

**A DISSERTATION ON SERVITUDE:
EMBRACING AN EXAMINATION OF THE
SCRIPTURE DOCTRINES ON THE SUBJECT,
AND AN INQUIRY INTO THE CHARACTER
AND RELATIONS OF SLAVERY**

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A Dissertation on Servitude: Embracing an Examination of the Scripture Doctrines on the Subject, and an Inquiry into the Character and Relations of Slavery by Leicester A. Sawyer

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LEICESTER A. SAWYER

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BY LEICESTER A. SAWYER, A. M.

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."—Paul.



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INTRODUCTION.

THE following Dissertation is devoted to an extensive subject, and one of great practical importance. Servitude occupies a prominent place in the Scriptures, and is illustrated by a great variety of Scripture precepts and examples. It enters into several of the most important institutions of civilized and christian society, and opens a field for investigation, pertaining to the deepest principles of morality and religion.

This subject in all its branches is now brought into discussion, by the existing excitement in relation to slavery. The advocates and apologists for slavery, are examining it for the purpose of fortifying their positions and maintaining more effectually their tottering cause.

The opposers of slavery are examining it for the opposite purpose; namely, that of assailing more effectually the object of their opposition. This subject, therefore, is one of interest to all classes of persons.

The order pursued in this Dissertation, has appeared to the writer to possess several important advantages. It follows the divine communications on this subject, beginning with the earliest, and proceeding regularly to the latest. On leaving them, it proceeds naturally from the more simple to the more complicated and difficult topics of inquiry. Whatever may have been his success, the writer has sought diligently and honestly for the truth, in respect to the Scripture examples of servitude, and the doctrines they inculcate on this subject. Those doctrines and examples, as they have appeared to him, are herein impartially set forth, and are com-

mended, not to the blind credulity, but to the diligent investigation of every reader.

Truth will bear examination. It is our high privilege to prove all things by free and liberal inquiry; and we must do it in order to attain and hold fast that, and that only, which is truly good.

The present inquiry has led the writer to several conclusions which he did not anticipate at the commencement of it. Many of them have been highly gratifying to his feelings, and in his opinion, favorable to the honor of religion. As far as those conclusions are according to truth, and no farther, he would be glad to conduct others to the same.

The truth is not bound. It is not altogether concealed, nor yet does it all appear to the superficial and hasty inquirer. It must be sought for with diligence and patience, and with continued attention and repeated effort, in order to its being fully explored even in its most simple developments. Moral truth must also be sought with a humble, submissive, teachable, and christian spirit, in order to its being fully understood and appreciated. Labor and argument are often expended in vain upon the unhumbled and unteachable, already wiser in their own eyes, and in entire ignorance, than seven men who can demonstrate the truth of their opinions. Prov. xxvi. 16.

A christian spirit is peculiarly necessary in the investigation of the nature and relations of slavery. Here it becomes us all to feel that we are but men, and that truth is of God. Here our inquiries ought to be prosecuted with special deliberation and care, remembering that we are responsible to God for our opinions and words, as well as for our actions. Errors of opinion lead to those of affection and action. We must think right on all practical subjects, in order to feel and act right.

The subject of slavery is one of practical interest to every citizen of the United States. We all have something to do with it as citizens, to approve or disapprove,

to encourage or discourage, to build up or pull down. We have done too much in ignorance ; it becomes us now to act with intelligence and discretion. Not to feel a desire to understand this subject, indicates an unusual and criminal apathy in respect to the interests of humanity and religion ; and also in respect to the influence which we are bound as individuals to exert.

Slavery is not only supported by the slave-holding states and districts in which it exists, but by every portion of the United States. Every part of the Union is implicated in its support, by the action of their representatives in congress. The national legislature has assumed the responsibility of continuing it in the District of Columbia, the heart of the nation, and the very Citadel of freedom, and in other districts under its entire control, at the South and West. It has permitted this acknowledged evil to increase and extend itself from year to year, till its present alarming magnitude has been attained. In this procedure of the national government, the North and non slave-holding states have generally co-operated. The voice of remonstrance from this quarter has been occasionally heard ; but it has been only occasional, feeble, and consequently ineffectual. This co-operation of the North in the support and extension of slavery, is the more surprising on account of the general condemnation and abhorrence of this institution by the mass of northern men. It is acknowledged to be wrong. It is deplored as a great political evil, and a source of imminent peril to our liberties as a nation. Over the South it is seen to hang like a dark portentous cloud of the wrath of the Almighty, who declares both by his word and providence, that though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished ; (Prov. xi. 21 ;) and that evil shall pursue them. A sentiment has generally prevailed, that something effectual ought to be done to check this extending and increasing evil ; but till this time it has gone on unchecked, and is now in the full tide of advancement.

In the opinion of the wisest and most discerning