

GREEK WORD STUDY PAPER

Δοῦλος, ὁ

PRESENTED TO

DR. LORIN CRANFORD

GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENT FOR GREEK 102

BY

MICHAEL TAUB

APRIL 30, 1999

This is a sample paper made available exclusively to illustrate the guidelines for the paper assignment. Copying the content of the paper for later assignments is strictly forbidden. The paper is used by permission.

Introduction¹

When we hear the words **slave** or **servant**, we usually view it with a negative connotation. In the Greek, it did have that same meaning also, but the writers of the Bible put a positive angle on the word. The Greek word that is translated as **slave** or **servant** is δοῦλος. The word δοῦλος, and several others that belong to that word group, appears 178 times in the New Testament. Of these 178 times it is used in the Synoptic Gospels 73 times (37 in Matt., 5 in Mark, 31 in Luke); in John 12 times; in Acts 7 times; in Paul's Epistles 62 times; in the Catholic Epistles (including Hebrews) 7 times; and in Revelation it is used 17 times (Aland, 78-79, 264- 265).

Other words belong to that grouping with similar meanings. For this study, we will not only look at that word, but other words that belong to the same group. These words are δουλεύω **be a slave, serve**; δουλαγωγέω **bring into slavery**; δουλεία, ἡ, **slavery**; δούλη, ἡ, **female slave, maidservant**; δοῦλος, η, ον, **subservient, subject**; δοῦλος, ὁ, **slave, servant**; δουλόω **enslave, subjugate**; σύνδουλος, ὁ **fellow slave**. There are several areas to consider as we study words from the Greek text-how it was used in (1) Classical Greek; (2) Jewish Literature; (3) the New Testament; (4) by the Early Church.

Word Study

Classical Greek

In the Classical Greek, the meaning has essentially the same negative connotation. One of the few times they view being a δοῦλος as positive is when it is associated with being a slave to, or serving, one of their many gods. In the non-religious world, the δοῦλος has no possibility of avoiding the tasks he has been ordered to do (Kittel, 2:261). Plato also held to the belief of the negative impact on those whose life was described as a slave.

¹ Software used was Corel Word Perfect 8. Greek fonts are the Symbol Greek P fonts from Linguist's Software. The Hebrew fonts are SHebrew.

If all rules have an exception, Plato found one to this rule as well -- that is when somebody was a slave to the law. This was the determining mark of a true citizen, and only when the citizens recognized their masters in the law could a city be solid. This also distinguishes the free man from the slave, since he is slave to the law of the city it guarantees the solidity of the city (Kittel, 2:262).

Aristotle shares this derogatory view. In his Politics, Aristotle makes a statement that clarifies his belief that slaves have no part in the city or its service (Kittel, 2:263). This seems to contradict what Plato believes, but the difference is being an ordinary slave or a slave to the law. The Stoics have a broader or more of a universal conception of service (Ibid). Zeus is the one who issues the call to service. Even though the Cynic may be free in relation to all, he is also unconditionally bound to all and responsible for all they leave undone. Once they have committed themselves, they have become the servant (διδάκονος) of Zeus.

Philo also takes this same view. In his mind, everything that is beautiful and earnest is free, while everything that is evil, is in a state of servanthood. A Stoic view is also shared by Philo, in the thought that no one is a δοῦλος originally, but a man becomes that way via someone else's gain, punishment, revenge, or some other way. It is also speculated that there may have been a Jewish influence on Philo because he uses the phrase δοῦλος τοῦ θεοῦ (Kittel, 2:264). There is little evidence that the usage of this word has any connection with the religious sphere in the Greek world. Euripides uses this word in only three passages (Kittel, 2:264). Each time there is no religious reference made to God. It is used in the same manner as Plato, Aristotle, and Philo used it in their writings.

There is no place within the Greek thought and belief in God for the δοῦλος word group as an expression of service. It was used to describe the attitude that gods and men are bound to serve in their family relationships. Since the Greeks at this time did not recognize God, they did not use the word in relation to serving Him. They did, however, have a plethora of gods, that described their service as πρὸς θεοῦς ὁμιλία or in company with the gods (Kittel, 2:265).

Jewish Literature

In Jewish literature, we find a different use of the δοῦλος word group. Here we see they use it

in a religious sphere. It was also used in the same derogatory manner the Greeks used. The Jewish writers, some of them anyway, recognized God and attributed service to Him. We see in Josephus' writings the use of several words that are within this word group. The words that he uses are δοῦλος, δουλεία, δουλεύω, δούλη, and δουλόω (BAG, 204). Sometimes he uses these words in attributing some sort of service to God, others he denotes somebody being subservient to someone else.

When we look at how the word group was used in the Septuagint, also known as LXX, we see the same features. The translators used the word, or one belonging from this group, in almost every instance the Hebrew word עָבַד appears. They mainly used the word δουλεύω except in Isaiah 56:6 and Daniel 7:14, 27 where in the original context there is no verb that means "to serve" (Kittel, 2:265). Since the Hebrew did not have a word from the main root for female slaves, the translators used δούλη in the place of the Hebrew words אִמָּה or שִׁפְחָה. The only exceptions to this are found in Exodus 2:17 and Nehemiah 5:5b (Kittel, 2:266).

When used in the LXX to refer to those born into slavery or those who have no other station in life they used the word παῖς instead of δοῦλος. When translated this way it usually means a natural relationship that is incontestable, but when δοῦλος is used it is used to represent the illegality of the service rendered. A good example of this is found in Genesis as it describes Jacob's service for Rachel. The word also carried with it meaning of service that could have been forced or voluntary, but was always felt restrictive. A good example of this would be the relationship between a king and his subjects.

The word group was also used in relating a person's relationship of service to God. When we look at the LXX we see that when they refer to service of God, in a totally committed way, the most common word they used was δουλεύειν (Kittel, 2:267). This is also the reason why only a few men in Israel's history have been given the title δοῦλοι. These men were Moses (Jos. 14:7a; Jos. Ant., 5. 39), Joshua (Jos. 24:29; Ju. 2:8), Abraham (Psalms 104:42), David (Psalms 88:3 and others), Isaac (Δα. 3:35), the prophets (4 Βασιλ. 17:23 and others), and Jacob equating Israel as the people of God (Is.48:20). This is understood to mean that any attitude towards God other than δουλεύειν is considered a betrayal to His cause (Kittel, 2:268).

New Testament

In most of the cases where one of these words are used, except where it has a religious connotation to it, it is used improperly, mainly in figures of speech and comparisons especially in Jesus' parables (Kittel, 2:270). When Jesus wanted to emphasize the unconditional nature of the responsibility humans have to God, He used the word δοῦλοι. He also wanted to make it clear that God is not constrained in His relationship to man by any preordained notions that He must keep. In relating to God as master and humans as δοῦλος, there is no room for one's own will or initiative (Ibid). In relating this to us, in the New Testament the δοῦλος is the picture of bondage and limitation. With this thought in mind though, the slave is never thought of in the derogatory way that he was in the Greek world. The δοῦλος is never looked down upon just because he has that station in life.

Being on a lower level of humanity, the slave had no rights in the law or could not own property. Even the slave's family was not his own, they were property of his master. This was not good. Since he had no laws protecting him, the slave was at his master's will. If the master wanted to beat or abuse him, that was fine. A master could even mutilate him if he wanted to, as long as it complied with the Law, the only one there was, in Exodus 21:26, and then only if he had witnesses (Kittel, 2:271). There is even evidence of this in Rabbinic tales. It can be read where a slave had a full cup thrown at him by his master, or where he had his head slapped for not following his master's teaching precisely. To the Rabbis the greatest insult that could fall upon someone is to be called a slave (Kittel, 2:271).

If the Christian chose not to reject slavery, every effort was made to end it. If given the chance, a slave was encouraged to joyfully accept his chance for freedom. This followed the rule of love. The rule was understood as everybody was equal within the community in relationship with Christ. This is founded in the fact that we are all redeemed in Jesus and it was given universally to all men regardless of their status or ancestry (Kittel, 2:272). The New Testament as a whole applies this concept to all, even the non-Christians, since Christ came for all.

Used very little in the New Testament are the phrases δοῦλος θεοῦ and τῷ θεῷ δουλεύειν (Kittel, 2:273). Most references speak of the relationship Christians have with Christ. In most of the

occurrences of δοῦλος θεοῦ, there is a connection with the men referred to earlier and their relationship with God or from a quotation. In Rev. 15:3, Moses is given the title δοῦλος τοῦ θεοῦ and in Rev. 10:7 and Acts 4:29, the prophets are referred to as δοῦλοι τοῦ θεοῦ. We can also assume that the meaning is the same in 1 Pet. 2:16 when the people of Israel are called δοῦλοι of God.

In the normal Jewish usage, the phrase was reserved for just a few selected outstanding men or the people of Israel collectively. We find two exceptions to this. Paul, in his epistles would normally refer to himself as δοῦλος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ but, in Titus 1:1, he refers to himself as δοῦλος θεοῦ. The other place is in Jas. 1:1 where the author refers to himself as θεοῦ...δοῦλος (Kittel, 2:273). The prominent theological use of these words in the New Testament is that Christians are δοῦλος of Christ.

Jesus said of himself that He was also just a δοῦλος when He washed the disciples feet at the last supper. To better understand this, only the slaves were supposed to wash the feet of the guests. This is what Christ wants in us; a spirit so willing to serve and be a servant that we do it without thinking about it or realizing we are doing it. Jesus expected this out of His disciples and He expects it out of you and me.

There is one other word in the New Testament that can be translated as **servant**. It is the word that we understand to mean **deacon**, διάκονος. The difference between the two is that δοῦλος stresses the Christian's complete devotion and service to God, and διάκονος reflects more of the service one provides to the church fellowship and others (Brown, 546).

The Early Church

The δοῦλος word group was started to be used more and more by Christians in applying the meaning to themselves. There are two factors that account for this: the first one is that the people started accepting the idea of Christianity as the true Israel, and the second is that the people started viewing Jesus as the Son of God and not the δοῦλος of God. This totally eliminated the feeling of competing with or a rivalry with Him (Kittel, 2:274).

One thing also inherent to these words is the strong implications behind them. If one is to truly call himself a δοῦλος of God, he needs to be ready and willing to make a full commitment to God. If this

is the case, then Christians need to be prepared to accept this responsibility (Ibid.).

Conclusion

In this study, we find a variety of uses stemming from the word δοῦλος. It means more than just being a **slave** or a **servant**. In the Greek thought, they had no religious connection to them, it is mainly used in a derogatory manner. In Jewish literature, there is the same usage except when referring to a few outstanding people in the LXX. When the writers of the New Testament used it, there was nothing negative about it. Everyone was equal, the slave as well as the freeman. The major difference being the theological twist they add to it.

The major shift from the New Testament to the early church reinforced the meaning that the New Testament writers were trying to establish. Only through a fully committed life, one dedicated to serving Christ with all their heart, soul, and strength, could one call himself a δοῦλος of God. This is a real challenge. Are you up to it?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Balz, Horst and Gerhard Schneider eds. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. S.v.,
δούλος. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990.