



*Jesus said, “<sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35 NRSV*

Today is Juneteenth, the 154<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the end of slavery in Texas, the last bastion of that horrid institution.<sup>1</sup> To write about this as a reflection, I wanted to see what the Bible had to say about slavery, and I confess to you, my sisters and brothers, that I was a bit dismayed. Where I had hoped to find an outright condemnation, there was none, except with regard to Hebrew males owning other Hebrew males. The only place where it was designated decisively wrong was in the case of the **stealing** of Hebrew men to make them slaves.

And I realized something – the concept of slavery in the Bible was markedly different from the way it was practiced in the United States and the colonies which preceded it.

In ancient times, a man could sell himself, his wife, or his children into slavery when a debt couldn't be paid. (We came to call that “indentured servitude”.) The term of slavery would not last longer than the debt, except in the case of the women. Women couldn't come back because they would no longer be virgin, and therefore became part of the new household, sometimes in honor as a wife, often in dishonor. Because of abuses, where the slavery would stretch out, the Hebrew Scriptures lay out rules where slaves must be freed. That is **not** the sort of slavery practiced in the United States.

Rather than recount the horrors of slavery, I want to reflect on why and how Scripture would have us change, even when there is nothing explicitly stated. The John 13:34-35 passage quoted above we usually hear read on Holy (Maundy) Thursday, when Jesus washes the feet of the disciples, a Master who acts like a slave to them. We can translate Jesus' actions into broader use without doing violence to the Scriptures by remembering what Jesus says in the next chapter of John:

*But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. John 14:26 NRSV*

The Holy Spirit lives in us, and the Holy Spirit teaches us the new things God and Jesus would have us do. You have heard it said that a slave should obey their master, but I say to you that if you love each other the way that Jesus loves us, you could not ever own someone else! You could never look down on someone else because they are loved by God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit **just as much as you are**. God loves you, just as you are now, and **God** will help you change into the person God sees you as being. Become the ‘you’ that God sees!!

*Good and gracious God, you invite us to recognize and reverence your divine image and likeness in our neighbor. **Enable us to see** the reality of racism and free us to challenge and uproot it from our society, our world, and ourselves. Give us gifts of humility and generosity of spirit to recognize in all people the face of our Savior, Jesus, and to practice his commandment to “love one another,” towards the end of bringing harmony and peace among persons of all colors, origins, and abilities, for the sake of your Kingdom. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> [www.juneteenth.com](http://www.juneteenth.com) for a more complete explanation but it has been celebrated within the black community for over 100 years, waxing and waning in observance and popularity along with the situations in which black communities found themselves. With a renewed focus on civil rights over the past 65 years, Juneteenth has become more important to those who celebrate the end of one person legally owning another in our country.