From Slaves of Sin to Slaves of God: 
Reconsidering the Origin of Paul's Slavery Metaphor in Romans 6

JOHN K. GOODRICH
MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

The origin of Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors has long captured the attention of NT interpreters. While many scholars maintain that these images were principally influenced by one of the modes of physical slavery practiced in the Greco-Roman world, others propose that the metaphors derive exclusively from the servant/slave of God motif enlisted throughout Jewish literature. Concentrating on Romans 6, this article provides a detailed survey of three recent contributions to the Jewish-only position (those by Richard Horsley, John Byron, and Tom Holland, respectively) before responding critically to them at three points. The article ultimately seeks to assert that Paul’s δοῦλος metaphor in Romans 6 (and elsewhere), while functioning as an extension of a Jewish theological motif, was significantly influenced by Greco-Roman notions of domestic slavery.

Key Words: slavery, metaphor, Judaism, Hellenism, Romans 6

INTRODUCTION

Slavery is perhaps Paul’s favorite metaphor in Romans for illustrating religious and ethical devotion. The concept of slavery, which is cast in the epistle through numerous words, appears most frequently by way of the concrete noun δοῦλος, the abstract noun δουλεία, and the verbs δουλεύω and δουλόω. This metaphor appears, for instance, as soon as the epistle’s first verse, where, in an effort to introduce himself to a church he has not yet visited, Paul describes himself as “a slave of Christ Jesus” (δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 1:1). Moreover, at numerous times in the middle and end of the letter Paul employs this word group to illustrate a person’s adherence to one of several personal or personified powers, including sin (6:6, 16, 20, 22; 7:25), obedience (6:16), a model of teaching (6:17), righteousness (6:18, 19, 20), impurity (6:19), lawlessness (6:19), God (6:22; 7:25), corruption (8:21), and

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1. Ancient historian William Fitzgerald, for example, says that Paul is “obsessed with the figure of slavery” (Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination [Roman Literature and Its Contexts; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000] 113).
the Lord Christ (12:11; 16:18; 14:18). 2 But despite the abundant employment of δοῦλος metaphors in the letter, their origin—or source domain—has been much disputed in NT scholarship, especially in Romans 6.

A number of scholars have argued that the source domain of Paul’s δοῦλος metaphor in Romans 6 is one of the modes of physical, institutional slavery practiced in the Greco-Roman world. According to proponents of this position, Paul refers to the notion of legal bondage to a human master together with the concept of slave manumission (freedom)—images all too familiar to Paul’s audiences 3—to illustrate the believer’s possession by and service to God. 4 A version of this position was defended, for instance, over a century ago by Adolf Deissmann, who argued that Paul’s portrayal of believers as people freed from sin and enslaved to God (Rom 6:18, 22) is analogous, and perhaps indebted, to the Hellenistic practice of sacral manumission. 5 Drawing on the famous Delphi inscriptions, which report masters freeing their slaves to the god Apollo by way of a trust sale, Deissmann was able to identify a fascinating extrabiblical example of the freedom acquired through a slave’s devotion to a deity. This thesis was also defended, with some amendments, by classicist William Westermann, who argued that the former slave, though no longer in bondage to a master, still owed indentured service (παραμονή) to the deity as his freedman. 6

Other interpreters concentrate less on religious parallels and more on Greco-Roman domestic slave law and custom. For example, ancient histo-

2. Paul also uses the word group this way in 7:6 and 8:15, though the object of service on both occasions is unspecified. The verb in 9:12, moreover, refers to Esau’s service to Jacob.


5. Adolf Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World (trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan; rev. ed.; New York: G. H. Horan, 1927) 326: “[A]s in every other case of purchase by a god, the slave of Christ is at the same time free: indeed, he is ‘the Lord’s (i.e. Christ’s) freedman,’ even when in the outward meaning of the word he is the slave of a human lord.”

6. William L. Westermann, “The Freedmen and the Slaves of God,” Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 92 (1948): 55–64. For criticism of this view, see S. Scott Barchty, First-Century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21 (SBLDS 11; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1973) 121–25. Deissmann also observes the similarities between the παραμονή of the freedman and Paul’s emphasis on the believer’s service to God but concedes that Paul’s concept may not be “fully parallel to the pagan formulae because the reference in St. Paul is to the new master” (Light from the Ancient East, 326). For another religious parallel, see James S. Jeffers (“Slaves of God: The Impact of the Cult of the Roman Emperor on Paul’s Use of the Language of Power Relations,” Fides et Historia 34 [2002] 123–139), who suggests that “Paul seems to be playing off the ubiquitous imperial cult, whose followers were united in their service to the divine Caesar, in order to depict all Christians, not just those involved in ministry leadership, as the united servants of Christ” (p. 138).
rian Francis Lyall argued that Paul’s metaphor alludes to the Roman practice of voluntary self-sale into slavery. Rom 6:16–22, Lyall explains, is the “clearest and most telling” example in biblical literature of “entry into slave status by yielding oneself to another.”

Dale Martin, on the other hand, argues that Paul’s metaphorical uses of δοῦλος connote salvation as well as honor, because service to high status persons, it is alleged, brought honor on the slave in the patron-client system of Roman antiquity. “Slavery to Christ,” Martin explains, “would for that reason have been an appealing image for people caught in low-status or dead-end positions.”

Following these and other studies, most biblical scholars continue to interpret Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors in Romans 6 and elsewhere through the lens of Greco-Roman chattel slavery. As J. Albert Harrill remarks, “When Paul exhorted Christians that slavery was the proper relationship of the believer to God, his words were embedded in [his] Roman cultural milieu.” This perspective, however, has been challenged by several scholars proposing that Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors are better interpreted strictly within the apostle’s Jewish context, and that Paul’s use of the image in Romans 6 functions as new exodus typology. This hypothesis was advanced at various lengths in the early and middle parts of the last century, but has not until


9. Martin, Slavery as Salvation, 63. However, relying on Orlando Patterson’s important sociological investigation of slavery (*Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982]), Briggs argues from Romans 6 that “Christians share in the enslavement and extreme social degradation of Christ” (“Paul on Bondage and Freedom in Imperial Roman Society,” 118).


Recent years have given fuller defense. And while it is perhaps true that the primary function of most δοῦλος metaphors—to convey obligatory service—stands regardless of their derivation, it is also true that certain other interpretive matters, including the meaning and additional connotations of δουλεία language, are brought into question as a result of the debate, as will become clear below.

In this article I will seek to advance a mediating and indeed fairer position regarding the source domain(s) of Paul’s metaphorical uses of δοῦλος and related language. First, I will provide a detailed survey of three recent proposals on the Jewish origin of Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors (those advanced by Richard Horsley, John Byron, and Tom Holland, respectively), giving special attention to their treatment of Romans 6. Afterward, I will respond critically to their proposals at three points in an effort to defend the view that Paul’s δοῦλος metaphor in Romans 6 (and elsewhere), while functioning as an extension of a Jewish theological motif, was significantly influenced by Greco-Roman notions of domestic slavery. In that respect, this article seeks to do for Paul’s slavery metaphors what some scholars have endorsed in other areas of Pauline studies—namely, to move “beyond the Judaism/Hellenism divide.”

RECENT JEWISH APPROACHES TO PAUL’S δΟΥΛΟΣ METAPHOR IN ROMANS 6

We begin our survey with the contribution of Richard Horsley. Horsley’s essay, “Paul and Slavery: A Critical Alternative to Recent Readings,” is largely a response to the notion that Paul was socially conservative in his approach to slavery. In the piece Horsley seeks to show, among other things, that Paul’s slavery metaphors neither appear as frequently as most assume nor function in the way that they are usually interpreted. While


13. Cf. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., Paul beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). Tess Rajak, “The Jewish Diaspora,” in The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine (ed. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young; vol. 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 53–68, at p. 62: “Eschewing a picture of two world-views in opposition, expressed by those time-honoured abstractions, ‘Hellenism’ and ‘Judaism’, we do better to conceive of the culture of this diaspora as a complex interweaving of traditions, to produce, in the distinctive culture of Greek-speaking Judaism, a fabric in which the threads are no longer separable. At the same time, it is now widely accepted that a process of Hellenisation was integral to the development of Judaean society too, even if the extent, depth and significance of its impact continue to be contested.”
many suppose that Paul’s δουλεία language was meant to convey familiar images of Greco-Roman domestic slavery, it is Horsley’s contention that the source domain of Paul’s metaphors cannot be determined simply by noting his use of δοῦλος and its cognates, because these terms can connote a variety of notions apart from the chattel slavery witnessed regularly in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. Interpreters must therefore be more attentive to Paul’s many influences. As Horsley explains, “Any conclusions about the significance and prominence of symbols of slaves/slavery (and freedom) in Paul’s symbolic universe . . . must be based on a critical survey of Paul’s rhetoric, including the complex multi-cultural background of his discourse. We cannot simply assume a basic and consistent meaning of a given term such as doulos.”14

In response to the conventional interpretation, Horsley asserts that Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors derive from his Jewish heritage. As he remarks, since Jewish authors such as Paul were coming from a subject society with social relations and cultural traditions different from those of the dominant imperial society, we need to take into account the discourse of Israelite-Jewish tradition (even after its translation into Greek terms) which originated in and was shaped by ancient Near Eastern political-economic-religious patterns.15

According to Horsley, these patterns so influenced Paul that many of his slavery discourses came to resemble the political history of national Israel. Just as the Jewish people were subjected at various times to foreign political powers until liberated by Yahweh and (re)enlisted into his service, so believers in Christ have been freed from evil personified powers to serve God as their king. It is in this Jewish context of religious and political service to Yahweh that Horsley proposes Paul’s δοῦλος metaphor in Romans 6 be interpreted. As he explains,

The dominant imagery is of political rule and domination by the superhuman forces of Sin, Death, and the law versus God/righteousness/Spirit (basileuein 6:12, continuing 5:14, 17, 21; kyreuein, 6:9, 14; 7:1) and the corresponding political subjection and servitude of people (doulouein 6:6; 7:6). In portraying this struggle for domination of human life, Paul features images of political violence such as military weapons, terrorizing execution by torture on the cross (crucifixion), and subjection/enslavement, on the one hand, and setting free by acquittal and liberation, on the other. Paul’s use of the imagery of slavery/servitude here does not refer to the relations of master and slave in the household, but to the broader Roman imperial conquest, subjection, and enslavement of peoples such as the Jews/Israel. This is an argument formulated by a member of a people who had been subjected by the overwhelming military might of Rome and whose perspective had surely been formed in the apocalyptic mentality of

15. Ibid., 168.
frustrated Jerusalem scribal circles before he received his distinctive evangelical commission from his Lord, Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{16}

In Horsley’s scheme, then, Paul’s use of δουλεία imagery, particularly in Romans 6, is patterned after Israel’s history of political captivity to foreign oppressors (e.g., Egypt, Babylon, Rome) and implies that unbelievers are similarly enslaved to evil powers (e.g., sin, death, law) until they experience and submit to the apocalyptic intervention of their sovereign Lord.

For Horsley, however, freedom and not slavery is what characterizes the believer’s new religious status in Christ.\textsuperscript{17} Liberation from sin and death is provided by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, who becomes not the believer’s master but king, and is entitled to all the religious and political devotion this reign entails. As Horsley elaborates,

For Paul freedom was a contingent historical shift from servitude to dehumanizing superhuman forces to obedience to God. In that sense, he stands in the Israelite tradition that understood its historical liberation from bondage to human rulers (in Egypt, etc.) as involving a continuing commitment in service of God, who required obedience to fundamental covenantal principles of social cooperation and solidarity. The dominant note in Paul’s arguments, particularly in Galatians 3–5 and Romans 6–8, however, is that “slavery” characterizes that bondage to superhuman forces to which people/believers have been historically subjected, while “freedom” characterizes the deliverance that God has inaugurated and will soon complete in the crucifixion, resurrection, and parousia of Christ.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, while Horsley identifies images of Roman military might and conquest in Paul’s symbolic universe, Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors themselves are at home in the context of his Jewish world view and comparable to the free (rather than enslaved) service of the Jewish people to the God of Israel.\textsuperscript{19}

Much of Horsley’s perspective has been adopted and developed by John Byron. In his monograph \textit{Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline}

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\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 174.
\textsuperscript{17} While Horsley grants that Paul repeatedly styled himself “a slave of Christ” (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1), used the title for free believers (1 Cor 7:22), and considered all believers to be slaves of righteousness/God (Rom 6:18–22), he rejects the notion that domestic slavery to God/Christ is a characteristically Pauline metaphor. As Horsley maintains, “Although Paul refers to himself in a semi-titular way as a ‘slave of Christ,’ it is simply not true that he refers to believers generally as ‘slaves of Christ’ or conceives of the God/Christ-human relationship in terms of master-slave relations” (ibid., 176).
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 171–72: “In contrast to his pointed ‘self-enslavement’ in 1 Cor 9:19, Paul uses the verb douleuo metaphorically in other places where its meaning is not so pointedly ‘to be enslaved,’ but rather ‘to serve.’ . . . Such service of the Lord in maintaining community solidarity [at Rom 12:10–12; 14:13–23; 16:17–18] derives from the biblical tradition of Israel as servants of God, hence observing the covenantal mutuality that maintained its group solidarity—although again the overtones of ‘slavery’ would be present in the context of a slave-holding society.” A. Katherine Grieb also notes the metaphor’s scriptural “roots” while acknowledging its probable resonances in a slave society (\textit{The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God’s Righteousness} [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002] 68).
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Christianity, Byron attempts to interpret Paul’s uses of the metaphors “slave of God” and “slave of Christ” as titles originally borne out of Israel’s post-exodus enslavement to Yahweh, though functioning more immediately as an amendment to the honorific “slave of God” motif perpetuated between the biblical testimonies. Thus, while Byron departs from Horsley by consistently applying the notion of slavery to δουλεία language, he and Horsley are in basic agreement when Byron seeks to demonstrate that on most occasions the δοῦλος metaphors introduced by Paul and his Jewish contemporaries drew not on Greco-Roman society, but on Hebrew tradition.

Byron is careful in his attempt to distinguish between the two source domains. According to Byron, most Jewish slavery metaphors had their conceptual origin in the exodus, the event that installed the Israelites as God’s slaves. After distinguishing between the various kinds of slavery that surface in the OT (domestic, debt, temple, and state slaveries), Byron argues that slavery to God via the exodus is the antithesis of slavery to Pharaoh/Egypt, a form of state slavery; slavery to God in the OT, therefore, was patterned not after domestic slavery but after state slavery. As Byron explains,

The image of enslavement in Egypt is sometimes contrived of as a cruel domestic slavery that ends with manumission at the hand of Israel’s victorious God. This is not the case, however. Rather it is the image of a people oppressed by a king who refuses to release those he has enslaved to the state so that they might serve another king. The episode in Egypt is not about the manumission of Israel but a change of masters. The conflict is between two competing kings over “who will be the king of Israel and whom Israel will serve.”

Furthermore, Byron implies that in Judaism slavery to God eventually became a dead metaphor, that is, one which ceases to be directly associated with the source domain on which it once drew its meaning. As he states,

slavery language underwent an etymological shift in the way it was used. This shift allowed the language to function in a sphere of meaning that was conceptually separate from the institution in which it had initially developed. In this new sphere, anyone who offered obedience to another person could be called a slave as a way of describing his/her behavior.

Moreover, by tracing the development of the theme through its application to collective Israel and individual Israelites in both OT as well as Second Temple Jewish literature, Byron seeks to demonstrate that within

21. Byron, Slavery Metaphors, 36. He also states, “The language [of slavery] could describe individuals who were part of the institution of slavery as well as a variety of other relationships. The language operated separately from images of institutional slavery and was used as a convenient way to describe situations and relationships in which subordinates showed obedience to an authority figure, whether voluntarily or by force. . . . It is within this framework that Jews could identify themselves as slaves of God. The source of this identification was the traditions surrounding the Exodus event” (p. 140).
early Judaism the title “slave of God” functioned as an “emblem of theological identification.” The title, Byron maintains, says little to nothing of one’s sociolegal condition, whether literal or metaphorical. Rather, it implies both religious and nationalistic allegiance, particularly emphasizing one’s voluntary subordination and exclusive devotion to the God of Israel. Paul’s identification of himself and his readers as “slaves of God/Christ,” therefore, situates them within this Jewish heritage, implying both participation in God’s redemptive-historical plan, as well as loyalty and obedience to Christ.

Many of Byron’s insights surface in his treatment of Romans 6. In his exegesis, Byron initially notes the alleged weaknesses of those arguments which compare Paul’s metaphor specifically to Greco-Roman domestic slavery. For instance, building on the work of James Aageson, Byron seeks to demonstrate that Paul’s use of slavery language in Romans 6 conveys notions of “control” and “restrain” without ownership. Moreover, Byron analyzes closely how Paul’s use of the metaphor in Rom 6:16–23 portrays slaves of sin voluntarily being freed from an old master (sin/death) and enslaving themselves to another (righteousness/God). By virtue of such voluntary transference between masters, Byron rejects the possibility that the metaphor is modeled on the Greco-Roman practice of self-sale into slavery, as defended by Lyall and others, because actual domestic slaves were afforded no such choice. Instead, he insists that Paul’s metaphor is influenced by the exodus tradition:

Since the slavery language in chapter 6 cannot be linked to the Greco-Roman institution with any certainty and since the chapter is not a contrast between slavery and freedom but between slavery to two different masters, it seems possible that Exodus imagery influenced Paul. . . . The Christ event, like the Exodus, transfers the believer from

22. Ibid., 17.
23. Ibid., 59: “[T]he twin axioms of covenant fidelity and monolatry, the inevitability of slavery, and the importance of national identity suggest that the title ‘slave of God’ occupied an emblematic status. The phrase was not merely a metaphorical image that compared Israel’s relationship with God through the institutional language of slavery. The title was a distinctive way of associating the Israelites with God and represented their national history in conjunction with God. To declare oneself a slave of God was to identify with the story of the Exodus, the stipulations of the covenant and the subsequent events that influenced the development of the tradition. As an emblem, the title contained within it the axioms of Israelite religion and the lessons of history. To identify oneself as a slave of God was to make a statement of both religious and national significance.”

25. Byron, Slavery Metaphors, 209: “Paul’s use of a general principle in 6.16 as a way to describe ‘Control Restrain’ relationships would have quickly excluded images of Greco-Roman slavery. Paul is writing about control not ownership.” Unfortunately, it is not finally clear how identifying “control” and “restrain” as the metaphor’s primary connotations and even rejecting self-sale as an explanation of the principle in 6:16 eliminates domestic slavery as a possible source domain. As Byron himself states, “All Paul has done [in Rom 6:16] is to state a general principle that could be applied to any system of slavery” (p. 209). In fact, it is quite instructive that Aageson himself retains Greco-Roman slavery as the source domain of Paul’s metaphor (‘‘ ‘Control’ in Pauline Language and Culture,’’ 86–89).
one master to another. Through their identification with the Christ event, believers were free from their obligation to serve sin in order that they might serve God. Romans 6 is not, therefore, a declaration of freedom, but a declaration of enslavement. This is not to suggest, however, that Paul specifically had the Exodus in mind when he wrote the chapter... but that his understanding of enslavement to God was naturally shaped through the prism of the Exodus.26

Offering a far more thorough exegetical treatment of the relevant Pauline texts than Horsley and all other like-minded interpreters before him (especially in Romans 6), Byron’s work is at present the most comprehensive analysis of Paul’s slavery metaphors from a Jewish theological perspective.

Byron, however, is by no means the latest interpreter to approach Paul’s slavery metaphors from the vantage point of Judaism. In two recent publications, Tom Holland has proposed an even more nuanced understanding of Paul’s metaphorical use of δουλεύω language than either of the two exegetes previously discussed. While he shows no knowledge of their work, Holland is in basic agreement with both Horsley and Byron when he argues that Paul’s use of δοῦλος metaphors is indebted not to Greco-Roman culture and contemporary slave practice, but to Jewish tradition. In fact, Holland contends that it is the Jewish Scriptures specifically that give Paul’s metaphorical use of δοῦλος redemptive-historical significance, and even its semantic range. As Holland summarizes in Contours of Pauline Theology,

our study has identified a fundamental error in the understanding of scholars regarding the use and meaning of doulos in the New Testament. The traditional Hellenistic setting in which doulos is set has been seen to be inadequate to explain the theological implications which surround its use. A Semitic setting, however, proves itself authentic for interpreting many of the concepts where Paul has allegedly been lacking in clarity. Paul, nor indeed any Christian, is not a slave of Christ, but is a [free] servant with all of the dignity and privileges that such a calling carries.27

Holland’s case is built on several observations. The first, as we have just observed, concerns Paul’s profound indebtedness to his Jewishness. As Holland explains, “Paul’s claim to be a Hebrew of the Hebrews points not only to competence in the Hebrew language, but also a zeal for the Hebrew culture.”28 But apparently this zeal was not for Second Temple Hebrew culture, for Holland rejects the possibility of Paul’s interaction with

26. Ibid., 217. Later in the book, Byron states, “This does not mean that Paul never had Greco-Roman practices in mind. It does signify, however, that Paul’s notion of slavery to God and Christ can be regarded as a natural development from his Jewish heritage. Paul did sometimes allude to Greco-Roman practices by way of an illustration (Rom 6:16; 14:4; 1 Cor 7:22 and perhaps Gal 4:1–7). His preliminary framework, however, was the Jewish slave of God tradition” (p. 258). But given Byron’s exegesis of individual texts, it is unclear why and how he allows for allusions to Greco-Roman domestic slavery in Romans 6 and Galatians 4.
28. Ibid., 75.
and acceptance of that era of Jewish life and tradition. Thus, second, Paul’s understanding of Jewish culture and theology was entirely informed by his reading of the Jewish Scriptures, especially Isaiah. Third, Paul’s language reflects the lexical storehouse of the LXX. As Holland explains,

> While the vocabulary of the New Testament could be found throughout the Hellenistic world, it did not have the same meaning when it was used in a religious sense within the Jewish community. Here the language had imbibed its own theological meaning as a result of the translation of the Hebrew Bible some two hundred years or so before Christ. The Hebrew meaning had been poured into the text of the Greek translation to produce a language that had its own particular lexicon. It was Greek in its alphabet and vocabulary, but Hebrew in its mindset and essential meaning. It was this very language that Judaism bequeathed to the infant church as she interpreted and proclaimed the message of the prophets.

According to Holland, Paul’s understanding of the Greek noun δοῦλος is indebted to the LXX in precisely this way. Holland proposes that Paul understood δοῦλος language in the LXX to possess the same semantic potential as the Hebrew ‘ebed (“slave”/“servant”). However, because ‘ebed Yahweh metaphors in the OT did not imply slavery but free service to God as king, Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors must imply the same, even in Romans 6. As Holland states in his recent commentary, “the term doulos in Rom 6:16 should be translated ‘servant’ rather than ‘slave.’ ‘Servant’ keeps the argument in the flow of redemption history. Nevertheless, in Egypt the Israelites were slaves. In this verse [Rom 6:16] there is a subtle switch: once, slaves (doulos) to Sin (or Pharaoh); now, servants (doulos) to Yahweh. What a contrast!”

Thus, while Holland interprets Paul’s δοῦλος metaphor in Romans 6 in much the same manner as Horsley and Byron before him, he certainly goes some ways beyond them when he argues that Paul’s image not only had its origin in Jewish-scriptural tradition but actually portrays believers as participants in the Isaianic new exodus: God, through Christ (the new Moses), has brought unbelievers out from slavery to personified powers and called them into his service. Moreover, the lexical nuances of Holland’s proposal seem to make explicit what Horsley only implied, namely, that Paul does not (normally) consider believers to be slaves of God/Christ. Rather, their

29. Holland is critical of those who use extra-biblical Jewish texts (i.e., Pseudepigrapha) for illuminating NT theology (ibid., 51–68). It is quite curious, therefore, when he himself does the same (pp. 22–26).

30. Ibid., 52. He continues: “[T]he New Testament is not a collection of Hellenistic writings, as argued by the liberal forefathers, for it is being increasingly recognised to be a collection of essentially, if not entirely, Jewish writings. If this is true, then it challenges at a fundamental level the presuppositions of theological liberalism. There was no radical Hellenistic development. The identification of the New Testament as a collection of Jewish writings means that we have to abandon, or at least radically restrict, the method that has prevailed for the last hundred years, and begin all over again” (pp. 53–54).


32. Idem, Romans, 10–11.
obedience is conducted voluntarily as God’s free servants (slightly against Byron’s notion of voluntary slavery), indeed, as participants in the identity of Isaiah’s suffering servant.\(^{33}\)

Having surveyed the views of Horsley, Byron, and Holland on Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors, we can now summarize the themes that consistently surface in their work. First, all three scholars assert that Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors in Romans 6 and elsewhere derive not from Greco-Roman physical, domestic slavery but from the apostle’s Jewish tradition and exodus-shaped world view. Second, and as a correlate to the first, all three scholars (Byron most explicitly) seem to assume that the δοῦλος metaphors used by other Second Temple Jewish authors were employed free of influence from Greco-Roman slavery. Third, in the cases of Horsley and Holland, Paul’s metaphor in Romans 6 implies free service rather than slavery to righteousness/God. Having noted these insights, we shall in the following section respond critically to the views of Horsley, Byron, and Holland in order to show that Paul’s slavery metaphor in Romans 6 betrays the influence of both Jewish tradition and Greco-Roman domestic slavery.

A JEWISH-GRECO-ROMAN APPROACH TO PAUL’S SLAVERY METAPHOR IN ROMANS 6

The works of Horsley, Byron, and Holland offer significant food for theological thought. Especially noteworthy is their propensity to underscore the continuity of Paul’s slavery metaphors with earlier Jewish and scriptural traditions. In fact, for all the debate over their origin, Paul’s slavery metaphors certainly satisfy, for example, Roy Ciampa’s proposed criteria for detecting “scriptural concepts and ideas.” According to Ciampa, Pauline themes are more likely to be scriptural if:

1. Paul and/or early Jewish or Christian authors associate them with scriptural quotations, allusions, and/or echoes elsewhere in their writings;
2. they have a distinctive background in the Jewish Scriptures and are typically introduced in Jewish (and early Christian) discourse as Jewish or scriptural concepts;
3. they reflect dissimilarity (in some significant aspect) to Greco-Roman ideas or concepts while also demonstrating similarity to a distinctive (generally known) Jewish concept that has roots in Scripture; or
4. they reflect dissimilarity (in some significant aspect) to Greco-Roman ideas or concepts but are explicable in terms of new or alternative interpretations of Scripture inspired by Jesus or by the context and needs of the early church (especially if explicit scriptural support is given for the idea within early Christianity).\(^{34}\)

As surveyed above, and shown in greater detail elsewhere (especially by Byron), Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors are preceded by a rich history of similar

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33. Idem, Contours, 79–82.
images in Jewish literature and are even associated with scriptural echoes and allusions in certain Pauline passages (e.g., Rom 7:25; 8:15, 21; 2 Cor 6:3–4; Phil 2:7). Additionally, as Byron observes, the master of a δοῦλος in Romans 6 is determined strictly by whom a person serves, rather than by ownership. While this should not preclude one from interpreting the metaphor in the context of Greco-Roman physical slavery, it is probably in this respect more analogous to Jewish slave tradition than contemporary slave practice. With these insights in view, we should therefore consider Paul’s δοῦλος metaphor in Romans 6 to be a “scriptural concept.”

But even after conceding this point, it does not follow that Paul’s δοῦλος metaphor in Romans 6 must be void of any and all influences from Greco-Roman physical slavery. Scriptural concepts were not preserved in a vacuum. As even Ciampa recognizes, many such themes were “developed further in traditions that reflected other historical, cultural, and theological influences.” And this development has probably taken place in the case of Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors. In order to demonstrate this, we shall in the remainder of this article respond critically to three of the problematic assertions and assumptions made by Horsley, Byron, and Holland.

First, I will respond to the implicit and explicit shared assumption of Horsley, Byron, and Holland that δοῦλος metaphors in other Second Temple Jewish literature were employed without having undergone any influence from Greco-Roman slavery. Second, I will address Holland’s explicit (and Horsley’s implicit) suggestion that δοῦλος means something other than “slave” in Romans 6 when righteousness and God are the objects of service. Third, in response to all three scholars, I will demonstrate that Paul’s slavery metaphor in Romans 6 itself betrays the influence of Greco-Roman domestic slavery. Paul’s slavery metaphors, therefore, are Jewish—insofar as they build on a familiar scriptural concept—as well as Greco-Roman—insofar as they draw on aspects of contemporary slave practice.

The Influence of Greco-Roman Domestic Slavery on Second Temple Jewish Metaphors

Each of the three interpreters discussed above, Byron most notably, seem to interpret Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors as they do because they assume that most Jews—especially those who belonged to the Jewish theological tradition Paul inherited—also employed similar images without recourse to Greco-Roman slave practices. It is clear from a variety of texts, however, that Jewish notions of slavery assimilated in varying degrees to contemporary

37. This proposal is by no means original to me. Westermann argued long ago for a similar “dual source of Paul’s idea of the slaves of God” (“The Freedmen and the Slaves of God,” 62).
Hellenistic approaches as Israel came into close contact with Greco-Roman societies. Not only did the Levitical distinctives of Israelite debt and domestic slavery fade during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, but Jewish conceptualizations of service to God were also affected by the inroads of Hellenism. Slavery to God may still have had nationalistic and honorific overtones, but the metaphor gained additional connotations through the influence of Greco-Roman chattel slavery.

Many of these changes are apparent in the Greek literature of the Second Temple period. Due, for instance, to the multiplicity of Greek terms used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew 'ebed, together with the subtle patterns in which they are used, Benjamin Wright suggests that “the [LXX] translators were struggling to find ways to represent what was a completely different lexical and social world from theirs.” Wright offers the use of δοῦλος as an important example: the near absence of δοῦλος in the Greek Pentateuch (where Israel’s restricted debt slavery is expounded), versus the term’s abundant use in the rest of the LXX (where actual slaves and figurative uses abound), probably suggests that the LXX translators largely withheld the term from the Pentateuch to avoid confusing it with Israel’s indentured service—“an in-between category which does not exist in Hellenistic slave systems.” Thus, Wright explains,

The translators of the Hebrew Bible lived in [a slave-dependent] world, and their use of terms for slaves in the Jewish-Greek translations reflects their attempts to transform the monolithic slave/servant language of Hebrew to their own. In doing so, these scholars not only

38. For the influence of Hellenism on the Jewish people during the intertestamental period, see the much-celebrated volume by Martin Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974): “It is not possible to say that Palestinian Judaism, leaving aside the interlude under Antiochus IV, which was speedily remedied, maintained a straight course through the Hellenistic period untouched by the alien civilization and completely faithful to the Old Testament tradition” (p. 310). For the varying degrees of assimilation by Jews living outside Palestine, see John M. G. Barclay, The Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

39. Catherine Hezser, Jewish Slavery in Antiquity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 93: “Whereas the Torah and the Elephantine documents do not seem to have been too concerned about boundaries between slaves and free persons, especially as far as Israelite slaves were concerned, Jewish literature from Hellenistic and Roman times emphasizes the contrast between the two categories but plays down distinctions between Jewish and gentile slaves. The free adult male Israelite comes to assume the role of the Greek and Roman citizen as far as his self-distinction from slaves is concerned. He is the author of all of the surviving literary texts, which accordingly represent his perspective. Greek Jewish writers other than Philo and Josephus use the generic category of the slave only and do not seem to have been much concerned about status distinctions amongst slaves. Within this literature no text which distinguishes between Hebrew and gentile slaves is known to me. One might argue that at that time all slaves owned by Jews were gentile, but this possibility is unlikely on the basis of what Josephus tells us about Hasmonean policies.”


41. Ibid., 97.
lexically translated, but culturally transformed the biblical language of slavery for those who used the texts after them.\textsuperscript{42}

Wright also observes this transformation in extrabiblical Jewish literature. According to Wright, the predominance of δοῦλος in Josephus, Philo, and various apocryphal texts—especially when the term refers to persons whom the LXX labeled with the more ambiguous παῖς—together with the intimate knowledge these authors possessed of Greco-Roman slave systems, suggests that they conceptualized the various modes of service mentioned in the Jewish Scriptures in basically the same way as they perceived the chattel slavery they knew firsthand. As Wright explains,

To a great degree, living in the Hellenistic-Roman Mediterranean and speaking (or, at least understanding) Greek or Latin meant transforming the notion of slavery or servanthood from that of the Hebrew Bible to that of the slave systems characteristic of the Mediterranean social world in the Hellenistic-Roman period. Of course, the most critical place in which such a transformation can be found is in the Jewish-Greek biblical translations, and the lexical choices made by the translators to render ʿebed have the potential to have a dramatic impact on the “biblical” concept of servanthood. The term doulos, one of the two major translations of ʿebed in the Jewish-Greek Bible, quite simply communicated to the Greek reader in this period something different from what the word ʿebed did earlier. This consideration most probably applies not only to those instances in which an actual servant or slave is meant, but also to metaphorical uses of the terminology.\textsuperscript{43}

The influence of Greco-Roman domestic slavery on Second Temple Jewish slave of God metaphors is also clear from those images themselves. Such images appear frequently in Philo’s discourses on slavery and his repeated use of slavery metaphors. For our purposes, one example will suffice:


\textsuperscript{43} Wright, “ʿEbed/Doulos,” 84. Cf. John G. Gibbs and Louis H. Feldman, “Jospehus’ Vocabulary for Slavery,” JQR 76 (1986): 281–310. Holland, however, rejects this hypothesis, for while the LXX did use familiar slave terms to render ʿebed, he assumes that Paul and his contemporaries recognized the distinction between the supposed Jewish and non-Jewish senses of those terms. However, it is curious that in a different context Holland himself recognizes the difficulty of making such an assumption: “What determines any word’s meaning is not how earlier generations understood that particular word, but how the generation that has produced the text under consideration interprets it” (Contours, 51). With this logic, one cannot assume that Paul understood δοῦλος to refer to a free servant (even if the LXX translators did), because Paul’s own generation did not normally use the term that way. As Wright explains, “It is hard to imagine that the lexical content of the Hebrew ʿebed was simply dumped into the Greek and Latin vocabulary; the idea was socially conditioned” (p. 84). Westerman (“Slaves of God,” 56), at the beginning of the last century, criticized Sass for making the same assumption as Holland.
When, then, is it that the servant [οἰκέτης] speaks frankly to his master [δοῦλόν]? Surely it is when his heart tells him that he has not wronged his owner, but that his words and deeds are all for that owner’s benefit. And so when else should the slave of God [τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ δοῦλον] open his mouth freely to him Who is the ruler and master [ήγεμόνα καὶ δικαστήριον] both of himself and of the All, save when he is pure from sin and the judgements of his conscience are loyal to his master [τὸ φιλοδέσποτον ἕκ τοῦ συνειδότος κρίνῃ], when he feels more joy at being the servant of God [τῷ θεράπων θεῷ] than if he had been king of all the human race and assumed an uncontested sovereignty over land and sea alike? (Heir 6–7)\(^{44}\)

This example from Philo demonstrates that, even though he surely considered his references to slavery to God to correspond to Jewish tradition, his concept of domestic slavery informed his use of the metaphor.\(^{45}\)

The use of chattel slavery to illustrate service to God is also apparent in the Wisdom of Solomon. Due to the similarities between Wisdom and Romans, Pauline scholars have argued convincingly that Paul was intimately familiar with the Jewish tradition on which Wisdom is based, if not the book itself. As John Barclay explains,

> A reasonable case can be made that Paul’s arguments run not only parallel to Wisdom but actually in direct engagement with it. Rom 1–2 can be read fruitfully as a polemical restatement of the key theses of Wis 13–15, and . . . there are strong similarities between Rom 9–11 and Wis 10–12. Whether or not the literary relationship is direct, the author of Wisdom is clearly a “kinsman” for Paul, not only in ethnic origin but also in theological focus and method.\(^{46}\)

It is therefore quite instructive to observe in Wis 9.5 how the author, when addressing God, calls himself “your servant [δοῦλος σός] the son of your serving girl [παιδίσκη]” (NRSV). Because the speaker is the son of a παιδίσκη (“female slave”) and δοῦλος is clearly a domestic slave in 18.11,

\(^{44}\) Translation from the Loeb Classical Library. Byron himself cites this text but does not comment on its apparent use of domestic slavery to illustrate slavery to God.

\(^{45}\) See also J. Albert Harrill, “Review of John Byron, *Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity*,” Shofar 23 (2005): 185–87, at p. 186: “When Philo of Alexandria wrote about slavery in the past, he naturally assumed it to be similar to the institutions and ideologies in his Hellenistic and Roman world, interpreting Moses and other biblical figures, for example, through the Stoic philosophy of mastery over the passions and the distinctively Roman moral value of authority (*auctoritas*).”

Wright is correct to assert that the δοῦλος of God metaphor in 9.5 portrays the speaker as a chattel slave.47

One could, of course, also analyze the NT slave parables (e.g., Matt 24:45–51/Luke 12:42–48; Matt 25:14–30) and Haustafeln (e.g., Eph 6:5–7; Col 3:22–24; 1 Pet 2:16), which repeatedly use domestic slavery to illustrate slavery to God/Christ.48 Nevertheless, given the forgoing observations it seems too restrictive to assume that Jewish and Christian authors like Paul writing during the NT period would have used the metaphor of slavery to God apart from the notion of domestic slavery practiced ubiquitously in the Greco-Roman world. As Wright says, “[W]hen these writers use terms for slaves, whether general or specific, modern interpreters ought to see the thought world of this language reflecting that of Hellenistic-Roman chattel slavery.”49 This does not deny that images of slavery to God stand in continuity with Jewish tradition, but simply suggests that Jewish concepts of metaphorical slavery were impacted by the practices of slavery and slave ownership which the Jewish people witnessed in their variegated cultures and contexts during the Second Temple period.

The Meaning of δοῦλος in Romans 6

As observed above, Holland’s reading of Romans 6 departs significantly from the modern consensus. On the one hand, his recognition of the influence of Isaiah on Romans is generally on the mark and his propensity to interpret many of Paul’s discourses in that light is therefore commendable.50 On the other hand, it seems quite clear that Holland forces the model of new exodus (as he understands it anyway) onto Romans 6, most apparent through his interpretation of the δοῦλος of righteousness/God as a free servant. In this section we shall show why Holland’s reading of Rom 6:16–23 is more creative than it is convincing.

To begin with, it is quite instructive to observe that the LXX (the alleged source of Paul’s δοῦλος metaphor) makes minimal use of ἐλευθερία language—relative to Paul (cf. Rom 6:18, 20, 22)—and in fact never uses it to refer to Israel’s release from Egypt or exile, whether in contexts involving the exodus or new exodus events. The term most often used in that respect is “redeem” (λυτρόω). The use of ἐλευθερία language in the LXX, on

49. Wright, “ʿEbed/Doulos,” 88–89.
the other hand, almost always appears with reference to the liberation of physical (often debt and domestic) slaves within Israel.51 Words such as δοῦλος/δουλόω and λυτρώ, then, are the terms that would relate to a new exodus theme in the LXX, and not ἐλευθερία, which occurs in different settings. That Paul is using ἐλευθερία language metaphorically is clear, but evidence from the LXX points to a source domain other than new exodus. Thus, Holland ignores the clear pattern of ἐλευθερία and exodus language in the LXX, which seems to undermine any suggestion that Paul’s metaphor in Romans 6 is adapted (at least directly) from the LXX’s portrayal of the new exodus, whether in Isaiah or elsewhere in the OT.52

Neither does Holland pay much attention to the rhetorical function of the various kinds of contrasting parallelism apparent throughout Romans 6. Paul’s contrast of slaveries in v. 16, for instance, creates a perfect conceptual (though not syntactical) parallelism. Paul begins the verse asking, “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” The two coordinating conjunctions ἤτοι and ἤ are essential for establishing the parallelism: a person is an obedient slave either of sin/death or of obedience/righteousness.53 There is no terminological contrast employed in order to create any kind of conceptual distinction between the two services rendered; in fact, the parallel phrases ἁμαρτίας εἰς θάνατον and ὑπακοῆς εἰς δικαιοσύνην modify the same occurrence of the noun δοῦλοι, providing it no opportunity for semantic variation. The only difference, then, lies in the object of the services rendered, so that the nature of service to sin/death prior to baptism is precisely that which is rendered to obedience/righteousness following baptism: obedient slavery.

A second kind of parallelism is apparent in vv. 18, 20, and 22, where Paul introduces a contrasting relationship between slavery (δοῦλος/δουλόω) and freedom (ἐλεύθερος/ἐλευθερόω) that is respected throughout the discourse. Within this contrast, slavery to one entity necessarily entails freedom from the other; alternatively, freedom from one entity necessarily implies slavery to the other.54 It is the assumed antithesis between the two sets of terms that supplies their meaning (cf. 1 Cor 7:21). As Larry Hurtado

51. Cf. ἐλευθερόω = Exod 21:2, 5, 26, 27; Deut 15:12, 13, 18; 21:14; 1 Kgdms 20:8, 11; Neh 13:17; Job 39:5; Ps 87:5; Eccl 10:17; Jer 36:2; 41:9, 14, 16; ἐλευθερία = Lev 19:20; ἐλευθερόω = Prov 25:10.


53. The syntax of the verse is quite tricky and perhaps slightly misleading. David J. Southall may be correct to understand εἰς δικαιοσύνην to be in contrast not with εἰς θάνατον, but with ἁμαρτίας. Thus, ὑπακοῆς reiterates ὑπακούετε, and εἰς θάνατον contrasts with the yet-to-be-introduced phrases εἰς ἁγιασμόν (v. 19) and ζωήν αἰώνιον (vv. 22–23) (Rediscovering Righteousness in Romans: Personified dikaiosynē within Metaphoric and Narratorial Settings [WUNT 2/240; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008] 128–35).

54. Leander E. Keck, Romans (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2005) 166: “In this passage [Rom 6:15–23], as in the rest of the section, Paul’s thought expresses stark contrasts, radical alternatives; it is either/or.”
explains, “'[T]he meaning of ‘free(dom)’ in Roman times can scarcely be understood adequately without the contrasting condition of slavery.’” Due, then, to their explicit contrast with ἐλεύθερος and ἐλευθερόω, Paul’s use of δοῦλος and δουλόω throughout the discourse must be interpreted as denoting slavery. Introducing “free service” as the sense of either δοῦλος or δουλόω at any one point in Romans 6 would completely destroy the parallelism.

As we have seen, the LXX’s use of ἐλευθερία language, together with Paul’s use of various kinds of parallelism, demonstrates that Paul’s δοῦλος metaphor in Rom 6:16–23 is not derived directly from the LXX's portrayal of a new exodus and most certainly denotes slavery in all its appearances. Thus, it is difficult to conceive of any interpretation of this passage wherein freedom from righteousness/God is to be contrasted with free service to righteousness/God, as Holland would have it. For δοῦλος/δουλόω to undergo such a radical and unexpected change of meaning is hugely implausible and nearly impossible to detect for one not already disposed to such an interpretation of the metaphor. Paul’s discourse only allows for one meaning of δοῦλος/δουλόω: slavery, the antithesis of freedom.

The Influence of Greco-Roman Domestic Slavery in Romans 6

The final point to be made in response to the work of Horsley, Byron, and Holland is that Paul’s slavery metaphor in Romans 6 itself displays the influence of Greco-Roman domestic slavery. This much is apparent through the use of three commercial/monetary terms in Rom 6:21–23. There, Paul uses somewhat interchangeably the nouns καρπός, τέλος, and ὀψώνιον. Each of these has financial connotations that would have resonated deeply in the commercial world of first-century Rome, in which many from the church’s large population of slaves doubtlessly participated. Moreover, as we will see, Paul was surely familiar with the commercial/monetary sense of these terms, having employed them elsewhere.


56. Cf. Wayne Coppins, The Interpretation of Freedom in the Letters of Paul: With Special Reference to the 'German Tradition' (WUNT 2/261; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) 124–25: “[I]t is far from clear that [v. 19] expresses or implies that the believers’ relation to righteousness is, in fact, freedom rather than slavery. Instead, his formal use of freedom terminology in vv. 18, 20, and 22 suggests that Paul is not operating with such a rich or robust understanding of freedom in this context.”

Verse 21 begins, “Therefore what fruit were you getting then [καρπόν εἴχετε τότε]? The things of which you are now ashamed.”

The adverb τότε (“then”), together with οὖν (“therefore”), suggests that Paul’s question about the receipt of καρπός (“fruit”) in v. 21 logically follows on his prior statement in v. 20 concerning the believer’s freedom to righteousness “when” (ὅτε) he/she once was a slave of sin. Thus, in v. 21 both the question (“what fruit?”) and answer (“shameful things”) function as an extension of the slavery to sin metaphor in v. 20. The association between slavery and fruit is also clear in v. 22. There, Paul states that, because believers have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, “the fruit you get [ἐχετε τὸν καρπὸν ὑμῶν] leads to sanctification.” But how is the notion of having fruit related to slavery, or, for that matter, commerce/money?

The commercial/monetary sense of καρπός is apparent in Rom 1:13 and 15:25–29. In 1:13 Paul, the “slave of Christ Jesus” (δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ), shares with the Roman believers his recurring plan to visit them, a trip he wishes to take “in order that I might reap some fruit also among you [πινὰ καρπὸν σχῶ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν].” Paul’s use of καρπὸν σχῶ refers to the results of his preaching ministry, including the financial support he hoped to garner for his anticipated mission to Spain. As Robert Jewett explains, “the same kind of fruit is being sought in Rome as Paul seeks elsewhere, support for extending the gospel to the Gentiles.”

The phrase ἔχω + καρπός, much like its use in 6:21–22, is therefore an idiom indicating productivity and, in certain instances, the receipt of money. The monetary sense of καρπός is abundantly clear in Rom 15:25–29, where in a discourse employing a host of monetary terms (οἱ πτωχοί, ὀφειλέται, κοινωνέω, ὀφείλω, λειτουργέω) Paul shares his travel itinerary with the Roman believers, explaining once more his plan to travel to Rome and onward to Spain, but not until completing and delivering the collection (τὸν καρπὸν τοῦτον, v. 28; cf. Phil 4:17) for the Jerusalem believers.

Paul also uses the noun τέλος in vv. 21–22 with monetary significance. It certainly carries such a meaning in Rom 13:7 (“Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed,” τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος), and its use with καρπός in 6:21 seems to suggest the same here. In v. 21, the product (καρπός) of slavery to sin is an unbeliever’s shameful deeds (ἐφ᾽ ὦν ἐπαισχύνεσθε), the result (τέλος) of which is death (cf. v. 16). In v. 22, however, the product (καρπός) of slavery to righteousness/God is sanctification (εἰς ἁγιασμόν; cf. v. 19), the result (τέλος) of which is eternal life.

58. Most modern translations extend the question in v. 21 to include ἐφ᾽ ὦν ἐπαισχύνεσθε (“So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed?” [NRSV]). For a defense of the punctuation adopted above (that is, with the question ending with τότε), see Moo, Romans, 406–07.

59. Ibid., 406: “‘then’ matches the ‘when’ in v. 20.”

60. Robert Jewett, Romans (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 130.

61. Cf. LSJ 5; BDAG 5.

62. Cranfield, Romans 1–8, 329.
are listed in table 1. Given these uses of καρπός and τέλος, it seems likely that, within Paul’s metaphorical field of slavery—especially if Rome’s large population of commercial slaves is the field in view—καρπός is the commodity, or perhaps profit, that a slave produces for his master (whether sin or righteousness/God), whereas τέλος is the specific benefit the master gives to the slave as a result of faithful and productive service.

The identification of καρπός and τέλος as commercial/monetary terms is further reinforced in v. 23 by Paul’s reference to “the salary/wages of sin” (τὰ ὀψώνια τῆς ἁμαρτίας). In fact, Paul uses both καρπός and ὀψώνια in adjacent analogies in 1 Cor 9:7, where he seeks to establish the legitimacy of his right to receive financial support as an apostle, asking “Who serves as a soldier at his own expense [ιδίοις ὀψωνίοις]? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit [τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ]?” But as the context of Rom 6:16–7:6 indicates, the metaphorical field implied by ὀψώνια in 6:23 is domestic slavery, not military service as some suggest. Many scholars who arrive at a military interpretation do so as a result of the assumption that slaves were never awarded monetary perks for their labor. But many slaves had

63. Adapted from Keck, Romans, 171; cf. Southall, Rediscovering Righteousness in Romans, 146.
64. For examples of slaves’ being awarded benefits for faithful service and in proportion to their productivity, see Matt 25:14–30 // Luke 19:12–27.
66. Cf. John 4:36: “The one who reaps receives a wage and gathers fruit for eternal life [ὁ θερίζων μισθὸν λαμβάνει καὶ συνάγει καρπὸν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον], so that the one who sows and the one who reaps may rejoice together.”
67. Harris, Slave of Christ, 84: “The exquisite attractiveness of the new slavery becomes evident when Paul contrasts the outcome or ‘fruit’ of the two ‘slaveries’. For those on the payroll of sin, the wages are ‘death’ (v. 23; cf. vv. 16, 21), what Paul elsewhere depicts as ‘eternal ruin and exclusion from the presence of the Lord’ (2 Thess. 1:8). On the other hand, those who are God’s slaves will receive as a gracious gift (unrelated to merit) ‘eternal life’ (v. 23b), that unmediated and beatific participation in the eternal divine life that will exclude both physical and spiritual death.” See also Caragounis, “ΟΨΩΝΙΟΝ,” 53–56; Martin, Slavery as Salvation, 62; Kent L. Yinger, Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds (SNTSMS 105; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 187–92; C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979) 329; Jewett, Romans, 425–26; Southall, Rediscovering Righteousness in Romans, 98. Paul uses μισθός and ὀψώνιον interchangeably when referring to his material support (cf. 1 Cor 9:17–18; 2 Cor 11:8).
68. See, e.g., Holland, Contours, 73: “It is unlikely that Paul would speak of a wage being paid in a slave relationship.” Byron proposes a military context largely because he assumes “the passage does not use institutional [slavery] imagery” (Slavery Metaphors, 215 n. 75).
the opportunity to receive a variety of benefits as a result of faithful service, including daily provisions, a spending account (peculium), and a salary/wages (ὀψώνια), as a number of texts show. What implications, then, do these cultural insights provide for our reading of Rom 6:16–23?

Paul’s slavery discourse in Rom 6:16–23 seeks to explain why believers are not to sin even though they are no longer under law but under grace (vv. 14–15; cf. v. 1). Clearly certain opponents of Paul were anxious about the ethical implications of his law-free gospel and therefore charged the apostle with promoting sin (cf. 3:8). But as Paul assures his readers, his gospel is law-free without being antinomian. Obedience is a necessary corollary to slavery (δοῦλοί ἐστε ὑπακούετε, v. 16), so that those who present themselves to God/righteousness to serve him as slaves must obey him, rather than obey sin, if in fact they truly are God’s slaves (6:16–19). Paul therefore encourages his readers to continue presenting their very members as slaves to God/righteousness (v. 19).

Paul then advances the discourse by explaining how each condition of slavery yields distinctive products and perks: slaves of sin produce shameful things and acquire death in return (v. 21), while slaves of God produce sanctification and acquire eternal life in return (v. 22). But in order to avoid the implication that eternal life is somehow merited through sanctification, Paul offers as a clarifying note in v. 23 one final metaphorical contrast between the two conditions of slavery and their respective returns: for slaves of sin, death is a (deserved) salary/wages (ὀψώνια), while eternal life is, for slaves of God, a(n) (unconditioned) gift (χάρισμα).

The uses, then, of the terms καρπός, τέλος, and ὀψώνιον suggest that as the slavery metaphor continues into Rom 6:21–23, Paul employs the notion of physical slavery there in order to inform the reader about the contrasting outcomes of slavery to sin and slavery to God. Accordingly, Paul’s slavery

69. Cf. Caragounis, “ΟΨΩΝΙΟΝ,” 45, 53–56; Martin, Slavery as Salvation, 7–11, 75; Goodrich, Paul as an Administrator of God in 1 Corinthians, 98–100, 182–83. See also Spicq (“ὀψώνιον,” TLNT 2:602), who lists several Alexandrian papyri from the Hellenistic period that mention slaves (σώματα) receiving ὀψώνια: P.Cair. Zen. 59027 (συντάξαντος ἡμῖν Ἀμύντου δεδώκαμεν ὀψώνιον τοῖς σώμασιν τοῖς ἀπολελειμμένοις διμήνου, καὶ Καλλιάνακτι δὲ τῶι τέκτονι τριμήνου; 258 B.C.); 59043 (καὶ πρῶτον σοι [εὐγένειαν ἵνα τῇ] σάμῳ ἐνοχλεῖ ἡμᾶς τὸ ὀψωνίον ἀπαίτει [τα], καὶ νῦν δὲ ἀξίοι] [σιν] τι δώθησιν αὐτοῖς, εἰ μέλλουσιν εὐτὰκτῆσιν. καὶ δῶν δέν ποιήσεσιν; [ὑρίας ἡμῖν εἰ διδότας αὐτοῖς; 257 B.C.]; 59059 (Ἀριστεὺς περὶ τῶν ὀψωνίων τῶν τοῖς σώμασιν; 257 B.C.). Certain slaves (e.g., οἰκέται) on the Hermonos estate in Egypt also received ὀψώνια. Dominic Rathbone rejects the identification of these laborers as slaves (Economic Rationalism and Rural Society in Third-Century AD Egypt: The Heroninos Archive and the Appianus Estate [Cambridge Classical Studies; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991] 106–16). However, their slave status has been defended recently by Kyle Harper, Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 513–18.

70. For personified righteousness as representing Christ, see Southall, Rediscovering Righteousness in Romans, 83–147.

71. Of course Paul departs quite clearly from the field of domestic slavery when he introduces the notion of gift. But the themes from vv. 21–22 that are repeated in v. 23 prepare the reader for this departure. Indeed, there does not appear to be any reason for Paul to have included v. 23 except to clarify the unconditioned nature of eternal life, which must be a gift, otherwise it would “not be counted as a gift, but as one’s due” (4:4; cf. 11:6).
metaphor in Romans 6 is neither a decontextualized nor (strictly) “new exodus” portrait of divine service. Rather, the analogy draws on features of Greco-Roman domestic slavery (slave obedience, slave production, and slave perks) that would have been familiar to Paul’s readers, who probably witnessed such phenomena on a daily basis.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that several recent attempts to interpret Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors strictly within the context of Judaism, while not without merit, nonetheless have serious shortcomings. Not only have we shown that many of the Jewish ideas and traditions concerning slavery perpetuated between the testaments did not survive free of Hellenism’s impact, but Paul’s discourse in Romans 6 itself exhibits signs of such influence. Both the consistent antithesis between slavery and freedom as well as Paul’s employment of terms for slave productivity and perks indicate that Paul’s δοῦλος metaphors in Romans 6 and elsewhere should be interpreted in the contexts of both Judaism and Hellenism. As eminent ancient historian Peter Garnsey remarks, “Paul was a Christian theologian steeped in the Jewish scriptures and law. He also drew ideas from classical philosophy, even if second-hand and in an attenuated form. These influences, when fused with Paul’s own historical experience and perception of the social and ideological context, produced the distinctive mix which is Pauline slave theory.”

Indeed, Jewish concepts of slavery and use of slavery metaphors, even if exhibiting some, or much, continuity with earlier scriptural traditions, did not completely avoid the influence of those foreign notions of slavery that accompanied the Hellenization of the Jewish people, Paul included.

Therefore, while the scope of this article has not allowed for the identification of all that Paul associated with slavery, or even connoted through his use of slavery metaphors, I have provided here a more nuanced perspective on the origin and use of Paul’s slavery metaphors than has been offered in recent years, which recognizes Paul’s participation in a tradition that identifies God’s people as his slaves and which takes into consideration the conceptual transformation that this metaphor experienced over time. This realization, I believe, is necessary in order to interpret Paul fairly, and perhaps has some implications for how NT interpreters ought to conceive of the interplay between the supposed disparate cultures and contexts operative in the ancient Mediterranean world. Thus, this study is yet another example of why interpreters of the NT in general and of Paul in particular must continue to move beyond the Judaism/Hellenism divide.