is at the same time free: indeed, he is “the Lord’s (*i.e.* Christ’s) freedman” (1 Corinthians 7:22), even when in the outward meaning of the word he is the slave of a human lord.² (pp. 325–26)

The Greek of the last phrase of 1 Peter 2:16 is **δοῦλοι Θεοῦ, *douloi Theou*** is translated the “servants of God” by the KJV and the NIV; “bondslaves of God” by the NASB, and “God’s slaves” by the NET. The base idea from the culture of the first century is *slave* not *servant*, a point emphasized by a footnote in the NET Bible at 2 Peter 2:16:

Traditionally, “servants” or “bondservants.” Though **δοῦλος (*doulos*)** is normally translated “servant,” the word does not bear the connotation of a free individual serving another. BAGD [Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker’s *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*] notes that “‘servant’ for ‘slave’ is largely confined to Biblical translations and early American times ... in normal usage at the present time the two words are carefully distinguished” (BAGD 205 s.v.). The most accurate translation is “bondservant” (sometimes found in the ASV for **δοῦλος**), in that it often indicates one who sells himself into slavery to another. But this is archaic, few today understand its force.

Undoubtedly the background for the concept of being the Lord’s slave or servant is to be found in the Old Testament scriptures. For a Jew this concept did not connote drudgery, but honor and privilege. It was used of national Israel at times (Isaiah 43:10), but was especially associated with famous Old Testament personalities, including such great men as Moses (Joshua 14:7), David (Psalm 89:3 cf. 2 Samuel 7:5, 8) and Elijah (2 Kings 10:10); all these men were “servants (or slaves) of the Lord.”³

² Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1927; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 318–26.

³ *NET Bible* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2001) 2259n26.

The key concept to understand from this is that when one believes in Christ he has the distinct honor and privilege of becoming a bonds slave of the God of the universe. Through His substitutionary sacrifice we have been bought out of the slave market of sin and have become His slaves commissioned to represent ourselves before Him as royal priests and to represent Christ before the world as royal ambassadors.

Therefore, the translation by the New American Standard comes closest to recognizing the force of the phrase:

1 Peter 2:16 - Act as men in a state of freedom, and do not use your environment of freedom as a veil for evil function, but use it as bondslaves [δούλος, *doulos*] of God.