



### Titus 1:1-9

*Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness,<sup>2</sup> in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began<sup>3</sup> and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;*

*<sup>4</sup>To Titus, my true child in a common faith:*

*Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.*

*<sup>5</sup>This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—<sup>6</sup>if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers<sup>1</sup> and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup>For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,<sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup>He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

Karen got a new Bible this year that she really loves. It is the CSB translation, which is the 2017 version of the Holmen Christian Standard Bible. So they changed the name from HCSB to CSB. But they changed a lot more than that. One of the distinctives of the HCSB<sup>1</sup> was that they often translated the Greek word *doulos* as 'slave.' The word *doulos* can be translated either as servant or as slave. Both are appropriate at times.

A prime example is 1 Corinthians 7:22-23. Most translations translate *doulos* as slave. Only the ESV translates it as bondservant, which is really just a nice way of saying slave.

HCSB/NASB/NIV/NLT/CSB

For he who is called by the Lord as a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called as a free man is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

ESV

<sup>22</sup> For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. <sup>23</sup> You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men.

In this passage it makes perfect sense to translate *doulos* as slave because the context shows that Paul was writing about literal slavery. Paul was making a comparison between someone who became a believer when he or she was still a slave vs. the person who was not a slave—they were a “free man” when they got saved. To the first group Paul wrote, “For he who is called by the Lord as a slave is the Lord’s freedman.” In other words, even if you remain a slave after your conversion, spiritually speaking, you are a “freedman of the Lord.” Even though in daily life you are still bound to your master, in your heart and soul, you are free in Christ.

As we talk about slaves and slavery, it is always helpful to remember that slavery in the Roman world of the New Testament was much closer to indentured servitude than slavery from American history. It was not a race-based slavery that we are familiar with that treated human beings worse than animals. This is why some Bible translations, such as the ESV, which is what we have as pew Bibles, uses the word bondservant instead of slave. Let’s face it. In our culture, the words slave and slavery are loaded words. It’s hard to see the word slave in our Bible and not immediately conjure up images of the worst forms of brutality. Again, this is why the ESV prefers the word bondservant. Don’t get me wrong, it was involuntary servitude. Many were able to purchase their freedom but many would live their entire lives as slaves. Whether you call the person a slave or a bondservant, in both cases, they are bound to that person by a financial debt.

This is why Proverbs 22:7 puts things into perspective for all of us. “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender.” In this case you have a Hebrew word that can be translated as servant or as slave, but the majority of translations use the word slave. And how true this verse is, right? Borrowing creates a form of slavery and the more you borrow, the more enslaved you become. If you have \$100,000 in student loans and a \$200,000 mortgage, in what sense are you not enslaved to that debt and to that lender? Now we should not attempt to say that heavy borrowing is the same as chattel type slavery, but we can say that it is very similar to the slavery in the Bible. And we know this because the Bible itself is giving us this prime example.

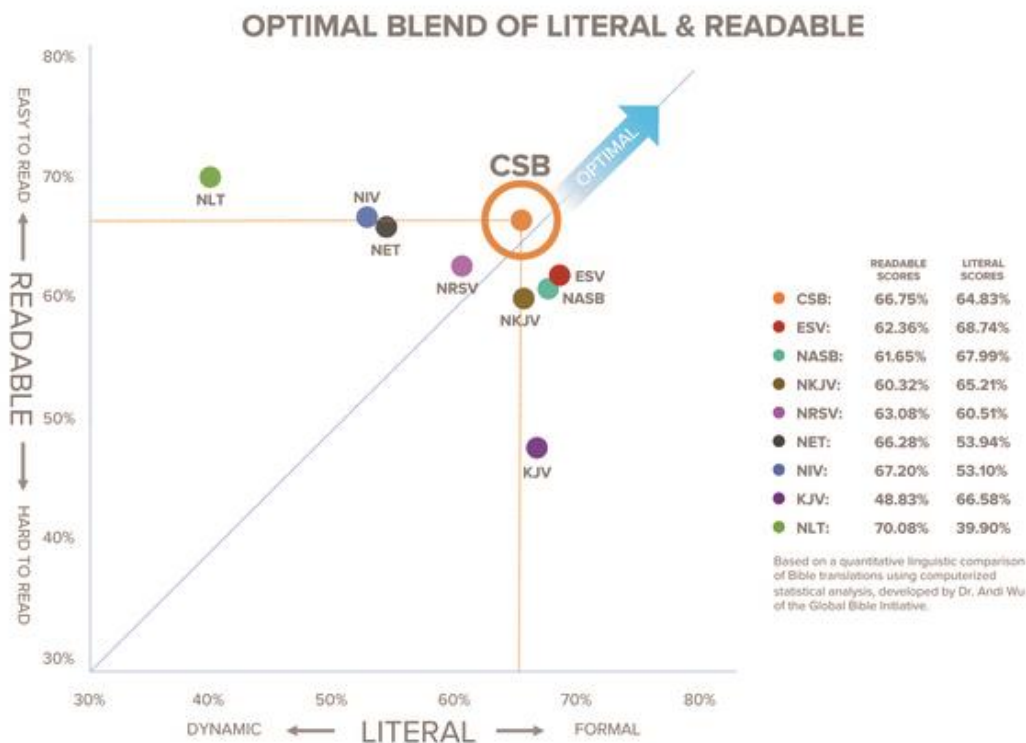
Thankfully we no longer have debtor’s prison and while I do not recommend it, there are extreme cases where filing for bankruptcy can get you out from under burdensome debt. Bankruptcy laws came into existence to help put an end to debtor’s prison, so there is some genuine justice built into the law, even though it is very often abused. But it’s almost impossible to file a bankruptcy claim for student debt. When we lived in Prairie du Sac, one day I opened our credit card bill and just about fell over when I saw the total due. It was almost \$80,000. So I yelled to Karen in the next room. “How much did you spend at Walmart last week?” I didn’t actually do that but pretty quickly I noticed that it belonged to one of my neighbors and the mailman had accidentally put the bill in our mailbox. Now what do you do with this bill? If I took the opened bill to my neighbor, he would know that I know that he has \$80,000 in credit card debt. If it had been any other type of mail or if I hadn’t opened it—and the only reason I opened it was because we both had the same credit card company—I would have returned it to him. But in this case, I threw it away.

But think about having a credit card bill of \$80,000. That is almost impossible to pay off. At the average interest rate for credit cards, if you paid \$1000 per month and if you never again spent a dime on credit cards, it would take you twenty years to pay it off. The Bible says that is a form of slavery. Having \$10,000 in credit card debt is servitude. Having \$80,000 is a type of slavery.

I want to step aside from the slavery servant discussion to say a few things about Bible translations. We've already seen how various translations handle certain words. It is a good reminder that translating the Bible is often more than just translating. It is also interpreting. The translators are making an interpretive decision when they decide between the word servant, bondservant or slave in Titus 1:1.

- ESV/NIV/CSB—a servant of God
- HCSB/NLT—a slave of God
- NASB—a bond-servant of God

Translation work is not always like this. The vast majority of the words and phrases are straightforward. However, there are times when a translation committee has to make a hard call and decide to go one direction or another. This verse is a great example of that. In a bit I'll explain why I think slave or bondservant is the best choice but first, let me show you a helpful chart on the various Bible translations.



This chart was developed by the CSB folks so it may have some inherent bias but by and large, I have found their conclusions to be true. The left axis shows the readability factor. When I got saved at age sixteen, the parents of the friend who helped lead me to the Lord gave me a King

James Bible with my name imprinted on it. I loved that Bible and it was the only thing I read for the first few years I was a believer. Sadly, I didn't read it that much but when I did, it was this King James. In fact, one day in college I decided I should memorize a Bible verse. I didn't know what I should memorize so I "randomly" pended my Bible to Romans 12 and memorized the first two verses.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Because this was the only Bible I had I did not realize how unreadable it was compared to more modern translations. Now I'm not knocking the King James. There is great beauty in the language that is lost in other versions but it's not an easy read. It is simply less readable than other versions.

At least according to this chart, the NLT, or New Living Translation is the most readable. Let's use the same two verses.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

It's interesting that the KJV has 59 words and the NLT has 87 words. This is fairly common in the more readable versions. They require more words and longer phrases to convey the same meaning. Because I memorized this passage in the KJV and for other reasons, I really don't care for the NLT translation. However, if you are a new believer or a young reader, there is no question that the NLT is easier to read.

But then notice the bottom axis which is a function of how literal of a translation it is. As you move to the right you get closer to a word for word translation and as you move to the left you get more a phrase by phrase translation, often called a dynamic equivalency. In general, more literal is preferred. In my opinion, literal equates to more accurate. But that is what causes it to be less readable, so there really is this tension between literal and readable. Because this chart was produced by the CSB, naturally they claim that the CSB is the ideal combination of literal and readable, thereby making it the preferred version. I haven't used this translation so I can't say for sure but even though I currently preach from the ESV, I have a slight preference for the NASB. As I prepare a message and compare versions, if the ESV is hard to read in a given passage, the NASB will sound better to me.

So at the end of the day, I have a slight preference for the NASB. The only translation I would encourage you to avoid is the 2011 NIV. So if you have an NIV Bible, check in the front to see if it is the 1984 version, which was good, or the 2011 version. Here are a couple of examples.

1 Timothy 2:12

1984 NIV I do not permit a woman to teach or **to have** authority over a man; she must be silent.

2011 NIV I do not permit a woman to teach or **to assume** authority over a man; she must be quiet.

This one is a clear example of promoting egalitarianism or what is often called evangelical feminism. It's a complicated explanation but take my word for it—this is a classic evangelical feminism inserted into a Bible translation. This is not just translation but heavy-handed interpretation. Several books have been written about just this one verse.

2 Samuel 23:8

1984 NIV These are the names of David's mighty **men**:

2011 NIV: These are the names of David's mighty **warriors**:

1 Kings 9:5

1984 NIV I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a **man** on the throne of Israel.'

2011 NIV I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a **successor** on the throne of Israel.'

In these two examples the NIV has substituted a gender-neutral word when the text and the context clearly require the words men and man. I fully support gender-neutral language when the context clearly allows it, such as in James 3:8. "For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue." Even the ESV translated the Greek word for man as "human being." That is perfectly fine, but the NIV plays fast and loose with gender-neutral language.

Now I want to get back to Titus 1:1, specifically the servant vs. slave topic. I think it is preferable to translate the word as slave and more importantly that we view ourselves as slaves of Christ. I believe this for several reasons.

1. Paul refers to believers as "slaves of Christ" in the passage we looked at earlier. "For he who is called by the Lord as a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called as a free man is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." So if Jesus refers to us as slaves we should not be afraid to own this role.
2. We are slaves because Jesus bought us with the cost of his own blood. "You were. bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." We don't want to think of this as a slave auction. but we do need to see it just as it is stated. All believers have been bought with a price.

3. Jesus said that God is our master. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24). A slave has a master. In our case, we have an infinitely benevolent master, who only intends our good.
4. Paul taught that believers are slaves to righteousness. “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18).
5. We will always be enslaved to something so it’s far better to be enslaved to Christ.
6. The greatest example of faith in Jesus’ day was the Roman centurion who recognized Jesus’ mastery over him. “For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”<sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith” (Matthew 9:9-10).
7. We can be a slave and a son at the same time. “Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God” (Galatians 4:7). In the first verse Paul said that he was a slave AND an apostle. BOTH can be true at the same time. He did not see his high calling as an apostle to be incongruent with being God’s slave. In fact, I would argue that the more we see ourselves as God’s slave, the more we will rest in our other role as sons and daughters.
8. Jesus can be both our master and our friend. “You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:14-15).

It might appear that Jesus moved us from the servant category to the friend category so certainly that means we are not slaves. However, look back at the first part. What kind of a “friend” obeys every command of another? This is not typical friendship at all. If you obeyed every command that your friend gave you, that would be a twisted and sick friendship. Friends don’t even give other friends commands let alone expect them to be obeyed. So this tells us that it is a very different kind of friendship. There is an intimate relationship here but it is still a subservient relationship.

Servant, Slaves or Sons? Yes, all three can be true and are true at the same time. It doesn’t matter if you use the word servant or slave as long as you realize that Jesus is your master in every possible way in every area of your life. To the extent that we realize this, this brings him glory and brings us great joy.

**Rich Maurer**  
**September 8, 2019**

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<sup>1</sup> In verses where Christian discipleship is in view, the HCSB rendered *doulos* as “slave” rather than the traditional “servant” or “bond-servant.” An example is Titus 1:1: “Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” This rendering is accurate from a lexicographical standpoint, and it conveys an important

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theological truth: we are bought at a price (1 Corinthians 6:20) <https://csbible.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Translation-Decisions-QA.pdf>