

## SERVANTS AND SLAVES

The Bible word for “servant” is “diakonos” from which we get our English word “deacon”. It comes from the word “dia” which means “thoroughly” and “konis” which means “dust”. The idea is that a faithful servant will kick up the dust as he hastens to obey his master. It is found 29 times in the N.T. Scriptures.

The Bible word for “slave” is “doulos”. It comes from the root word “deo” which means to “bind or fasten with chains”. It is found some 124 times in the N.T. Scriptures.

The difference between a “servant” and a “slave” is simple. The “servant” is “hired” by his master, and the “slave” is “owned” by his master. The “servant” has a choice, the “slave” doesn’t!

Both words apply to the followers of Jesus. When the mother of James and John asked that her sons have positions of honor on the right and left of Christ’s throne, it caused the ten to be moved with indignation against them. Then **“Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant (diakonos), and whosoever wants to be first must be your slave (doulos) – just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’” (Matt. 20:25-28).**

Jesus, as you know, became a slave. He did not count His equality with God something to be grasped, but willingly made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a “doulos” (slave) (Phil. 2:7).

Slaves were the lowest class in the Roman world. Even freed criminals had more rights. Slaves had no legal rights at all. They could not have a family or own property. To all intents and purposes they were owned by their masters like an animal or a piece of furniture. When Paul wrote to Rome it is estimated that 35% – 40% of the people in Italy were slaves. Disregarding the shame of slavery Paul began his letter to Rome by identifying himself as a “slave of Christ Jesus”. **“Paul, a servant (doulos -slave) of Christ Jesus” (Rom. 1:1).** As we have said, there is a difference between a servant and a slave. It is sad that the translators have chosen to translate “doulos” as “servant”. The citizens of Rome knew that Paul was a slave of Christ Jesus and we should know it too.

It is also clear that Paul expected all the followers of Christ to consider themselves as slaves: **“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness. But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:16-23).** Each of these underlined words is “doulos” not “diakonos”. As we have said, we are more than mere servants, we are slaves to Christ.

Paul explains the strategy of God like this: **“Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before him” (1 Cor. 1:26-29).**

The Law of Moses described two kinds of bondservants (See Ex. 21:2-6). One was a bondservant by law, and the other by love. The law slave had rights. After seven years he was set free. The love slave gave up his rights and loved his master so much that he wanted to be his slave forever! Christ became a love slave and God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him a name above every name (Phil. 2:9). When we became a love slave to God we will also be exalted (Lk. 14:11).