

A Biblical Perspective of Slavery

Slavery and the Spirit of Salem - Part 10 of 10 of a series

Published: Monday, 30 September 2019 14:11

by Mike Scruggs

Words: 1111



The ruins of Columbia, South Carolina, 1865

Slavery is part of world history, and it is an important part of American history. But slavery is one of the subjects Americans cannot have a frank discussion about. It is too wrapped in emotional, political, and ideological chains. On the subject of slavery, many Americans, especially in the media, academia, and politics, have succumbed to a form of ignorant hysteria comparable to the

A Biblical Perspective of Slavery

~~Salem Witch Trials. If you saw anything that contradicts the usual, required extreme image of Southern slavery, you are likely to be shouted down without any consideration of the facts.~~
Published: Monday, 30 September 2019 14:11

~~By Mike Scruggs~~
If you say anything that contradicts the heroic image of the “abolitionist” movement in pre-Civil War and Reconstruction America, you are also likely to be shouted down without regard to the facts. This leaves us in a dangerous intellectual, moral, and political straightjacket. But if we value truth and freedom, we need to look at unadulterated and un-whitewashed truth no matter how loud the screaming.

The tremendous trauma and loss of human life during the American Civil War dramatically influenced our perception of slavery issues.

Civil War Casualties

After the Civil War, Union officers estimated that military deaths from all causes for both sides totaled 620,000. Many Confederate records, however, were lost or incomplete. In 2011, Dr. J. David Hacker of Binghamton University in New York revisited that estimate by comparing population changes from 1860 to 1870. He estimated that the total was 750,000 and possibly higher. In addition, Dr. James McPherson has estimated that Southern free civilian deaths were about 50,000. Moreover, Professor Jim Downs of Connecticut College found documentation that 60,000 displaced Southern slaves died of malnutrition and disease following Emancipation and the collapse of the Southern economy following the war and estimated that the total was about 80,000. Dr Downs documented this little known medical calamity in his 2012 book, *Sick from Freedom*. That brings the total deaths caused by the war to 880,000 or higher, considerably more than the total deaths of all other American wars. In addition, the seriously wounded, many of them permanently disabled, probably exceeded 500,000. There were at least 35,000 surviving amputees. Union forces serving during the war totaled 2.2 million. The Confederate estimate is 750,000 to one million. These figures tend to confirm the estimate that one in four white Southern men died in the war. Moreover, over 40 percent of private property in the South was destroyed including homes, businesses, livestock, and crops. This devastation and Reconstruction (No Marshall Plan for Southern recovery) and tariff policies harmful to Southern agricultural exports impoverished the South for generations.

Such appalling suffering demands a morally and politically acceptable cause—which victors tend to distort in their favor. Thus the economic burdens and Constitutional issues that led Southern states to seek their independence and resist Northern coercion to prevent that independence have been dismissed or buried, and to the Northern Union attributed a more inspiring and glorious cause. Yet contrary to common assertions by uninformed politicians and media, the American Civil War was not a Northern crusade to free Southern slaves or to end slavery, although there were many North-South issues over slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation did not occur until the middle of the war, and Lincoln admitted this was primarily a military strategy with possible political and diplomatic benefits. Actually, the proclamation only applied to slaves in Confederate held territory; thus no slaves were actually freed. Fortunately, slavery did end after the war under a more orderly

A Biblical Perspective of Slavery

Constitutional form—the 13th Amendment. However, five years after the war, prominent Northern abolitionist and legal scholar, Lysander Spooner, stated the political reality:
Published: Monday, 30 September 2019 14:11

By Mike Scruggs

"All these cries of having 'abolished slavery,' of having 'saved the country,' of having preserved the Union,' of establishing a 'government of consent,' and of 'maintaining the national honor' are all gross, shameless, transparent cheats—so transparent that they ought to deceive no one."

In 1861, the major British newspapers, The Times, The Economist, and the Saturday Review, believed that the war between North and South was over protectionist Northern tariffs that benefited the North but imposed severe economic hardships on the South and did not touch the question of slavery. It was a struggle for sectional economic and political power. In December 1861, the celebrated English author Charles Dickens, a strong opponent of slavery, wrote in a London weekly publication:

"The northern onslaught upon slavery is no more than a specious humbug disguised to conceal its desire for economic control of the United States."

Politically correct history has nearly buried the memory of such economic sectionalist atrocities as the Morrill Tariff and the Northern drift away from Constitutionally guaranteed States Rights to powerful centralized government. But it has also attempted to bury a major controversy and struggle over the Authority of Scripture.

In the Appeal of 95 Southern Clergymen addressed to Christians throughout the world in April 1863, they stated that **"The practicable plan for benefiting the African Race must be the Providential Plan—the Scriptural plan."** [As opposed to the violent self-righteous urgency of the ultra-abolitionists]

In the notes appended to the "Appeal" they gave evidence of God's gracious Providence in bringing large numbers of African-American slaves to Christ's Church. Of the approximately 8.0 million whites in the South in 1860, about 4.0 million were age 18 or over. Of these, 1.55 million or 39 percent were communicants of Christian churches. The actual church attendance would have been higher. [In addition, Confederate Chaplains recorded 150,000 conversions during the war.] In 1860, there were 3,953,760 slaves in the South. Approximately 2.0 million of these would have been of communicant age, and 500,000 were communicant members of Christian churches, representing about 25 percent of the total. **This 500,000 was twice the number converted by Protestant missions in the entire pagan world.** To which the 95 ministers signing the "Appeal" agreed. **"Thus has God blessed us in gathering into his Church from the children of Africa."**

On January 4, 1861, Rev. George D. Cummings of St. Peter's Church in Baltimore gave a sermon that eloquently expressed the Providential outlook of most Southern clergy, entitled:

"The African, a Trust from God to the American," in which he called his congregation and wider

A Biblical Perspective of Slavery

audience: Mike Scruggs' Column

Published: Monday, 30 September 2019 14:11

“To regard the African race in bondage (and in freedom, too) as a solemn trust committed to this people from God, and that He has given us the great mission of working out His purposes of mercy and love towards them.”

The memory of the largely North-South aligned struggle over the Authority of Scripture versus placing popular humanistic values above Scripture has also been suppressed. The struggle to maintain the Authority of Scripture was not exclusive to the South, however. Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge, an ardent unionist, refused to condemn slavery per se outright, because the Bible did not. The Episcopal Bishop of Vermont John Henry Hopkins took the same position and sympathized with Southern clergy defending the Authority of Scripture on slavery issues.

According to Mark Noll, author of *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, not a single well-known American Catholic fully supported the abolitionists before 1862. American Catholics tended to hold traditionalist or moderate emancipationist views similar to many Southern Protestant pastors and avoided any connection to abolitionists. Pope Pius IX did not take a partisan position in the Civil War but called for peace. He developed a warm relationship by correspondence with Confederate President Jefferson Davis and sent him a “crown of thorns,” which he had weaved himself, during the two years Davis was in prison awaiting a trial that was eventually cancelled. This crown of thorns can be seen at the New Orleans Civil War Museum.

The slave trade was abolished in 1808 and had been roundly condemned by all because of its extreme hardship and high death rate. All American slave-trading ships were based in New England and flew American flags. New England industry was built on profits from the slave trade. The South Carolina legislature voted to end all further importation of slaves in 1799, but King George III disallowed it and reprimanded the governor for having assented to it.

The modern disadvantages of slavery are obvious. The extent of power over people that slavery gives is great and too easy to abuse and can limit human potential to the disadvantage of everyone. We can be thankful that slavery is in our past.

However, it is well documented by New Testament Apostolic teachings and Old Testament law that although Scripture does not promote slavery, it allowed it and regulated it to soften it. Neither slavery per se nor being a master of slaves are prohibited or counted as sin—and certainly not “heinous sin.” But the abuse or mistreatment of slaves was prohibited and its penalties were enforced. Masters and slaves were urged to act with mutual understanding and good will.

So what grounds do politicians, media pundits, or anyone else have to stir up historical grievances about slavery, especially when they are largely ignorant—even willfully ignorant—of the facts? They are on dangerous grounds. To what purpose is their equally misinformed and arrogant virtue-signaling? It has aspects of both bullying and obsequious groveling and generates politically driven self-righteous animosities and division. We are marching toward political hysteria and social

A Biblical Perspective of Slavery

destruction similar to the Salem Witch Trials but on a grand scale.

Category: Mike Scruggs Column
Published: Monday, 30 September 2019 14:11

By Mike Scruggs

Hits: 1111