

**Slaves and Slavery in the Roman World - S. Scott Bartchy**

Bartchy defines Roman slavery as 'social death' (p.169). Citing Patterson 's Slavery, Bartchy delineates the types of "death" through separation and isolation that is inflicted upon the enslaved. Further, this "dehumanizing practice" developed into the fundamental requisite of Greek and Roman economy (169). Moreover, enslavement of another human being was regulated by law and incorporated into the moral fiber of the culture as an accepted norm (169). Equally as important, ownership was not just subject to individuals and families, but expanded to include corporate entities, communities and religion (170).

The Romans did not believe, as did Aristotle, that based upon physical characteristics certain humans could be deemed to be 'slaves by nature' (170). However, Romans reasoned that since slavery appeared to be entrenched in every society they encountered ("*ius gentium*, a law common to all peoples"), humans could be considered as "legitimate spoils of war" (170). Whether by design or capture, the life of the enslaved was in the complete control of the captor. The enslaved were stripped of all human rights, identity and regulated to a subclass within the society. Yet, it was not necessarily a lifelong sentence in every case nor was it the lowest rung in Roman cultural strata (173). The relationship between owner and enslaved was paradoxical. The enslaved were dehumanized, violence was considered not only a right of ownership, but necessary to ensure the proper subservient attitude of the enslaved (171). Yet at the same time, the enslaved was intrinsically valuable not only as the provider of free labor and services, but also as a sign of economic prosperity of the owner, equivalent to actual produce and currency (some sold their children to pay off debts) (171). On owner's status and reputation was often determined not only by the number of slaves, but the "quality of slaves" as well. Although not

explicitly stated in the article, it is plausible to consider if you had a slave that was educated and could run a household or a business, it would add to an owner's prestige.

Overall, the estimated number of enslaved persons in the Roman Empire was about sixteen to twenty percent of the population or around twelve million persons (170). As shared previously, enslavement was embedded in the fabric of Roman culture, however, it was not always lived in a state of peace. There were revolts between 140 and 70 BC not against the institution, but rebels seeking to regain their human rights and freedom (171). However, as rightful property of the owners, the enslaved could be released from enslavement to become "patrons" to their owners often providing the similar services as freed people. Further, slavery was so entrenched as an accepted societal component and lifestyles that it was not unusual for freed persons to own slaves (171).

It is imperative for the twenty-first century reader to understand the normality of slavery in Roman times. Moreover, it is also important to understand the distinct differences: Roman slavery was not predicated on ethnicity or color; remarkably, an enslaved person could own property as well as other slaves; in contrast to enslavement in the United States, education of the enslaved was encouraged (remember prestige) resulting in the enslaved obtaining positions of responsibility and sensitivity (173). Further, despite the disparity of human rights, treatment of the enslaved could be mitigated by the will of the owner (Augustus) and the enactment of laws protecting the life of the enslaved (even from homicide) (175).

There are two important "takeaways" for the twenty-first century reader; first, the fundamental differences between enslavement in the Roman and New World slavery and second, how the legal application of emancipation of the enslaved affected our current theology regarding 'redemption,' 'justification,' and 'reconciliation' (176).