

Dear Justme,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You wanted to know what the Bible had to say about slavery. You also asked if working for someone today would be considered slavery from the biblical standpoint.

The Bible does not specifically condemn the practice of slavery. It does, however, give instructions as to how slaves should be treated (Deuteronomy 15:12-15; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1). Many infer from the above references and other references as well (Leviticus and Philemon) that the Bible is condoning all forms of slavery. It is not. What people fail to understand is that slavery in biblical times was very different from the slavery practiced throughout the world during the last few centuries. In biblical times people were not enslaved because of their skin color or nationality. Slavery was more a matter of social status. People even sold themselves as slaves when they could not pay their debts or provide for their families. In New Testament times, some doctors, lawyers, and even politicians were slaves of someone else. Some people actually chose to be slaves so as to have all their needs provided for by their masters.

All of the above having been said, it is important to remember that the Bible does condemn race-based slavery. We need only to consider the slavery the Hebrews experienced when they were in Egypt. The Hebrews were slaves, not by choice, but because they were Hebrews (Exodus 13:14). The plagues God poured out on Egypt demonstrate how God feels about racial slavery (Exodus 7-11).

What does the Bible have to say about slavery? While the Bible condemns some forms of slavery, it also allows other forms. The key issue is that the slavery the Bible allowed for in no way resembled the racial slavery with which we identify. Furthermore, both the Old and New Testaments condemn the practice of "man-stealing," which is what happened in Africa when slave-traders rounded up Africans and brought them to the New World to work on plantations. Such a practice is abhorrent to God. The penalty for such a crime in Mosaic Law was death. "Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death" (Exodus 21:16). Similarly, in the New Testament, slave-traders are listed in the same category as murderers, adulterers, perverts, liars and perjurers (1 Timothy 1:8-10).

You also asked if working for someone today would be considered a form of slavery in biblical terms. No, we do not believe so, since workers receive payment for services rendered and have the freedom to leave a job whenever they so choose. Employees are not indentured servants who need to work for a period of time in order to pay off a debt.

A crucial point to remember is that slavery in the Bible is mostly of the indentured servitude variety and was most always on a term basis (seven years, fourteen years, etc.). It is also very important to remember that the purpose of the Bible is not to reform society now during this present evil age, but, instead, to point the way to salvation (either heavenly now for some or earthly later for the many) through the sacrifice of God's Son Jesus. Each of us is a captive (or a slave) to sin and in need of a redeemer. Jesus was that redeemer and was sent to release all captives from sin. "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn." (Isaiah 61:1-2) As a result of Jesus' incredible sacrifice all will be saved. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (John 3:16-17)

We hope we have answered your questions. If you would like more in-depth information on what the Bible has to say about slavery, go to our Christian Questions web site at [www.christianquestions.net](http://www.christianquestions.net) and click on "Archived Programs" on the left. Click on 2007 and scroll down to #450 (May 6, 2007) "Did God Ever Advocate Slavery?" While on our web site, be sure to sign up for CQ Rewind. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with scriptural perspective on many questions and topics.

Sincerely,

**Christian Questions Radio**