

## Study # 8

### Cruciformity as a Bond-Slave

The Greek word *δουλος* (*doulos* #1401) occurs frequently in the New Testament, referring usually to Jesus or His followers and is almost always translated “servant”. However, *δουλος* never refers to a hired servant, but “. . . a slave, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other . . . ”<sup>1</sup>

[W]hoever wants to become great among you must be your servant [*διακονος*], and whoever wants to be first must be **slave** [*δουλος*] of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45)

Here clearly, it is not a case of our direct replication of Jesus’ own unique action, for the preceding exhortation is not to death but to service, and in any case disciples are not able to give their lives as a ‘ransom for many’. . . Jesus’ death here is paradigmatic of a servant ‘culture’ that is to characterise his followers.<sup>2</sup>

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, . . . made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant [*δουλος* “**slave**”], being made in human likeness . . . he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:5-8)

Notice that Paul, James, Jude, Peter, John all call themselves “bond-slaves” of Jesus Christ. Our translations usually render *doulos* as “servant”, but “bond-slaves” is closer to the real meaning. (Rom. 1:1; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1:1; Rev. 1:1; etc.)

. . . When we understand the humbling and self-emptying that is involved in really being a servant, it becomes evident that only those who

---

<sup>1</sup>Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 483.

<sup>2</sup>L. W. Hurtado, “Jesus’ Death as Paradigmatic in the New Testament”, <http://www.ex.ac.uk/~mahigton/Hurtado.rtf>.

are prepared to live quite definitely under the shadow of Calvary, ever contemplating the humility and brokenness of the Lord Jesus for us, will be willing for that position.<sup>3</sup>

[Jesus was] without rights, willing to be treated as the will of the Father and the malice of men might decree, if only He might thereby serve men and bring them back to God. And you and I are to be bond-servants of Him . . .<sup>4</sup>

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb. 5:8, 9)

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing . . . (John 5:19)

I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him. (John 8:28, 29)

### **An Athlete as a Bond-Slave**

The metaphor of the training and competing of athletes is much like the previous picture of a slave, for the goal of winning is very much a master to which the athlete is enslaved.

Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. . . . I beat my body and make it my slave<sup>5</sup> so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Cor. 9:24b-27)

Notice how Jesus is our Example in His demonstration of the slave-like commitment, self-denial, and discipline of a champion Olympian marathon runner:

[L]et us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and **let us run with perseverance the race** marked out for us. **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for

---

<sup>3</sup>Hession, Roy, *The Calvary Road*, (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 2001), 56.

<sup>4</sup>Hession, Roy, *The Calvary Road*, 57.

<sup>5</sup>a compound using *doulos* – “to make a slave and to treat as a slave; i.e., with severity, subject to stern and rigid discipline” – *Strong’s Concordance*.

the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb. 12:1-3)

Paul takes up the challenge to run as Jesus did, willing even to die in His passion to be conformed to Jesus' sacrificial service:

. . . that I may boast on the day of Christ that **I did not run** or labor for nothing. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. (Phil. 2:16b, 17)

**I press on** to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. . . . Forgetting what is behind and **straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal** to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:12)

### **A Prisoner as a Bond-Slave**

Six times in his epistles, Paul calls himself a “prisoner” of Jesus Christ. Paul thus indicates his willingness to be like Jesus in accepting the humiliation and restrictions cruelly imposed on him by the Romans; but he stresses that they are not his real captors—he is bound primarily to Jesus. Considering that Paul links this metaphor with his apostolic service, we can infer that he had in mind the Romans' practice of forcing prisoners of war to labour as slaves, sometimes in a rock quarry, sometimes on long lines of oars in a warship. This picture of prisoners forced to do hard labour helps convey vividly the meaning of passages in which we find types of service linked with the verb *συνεχω* (*sunecho* #4912), which essentially means to “press/squeeze on every side” or “to hold fast as in arresting/imprisoning a criminal”.<sup>6</sup>

But I [Jesus] have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed **[captivated]** I am until it is completed! (Luke 12:50)

---

<sup>6</sup>*Online Bible*, Strong's #4912

. . . Paul devoted himself exclusively [**was captivated** in the Spirit] to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 18:5)

For Christ's love compels [**captivates**] us . . . We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5: 14a, 20)

Two other Greek verbs express a similar metaphor of capturing a prisoner:

(1) *καταλαμβάνω* (*katalambano* #2638) “to take hold of” as in capturing and binding a prisoner.<sup>7</sup>

(2) *διώκω* (*dioko* #1377) “to press on” or “pursue with the object of capturing”.<sup>8</sup>

I **press on** [*διώκω*] **to take hold of** [*καταλαμβάνω*] that for which Christ Jesus **took hold** [*καταλαμβάνω*] of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to **have taken hold of** [*καταλαμβάνω*] it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I **press on** [*διώκω*] toward the goal **to win** the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things . . .

Join with others in following my example, . . . (Phil. 3:12-17)

The next study contains more discussion on Jesus as an example of a bond-slave as we look at His incarnation and humility.

[BACK TO CONTENTS](#)

[TO STUDY #9](#)

---

<sup>7</sup>Online Bible, Strong's #2983

<sup>8</sup>Online Bible, Strong's #1377. See discussion on this Greek verb on page 19.