

From Thornton Stringfellow's *Scriptural and Statistical View of Slavery* (1856):

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Circumstances exist among the inhabitants of these United States, which make it proper that the Scriptures should be carefully examined by Christians in reference to the institution of Slavery, which exists in several of the states, with the approbation of those who profess unlimited subjection to God's revealed will.

It is branded by one portion of people, who take their rule of moral rectitude from the Scriptures, as a great sin; nay, the greatest of sins that exist in the nation. And they hold the obligation to exterminate it, to be paramount to all others.

If slavery be thus sinful, it behooves all Christians who are involved in the sin, to repent in dust and ashes, and wash their hands of it, without consulting with flesh and blood. Sin in the sight of God is something which God in his Word makes known to be wrong, either by preceptive prohibition, by principles of moral fitness, or examples of inspired men, contained in the sacred volume. When these furnish no law to condemn human conduct, there is no transgression. Christians should produce a "thus saith the Lord," both for what they condemn as sinful, and for what they approve as lawful, in the sight of heaven.

It is to be hoped, that on a question of such vital importance as this to the peace and safety of our common country, as well as to the welfare of the church, we shall be seen cleaving to the Bible, and taking all our decisions about this matter, from its inspired pages. With men from the North, I have observed for many years a palpable ignorance of the divine will, in reference to the institution of slavery. I have seen but a few who made the Bible their study, that had obtained a knowledge of what it did reveal on this subject. Of late their denunciation of slavery as a sin, is loud and long.

I propose, therefore, to examine the sacred volume briefly, and if I am not greatly mistaken, I shall be able to make it appear that the institution of slavery has received, in the first place,

- 1st. The sanction of the Almighty in the Patriarchal age.
- 2d. That it was incorporated into the only National Constitution which ever emanated from God.
- 3d. That its legality was recognized, and its relative duties regulated, by Jesus Christ in his kingdom; and
- 4th. That it is full of mercy.

Before I proceed further, it is necessary that the terms, used to designate the thing, be defined. It is not a name, but a thing, that is denounced as sinful; because it is supposed to be contrary to, and prohibited by the Scriptures.

Our translators have used the term servant, to designate a state in which persons were serving, leaving us to gather the relation between the party served, and the party rendering the service, from other terms. The term slave, signifies with us, a definite state, condition, or relation, which state, condition, or relation, is precisely that one which is denounced as sinful. This state, condition, or relation, is that in which one human being is held without his consent, by another, as property; to be bought, sold, and transferred, together with increase as property forever. Now, this precise thing, is denounced by a portion of the people of these United States, as the greatest individual and national sin that is among us, and is thought to be so hateful in the sight of God, as to subject the nation to ruinous judgments, if it be not removed.* Now, I propose to show from the Scriptures, that this state, condition, or relation, did exist in the patriarchal age, and that the persons most extensively involved in the sin, if it be a sin, are the very persons who have been singled out by the Almighty, as the objects of his special regard--whose character and conduct he has caused to be held up as models for future generations. Before we conclude slavery to be a thing hateful to God, and a great sin in his sight, it is proper that we should search the records he has given us, with care, to see in what light he has looked upon it, and find the warrant for concluding, that we shall honor him by efforts to abolish it; which efforts, in their consequences, may involve the indiscriminate slaughter of the innocent and the guilty, the master and the servant. We all believe him to be a Being who is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

The first recorded language which was ever uttered in relation to slavery, is the inspired language of Noah. In God's stead he says, "Cursed be Canaan;" "a servant of servants shall he be to his brethren." "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant." "God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant." Gen. ix: 25, 26, 27. Here, language is used, showing the favor which God would exercise to the posterity of Shem and Japheth, while they were holding the posterity of Ham in a state of abject bondage. May it not be said in truth, that God decreed this institution before it existed; and has he not connected its existence with prophetic tokens of special favor, to those who should be slave owners or masters? He is the same God now, that he was when he gave these views of his moral character to the world; and unless the posterity of Shem and Japheth, from whom have sprung the Jews, and all the nations of Europe and America, and a great part of Asia, (the African race that is in them excepted,)--I say, unless they are all dead, as well as the Canaanites or Africans who descended from Ham, then it is quite possible that his favor may now be found with one class of men who are holding another class in bondage. Be this as it may, God decreed slavery--and shows in that decree, tokens of good-will to the master. The sacred records occupy but a short space from this inspired ray on this subject, until they bring to our notice, a man that is held up as a model, in all that adorns human nature, and as

one that God delighted to honor. This man is Abraham, honored in the sacred records, with the appellation, "Father" of the "faithful." Abraham was a native of Ur, of the Chaldees. From thence the Lord called him to go to a country which he would show him and he obeyed, not knowing whither he went. He stopped for a time at Haran, where his father died. From thence he "took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls they had gotten in Haran, and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan."--Gen. xii: 5.

All the ancient Jewish writers of note, and Christian commentators agree, that by the "souls they had gotten in Haran," as our translators render it, are meant their slaves, or those persons they had bought with their money in Haran. In a few years after their arrival in Canaan, Lot with all he had was taken captive. So soon as Abraham heard it, he armed three hundred and eighteen slaves that were born in his house, and retook him. How great must have been the entire slave family, to produce at this period of Abraham's life, such a number of young slaves able to bear arms.--Gen. xiv: 14.

Abraham is constantly held up in the sacred story, as the subject of great distinction among the princes and sovereigns of the countries in which he sojourned. This distinction was on account of his great wealth. When he proposed to buy a burying-ground at Sarah's death, of the children of Heth, he stood up and spoke with great humility of himself as "a stranger and sojourner among them," (Gen. xxiii: 4,) desirous to obtain a burying-ground. But in what light do they look upon him? "Hear us, my Lord, thou art a mighty prince among us."--Gen. xxiii: 6. Such is the light in which they viewed him. What gave a man such distinction among such a people? Not moral qualities, but great wealth, and its inseparable concomitant, power. When the famine drove Abraham to Egypt, he received the highest honors of the reigning sovereign. This honor at Pharaoh's court, was called forth by the visible tokens of immense wealth. In Genesis xii: 15, 16, we have the honor that was shown to him, mentioned, with a list of his property, which is given in these words, in the 16th verse: "He had sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and man-servants, and maid-servants, and she-asses, and camels." The amount of his flocks may be inferred from the number of slaves employed in tending them. They were those he brought from Ur of the Chaldees, of whom the three hundred and eighteen were born; those gotten in Haran, where he dwelt for a short time, and those which he inherited from his father, who died in Haran. When Abraham went up from Egypt, it is stated in Genesis xiii: 2, that he was "very rich," not only in flocks and slaves, but in "silver and gold" also.

*The property in slaves in the United States is their service or labor. The Constitution guarantees this property to its owner, both in apprentices and slaves. And the supreme court has decided, Judge Baldwin presiding, that all the means "necessary and proper" to secure this property, may be constitutionally used by the master, in the absence of all statute

law. The Roman law made the slave of that law, to be, not a personal chattle, held to service or labor only as is the American apprentice or slave, but to be a mere thing; and guaranteed to the master the right to do with that mere thing, just as he pleased.--To cut it up, for instance, as the Master sometimes did, to feed fishes.

Abolitionists are guilty of the inexcusable wickedness of holding up this ancient Roman slavery, as a model of American slavery. Although they know, that the personal rights of apprentices and slaves, are as well defined and secured, by judicial decisions and statute laws, as the rights of husband and wife, parent and child."