

**AN EXAMINATION OF ALBERT BARNES' HANDLING OF
THE BIBLE IN THE DEBATE ON SLAVERY IN
MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA**

by

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ABSTRACT

Albert Barnes was an influential leader among New School Presbyterians in mid-nineteenth-century America. As a beloved pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and as a biblical scholar whose commentaries are still widely used today, Barnes undertook an exhaustive study of the Bible to address the foremost social issue of his day—slavery. After considering most passages in the Bible being used in the discussion, he realized that a conclusive argument could not be made, which was based exclusively on proof-texts. Barnes challenged those involved in the discussion not to ignore the Bible or its ability to provide answers to life’s difficult questions—an error made all too quickly in modern America—but to find an objective way to measure the validity of proposed applications of those proof-texts directly addressing slavery. Barnes’ chief contribution to the American slavery discussion was not merely his exhaustive study of the biblical texts directly addressing slavery. His hermeneutical method brought the discussion beyond the texts directly addressing slavery to a principle-driven approach as a necessary supplement to proof-text ethics. By suggesting that the application of proof-texts be measured against the primary principles of scripture, he found one means by which scripture could be objectively applied to the slavery discussion. In the end, Barnes would conclude that the practices essential to the perpetuation of the institution of slavery so greatly conflict with the primary principles of scripture (such as the “golden rule,” equality, the brotherhood of God’s family,

spiritual growth, and God's abhorrence of oppression), that if the sinful practices were to cease, all that would be left would be a toned-down form of employment. Barnes was convinced that if masters only knew and were sensitive to these primary principles of scripture, they would naturally emancipate their slaves. In the conclusion section, suggestions are made for further study on how the Bible can be used as an authoritative source of morality in modern discussions on civil rights and ethical issues such as racism, homosexuality, abortion, and human cloning.

To Your Only Begotten Son: Jesus Christ

My Lord, My Savior, and My Friend

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

If there was any one, single social issue that dominated the hearts, minds, and attention of mid-nineteenth-century Americans, it was the issue of slavery. It was an inescapable topic of conversation, and rare indeed was the person who did not have an opinion on the matter. Slavery was frequently discussed in a diversity of contexts including morality, the economy, philosophy, religion, and the various sciences. Eventually discussions gave way to action culminating in the American Civil War (1861-65).

Although Americans have always been a religiously-diversified people, the main religion of mid-nineteenth-century Americans was Christianity. Christianity and the Bible were indispensable influences in the thought of mid-nineteenth-century Americans. It stood to reason, therefore, that conversations about slavery often would often center on the biblical texts that dealt with slavery directly or indirectly.¹

¹Kevin Giles, "The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Quarterly* 66 (January 1994): 12; Kurt O. Berends, "'Thus Saith the Lord:' The Bible and the Southern Evangelical World View in the Era of the American Civil War" (D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1997), 9, 19.

In recent years much has been written about slavery.² That which has been written about slavery can be divided into two categories. The first category deals with the philosophical, theological, rhetorical, and political aspects of slavery (e.g. the debate on whether or not the institution was proper and what to do about it). The second category deals with the sociological, psychological, cultural, and anthropological aspects of slavery (e.g. life on southern plantations and the treatment of slaves). Within this first category, one finds the discussion of how the Bible was used in the slavery debate.³

Different people in the debate used the Bible in different ways. To some, the Bible was no more than a convenient source of proof-texts to substantiate their views on slavery.⁴ To others, the Bible was God's Word—to be understood comprehensively and

²According to the "Dissertation Abstracts" database (a database that lists dissertations and theses written since the late nineteenth-century) there have been somewhere in the neighborhood of 1700 dissertations and theses written on the topic of slavery since the end of the American Civil War. According to "WorldCat" (a search-engine containing lists of books, articles, abstracts, etc. written in the same period of time) there have been over 55,000 works written on the topic of slavery.

³Andrew Lee Feight, "The Good and the Just: Slavery and the Development of Evangelical Protestantism in the American South, 1700-1830" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 2001); G. Whit Hutchinson, "The Bible and Slavery: A Test of Ethical Method: Biblical Interpretation, Social Ethics, and the Hermeneutics of Race in America, 1830-1861" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1996); Laura Lynn Mitchell, "Fugitive Slaves, Northern Protestant Clergymen, and the Bible in the Decade before the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1996); Brian T. Wingard, "'As the Lord Puts Words in Her Mouth': The Supremacy of Scripture in the Ecclesiology of James Henry Thornwell and Its Influence upon the Presbyterian Churches of the South" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1992).

⁴The definition and perils of "proof-texting" will be discussed at greater length in the fifth chapter of this current work. Modern exegetical and hermeneutical textbooks cited there treat the subject thoroughly. The authors of such textbooks generally paint a negative picture of the act of proof-texting (especially when proof-texts are understood without considering their original contexts and are haphazardly applied to a

consistently, regardless of its effect on modern social issues. The approach of the latter group made a significant impact on mid-nineteenth century Christians in America. Among those who contributed to the discussion from a biblical perspective, one of the most important individuals has been relatively ignored.

Albert Barnes (1798-1870) was a pastor and biblical scholar in Philadelphia. Barnes was also a leader among New School Presbyterians in the mid-nineteenth century. Although Barnes is primarily known for his sermons, lectures, and biblical commentaries, perhaps his most significant literary contributions to the people of his era were his works on slavery. He wrote two books favoring the abolitionist cause. One dealt with the Bible and slavery, and the other was his recommendation for what the church should do about slavery.⁵ For efficiency's sake, from this point forward in this current work, Barnes' book, An Inquiry into the Scriptural Views of Slavery, will be referred to simply as Inquiry.

In his Inquiry, Barnes responded to most of the biblical passages used as proof-texts by people on both sides of the debate. He strongly encouraged his readers to handle the Bible with consistency and care when applying it to the debate. For instance, he demonstrated the benefits of considering the historical context of the original writings prior

modern situation). Although proof-texts can be applied wisely, carefully, and appropriately (as will be seen in the sixth chapter of this current work), arguments based exclusively on proof-texts will generally be described in a negative light in this current work as a way to highlight their abuse.

⁵ Albert Barnes, An Inquiry into the Scriptural Views of Slavery (Philadelphia: Parry and McMillan, 1857; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969). This edition was actually first published in 1846, but the reprint consulted here is from an 1857 printing. There was at least one more printing published by Parry and McMillan in 1855. Idem, The Church and Slavery (Philadelphia: Parry and McMillan, 1857; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969).

to their modern exegesis, interpretation, and application. He was a strong advocate of being consistent and careful with what the slavery-related texts really say and how little should actually be directly applied to the discussion itself. Perhaps his most enduring legacy was his idea that simply practicing the most basic and fundamental aspects of Christianity would be a much more effective way to rid America of the problems related to slavery than would the questionable use of certain slavery-related texts. His ideas fit well into the overall mood of anti-slavery churches in the 1840s. Many churches wanted to see the institution gradually abolished rather than to see something drastic—like a war—come along to remove the institution immediately. In this sense Barnes carefully and accurately communicated the hopes and aspirations of many Christians in America in the 1840s.⁶

So far, the secondary literature concerning Barnes and especially his handling of the Bible to deal with the issue of slavery has been relatively minimal.⁷ Although his

⁶ Joanne Pope Melish, Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998); Vivien Elizabeth Sandlund, "'To Arouse and Awaken the American People': The Ideas and Strategies of the Gradual Emancipationists, 1800-1850" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1995).

⁷ To date, the most thorough examination of Barnes' use of the Bible in dealing with the slavery issues was produced by Philip A. Kledzik, "Thornton Stringfellow and Albert Barnes: The Bible and Slavery in the 1840s" (M.S. thesis, Chicago State University, 1995). Although Barnes was a prominent figure among New School Presbyterians, only four other works have been written about him recently: Edward Bradford Davis, "Albert Barnes—1798-1870: An Exponent of New School Presbyterianism" (Th.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1961); Earl A. Pope, "Albert Barnes, the Way of Salvation, and Theological Controversy," Journal of Presbyterian History 57, no. 1 (1979): 20-34; Thomas Ellsworth Jenkins, "The Character of God in American Theology: 1800-1900" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1991); Daryl Joan Fisher-Ogden, "The Heresy Trials of Albert Barnes: A Focused Examination of the New School-Old School Presbyterian Debate in the 1830s" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1997).

significance was not lost on those of his era, it seems that for almost a century there has been little academic interest in him.⁸ As of yet no one has demonstrated an adequate

⁸Nathaniel Porter, A Review of a Discourse on the Sovereignty of God; Delivered at Morris-town, June 21, 1829, by Albert Barnes (Morris-Town, New Jersey: S. P. Hull, 1829); William Latta McCalla, A Correct Narrative of the Proceedings of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, Relative to the Reception and Installation of Mr. Albert Barnes (Philadelphia: Russell and Martien, 1830); William Morrison Engles, A True and Complete Narrative of All the Proceedings of the Philadelphia Presbytery, and of the Philadelphia Synod, in Relation to the Case of the Rev. Albert Barnes (Philadelphia: Russell and Martien, 1830); Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Presbytery of Philadelphia, A Report of the Debates in the Presbytery of Philadelphia at a Special Meeting Held in the City of Philadelphia, on the 30th of November, and Continued on December 1-2, 1830 (Philadelphia: William. F. Geddes, 1831); Trial of the Rev. Albert Barnes before the Synod of Philadelphia, in Session at York, October 1835: on a Charge of Heresy, Preferred against Him by Geo. Junkin, with All the Pleadings and Debate as Reported for the New York Observer (New York: Van Nostrand and Dwight, 1836); George Junkin, The Vindication Containing a History of the Trial of the Rev. Albert Barnes, by the Second Presbytery, and by the Synod of Philadelphia: to Which Are Appended, New Schoolism in the Seventeenth Compared with New Schoolism in the Nineteenth Century (Philadelphia: W.S. Martien, 1836); The Crisis: Or, a Statement of Facts in Exposition of Dangerous Errors Contained in Mr. Barnes's Defence (New York: R. Carter, 1836); The Facts in the Case of the Rev. Albert Barnes Fairly Stated. Addressed to the Ministers, Elders, and People at Large of the Presbyterian Churches and Congregations in the United States; By Members of the Presbytery and Synod of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1836); First Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia, Pa.) Address of the First Presbyterian Church and Congregation in the City of Philadelphia: to the Ministers and People of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States (Philadelphia: William F. Geddes, 1836); Arthur Joseph Stansbury, Trial of the Rev. Albert Barnes before the Synod of Philadelphia, in Session at York, October 1835, on a Charge of Heresy, Preferred Against Him by the Rev. Geo. Junkin with All the Pleadings and Debate as Reported for the New York Observer by Arthur J. Stansbury (New York: Van Nostrand and Dwight, 1836); Robert Wharton Landis, Bethlehem Church and Its Pastor, or, A Narrative of the Injurious Proceedings of the Reverend Ministers Albert Barnes and H.W. Hunt, Sr. in Relation to the Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Bethlehem, New Jersey (New York, 1851); Henry Jones Ripley, Exclusiveness of the Baptists: A Review of Albert Barnes's Pamphlet on "Exclusivism" (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1857); Frederick Augustus Ross, Position of the Southern Church in Relation to Slavery as Illustrated in a Letter of Dr. F. A. Ross to Rev. Albert Barnes (New York: John A. Gray, 1857); James Wheaton Smith, Baptists Not Exclusive: Being a Letter to Rev. Albert Barnes, D.D., in Answer to "Exclusivism" (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1857); Ephraim Buck, Answers to Rev. Albert Barnes' Questions on Romans 5:12-21: with a Short Sketch of His Character and Last Sickness (Boston: Franklin Wood, Edward L. Mitchell, 1859); Robert Watts, An Outline of the

understanding of how Barnes handled the Bible and the method of his biblical argument. Kledzik stated that Barnes used a logical and deductive approach, but this was never examined or explained in any detail or depth.⁹ Davis was impressed by the “exhaustive” nature of Barnes’ study of the Bible’s teaching on slavery, but Davis’s investigation stopped there; his agenda kept him away from examining the method behind Barnes’ exhaustive study.¹⁰ The beauty of Barnes’ biblical argument, however, is not limited to his exhaustive study or his logical and deductive approach, for such conclusions are over simplistic and incomplete.

Barnes’ biblical argument against the institution of American slavery manifested itself in three stages: (1) an exhaustive study of all the major biblical passages and most of the minor ones used by those involved in the discussion, (2) a prioritizing of the application of those texts to the problems related to American slavery based on the timelessness of their teaching and their centrality to Christianity, and (3) a call for the gradual abolition of slavery based on the primary principles of scripture. Essentially, the

Calvinistic System: With a Defence of Its Fundamental Doctrines and Principles, against Barnes, Bushnell, and Others (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1866); Elbridge Gerry Brooks, “He, Being Dead, yet Speaketh”: Three Sermons Suggested by the Death of Rev. Albert Barnes, Preached in the Church of the Messiah, Locust St., below Broad, Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Review Printing House, 1871); James Harvey Johnston, The Dead Who Die in the Lord Blessed a Sermon Preached in Centre Church, Crawfordsville, Indiana, February 26, 1871, on the Death of Rev. Albert Barnes (Philadelphia: Sons of W. E. Murphy, 1871); “Funeral Services Held in the First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, December 28, 1870” (Philadelphia: James B. Rodgers, 1871); Frederick Heuser, “Philadelphia, PA: First Presbyterian Church [archival resources, record group #35, Presbyterian Historical Society]” Journal of Presbyterian History 62 (spring 1984): 68.

⁹Kledzik, “Stringfellow and Barnes,” 47.

¹⁰Davis, “Albert Barnes,” 302-9.

hermeneutical method Albert Barnes applied to the debate on American slavery required that the biblical texts directly addressing slavery be supplemented by a principle-driven approach. This should be considered to be the thesis statement of this current work.

This in-depth study of Barnes' biblical argument will yield a greater understanding of Barnes' thought, the mid-nineteenth-century debate on American slavery, and the strategy of biblical scholars that deal with social issues such as slavery. In the modern climate of so-called "religious tolerance," Bible-believing Christians are challenged regarding their use of the Bible to uphold their views of morality. It is not uncommon for such people to be pointed to the inconsistent conclusions of those on either side of the slavery debate as if to argue that the Bible is an unreliable source of authority for modern moral and social issues. In response, these Christians may feel tempted to shy away from using biblical arguments to uphold their views of morality. By demonstrating the success and boldness of Barnes biblical argument against slavery, in the concluding section modern Christian leaders will be encouraged not to shy away from the Bible but to embrace it more carefully and fully. The Bible is God's Word, and its primary principles are every bit as applicable to moral issues in modern America as they have been in any other culture and time.

Barnes' Inquiry did not appear in a vacuum. In the second chapter of this current work an investigation will be undertaken of three important factors to consider when studying the background behind Barnes' publishing of his views on the Bible and slavery in 1846. First, he was one of the leaders among New School Presbyterians—a group of Christians known for their passion for the Bible, for their dedication to social activism, and for their desire for effective evangelism. Second, his church was one of the largest in

Philadelphia—a city deeply involved in the slavery debates. Third, he was a noted biblical scholar working on a complete set of commentaries on every book of the Bible.¹¹ These three factors are integrally related to the publishing of his views on the Bible and slavery. Barnes' views on the Bible and slavery are necessarily linked to his own historical context.

This chapter will not accomplish three things. First, it will not be a biographical study in and of itself debating the various facts and dates of critical events in Barnes' life. Most of what is known about Barnes' life is not a matter of historical dispute, so if there is to be any debate over the facts of his life, then it will have to be taken up in a separate work. Second, this section will not attempt to debate authoritatively the factors involved in the separation of the Old and New Schools of Presbyterians in the nineteenth century. Such factors will be alluded to only to the extent that they demonstrate the thesis. Third, this section will not attempt to discuss at length the conclusions of Edward Davis concerning Barnes' relationship with New School Presbyterianism.¹² This, too, will only be alluded to, to the extent to which it is relevant to the thesis.

The third and fourth chapters of this current work will demonstrate that Barnes' study of the passages and proof-texts related to slavery in the Bible and the American situation was reasonably exhaustive. Barnes did not literally refer to every passage in the Bible that dealt with slavery. Nor did Barnes literally refer to every passage used by every person arguing from either side of the American slavery debate. His coverage of the biblical

¹¹For efficiency's sake, hereafter in this current work, Barnes' commentaries will be referred to simply as his Notes.

¹²Davis, "Albert Barnes."

passages, however, was considerably more exhaustive than those who wrote before him with perhaps the sole exception of the apologist Thornton Stringfellow.¹³ No one could correctly argue that Barnes hid from any passages or biblical arguments used by apologists. In these chapters it will be demonstrated how exhaustive Barnes' study was, and the ramifications of such an exhaustive study will be outlined here as well. These two chapters will not be dedicated to the full exposition of all slavery-related texts and arguments offered by everyone who debated the issues pertaining to American slavery in the nineteenth century. Enough of a sample of others' contributions will be cited to place Barnes accurately among the other debaters, but this will only be done to the extent that it relates to the thesis.

The purpose of the fifth chapter of this current work is to demonstrate how Barnes made his claims regarding the limitations of relying exclusively on texts directly addressing slavery to ascertain the Bible's answer to the problems related to American slavery. In the first part of this chapter specific examples of these limitations will be described. The second part of the chapter will uncover Barnes' advice for reconstructing a more sound biblical argument based on a symbiotic relationship between the texts directly addressing slavery and the primary principles of scripture.

The sixth chapter of this current work will investigate the plausibility and helpfulness of Barnes' advice for overcoming the limitations of the texts directly addressing slavery. He would argue that if the application of a slavery-related text to the problems related to American slavery was inconsistent with the primary principles of scripture, then

¹³Thornton Stringfellow, A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony on the Institution of Slavery (Richmond: Religious Herald, 1841; reprint, Freeport, New York: Books for Library Press, 1972).

that particular application should be abandoned. In essence, the primary principles of scripture were to regulate the application of proof-texts to American slavery. These texts were not totally abandoned, but there was necessarily a symbiotic relationship between the two. This, it will be argued, was Barnes' chief contribution to the slavery debate.

Based on his exhaustive study of the passages related to biblical and American slavery and his hermeneutical method used when applying the passages to the problems related to American slavery, Barnes recommended the natural emancipation of every slave. Although his solution to the problems related to American slavery were spelled out in greater detail in his work on The Church and Slavery, the term "natural emancipation" seen in his Inquiry refers to what would naturally happen in America if everyone lived consistently with the primary principles of scripture.

Today in America, the discussion on slavery has been replaced by discussions on civil rights and bio-ethical issues. In the conclusion of this current work, four examples will be give of modern social and ethical issues, which stand to be helped along by applying Barnes' hermeneutical method to their individual inquiries into the Bible. There are many more civil rights and bio-ethical issues that stand to be helped along by a careful study of the Bible. It is hoped that one result of this current work will be for modern scholars to adopt Barnes' hermeneutical method along with other sound hermeneutical methods to ensure that the Bible continues to be a helpful source of authority regarding the moral dimension of modern social and ethical issues.

CHAPTER TWO
ALBERT BARNES AND HIS ORIGINAL READERS
IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

No book is written in a vacuum. Every author is unique and writes among a unique set of circumstances. Taking an author's own uniqueness and circumstances into consideration helps the reader to understand the book being read better. This principle applies to two contexts. First, the reader who investigates the author of a book and the author's circumstances gains a better understanding of what is written. Questions such as "Why did the author include this fact?" or "Why did the author exclude that fact?" are better answered when the reader is familiar with the author and the author's circumstances. Second, the reader who investigates the specific audience to whom the author originally wrote also gains a better understanding of what is written. Questions such as "Why did the author take so long to spell out that point?" or "Why is this point only mentioned in passing and not further elaborated?" are better answered when the reader is familiar with the original audience. Familiarity with the uniqueness of a book's author and audience will help the reader gain a better understanding of the book.

The writings of Albert Barnes on the Bible and slavery are no exception to this principle. Modern readers of his Inquiry, for instance, will gain a deeper understanding of his book by familiarizing themselves with Barnes and his original audience. Answers to

questions such as “Who was Albert Barnes?” and “Who was his original audience?” are a good place to start. Eventually, however, questions of applicability will rise (e.g. “What biographical information is relevant to a better understanding of his Inquiry, and what biographical information is irrelevant?”). This current work will take into consideration only the biographical details of Barnes and his original audience that had the greatest impact on what he wrote and how it was received by his original audience. The other matters of the life of Barnes and his original audience will be left for their biographers.¹

Who was Albert Barnes?

Who was Albert Barnes? Those in the field of biblical studies may be familiar with Barnes for his numerous commentaries on almost every book in the Bible. Barnes’ Notes on the Old and New Testaments is currently in print—roughly a century and a half after it was written. Those in the field of church history may be familiar with Barnes as a leader among the New School Presbyterians in the mid-nineteenth century. He was tried twice for heresy as the people of the Presbyterian church in America began to split into two different schools of thought. The charges made against him related to the conflict between the two schools and his ultimate vindication catapulted him into the spotlight of the rivalry between the two schools. From that point forward he was seen as a leader among the New School Presbyterians. To those at the First Church in Philadelphia, however, Barnes was a pastor and quite simply: a man of God. There are aspects of his being a New School Presbyterian, a pastor, and a biblical scholar, which provide helpful insight into his literary

¹The most well-rounded biography of Barnes is a dissertation written by Davis, “Albert Barnes.”

work concerning the Bible and slavery. These aspects will be spelled out in this current chapter and related to points to be made in subsequent chapters of this current work.

Barnes' Formative Years (1798-1830)

Albert Barnes was born on December 1, 1798, in the small country town of Rome, New York. Although little is known of his parents, Davis has supposed that they were morally-minded Congregationalists that joined a Wesleyan church after being influenced by Methodist revivalists.² Barnes himself never joined a church until he entered Princeton in 1820. His conversion to Christianity took place a year or so earlier at a revival meeting at Hamilton College when Barnes was a senior at that Yale-influenced, bi-racial (Native American and European American) institution. Barnes was an excellent student, and in 1825, he found himself pastoring a Presbyterian Church in Morristown, New Jersey. He would remain there until 1830, when the First Church in Philadelphia called him to be their pastor.

Barnes the Young Activist (1825-1830)

The first five years of Barnes' pastoral ministry were spent in the pulpit of a small Presbyterian church in Morristown, New Jersey. During those years he was quite active in the movement against intemperance. Barnes was surrounded by the positive effects of social activism, and he believed social activism was the direct outcome of spiritual revival. He is often considered to be the moral extremist among the leaders of the New School. It

²Davis offers no proof of this supposition but states it as follows: "More than likely, Barnes' parents were Congregationalists when they first moved to Rome. Apparently under the influence of Methodist revivalists, they became Wesleyans, but their connection with the movement was never more than tenuous." Davis, "Albert Barnes," 9.

was said that his temperance campaign “practically put the local liquor industry out of business” in Morristown.³ This passionate campaign against the abuse of alcohol was a natural step in the process of sanctification.⁴ The sanctified Christian was to have a zeal for godliness.⁵ When Barnes surveyed his situation in Morristown, he saw one of the greatest social evils to be the abuse of alcohol, so he responded accordingly.⁶

What effect would his campaign against intemperance during these early years of his ministry have on Barnes as a contributor to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery? Social activism was necessarily tied to New School theology.

During the years prior to the Civil War, New School Calvinists engaged in the broad variety of activities now labeled as “antebellum reform,” while carrying the presuppositions of New Haven theology with them. These ideas provided the intellectual grounding and moral frame of reference for a prominent range of antebellum reform movements. . . . These men and women were at the forefront of reform movements within what is generally termed the “evangelical Protestant”

³ George M. Marsden, The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America (New Haven: Yale University, 1970), 27.

⁴ Albert Barnes, Essays on Intemperance (Morristown, New Jersey: J. Mann, 1828); see also: idem, Albert Barnes on the Maine Liquor Law: The Throne of Iniquity, or, Sustaining Evil by Law: A Discourse in Behalf of a Law Prohibiting the Traffic in Intoxicating Drinks--Delivered in the First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Feb. 1, 1852, and in the Presbyterian Church, Harrisburg, Feb. 29, 1852 (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson, 1852).

⁵ Albert Barnes, The Atonement in its Relations to Law and Moral Government (Philadelphia: Parry & McMillan, 1859).

⁶ For another example of the connection between revivalism and the temperance movement see Susan Marie Ogden-Malouf, “American Revivalism and Temperance Drama: Evangelical Protestant Ritual and Theatre in Rochester, New York, 1830-1845” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1981).

tradition. They provided critical leadership to anti-Catholic, temperance, antislavery, missionary movements, and other religious enterprises.⁷

One of the abuses of high Calvinism is to be so caught up in one's inability to lose one's salvation that one tends toward moral laziness.⁸ Barnes' theological emphasis on moral responsibility and progress in the Christian life led to a zeal for social activism. In his opinion it was the necessary response to God's saving grace and the work of the Holy Spirit within the life of the Christian.

The Effect of the Successes of Revivalism

In 1830 there was a sudden increase in social and literary activism concerning the issue of slavery in America. Prior to that time tensions were mounting, but for the most part all parties remained relatively silent.⁹ The first third of the nineteenth century was "an

⁷ Leo P. Hirrel, Children of Wrath: New School Calvinism and Antebellum Reform (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1998), 2. Of particular interest to those who study the connection between social activism and "new divinity"—the theological force behind New School Presbyterianism—is an article by John Saillant tracing the racial views of leading new divinity men in America in their quest to solve the slavery problem during the two generations prior to Barnes' ministry; "Slavery and Divine Providence in New England Calvinism: The New Divinity and a Black Protest, 1775-1805," The New England Quarterly 68, no. 4 (1995): 584-608.

⁸ The term "high Calvinism" in this chapter of this current work refers specifically to the tendency among some theologians to look down upon works thought to be done apart from God's active leading—even if these works are morally upright. This tendency lay at the root of Old School Presbyterians' objections to Charles Finney's "new measures" in his revivalistic meetings and to aggressive campaigns regarding social issues such as slavery.

⁹ It should be noted that the Quakers in America had always been quite active in their anti-slavery campaign and that the slavery issue in Great Britain occupied much of the attention of the British Empire a generation before the same happened in America.

era of good feelings” in general in America that saw tremendous church growth.¹⁰ From where did this religious revival come? George Marsden connects the events in the following way. After the American Revolution there was a turning of the hearts and minds of Americans away from religion toward politics. Morality slipped in the last generation of the eighteenth century, and some prominent church leaders were rightly alarmed. Timothy Dwight was one of them. His position of influence as President of Yale University and his fervor for religious revival and personal responsibility for morality contributed to many of the ministers’ graduating from that and other institutions of higher education to follow in his footsteps. This increased interest in religion translated into a time of growth in the American churches.¹¹

In addition to these temporal factors there was also the work of the Holy Spirit. Many church leaders of the early nineteenth century recognized this era of church growth and revival of religious sentiments as one of the occasional outpourings of the Holy Spirit. For them it was a time in which the Holy Spirit seems to have worked in an exceptional way to reach a broad audience of people. Debates among church leaders would continue as to the origins of this and the previous century’s revivals, but two things are

¹⁰ George P. Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative of Their Origin, Progress, Doctrines, and Achievements (New York: J. A. Hill and Company, 1892), 167.

¹¹ Marsden, The Evangelical Mind, 7-10; this was earlier the view of Ernest Trice Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, vol. 1, 1607-1861 (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox , 1963), 303.

certain: the churches began to grow in number, and there was an increased sense of devotion to matters of religion.¹² This is the era in which Barnes was raised.

What effect would revivalism have on Barnes as a contributor to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery? Having witnessed the success of the Holy Spirit's work in people's hearts, Barnes would retain a youthful optimism throughout his life that God could change the hardest of hearts and draw people closer to Himself. Once the heart was changed regarding sin in general, the process of sanctification would begin, and individual sins and sin patterns would be exposed and dealt with in the life of the Christian. Barnes believed that the sins of the slave traders, buyers, and holders would eventually be

¹²Randall Balmer and John Fitzmier, The Presbyterians (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1993): 45-7; Mark A. Noll, "Revival, Enlightenment, Civic Humanism, and the Development of Dogma: Scotland and America, 1735-1843," Tyndale Bulletin 40 (1989): 49-76; Timothy Lawrence Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War (New York: Abingdon, 1957; reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1980); Louis Billington, "Popular Religion and Social Reform: A Study of Revivalism and Teetotalism, 1830-1850," Journal of Religious History 10, no. 3 (1979): 266-93; Nancy Jean Sonneveldt, "Analysis of an Early Nineteenth-Century American Periodical, the Spirit of Pilgrims, with Emphasis on Religious Controversy, Revivalism, and Social Reform" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1968); David O. Moberg, "Social Concern Versus Evangelism," Gordon Review 10, no. 4 (1967): 204-14; George M. Marsden, "Did Success Spoil American Protestantism?" Christianity Today 11, no. 25 (1966): 1228-31. Marianne Perciaccante draws a contrast between Presbyterians and their Methodist and Baptist counterparts in the area of social reform. She claims that the reason pro-revival Presbyterians did not fall prey to the emotionalism of their pro-revival counterparts among Methodists and Baptists in America is due to the strong connection between revivalism and social reform; "Calling Down Fire: Charles Grandison Finney and Revivalism in Jefferson County, New York, 1800-1840" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1992). For more on the connection between new divinity eschatology and social reform see Dietrich Buss, "The Millennial Vision as Motive for Religious Benevolence and Reform: Timothy Dwight and the New England Evangelicals Reconsidered," Fides et Historia 16, no. 1 (1983): 18-34. A more comprehensive treatment of the connection between revivalism and slavery reform is taken up by Arthur Dicken Thomas, Jr., "The Second Great Awakening in Virginia and Slavery Reform, 1785-1837" (Th.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1981).

recognized and dealt with appropriately, if only they would convert to Christianity. His strategy, then, would ultimately become one of converting non-Christians to Christianity and directing Christians in the ways of righteousness in hopes that their salvation and sanctification respectively would result in a discontinuation of the sins related to the institution of slavery. This was the same strategy he employed in other social issues such as his battles against intemperance, not keeping the Sabbath holy, dancing, etc.

The Effect of New Divinity Theology

As a young aspiring minister, Barnes found himself at Princeton University when many Presbyterian seminary students were being influenced by ideas coming out of New England via Timothy Dwight and others.¹³ Collectively, these ideas were called “new divinity” or “New Haven divinity” by those who opposed them.

Johnathan Edwards . . . had restated—his followers said ‘improved’—some of the doctrines of Calvinism. Samuel Hopkins carried innovations farther, and Nathaniel W. Taylor farther yet. So-called Hopkinsianism and Taylorism were types of doctrine popular in the New School party.¹⁴

George Hays further explains:

¹³Ironically, Yale had gravitated toward a new divinity/New School Presbyterian institution, while Barnes’ Princeton had gravitated toward an Old School Presbyterian institution; Joseph A. Conforti, Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism, the Congregational Ministry, and Reform in New England between the Great Awakenings (Grand Rapids: Christian University , 1981): 185-6.

¹⁴Lefferts A. Loetscher, A Brief History of the Presbyterians, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 96. See also Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout, eds., Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience (New York: Oxford University , 1988); Fred William Youngs, “The Place of Spiritual Union in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards” (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1986).

Many leading men believed that ‘Hopkinsianism’ was only another name for Pelagianism. . . . It had various degrees of intensity or of error, generally determined by the individual person who was supposed to hold the system. The ‘New Divinity’ was generally recognized as originating with Dr. N. W. Taylor. . . . It was easy to charge these doctrines on peculiar men anywhere.¹⁵

“The term ‘New Divinity’ was first used as a pejorative in 1765 in reference to Hopkins’ argument that an unregenerate but awakened sinner who used the means of grace appeared more guilty in God’s eyes than an unawakened sinner who remained unconcerned with his spiritual state.”¹⁶ Balmer and Fitzmier have even connected these ideas to the political

¹⁵Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative, 175-6. For more on the connection with Pelagianism see Bradley J. Longfield, The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates (New York: Oxford University , 1991), 33. For more on Hopkinsianism see Marsden, The Evangelical Mind, 34-39; William Warren Sweet, The Presbyterians, vol. 2, Religion on the American Frontier: 1783-1840 (Chicago: University of Chicago , 1931; reprint, New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), 107.

¹⁶Conforti, Samuel Hopkins, 4; for more on the primary and secondary sources regarding Hopkins, see Conforti’s bibliographic notes on 233-6. See also Ezra Stiles Ely, A Contrast between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism (New York: S. Whiting and Company, 1811); Peter Dan Jauhiainen, “An Enlightenment Calvinist: Samuel Hopkins and the Pursuit of Benevolence” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 1997). For more on Taylor see Douglas A. Sweeney, “Nathaniel William Taylor and the Edwardsian Tradition: Evolution and Continuity in the Culture of the New England Theology” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1995); Wayne S. Hansen, “Nathaniel William Taylor’s Use of Scripture in Theology” (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1995); William R. Sutton, “Benevolent Calvinism and the Moral Government of God: The Influence of Nathaniel W. Taylor on Revivalism in the Second Great Awakening,” Religion and American Culture 2 (winter 1992): 23-47; William G. McLoughlin, Jr., Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977, Chicago History of American Religion Series (Chicago: The University of Chicago , 1978); Sidney Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786-1858: A Connecticut Liberal (Chicago: University of Chicago , 1942); Joseph Haroutunian, Piety versus Moralism: The Passing of the New England Theology (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1932; reprint, Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1964); George Park Fisher, “The ‘Princeton Review’ on the Theology of Dr. N. W. Taylor,” New Englander 27 (April 1868): 284-348; idem, “Dr. N. W. Taylor’s Theology: A Rejoinder to the ‘Princeton Review,’” New Englander 27 (April 1868): 740-63.

direction the country was taking at the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ There was a difference of opinion as to how this new divinity was to be viewed.¹⁸ On the one hand, especially to many of the Old School party, this theological direction seemed dastardly—only one step removed from all-out Pelagianism and rationalism.¹⁹ On the other hand, especially to many of the New School party, this theological direction was much needed to wake up American Christians and encourage personal accountability for one's specific actions and general direction in life.²⁰ In the end, when the two schools were poised to reunite following the civil war, many would believe that the two schools never substantially differed from one another theologically.²¹ Either way, Barnes found himself attracted to these new divinity teachings. They had a profound effect on his theology and ministry.

What effect would the new divinity theology have on Barnes as a contributor to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery? Barnes would become a staunch advocate of an individual's moral responsibility. While the Holy Spirit was responsible for bringing sinners to their knees and creating a desire in them to turn from their sin, the

¹⁷ Balmer and Fitzmier, The Presbyterians, 47.

¹⁸ This difference of opinion has continued even until this day; for more on the recent discussions of new divinity's identity and affinity with Calvinism see Mark R. Valeri, Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England: The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America (New York: Oxford University, 1994), 174-8.

¹⁹ Hirrel, Children of Wrath, 1-2.

²⁰ Although there was nothing intrinsically connecting new divinity with the northern church, the only southern state in which new divinity ideas seemed to take root was in Tennessee. Ernest Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 355, 362, 411, 414.

²¹ Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative, 200-1.

individuals were still responsible for their response to the Holy Spirit's leading—for their subsequent thoughts, words, and actions. Barnes was not fighting the system of Calvinism as much as the extreme of high Calvinism. He taught and preached against moral laziness and against individuals blaming God for their sin. When it came to the discussion of the Bible and slavery, Barnes would not tolerate the argument that slave-holders had no choice in how to act—that God had given them their current situation, and only He could change them. This, in Barnes' view, led to fatalism, and this was inconsistent with his beliefs and experience. As a result of these theological views, Barnes would not adopt a posture of despair in dealing with slave-holders and churches with slave-holders among their members. He would also take a strong stand on the theological education of slaves based on these same theological views. Barnes passionately taught that slaves were to be educated on their moral responsibility to God. He also taught that slaves' having to work instead of go to church was another missed opportunity to preach moral responsibility to this important congregation. In reading any of Barnes' written works it is nearly impossible to miss his passionate plea for moral responsibility—a responsibility he learned as a result of his exposure to the doctrines of new divinity during his formative years in ministry training.

Barnes was not the only one who noticed this connection between the theology known as new divinity and abolitionism. Marsden states:

There was a connection, as Old School leaders were quick to point out, between New School theology and abolitionism. Both emphasized the rights of man and his moral obligations. Both seemed to the orthodox to place rationalistic theories concerning man's nature above Biblical precedents.²²

²²Marsden, The Evangelical Mind, 97.

There seemed to be a natural tendency of most New School Presbyterian leaders toward abolitionism. This would explain why only one eighth of southern Presbyterians were in the New School party, but more than one third of the Old School party was made up of southern Presbyterians.²³

The Effect of the “Plan of Union” (1801)

Revivalism in America led to increased church attendance, which led to a call for more ministers, which led to a greater need for colleges and seminaries.²⁴ Because this revivalism was especially taking place in the western territories many of these new ministers would be supplying the pulpits of the new church plants in the west and along the southern frontier.²⁵ So fast was the growth of churches in the west that the two largest denominations in America (Presbyterians and Congregationalists) came together to ensure that the congregations in the west had properly supplied pulpits.²⁶ Many funds were generated from both denominations for home mission societies, so these church plants could establish themselves, supply themselves with pastors, and grow according to their needs. Under the 1801 “Plan of Union,” the leaders of the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations

²³ Loetscher, Brief History of the Presbyterians, 97.

²⁴ James H. Smylie, A Brief History of the Presbyterians (Louisville: Geneva, 1996), 74-5; Balmer, The Presbyterians, 49-54.

²⁵ Ernest Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 351.

²⁶ For more on the historical background behind the “Plan of Union,” see Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston: Pilgrim, 1960), 524-30.

agreed to allow their fledgling church plants to be staffed by ministers of either denomination.

It is strictly enjoined on all their missionaries to the new settlements, to endeavour, by all proper means, to promote mutual forbearance, and a spirit of accommodation between those inhabitants of the new settlements who hold the Presbyterian, and those who hold the Congregational form of church government. . . . If any congregation consist partly of those who hold the Congregational form of discipline, and partly of those who hold the Presbyterian form, we recommend to both parties that this be no obstruction to their uniting in one church and settling a minister; and that in this case the church choose a standing committee from the communicants of said church, . . . And provided the said standing committee of any church shall depute one of themselves to attend the Presbytery, he may have the same right to sit and act in the Presbytery as a ruling elder of the Presbyterian church.²⁷

This was considered to be an acceptable alternative to leaving pulpits unsupplied during this era of rapid church growth—primarily in the west.²⁸ It stood to reason, then, that revivalism and new divinity theology might eventually be heard from the pulpits of these Presbyterian and Congregational churches of the west. Barnes would see many of his seminary colleagues head out west to become the first pastors of some of these denominationally mixed congregations.

What effect would the “Plan of Union” arrangement have on Barnes as a contributor to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery? In 1801, the leaders of the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations in America decided that the spreading of the gospel and the supplying of preachers in the pulpits of all congregations that wanted to hear the gospel were higher priorities than which denomination controlled the individual

²⁷ Ibid., 530-1.

²⁸ Neither side seemed to anticipate the large factor this would play in the next generation of Presbyterian General Assemblies according to Walker, Creeds of Congregationalism, 532.

congregations. Both sides still maintained a vested interest in the teaching and preaching of correct theology in the churches, but they laid aside their denominational peculiarities for the higher calling of the spreading of the gospel and the founding of individual churches.

Although Barnes' love for and loyalty to the Presbyterian denomination should be unquestioned today, he certainly placed a higher priority on things central to the Christian faith—things like salvation and sanctification.²⁹ In the end his solution to the slavery problem in America would be for all Americans to draw closer to God—for non-Christians to convert to Christianity and for Christians to become more Christ-like in their thoughts, words, and actions. Inevitably, he pleaded, this would lead to the end of the institution of slavery in America. This solution to the slavery problem did not happen in a vacuum, however. It had its roots in the successful cooperation between the leaders of the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations in 1801 and their resulting "Plan of Union."

Barnes' Heresy Trials (1830-1836)

During an era of clashing between the Old School and New School parties prior to their eventual split, three noteworthy New School Presbyterians were brought up on trial by Old School Presbyterian leaders in an attempt to label New School thought as heresy. Barnes was one of the first to be accused, but his heresy trials were not so much about him as they were about the squabbles between Old and New School Presbyterians.

²⁹ Despite his difficulties with various Old School Presbyterian leaders (especially during his heresy trials in the 1830s), Barnes never showed any indication of disloyalty to the Presbyterian denomination or superior loyalty to another denomination. If Barnes displayed a superior loyalty to anything, it was to God, the Bible, and/or the Christian mission.

An Introduction to the Division

Not everyone in the Presbyterian Church of America was excited about this new direction some of its leaders were taking. Between 1830 and the eventual split of 1837, two distinct parties emerged. Assuming titles reminiscent of those taken in the Old Side-New Side split of the Presbyterian denomination in America in the previous century, the two parties of the nineteenth century came to be known as the Old School and New School Presbyterians.

Presbyterian leaders of that period and subsequent theologically-minded historians have not agreed on how to label and categorize exactly what divided the leaders in the two schools. This current work will not debate this point, but it is fitting, as far as Barnes' affinity with the New School Presbyterians is concerned, to provide a brief summary of three commonly accepted distinctions. Those three distinctions are (1) denominational control of churches and parachurch organizations, (2) the theological ideas referred to as "new divinity," and (3) revival-related phenomena known as "new measures." In most cases, the term "new" was chosen by the Old School Presbyterians as a rhetorical device to give the appearance that their counterparts were departing from traditional Calvinism and heading in a new (and therefore incorrect) direction.

Denominational Control of Churches and Parachurch Organizations

Many new churches and parachurch organizations were formed in America during the explosion of church growth and revivalism of the early nineteenth century. The 1801 "Plan of Union" allowed the new church plants to be properly established with pastors,

but by the 1830s there began to be concern among Old School Presbyterian leaders over the denominational affiliation of the pastors of their newer churches. For instance, if churches formed under the “Plan of Union” had a Congregational minister, Presbyterian leaders had little control over the doctrine being taught and preached in those churches, and those churches should not be equally represented at Presbyterian general assemblies. The Old School Presbyterian leaders desired greater control over their churches, and those churches formed under the “Plan of Union” were not as easily controlled as purely Presbyterian churches were.³⁰

Likewise, there was a boom in parachurch organizations (also known as “societies”) in the early nineteenth century. The American Home Missionary Society serves as a good example.

The American Home Missionary Society represented both the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists. Large numbers of its directors were leading Presbyterian ministers and laymen. They believed in the sincerity of the zeal of that society, and the possibility of a joint work being carried on through it by the two denominations. Another large section of the Church believed that the presence of the Congregationalists in the Home Missionary Society was injurious to the general interests of Presbyterianism in its hands.³¹

Many of the Old School Presbyterian leaders objected to funds being directed from the Presbyterian churches to parachurch organizations. Behind these objections there often seems to have been a sincere desire for purity in doctrine.³² Another reason for Old

³⁰Walter L. Lingle, Presbyterians: Their History and Beliefs, rev. ed. (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox, 1960), 80-1.

³¹Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative, 174-5.

³²See sections of the “Plan of Union” cited above from Walker, Creeds of Congregationalism, 530-1.

School leaders' objecting to the relationship between the Presbyterian Church and parachurch organizations was that social and political concerns were outside of the church's jurisdiction.

James Henley Thornwell objected to such affiliations on these grounds.

No court of Christ can exact of His people to unite with the Temperance, Moral Reform, Colonization, or any other, Society, which may seek their aid. Connection with such institutions is a matter of Christian liberty. Their objects may be, in every respect, worthy of the countenance and support of all good men, but in so far as they are moral and essentially obligatory, the Church promotes them among its own members—and to none others does its jurisdiction extend—by the means which God has ordained for the edification of His children.³³

The church is exclusively a spiritual organization, and possesses none but spiritual power. It is her mission to promote the glory of God and the salvation of men from the curse of the law. She has nothing to do with the voluntary associations of men for various civil and social purposes, that are outside of her pale. Ever since I have been a member of the Church I have believed this, and contended for this, and have steadily resisted associating this Church with outside organizations. The Lord Jesus Christ has never given His Church a commission to be identified with them. It is the great aim of the Church to deliver men from sin and death and hell. She has no mission to care for the things, and to become entangled with the kingdoms and the policy, of this world.³⁴

“ . . . I would have the Assembly vote out all the Societies of this world, and keep to theirs, and do good in their own way without asking the Church's co-operation. It is this principle

³³This quote is from a report Thornwell wrote while Chairman of the Committee of Bills and Overtures, which was submitted to the 1848 General Assembly; James Henley Thornwell, The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell, vol. 4 (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871; reprint, Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 470.

³⁴This quote is taken from a speech delivered to the General Assembly in 1859. It was originally fitted together from an abstract of Thornwell's paper delivered on that occasion and from newspaper reports. The exact wording above is from its final version found in Thornwell, Writings of Thornwell, 473.

that I deem absolutely indispensable to the purity and success of the Church in her peculiar mission.”³⁵

The objections of Old School Presbyterian leaders, then, fell along one of two lines of argument. First, without a heavily centralized denominational control, there might be a tendency for corrupt doctrine and no recourse in light of it. Second, the issues with which these societies dealt were felt to be more social or political—rather than spiritual—in nature.

The Theological Ideas Referred to as “New Divinity”

This desire for doctrinal purity was most evident in the frequent and often passionate objections to the theological ideas referred to as “new divinity.” Earlier in this chapter reference to Timothy Dwight, Samuel Hopkins, and Nathaniel Taylor was made, and it was stated that the main connection between new divinity and Barnes’ contribution to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery was a deep sense of an individual’s moral responsibility. Beyond that it would only be beneficial to say here that those theologians who held most tightly to new divinity theology seemed to do so because of their distaste for the moral laziness inferred from high Calvinism and seen blatantly in fatalism. Taylor, for example, wrote extensively on the moral law of God under which all people are responsible

³⁵Ibid., 474. Charles Hodge would object to Thornwell’s reasoning that whatever is not found in scripture should not be the business of the church, however, in an appendix to the fourth volume of Writings of Thornwell, 616-32.

for their individual actions. God, he said, gave them a free will by which they might choose to obey or disobey. People are not simply creatures of instinct without a soul.³⁶

On the other side of the coin, those theologians that despised the theological ideas of new divinity seemed to do so because of their distaste for the lack of God's grace inferred from Arminianism and seen blatantly in Pelagianism. Upon closer examination, however, the new divinity theologians opposed Arminianism and especially Pelagianism.³⁷ Nonetheless, it was the general opinion of Old School Presbyterians that new divinity ideas headed in the direction of Arminianism. The fact that the difference between Old School and New School theology should not have warranted a denominational split is something that would not be openly admitted by Old School Presbyterians until reunification efforts were underway after the Civil War.

³⁶Taylor taught that benevolence is the "best kind of action" and "the sum of obedience," whereas selfishness is the "worst kind of action and the sum of disobedience." Nathaniel Taylor, Lectures on the Moral Law of God, vol. 1 (New York: Clark, Austin & Smith, 1859), 16. The overarching theme of this entire work is every person's responsibility to the moral order rightly set out and enforced by God. Charles Finney would echo this theme in his lectures on moral government; "Moral Government," lecture 3, Finney's Systematic Theology, 1878 ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1994), 25-36.

³⁷As proof of New School theologians strict adherence to the Westminster Confession, Smylie points to the New School's firm stance in their 1837 Auburn Confession; Smylie, Brief History of the Presbyterians, 80. For an extended discussion of the relationship between new divinity and revivalism see David W. Kling, A Field of Wonders: The New Divinity and Village Revivals in Northwestern Connecticut, 1792-1822 (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 1993), 75-109. See also Haroutunian, Piety Versus Moralism, 67-8.

**Revival-Related Phenomena
Known as “New Measures”**

The Presbyterian Church of America had split in 1741 over a disagreement regarding the genuineness of the religious revivals in America. The “Old Side Presbyterians” rejected the unusual phenomena claiming they were either of human or demonic origin. The “New Side Presbyterians” accepted the unusual phenomena claiming they were of divine origin. On both sides there were degrees of critical investigations invested in the controversy—some automatically and universally assuming their position and some considering each exhibition of each phenomenon individually. When the two sides reunited in 1758, the New Side had more supporters, so revival-minded evangelicalism enjoyed some popularity for a generation or so towards the end of the eighteenth century.

In a similar controversy there was a growing concern over revivals in the early nineteenth century. The focus shifted from those experiencing revival to those leading it. Opponents of some of the teaching, preaching, and techniques used by those leading revivals referred to some of their methods as “new measures.”³⁸ The greatest alarm was caused by

³⁸Balmer, The Presbyterians, 62-65. “New measures” were often thought of as new rituals that replaced the old rituals—such as the sacraments; see Leigh Eric Schmidt, Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period (Princeton: Princeton University, 1989), 207-9. Finney’s own thoughts on the various “new measures” can be found in Charles Grandison Finney, The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text, ed. Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1989), 141, 226-7, 239, 320-22, 523-4; see also the following in Finney’s Memoirs: the “altar call” (306, 588-9), the “anxious meeting” (248, 286), the “anxious room” (256, fn. 53), the “anxious seat” (226-7, 315, 320-2, 435-7), the “meeting of inquiry,” the “prayer of faith” (72, fn. 43), the “protracted meeting,” and women speaking in public (175-6, 220, 514-5).

the revival efforts of Charles Finney in the New York region.³⁹ Those that objected to these new measures seemed to do so out of a concern that the leaders of these revivals were manipulating their audience into salvation rather than waiting on the Holy Spirit to do a genuine work in the lives of their audience.⁴⁰ Finney and others that supported his new measures argued that it was unfair for evangelists to preach the gospel to a man then “tell him that he must wait, and first have his constitution recreated before he can possibly do anything but oppose God!”⁴¹ He put these so called “new measures” in a category with other necessary means for regeneration such as a gospel sermon itself.⁴² Finney defends his use of the new measures in this manner:

³⁹Sweet, The Presbyterians, 107; Ernest Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 363. Keith Hardman, Charles Grandison Finney: 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer (New York: Syracuse University, 1987); Whitney R. Cross, The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1950). George Hays saw the greatest threat not coming from Finney himself but from his imitators; Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative, 176; see also William G. McLoughlin, Jr., Modern Revivalism: Charles G. Finney to Billy Graham (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1959). David L. Weddle explains the innovations known as “new measures” as Finney’s adaptation of methods he used in his prior legal profession to the evangelical context in Studies in Evangelicalism, vol 6, The Law as Gospel: Revival and Reform in the Theology of Charles G. Finney (Netuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1985), 6.

⁴⁰Conforti explains that the problem was largely one of nineteenth-century historical revisionism. He puts forth his theory that those entering the nineteenth-century revivalism debate argued over the actual scope and formality of the First Great Awakening, so that the debate was both a matter of history and theology; Joseph Conforti, Jonathan Edwards, 12-21.

⁴¹Finney, “Regeneration,” lecture 17, Finney’s Systematic Theology, 276.

⁴²Finney recognized he was considered an innovator, but he did not consider himself to be the only one as many other evangelists and pastors simultaneously used these “new measures”; Finney, Memoirs, 1-2.

... it was left to the discretion of the church to determine from time to time, what *measures* shall be adopted, and what *forms* pursued, in giving the gospel its power. We are left in the dark as to the measures which were pursued by the apostles and primitive preachers, except so far as we can gather it from occasional hints in the book of Acts. We do not know how many times they sung and how many times they prayed in public worship, nor even whether they sung or prayed at all in their ordinary meetings for preaching. When Jesus Christ was on earth, laboring among his disciples, he had nothing to do with forms or measures. He did from time to time in this respect just as it would be natural for any man to do in such cases, without any thing like a set form or mode of doing it. The Jews accused him of disregarding their forms. His object was to preach and teach mankind the true religion.⁴³

The Effect of Barnes as a Target of Heresy Accusation

The general, but mistaken impression, that there were doctrinal differences between the Old and New School, was probably due to the fact that, just as the parties were forming, there were three famous ecclesiastical trials in the Church. The ministers thus accused were ultimately members of the New School body. In all these three cases the result left the accused in good standing in the ministry, and with the reputation of being sound evangelical preachers.⁴⁴

Barnes was, more or less, a victim of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. A sermon he preached on February 8, 1829, in Morristown, New Jersey, where he was a pastor for five years, thrust him into the center of the Old School-New School controversy in 1830.⁴⁵ In order to be considered for the position of Senior Pastor of the First Church in

⁴³ Charles Grandison Finney, Lectures on Revivals of Religion (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1960), 251; Finney's extended discussion of new measures is found on pp. 250-76.

⁴⁴ Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative, 184-5.

⁴⁵ Albert Barnes, "The Way of Salvation": A Sermon, Delivered at Morristown, New Jersey, February 8, 1829, together with Mr. Barnes' Defence of the Sermon, Read before the Synod of Philadelphia, at Lancaster, October 29, 1830, and His "Defence" before the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia, in Reply to the Charges of the Rev. Dr. George Junkin, 7th ed. (New York: Leavitt, Lord, 1836); Engles, True and Complete Narrative; McCalla, Correct Narrative of the Proceedings; Pope, "Albert Barnes"; Fisher-

Philadelphia, he had to receive the approval of the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly. Some of the things he said in this sermon, however, invoked the wrath of most Old School Presbyterian leaders, so rather than a smooth transition from Morristown to Philadelphia, he was put on trial for heresy. Ashbel Green (editor of the ultra-conservative publication the Christian Advocate), in particular, was the one who opposed Barnes' transfer to Philadelphia. The discussion among the elders in the second Presbytery of Philadelphia in October 1830 lasted for four days before the charges were dropped.⁴⁶ An appeal was made to the Philadelphia Synod, and the synod sustained the appeal. The matter was finally brought before the General Assembly of 1831. A committee considered the matter then recommended that the Presbytery suspend its consideration of the matter (having the effect of acquitting Barnes) stating that Barnes used some 'unguarded and objectionable passages,' but Barnes committed no heresy.⁴⁷

A few years later, however, a similar thing happened to Barnes. This time objections were raised by George Junkin and others in reference to some things printed in Barnes' Notes on Romans (published in 1835).⁴⁸ Junkin listed ten issues, but Barnes was cleared by the Philadelphia Presbytery. The presbytery declared that Junkin's objections

Ogden, "Heresy Trials of Albert Barnes."

⁴⁶Daryl Joan Fisher-Ogden, "Albert Barnes," Dictionary of Heresy Trials in American Christianity (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1997), 13-5.

⁴⁷Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, vol. 7 (Philadelphia: William F. Geddes, 1831), 159-81.

⁴⁸First Presbyterian Church, Address of the First Presbyterian Church; George Junkin, Vindication; Stansbury, Trial of the Rev. Albert Barnes; Fisher-Ogden, "Albert Barnes," 15-8.

were based on inferences he himself made from Barnes' Notes on Romans—not on anything Barnes actually wrote.⁴⁹ Dr. Junkin successfully appealed to the Philadelphia Synod, however. The Synod subsequently suspended Barnes from the ministry in October 1835. Before the General Assembly of 1836, however, Barnes' was cleared of all heresy charges, and his right to minister was reinstated.⁵⁰ Junkin's supporters asked the Assembly to instruct Barnes officially to revise his Notes on Romans. The Assembly voted that idea down, but Barnes decided on his own accord to revise a few words here and there for his accusers. "Mr. Barnes, in order to avoid the appearance of disrespect toward his brethren who opposed him, did afterward, voluntarily, revise the 'Notes on Romans,' and without changing his views, used forms of expression that were not obnoxious to those who differed from him more in words than in doctrine."⁵¹

Although both sides of those involved in Barnes' heresy trials continued to disagree on whether or not he was guilty of doctrinal error,⁵² they were unanimously in agreement on one important point: his unquestionable integrity during the trials. Hays would remark, "Mr. Barnes' own behavior and bearing in all that trying period strengthened the

⁴⁹ Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative, 187; Jacob Harris Patton, A Popular History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (New York: R. S. Mighill and Co., 1900): 403. Fisher-Ogden asserts that Barnes followed the same methods as Hodge did in studying soteriology in Romans, but Barnes came to different conclusions; "Albert Barnes," 16.

⁵⁰ In 1835 the Old School Party came into power in the annual assembly, but the next year the New School Party regained control, and Barnes was promptly reinstated.

⁵¹ Patton, Popular History of the Presbyterian Church, 405.

⁵² Balmer, The Presbyterians, 48.

confidence of his friends, and secured the profound respect of his adversaries.”⁵³ Patton likewise states, “The ministerial character of the accused was referred to as that of a devoted pastor, even by some who differed from him in the views expressed in the sermon.”⁵⁴ Those that were not present in that Assembly to witness Barnes’ integrity were divided as to their opinion of him.⁵⁵ Following his acquittal by the General Assembly of 1836:

He at once resumed his pastoral duties, and was cheered by being welcomed back by an affectionate people. During almost six years he had undergone these harassing trials, and yet he was never heard to utter a harsh word nor manifest defiance of ecclesiastical authority, but in a self-respecting manner and Christian spirit abided the time when his integrity would be vindicated.⁵⁶

Throughout the difficult times of his various trials, Barnes had followed the advice of the apostle Peter:

And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.⁵⁷

⁵³ Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative, 187.

⁵⁴ Patton, Popular History of the Presbyterian Church, 400.

⁵⁵ Some considered him a heretic but others a hero; Walker, Creeeds of Congregationalism, 535.

⁵⁶ Patton, Popular History of the Presbyterian Church, 405.

⁵⁷ 1 Pet 3:13-17; all scriptural quotations are quoted from the King James version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.

What effect would these trials have on Barnes as a contributor to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery? These trials served as a tutor for Barnes on how to stand firm in his beliefs and in his integrity, believing that God would vindicate him in the end despite seemingly overwhelming opposition. Barnes' victories in his trials were more than just legal and theological vindications. They served as emotional and spiritual encouragement that God was in control of his destiny, and God's truth would ultimately prevail. He never struck back at his opponents on the personal level. His responses were totally fixed on the theological issues at hand and never on his accusers. His attention to edifying all those around him, even during the trials spoke volumes of the Holy Spirit's work within and through him. "Those who knew him best said that he never spoke without saying something edifying—to the heart as well as to the head."⁵⁸ Barnes' character under fire allowed him to stick to the issue at hand—not attacking his accusers but seeking to edify them as the opportunities presented themselves for him to do so. When Barnes stepped into the arena of the discussion of the Bible and slavery, he knew he would make many bitter foes and irremovable friends automatically. Barnes would again become the target of those that had already settled the matter of slavery in their own minds. Because of the thorough and exhaustive nature of his writings on the subject, he would be considered by many on both sides of the debate to be the measuring stick of biblically-informed abolitionists.⁵⁹ Barnes was prepared for the challenge that lay in front of him by the fire of his heresy trials.

⁵⁸ Henry Fish, Pulpit Eloquence of the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1857), as cited in Davis, "Albert Barnes: Exponent of New School Presbyterianism," 481.

⁵⁹ Willard M. Swartley, Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald, 1983): 37-8.

The Split of 1837

The tensions between the Old School and New School Presbyterians eventually became insurmountable. It was generally maintained that the people in each of the two schools had “less ministerial or Christian communion with one another, than either of those parties has with Christians of other denominations.”⁶⁰ Leaders among the Old School Presbyterians assumed that they would not be in a majority among voting members of the 1837 General Assembly, so they planned to leave the denomination to form their own. When, however, the Old School party realized they had a majority in the General Assembly of 1837, they passed a resolution to abrogate the “Plan of Union,” and they cut off the presbyteries, synods, and churches that had been organized according to that plan.⁶¹ This disqualified the churches and four presbyteries that were formed under the Plan from being members of the denomination (much less having voting rights in the Assembly). This swung the majority that had barely been in favor of the Old School party more comfortably in favor of the Old School majority. The Assembly then passed a resolution “affirming that the organization and operation of the so-called American Home Missionary Society and American Educational Society, and its branches of whatever name, are exceedingly injurious

⁶⁰David Elliott, “Pastoral Letter to the Churches under the Care of the General Assembly,” Minutes of the Philadelphia Convention of Ministers and Ruling Elders in the Presbyterian Church in the United States, May 11, 1837 (Philadelphia: Wm. S. Martien, June 8, 1837), 26.

⁶¹Walker, Creeds of Congregationalism, 537. The official explanation offered by the Old School-dominated General Assembly of 1837 as to why the 1801 Plan of Union was abrogated in 1837 was spelled out by the Assembly’s Moderator, David Elliott in his “Circular Epistle of the General Assembly,” in the Minutes of the Philadelphia Convention, 22-3; and in his “Pastoral Letter” of the same minutes, 27-9. See also Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative, 178-9; Lingle, Presbyterians: Their History and Beliefs, 81.

to the peace and purity of the Presbyterian Church. We recommend, therefore, that they cease to operate in any of our churches.”⁶² “This division of the Presbyterian Church in 1837, with its strong influence toward stricter denominationalism, together with the economic depression of the same year, greatly weakened the religious voluntary societies.”⁶³

When the General Assembly adjourned, the New School Presbyterian leaders found themselves in a state of disorganization. There were no immediate plans to form their own denomination, but something had to be done to counteract the damage done by the General Assembly. Eventually they did organize and met only once every three years. They were known for their activism regarding social issues, their support of revivalism and evangelism, and their support of volunteerism.⁶⁴

The Early New School Years (1837-45)

In 1818 the General Assembly had issued some stern warnings against slaveholders and churches that admitted them into membership. For example:

We enjoin it on all Church Sessions and Presbyteries, under the care of this Assembly, to discountenance, and, as far as possible, to prevent, all cruelty of whatever kind in the treatment of slaves; especially the cruelty of separating husband and wife, parents and children, and that which consists in selling slaves to those who will either themselves deprive these unhappy people of the blessings of the Gospel, or who will transport them to places where the Gospel is not proclaimed, or where it is forbidden to slaves to attend upon its institutions.—The manifest violation or

⁶²Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative, 180.

⁶³Loetscher, Brief History of the Presbyterians, 98.

⁶⁴The New School Assemblies did continue to recognize the 1801 “Plan of Union,” but, as Walker asserts, they eventually thought it useless in the wake of the newly acquired denominational consciousness of both Presbyterians and Congregationalists; Walker, Creeds of Congregationalism, 537-41.

disregard of the injunction here given, in its true spirit and intention, ought to be considered as just ground for the discipline and censures of the church.—And if it shall ever happen that a christian professor, in our communion, shall sell a slave who is also in communion and good standing with our church, contrary to his or her will, and inclination, it ought immediately to claim the particular attention of the proper church judicature; and unless there be such peculiar circumstances attending the case as can but seldom happen, it ought to be followed, without delay, by a suspension of the offender from all the privileges of the church, till he repent, and make all the reparation in his power, to the injured party.⁶⁵

However, as the slavery debate heated up in 1830, the Old School-controlled General Assembly stifled discussions about slavery in its meetings. As suggested before, perhaps as many as one-third of the Old School Presbyterian churches were pro-slavery. In order for the Old School party to remain in tact after the split, anti-slavery leaders chose to remain silent on the matter. They did so as long as they could—not splitting with their southern counterparts until the eve of the Civil War. If ever they were asked to take a stand on this issue, the anti-slavery leaders would simply refer back to the statements of the General Assembly of 1818, and they would go no further.

If the New School Presbyterians felt any joy after the split, it was due to their ability to voice their opinions freely on the issue of slavery. Being highly prone to social activism, most of them found themselves on the anti-slavery side of the debate. There were still New School congregations in the south, but they usually had split for reasons other than slavery.⁶⁶ Slavery was by no means the main issue that drove the two schools to the 1837

⁶⁵Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America; A.D. 1818 (Philadelphia: Thomas & William Bradford, 1818), 33.

⁶⁶Erskine Clarke, for example, relates the story of a presbytery in South Carolina that sided with the New School Presbyterians until the civil war broke out because of the presbytery's hatred of a highly authoritative, centralized church government; "The

split, but once the split had taken place, there was an increased amount of anti-slavery activity among the New School churches.

One feature that distinguished the Old School from the New School presbyteries and synods was that the Old School party had a strong, organized, centralized sense of leadership. Among the presbyteries and synods of the New School churches, the only leaders were reluctant ones. This is largely due to a reaction the churches were having against the heavy-handed leadership of their Old School counterparts in the years leading up to the split. Albert Barnes found himself as a leader among New School Presbyterians not because he desired to be one but because of his successes against accusations of heresy.⁶⁷ Because of his public trials and his grace in enduring them, Barnes was looked upon as a hero of the New School cause.

What effect would these developments during the early years of the New School Presbyterian denomination have on Barnes as a contributor to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery? First, there was a hunger for discussion on the issue of slavery. Barnes responded to this hunger with his Inquiry in 1846, and his widely published commentaries were peppered with anti-slavery teachings as well. Until he and Thorton Stringfellow published their works on the Bible and slavery in 1846 and 1844 respectively, the works on the Bible and slavery were nowhere near exhaustive, and after their being

Strange Case of Charleston Union Presbytery: A Pro-Slavery 'New School' Party." Affirmation 6, no. 2 (1993): 41-58. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, although there was nothing intrinsically connecting new divinity with the northern church the only southern state in which new divinity ideas seemed to take root was in Tennessee; Ernest Thompson, Presbyterians in the South, 355, 362, 411, 414.

⁶⁷Jenkins, "Character of God in American Theology," 179.

published, other works on the Bible and slavery added little to the debate.⁶⁸ Second, Barnes personally found himself in the spotlight. People on both sides of the split were watching Barnes carefully to see what he would preach or write about slavery, salvation, and sanctification. There was no better time for him to publish his Inquiry than in the mid-1840s, when the slavery debate and Barnes' popularity (or notoriety) were at their apexes.

Summary of New School Presbyterianism's Effects on Barnes

By way of summary, there are several important influences the New School Presbyterian movement had on Barnes as he became a major contributor to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery. First, having witnessed the success of the Holy Spirit's work in people's hearts, Barnes would retain a youthful optimism throughout his life that God could change the hardest of hearts and draw people closer to Himself. Barnes' ultimate solution to the slavery debate was to approach the problem through evangelism and discipleship in general rather than attacking the specific sin first. Although Barnes, in the concluding section of his Inquiry, called for the immediate abolition of slavery, his view that the best way to overcome the evils of slavery was through evangelism and discipleship was consistent with southern leaders among the New School Presbyterians. Balmer and Fitzmier point to the debates on slavery between the southern and northern contingencies at the New School Presbyterians General Assembly of 1853. They maintain that the main difference between the northern and southern contingencies was not whether or not slavery was immoral but how it should be dissolved. Northern Presbyterians were calling for immediate abolition

⁶⁸Kledzik, "Stringfellow and Barnes."

of slavery and immediate emancipation of all slaves. Southern Presbyterians argued “that the South, if left to solve the problem on its own, would eventually surmount the problem of slavery.”⁶⁹

Second, having been exposed to the theological ideas labeled “new divinity,” Barnes became a staunch advocate of an individual’s moral responsibility. Barnes would not tolerate the argument that slave-holders had no choice in how to act. He would also teach that slaves were to be educated on their moral responsibility to God. It is nearly impossible to miss his passionate plea for moral responsibility in any of his writings—especially those concerning the issue of slavery.

Third, having observed the friendly interaction between Congregationalist and Presbyterian leaders as they agreed on the “Plan of Union,” Barnes supported parachurch organizations and interdenominational efforts for the greater good of humanity. Although Barnes’ love for and loyalty to the Presbyterian denomination remains unquestioned, he certainly placed a higher priority on things central to the Christian faith. Barnes would always place a higher priority on one’s faith than on where one stood in relation to any particular issue.

Fourth, having passed through the fire of heresy trials relatively unscathed, Barnes learned how to stand firm in his beliefs and in his integrity, believing that God would vindicate him in the end despite seemingly overwhelming opposition. Barnes knew what he was in for when he preached, taught, and wrote against slavery, but God’s faithfulness to Barnes encouraged him to do what he felt was right no matter what opposition should arise.

⁶⁹Balmer, The Presbyterians, 62-65.

Fifth, having found himself as the center of much attention given his lot in life, he was in an excellent position to be heard concerning his views on the Bible and slavery. Barnes was an opportunist in that he did not pass up what he believed to be one of the most critical challenges of his ministry, but he never sought the spotlight. This kind of genuineness and humility would cause his words to solicit even more interest among his readers.

Barnes as a Biblical Scholar

During his years of being accused of heresy and the corresponding trials Barnes began to see a need in the local churches. There were biblical commentaries being used by pastors and Sunday school teachers, but the pastors and teachers often found that the available commentaries were impractical, unhelpful, and/or difficult to use.⁷⁰ Although Barnes made frequent references to the classics and to philosophers in his sermons, he never sought to lose his hearers by speaking over their heads. It was important to Barnes that he minister to his people—not lord his intellectual superiority over them. As he preached with this mindset, he began to convert his sermon notes into a biblical commentary.

During these years of turmoil [1830-36], Albert Barnes, the laborious student and faithful pastor, was preparing a series of notes on the gospels. These were designed to supply a great want in religious communities for a more simple and concise commentary than the ponderous ones of Henry, Scott, and others. It was soon

⁷⁰There was much discussion among new divinity theologians regarding the intellectualism of written works intended for fellow ministers and scholars in contrast to the needs of the average person in the pew. Following in the Edwardsian tradition of truth and scholarship, “some new divinity men found it difficult making the transition from the study to the pulpit.” Conforti, Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement, 177.

recognized by lay teachers that the notes were well adapted to aid them in giving instruction in Sunday-schools and Bible classes.⁷¹

The target audience of his commentaries was made up of other pastors and Sunday school teachers.⁷² He sought to provide a set of commentaries that would address the important issues in the original languages of the Bible, that would be easy to read and follow along, and that would be saturated with practical advice for applications in the lives of individuals and churches. In his original preface to the 1832 commentary on the gospels, for example, Barnes wrote:

It was my wish to present to Sunday-school teachers a plain and simple *explanation* of the more common difficulties of the book which it is their province to teach. This wish has given character to the work. If it should occur to anyone that more minute explanations of *words, phrases, and customs* have been attempted than might seem to them desirable, it will be recollected that many Sunday-school teachers have little access to means of information, and that no small part of their success is dependent on the *minuteness* and *correctness* of the explanation which is given to children.⁷³

His first published commentary was on the Gospel of Matthew. It was issued in 1832 between his two sets of heresy trials. Three years later his commentary on the Epistle of Romans surfaced. To some of the statements in Barnes' commentary on Romans, George Junkin and others took offence—setting off the second round of heresy accusations against Barnes.

⁷¹Patton, Popular History of the Presbyterian Church, 402.

⁷²Fisher-Ogden, "Albert Barnes," 12.

⁷³Barnes, Matthew and Mark, vol. 9, in Notes, v.

In spite of, and one might also be tempted to say in light of, the heresy accusations connected with Barnes' Notes on Romans, Barnes' Notes became quite popular, not only in New School Presbyterian churches, but in other denominations and locations too.

God in His providence used him to promote in a marked degree the study of the Bible, especially among American youth. Seeing the want of a more concise and clearly defined commentary on the word of God, and one better adapted for giving instruction in Sunday-school and Bible classes than the ponderous volumes of Henry, Scott, and others, he issued in 1832 "Notes on Matthew." The good effects of the work were soon seen in the spirit in which it inspired the Bible teachers themselves and in the reflex influence upon their classes, by creating in their members a corresponding interest in the study of the Scriptures and their history. The earnestness in thus studying on the part of both teachers and pupils was the legitimate outgrowth of being familiar with the spirit of piety, and of the judicious, concise, and suggestive manner in which the "Notes" were written.⁷⁴

Notice here that Barnes' youth and educational ministries were indirect ones. He wrote commentaries that the youth in Protestant churches could understand and use, but the instrument of causing their increased interest in the things of religion was the Word of God. Likewise, when teachers of Sunday school classes or Bible classes read through Barnes' Notes, they were inspired to write their own commentaries and teach their own series on individual books of the Bible.⁷⁵ Barnes felt that the Word of God was a helpful tool in ministering to people in diverse situations in life.

What is the connection between Barnes as a man of God's Word and his contribution to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery? First, one sees the zeal Barnes had for the Word of God. The Bible occupied a prominent place on his pulpit, in his ministry, and in his heart. Second, his passion for ministering to common lay people every

⁷⁴Patton, Popular History of the Presbyterian Church, 406.

⁷⁵Ibid.

week in his sermons translated into a series of easily-understood, extensively-applicable, and widely-read commentaries on almost every book in the Bible. Third, before his Inquiry was published, Barnes had already come to see the fruit of the ministry he had to a denominationally and generationally diverse audience by extensively studying the Bible and suggesting applications to their current situations. Barnes' legacy today centers on his devotion to God and the study of God's Word.

The Legacy of Barnes as Pastor: His Later Years

Much of what has already been said about New School Presbyterianism's influence on Barnes can also be said about the influence his pastoral role had on him. Therefore, these things need not be repeated here. Barnes was a pastor for nearly forty years. The closer people were to him, the more they saw him—not as a debater or a scholar—but as a steady, reliable shepherd to his flock.

Toward the end of his life, many looked back on Barnes' ministry as a pastor in the First Church in Philadelphia with praise. Barnes left a large legacy as a pastor. Most of what he wrote—special theological works or biblical commentaries—came from series of sermons he preached from his pulpit at First Church in Philadelphia.

People flocked from all over to hear the Rev. Barnes preach. In the years preceding his Inquiry, his sermons were a popular attraction in Philadelphia. One observer noted:

As a preacher of the Gospel, the reputation of Mr. Barnes is second to none in the United States. . . the immense edifice in which he ministers is thronged from Sabbath to Sabbath, not only with the highest grade of society which the city can furnish, but by intelligent strangers from distant parts of the land. To obtain a pew, or even a

stated seat in his church, is a matter so difficult, that many disappointed applicants have left their names with the trustees, waiting for the death or removal of present occupants.⁷⁶

Barnes' sermons were always laced with evangelistic references, for he felt the saving of souls to be of the highest priority. His pastoral visits to the sick and elderly were saturated with the same.⁷⁷

The Bible always played a prominent role in Barnes' pastoral ministry. At no time did he ever yield to the temptation to supplant biblical arguments against slavery with rationalistic non-biblical arguments against slavery. The Bible was so fundamental to his preaching that he disallowed elaborate ecclesiastical symbols in the front of his church, having only a perpetually open Bible on the pulpit "as a symbol of the fact that God is the Light of the world."⁷⁸ Barnes also hoped and prayed for a Bible in every home.⁷⁹ The Bible had no parallel in Barnes' ministry. It was, for him, the source of absolute truth because God is the absolute source of all truth.

Jenkins, in his 1991 dissertation, paints a picture of Barnes as a security- and fame-seeking ego-phile. Jenkins said that what Barnes craved was the attention of the social elite in Philadelphia. He admired the legal profession, so he often used legal terminology to

⁷⁶Thomas Brainerd, as cited in an editorial reminiscence in the New York Evangelist (March 16, 1871), 2, as cited in Davis, "Albert Barnes," 478.

⁷⁷Davis, "Albert Barnes," 486-7.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 501.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 495.

impress the social elite. Essentially, his congregation was made up of such.⁸⁰ Jenkins' portrait of Barnes does not seem to take into consideration the integrity of his character during his heresy trials, the testimony of his congregation, or for that matter the sincerity of his beliefs that even his opponents took seriously. Rather, we find a humble, non-self-seeking pastor more concerned with shepherding all that crossed his path, regardless of how others may have viewed him.

What is the connection between Barnes' legacy as a pastor and his contribution to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery? At least three answers present themselves. First, Barnes was primarily a shepherd—not a debater or a scholar. No matter what his legacy, his daily routine was to shepherd souls. Second, his passion for the task of evangelism worked its way in to many aspects of his ministry—most prominently into his sermons. This would later translate into a call for slave-holders and slaves to be evangelized as part of the duty of the local churches where slave-holders and slaves lived. Third, the precious nature of the Word of God made it a priority in Barnes' ministry. The Bible was a natural starting point to investigate the rightness or wrongness of various aspects of slavery. It stood to reason, then, that the strongest biblical argument would carry the most weight. Barnes' role as a shepherd, evangelist, and expositor of God's Word (in addition to a social activist and godly defendant) had a profound effect on his contribution to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery.

⁸⁰Jenkins, "The Character of God in American Theology."

Who Were Barnes' Original Readers?

So far, much allusion has been made to Barnes' readers. Barnes' original audience for his Inquiry and miscellaneous other writings concerning the Bible and slavery was made up of not only those that would agree with him but also many that would disagree with him. His friends and enemies alike read his works on the Bible and slavery.

A moment should be taken to mention that absolute proof of exactly who read his Inquiry and other writings on the Bible and slavery would at this point be impossible.⁸¹ The same is true of most writings in most historical contexts. However, it seems reasonable to rely to a certain degree on those authors toward the end of the nineteenth century who, from their own personal experience, came into contact with people that spoke of Barnes' Inquiry and other writings as if they had read them and understood them beyond a minimal degree.⁸²

There is no reason to believe that his Inquiry was not read by lay people and church leaders in many churches both in the north and south. Given the way his contemporaries were carefully monitoring Barnes' published sermons in Morristown, New Jersey in 1829 and his Notes as early as 1832, it seems reasonable to suggest that one of his

⁸¹The first printing of Barnes' Inquiry was published in Philadelphia by Perkins and Purves and in Boston by B. Perkins & Co. in 1846. As the slavery debate heated up to fever pitch in the 1850s, Barnes' Inquiry was reprinted by Parry & McMillan in Philadelphia in 1855 and again in 1857. These publication facts suggest that copies of Barnes' Inquiry were in wide demand at a crucial time in the history of the slavery debate in America.

⁸²“Funeral Services Held in the First Presbyterian Church; Johnston, “The Dead Who Die in the Lord”; Hays, Presbyterians: A Popular Narrative; Patton, Popular History of the Presbyterian Church.

greatest literary contributions to his era dealing with the hottest social topic in mid-nineteenth century America would be a widely anticipated and widely read work. Another factor to consider in determining how broad Barnes' original audience was, is the lack of any attempt, by other abolitionists subsequent to the publication of Barnes' Inquiry, to publish an exhaustive study of the Bible on slavery from an abolitionist perspective. It seems reasonable to suggest that his Inquiry sufficed to voice the biblically-minded community of abolitionists' position on the issue of slavery.

By skimming through Barnes' Inquiry, one can tell that Barnes was aiming for neither the most capable nor the least capable intellectual community in writing his work. From his sermons and writings, one senses—simply by the level of language and logic used—that Barnes was anticipating a broad readership. He interacted well with previously and broadly published works on the Bible and slavery from both sides of the debate. It seems he intended for his responses to their works to be read by those that created them. He addressed both those that had invested much time and energy already studying the subject of the Bible and slavery and those that were new to the discussion. In general he wrote to such an average or middle-range audience that his work would be widely read and reacted to at a time when literature on slavery was so prolific that one could not possibly ingest everything published on the issue.

Summary of the Contextual Factors That Affected Barnes' Writings on the Bible and Slavery

So far an attempt has been made to gain an understanding of the social context of Barnes' writings and of the biographical factors of Barnes and his original readership,

which seemed to have influenced his writings on the Bible and slavery. Taking an author's own uniqueness and circumstances into consideration helps the reader to understand the book being read better. This understanding can offer explanations as to why Barnes included or excluded certain things and why he explained certain things while only briefly alluding to others. In general, familiarity with the uniqueness of a book's author and audience will help the reader gain a better understanding of the book.

The Relation of Barnes to His Writings

While examining Barnes as a leader among New School Presbyterians, five major influences were mentioned concerning his contribution to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery. First, having witnessed the success of the Holy Spirit's work in people's hearts during revivals, Barnes would retain a youthful optimism that God could change the hardest of hearts and draw people closer to Himself—even slave-holders and those that encouraged them to continue in their ways. Second, his exposure to new divinity theology led to his becoming a staunch advocate of an individual's moral responsibility before God. Third, having seen the successful interaction between Congregationalist and Presbyterian leaders in the Plan of Union, Barnes supported parachurch organizations and interdenominational efforts for the greater good of humanity. Fourth, his faithfulness to the truth and integrity during his heresy trials prepared him mentally and spiritually for the challenges that would come from those who opposed him and his work on the Bible and slavery. Fifth, he used his being the center of attention as a leader among New School Presbyterians to meet one of the most critical challenges of his ministry, but he never sought

the spotlight. These five influences profoundly affected Barnes' contribution to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery.

To many, Barnes was not a leader among New School Presbyterians; he was just an intelligent, hard-working, thorough, and caring pastor and man of God. There were three major influences that can be seen on Barnes' contribution to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery in this context. First, Barnes was primarily a shepherd—not a debater or a scholar. This would come across in the tone of his writing as he sought to edify all of his readers. Second, his passion for the task of evangelism wound up inseparably linked to his proposed solution to the slavery problem. He would call for evangelistic efforts to the slaveholders and to the slaves themselves. Third, the place of God's Word in his heart and ministry made his inquiry into what the Bible taught about slavery to be his sole angle from which he entered the discussion of the rightness or wrongness of most of the practices involved in the institution of slavery. Barnes' role as a shepherd, evangelist, and expositor of God's Word (in addition to a social activist and godly defendant) had a profound effect on his contribution to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery.

In addition to being a leader among New School Presbyterians and being a godly pastor, Barnes was also a biblical scholar. This proverbial hat he wore influenced his contribution to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery in three senses. First, his genuine zeal for the Word of God was manifest in the authority he placed in his biblical arguments related to slavery. Second, his passion for ministering to common lay people would cause him to target an audience of neither intellectual extreme but of such a middle ground that his audience would be assuredly broad—writing to all segments of his society.

Third, his writing would target people of various denominations and ages—just as his early commentaries had. His writing of commentaries and his habits in the pulpit as a biblical expositor influenced his contribution to the discussion on the Bible and American slavery.

The Relation of Barnes' Audience to His Writings

The tone of Barnes' Inquiry is similar to the tone of his Notes. Both were written for the purpose of edification of lay people and their church leaders. By taking a well-studied, average-audience approach, Barnes was able to maximize the demographic breadth of his readership. He encouraged his readers to pick up the Bible and study it for themselves—not just to take his word for it. Both his friends and enemies were interested in what Barnes had to say as well as those that agreed and those that disagreed with his conclusions. Barnes saw his audience as the average lay-people in the pew. Either they had already studied the issue of slavery in the Bible, or at least they were capable of opening a Bible for themselves to look. Barnes' audience saw him in many different lights. To some he was a leader among New School Presbyterians, to some he was a pastor, and to some he was a biblical scholar/teacher. One thing was for sure, though, his audience, whether they agreed or disagreed with him, came to expect an exhaustive treatment of the subject.

CHAPTER THREE

BARNES' EXHAUSTIVE STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

In this current work it will be shown that the hermeneutical method Albert Barnes applied to the debate on American slavery required that the biblical texts directly addressing slavery be supplemented by a principle-driven approach. Barnes interacted with almost every text used in the discussion of American slavery. In doing so he demonstrated that he had a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the texts involved in the discussion. Eventually he would contend that the debate had to go beyond a proof-text ethics to a principle-driven approach. In order to prove the inadequacy of an ethical position on slavery based entirely and exclusively on proof-texts, he had to show that such a position would be impossible to maintain even if all of the texts directly addressing slavery were brought to the discussion table. Had he left out any major slavery-related text in his own treatment of the subject, he could not have rightly made the claim that a position based solely on such texts was inadequate. Therefore, in the following two chapters it will be demonstrated that Barnes possessed a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the texts directly addressing slavery, which were involved in the discussion. Support for this

position will be garnered from brief comparisons and contrasts to the use of proof texts by Barnes and by his contemporaries in the discussion.¹

Before proceeding to the actual biblical arguments a brief word regarding categories of argumentation is in order. A modern superficial glance of the slavery debate in

¹The volume of extant literature from the nineteenth century American slavery debate is overwhelming. From the overall list of works on nineteenth century American slavery, this current work will select for critical treatment especially those works, like Barnes' Inquiry, whose primary objective seems to be a treatment of the Bible's teaching on slavery. This manner of handling such issues is patterned after the work of Willard Swartley in his Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women, who handled the major works from the American slavery discussion to explain the hermeneutical features of the biblical portion of the discussion. Although an occasional proof-text from the Bible would surface in other nineteenth century American slavery literature that was not primarily intended to discuss the Bible's teaching on slavery, such works will not be the primary focus of this current work. Among the apologists' works primarily considered here are: George Junkin, The Integrity of our National Union, vs. Abolitionism (Cincinnati: R. P. Donogh, 1843); Josiah Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery (Glasgow, Kentucky: W. S. Brown, 1853); Iveson L. Brookes, A Defence of Southern Slavery, against the Attacks of Henry Clay and Alex'r Campbell (Hamburg, South Carolina: Robinson and Carlisle, 1851); George D. Armstrong and Cornlandt Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery: Three Letters to a Conservative by George D. Armstrong, D.D., of Virginia, and Three Conservative Replies, by C. Can Rensselaer, D.D., of New Jersey (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1858); and Cotton is King and Pro-Slavery Arguments, ed. E. N. Elliott (Augusta, Georgia: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860). As Kevin Giles noted, "The written defences of slavery from the pens of these evangelicals were legion but they are not easily obtainable today." Giles, "Biblical Argument for Slavery," 7. Among the abolitionists works primarily considered here are: George Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable (Philadelphia: J. M. Sanderson & Co., 1816); idem, A Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument by a Citizen of Virginia (New York: S. W. Benedict, 1845); John D. Paxton, Letters on Slavery Addressed to the Cumberland Congregation, Virginia (Lexington, Kentucky: Abraham T. Skillman, 1833); LaRoy Sunderland, The Testimony of God against Slavery (Boston: Webster & Southard, 1835); William E. Channing, Slavery (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836); Enoch Pond, Slavery and the Bible (Boston: American Tract Society, n.d.); Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, 2 vols. (Cincinnati: Swormstedt & Power, 1850); Joseph P. Thompson, Voice of God against National Crime (New York: Ivison & Phinney, 1854); idem, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery (New York: Joseph H. Ladd, 1856); Theodore Dwight Weld, The Bible against Slavery: Or, an Inquiry into the Genius of the Mosaic System, and the Teachings of the Old Testament on the Subject of Human Rights (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Education, 1864).

nineteenth-century America will reveal two opposing groups: abolitionists and apologists. As one becomes familiar with the differences in the arguments and aspirations of each group, one notices enough diversity within each group to warrant the creation of even more diverse categories. For instance, in 1858 a series of three letters and three replies between George Armstrong and Cortlandt Van Rensselaer was published. In these letters Armstrong was simply labeled as an apologist, but Rensselaer was cast as a “conservative”—somewhere between an apologist and an abolitionist.² Remember also that there were colonizationists in the late 1820s, who approved of emancipation as long as the freed slaves were sent back to Africa. Among those in favor of emancipation, there were immediate and gradual emancipationists. David Christy established three other categories in the debate:

The prevalent opinion, as to the morality of the institution of slavery, in the United States, may be classified under three heads: 1. That it is justified by Scripture example and precept. 2. That it is a great civil and social evil, resulting from ignorance and degradation, like despotic systems of government, and may be tolerated until its subjects are sufficiently enlightened to render it safe to grant them equal rights. 3. That it is *malum in se*, like robbery and murder, and can not be sustained, for a moment, without sin; and, like sin, should be immediately abandoned.³

In the remaining chapters of this current work there will be general references to abolitionists and apologists, but it should be recognized that these two categories are diverse and flexible. Sometimes an abolitionist and an apologist will agree on the interpretation of a particular slavery-related text but disagree as to the application of that text. The lines that distinguish

² Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 3-4.

³ David Christy, “Slavery in Light of the Political Argument,” in Cotton is King and Pro-Slavery Arguments, ed. E. N. Elliott (Augusta: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 206. See also Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 11-12.

those in the debate are not as simple as “abolitionists” and “apologists,” but such categories are a helpful as a reference point for further discussion.

The Role of the Bible in the Overall Discussion

The discussion on slavery was approached from many different angles. Some addressed their concerns within the economic angle, the political angle, the medical angle, the biblical angle, the philosophical angle, or from other angles.⁴ Although Barnes demonstrated familiarity with the discussions that were taking place in these other contexts, his participation in the discussion on slavery fell almost exclusively within the biblical context.

Why did Barnes approach the slavery discussion from a biblical angle? Or perhaps more to the point, why would anyone appeal to the Bible for answers to the questions about slavery? From Barnes’ own pen he gives five reasons why an appeal should be made to the Bible to answer various questions about slavery. First, “the Bible is the acknowledged standard of morals in this nation.”⁵ In mid-nineteenth-century America the Bible enjoyed a position of primary authority in matters pertaining to morality.⁶ It was not the official state-proclaimed standard of morality. It was, however, so widely accepted, that those entering a

⁴For example, in Cotton is King there is a collection of arguments from various apologists entering the discussion from each of these angles.

⁵Barnes, Inquiry, 21.

⁶Giles reminds modern scholars not to overlook the perceived authority the Bible enjoyed during this era in American history: Giles, “Biblical Argument for Slavery,” 12.

discussion of morality, no matter what their personal beliefs, were considered to be making a mistake if they did not at least address what the Bible has to say about their particular topic.⁷

Second, “the subject of slavery is one on which the Bible has legislated, and there is, therefore, a propriety that we should ascertain its decisions.”⁸ Some form of slavery had been in existence throughout the history of the Bible, therefore the Bible alludes to it frequently. As will be demonstrated in this and the next chapter of this current work the discussion on slavery in the Bible drew from as early a scene as the mark on Cain in Genesis 4 to as late a scene as that in Revelation 18 and from all literary types—narrative, legal, poetic, prophetic, didactic, and apocalyptic. Since God issued moral opinions and legislation on institutions much less prominent than slavery, it was altogether fitting that He would issue a moral opinion on the institution of slavery and create legislation regarding its practice. The place of slavery in the Bible and the place of the Bible in history make the Bible an entirely appropriate source of authority concerning the institution and practices of slavery.

Third, “there is little approximation to a settlement of the question whether slavery is right or wrong on other grounds than an appeal to the Scriptures.”⁹ Political and economic arguments can only go so far in solving the problems related to slavery. Political and economic considerations may alter the way in which the system is conducted, or they

⁷ Berends pointed out that the three major denominations in America placed supreme importance on the authority of the scriptures to address such issues: Berends, “Thus Saith the Lord,” 9. He also demonstrated that the common lay people of that era relied heavily upon the Bible in their everyday affairs: p. 19.

⁸ Barnes, *Inquiry*, 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

may place certain limits on it, but they are inadequate to solve the problems related to it. The highest purposes of the Bible include understanding God and His will for the lives of His people. Politics and the economy are not necessarily bound to such things.

Fourth, “Great reforms on moral subjects do not occur except under the influence of religious principle.”¹⁰ Again, a contrast is drawn between the limited effectiveness of political policy changes and the advancement of religious principles. Politics can change the way things are done. Matters of right and wrong, however, especially related to the rights of an inferior and downtrodden class of people, are only changed by the effects of religion. Moral changes initiated by the religious realm last longer and are more profound than policy changes by the political realm. As seen in the previous chapter of this current work, Barnes and other New School Presbyterians and new divinity men resolutely believed that if moral change were to take place across the nation as a whole it would begin by the activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.¹¹

Fifth, “The appeal will be made solely to the Bible, because it is by such an appeal that the advocates of slavery endeavor to defend the system.”¹² When one’s opponents in a moral debate rely primarily on one source of authority to prove their points, it

¹⁰Ibid., 25.

¹¹For example see: Ogden-Malouf, “American Revivalism and Temperance Drama”; Noll, “Revival, Enlightenment, Civic Humanism, and the Development of Dogma”; Timothy Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform; Billington, “Popular Religion and Social Reform”; Sonneveldt, “Analysis of an Early Nineteenth-Century American Periodical”; Moberg, “Social Concern Versus Evangelism”; Perciaccante, “Calling Down Fire”; Arthur Thomas, “The Second Great Awakening in Virginia.”

¹²Barnes, Inquiry, 28.

behooves those opposing them to discuss the matter within the context of that source. In the discussion of slavery in mid-nineteenth-century America, therefore, it was essential for the primary battlefield of the debates to center on what the Bible taught about slavery.¹³

It seemed altogether appropriate that Barnes should undertake this study of what the Bible taught about slavery and how the Bible's teaching should have been applied to the institution as it existed in mid-nineteenth-century America. The Bible was so well recognized in America as an authority on moral questions that both sides of the debate treated the Bible as their primary source of moral authority. As for Barnes' intentions to solve the moral problems related to slavery, he saw no instrument more effective than the application of the religious principles of the Bible.

Barnes' Word Studies Related to Slavery

One of the most commonly recurring arguments from Barnes' study of both testaments is related to the semantic range of the biblical words used for "servant" or "slave." Barnes maintained that if a word study of the biblical words for "servant" were to indicate that the words were very similar to the English "servant" or "slave," then some application could be made. However, if the words were so different that there were no English corollary

¹³ Similar statements were made by apologists: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, iii; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," in Cotton is King and Pro-Slavery Arguments, ed. E. N. Elliott (Augusta: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 461; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 7. See also James O. Buswell, Slavery, Segregation, and Scripture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 9-10, 49. Shriver even muses, "How predictable that southerners writing to southerners either to attack or to defend slavery, should bombard each other with *scripture*. . . . southerners have mostly preferred to fight each other holding in their hands the leather-covered billyclub of the Bible." Donald W. Shriver, Jr., "Bible and Southern Ethics," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 31 (winter 1976): 94.

to the biblical words, then little or no application of the teaching of the Bible on slavery could be made.¹⁴ Other abolitionists agreed with Barnes by semantic range of the biblical words or claiming outright that in most occurrences a milder form of servitude was intended—not a harsher form such as chattel slavery.¹⁵ Apologists considered semantic ambiguity and the unlikelihood of such words referring to chattel slaves as *non sequitur* ideas. They argued that the words denoting slaves in the Bible were well-suited for application to slavery in America.¹⁶ They frequently drew a distinction between the minority of words in the Bible that referred to hired servants (sâkiyr, mishhōtōs) and the majority that referred to chattel slaves (‘ebed, dōulōs, ōikētēs).¹⁷

From Barnes’ linguistic studies in general he observed that the Hebrew language had fewer words with greater semantic range than the Greek language did. Given this observation, he pointed out that the single Hebrew word used to identify all forms of

¹⁴Barnes, Inquiry, 64.

¹⁵Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 63, 143; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 83-6, 98; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 105; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 337; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 16.

¹⁶Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 26, 45, 58, 66, 70; Alexander Campbell, “Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law,” in Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 515; Stringfellow, “Examination of Elder Galusha’s Reply,” in Cotton is King and Pro-Slavery Arguments, ed. E. N. Elliott (Augusta: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 501-3. Bledsoe even calls Barnes out by name asking for proof of his theory: Albert Taylor Bledsoe, “Liberty and Slavery,” in Cotton is King and Pro-Slavery Arguments, ed. E. N. Elliott (Augusta: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 360-4.

¹⁷Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 26-9; Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 476; idem, “Examination of Elder Galusha’s Reply,” 501-2; Campbell, “Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law,” 516-7; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 389.

servitude in the Old Testament was ‘ebed. Although it appeared in different forms, the Hebrew root word from which these forms derived was simply ‘ebed. With a deficiency in other Hebrew words that were as commonly used to denote all kinds of servants, Barnes argued that the use of the term ‘ebed did not necessitate that it did or did not refer to the form of servanthood properly known as slavery. Barnes’ argument here will be spelled out more clearly and related to his overall solution to the slavery problem in the fifth chapter of this work. In general Barnes would minimize the weight of any arguments based on studies of the word ‘ebed.¹⁸

The Greeks, however, had a number of different words for various forms of servitude to distinguish shades of meaning based on the circumstances that caused them to serve and the conditions of their service. Barnes mentioned four. The first was *latrēuō*; it referred to the service of a soldier or someone who served the gods. *Ōikētēuō* was a Greek word that denoted the service of someone in a household capacity such as a maid or a nanny. Service that was strictly for pay in any capacity was called a *misthōō*. The word *hupachōuō* referred to the service rendered by a door attendant or a waiter. The most common word—and the broadest too—was *dōulōs*. It was used in such a generic sense that its use could not specify any one form of servitude as would the other terms. It is the most commonly used of these terms in the New Testament. Barnes’ argument concerning *dōulōs*, therefore, was similar to his argument for ‘ebed. Both were the most generic terms available to encompass all forms of servitude. Based on this supposition, Barnes drew two conclusions. First, nothing significant can be proved for or against slavery based on the word studies because the

¹⁸Barnes, *Inquiry*, 67-70.

terms typically used are so broad. Second, if anything can be taken from his word study, it is that just because the term ‘ebed or dōulōs appeared, it was not necessary to conclude that the type of servitude being referred to by the use of the word was specifically slavery.¹⁹

Barnes’ Study of the Old Testament and Slavery

There are three systems of slavery referred to in the Bible: Hebrew slavery, Roman slavery, and a tributary form of slavery.²⁰ No small amount of attention is paid to the system of slavery in the ancient Hebrew world when discussing the system of slavery in nineteenth-century America. To many of the early European Americans (Puritans, for example), America represented an escape from the religious tyranny, faith-based persecution, and secular governments of western European nations. Many of the religion-minded early settlers sought to create their own government based on the principles of the Bible—a situation not unlike that of God’s chosen people in the Old Testament. Beleaguered Christians’ frequent references to America as a “New Zion” or the “Promised Land” often accompany the theocratic aspirations of her early founders. This spirit of one nation under God continued past the American Revolution well into the nineteenth century. This, in addition to the perceived authority of the Bible in general to settle matters of debate regarding social issues, resulted in a careful consideration of the Old Testament texts that, to one degree or another had applicational potential in nineteenth-century America.

¹⁹ Ibid., 64-7.

²⁰ In a “tributary” form of slavery a nation is said to be owned by a king—usually a foreign king. In exchange for their services they are provided with protection of other governmental services. An example of this would be the tributary status of the Israelites while in “bondage” to the Egyptians.

The Curse of Canaan

And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.
 And he said, 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 9:25-26

After realizing what Ham had done to Noah he pronounced a curse upon Ham's son Canaan (and, it is generally supposed, his posterity). This passage is the most frequently referred to biblical text in the entire slavery debate.²¹ Apologists appealed to it to argue that Africans were perpetually to be servants to the descendants of Shem and Japheth. Apologists regarded this curse as a prophecy of judgment given by God through Noah as a way of creating the three, major racial groups in an orderly fashion and dictating the relationship of their descendants.²²

Among all of the apologists, Josiah Priest took the lead role in advancing the pro-slavery argument through this proof-text.²³ According to Priest, Adam was created red, so every person between Creation and the Flood were of the red race.²⁴ Then, in anticipation of atmospheric and environmental changes in the post-flood era, God miraculously created

²¹ T. B. Maston, The Bible and Race (Nashville: Broadman, 1959), 105; Buswell, Slavery, Segregation, and Scripture, 16; L. Richard Bradley, "The Curse of Canaan and the American Negro," Vetus Testamentum 21, no. 2 (1971): 100; Shriver, "Bible and Southern Ethics," 94; Giles, "Biblical Argument for Slavery," 7-8.

²² Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 463.

²³ Among the different apologists there was disagreement as to the particular ramifications of the Curse of Canaan passage to American slavery, but all depended heavily on this proof-text to justify a racially-based caste system from which African slavery received its impetus.

²⁴ Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 18-19, 79.

Japheth white and Ham black.²⁵ Fortunately for the white race and unfortunately for the black race, according to Priest the color of the white and black races also reflected moral tendencies and intellectual abilities.²⁶ After the flood, based on Ham's behavior before and during the incident with Noah's nakedness, Priest believed that God condemned Ham and his posterity forever through the curse pronounced by Noah.²⁷

Abolitionists rebutted these arguments with arguments of their own. Most who took up the topic seemed to downplay the claim that Canaan himself had done anything deserving condemnation.²⁸ They maintained that the "curse" was nothing more than a prophetic description of the domination of the Canaanites by the Jews.²⁹ There was also

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25, 29-30, 33-4, 40-1, 43, 45, 47-8, 79-80, 162-3. Also it is interesting that Priest believed that Jesus, although born to a red Jew, was specially white Himself: p. 166.

²⁶ Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*, 40, 80-81, 164, 175.

²⁷ That the curse was pronounced against Ham rather than Canaan is based on an Arabic copy of the Old Testament: Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*, 91-2, 303-304. Other apologists, however, seemed to take the words of Noah's curse in the Hebrew text at face value, believing it was Canaan that was cursed: Brookes, *Defence of Southern Slavery*, 5; Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 506. Priest adamantly defended his position against those who held that Noah was merely describing what would probably happen in the future: Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*, 91-4, 98-103, 317-8, 390. In Priest's opinion the curse was to fall on all the descendants of Ham until the end of the world: *idem*, 97-8, 375. See also Maston, *The Bible and Race*, 115.

²⁸ *Brown's Dictionary of the Holy Bible* as cited in Bourne, *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable*, 174; Bourne, *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable*, 186. Although also see a dissenting abolitionist on this point: Paxton, *Letters on Slavery*, 92-3. See also Maston, *The Bible and Race*, 110, 116.

²⁹ *Brown's Dictionary*, 174; Bourne, *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable*, 184; Paxton, *Letters on Slavery*, 92; Weld, *The Bible against Slavery*, 95-6; Bourne, *Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument*, 25-6; Charles Elliott, *Sinfulness of American Slavery*, vol. 2, 259-61; Joseph Thompson, *Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery*, 8-10. See

plenty of talk about rejecting any notion that American slavery was somehow Japheth's best attempt to fulfill God's prophecy regarding Canaan. In other words the curse was fulfilled during the era of ancient Israel only—not to be perpetuated forever.³⁰

Entering into the discussion on this text, Barnes agreed that the curse was limited to the Canaanites of the Old Testament era.

Nothing, moreover, would have been more natural than this course, if they had recalled one of the ancient predictions respecting a portion of this people—the malediction of Noah. Gen. ix. 25. "Cursed be Canaan; *a servant of servants* shall he be unto his brethren." This passage, by a singular perseverance in that perverseness notwithstanding the plainest rules of exegesis, is often employed to justify the reduction of the *African* to slavery, because Ham, the *father* of Canaan, peopled Africa. Nothing can be clearer, however, than that if a Hebrew had ever thought of employing this passage to justify slavery, it would not have been applied by him to *the African*, but to *the Canaanite*. . . . A far more plausible argument could have been derived from *this* application of the passage in favour of fastening the chains of servitude on the Canaanite, than has ever been urged in modern times from it in favour of the subjection of the African to bondage.

Yet this application of the prophecy, so far as we know, was never made, nor did these plausible considerations in favour of subjecting the inhabitants of Palestine to slavery, ever occur to the mind of the Hebrew conquerors.³¹

Barnes' unique contribution to the discussion in 1846 was to point out that the Israelites never enslaved a large number of the Canaanites. If the Israelites had interpreted the curse in the same manner as the apologists, then certainly the Bible would have recorded such mass enslavements. Barnes interacted with this passage, demonstrating a familiarity with one of the discussions most frequently cited proof-texts.

also Maston, *The Bible and Race*, 113, 116-7.

³⁰*Brown's Dictionary*, 174; Paxton, *Letters on Slavery*, 92; Joseph Thompson, *Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery*, 8-10. See also Maston, *The Bible and Race*, 116-7.

³¹Barnes, *Inquiry*, 207.

When the dust of the American Civil War had settled, there were still exegetical and hermeneutical questions to be answered regarding this passage. The five main questions exegetical and hermeneutical students would ask of the Curse of Canaan passage relative to American slavery are as follows: (1) Why was Canaan cursed if Ham was the one who sinned? (2) Was the curse prophetic, judgmental, or a combination of the two? (3) Who exactly fulfilled the terms of the curse? (4) What was the duration of the fulfillment of the curse? (5) Were the Canaanites among the races historically designated as “Negro”? Before, during, and after the discussions on American slavery exegetical and hermeneutical scholars have continued to debate these issues.³² Although these issues continue to be a matter of

³²Martin Luther and John Calvin struggled with these issues: Martin Luther, Luther’s Commentary on Genesis, vol. 1, translated by J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 174-9; Bradley, “Curse of Canaan and the American Negro,” 101-2; John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, vol. 1 (Geneva, 1564; John King, translator, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948), 305-7. At the height of the slavery debates commentators faced an increased pressure to answer these questions carefully: M. M. Kalisch, Genesis, vol. 1 in A Historical and Critical Commentary of the Old Testament (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 226-7; George Bush, Notes on Genesis, vol. 1 (New York: Ivison, Phinney, & Co., 1860; reprint, Minneapolis: James & Klock Publishing Co., 1976), 162-3; J. G. Murphy, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Philadelphia: Smith, English, and Co., 1866), 211-5. From the Reconstruction era to the Post-Modern era, even with the moral question of slavery settled, commentators still consistently struggle to find adequate answers to these five questions: Melancthon W. Jacobus, Notes, Critical and Explanatory, on the Book of Genesis: From the Creation to the Covenant, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1867), 193-5; John Peter Lange, Genesis, or the First Book of Moses: Together with a General Theological, and Homiletical Introduction to the Old Testament, Taylor Lewis and A. Gosman, trans. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1872), 336-42; Harold Browne, Genesis: The First Book of Moses (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1873), 81; James Inglis, Notes on the Book of Genesis: Explanatory, Expository, and Practical (London: Gall & Inglis, 1877), 87-9; Marcus Dods, The Book of Genesis (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1882), 43; G. J. Spurrell, Notes on the Text of the Book of Genesis, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), 94; Franz Delitzche, A New Commentary on Genesis, vol. 1 in Clark’s Foreign Theological Library, n.s. vol. 36 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), 294; W. G. Blaikie, A Manual of Bible History (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1907), 41-2; S. R. Driver, The Book of

ongoing discussion, perhaps it is best to agree with Maston when he said, “There is no way to

Genesis, 8th ed. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1911), 109-12; John Peter Lange, Genesis (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915): 340, as cited in Bradley, “Curse of Canaan and the American Negro,” 100-1; William Evans, The Book of Genesis (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1916), 40-1; Eleanor Herr Boyd, The Gospel in Genesis (New York: The Book Stall, 1918), 76; Arthur Pink, Gleanings in Genesis (Chicago: Moody, 1922), 126; P. E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary on the Bible, vol. 1, The Old Testament (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1923), 23; Ferdinand Rupprecht, Bible History References (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1926), 23; William Dallman, Why Do I Believe the Bible is God’s Word? (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1937), 11; H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), 349-52; C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1, The Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 157-8; W. H. G. Thomas, Genesis: A Devotional Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 97; Joseph S. Exell, The Bible Illustrator, vol. 1, Genesis (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), 405; R. Payne Smith, The Layman’s Handy Commentary Series, vol. 1, Genesis (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), 146; Basil Atkinson, The Pocket Commentary of the Bible: Genesis (Chicago: Moody, 1957), 97; Gerhard von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary, trans. John H. Marks, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 133; Ralph H. Elliott, The Message of Genesis (St. Louis: Bethany, 1962), 70-1; David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1966): 91, 109, 451; Gustav Kenneth Andeen, Genesis: The Book of Beginnings, LCA Sunday School Series (Philadelphia: Lutheran Church, 1966), 54; Peter S. Ruckman, The Book of Genesis in The Bible Believer’s Commentary Series (Pensacola: Pensacola Bible, 1969), 254-8; “Mormons Reaffirm Church’s Ban on Negroes in Priesthood,” New York Times (January 9, 1970), 14; Les Woodson, The Beginning: A Study of Genesis (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1974), 53-4; Claus Westerman, Genesis 1-11: A Commentary, John J. Scullion, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 490-1; Henry M. Morris, The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 237-42; Harold G. Stigers, A Commentary on Genesis (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 119; Meir Zlotowitz, trans., Bereishis: Genesis / A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1977), 301, 304-305; Bruce Vawter, On Genesis: A New Reading (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 138-9; Gordon J. Wenham, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1, Genesis 1-15 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 199-202; Nahum M. Sarna, The JPS Torah Commentary, vol. 1, Genesis (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 66; Ronald Youngblood, The Book of Genesis: An Introductory Commentary, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 122-3; Allen P. Ross, Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, 1998), 216-8; Laurence A. Turner, Genesis, in Readings: A New Biblical Commentary (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 54-56.

be absolutely sure about the answers to these questions.”³³ One laments that issues of racial inequality in modern America are still interested in using the Curse of Canaan as a proof-text to support their views.³⁴

The Patriarchs

Apologists frequently pointed their opponents’ attention to the patriarchs (especially Job, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) to prove that God sanctioned the institution of slavery. After all, the patriarchs were morally upstanding men whom God loved dearly. Certainly God would have cared enough to reprove them if their owning slaves were wrong. Instead, God seems to have given the patriarchs His uncompromising approval and blesses them richly, singling them out as morally distinct from their neighbors.³⁵

The abolitionists’ basic counter-argument was: just because a patriarch did something, that did not necessarily mean the patriarch was in the right.³⁶ Only Jesus enjoys

³³ Maston, The Bible and Race, 109.

³⁴ Ibid., 111, 115-7; Buswell, Slavery, Segregation, and Scripture, 16.

³⁵ Stringfellow, for example, laments, “Yet such saints would be refused the ordinary tokens of Christian fellowship among abolitionists. If Abraham were on earth, they could not let him, consistently, occupy their pulpits, to tell of the things God has prepared for them that love him. Job himself would be unfit for their communion. Joseph would be placed on a level with pirates.” Stringfellow, “Examination of Elder Galusha’s Reply,” 498. See also: Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 463, 471-3; Barnes, Inquiry, 32 (quoting from a statement made by the Presbytery of Tombechee, in a formal letter to the General Conference in Maine); Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 128, 337; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 8-9; Giles, “Biblical Argument for Slavery,” 8-9.

³⁶ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 184; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 30. Bourne and Paxton excused the behavior of the patriarchs in this respect on account of their ignorance of moral duty: Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 36; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 93.

the status of having lived a morally perfect life. In doing so, however, abolitionists unnecessarily distanced themselves from part of the patriarchs' lives. By implying that the patriarchs were wrong for owning slaves, abolitionists left themselves in a position where they were unable to point to the patriarchs as examples of how masters should treat servants. Since there was in general a significant difference between the way the patriarchs treated their slaves and the way American slave owners treated their slaves, abolitionists often too quickly distanced themselves from the arrangement of the patriarchs with their slaves.³⁷

Barnes understood the strength of each side's arguments. He contributed in four ways to the discussion of how the Old Testament patriarchs related to American slave owners. First, he insisted that anyone involved on either side of the debate prove that the patriarchs indeed practiced the form of servitude known as "slavery."³⁸ Barnes demonstrated that there have been many different forms of servitude throughout history. He also demonstrated that there were various forms of servitude in the Old Testament. Barnes insisted that if the arguments relating to the patriarchs were to be used to discuss the American form of slavery, then it would need to be demonstrated that the patriarchs' system of servitude was particularly the system distinctly known as slavery. Barnes and other abolitionists would frequently refer to all those serving another, no matter what the

³⁷This is especially the case with respect to Abraham. Consider, however: Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 95; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 53; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 10-11; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 261-3.

³⁸Barnes, Inquiry, 60. See also Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 93-94, 115; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 55-56.

arrangement, as “servants” unless it could be satisfactorily proved that they were clearly and distinctly slaves.

Second, Barnes used the polygamy argument.³⁹ He was not the first abolitionist to do so, nor would he be the last.⁴⁰ Barnes maintained that if Americans were to follow the moral example of the patriarchs in things related to slavery, then it should be sufficiently demonstrated that every example set by the patriarchs ought to be followed in any historical context and under any circumstances. If apologists would agree to such a statement, then he would point them to the patriarchs’ practice of polygamy (especially as clearly seen in the case of Jacob). Barnes therefore put apologists in a moral dilemma. If the reasoning of the polygamy argument was sound, then apologists would either have to allow both polygamy and slavery to be practiced at all times in all circumstances, or they would have to withdraw their argument based on the patriarchs. In nineteenth-century America, the practice of polygamy was considered so immoral that it was virtually unthinkable for anyone to practice it anywhere. Therefore, if the polygamy argument was sound, apologists’ arguments based on the godly example of the patriarchs would have to be withdrawn.⁴¹

³⁹Barnes, Inquiry, 60-61.

⁴⁰Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 89, 93, 115, 145; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 10-11; Channing, Slavery, 119-20; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 3-5; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 10-11; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 29.

⁴¹The best pro-slavery responses to this argument came from Stringfellow and Hodge wherein they argued that the polygamy argument fell short when one saw that Jesus amended the patristic practice of polygamy and the Mosaic institution of divorce without mentioning a word about the alleged wrongfulness of slavery; Thornton Stringfellow, “A Letter to a Brother in Kentucky,” in Cotton is King, ed. E. N. Elliott (Augusta: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 513-5; Charles Hodge, “The Bible Argument on Slavery,” in

Third, Barnes pointed out that one of the apologists' arguments related to the patriarchs was an argument from silence.⁴² At no time in the narrative accounts in Genesis was God said to have openly sanctioned or commended the system of servitude practiced by the patriarchs. God's silence on any given moral issue does not necessarily imply His sanction of the issue. Once again, the polygamy argument works here. If polygamy is immoral, but there is no record of God's openly condemning it when the patriarchs practiced it, then it is possible that the Bible does not record God's condemning every form of immorality every time it is practiced. Therefore, the pro-slavery argument that depends on God's silence is without force (or at least it is severely weakened).⁴³

Fourth, and perhaps a more basic of an argument than the previous three arguments, is Barnes' claim that the mere mentioning of an act in history does not mean that the act is right.⁴⁴ Barnes backs this easily citing sins throughout history. By doing so he demonstrates the foundational fallacy in maintaining that the mention of slavery in the Bible as a historical fact must be taken as God's commendation of slavery.⁴⁵

Barnes' responses to apologists' use of the Old Testament patriarchs as examples of God's condoning slavery will be examined in a different light in the fifth chapter

Cotton is King, ed. E. N. Elliott (Augusta: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 860. See also Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 73-74; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 121-2; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 351.

⁴²Barnes, Inquiry, 61.

⁴³Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 64.

⁴⁴Barnes, Inquiry, 79-80.

⁴⁵Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 114.

of this current work. In the fifth chapter, Barnes' responses to these arguments will be used as examples of his minimizing what could actually be applied from the Bible to the situation in nineteenth-century America. Here, it has only been mentioned as a demonstration of the exhaustive extent of Barnes' study on the issue of slavery in the Bible.

Abraham

Of all the patriarchs under examination, more was written about Abraham than about the others. This was generally true of Barnes, of the apologists, and of the abolitionists.⁴⁶ This is naturally due to the fact that there is more information supplied about Abraham's relationship with his servants than about other patriarchs' relationships with their servants. This may also be related to Abraham's place as the father of God's people. Recognizing the diverse areas of discussion pertaining to Abraham and his servants, Barnes entered the discussion in three different areas: (1) servants bought with money, (2) hereditary slavery, and (3) differences between Abraham's servants and American slaves.

Servants Bought with Money

And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money,

⁴⁶Examples of apologists' reference to Abraham to strengthen their argument can be seen in Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 464-8, 490; idem, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 494-5, 507.; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 153-7, 337; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 5, 41. Abolitionist samples of the same issues can be seen in Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 175, 184, 187; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 34-5; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 95, 99; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 41, 53; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 261-3. Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 10-11.

must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

—Gen 17:12-13

And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.

—Gen 17:23

And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.

—Gen 17:27

These are the only four times in the Bible it is mentioned that a patriarch bought a servant with money. Apologists used these passages to argue that it is altogether fitting for people to purchase other people (especially those purchased from foreign lands). The Bible does not say that their services were purchased; it says the people themselves were purchased.⁴⁷

The typical abolitionist response to this argument was to claim that when the Bible communicates a purchase of a person in general, it is specifically signifying that the rights to employ a person's labor had been purchased, or the relationship was that of tributary servitude. The Hebrew exegete should see the purchasing of a person as a reference to the purchase of the rights to employ their services.⁴⁸

Barnes responded to the apologists' arguments in three ways. First, he pointed out that the fact that the act was accurately recorded in scripture does not mean that God

⁴⁷ Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 153-4, 157; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 464, 468; idem, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 507.

⁴⁸ Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol 2, 261-3.

condoned it in any way. This is true of any fact found in the Bible; its inclusion does not necessitate God's moral approval of it.⁴⁹

Second, in a novel contribution to this particular discussion, there is no command attached to Abraham's purchase of these people. If God had said, "Abraham, I want you to buy these people," then maybe there would be a more convincing pro-slavery argument here. Also, there is no expressed commendation concerning the purchase of these people. Since there is no such command or commendation, Barnes maintained that there is nothing worth proving in the American slavery debate in this passage.⁵⁰

Third, just because the word "buy" or "purchased" is used, this fact is no indication that the people themselves were bought as chattel slaves in the sense that they were bought and sold in America. In the Hebrew language, the terms buy and sell are used with more than just physical property. They are also used in conjunction with buying services or rights to things.⁵¹ Barnes does something interesting here within this argument. He mentions the possibility that Abraham may have been so disgusted with the form of servitude some people were under, that he purchased the rights to their service, so he could provide them with a God-pleasing employment arrangement. The text does not say either way, but Barnes at least introduces an interesting possibility here. Perhaps Abraham's purchase was

⁴⁹ Barnes, Inquiry, 71.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ More will be discussed on this later in this chapter during the treatment of Mosaic legislation.

for the purpose of emancipating chattel slaves from a poor employment situation to a better employment situation.⁵²

Hereditary Slavery

In several places in Barnes' Inquiry, he argues against the notion that there is any evidence of slaves being made part of an inheritance and passed along to one's heirs.⁵³

This is significant in that it was an assumed right among slave owners in nineteenth-century America to possess their slaves eternally. Few questioned their passing down their slaves from generation to generation until the famous 1857 Supreme Court case known as "Dred-Scott."⁵⁴ Barnes makes this point in reference to Abraham. He used it as an argument of silence, but at least it put the responsibility of finding any biblical precedent for hereditary slavery upon the apologists of American slavery.⁵⁵

Differences between Abraham's Servants and American Slaves

From the larger perspective, apologists tended to refer to the Old Testament to defend the practice of American slavery by pointing to the examples of patriarchs' owning

⁵²Barnes, Inquiry, 72, 75-6.

⁵³For example: *ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁴Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol 2, 262.

⁵⁵Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 465-7, 472; *idem*, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 494-5; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 867-8. Modern commentators continue to maintain that slaves were inherited among the patriarchs: Jacobus, Notes on the Book of Genesis, 100; R. Smith, Genesis, 203; Youngblood, The Book of Genesis, 201.

slaves and to the God-breathed legislation regarding slavery.⁵⁶ By this they hoped to admit that some form of servitude is not only acceptable but also necessary to any society.

Abolitionists tended to point out the differences between systems of servitude in the Old Testament and the system of slavery in America.⁵⁷ However, the system of American slavery, to Barnes and many other abolitionists, was so full of immorality that it could not possibly exist as slavery in a Christian community. If any form of servitude existed among Christians, it would have to be a non-rationally based, mutually agreed upon form of employment.

Barnes followed in this general tendency among abolitionists by pointing out three differences between Abrahamic servitude and American slavery. First, Abraham's servants could leave his home. More specifically, Barnes used this as an argument of silence stating that there was no evidence in the text of Genesis to indicate that Abraham's servants could not leave at any time.⁵⁸

Second, Abraham's servants fought with him. To nineteenth-century slaveholders, the idea of taking their slaves with them to fight a battle would have been absurd. In

⁵⁶Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 498. See also: idem, "The Bible Argument," 463, 471-3; idem, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 498; Barnes, Inquiry, 32; quoting from a statement made by the Presbytery of Tombebee, in a formal letter to the General Conference in Maine; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 128, 337; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 8-9; Giles, "Biblical Argument for Slavery," 8-9.

⁵⁷Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 184; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 56; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 95; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 41; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 261-3; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 10-11.

⁵⁸Barnes, Inquiry, 76. See also Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 10.

general, the slave-holders did not trust their slaves to the degree that the slave-holders would ever consider equipping their slaves with weapons that could be turned back on the slave-holders or on the catchers of fugitive slaves. From Genesis 14 Barnes recounts Abraham's taking his servants to battle with him and defeating neighboring armies . . . "yet he felt himself entirely safe, when accompanied with this band of armed men, and when far away from his family and his home."⁵⁹

Third, a servant of Abraham would have inherited Abraham's inheritance if Abraham had died without a family heir. Barnes made this case from Gen 15:2 ("And Abram said, LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?"). The idea of an American slave owner bequeathing all of his possessions to his slave would have seemed absurd to the nineteenth-century American mind.⁶⁰ By pointing out Abraham's intention to bequeath his possessions to his "steward," Barnes sought to startle his readers with the stark contrast between Abrahamic servitude and American slavery.⁶¹

Barnes would interact more with Abraham and his form of servitude than with the other patriarchs and their forms of servitude. He responded to his opponents' concerns related to Abraham's buying servants with money. By using an argument of silence, he addressed the American practice of handing down slaves as property from generation to

⁵⁹Barnes, Inquiry, 76-77. See also Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 95; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 10.

⁶⁰Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 184.

⁶¹Barnes, Inquiry, 128.

generation as an inheritance. He also joined other abolitionists in pointing out the differences between Abrahamic servitude and American slavery. Barnes demonstrated a broad and deep understanding of the various slavery-related texts used regarding Abraham and slavery.

Job, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph

From Job 1:15-17 one finds three references to Job's having servants. It may also be reasonable to assume that the four messengers that brought Job the bad news were in Job's employment as some form of servants too. Little is known about the servants of Job other than that he had them. Job's name is typically brought up in the nineteenth-century slavery discussion to bolster arguments about the patriarchs in general, but it does not receive much attention as an argument in and of itself.⁶² Stringfellow argued in particular that Job's reference to only death bringing relief to a slave (Job 3:19) demonstrated the permanent nature of slavery. In other words, only death could remove the title of slave.⁶³ Job was usually subsumed under the arguments advanced regarding the patriarchs in general.

From Genesis 26-27 there are multiple references to Isaac's having servants. The fact that no mention was made of Isaac's purchasing servants, unlike the biblical account of his father's purchasing servants, led some apologists to argue that Isaac's slaves must have been acquired by Isaac through a hereditary arrangement with his father.⁶⁴ Although Barnes never makes explicit mention of Isaac as a master, he did use an argument from silence to

⁶²Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 471, 473; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 337, 398-9.

⁶³Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 469-70.

⁶⁴Ibid., 467, 472; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 867-8.

respond to apologists' claims on this point. He maintained that the burden of proof lay on apologists to prove that Abraham had ever bequeathed his servants as his property to his son.⁶⁵

From Genesis 30-32 there are multiple references to Jacob's having servants. The servants were mentioned as indicators of Jacob's wealth upon leaving his Uncle Laban's home. Two of the servants were given as wives to Jacob for the expressed purpose of procreation.⁶⁶ The only mention Barnes makes of Jacob explicitly as a master is in quoting a pro-slavery source to demonstrate that apologists rely on the Bible to make their argument.⁶⁷ He only cited the source as proof that apologists were using the Bible to defend their views on slavery.⁶⁸

In Gen 35:25-28 there is an account of Joseph's being sold into slavery by his brothers. This is clearly a case of chattel slavery in that Joseph, the person, was exchanged for money. Joseph was in no way in agreement with this arrangement as can be seen from their later recollection in Gen 42:21, so this was not a matter of employment by consent. Barnes made mention of Joseph as a slave in reference to an argument he had made concerning Abraham.

In the case, moreover, of Abraham, it should be remembered that it is the record of a mere *fact*. There is no command to buy servants or to sell them, or to hold them as

⁶⁵ Barnes, Inquiry, 76.

⁶⁶ Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 41.

⁶⁷ Barnes, Inquiry, 32.

⁶⁸ Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 472.

property—any more than there was a command to the brethren of Joseph to enter into a negotiation for the sale of their brother.⁶⁹

From the juxtaposition of Barnes' argument concerning Abraham to his mention of Joseph's being sold, it seems that Barnes was implying that God did not expressly approve of Joseph's being sold into slavery. Others in the slavery discussion gave issues pertaining to Joseph's slavery more attention, but the mere inclusion of it in Barnes' Inquiry at least demonstrates that he included the matter in his exhaustive study of the Bible and slavery.⁷⁰

The scant mention or absence of reference to Job, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph does not indicate that Barnes was unfamiliar with the texts and arguments regarding these patriarchs. He does offer arguments concerning the patriarchs in general without alluding to these four, and he seems to do so with a familiarity he has with their all bringing the same issues to the table (thus making unnecessary the need to mention them individually).

Egyptian Bondage

While the servanthood arrangements of the patriarchs were more freely introduced to the discussion by apologists, the Egyptian bondage of Israel was more introduced to the discussion by abolitionists. Abolitionists were quick to point out that God was angry with the Egyptians for enslaving His people, so He punished them in a ten-fold

⁶⁹Barnes, Inquiry, 71.

⁷⁰The two proof-texts used related to the sale of Joseph by his brothers and Joseph's purchase of the people of Egypt as tributary servants: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 17; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 471-3; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 11-12, 36; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 128; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 69, 337; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 8-9.

manner for all the world to see throughout its generations.⁷¹ A correlation was then made between God's anger and the system of slavery in general. It was supposed to follow that a connection could be made between God's wrath and slavery in any context.⁷²

Although Barnes was against slavery as an institution, he usually argued against its practices rather than against it as an institution. He would find so many sins related to the practice of slavery in America, that if all of the sins were removed, the system could no longer exist as slavery. Such a system would have to be considered to be some temporary form of voluntary employment—much like his being a pastor or another person's being a grocer. Barnes dealt a significant blow to the cause of slavery with his set of arguments concerning Egyptian bondage. They appeared in a variety of contexts in his Inquiry, but in this current section, they will be treated as a set of arguments in and of themselves to demonstrate the extent to which Barnes was familiar with the Bible's teaching on slavery with regard to Israel's Egyptian bondage and the American slavery debate.

Would one be justified in suggesting that God's attitude toward Israel's Egyptian bondage is any indication of His attitude toward slavery in America? Barnes would suggest that this would be possible if one could answer two questions. First, how similar was Israel's Egyptian bondage to American slavery? Second, is there a consistency to God's reaction to Israel's Egyptian bondage? Barnes maintained that if it could be demonstrated that Egyptian bondage and American slavery were similar enough, then God's consistent

⁷¹ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 279.

⁷² Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 14; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 86; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 261.

attitude toward Egyptian bondage would be a fair indicator of God's attitude toward American slavery.⁷³

Similarities and Differences between Egyptian Bondage and American Slavery

To the first end, Barnes conducted a study comparing and contrasting Egyptian bondage with American slavery. He found and listed sixteen differences between Egyptian bondage and American slavery. First, the racial difference (especially skin color) was not as distinct between Egyptians and Hebrews as it was between American masters and their African slaves. Second, the Hebrew slaves were in the custody of the Egyptian government, not in the custody—or even under the control—of individual Egyptian citizens. Barnes also listed fourteen ways in which bondage in Egypt was milder than slavery in America.⁷⁴ First, the Hebrews were not dispersed among different families; they lived in their own community. Second, they alone lived in Goshen—the most fertile land in Egypt. Third, they lived in permanent dwellings. Fourth, they had personal ownership of herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. Fifth, they had their own government (even though they were still subject to Pharaoh). Sixth, they maintained their tribal and family order in an organized manner. Seventh, they had considerable control over their own time. Eighth, they were armed with weapons. Ninth, all the females seem to have known something of “domestic refinements.” Tenth, only the adult males seem to have been the laborers. Eleventh, their food situation seems to have been one of abundance and variety. Twelfth, they did not seem

⁷³Barnes, Inquiry, 81, 83.

⁷⁴Ibid., 83-6.

to be liable to be sold as a payment for debt. Thirteenth, it appears that they were not able to be disposed of by “testamentary disposition.” Fourteenth, they were not held strictly as chattel slaves. Having made his case that life was generally more difficult for African slaves in America than for Hebrew slaves in Egypt, he pointed to biblical terms describing Egyptian bondage such as “hard,” “oppressive,” “grievous,” and a “furnace” to demonstrate how much worse American slavery ought to be considered.⁷⁵

At first glance it might seem odd that Barnes would list sixteen differences between Egyptian bondage and American slavery if he were trying to make an argument based on the similarities of the two systems. He would list enough similarities to make his point, but another, more tangential point was made by listing these differences. Notice that all of these differences distinguish Egyptian bondage as a more tolerable or bearable form of servitude than American slavery. This was a common argument by his fellow abolitionists, and in the end it would even strengthen his argument.⁷⁶ If God had such a strong reaction to Egyptian bondage—a milder form of servitude, then just imagine how much stronger a reaction He would have to American slavery—a harsher form of servitude!

⁷⁵ Apologists also pointed out the differences between the two forms of slavery, but the objective of doing so was different. In general the differences were supposed to make application more difficult for anyone to use in nineteenth-century discussion: Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 377-82.

⁷⁶ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 113; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 14; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 87-89; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 260.

Barnes also found and listed six similarities between Egyptian bondage and American slavery.⁷⁷ First, the Hebrews were a foreign race living in a foreign land. Second, Hebrews came into Egyptian bondage in much the same manner as Africans became slaves in America—through the acts of kidnaping and trafficking them as property to be sold to another and for their descendants to be involuntarily forced into perpetual labor. Third, the Egyptian government and the American slave-holders exercised their authority over their slaves on the basis of power—not right. Fourth, there was no compensation for the services provided. Fifth, there was a concern that the slaves, with their superior rate of repopulation, would eventually put the controlling nation’s way of life in jeopardy. Sixth, the number of Hebrews held in Egyptian bondage and the number of Africans held as American slaves was roughly three million and 2.5 million respectively. Altogether, when studying the similarities and differences between Egyptian bondage and American slavery, Barnes arrived at the conclusion that the two systems were either to be considered similar or American slavery was to be considered worse than Egyptian bondage.⁷⁸

⁷⁷Barnes, Inquiry, 86-96. See also Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 100, 149-50; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 260.

⁷⁸Unlike Priest, Stringfellow argued from a position of similarity between the two systems. Stringfellow regarded Egyptian bondage as God’s benevolent way of protecting His people, and Stringfellow observed that it was only at the end of Israel’s stay in Egypt that Pharaoh sinned by oppressing Israel in a harsh manner: Stringfellow, “Letter to a Brother in Kentucky,” 517.

**The Consistency of God's Reaction
to Egyptian Bondage**

Undoubtedly Barnes recognized a consistently angry and disfavorable response from God everywhere in the Old Testament that God's reaction to the matter is described. Barnes stated, "No one can pretend that God approved of servitude as it was in Egypt, or that the measures which were adopted to perpetuate it were pleasing in his sight."⁷⁹ Barnes mentions God's hardening Pharaoh's heart, sending ten awful plagues on Egypt, drowning Pharaoh's army, and delivering all Israel from Egypt were acts indicative of God's wrath against Israel's Egyptian bondage.⁸⁰

Barnes anticipates one objection that apologists might bring: the Hebrews were God's people, but the Africans were not. To this he responds, on the basis of Acts 17:26, that all people in all nations are now to be considered God's people. The Israelites were certainly a special group of people to God, but in the New Testament, the designation of "His people" belongs to people from all nations. Unfortunately for Barnes, this is not a valid argument because he is applying a New Testament principle to a situation in the Old Testament that was entirely different on this very point. The Old Testament overwhelmingly paints a picture of the people of Israel as God's people by His covenant with Abraham passed down from generation to generation. God treats them in a very distinct manner based on their relationship to Him—not based solely on their current plight. They were enslaved and oppressed many times, and every time that God saved them and restored them to the

⁷⁹ Barnes, Inquiry, 99.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 97-104.

Promised Land, it was explicitly on the basis of their unique relationship to Him—not based on their oppressive circumstances. Nonetheless it is mentioned in this current work in order to demonstrate the exhaustive nature of his study of the Bible and its teaching concerning slavery.

From his study on the similarities and differences between Egyptian bondage and American slavery and from his study on the consistent reaction of God against Egyptian bondage, Barnes made the conclusion that

such oppression is hateful to God; . . . the acts of cruelty and wickedness which are necessary to perpetuate such oppression, are the objects of his abhorrence; . . . wherever the same system of things exists which did there, it must be equally offensive to him; . . . it is his will that, if a foreign race have been held in servitude, they should be allowed to go free; . . . if those who hold them in bondage will not allow them to go free when he commands it, he will, by his own providence, bring such a series of desolating judgments on a people, that, however hardened their hearts may have been towards the oppressed and the down-trodden, and however much they may be disposed, like Pharaoh, to say, “Who is JEHOVAH, that we should obey his voice to let the people go?” (Ex. v. 2;) he will make them *willing* to send them forth, even if they pursue them with their maledictions, as Pharaoh pursued the ransomed Hebrews with his embattled hosts.⁸¹

If Egyptian bondage and American slavery were similar, then American slavery could be said to be “oppressive” because Egyptian bondage was described as such in the Old Testament. If God’s reaction to Pharaoh and the Egyptians during that era and afterwards relative to their bondage of His people was consistently one of anger and disfavor, then it could fairly be said that God’s reaction to American slave-holders and apologists would be similar if not angrier and more disfavorable due to the more oppressive conditions of American slavery.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

Mosaic Legislation

Both apologists and abolitionists actively discussed Mosaic legislation relative to the system of American slavery. Apologists were quick to point out that God provided legislation for the institution of slavery. They argued, therefore, that God intended for the institution of slavery to be part of His ideal for his people.⁸² Abolitionists responded by challenging slave owners to live up to the standards God set for his people regarding their servants.⁸³ A few abolitionists even argued that God intended for His legislation of the system of slavery to be the tool of its permanent abolition. In other words, it was to be an institution that provided ways for people to pay off debt or earn wages, but God legislated the institution in such a way so as to ensure that it would not be a perpetual institution among his people. Barnes led the abolitionists in this portion of the discussion. In general the apologists and abolitionists approached the texts regarding God's legislation of the practices related to servitude in much the same manner as they approached the texts regarding the patriarchs and their servants.

"Found" or "Find"?

Was Moses the founder of the institution of slavery in Israel, or did he find the institution already in place? Did he legislate the institution of slavery into existence, or did he regulate a previously established institution? On this point in the discussion there appears

⁸²Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 343. See also Giles, "Biblical Argument for Slavery," 9.

⁸³Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 42, 45-6, 52-3; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 166.

to have been little or no debate. Both sides equally acknowledged that slavery, in some form or another, existed prior to the giving of Moses' laws respecting it. The first mention of servitude in the Bible appears in Noah's "Curse of Canaan" (Gen 9:25-27).⁸⁴ The patriarchs clearly held servants—in one form or another—during the era preceding Moses. Egyptian bondage, be it seen as tributary service or any other form of servitude, also is a fair example of the existence of the institution of slavery prior to Moses' day. The very fact that the Israelites, while they were in bondage themselves in Egypt, also had their own slaves is another point in favor of slavery existing prior to the giving of the law. It was agreed, therefore, that slavery had existed prior to Mosaic legislation concerning its practice in Israel.

Such proof-texts, however, were used in a variety of ways to argue one point or another in the discussion. To apologists it seemed to be a matter of common sense that God would protect the institution of slavery, which He Himself instituted by carefully legislating the institution via Moses.⁸⁵ Abolitionists, however, saw the Mosaic laws as (at best) a God-ordained method to prevent slavery from continuing by restricting its practice.⁸⁶ Both groups, however, agreed on the fact that Moses found the institution being practiced, in one form or another, prior to Moses' laws respecting it.

It also seemed clear to Barnes that various forms of slavery were already in existence among the other nations of Moses' generation. Barnes made reference to Gen

⁸⁴ Although, as mentioned previously, some felt the institution was present from the days of Cain: Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 94; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 23; Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law," 161.

⁸⁵ Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 341.

⁸⁶ Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 77, 115.

37:25-8, 39:1 to demonstrate that the Midianites and Egyptians were involved in slave trading, and he reminded his readers that the Israelites were in bondage as an institution of servitude established prior to the exodus of Israel from Egypt. Reference was also made to Exod 12:43-5 to show that even the Israelites, being servants themselves, had their own servants. Barnes wanted his readers to imagine such a thing in America in his day—slaves owning their own slaves. By bringing such a thought to mind, Barnes directed his readers to another difference between a practice of servitude in ancient Israel and the lack of the possibility of such a practice in America in the nineteenth century.⁸⁷ In all these ways Barnes demonstrated a keen awareness of how the proof-texts settling the “found or find” question were being used in the discussion on American slavery.

Kidnapping

And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.

—Exod 21:16

If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, or selleth him; then that thief shall die; and thou shalt put evil away from among you.

—Deut 23:7

Most of America’s slaves had been initially acquired from the west coast of Africa. The typical scenario was for an African native to be captured either by another African native or by a European slave catcher. Those that were caught were bound and sold or traded to slave traders. The slave traders would sell or trade those that were caught to a shipping company. The shipping company would transport those that were caught to

⁸⁷ Barnes, Inquiry, 112-3.

America where they would be bought at auctions by Americans as their property. Eventually the slaves would procreate, and their children were equally considered the property of the American masters. Sometimes generations of slaves would stay with the same slave owner that bought their first ancestor, and sometimes children would be separated from their parents when one or the other would be sold or traded as property to other slave owners. These were the several steps involved in the process of causing a free African to become an enslaved American.⁸⁸

The Bible clearly indicates that kidnaping is a sin, a crime deserving capital punishment. The incident with Joseph being sold against his will by his brothers in Genesis 37 would be an example of this sin. Those discussing slavery in nineteenth-century America debated how much of this Mosaic legislation ought to be applied to the institution of slavery in America. Who, if anyone, was guilty of kidnaping? Some apologists argued that the taking of prisoners of war in ancient Israel was similar to taking Africans by Christians in a

⁸⁸ Henry M. Stanley, Slavery and the Slave Trade in Africa (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893); W. E. B. Du Bois, The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870 (New York: Longmans & Green, 1896); John Randolph Spears, The American Slave-Trade: An Account of its Origin, Growth and Suppression (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1900); William Wilberforce, Horrors of the British Slave-Trade (New York, Modern Eloquence, 1923); Tommy Todd Hamm, "The American Slave Trade with Africa, 1620-1807" (Ph.D. diss., University of Indiana, 1975); Basil Davidson, The African Slave Trade, rev. ed. (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1980); Philip D. Curtin, Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1997); Hugh Thomas, The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870 (London: Papermac, 1998); Herbert S. Klein, The Atlantic Slave Trade (New York: Cambridge University, 1999); Christopher R. DeCorse, West Africa during the Atlantic Slave Trade: Archaeological Perspectives (New York: Leicester University, 2001); David Northrup, The Atlantic Slave Trade, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002); Daniel P. Mannix and Malcolm Cowley, Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865 (London: Penguin, 2002).

holy war against a pagan continent.⁸⁹ Many apologists admitted that taking Africans by force was wrong, but those that held descendants of stolen Africans were in no way to be held liable for their holding slaves.⁹⁰ Many abolitionists referred to all people held against their will for no crime in America as kidnaped people, and based on the passages under consideration they called for the immediate release of all slaves.⁹¹

Barnes held to this latter view. He brought up four points in reference to the laws concerning kidnaping in the Bible and to American slavery. His first point was that the stealing of people has been essential to every form of slavery throughout history. If there is a system of servitude that does not rely upon having stolen people and forcing them into labor, it is not properly called slavery. Thus, if kidnaping were wrong, then any form of slavery would be wrong.⁹²

His second point was that this Mosaic law stood out as a priority among other Mosaic laws. This is so for two reasons. First, it occupies an early place in the Mosaic

⁸⁹ Interestingly, Priest argued that the texts regarding kidnapping did not refer to the Canaanites, who, in his opinion were black (therefore under the Curse of Canaan and fair game for slave-catchers): Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 334-6.

⁹⁰ Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 17; Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law," 518-20; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 28.

⁹¹ The leading proponent of this argument was Bourne. It is the main point of his 1816 landmark work: Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 105, 119, 121, 123-5, 148-9, 153, 171, 199; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 9, 19-20. See also Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 77; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 22, 24, 27-8, 60-2; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 24-6; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 7; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 65-6, 78, 89, 271, 275, 282, 332-3, 335, 337, 340, vol. 2, 103, 263-4; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 12; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 44.

⁹² Barnes, Inquiry, 118-20.

laws—right after the Ten Commandments. Second, there is no stricter penalty for any other crime than this; its proscribed punishment was death. The penalties for stealing things varied, but the only instance of stealing in which the penalty was death was when a person was stolen. This seemed to be the clearest command in the Bible against the form of slavery found in America.⁹³

His third point was that there is nothing involved in a word study, which would lead us to believe that the term used in these verses for stealing meant anything different than it did in nineteenth-century America. Stealing a lamb in ancient Israel carried the same idea as stealing a lamb in nineteenth-century America. It was wrong for apologists to attempt to redefine the biblical term used for stealing people to mean anything short of kidnaping.⁹⁴

His fourth point is that there is a three-fold command in Exod. 21:16—stealing, selling, and holding. He will apply this to the initial kidnaping of the African, to the various stages in which the African is sold or traded from person to person, and to all those that hold the African for any length of time against the African's will. Barnes distinguishes himself on this point from many others in the debate by applying this verse

⁹³ Ibid., 118-20; Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 119, 123-4; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 24-6; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 340.

⁹⁴ Barnes, Inquiry, 119-20.

broadly to all stages of the process in which an African goes from being free to being a slave in America.⁹⁵

His fifth point is to spell out explicitly how these commands concerning kidnaping would be properly applied to American slavery. First, since the penalty for kidnaping in ancient Israel was death, it would seem safe to assume that Moses (and therefore God) did not approve of any system that relied upon stealing people to perpetuate it. Second, the only way in which slaves could be properly made would be from war, and the scant number of prisoners taken in any war would never suffice to perpetuate a system of slavery in the victor's country. Third, the punishment for holding stolen people would effectively prevent anyone from buying stolen people. Fourth, this prohibition of kidnaping would effectively ground to a halt any progress a perpetual institution of slavery might have. Essentially, Barnes claimed that if this command alone were followed by Americans, there would be no possibility that slavery could exist in America.⁹⁶

Prisoners of War

It had been argued by apologists that some Africans had rightly become American slaves being considered prisoners of war. Apologists that used this argument made

⁹⁵ Barnes, Inquiry, 120; Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 119, 121, 123-5; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 77; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 24; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 24; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 65-6, 78, 332-3, 337, 340, vol. 2, 263-4; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 44.

⁹⁶ Barnes, Inquiry, 120-2; Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 119, 123-4, 153; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 22; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 7.

reference to prisoners of war taken by ancient Israelites and converted into slaves. These apologists saw some similarity between the captivity of ancient Israel's enemies and the capture of Africans on the continent of Africa.⁹⁷

The consensus rebuttal to this argument seems to have been to debunk the idea that any war was involved between Americans and Africans, which might even remotely resemble the destruction of God's enemies in the Old Testament era mandated by God Himself.⁹⁸ Barnes approached this argument from a different angle, however. Rather than pointing the attention of his readers to the act of capturing Africans, he pointed attention to the Gibeonites of the era of Joshua's leadership and the leftover inhabitants of God's enemies during Solomon's reign. Barnes argued that neither of these groups are to be correctly labeled as slaves.

The Gibeonites of Joshua 9, Barnes maintained, were not slaves in the sense that Africans had been made slaves in America. There were too many dissimilarities. First, the Gibeonites pleaded to become servants of God's people being protected by their generous laws regarding servants. The Gibeonites even did so by deceit and trickery.⁹⁹ It was totally a

⁹⁷Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 491; idem, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 507; idem, "Letter to a Brother in Kentucky," 511, 513; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 7.

⁹⁸Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 135-46; Victor H. Matthews, "The Anthropology of Slavery in the Covenant Code," chapter in Theory and Method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law, ed. B. Levinson (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 122.

⁹⁹According to Priest it was totally acceptable that the Canaanites should be subjected to perpetual slavery because they were the objects of the Curse of Canaan: Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 147, 151. See also Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 507; idem, "Letter to a Brother in Kentucky," 511.

voluntary matter.¹⁰⁰ Second, they were never considered as property in the sense that Africans were held as property. The Gibeonites were allowed to provide menial labor for service in the temple—not for the service of individuals. Third, there was no mention in the Old Testament of a perpetual agreement by which the children of the Gibeonites were to continue in slavery from generation to generation. In Josh 9:27 the phrase “unto this day” occurs. This phrase was found in a similar context related to the leftover people of God’s enemies in the land of Canaan in 1 Kgs 9:21. Although Barnes did not address this phrase when he dealt with Joshua 9, in the very next paragraph Barnes dealt with the phrase in 1 Kgs 9:21. His explanation of this phrase in the context of 1 Kgs 9:21 may very well have been intended as an explanation of the phrase as it appeared in Josh 9:27 too. From the brief mention of the Gibeonites in Joshua 27, Barnes concluded that the dissimilarities were too great to make a fair application of Joshua 27 to American slavery.¹⁰¹

Barnes handled the text of 1 Kings 9 in a similar manner as that in which he handled the text of Joshua 9. He claimed that the leftover people from God’s enemies, who were not killed during the era of God’s purging the evil nations from the Promised Land during Joshua’s day were free among God’s people. He also reminded his readers that it was very carefully spelled out that these people were not made slaves; they were pressed into service for the task of building of the temple.¹⁰² As for the duration of their employment,

¹⁰⁰Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 85; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 49-50.

¹⁰¹Barnes, Inquiry, 208-9.

¹⁰²Priest would disagree saying that they were clearly slaves in Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 145-50.

Barnes briefly discussed the phrase “unto this day.” He mentioned the possibility that the writing of that portion of the book of 1 Kings was so immediate in time to the event, that the phrase “unto this day” may not have been a significant amount of time. In both cases, with the Gibeonites and with the leftovers of the enemies of God, Barnes sought to demonstrate that neither group could be properly called slaves because of the significant differences between them and American slaves.¹⁰³

Buying and Selling of Slaves

Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour.

—Lev 25:44-46

This passage was typically a tricky one for abolitionists to handle because it contains a command to buy people, a command to make them an inheritance for the children of the purchasers, and an assurance that the slaves would be bondmen to the purchasers forever. Such things require much explanation from those that would argue that people were not bought in the Old Testament era and that all forms of servitude were only temporary. Although Barnes did not address the most difficult matters of this passage, he at least addressed the passage (which is more than can be said for most of his contemporaries).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Barnes, Inquiry, 209.

¹⁰⁴ Paxton called for this text to be understood within the context of all of the anti-slavery passages in the Old Testament: Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 85-6, 121-2. Sunderland claimed that this was a law for ancient Israelites—not Americans: Sunderland,

When it came to the purchasing of slaves in ancient Israel, Barnes' only point was that the only slaves ancient Israelites were allowed to purchase were foreigners. This group did not include anyone kidnaped (Exod 21:16), any prisoner of war, or any Israelite. Essentially, he conceded that Israelites were allowed to make slaves of a small amount of the population, but he would go on to emphasize that all servants of all types would have to be freed in the Year of Jubilee. He thus qualified "forever" as "forever until the Year of Jubilee."¹⁰⁵

When it came to selling slaves, Barnes had more to say. His argument on this point is one from silence. He was careful to point out that there is no narrative in any part of the Old Testament that describes the sale of one person to another (beside the sin of Joseph's brothers in Genesis 37). There is also no legislation pertaining to the selling of people. Barnes maintained that once slaves were bought they would not be sold or transferred to another, or else there would be evidence of such transactions in the narrative or legal portions of the Old Testament.¹⁰⁶ Abolitionists experienced difficulty reacting to this passage. Barnes demonstrated a knowledge of the passage's use as a proof-text and did his best to contribute to the discussion accordingly.

Testimony of God against Slavery, 25. See also Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 31.

¹⁰⁵ Barnes, Inquiry, 117-8. Weld argued that "forever" referred to how long the Israelites would be able to purchase servants from foreign nations—not to the length of their contract with the individual Israelites: Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 109, 111. Bourne claimed that it was only the services for hire being referred to in this passage: Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 27, 39, 48.

¹⁰⁶ Barnes, Inquiry, 133-4, 186-8.

Divorce and Slavery

The Bible was used in many ways to debate the issue of slavery in America. Reference was made to more than just those passages that directly mentioned or dealt with slavery. Sometimes arguments would be made by using ideas other than slavery to argue a point about slavery. Such is the case with the act of divorce. Abolitionists used divorce as an analogy for slavery.¹⁰⁷

Barnes offered no different argument than the other abolitionists did regarding this issue. He claimed that Moses found slavery, polygamy, and divorce as acceptable parts of neighboring communities and in Egypt prior to Israel's leaving for the Promised Land. Moses did not create slavery, polygamy, or divorce, but he did create legislation to guard against their leading to sin among God's people. Barnes invoked Jesus' teaching about divorce in Matt 19:8 to explain that Moses reluctantly gave in to some form of divorce because of the hardness of the hearts of God's people. Jesus explicitly stated that from the very beginning God never intended for divorce to be practiced among his people except in the case of adultery. Barnes would then maintain by analogy that God never intended for slavery to be practiced among his people, but for a short season Moses allowed it because of the hardness of the hearts of God's people in Moses' generation.¹⁰⁸

Barnes also treated divorce like polygamy. Both polygamy and divorce were generally considered immoral in the nineteenth century. Barnes' argument was that if it could be said that Moses' legislating the practice of slavery meant that Moses approved of

¹⁰⁷ Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 88-9; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 3-5.

¹⁰⁸ Barnes, Inquiry, 113-5, 166-8.

slavery, then the same could be said of the practice of divorce. This argument uses the general sentiment against divorce in nineteenth-century America as leverage against accepting slavery in nineteenth-century America. This argument makes it sound like if one approves of slavery on such biblical grounds, then one would also need to approve of divorce on the same grounds.¹⁰⁹

Runaway Slaves

Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee: He shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best: thou shalt not oppress him.

—Deut 23:15-16

In nineteenth century America the issue of “runaway” or “fugitive” slaves was a hot topic. When slaves ran away from their masters they were hunted down and either returned or killed by slave catchers. In 1850, not long after Barnes wrote his Inquiry, the controversial “Fugitive Slave Act” was passed requiring anyone that found runaway slaves to return them to their owners. As of the time of Barnes’ writing of his Inquiry, however, runaway slaves were liable to be punished and returned in the most gruesome of ways.¹¹⁰

Barnes drew another distinction between servitude under Mosaic law and slavery in America by bringing up the subject of fugitive slaves. As can be seen from Deut

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 168.

¹¹⁰ Samuel May, The Fugitive Slave Law, and its Victims (Westport, Connecticut, Negro Universities , 1970); Herbert Edward Strom, Conscience and Law: The Debate in the Churches over the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 (New Haven: Yale Divinity School, 1969); Stanley W. Campbell, The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972); John Diaz, “An Enmity Deep and Enduring: The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 as a Cause of the Civil War” (M.A. thesis, East Stroudsburg University, 1997).

23:15-16, fugitive slaves were not to be returned to their masters.¹¹¹ It was the responsibility of the Israelites to whom the fugitive slaves ran to provide them with protection and a place to live. Those receiving the slaves were not to oppress them in any way. The land of Israel was to be a haven for the oppressed of other lands, and the government was to protect the fugitive slaves—never to hand them over to those from whom they escaped. As such, Barnes painted a picture of the Mosaic ideal of slavery as an institution of mercy. Israel was, in not so many words, the Underground Railroad of the ancient near east—a place for the oppressed to run and receive mercy.¹¹²

If nothing else, at least this distinction drawn between servitude under Mosaic law and slavery in America served to argue against the custom of pursuing runaway slaves in America. As apologists were pointing to Mosaic legislation regarding slavery as a means to promote their cause, they were met by the abolitionists' plea to follow in Israel's footsteps and reconsider America's runaway slave laws. Barnes suggested that the United States government ought to have protected runaway slaves as fully as the government of Israel was to do under Mosaic law.

¹¹¹ Abolitionists generally took this passage at face value and applied it to their opposition to the Fugitive Slave law and the idea of returning runaway slaves in America: Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 28; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 59; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 264-5, 270-1, 280. Apologists, on the other hand, rightly argued that if these laws applied to Hebrews, then there would be no point in hiring anyone because anyone could run away and nullify the debt owed to the master: Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 13; Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 503. On the other hand, if it applied to those fleeing from heathen masters, then it made more sense: Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 497; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 345-6; Charles Hodge, "The Fugitive Slave Law," Cotton is King, ed. E. N. Elliott (Augusta: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860), 813.

¹¹² Barnes, Inquiry, 190-2.

Life and Treatment of American Slaves

When analyzing and sorting all of the data related to how the Bible was used in the discussion on American slavery, in general one may put the data into one of two categories. The first category concerns slavery as an institution. Questions such as “Is the institution of slavery necessary to all societies at all times?” or “Is the institution of slavery inherently evil?” are questions raised in the first category. The second category of discussion relates to the abuses of the institution in actual practice. Questions such as “What specific acts pertaining to the managing of slaves are sinful?” or “How can masters best glorify God in their management of their slaves?” are questions raised in the second category.

In general Barnes argued that there were so many sins committed in the practicing of slavery that if they were discontinued, the system left would not be one of slavery but of voluntary, compensated employment. In other words, Barnes claimed that the institution was so wrought with sins that apart from those sins the institution could no longer exist. Barnes attacked the institution by attacking its necessary practices.

To accomplish this Barnes studied the Old Testament carefully to see if the practices involved with the various forms of servitude in ancient Israel were similar to those of American slavery. If he could demonstrate God’s wrath against aspects of servitude in ancient Israel, which were more merciful and loving than aspects of slavery in America, then Barnes could conclude that God would be even angrier and more displeased at Americans than He was at ancient Israelites.

Oppression

The discussion of oppression will be covered in detail in the sixth chapter of this current work, but it should be mentioned briefly that Barnes clearly recognized the link between oppression in the laws of Moses and the oppressive nature of slavery in America. Barnes saw God's wrath against the oppression of Egyptian bondage come out in the specific laws designed to keep such oppression against various forms of servants out of the nation of Israel.

Barnes pointed out three matters related to God's anger at oppression as born out in Mosaic legislation.¹¹³ First, servants were to be treated with humanity and kindness. There were laws to protect servants from being abused by their masters.¹¹⁴ Second, servants that were abused to the point of sustaining permanent physical damage at the hand of their masters were to be freed in compensation for such damage.¹¹⁵ Third, Barnes places all servants of all kinds into the category of strangers. God has much to say about how His people were to treat strangers among them.¹¹⁶ Barnes maintained that all of the instructions given to Israel concerning the treatment of strangers were to apply unequivocally to Israel's

¹¹³ Barnes, Inquiry, 122-4, 171.

¹¹⁴ Exod 21:20-21. Other abolitionists were quick to point out the severe penalties for physically abusing servants: Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 77; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 22; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 51-52, 98; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 42-3; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 194, 264, 282; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 12-13.

¹¹⁵ Exod 21:26-27. Apologists would use this same proof-text to show the discretion a master had in beating his slaves. If the slave did not die, the master went unpunished because the slave was his money: Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 475-7.

¹¹⁶ Exod 22:21, 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 1:16, 10:17, 19, 27:19.

foreign-born servants as well. The system of servitude in ancient Israel stood in stark contrast to the system of slavery in America when measured against these three standards.

Religious Improvement and Holidays

As was mentioned in the second chapter of this current work, Barnes was passionate about the religious improvement of every Christian. He considered it the moral responsibility of every Christian to improve themselves as Christians. This meant regular church attendance, Bible study, evangelism, etc. As these things were a matter of utmost importance for Barnes, it did not escape his notice that most slaves did not have the ability to improve themselves. They were frequently made to work on Sundays instead of being allowed to attend church services. They were deprived of an education that included learning how to read, so they could study the Bible. Their workload was so unrelenting that they had no time to attend church-sponsored retreats to rekindle their spiritual flame and refresh their spirits. In short, the system of American slavery promoted ignorance and moral destitution rather than religious improvement.

In order to combat this deplorable situation, Barnes studied the rights of servants in ancient Israel to see if he could determine whether they had more or less ability than their American counterparts to pursue their own religious improvement. The differences he found were intended to be astonishing to his readers.

First, servants in ancient Israel were instructed to participate in religious holidays to the extent that their masters were. Every seventh year was to be a sabbatical year during which neither masters nor slaves were to work. It was a year of refreshing and

rejuvenating the spirit. It was a year of resting in the Lord.¹¹⁷ Every seventh day, the Sabbath, was to be spent in rest and in the things of the Lord. It was a weekly version of the seventh year.¹¹⁸ Servants were also to attend all national religious festivals.¹¹⁹ This included all male servants taking three weeks off,¹²⁰ all boys taking three weeks off,¹²¹ seven days off for all slaves at the Passover,¹²² seven days off for all slaves at Pentecost,¹²³ and another seven days off for the Feast of Tabernacles.¹²⁴ Servants were also to participate in family holidays—special days set aside for religious celebrations with family members.¹²⁵ These were not just vacation days when no work was done. These were days to lay aside the

¹¹⁷ Lev 25:4-6. Barnes, Inquiry, 125.

¹¹⁸ Exod 20:10. Barnes and other abolitionists lamented that many American slaves were not allowed to cease from their labors on Sundays to allow them to rest and worship: Barnes, Inquiry, 125; Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 130, 162, 171; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 56; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 43. Some slaves, however, did enjoy such weekly days of rest: Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 25.

¹¹⁹ Barnes, Inquiry, 126; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 56. Priest concedes that bond slaves in ancient Israel, who were by circumcision inducted into the covenant community, had one right—to “eat of the passover”; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 139.

¹²⁰ Exod 23:17.

¹²¹ Exod 34:23.

¹²² Deut 16:1-8.

¹²³ Deut 16:13-15.

¹²⁴ Lev 23:24-36.

¹²⁵ Exod 12:44; Deut 15:12-5. Barnes, Inquiry, 126, 128.

everyday concerns of life and concentrate on the things of the Lord. Servants in ancient Israel enjoyed such opportunities for religious improvement, but American slaves did not.

Second, Israel's servants were inducted into the covenant community. Barnes cited God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 17 as proof that those living among Abraham's seed were to be taken into his family; the promises intended for Abraham's seed were intended for their servants too.¹²⁶ Such was certainly not the case in America. Slavery in the nineteenth century was primarily based on race, and there was a large caste distinction between masters and slaves. By citing the scriptures he did concerning religious improvement, Barnes painted a very different picture of the servants of Israel and the slaves of America. While servants were elevated to the same class of people as their masters in ancient Israel, slaves were degraded to the lowest class of American society.

Third, slaves were to be instructed in the duties of morality and religion. They were to participate in the public reading of scripture and hear about what the Lord wanted them to do. They were to learn along side of their masters as if they were together in one classroom.¹²⁷ This too would appear absurd to Barnes' original readers.¹²⁸ The best

¹²⁶Barnes, Inquiry, 129; Matthews, "Anthropology of Slavery," 124-5.

¹²⁷Exod 12:49, Lev 24:22, Num 9:14, 15:15-16, 29, 23:34, Deut 31:10-12. Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 56; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 126.

¹²⁸Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 130-5, 148-9; Minutes of the 1818 General Assembly, 29, 32; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 56, 130; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 25; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 121, 127, 132-45, 279, 294-5, 306; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 49.

examples of racially-mixed religious education in nineteenth century America still were a far cry from what they were in ancient Israel.¹²⁹

Fourth, Barnes used the evangelism argument again. This time, however, he was more explicit in mentioning the likelihood with which a servant in ancient Israel might turn to the Lord.

The arrangement seems to have been such as would lead him, of course, to become a worshipper of the true God, and to feel that his interests were identified with those of the Hebrew people. That all this was contemplated, there can be no doubt. The laws requiring them to be circumcised; to keep the Sabbath, the Passover, the Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, all suppose this.¹³⁰

It is true that servants in Israel were exposed to God in a profound way. Barnes would not advocate American slavery for evangelistic reasons though.¹³¹ He was just attempting to encourage slave owners either to adapt their system to resemble that of the ancient Israelites under the Mosaic law or to drop the institution altogether.

Right to Own Property

Another difference between servitude under Mosaic law and slavery in America is that servants in ancient Israel were allowed to hold their own property. This included land as well as livestock. The servants in ancient Israel were allowed to accumulate enough wealth to buy their own freedom, whereas the slaves in America were not allowed to own so much as a hammer. Some servants even became heirs to their masters in certain

¹²⁹ Barnes, Inquiry, 130-1.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 132.

¹³¹ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 127.

situations—a repulsive idea to slave-holders in nineteenth-century America. Barnes was perhaps the only abolitionist who challenged American slave-holders to grant their slaves the same privileges as ancient Israelite masters extended to their servants.¹³²

Barnes' method of argumentation on this point was simple. If it could be demonstrated that God was angry at the oppression of servants in the Old Testament era, then how much angrier must God be at the greater oppression of slaves in America? If God carefully provided instructions to be kind to all forms of servants, then He must have been equally concerned with the way American slaves were being mistreated by their masters.

Moses' Reluctance to Abolish Slavery

Apologists rightly asked the question: if Moses could have stopped the practice of slavery in Israel, why did he not do so?¹³³ Certainly Moses did not allow abortion, child sacrifices, idolatry, etc. to become a part of the life of Israel. These were sins practiced by neighboring nations and (at least in the case of idolatry) even by Israelites in Egypt. Moses seemed to have no reservations about legislating against such sins, so what reason would anyone have to believe that he would not have similarly legislated against slavery if it were genuinely a sin (as abolitionists claimed it was)?

Barnes carefully answered this question in a few ways. First, he maintained that Moses would never have allowed for the system of servitude known as “slavery” to be practiced in Israel as it was in the surrounding nations. In other nations people were bought

¹³² Barnes, Inquiry, 178-9.

¹³³ Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 43; Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 475, 490; idem, “Letter to a Brother in Kentucky,” 518.

and sold as property (chattel slavery) and treated harshly. In stark contrast to the way in which the Israelites were treated during their time in Egyptian bondage, free Israelites were to treat their servants kindly, with fairness, and as having full rights as citizens to enjoy the blessings and protection of God's people. Such a system of servitude was so different from the system of slavery found in the surrounding nations that it would have appeared to be a merciful alternative to the situation slaves would find themselves in being slaves in those surrounding nations. In other words, Israel would be an oasis of peace and mercy in a desert of nations that knew no peace or mercy. Under such an arrangement God would save the oppressed slaves from other nations by providing a system in Israel that would meet the slaves financial obligations to their harsh masters. Then, under the care of their new masters, the former slaves could repay their new masters in a peaceful and merciful environment. When the debt was repaid, the servants would have every benefit their masters enjoyed and would be fully a part of God's people.¹³⁴

Second, Barnes stepped into the dangerous argument of evangelism. As was established in the second chapter of this current work, Barnes was passionate about evangelism and the salvation of lost souls. Barnes briefly suggested that one of the benefits former slaves of other countries might experience if they were to become servants in Israel was exposure to the truth and righteousness of God. In other words, being exposed to God in Israel may have led them to become counted among his people in a salvific way. Essentially this is an argument that servitude in Israel was a benefit in that the servant would be

¹³⁴Barnes, Inquiry, 115; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 63; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 61-2; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 283, 344; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 44.

evangelized as a resident among God's people. The precarious issue here is that apologists were emphatic about this same benefit among those brought to America from Africa as slaves. Africans in Africa had relatively little exposure to the gospel of Christ and the other benefits of Christianity. When the Africans were brought to America, many of them became Christians. Apologists would argue that in the eternal perspective of things, it was better to be a Christian slave in America than a free pagan in Africa.¹³⁵ Barnes' evangelism argument only comes out in one thickly veiled reference to the blessings of the Hebrew commonwealth, so it may not have attracted much attention. It is mentioned here only to demonstrate the degree to which Barnes studied the relationship between slavery and Moses' not abolishing all forms of servitude when he had the power to do so.¹³⁶

Third, Barnes mentioned his theory that by establishing laws related to servitude in Israel, Moses intended to abolish it from the beginning. As will be seen shortly in the next section of this current work, Moses put laws into place, which severely limited the number of years anyone was allowed to serve another. No one was to be a perpetual slave under Mosaic law. By putting temporal limits on the length of time one person could serve another, Moses was said to be ensuring that perpetual slavery could not exist among God's people.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Priest, for example, poignantly makes this argument for his readers visually when he included pictures in his work showing the difference between free Africans and American slaves: Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 25-26.

¹³⁶ Barnes, Inquiry, 115.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Certainly this question is a difficult one for abolitionists to answer. It will come up again when considering arguments from the New Testament. It will be said that of all people, certain Jesus and the apostles did not shrink from calling sin, sin. Suffice it to say, regardless of the strength or effectiveness of Barnes' response to this question, at least he did not shy away from it. This is indicative of the exhaustive nature of his study of the Bible and how proof-texts from it were used by those on both sides of the debate.

Emancipation

If American slaves were the property of their masters, as the apologists argued, then their masters would be no more disposed to emancipate their slaves than they would be to emancipate their horses. The masters might choose to sell their horses or slaves, but letting them go free made no sense to them. Under the laws of Moses, ancient Israelites had no concept of owning people. They had the right to employ each other and foreigners according to voluntary arrangements, but every so often all servants were to be freed from their responsibilities—enjoying all the benefits and responsibilities of their masters. These regular times of emancipation occurred every six years and every fiftieth year.¹³⁸

The Emancipation of All Hebrew Slaves after Six Years

If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him.

—Exod 21:2-3

¹³⁸Matthews, "Anthropology of Slavery," 127.

And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.

—Deut 15:12

No servitude arrangement between two Hebrews was to last longer than six years. If one Hebrew owed a debt to another Hebrew, its repayment could be no longer than the debtor's six years of labor would repay.¹³⁹ This leaves open the possibility that Hebrews would serve each other for less than six years, however, as the six years was a maximum length of time for required service.

Barnes brought up these two passages to remind his readers that if the slaves in America were no longer considered foreigners, then they ought to work for their masters for a period of time not to exceed six years. After six years, all slaves ought to be emancipated and their debts (if any) considered paid in full. Barnes attempted to apply this universally to all American slaves of African descent—especially those born in America. Barnes argued that if the Mosaic laws found in these two passages were to be fully applied in nineteenth century America, then all slaves would be freed after serving their masters for no longer than six years. By arguing this point he demonstrated two things. First, the system of American slavery was worse than the system of servitude in ancient Israel. Second, the

¹³⁹Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 79, 91; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 25, 28; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 134; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 39; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 87; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 13; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 44. Generally speaking, apologists did not deny that Hebrew servants were not allowed to be held for a maximum of six years. Their discussion focused on the distinctions between Hebrew and Gentile slaves: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 30; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 475. See also Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Slaves of God," Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society 9, no. 1 (1966): 38.

system of servitude was set up as a merciful practice in which debts could be repaid, but there would be no perpetual servitude between fellow Hebrews.¹⁴⁰

The Emancipation of All Slaves Every Fiftieth Year

And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.

—Lev 25:10

In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession.

—Lev 25:13

Under Mosaic laws, there was also to be a universal emancipation of all slaves—regardless of their race or the initial situation that caused them to become servants of Hebrews. This happened every fiftieth year and was known as the “Year of Jubilee.” During this year all properties of land returned to their rightful owners and all servants were freed. If someone were to sell his services to another three years prior to the Year of Jubilee, then the seller could work no longer than three years for the buyer.¹⁴¹

Barnes interacted with these passages to inform his readers that all slaves—even those that were not Hebrews—were to be freed every fiftieth year.¹⁴² By the time of Barnes’ writing on the issue of slavery, much more than fifty years had elapsed since

¹⁴⁰Barnes, Inquiry, 143-4.

¹⁴¹Lev 25:50-54.

¹⁴²Barnes, Inquiry, 143-56; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 79; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 25; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 39, 47; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 13; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 44-5. Among the apologists to refer to these proof-texts, Priest took the lead arguing that “the *jubilees* did the negro Canaanite slave no good, as is contended by abolitionists, as *they were never* to be made free.” Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 407.

the first Africans were pressed into slavery in America, but no one had been emancipated in relation to a fiftieth year in America. By arguing this point he demonstrated two things. First, the system of American slavery was worse than the system of servitude in ancient Israel. Second, the system of servitude in ancient Israel was never intended to be perpetual. It ended on the fiftieth year. If the fiftieth year principle were fairly applied to slavery in America, then all of the slaves should have been freed a long time before Barnes entered the slavery debate.¹⁴³

Barnes also mentioned that the reason that ancient Israel was allowed to make servants of its neighbors was that God had expressly condemned Israel's neighbors to death for their sin. When Israel did not entirely follow through with the punishment of God's wrath against the nations by exterminating them entirely, God instructed His people to make servants of the rest of them that remained in the land. This, according to Barnes, was God's way of punishing those that had escaped the punishment of death. Barnes emphatically maintained that God was not calling Americans to punish Africans for their complexion by enslaving them in the same way that God once called ancient Israel to punish the enemies of God for their sin by killing and enslaving them.¹⁴⁴

Exceptions to the Regular Emancipation of Servants

If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the

¹⁴³ Shriver, "Bible and Southern Ethics," 94.

¹⁴⁴ Barnes, Inquiry, 156.

door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.

—Exod 21:4-6

And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself.

—Lev 25:47-49

There were four exceptions to these regular occasions of emancipation. First, if a master gave a woman to a servant to be his wife, and the servant's time of service were then to expire, the servant was free to leave. The servant's wife and any children they bore during his service, however, were to remain with the master until the year of Jubilee. The husband was apparently still free to leave, but if he wanted to stay with his wife, children, and master, then he would go through an embarrassing ceremony wherein his ear would be pierced as a sign that he would be a permanent servant to his master.¹⁴⁵ Second, if the servants themselves or one of their relatives paid off the debt the servant owed, they could go free. In this case the servant was allowed to leave before his time of service was complete.¹⁴⁶ A third exception related to the supposed inheritance of young slaves passed

¹⁴⁵Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 91. Weld argued two things from this text: (1) that servitude was of a voluntary nature and (2) that the women in this text were foreign slaves—not Hebrew bond women: Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 57, 133-4. Junkin, on the other hand would argue for the perpetual nature of slavery as evidenced by the husband's embarrassing ritual: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 33-6; see also Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 342. Stringfellow sees God's providence in separating slave families in this text: Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 477-8. See also Matthews, "Anthropology of Slavery," 129-32.

¹⁴⁶Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 44-5; Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 497; *ibid.*, "Letter to a Brother in Kentucky," 515.

down from generation to generation.¹⁴⁷ Fourth, as mentioned previously, if a servant were violently attacked by a master, then the servant was allowed to go free (Exod 21:20-21).¹⁴⁸

These were the four exceptions to the regular occasions of emancipation.

With regard to these exceptions, Barnes had one particular point to make. The fact that certain male servants chose to remain with their masters was no reason to justify perpetual slavery in America. The servants under Mosaic law clearly chose to remain with their masters. The servants were not forced to stay, nor would their wives and children be held past the Year of Jubilee. In these cases, the permanent servant was not to be considered a slave, but he was to be treated with kindness. This clashed with the system of American slavery.¹⁴⁹

Summary of Barnes' Study of the Mosaic Laws

In general Barnes' main argument from his study of slavery in the laws of Moses was that the cruelty of American slavery was a far cry from Moses' humane program of servitude. By the laws that Moses set in place no one was to be kidnaped, no one was to

Bartchy would later argue that *YHWH* owned the Israelites Himself after He saved them from Egyptian bondage, so owning one another would be a theoretical and legal impossibility: S. Scott Bartchy, ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ: First-Century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21 (Missoula, Montana: University of Montana, 1973), 53.

¹⁴⁷ Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 40-1; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 44.

¹⁴⁸ Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 77; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 22; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 51-52, 98; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 42-3; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 194, 264, 282; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 12-13.

¹⁴⁹ Barnes, Inquiry, 144-5.

be sold, runaway slaves were to be protected and provided for, no one was to be deprived of their dignity or religious rights, and every servant was to be emancipated on a regular basis. These laws applied to all servants regardless of how they became servants in the first place. According to Barnes Moses never intended to found an eternally perpetuating institution of slavery in which people were considered the property of another. From Barnes' viewpoint, if the institution of slavery were to be measured against the grid of Mosaic legislation on issues pertaining to servanthood in ancient Israel, American slavery would be found morally deficient in almost every way. Through all this, Barnes demonstrated a deep and broad understanding of which passages in the Bible might have a bearing on American slavery and how such passages were used as proof-texts by those on either side of the debate.

Psalms

Most of the Old Testament proof-texts and arguments used in the discussion on American slavery came from the Pentateuch. There are few direct mentions of slaves or slavery in the rest of the Old Testament. Few individual texts outside of the Pentateuch were used by both sides of the debate. Attention to the book of Psalms is an instructive example.

When reading through the poetic books of the Bible in general and through the book of Psalms in particular, one does not find an abundance of references to slaves. In the book of Psalms the word only appears twice. In Ps 105:17 there is an amoral reference to Joseph, and in Ps 123:2 the word is used as a metaphor to describe the way God's people

relate to Him. It should not seem surprising to learn that contributors to neither side of the slavery debate relied heavily on proof-texts in the Psalms.¹⁵⁰

This did not stop Barnes. He early and often applied passages referring to strangers, the poor, and the oppressed to the discussion of slavery. In this way he was able to apply some of the most central, fundamental principles of Christianity to the debate on American slavery. In Psalms there are three times in Barnes' Notes when he attacks the evils he saw in slavery from this angle. In his commentary on Ps 12:5 Barnes focused on broken promises and related them to slaves' not being compensated for their labor.¹⁵¹ He used his commentary on Ps 72:4 to point out how in God's eyes both the slaves and masters would be judged in a fair light, whereas in America masters had a decided edge over their slave opponents in any judicial context.¹⁵² Barnes took this principle a step further in his commentary on Ps 140:12 when he claimed that the oppressed had an even greater chance of justice before God than did their oppressors.¹⁵³ Barnes extended his study of the Bible's teaching about slavery to the Bible's teaching about oppression and the way the poor or strangers were not to be mistreated. This allowed Barnes' Bible study to extend into the Psalms where most of those in the debate did not venture.

¹⁵⁰In Ps 44:12 those practices which are necessary to perpetuate slavery are said by Bourne to be "represented as among the greatest sins and threatened with the severest Divine judgments and punishment." Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 17. Priest used Ps 105:23,25 as a proof-text to argue that David knew the people in Egypt were black because he called Egypt "the land of Ham"; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 55.

¹⁵¹Barnes, Notes, 4:106-107.

¹⁵²Ibid., 245.

¹⁵³Ibid., 302. There is no direct quotation from the Psalms in his Inquiry.

The Prophets

What do the prophets have to do with slavery? Not much really—or so the apologists would say. They were willing to dismiss most discussion on slavery taken from the prophetic books holding mainly to an argument from silence. Apologists would have others believe that there was a constant stream of slaves in Israel during all eras of the Old and New Testaments.¹⁵⁴

Abolitionists, on the other hand, would point to a few key events and prophetic words to show that there was an increased disapproval of slavery in the later divided kingdom era of the Old Testament. Three particular passages during the era of the prophets became the focus of studies conducted by abolitionists. The first is an incident regarding the northern kingdom's taking fellow Israelites from the southern kingdom to be prisoners of war as recorded in 2 Chr 28:8-15. God sent the prophet Oded to deal with that situation.¹⁵⁵ The second passage is Isaiah's plea for a fast that includes the general emancipation of all slaves in Israel. This is found in Isa 58:6.¹⁵⁶ The third passage records the emancipation and sinful re-introduction of slaves preceding the final Babylonian captivity

¹⁵⁴The only exceptions are proof-texts used from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Joel; Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 64-5; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 475; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 64, 142-5, 321-33.

¹⁵⁵Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 102-3; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 17-9.

¹⁵⁶Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 157, 184; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 260, 283; Joseph Thompson, Voice of God against National Crime, 27-28; idem, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 14.

of the southern kingdom as recorded in Jer 34:8-20.¹⁵⁷ Barnes studied each one of these passages and wrote about their pertinence to his situation in nineteenth-century America.

From these three passages Barnes presented the inductive argument that there was a general consensus concerning slavery among the prophets in the divided kingdom era of the Old Testament. From these three passages he concluded that the prophets were opposed to slavery and freely intervened with any intention of continuing its practice. As for the differences between the type of servitude practiced in the era of the prophets and the type of servitude intended by Moses to be temporarily tolerated, Barnes saw the servitude of the prophetic era to be worse—perhaps as bad as American slavery. By drawing an affinity between prophetic era servitude and American slavery, Barnes justified the application of the prophets' rebukes to the American context. For now, however, it will suffice to demonstrate that Barnes' study was exhaustive enough to include all three passages referring to slavery in the prophets.¹⁵⁸

**The Prisoner of War Incident
during Ahaz's Reign**

And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold, because the LORD God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for

¹⁵⁷ Bourne, Slavery and the Book Irreconcilable, 116, 187; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 50-1; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 105; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 60; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 14.

¹⁵⁸ Barnes, Inquiry, 213-4, 219-20.

bondmen and bondwomen unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the LORD your God? Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which ye have taken captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you. Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war, And said unto them, Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for whereas we have offended against the LORD already, ye intend to add more to our sins and to our trespass: for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the congregation. And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria.

—2 Chr 28:8-15

According to the prophet Oded God was angry at the people of the northern kingdom of Israel for their sins. Oded instructed the people of the northern kingdom to release the captives they had taken in battle against the southern kingdom. It was not God's intention to have His people become slaves to others among His people in this situation. Barnes interpreted Oded's warning as a timeless principle—namely that God never desired for His people to become slaves to others among His people regardless of the situation. Barnes held that Oded's warning demonstrated that the form of servitude possible under the Mosaic laws was never intended to include slavery. Barnes buffers these arguments with an argument from silence—namely that since there were no further instances recorded of the people of the northern kingdom enslaving people of the southern kingdom, this must mean that the people of the northern kingdom understood Oded and God to be saying that slavery was wrong. Barnes handled his study of this passage in such a way as to emphasize a change from the earlier eras of Old Testament history. By now, Barnes claimed in effect, the people

in the later kingdom era of ancient Israel knew better than to perpetuate a system of servitude as immoral as slavery.¹⁵⁹

Isaiah's Rebuke against Slavery

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

—Isa 58:6

In both his Inquiry and his Notes, Barnes was careful when writing on this verse to name slavery as one of the “heavy burdens” or “yokes” and to name slaves as the “oppressed.” The category of the oppressed extended beyond slaves but certainly included them. Slavery was among the many things that Isaiah’s readers would understand as being a heavy burden or a yoke. By including slavery and slaves among the heavy burdens, yokes, and oppressed, Barnes argued that genuine spirituality—the kind that brings about fasting—should also bring about things such as a giving up of oppressive activities. Barnes would encourage his readers to be of the same spirit in reference to their fasting. He saw this verse as Isaiah’s plea for God’s people to give up oppressive practices such as slavery. Barnes saw this verse as Isaiah’s call for a general emancipation wherever applicable among God’s people.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Barnes, Inquiry, 215. With an eye to his current situation, Paxton spoke highly of Isaiah as a minister who trusted God to use him to lead the people away from the sin of slavery: Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 103.

¹⁶⁰ Barnes, Notes, 6:2:332-4; idem, Inquiry, 220-4. Bourne and Thompson reflected in their own situation Isaiah’s concern over the lack of genuine charity slave-holders showed: Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 157; Joseph Thompson, Voice of God against National Crime, 27-28. Apologists argued that this passage referred only to some of the slaves—not those made slaves for life: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 64-5; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 325-6, 332.

Jeremiah's Rebuke and the Babylonian Captivity

The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for the slaves. Everyone was to free his Hebrew slaves, both male and female; no one was to hold a fellow Jew in bondage. So all the officials and people who entered into this covenant agreed that they would free their male and female slaves and no longer hold them in bondage. They agreed, and set them free. But afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves they had freed and enslaved them again. Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I made a covenant with your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I said, 'Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrew who has sold himself to you. After he has served you six years, you must let him go free.' Your fathers, however, did not listen to me or pay attention to me. Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight: Each of you proclaimed freedom to his countrymen. You even made a covenant before me in the house that bears my Name. But now you have turned around and profaned my name; each of you has taken back the male and female slaves you had set free to go where they wished. You have forced them to become your slaves again. "Therefore, this is what the LORD says: You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom for your fellow countrymen. So I now proclaim 'freedom' for you, declares the LORD—'freedom' to fall by the sword, plague and famine. I will make you abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth. The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.

—Jer 34:8-20

In the narrative above King Zedekiah and the remnant in Jerusalem made a covenant to please God by voluntarily emancipating all the slaves among them. In a spirit of repentance the remnant sought God's favor by acting on their sense of moral responsibility. After the slaves were emancipated the former masters changed their minds and re-enslaved

their former slaves. This infuriated God, so He threatened to punish those that re-enslaved their former slaves.¹⁶¹

Some would say that the sin the remnant committed was not the enslaving of people but the breaking of a covenant regarding voluntary service of fellow Israelites.¹⁶²

Barnes, however, would identify the sin as slavery—involuntary servitude. He pointed to the connection between the repentance that God saw in their hearts and the action of emancipation. Barnes also emphasized how disappointed God was that the covenant He made with their forefathers was broken—namely that God’s people served as slaves beyond the maximum six-year term. It was important to Barnes to use this passage in a positive sense to demonstrate how a large number of slaves could be emancipated all at the same time out of a “sense of justice.”¹⁶³ Negatively, he found an example of the sinful nature of people that the temptation to enslave people was so strong, they could not resist being pulled back into the sin. In doing so, Barnes connected one’s sin nature to the desire some of his contemporaries had to enslave people. In summary, from his study of this passage Barnes could not see how anyone could argue that God intended for slavery to be a perpetual institution among his people in Moses’ era or any other era of the Old Testament.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Abolitionists argued that this sin was a the catalyst for the destruction of their city, their captivity, and their dispersion among the nations: Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 105; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 50-1.

¹⁶² Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 475; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 328-31. See also Martin Kessler, “Law of Manumission in Jer 34,” Biblische Zeitschrift n.s. 15, no. 1 (1971): 105-7.

¹⁶³ Barnes, Inquiry, 215.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Proof-Texts and Arguments Not Used by Barnes

Barnes recognized all of the major proof-texts and arguments used in the discussion of slavery as it pertained to the Old Testament. On some points his approach was innovative—showing original thought, yet on other points he merely echoed the general sentiments of abolitionists who preceded him. It might be fair to argue that those texts and arguments in the Old Testament, which he does not mention in his *Inquiry*, he overlooked intentionally because they were not widely used or highly significant to the discussion on American slavery.

One such example is the Curse of Cain argument. Apparently it was argued by some “that the people of Africa descended from Cain, and are included in the curse pronounced on that murderer.”¹⁶⁵ In all fairness, most apologists would rather explain slavery as originating with a racial emphasis as seen in the Curse of Canaan than allow it to be traced back to Cain.¹⁶⁶

Other examples would be brief allusions to more obscure slavery-related texts in the prophets. Ezekiel’s allusion to Tyre’s destruction due to their trading slaves would catch the eye of some abolitionists.¹⁶⁷ Israel’s sin of selling the poor for shoes did not

¹⁶⁵ Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 23.

¹⁶⁶ Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 161.

¹⁶⁷ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 115; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 17-9. Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 108; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 69.

escape the notice of a couple of Barnes' contemporaries.¹⁶⁸ Bourne was apparently the only person participating in the American slavery discussion who saw a fugitive slave in Obad 14-15.¹⁶⁹

Summary of Barnes' Study of the
Old Testament and Slavery

When Barnes wanted to know what the Bible taught about slavery, he conducted an extensive study of the Old Testament. His general conclusion was that various forms of servitude existed, but those practiced by the patriarchs and legislated by Moses were much more morally admirable than was slavery in America. The main differences between servitude in the Old Testament and slavery in America were related to the duration of service and to the nature of managing that service. Barnes consistently emphasized God's intention that the forms of servitude practiced among His people were temporary arrangements. Hebrew servants were only to serve for six years, and all servants of any type were to be freed every fiftieth year. In America slaves, their children, and their children's children continually served without hope of emancipation. Slavery was a matter of owning people—not of paying off debts. Barnes also had much to say concerning the treatment of servants in the Old Testament in contrast to the treatment of slaves in America. The patriarchs treated their servants with love, trust, and benevolence. The laws of Moses promoted servitude as a tool of mercy when other nations would have used slavery as a tool of oppression. American

¹⁶⁸ Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 102, 108; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 17-9.

¹⁶⁹ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 120.

slavery was so rife with examples of oppression that Barnes could not see the institution rightly continuing to be called slavery if the oppressive practices had actually ceased. It would no longer be fair to refer to the institution as slavery but merely some form of voluntary employment. The two main differences between Old Testament servitude and American slavery, which Barnes attempted to demonstrate in his study of the Old Testament and slavery, were related to the duration of service and the treatment of those that served.

The only time Barnes pointed out the similarities between a form of servitude in the Old Testament and slavery in America is when the practice in the Old Testament was something clearly condemned by God. For example, Barnes drew affinities between American slavery and the chattel slavery practiced by the Ishmaelites from Gilead in Genesis 37. He also compared American slavery to the practice among Israel's neighbors, which was condemned by God and which gave rise to the merciful institution legislated by Moses. Barnes also recognized the few examples of servitude in the prophetic era to resemble American slavery closely. When God condemned a form of servitude found in the Old Testament, Barnes drew a corollary between that form of servitude and American slavery.

Through all of this Barnes interacted with almost every Old Testament text used in the discussion of American slavery. In doing so he demonstrated that he had a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the Old Testament proof-texts involved in the discussion. He would continue to demonstrate the same familiarity with the proof-texts in the New Testament.

CHAPTER FOUR

BARNES' EXHAUSTIVE STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The purpose of this chapter is the same as the previous one: to demonstrate that Barnes possessed a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the biblical texts involved in the discussion on American slavery. Support for this position will be garnered from brief comparisons and contrasts of the use of proof texts by Barnes and by his contemporaries in the discussion. The focus of this chapter, however, will be on the New Testament passages used. Although the Old Testament was indispensable to both sides of the American slavery debate, both sides recognized that in many cases certain things in the New Testament supersede their predecessors in the Old Testament. There were situations in which the New Testament fulfilled what the Old Testament promised. Therefore, if a strong argument either way could be made from the New Testament, it would hold more weight among Christians than those presented from the Old Testament.

The apologists presented two overall arguments based on the New Testament. First, they used an argument from silence: Jesus and the apostles in no way ever condemned the institution of slavery. They condemned every sin regardless of the consequences of doing so. It therefore stands to reason that if they were opposed to the institution in any way, they would have said so. Second, the apologists pointed to the epistles to demonstrate that the apostles considered the relationship between slaves and masters in a similar light as other

domestic relationships such as husbands and wives or parents and children. Different abolitionists answered the apologists' arguments in different ways. Barnes' response, once again, was based on two things—a thorough study of all the individual passages relevant to the debate and an understanding of the New Testament as a whole.

Barnes on the Intertestamental Period and Slavery

Barnes studied the topic of slavery in the books of the Apocrypha and in the other extrabiblical sources written in the era between the closing of the Old Testament and the opening of the New Testament. He did this not because he considered these books to be on the same level of authority as scripture but because his study was to be thorough. The main argument he desired to present was one he would more thoroughly present in his study of the New Testament. The point he wanted his readers to consider is that there seems to be no mention of any form of servitude in the southern kingdom after the final captivity. This point will develop more fully in his New Testament arguments, but in short, he claimed that little can be found about slavery in the gospels because there was no slavery or any other form of servitude in Judea. In other words, there was an argument put forth by apologists that Jesus approved of slavery because He is never recorded as saying anything against it. This was met by Barnes' claim that Jesus' silence is explained by the fact that slavery was not an issue in Palestine during His ministry. There simply were no slave owners in Palestine to reprimand.

This argument from the New Testament is strengthened by the absence of any sign of slavery in the literature of the intertestamental period. Barnes explicitly mentions

Josephus, Wisdom 18:11; Ecclesiasticus 4:30, 6:11, 7:20-21, 19:21, 23:10, 33:24-26, 30-31, 37:11, 42:5; 1 Maccabees 1:6, 8; 2 Maccabees 7:6, 33, 8:35; Tobit 10:10; Judith 10:23, 14:13; Esther 15:16; and Susanna 27. He does not go into each passage individually, for this is only a point made in passing. He mentions these passages and Josephus as a group. This further demonstrates the extensive nature of his study and his desire to leave no stone unturned in his study of the Bible and slavery.¹

Answering the Apologists' Argument from Silence

The absence of any condemnation of slavery in the New Testament has been accounted for in a variety of ways. These include: a primary concern with personal ethics and not with the existing social order, the expectation of the imminent return of Christ, avoidance of offending the civil authorities, concern that the gospel not be defamed, and concession to the hardness of heart (parallel to Moses' instructions on divorce in Deut. 24:1-4). None of these are persuasive.²

The apologists' argument from silence was an appealing one. It began with an observation from the Old Testament era. "For fifteen hundred years, during which these [slave] laws were in force, God raised up a succession of prophets to reprove that people for the various sins into which they fell; yet there is not a reproof uttered against the institution of *involuntary slavery*, for any species of abuse that ever grew out of it."³ To the apologists it seemed to be the height of hypocrisy that God would consider slavery as sinful as the

¹Barnes, Inquiry, 226-7.

²Guenther Haas, "The Kingdom and Slavery: A Test Case for Social Ethics," Calvin Theological Journal 28 (April 1993): 75. See also John M. Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and the Dilemma of Christian Slave Ownership," New Testament Studies 37 (April 1991): 161-2.

³Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 475. See also idem, 490, "Letter to a Brother in Kentucky," 518; Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 43.

abolitionists considered it yet provide legislation to ensure its proper use and provide no indication whatsoever by the prophets—whose function, among other things, it was to point out sins—that it was in any way a *malum in se*. The typical abolitionist response was to attack the apologists' presupposition that the form of servitude legislated in the Mosaic laws was indeed slavery.

The right, such as the master claims over the slave, is never acknowledged in the word of God. No such right is recognized by the Mosaic institutions, so that the master, without the consent of the servant, could exact services from him, prevent him from marriage, break up his family by sale, etc.⁴

Barnes quoted a few apologists regarding their argument from silence in the Old Testament era, but he reserved his thunder for arguments from silence in the New Testament, as they would play a more significant role in the New Testament discussion.⁵

Jesus and the Argument from Silence

There is a sense in which Barnes' entire argument from the Gospels and Acts is a response to the apologists' argument from silence. He did not give a quick and direct answer to the apologists' argument from silence. Instead it served as a platform from which Barnes would present his arguments from the Gospels and Acts.

⁴Charles Elliott, *Sinfulness of American Slavery*, vol. 1, 344. See also *ibid*, 299-300, vol. 2, 15; Bourne, *Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument*, 61-2. Bourne also pointed out the fact that "every nation, ancient or modern, which has ever practised human slavery, has necessarily adopted two distinct codes of laws, one for its free inhabitants, and the other for its slaves, . . . there is no trace of any such code in the Levitical law," therefore, slavery as an institution did not exist in the Old Testament era: pp. 57-8.

⁵Barnes, *Inquiry*, 34-5, 105.

Apologists argued that of all people who would ignore the consequences of condemning sin, Jesus would be the most likely to indict slave-holders of the sin of owning slaves.⁶ To suggest that Jesus would be callous toward so great a sin (if it be hypothetically conceded slavery were a sin) would be to suggest that the Lord Himself is a hypocrite. Stringfellow took the lead among apologists in this particular argument musing that “it is passing strange, that under such circumstances, Jesus should fail to prohibit its further existence, if it was at all his intention to abolish it. Such an omission or oversight cannot be charged upon any other legislator the world has ever seen.”⁷ Contrary to the abolitionists’ claim that Jesus abolished slavery Stringfellow added:

I affirm then, first, that Jesus Christ has not abolished slavery by a prohibitory command: and second, I affirm, he has introduced no new moral principle which can work its destruction, under the gospel dispensation; . . . and third, . . . I affirm that in all the Roman provinces, where churches were planted by the apostles, hereditary slavery existed, as it did among the Jews, and as it does now among us, . . . and that in instructing such churches, the Holy Ghost by the apostles, has recognized the institution, as one *legally existing*⁸ among them, to be perpetuated in the church, and that its duties are prescribed.

The general counter-argument was to ask for consistency in applying this argument from silence to other sins as well.

⁶Giles, “Biblical Argument for Slavery,” 10.

⁷Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 479. See also Hodge, “Bible Argument on Slavery,” 855-6.

⁸Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 480. See also p, 484; idem, “Letter to a Brother in Kentucky,” 515; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 10. Bourne had argued that Jesus did indeed abolish slavery “by solemnly re-affirming, ratifying, and confirming the Levitical or Moral law, which said law condemned human slavery by those names, as we have seen it did.” Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 66. See also *ibid*, 66-68.

If the silence of Christ may be referred to as a justification of slavery, then, by this same silence, we may justify the making selling and drinking of ardent spirits; if Christ never condemned slavery, then neither did he condemn masonry, nor anti-masonry, nor polygamy, nor lotteries, nor theatres, nor offensive wars, nor tyranny of any kind, nor gladiatorial exhibitions, a kind of game which was much in fashion when he was upon earth, and which formed some of the most horrid and bloody scenes upon which the eyes of man ever gazed. If Christ never condemned slavery, by calling it by name, and denouncing it expressly as a *sin*, then neither did he condemn the doctrine of purgatory, of transubstantiation, of indulgencies, and numerous other pernicious errors, which even in his day, had a local habitation and a name.⁹

Barnes' main answer to the question of Jesus' silence on the issue of slavery is that "there is no evidence that Christ himself ever came in contact with slavery."¹⁰ Barnes maintained that

if slavery did not exist in Palestine in his time; if he never came in contact with it, it will not be fair to infer that he was not opposed to it, because he did not often refer to it, and expressly denounce it. He was not accustomed to go out of his way to denounce sins with which he did not come in contact.¹¹

By shifting the focus from Jesus' silence to the lack of Jesus' geographical proximity to the institution, Barnes sought to answer the apologist's argument from silence with one of his own. If Jesus "never came in contact with it, nothing can be safely argued in favour of it from his silence, any more than it can be inferred that he was favourable to the sports of the

⁹Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 11. The list of examples of such unnamed sins could be—and sometimes seemed to be—carried on *ad infinitum*: Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 19. Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 9, 67; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 17-8.

¹⁰Barnes, Inquiry, 242.

¹¹Ibid., 228.

amphitheatre at Rome, or to the orgies which were celebrated in honour of Bacchus, or to the claims to inspiration of the oracles of Dodona or Delphi.”¹²

The only instance where Jesus came into contact with a servant is in Matt 8:5-13 (parallel passage in Luke 7:1-10), and Barnes maintains that this servant of a Roman centurion was not necessarily a slave. Barnes gives two reasons for this. First, the term used by the Centurion was παῖς. Sometimes this term is used of a servant of some sort, and sometimes its is used of a child. Second, it would be strange for a traveling Centurion to have a slave with him, but it would be common for him to have various servants of various kinds with him. Barnes maintained that there is no necessity to believe, therefore, that the παῖς in Matt 8:5-13 must be a servant of the slave variety. If the relationship between the παῖς and the Centurion was not objectionable, then Jesus would not feel obliged to comment on it. This fact, in Barnes’ estimation, accounts for Jesus’ silence on the matter in Matt 8:5. Jesus’ lack of contact with slavery in Judea, according to Barnes, accounts for Jesus’ lack of comment on the institution.¹³

In summary, how did the argument from Jesus’ silence affect the debate in the nineteenth century? The following statement sums it up well: “But to infer that he approved

¹²Ibid, 242. Although this was a fairly novel contribution among abolitionists to this portion of the discussion, there was an energetic response by the apologists to Barnes’ idea: Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 483-4, 490; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 6; Hodge, “Bible Argument on Slavery,” 847-8. Across the board, apologists typically assumed Jesus’ familiarity with Roman slavery. See also Joseph Thompson, an abolitionist who more reasonably acknowledged that Jesus came into contact with various forms of servitude but none of the slavery variety, which, consequently, Jesus would have had to condemn: Joesph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 15, 17.

¹³Barnes, Inquiry, 242-4.

of every thing on which he maintained silence, or which he did not expressly condemn, would be a violation of all the principles by which we judge of a religious teacher or philosopher, and would be doing him manifest injustice.”¹⁴ Barnes even threw the argument back on the apologists by reminding them that Jesus “never uttered a word which can be construed *in favour* of slavery.”¹⁵ By doing so Barnes placed the burden of proof back on the apologists who initiated their own argument of silence.¹⁶

The Apostles and the Argument from Silence

Barnes took an offensive stance in using the argument of silence as it related to the Apostles. If they said nothing to indicate that the institution of slavery is good, then the apologists had no right to suggest that the Apostles approved of it at all. First of all there are no explicit statements affirming its justice or propriety. Second, no explicit permission was given to Christians to hold slaves. Essentially there is nothing recorded concerning the Apostles, which would indicate that they considered it a right of one person to own another. By challenging the apologists in this way, Barnes shifted the burden of proof back on the apologists to come up with any statement that directly asserted the justice or propriety of holding slaves or the right of one person to own another.¹⁷

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 245. See also Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 3.

¹⁶ Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 54-5; *idem*, “Proposition,” in Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 548-9; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 299, 309-10; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 5; Hodge, “Bible Argument on Slavery,” 848.

¹⁷ Barnes, Inquiry, 305-307, 340. As was the case with the apologists’ argument from silence regarding Jesus, however, so was their argument regarding the

The Apostles' Exposure to Slavery

Did the apostles ever come into contact with slavery? Barnes presented an argument from silence to see if his opponents could find any hint of there being slavery in Judea during the time of Christ or there being any hint of Jesus' preaching or teaching against moral issues that were outside of the geographical location of his public ministry. Since Jesus confined Himself to Palestine during His public ministry years, Barnes did not have to study the surrounding nations to see whether or not slavery was practiced within their boundaries. This would not be the case for the Apostles however. They certainly traveled broadly and came into contact with moral situations far different from those in Palestine during Christ's public ministry years. Barnes reported that certain abolitionists believed that the Apostles did not come into contact with slavery in the areas where Paul, for example,

apostles: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 54-5; idem, "Proposition," 548-9; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 299, 309-10; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 5; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 848. See also Shriver, "Bible and Southern Ethics," 94. Charles Elliott demonstrated the absurdity of relying upon an argument from silence with reference to the apostles' opinion of slavery by retorting that there was no prohibition against emancipating slaves either: Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 267. Likewise, the abolitionists again resorted to the argument that if slavery was to be considered a good institution to be perpetuated forever just because it was not mentioned by name in the apostles' writings, then a long list of other sins also ought to be considered good and to be perpetuated forever: Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 122; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 11; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 68-70; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 28, 31-2; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 25. See Armstrong's response to this argument by abolitionists in Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 7.

wrote his epistles.¹⁸ Barnes rejected this notion and insisted that if the whole anti-slavery platform were based on such suppositions, then the abolitionists would have no case.

I am persuaded that nothing can be gained to the cause of anti-slavery by attempting to deny that the apostles found slavery in existence in the regions where they founded the churches, and that those sustaining the relation of master and slave were admitted to the churches if they gave real evidence of regeneration, and were regarded by the apostles as entitled to the common participation of the privileges of Christianity. If the argument from the Scriptures against slavery cannot be sustained without admitting that, I do not see that it can be sustained at all.¹⁹

This is an good example of Barnes' holding a consistent hermeneutic of scripture as a higher priority than the issue of his day. Doing this makes his extensive study more believable. He was less likely to be accused of twisting scripture to prove his point when he openly discouraged his fellow abolitionists from misusing the Bible when applying it to the slavery debate.

Expediency vs. Hypocrisy

The apologists put up a very credible argument when they maintained that if the Apostles were to have allowed something as prevalent in their society as slavery to

¹⁸Besides Barnes' own testimony, no extant evidence of this argument being advanced by other abolitionists can be found. This leaves modern scholars with two possible explanations. First, Barnes may have fabricated the existence of such an argument purely for rhetorical reasons—to create a “straw man” which could easily be knocked down by readily available evidence. Second, the argument may have existed in oral communication or in written literature that is no longer extant. Given the overwhelming amount of evidence for the existence of other arguments Barnes claimed to exist from sources by his contemporaries, it seems reasonable to give Barnes the benefit of the doubt that he would not stoop to fabricating such arguments.

¹⁹Barnes, Inquiry, 259-60. See also Bartchy, ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ, 50.

continue without their expressed rebuke, then the Apostles themselves would have been guilty of hypocrisy.²⁰

These holy men did not refrain from condemning sin from a regard to consequences. They did not hesitate to array against the religion which they taught, the strongest passions of men. Nor did they content themselves with denouncing the general principles of evil; they condemned its special manifestations.²¹

It seemed to be a valid argument because the Apostles were well known for openly and fearlessly objecting to sins of relatively little magnitude even at the peril of losing their own lives. In response, the abolitionists made a sharp distinction between the terms expediency and hypocrisy. The abolitionists argued that the Apostles were not making a large issue out of slavery as they found it in various parts of northern Africa, eastern Europe, and western Asia because it would not have been expedient of them to do so. As prevalent as slavery was throughout the Roman Empire, if the Apostles had spoken out against it boldly, they would never have been able to maintain the gospel as the central feature of their faith and message. The reaction against Christianity as nothing more than an anti-slavery society would have caused its premature downfall. It was not that the Apostles were scared of the ramifications

²⁰ Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 306-7; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 856. See Bourne's response, however, in Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 68.

²¹ Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 855. Hodge would use the example of polytheism as a greater sin with greater consequences for the apostles' condemnation of it. "They knew that to denounce polytheism, was to array against them the whole power of the State. Their divine Master had distinctly apprized them of the result. . . . Yet in view of these consequences, the apostles did denounce idolatry, not merely in principle, but by name. The result was precisely what Christ had foretold. The Romans, tolerant of every other religion, bent the whole force of their wisdom and arms to extirpate Christianity." p. 856.

of standing up for what is right; it was a matter of prudence that they retained the gospel as the central, foundational feature of their faith and message.²²

Barnes picked up this argument that was already in existence among abolitionists and sustained it in his Inquiry. Anticipating the objections of the apologists that the abolitionists were not acting expediently by campaigning actively against slavery in America, he made distinctions between the Roman and American contexts. If Christianity would have been labeled by the Roman Empire as primarily an anti-slavery society, then the negative attention drawn to it would have only accomplished its demise (apart from the saving hand of God). If, on the other hand, Christianity were to focus on its fundamental principles (salvation, loving God, and loving one's neighbor), then slavery would have been abolished via more godly and lasting means. In other words, if only one cause were to succeed (salvation or abolition), it would be better if salvation triumphed. Therefore it was expedient that the Apostles should focus as much attention on salvation and as little attention on slavery as they did in their epistles to the churches. This, in Barnes' opinion, accounts for the silence among the Apostles as to their attitude toward slavery.²³ This current work, however, seeks not to judge the strengths or weaknesses of this argument but in this chapter merely to demonstrate how exhaustive Barnes' study of the New Testament was in dealing

²²Channing, Slavery, 122. See also Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 51; Michael Parsons, "Slavery and the New Testament: Equality and Submissiveness," Vox Evangelica 18 (1988): 90; Haas, "The Kingdom and Slavery," 80-7. After all, argued Pond and Joseph Thompson, it was not like the Apostles had it within their power to abolish slavery in the Roman Empire anyway: Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 9-10; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 33.

²³Barnes, Inquiry, 249-50, 278-304.

with the issue of the Bible and slavery. More will be said about this argument in relation to the central themes of Christianity in the sixth chapter of this current work. Suffice it to say that the apologists' argument from silence, relative to the boldness that Jesus and the Apostles typically show when confronting such issues, was not an argument abolitionists could easily overlook.²⁴

The Relationship between Jesus and Slavery

There were plenty of arguments from both sides of the debate using specific texts from the Gospels related to Jesus' ministry. The argument from silence in the Gospels was unique in that people on both sides of the debate dealt with it. Other arguments based on specific proof-texts, however, were typically not dealt with by people on both sides of the debate. Such arguments were advanced by one side and mostly ignored by the other. In this way, the debate using the Gospels was unique.

Apologists often advanced arguments by inference from the teachings of Christ. Brookes, for example, argues that in Jesus' illustrations of masters and servants, the masters are clearly in a superior position when it comes to authority. The implication of this, for Brookes, would be that Jesus recognized and did not change the nature of the relationship

²⁴ Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 45, 54-5, 70; idem, "Proposition," 548-9; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 299, 309-10; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 6; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 5, 10; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 346-7; Stringfellow, "Letter to a Brother in Kentucky," 515; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 848-9. See also Parsons, "Slavery and the New Testament," 89-90; William J. Richardson, "Principle and Context in the Ethics of the Epistle to Philemon," Interpretation 22 (July 1968): 306-308, 311-2; Barchy, ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ, 63-4.

between masters and slaves.²⁵ Also by implication, Armstrong argued that Christ's teachings on slavery can be seen by their application made in the writing of the Apostles on slavery.²⁶ Stringfellow, as an exception to the general rule, did respond to a few of the abolitionists' proof-text arguments. In response to the one who advanced an argument that slaves are better than sheep based on Matt 12:12, Stringfellow categorized slaves superior to sheep yet inferior to their masters.²⁷ To the unfortunate soul who believed Jesus abolished slavery by advising that His disciples should not be called "masters" according to Matt 23:10, Stringfellow requested that the abolitionist consider the immediately preceding context wherein Jesus also advises His disciples not to be called "father."²⁸ Stringfellow also argued that not one social relation was broken upon one's becoming a Christian, even though it may be thought this was the implication from what Jesus said in Mark 10:42-45.²⁹ Apologists saw nothing inconsistent with slavery in the ministry and teachings of Jesus.

Abolitionists, on the other hand, argued that slavery was inconsistent with Jesus' character and message.³⁰

Christians! How long will you tacitly or openly sanction, or actually engage in a system which includes every practicable iniquity? Can you conscientiously believe,

²⁵Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 41.

²⁶Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 10-1.

²⁷Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 494.

²⁸Ibid, 499.

²⁹Ibid, 498.

³⁰Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 87; vol. 2, 265-6.

that a slave-holder exhibits that assimilation to the meek and lowly Jesus, which is indispensable to an enjoyment of the inheritance of the Saints in light?³¹

Bourne cited a Bible dictionary's use of Matt 19:16 to support the idea that when husbands and wives are separated (because they're regarded as property—not people), those doing the separating are putting asunder the slaves' marriages—a direct violation of Jesus' teaching.³²

Elliott argued from Luke 11:52 and John 5:39 that American slavery withholds a slave's God-given right to religious education.³³ Paxton and Elliott saw a necessary correlation between slavery and murder relative to Matt 5:21-22.³⁴ According to Elliott, masters' usurp God's ownership of the one's redeemed by Jesus' own blood.³⁵ In a discussion to be picked up again in the sixth chapter of this current work, Bourne and Elliott used Matt 23:8 and Luke 4:16-21 to argue for equality within the Christian family among Jesus' disciples—thus prohibiting the idea of inequality necessary to the sustaining of the master-slave relation in America.³⁶ On the whole, abolitionists believed that Jesus' character and message indirectly argued against slavery as an institution and especially in its abuses.

³¹ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 196.

³² *Ibid.*, 168.

³³ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 126.

³⁴ Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 116-9; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 25.

³⁵ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 303-5. See also Yamauchi, "Slaves of God," 31-35. Junkin, however, asked his contemporaries to distinguish between spiritual and physio-economic redemption: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 52.

³⁶ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 190; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 87.

As this current work has already demonstrated, most of what Barnes had to say about the relationship between the gospel narratives of Jesus' life and the issue of slavery was in response to the apologists' argument of silence. His response to them was that since Jesus was not in the habit of condemning sins with which He did not come into contact geographically, He therefore did not feel compelled to emphasize a condemnation of it specifically.³⁷

Barnes was quick to point out, however, that Jesus did deal with issues central to the Christian faith, and as such, if they were practiced without reservation, would have led to the emancipation of slaves. This point is only mentioned here in passing because it will become the central focus of the sixth chapter of this current work. Suffice it to say that Barnes' study of the gospels was not limited to the mention of the Roman's *παῖς* in Matt 8:5ff. Quite the opposite is true. Barnes saw the constant, recurring theme of Jesus' ministry to focus on the basics of Christianity—not on the social evils of the day. Indeed it will be demonstrated that Barnes' conclusions as to the solution of the problem of slavery in America were directly based on this recurring theme in the life and ministry of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels.

The Relationship between the Apostles and Slavery

Concerning his studies of the Old Testament Barnes was quick to point out the differences between the divinely sanctioned form of servitude found in ancient Israel and the cruel form of slavery found in nineteenth-century America. When it came to the Apostles,

³⁷Barnes, *Inquiry*, 228, 242-5.

however, he agreed with many of the apologists that the form of slavery found in the first-century Roman Empire was just as cruel as its nineteenth-century counterpart in America.³⁸

With the exception of his study of Paul's letter to Philemon, Barnes made little effort to distinguish the two forms of slavery. He did this because, in his opinion, slavery is what is to be expected of a sinful society. Ancient Israel was a society governed by God. Barnes held out hope for Christian America to change its ways, but he had little hope for moral reform apart from the salvation of souls.

Did the Apostles Treat Slavery Like the Abolitionists Did?

From his thorough study of the New Testament Barnes concluded that the difference between masters in the first-century church and masters in the nineteenth-century American church was negligible. The difference between the Apostles and American abolitionists concerning their opinions about slave-holders, however, was much more noticeable. Barnes mentioned five distinct differences between the Apostles and the American abolitionists of his day. First, slave-holders were fully members of the first century church and not disciplined for holding slaves.³⁹ Second, the faith of first century slave-holders was not openly challenged. Those that held slaves were considered capable of being Christians whereas the faith of American slave-holders was constantly questioned.⁴⁰ Third,

³⁸Barnes, Inquiry, 250.

³⁹Barnes, Inquiry, 260-3. Barnes likely had arguments like Bourne's in mind: Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 79-80.

⁴⁰Barnes, Inquiry, 264-5.

the Apostles did not openly and publicly denounce slavery as a sin. The severity of language used by the abolitionists of Barnes' day was nowhere to be found in the pages of the New Testament.⁴¹ Fourth, the Apostles never encouraged an insurrection, insubordination, or an attempt to escape.⁴² Fifth, the Apostles never called for an immediate, universal emancipation of all slaves under all possible circumstances.⁴³ It seems that the abolitionists of Barnes' day were so passionate about the abolition of slavery that they were not practicing the Christianity of the Apostles in their dealing with the issue of slavery.⁴⁴ Once again Barnes found a way in which abolitionists had departed from a consistent application of the Bible to their situation. This was all part of his setting up a call for all people on both sides of the debate to get back to the basics of the Christian faith as a solution to the problems related to slavery in America.

Domestic Relations and Slavery

Apologists argued that slavery is a domestic institution much like marital relationships or the relationships between parents and children. Apologists often referred to the domestic contexts in which instructions to masters and slaves were given in the

⁴¹ Ibid., 265-7. Consider also Channing's argument concerning responding to despotic tyrants in Channing, Slavery, 123.

⁴² Barnes, Inquiry, 270. Pond agreed in Slavery and the Bible, 2.

⁴³ Barnes, Inquiry, 270.

⁴⁴ On this point apologists were quick to agree with Barnes: Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 299; Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 498-9; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 854-5.

Epistles.⁴⁵ Passages like Eph 5:22-6:9 and Col 3:18-4:1 are fair demonstrations of Paul's treating issues related to slavery in the same context as treating issues related to family relationships. From this premise, apologists often argued that slavery was just another domestic institution like marriage or parenthood.⁴⁶

Far be it for abolitionists to argue against marriage or motherhood! To counter the apologists' argument, abolitionists were quick to point out differences between slavery and the other domestic relationships.⁴⁷ Barnes himself listed four differences to demonstrate that these relationships are not so similar as to be treated in the exact same way under all circumstances. First, the relationship between parents and children is a natural one, but that of masters and slaves is not.⁴⁸ Second, the relationship between husbands and wives is a voluntary one, but that of masters and slaves is not.⁴⁹ Third, in marriage relationships

⁴⁵ Lutheran scholars have taken to calling such lists "*Haustafeln*," or "house-tables": Parsons, "Slavery and the New Testament," 90-5; William Lillie, "Pauline House-Tables [Col 3:18-4:1]," *Expository Times* 86 (March 1975): 179-83.

⁴⁶ Junkin, *Integrity of Our National Union*, 55, 58, 75-6; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 481, 486; Alexander Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law," 513; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 869. See also Barnes, *Inquiry*, 31, 33; Joseph Thompson, *Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery*, 4; Giles, "Biblical Argument for Slavery," 10.

⁴⁷ Charles Elliott, *Sinfulness of American Slavery*, vol. 1, 296; Joseph Thompson, *Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery*, 6, 33-4; Van Rensselaer, *Letters and Replies on Slavery*, 27, 46.

⁴⁸ Barnes, *Inquiry*, 46. See also Paxton, *Letters on Slavery*, 144-5; Van Rensselaer, *Letters and Replies on Slavery*, 28.

⁴⁹ Barnes, *Inquiry*, 46. See also Paxton, *Letters on Slavery*, 144-5.

wives are to be treated in all respects as human beings, but slaves are not.⁵⁰ Fourth, there is no right of property between husbands and wives or parents and children in the same sense as there was between masters and slaves.⁵¹ Therefore Barnes considered it too broad of an interpretation of the Apostles' writings to infer in any way that slavery was just another domestic institution like marriage or parenthood.⁵²

Natural Emancipation

The option of various forms of abolition was a consideration for the abolitionists only. The very idea of slavery's abolition supposes that the institution of slavery is generally wrong and therefore requires abolition. For clarity's sake it would be helpful to distinguish between abolition and emancipation. In the discussion of American slavery emancipation refers to the freeing of slaves, but abolition refers to the destruction or discontinuation of the institution of slavery. Abolition applied to the institution of American slavery would include emancipating all slaves, making it illegal for involuntary slavery to be practiced, and assimilating freed slaves into mainstream American society.

Within the discussion among abolitionists concerning emancipation there grew a debate between two positions on the particular issue of how and when the slaves in America should be emancipated. Some argued that American slaves should be emancipated immediately because slavery is morally wrong. Allowing something that is morally wrong to

⁵⁰ Barnes, *Inquiry*, 46.

⁵¹ Ibid. For example, husbands typically did not sell their wives for financial gain.

⁵² Barnes, *Inquiry*, 271-8.

continue is in itself a moral wrong. Therefore, for many people involved in the abolitionist side of the discussion, immediate emancipation was the most desirable solution to the problem of slavery.⁵³ Others within the abolitionist camp argued that the sudden introduction of all slaves into American society would cause all forms of logistical chaos.⁵⁴ These abolitionists would argue that a gradual schedule of introducing slaves into American society as free people would be the most humane thing to do for all those involved in the process.⁵⁵ It was often a debate between morally-minded and pragmatically-minded abolitionists.

⁵³ Those associated with William Lloyd Garrison and his anti-slavery publication, The Liberator, were regarded among the more extreme of the immediate emancipationists. See John L. Thomas, The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison (Boston: Little & Brown, 1963); Sharleen Naomi Nakamoto, "William Lloyd Garrison: Nonresistant Christian Manliness in the Cause of Immediate Emancipation, an Analysis" (M.A. thesis, The College of William and Mary, 1998). Garrison, although the loudest and most well-known immediate emancipationist, was not alone: "Reasons for Preferring Immediate to What is Called Gradual Emancipation" (1825); James Gillespie Birney, "Letter to Ministers and Elders, on the Sin of Holding Slaves and the Duty of Immediate Emancipation" (New York, S.W. Benedict & Co., 1834); Immediate Emancipation: Safe and Profitable (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1843); Lewis Tappan, Immediate Emancipation: The Only Wise and Safe Mode (New York, 1861); George Cheever, The Salvation of the Country Secured by Immediate Emancipation: A Discourse (New York: J. A. Gray, 1861).

⁵⁴ Apologists also agreed that the proposed radical solution of immediate emancipation would lead to radical problems: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 77-8.

⁵⁵ Jesse Torrey, A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States Proposing National Measures for the Education and Gradual Emancipation of the Slaves, Without Impairing the Legal Privileges of the Possessor; and a Project of a Colonial Asylum for Free People of Color; Including Memoirs of Facts on the Interior Traffic in Slaves, and on Kidnapping, 2d ed. (Ballston Spa, New York: Jesse Torrey, 1818); Humphrey Marshall, The Gradual Emancipation of Slaves: A Series of Essays Addressed to All Christians (Frankfort, Kentucky: A. G. Hodges, 1830); Heman Howlett, "An Address on Slavery, and against Immediate Emancipation with a Plan of Their Being Gradually Emancipated & Colonized, in 32 Years" (New York: S. B. White, 1834); David Sears, Gradual Emancipation (New York, 1857). See also Melish, Disowning Slavery.

In the late 1820s and early 1830s the colonization solution reached a peak in popularity.⁵⁶ Colonization involved the idea that American slaves should be freed from

⁵⁶ Agricola, An Impartial View of the Real State of the Black Population of the United States: And the Advantages Pointed out to the Free Blacks, of Embracing the Generous Offer of the Colonization Societies (Philadelphia, 1824); Mathew Carey, African Colonization (Philadelphia, 1829); William Lloyd Garrison, Thoughts on African Colonization, or, An Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832); Sarah Tuttle, Claims of the Africans, or, The History of the American Colonization Society (Boston: Sabbath School Union, 1960); Thomas Hodgkin, On Negro Emancipation and American Colonization (London: R. Watts, 1832); Theodore Frelinghuysen, Review of Anti-Slavery Publications and Defence of the Colonization Society (New York: West & Trow, 1833); James Cropper, The Extinction of the American Colonization Society: The First Step to the Abolition of American Slavery (London, 1833); Elizur Wright, The Sin of Slavery, and Its Remedy, Containing Some Reflections on the Moral Influence of African Colonization (New York, 1833); Cyril Pearl, Remarks on African Colonization and the Abolition of Slavery (Windsor, Vermont: Richards & Tracy, 1833); James A. Thome, Samuel E. Cornish, Samuel H. Cox, and Henry B. Stanton, Debate at the Lane Seminary, Cincinnati, Speech of James A. Thome, of Kentucky, Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, May 6, 1834; Letter of the Rev. Dr. Samuel H. Cox, against the American Colonization Society (Boston: Garrison & Knapp, 1834); William Jay, An Inquiry into the Character and Tendency of the American Colonization and American Anti-Slavery Societies (Boston: Leavitt, Lord, Crocker & Brewster, 1835); Frederick Freeman, Yaradee: A Plea for Africa in Familiar Conversations on the Subject of Slavery and Colonization (Philadelphia: J. Whetham, 1836); James Nourse, Views of Colonization (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1837); Calvin Colton, Colonization and Abolition Contrasted (Philadelphia: H. Hooker, 1839); Giles Badger Stebbins, Facts and Opinions Touching the Real Origin, Character, and Influence of the American Colonization Society: Views of Wilberforce, Clarkson, and Others, and Opinions of the Free People of Color of the United States (Cleveland: Jewitt, Proctor, and Worthington, 1853); Philip Slaughter, The Virginian History of African Colonization (Richmond: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1855); Objections to the Scheme of African Colonization, Briefly Reviewed (Richmond: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1855); John Gregg Fee, Colonization: The Present Scheme of Colonization Wrong, Delusive, and Retards Emancipation (Cincinnati: American Reform Tract and Book Society, 1857); Phillip Charles Wander, The Image of the Negro in Three Movements: Abolitionists, Colonization, and Pro-Slavery (1969); John Hamilton Haley, "The Later Years of the American Colonization Society (1850-1865)" (M.A. Thesis, Old Dominion University, 1971); Early Lee Fox, The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840, in Studies in Historical and Political Science, ser. 27, no. 3 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1919); Marie Tyler McGraw, "The American Colonization Society in Virginia, 1816-1832: A Case Study in Southern Liberalism" (Ph.D.

slavery and sent back to Africa. The beginnings of this experiment saw some slaves returning to Liberia, Africa, but soon the weaknesses of this solution became apparent. In the 1830s only the more extreme abolitionists advocated immediate emancipation. In the 1840s Some adopted the position of gradual emancipation as a compromise between the pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions in America.⁵⁷ When Barnes' Inquiry was written in 1846, it embodied the ideas of many abolitionists that any radical movement in the abolition of slavery or in the emancipation of slaves may cause more problems than it solved. By the 1850s, however, abolitionists seemed to grow impatient with the lack of progress in advancing their views and an increasing number realized that the only solution to their disagreements would be a civil war and that war would either result in immediate emancipation or the indefinite continuance of slavery.

Barnes' study of the New Testament took into account this ongoing debate concerning the nature of the emancipation of American slaves. Barnes simply advocated the emancipation of slaves, but he engaged in no extreme language in pushing for his position. For most gradual emancipationists gradual emancipation would come about through the political system or through law. For Barnes and a handful of others, however, gradual emancipation would come about through moral awakening and spiritual growth. Rather than

diss., George Washington University, 1980); Charles Raymond Bennett, "All Things to All People: The American Colonization Society in Kentucky, 1829-1860" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1980); Peggy A McGill, "An Analysis of William Lloyd Garrison's Accusations against the American Colonization Society" (Ph.D. diss., Eastern Illinois University, 1987).

⁵⁷ Minutes of the 1818 General Assembly, 31; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 37; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 51.

labeling Barnes as a gradual or immediate emancipationist, he should be regarded as a natural emancipationist. More will follow on this point in the sixth chapter of this current work. For now it is appropriate to mention how extensive his studies were on the subject and what passages he referred to in upholding his view.

Relative to his position of natural emancipation, Barnes incorporated many passages to back his position. His arguments leading to natural emancipation can be seen in six categories. First, his studies of the New Testament revealed the equality of all people, so on the basis of this biblical equality slavery based on inequality could not be practiced among Christians.⁵⁸ Second, his studies of the New Testament also revealed the right involved in raising families, so on this basis a few of the key practices of American slavery could not continue.⁵⁹ Third, his studies of the New Testament revealed that all human beings have the natural right to worship God according to their own views of truth, but slavery interferes with this right.⁶⁰ Fourth, his studies of the New Testament revealed that stealing people is wrong.⁶¹ Fifth, his studies of the New Testament revealed that depriving anyone of their wages is forbidden, so non-compensated slavery is against this biblical principle.⁶² Sixth, his

⁵⁸This is explicitly seen in his studies of Acts 17:26. Barnes, Inquiry, 344-6.

⁵⁹This is explicitly seen in his studies of 1 Cor 11:3-16, Eph 5:22-6:4, Col 3:18-21, 1 Tim 5:4-5, Tit 2:4-5, and 1 Pet 3:1-2. Barnes, Inquiry, 346-50.

⁶⁰This is explicitly seen in his studies of Luke 11:52, John 5:39, Acts 4:18-20, 1 Cor 10:29, 1 Thess 5:21, and 1 John 4:1. Barnes, Inquiry, 350.

⁶¹This is explicitly seen in his studies of 1 Tim 1:9-10. Barnes, Inquiry, 354-5.

⁶²This is explicitly seen in his studies of Matt 3:5, Luke 10:7, 1 Tim 5:18, and Jas 5:4.

studies of the New Testament revealed that withholding religious instruction is also forbidden.⁶³ Since the lives of most slaves were such that they often were deprived of opportunities to receive a religious education, slavery stood in contrast to the instruction of the New Testament. The practice of slavery in America was such that committing these six sins was essential to the continuation of the institution. One of Barnes' conclusions was:

After all the spouting and vehemence on this subject, the *good old Book* remains the same. Paul's conduct and advice are still safe guides. Paul knew well that Christianity would ultimately destroy slavery, as it certainly will. . . . Yet Paul did not expect slavery . . . to be ousted in a day, and gave precepts to Christians respecting their demeanour, *ad interim*.⁶⁴

Barnes' study of the New Testament was not limited to those verses where some form of servitude was explicitly mentioned. It also covered secondary issues pertinent to the institution and the continuation of its practice.

Passages in the Epistles Directed to Masters

“And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.”
—Eph 6:9

“Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.”
—Col 4:1

With the exception of Paul's letter to Philemon (to be considered separately in its own section in this chapter), these are the only two passages in the New Testament

⁶³This is explicitly seen in his studies of Luke 11:52 and John 5:39. Barnes, *Inquiry*, 361-3.

⁶⁴Barnes, *Inquiry*, 36-7, quoting Professor M. Stuart in his letter to Dr. Fisk, Andover: April 10, 1837.

directed specifically to masters. Essential to what will be discussed in the following chapter of this current work is Barnes' argument that there is not anything in these two verses that can fairly be used as a valid argument in favor of slavery. Specifically, they never assert that it is right to buy, hold, or sell a human being; to separate a man from his wife or children; to withhold the Bible from anyone; or to provide him with unacceptably inferior food, shelter, and clothing. Apologists would generally point to these two verses to prove that Paul approved of slavery.⁶⁵ Barnes and other abolitionists, however, countered that the mere mention of masters does not fairly imply Paul's approval of slavery in general or in any of its details.⁶⁶

Barnes did not limit his application of these verses to the American slavery debate to what the verses do not prove. He used them to the benefit of the abolitionist argument. In these two verses Barnes recognized four precepts being taught to masters in the first century, which if fairly applied to American slavery, would lead to abolition and universal emancipation.⁶⁷ First, these verses teach the golden rule and the master-ship of

⁶⁵Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 53-4, 66, 70-1, 78; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 488; idem, "Letter to a Brother in Kentucky," 515; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 316; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 5; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 848. See also Parsons, "Slavery and the New Testament," 89.

⁶⁶Barnes, Inquiry, 307-11; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 4.

⁶⁷Other abolitionists picked up on this same argument for gradual abolition based on the Paul's instructions to masters: Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 37; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 45.

God.⁶⁸ Second, these verses assert the equality of all people.⁶⁹ Third, these verses remind their readers that Christ is the owner of all the redeemed, and as such no one has the right to own another.⁷⁰ Fourth, according to Barnes, these verses would naturally induce all Christian masters to emancipate their slaves.⁷¹ Barnes used these verses that were favorites of the apologists to argue for the abolition of slaves and the emancipation of those slaves held by Christian masters.

Passages in the Epistles Directed to Slaves

Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

—1 Cor 7:20-24

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With

⁶⁸Barnes, Inquiry, 308-9; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 114-5, 121; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 277-9.

⁶⁹Barnes, Inquiry, 312; Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 177; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 121; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 40-2.

⁷⁰Barnes, Inquiry, 313-4; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 88-9; Channing, Slavery, 122; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 77-8; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 8; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 267; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 37-40; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 45.

⁷¹Barnes, Inquiry, 314-7; Minutes of the 1818 General Assembly, 31; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 37; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 51.

good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

—Eph 6:5-8

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God; And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

—Col 3:22-25

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

—1 Tim 6:1-5

Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

—Tit 2:9-10

Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

—1 Pet 2:18-20

For the most part Barnes approached the six passages in the Epistles directed specifically to slaves in much the same manner as he approached the two verses in the

Epistles directed specifically to masters.⁷² He first argued that it was improper to infer from the six passages that slavery was something the Apostles felt was good and should be perpetuated. It was a common practice among apologists to claim that the justification of their argument that the Apostles' sanctioned slavery is based on the Apostles' giving instructions to slaves in their Epistles.⁷³ Bartchy frames the main question this way: "In this verse, . . . we are encouraged to find either: (1) Paul the 'social conservative,' whose determination to hold the *status quo* led him so far as to urge slaves to remain in slavery, even if this meant rejecting the opportunity to go free; or: (2) Paul the 'social realist,' who certainly would not have wanted his seemingly conservative-sounding advice in chapter 7 to be taken by slaves who were Christians to mean that they could not accept freedom if it became available to them."⁷⁴

⁷²When dealing with the subject of slavery, modern source critics tend to gravitate to the passages in Galatians 3, 1 Corinthians 7, and Philemon, but leave the other ones fairly untouched: Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and Slave Ownership," 161.

⁷³Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 50, 54, 58, 62-6, 70; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 6, 14; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 5; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 481-9; idem, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 501; idem, "Letter to a Brother in Kentucky," 515; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 351-2; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 848. See also Parsons, "Slavery and the New Testament," 89; Buswell, Slavery, Segregation, and Scripture, 15; Bartchy, ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ, 130.

⁷⁴This comment is found in a discussion of 1 Cor 7:21: Bartchy, ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ, 1. See also Gregory W. Dawes, "'But if you can gain your freedom' (1 Corinthians 7:17-24)," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 52 (1990): 689. Deming has made the most exciting new progress on understanding Paul's meaning in 1 Cor 7:21—not based on exegetical or theological data but by finding similar patterns in Paul's contemporary rhetoricians: Will Deming, "A Diatribe Pattern in 1 Cor 7:21-22: A New Perspective on Paul's Directions to Slaves," Novum Testamentum 37 (April 1995): 130-7.

In response to the apologists, Barnes issued seven arguments of his own. First, and perhaps the most forceful of his arguments, was that just because slaves were encouraged to endure the hardships of their situations, this encouragement in no way justified the oppression dealt out by their oppressors. Barnes introduced the Roman Emperor Nero and his persecution of Christians as an example of the fallacy of the apologists' argument on this point. The apostles gave abundant encouragement to those that were suffering persecution under the ruthless oppression by Nero, but this encouragement to Christians in no way justified Nero's ruthless oppression. Likewise, the oppressive conditions of Roman slavery were in no way justified on account of Paul's encouragement to his Christian readers to endure such suffering faithfully.⁷⁵

Second, Barnes deduced that the Apostles were opposed to slavery because they presented it as a harsh and undesirable condition from which slaves were advised to seek emancipation. This is especially seen in his reflections on 1 Cor 7:21, but it can be seen in a more general sense in the other five passages as well. According to Barnes, if Paul felt the institution was harsh and oppressive, then what place did it have among Christians?⁷⁶

⁷⁵This argument, in varying degrees of clarity, can be seen in many places in Barnes' Inquiry and Notes. A few of the clearer examples are in his Inquiry, 334 and his Notes, vol. 11, 123, vol. 12, 122, 197. See also Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 71; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 73, 90; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 79; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 267; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 35-6; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 26, 29.

⁷⁶Barnes, Inquiry, 338-40; Barnes, Notes, vol. 11, 123-4, vol. 12, 197. See also Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 120-2; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 8; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 295, vol. 2, 267; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 34-7; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 26, 46-7.

Third, Barnes used an argument from silence. He claimed that since these six passages contain no shred of approval of the institution or practice of slavery, it was unfair for apologists to suggest that merely addressing slaves was reason to believe the Apostles approved of the institution and desired its perpetuation.⁷⁷

Fourth, Barnes argued the inapplicability of such texts due to cultural differences. “If these passages, enjoining obedience and patience on the part of slaves, prove that slavery is right, and will go to justify it, they prove that it was right as it then existed—for the apostles do not discourse about any *abstract* duty of obedience, but of obedience in the circumstances in which they then were placed.”⁷⁸ This will be discussed further in the following chapter of this current work.

Fifth, Barnes’ advocacy of natural emancipation can be seen in his arguments from these texts. Barnes would explain that the Apostles were not after immediate and radical social upheaval by demanding the immediate universal emancipation of all slaves due to the equality of all people. The Apostles sought to overcome the oppressive nature of slavery by teaching the fundamental and central principles of Christianity to their readers and hearers. The Apostles naturally assumed, according to Barnes, that the logical application of these principles would be for the newly-converted masters to emancipate their slaves. To legislate the immediate universal emancipation of all slaves (or even the rebellion of all slaves from their masters) would have caused such a degree of chaos in their society so as to

⁷⁷Barnes, *Inquiry*, 336. See also Pond, *Slavery and the Bible*, 4; Joseph Thompson, *Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery*, 31-2.

⁷⁸Barnes, *Inquiry*, 335. See also Sunderland, *Testimony of God against Slavery*, 86.

render the gospel message secondary to emancipation. This will be spelled out more clearly in the sixth chapter of this current work.⁷⁹

Sixth, Barnes answered the question: how could the masters addressed in the 1 Tim 6:1-5 passage be Christians? Barnes explained that people coming to Christ come from all types of sinful habits and lifestyles. Being an oppressive owner of human beings was no exception. Barnes pointed out the possibility that masters could have converted to Christianity and remained slave-holders for a short period of time, but this would not last long. Barnes left no room for Christians becoming slave-holders after converting to Christianity due to the overwhelming inconsistencies between the systems of Christianity and Roman slavery.⁸⁰

Seventh, and perhaps the weakest of his arguments from these passages, was the argument that because Paul wrote these instructions to slaves, the slaves whom Paul

⁷⁹ Barnes, Notes, vol. 11, 123-4, vol. 12, 120, 122, 278. See also Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 178; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 4. It is interesting to see the renowned apologist George Junkin waver a bit on this very point. On the one hand, with his general distaste for the more radical abolitionists, he insisted that Paul was no abolitionist—trying to abolish the institution: Junkin, “Integrity of Our National Union,” 51. On the other hand, he agreed with Barnes that if emancipation on a case by case basis were to occur within the first century Christian community, it would be the work of God: “When grace touched the master’s heart, and especially if his conversion, as doubtless was often the case, was brought about by the patient and quiet obedience, and manifest improvement of his converted slaves, it cannot be doubted, he often freed his servants: and this is God’s plan of abolition.” p. 52.

⁸⁰ Barnes, Notes, vol. 12, 197. Apologists argued vehemently against this argument, insisting that Christian masters are in no way inferior in God’s eyes to those who are not masters. Social relationships, they maintained, stayed in tact despite one’s conversion to Christianity: Junkin, “Integrity of Our National Union,” 51-2. Armstrong seemed as his wits’ end with Barnes personally on this particular point: Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 18; see Van Rensselaer’s agreement with Armstrong on p. 62.

addressed in Eph 6:5-8 must have been literate. One of Barnes' problems with American slavery was that the masters, by withholding literary education from their slaves, were not only promoting the negative things associated with illiteracy in America, but the masters were denying the right of every slave to read the Bible. Barnes was so passionate about his attention to this problem that he stretched beyond his typically forceful arguments to make this one in his commentary on Ephesians. It takes little effort to point out to Barnes that Paul's letters could be read (and in fact were read) publicly to the literate, the illiterate, and even to the blind. The implication of Barnes' argument here is that Paul only gave instructions to people that could read.⁸¹

These seven points were intended to prove that slavery is in no way sanctioned by the Apostles. Suffice it to say that Barnes' study of the passages in the Epistles where the Apostles addressed slaves was thorough enough to take into account not only each of these passages but also their broader context of the New Testament as a whole.

Paul's Letter to Philemon

Paul's letter to Philemon stands out from the other slavery-related texts because of the nature of its content and the frequency with which both sides of the American slavery debate referred to it.⁸² The most frequent references to this letter were regarding the Apostle's teaching and example concerning fugitive slaves.

⁸¹Barnes, Notes, vol. 12, 121.

⁸²Barnes, Inquiry, 318-9.

The best way to deal with the many issues brought up in Philemon that are relevant to the discussion on American slavery is to write out a verse by verse commentary and point out how each of the verses relate to individual issues of the debate. Barnes did this in volume twelve of his Notes commentary and again in the seventh chapter of his Inquiry. All that this current work is attempting to demonstrate here is that Barnes conducted an exhaustive study of Paul's letter to Philemon to see what light it shed on the debate on American slavery. A brief demonstration of the main points of his study will suffice to demonstrate that Barnes' study on Paul's letter to Philemon was by no means minimal in quantity of words or depth of insight.

In his Inquiry Barnes established five criteria that must be met in order for apologists to advance an argument in favor of slavery from Paul's letter to Philemon. First, Onesimus must be shown actually to be a slave.⁸³ Second, it must be demonstrated that Paul returned Onesimus to his former master.⁸⁴ Third, it must be demonstrated that Paul returned

⁸³Barnes, Inquiry, 320. See also Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 58-62; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 298-300, 309-10, 315; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 5; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 26; Stringfellow, "Letter to a Brother in Kentucky," 518; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 359-60, 364-73. Richardson would later argue that Onesimus's being a slave can be seen from Paul's request that Onesimus be allowed into a social group legally forbidden to slaves—thus breaking with societal expectations: Richardson, "Principle and Context in Philemon," 304, 306, 308, 311. Consider also Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and Slave Ownership," 163; Jon D. Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," Horizons in Biblical Theology 13 (December 1991): 142; John G. Nordling, "Onesimus Fugitivus: A Defense of the Runaway Slave Hypothesis in Philemon," Journal for the Study of the New Testament 41 (February 1991): 97, 107; Brian M. Rapske, "The Prisoner Paul in the Eyes of Onesimus," New Testament Studies 37 (April 1991): 189-90.

⁸⁴Barnes, Inquiry, 320. See also Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 59-60; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 299-300, 309-11; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 6; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 5; Van Rensselaer, Letters and

Onesimus based on Paul's belief that Onesimus had done wrong by escaping from his servitude.⁸⁵ Fourth, it must be demonstrated that Paul's letter indicates that he was friendly toward the system of Roman slavery or regarded it as being consistent with Christianity.⁸⁶ Fifth, it must be demonstrated that Paul intended for Onesimus to continue to be held as a slave after he was returned to Philemon.⁸⁷ Having established his own criteria, Barnes argued against them at length to demonstrate that the apologists' argument was on shaky grounds at best. He relied most heavily upon his own arguments from silence.⁸⁸

The results of Barnes' study of Paul's letter to Philemon took a rhetorical tone in his Inquiry, but in his Notes the results took the tone of Christian education. This is due to the fact that Barnes' audience for his Notes was primarily made up of people in Sunday school classes and Bible study groups and their teachers. From his Notes, however, many of the same conclusions are mentioned. For example: Barnes, as shall be demonstrated more

Replies on Slavery, 26; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 364-7; Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and Slave Ownership," 170.

⁸⁵ Barnes, Inquiry, 320. See also Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 58, 60; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 6; Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and Slave Ownership," 165; Richardson, "Principle and Context in Philemon," 303, 309, 311; Nordling, "Onesimus Fugitivus," 97, 109-10, 113-4.

⁸⁶ Barnes, Inquiry, 320. See also Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 365-7. Also consider, however, Richardson, "Principle and Context in Philemon," 306-7; Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and Slave Ownership," 186.

⁸⁷ Barnes, Inquiry, 320. See also Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 300-1; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 5; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 364-8, 373; Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul: The Slave and the Freedman," New Testament Studies 17 (October 1970): 79; Shriver, "Bible and Southern Ethics," 94; Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and Slave Ownership," 165, 180.

⁸⁸ Barnes, Inquiry, 318-31.

clearly in the following chapter of this current work, minimized how much could be known with certainty concerning the situation and people of Paul's letter to Philemon.

He also addressed the issues of the American slavery debate related to runaway slaves. Barnes drew six distinctions between Paul's handling of Onesimus and the American custom of handling fugitive slaves. First, it cannot be demonstrated that Paul in any way coerced or even compelled Onesimus to return to his master.⁸⁹ In nineteenth-century America, however, the Fugitive Slave Act required those finding runaway slaves to return the slaves to their masters—even if violence was necessary to procure these ends.⁹⁰ Second and in light of the first point, Onesimus's return to his master was of his own volition. This is a situation that was incomprehensible to nineteenth-century Americans.⁹¹ Third, following Paul's example the Christian way to respond to fugitive slaves that (hypothetically) want to return to their masters is to provide them with whatever they need to return including a letter of recommendation offering to pay for anything the slaves might owe to their masters. Again this would have been absolutely unheard of in America.⁹² Fourth, Onesimus cannot be proved to be the variety of servant known as a slave from the use of the

⁸⁹Barnes, Notes, vol. 12, 302-303. See also Channing, Slavery, 122.

⁹⁰May, The Fugitive Slave Law, and its Victims; Strom, Conscience and Law; Campbell, The Slave Catchers; Diaz, "Enmity Deep and Enduring."

⁹¹Barnes, Notes, vol. 12, 302-3, 312-13.

⁹²Barnes, Notes, vol. 12, 302-3, 306. See also Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 92.

word *dōulōs*.⁹³ Fifth, Paul was raised and well versed in the tradition of Jewish law, so he would have been familiar with the Old Testament requirement to protect fugitive slaves that had run away from their masters.⁹⁴ Sixth, if people were to act upon Paul's teaching and example in this letter, slavery would come to an efficient end throughout the world. Barnes applied this even to America in the nineteenth century.⁹⁵ By filling the pages of his Notes with commentary-style points as these, Barnes was equipping Christian educators and their students with arguments against American slavery.

Barnes' conclusion from his study of Philemon is exactly the same as his conclusion from his study of the entire New Testament on these points:

The principles laid down in this epistle to Philemon, therefore, would lead to the universal abolition of slavery. If all those who are now slaves were to become Christians, and their masters were to treat them 'not as slaves, but as brethren beloved,' the period would not be far distant when slavery would cease. This would probably be admitted by all. . . . For, a state of things which would be destroyed by Christianity is not right at any time. Christianity, even in its highest influences, interferes with nothing that is good, and would annihilate nothing which is not wrong.⁹⁶

⁹³Barnes, Notes, vol. 12, 303, 306. See also Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 82-4.

⁹⁴Barnes, Notes, vol. 12, 306. Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 83.

⁹⁵Barnes, Notes, vol. 12, 307, 314; idem, Inquiry, 318-31. See also Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 77-8; Richardson, "Principle and Context in Philemon," 311-2.

⁹⁶Barnes, Inquiry, 330.

Summary of Barnes' Study of the
New Testament and Slavery

It is evident from Barnes' commentaries on the New Testament that he conducted a thorough study of the New Testament in general. It is equally evident from the slavery-related texts he took into account in his Inquiry and his slavery-related comments about the proof-texts in his commentaries, that he conducted a thorough study of all the passages commonly used in the slavery debate. Another evident conclusion is that Barnes' study of the Bible and slavery was not limited to the small context of each proof-text. He related each text to his overall understanding of the New Testament.

In summary, Barnes responded to the apologists' argument from silence and used one of his own. He explained Jesus' silence concerning slavery as a typical reaction to sins into which He did not come into contact. Barnes explained both Jesus' and the Apostles' lack of addressing the institution as a sinful one by maintaining that it would not have been expedient to do so. It was however, prudent to desire its abolition by advancing the basic principles of Christianity. If fairly applied, as Barnes argued frequently, the basic principles of Christianity would naturally abolish slavery without any such command or law.

As was the case in the Old Testament, where Barnes found things about the institution being spoken of in negative terms, he made close application with American slavery to show a sort of indirect biblical disapproval of American slavery. In his dealing with Paul's letter to Philemon Barnes also demonstrated that there were aspects of Paul's handling a supposed fugitive slave that greatly contrasted the prevailing attitude toward fugitive slaves in America. As was the case with his conclusions regarding the Old

Testament, Barnes saw certain discrepancies between the way Paul addressed slaves and masters and the way those on both sides of the nineteenth-century debate treated American slaves and masters. Through it all he clearly possessed a deep and broad knowledge of the texts used by both sides in the discussion on American slavery.

The two arguments Barnes used most commonly and passionately in discussing the New Testament and slavery were related to his minimalist approach to applying the scriptures, and his hermeneutic tempered by the central principles of Christianity. These two topics will be central focus of the next two chapters in the current work respectively.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE INADEQUACY OF AN EXCLUSIVELY PROOF-TEXT
APPROACH IN THE APPLICATION OF SCRIPTURES
TO THE AMERICAN SLAVERY DEBATE

In the previous two chapters of this current work, it was demonstrated that Barnes conducted a thorough study of the Bible's teaching on slavery, taking into consideration almost all of the leading texts being used by those involved in the discussion on American slavery. It would be difficult to find another major contributor to the discussion, who took into account more slavery-related texts than Barnes did in his various literary works on the Bible and slavery.¹ It was from this posture of having a superior knowledge and understanding of the proof-texts used in the discussion that Barnes was able to make his claims regarding the limitations of relying exclusively on texts directly addressing slavery to ascertain the Bible's answer to the American slavery question.

¹ Among the apologists involved in the discussion, Thornton Stringfellow and Josiah Priest seem to hold the distinction of taking into account the greatest number of slavery-related texts. Priest did so on the offensive—mounting his argument primarily from verses related to the descendants of Ham, while Stringfellow did so on the defensive—attempting to demonstrate the folly of poorly-mounted arguments based on abolitionists' use of their own proof-texts. Among abolitionists, George Bourne seems to have led the rest of the field of abolitionists (besides Barnes) in the number of slavery-related texts he used. It should be noted, however, that many of the texts Bourne used did not contribute to proving slavery as morally wrong but, under the presumption of slavery's being wrong, where it ranks among other sins.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first describes Barnes' attempt to deconstruct a biblical argument regarding American slavery, which is based exclusively on proof-texts. The second section uncovers Barnes' advice for reconstructing a more sound biblical argument based on a symbiotic relationship between slavery-related texts and the primary principles of scripture. Had Barnes written a textbook on hermeneutics and the application of scripture, or even if he had dedicated a chapter to the topic in his Inquiry, then modern scholars would have plenty of data to go on to demonstrate Barnes' methodology regarding interpreting scripture and applying it to modern social issues. Hermeneutics is certainly something Barnes spent a great deal of time studying and something he found essential to Christian life in general and to biblically-based discussions like that of slavery in particular.

Nothing in my view, is more important in the promotion of humble, and enlightened piety than a correct knowledge of the laws of the interpretation of the Bible. Nothing, I am satisfied, will tend more to suppress wild, irregular, and fanatical views of divine truth, than such views of interpretation. To every effort, therefore, to promote such knowledge, I am happy to express my earnest wish of success.²

The following information regarding the interpretation and application of scripture is taken from sporadic comments throughout Barnes' Inquiry. Such comments were intended to explain how various proof-texts and other biblical arguments ought to be used properly in the discussion on American slavery.

²Found in a letter of recommendation from Barnes to L. A. Sawyer. The letter is printed at the end of Sawyer's short work on hermeneutics apparently targeted at the average lay person: L. A. Sawyer, The Elements of Biblical Interpretation, Containing a Brief Exposition of the Fundamental Principles and Rules of This Science (New York: Leavitt, Lord, & Co., 1834) 71-2.

**The Deconstruction of a Biblical Argument
Based Exclusively on Proof-Texts**

Even though many of the biblical arguments Barnes advanced were based on texts directly addressing slavery, he cautioned that relying upon them alone was not going to solve the problems related to American slavery. He even used this as an argument against the apologists. Slavery, Barnes said, “is a system which cannot be defended by any fair and honest interpretation of the word of God.”³ Also, “if slavery is to be defended, it is not to be by arguments drawn from the Bible.”⁴ From such statements in their contexts in his overall argument it can be seen that Barnes began to deconstruct a biblical argument based exclusively on slavery-related texts. Barnes tore down proof-text-based arguments in several different ways.

Criteria

If there is an “Achilles Heel” to Barnes’ overall argument, it is his subjective selection of criteria by which a slavery-related text (in and of itself) is deemed applicable to the problems related to American slavery or not. This selection amounts to circular reasoning. In several places in his Inquiry Barnes listed criteria that must be met by a text in order for his contemporaries to use it to advance their argument in their ongoing discussion. Immediately following the listing of these criteria he would demonstrate, point-by-point, how the proof-text failed to meet any of the criteria. After demonstrating how the proof-text

³Barnes, Inquiry, 377.

⁴Barnes, Inquiry, 381.

failed to meet the criteria he would announce that the proof-text or texts were utterly unreliable for application to the American situation. The problem with this reasoning is that there seems to be no noticeable objective basis for the selection of the criteria. By choosing his own criteria Barnes left himself open to criticism that the basis for his selection was the promotion of the abolitionist cause. Consider the following line of reasoning as an example:

1. Barnes held to the abolitionist position regarding American slavery.
2. One of the tenets of the abolitionist position is that runaway slaves should not be forcibly returned to their masters.
3. Passage Criterion: In order to substantiate the position that runaway slaves should be forcibly returned to their masters, either a positive command to do so or a negative injunction against not doing so must be expressly stated in the passage.
4. There are no such commands in the passage.
5. Therefore, the idea that runaway slaves must be forcibly returned to their masters is not a valid application of the passage.

On the surface there is an argument of some weight found here, but it is subject to criticism regarding the circular or subjective nature of its reasoning. In the next chapter of this current work it will be demonstrated that, in the end, Barnes found a much stronger argument less subject to such criticism. For now, however, it is helpful to demonstrate that Barnes' selection of criteria was one of his methods used to minimize the applicability of certain slavery-related texts to the American slavery debate. Consider the following two examples of listing criteria taken from Barnes' Inquiry.

Patriarchs

As mentioned in the third chapter of this current work, apologists were quick to point out the fact that the Old Testament patriarchs themselves held slaves. Since they were men of God, and God did not reprimand them for this practice, according to apologists it must be true that God condoned this practice.⁵ In response to this Barnes mounted the following argument:

The question now is, whether the facts stated in the Bible, in reference to the conduct of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, furnish an evidence that God means to sanction slavery, and regards it as an institution which he intends should be perpetuated. It is whether one who is a slaveholder in the United States, in the manner in which slavery exists here, is justified in it by the example of the patriarchs.⁶

The only bearing which the example of the patriarchs can have on the question, must consist in the following considerations:

1. That, in the cases referred to, it was truly and properly *slavery* which was sanctioned by their example. Whatever is *essential* to slavery; whatever constitutes its peculiarity, and distinguishes it from every other species of servitude, it must be assumed in the argument, existed under the patriarchs. In an attempt to prove that *slavery* is sanctioned by their example, it is indispensable to show that the slavery which existed then was essentially the same as that which it is proposed to vindicate by it. . . . It is necessarily supposed, therefore, in this appeal to the patriarchs, that the idea of *property in a human being* existed in those cases, or the argument has no force of pertinency.⁷

2. That the patriarchs were good men, 'the friends of God,' and that we are safe and right in following the example of such men. The example of a *patriarch*, it is implied in the argument, must be decisive. Whatever he did, cannot be regarded as morally wrong, or a *malum in se*, and cannot be improper to be imitated in any relation of society, and at any period of the world. Unless *this* is implied in the appeal

⁵Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 463, 471-3; idem, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 498; Barnes, Inquiry, 32; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 128, 337; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 8-9; Giles, "Biblical Argument for Slavery," 8-9.

⁶Barnes, Inquiry, 59.

⁷Ibid., 60.

to the patriarchs, the argument has no force. For if it be admitted that they did things which would not be proper now; that they indulged in any thing which *is* to be regarded as a *malum in se*, or that they entertained views which are *not* adapted to promote the best interests of society, and which God does *not* design to have perpetuated, it is *possible* that their conduct in regard to servitude may belong to this class.⁸

3. The argument must involve this idea also, that as God permitted it, and as he caused their conduct to be recorded without any expression of disapprobation, it must have been therefore right. It is not pretended that he *commanded* the purchase of slaves in the time of the patriarchs, or that he *commended* them for what they did. The argument is based on his *silence* as to any expression of disapprobation, and on his causing the record to be made. The strength of *this* argument, then must be, that whatever God permits among good men at any time, without a decided expression of disapprobation; whatever he causes to be recorded as a matter of historical fact, must be regarded as authorizing the same thing in others,⁹ and as a proof that he considers it to be adapted to secure the best interests of society.

This argument contains the features of Barnes' subjective selection of criteria stated previously. For example, Barnes called for apologists to furnish any positive command in the passages related to the patriarchs that slaves must be purchased. He also called for any explicit commendation for their having slaves in the first place. This argument helped the abolitionist cause in that it cast the burden of proof on the apologists to find any examples of such things explicitly mentioned in the text. If they were unable to do this, they would be subject to the criticism that they were injecting their own presuppositions into the text.

Philemon

Another example of Barnes' listing criteria that must be met by an individual proof-text in order for that passage to be used by his contemporaries is related to Paul's letter

⁸ Ibid., 60-61.

⁹ Ibid., 61.

to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. “The points which it is *necessary* to make out, in order to prove that the epistle of Philemon may be urged in favour of slavery, are, that Onesimus was actually a slave; that Paul returned him against his will to his former master; that he sent him back because he supposed he had done wrong by escaping from servitude; that he so expressed himself in the letter to his master as to show that he was not unfriendly to the system, or regarded it as not inconsistent with the spirit of the Christian religion; and that he meant that Onesimus should continue to be held as a slave, after his return home.”¹⁰

This listing of criteria is followed by a detailed, point-by-point refutation of each of the criterion he listed.¹¹ Although such an approach may be subject to criticism regarding its circular reasoning or subjective nature, it does have the effect of causing his contemporaries to find specific examples of exactly what they are claiming the Bible teaches about slavery. Insofar as there is not a direct, one-to-one correlation between the issues the Bible addresses and the issues involved in the American slavery debate, there is less grounds for the application of a specific proof-text to the American slavery debate.

Word Studies

As mentioned in the previous two chapters of this current work, word studies played a significant role in Barnes’ overall argument from the Bible. They were an argument in themselves. Barnes argued that there have been many types of servitude throughout history. The Hebrew and Greek terms translated as “servant” or “slave” in English

¹⁰ Ibid., 320.

¹¹ Ibid., 321-30.

translations of the Bible may have reflected the exact form of slavery found in nineteenth-century America, or they may not have. The mere mention of such words in no way demonstrated that God or the leaders of His people had approved of a system such as the American form of slavery. Such words only demonstrated that there was some form of servitude being practiced by or near God's people.¹²

These word studies played a frequent role in his minimizing the number and significance of proof-texts to be applied to the American slavery debate. The degree of uncertainty as to what kind of slavery was being referred to in a particular text directly corresponded to the degree of the text's inapplicability to the American slavery debate. In other words, as the certainty decreased that a particular text referred to the American form of slavery, the likelihood decreased that it should apply to the American slavery debate. This was one of Barnes' most frequently used ways of minimizing the number and significance of slavery-related texts to be applied to the American slavery debate. The two terms for which this is best demonstrated are those best translated into English as "servant" or "slave" and "buy" or "purchase."¹³

¹²Ibid., 64-70. Abolitionists were quick to agree with Barnes: Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 63, 143; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 105; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 47, 52, 58, 77; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 283, vol. 2, 337; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 16. Apologists, of course, refuted this argument: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 25-9, 45, 50, 58, 63, 66, 70; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 489; idem, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 501, 503; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 360-4.

¹³For examples of the particular treatment of the terms used for "buy" or "purchase" see Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 19-22; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 48.

The single most effective aspect of this argument from word studies is its breadth. One would be hard-pressed to find an apologist's argument based on a biblical text that did not contain the word "servant" or "bought." If every use of these terms is legitimately questioned, then the effect is to minimize the number and significance of the proof-texts used by demonstrating their degree of inapplicability to the American slavery debate.

Curse of Canaan

Barnes recognized the prominence of the argument based upon Noah's curse of Canaan played in the American slavery debate.

And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.
And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

—Gen 9:25-26

Barnes countered the apologists' use of this passage by pointing out that there was no mention of Noah's curse after it was made. If the ancient Hebrews were as consumed with its implications as the American apologists were, then it would follow that there would be numerous references to it in the Old Testament as Israel went about possessing the land. Without such echoes elsewhere in the Old Testament, Barnes disqualified any use of it to substantiate slavery—even among the ancient Hebrews under Mosaic legislation. Barnes issued the following statement in the context of the connection between prisoners of war in the Old Testament era and African slaves in his own era.

Nothing, moreover, would have been more natural than this course, if they had recalled one of the ancient predictions respecting a portion of this people—the malediction of Noah. Gen. ix. 25. "Cursed be Canaan; *a servant of servants* shall he be unto his brethren." This passage, by a singular perseverance in that perverseness

notwithstanding the plainest rules of exegesis, is often employed to justify the reduction of the *African* to slavery, because Ham, the *father* of Canaan, peopled Africa. Nothing can be clearer, however, than that if a Hebrew had ever thought of employing this passage to justify slavery, it would not have been applied by him to *the African*, but to *the Canaanite*. . . . A far more plausible argument could have been derived from *this* application of the passage in favour of fastening the chains of servitude on the Canaanite, than has ever been urged in modern times from it in favour of the subjection of the African to bondage.

Yet this application of the prophecy, so far as we know, was never made, nor did these plausible considerations in favour of subjecting the inhabitants of Palestine to slavery, ever occur to the mind of the Hebrew conquerors.¹⁴

The essence of Barnes' argument here is not so much that Africans were not the descendants of Canaan as it was that the Israelites never seemed to have thought to apply this curse as justification for enslaving the Canaanites.¹⁵ If the Israelites had applied this curse this way, then maybe the apologists would have a case for applying it this way with the descendants of Canaan. Since there is no mention of such an application of this curse among ancient Israel, then it has less chance to be rightly applied so much later by Americans to those of African descent. In this manner Barnes argued against a valid application of this text to the American slavery debate.

¹⁴Barnes, Inquiry, 207.

¹⁵Most abolitionists disagreed with Barnes on this point claiming that the curse was intended for and fulfilled against ancient Israel's Canaanite neighbors: Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 184; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 25-6; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 92-3; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 95-6; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 260; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 9. See also James G. Murphy, Barnes' Notes, vol. 1, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Boston: Estes and Lauriate, 1873, reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998): 211.

Perpetual Slavery

Another anti-slavery argument Barnes used that minimized the number and significance of slavery-related texts that the apologists were using related to the idea of slavery as a perpetual institution. There are many institutions or practices found in the Bible. Many of them are of the permanent variety. They were intended to be universally perpetuated. Many also were not of the permanent variety, being limited by time, location, or circumstances. Barnes maintained that the forms of servitude found in the Bible were of the non-permanent variety. He cast the burden of proof on apologists to demonstrate that God or the leaders of God's people intended that such an institution was explicitly to be perpetuated universally. In the absence of such evidence, he claimed, it cannot be shown that the forms of servitude in the Bible were not temporary, necessary evils that were to be phased out among God's people over time.¹⁶

Throughout his treatment of the Mosaic laws, Barnes made this point frequently. Here are three examples:

But assuredly it would be an illegitimate method of reasoning to conclude that *because* Moses tolerated polygamy and divorce; *because* he legislated for them, and made arrangements that they might be continued, *therefore* he approved of them as necessary to the best state of society, and meant that it should be inferred that the spirit of his institutions was favourable to them. Still less could it be inferred that

¹⁶ Apologists maintained that because the patriarchs practiced slavery, Moses legislated slavery, and Jesus and the apostles seemed comfortable with it, it therefore stands to reason that it is an institution to be perpetuated forever. Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 35-6, 45, 54-5, 70; idem, Junkin, "Proposition," 548-9; Barnes, Inquiry, 33; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 479, 463, 466-7; idem, "Letter to a Brother in Kentucky," 515; idem, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 498; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 92, 97-8, 164, 299, 309, 337, 375, 407; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 6; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 5, 10; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 342-3, 346-7; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 848-9, 855-6.

they were to be perpetuated in *all* states of society, and at all periods of the world, as desirable arrangements for the promotion of human happiness.¹⁷

“The two cases now referred to, show, that though according to the exact letter of the Mosaic statutes it was lawful, in certain cases, to hold their brethren in servitude, yet that it was contrary to the spirit of those institutions that it should be perpetuated; . . .”¹⁸ “Those who suppose that slavery was contemplated by Moses as a permanent institution, and that it was regarded by the prophets as an institution with which they were not to intermeddle because it was established by law, must necessarily believe that all that the prophet contemplated here could have been complied with, even if the Hebrews should have continued to be owners of slaves to any extent.”¹⁹

Barnes concluded that Moses found the institution of slavery in practice at the time the people of Israel became a nation. Some form of slavery was in existence in Egypt where Israel had been and in the surrounding nations where Israel was going. Barnes’ interpretation of the mosaic legislation on slavery painted a picture of a merciful set of practices that were designed to rid Israel of slavery forever.²⁰ Without any hint of Moses’

¹⁷ Barnes, *Inquiry*, 167-8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 219-20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 220-1.

²⁰ Weld, although a fellow abolitionist, disagreed with Barnes on this point. By comparing the term “for ever” in Lev 25:46 with its usage elsewhere in Leviticus, Weld concluded that the term was not modifying the *service* of the bondslaves (as would seem to be the case when examined grammatically) but the *perpetuity of the buyer-seller relationship* between the Jews and their Gentile neighbors: Weld, *The Bible against Slavery*, 111.

explicit intention to perpetuate it, it seemed improbable that God intended slavery to be universally perpetuated.

As a second example, consider the prophets' general tone regarding slavery.

[The prophets] never speak of it as an institution which it was desirable to perpetuate, as contributing to the welfare of the community. In the few notices which we have of it, there is a uniform representation of its nature. It is, in their view, a hard and oppressive system; a system which should be abandoned if there were acceptable service rendered to God. There is no apology made for it; no pleading for it as a desirable system, and no attempt to show that it was in accordance with the laws of the land. In their writings there is no such effort to defend it or apologize for it, as, I am grieved to say, may often be found in the preaching and the writings of ministers of the gospel in the United States. It would not be difficult to imagine what would have been the emotions of Isaiah, after he had written the fifty-eighth chapter of his prophecies, were he to read some of the apologies for slavery issued by ministers of the gospel, and by professors in theological seminaries at the present day; or should he hear the sentiments uttered in debate in ecclesiastical synods, assemblies, conferences and conventions.²¹

There is very little said about slavery in the books of the prophets. Barnes takes this as a sign that slavery is either non-existent or so rarely practiced (because of the fair application of the Mosaic law) that it was not among the primary evils of God's people. What little is said about slavery by the prophets, however, is all negative, and there seems to be no indication that they favored its perpetuation as a practice among God's people.²²

A third example comes from the apostles in the New Testament.

They prescribed the duties of the *master* in a relation already existing—but that was not legislating for *slavery*; they prescribed the duties of *slaves*, in a relation which the

²¹ Barnes, Inquiry, 225-6.

²² Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 115-6, 120, 157, 184, 187; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 17-19, 50-51; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 102-5, 108; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 60, 69; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 260, 283; Joseph Thompson, Voice of God, 27-28; idem, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 14.

gospel did not originate, but in which it found them—but that was not laying down laws for the permanent continuance of the institution. The permanency of the institution can derive no support from what they said on the subject, and in no manner depends on it.²³

It is not fair to infer from the manner in which they prescribed the duties of masters and slaves *in* that relation, that they approved the system, and that they desired its perpetuity. To prescribe the duties of certain persons while sustaining a certain relation to each other, cannot be construed as an approbation of the relation itself. It might not be desirable for him who gave directions about the right mode of acting *in* a certain relation, to attempt to disturb it at that time, or it might be impossible at once to remove certain evils connected with it, and yet there might be important duties which religion would enjoin while that relation continued.²⁴

As was the case with Moses and the prophets, the apostles failed to mention explicitly any desire that the practice of slavery was to be perpetuated among the Christian community.²⁵ At best it ought to be said that slavery was temporarily tolerated until the basic principles of Christianity so constrained those enslaving others that the slave-holders would voluntarily abandon the practice as inconsistent with God's will. By casting the burden of proof on the apologists, Barnes sought to minimize further the number and significance of the slavery-related texts used by demonstrating their degree of inapplicability to the American slavery debate.

²³Barnes, *Inquiry*, 273.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Stringfellow, however, adamantly objected to such an inference being drawn from the apostles' instructions to slaves. "Now, I ask, can any man in his proper senses, from these premises [of the apostles' instructions regarding the relationship between slave and master], bring himself to conclude that slavery is *abolished by Jesus Christ*, or that obligations are imposed by him upon his disciples that are subversive of the institution?" Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 484. Also, "I affirm . . . that in instructing such churches, the Holy Ghost by the apostles, has recognized the institution, as one *legally existing* among them, to be perpetuated in the church, and that its duties are prescribed." p. 480.

Discontinuity

In close relation to the argument above, Barnes employed an argument based on discontinuity. As was seen above, Barnes called for apologists to furnish evidence that God or the leaders of God's people explicitly intended for slavery to be universally perpetuated. In the absence of such evidence Barnes further strengthened his position that God never intended slavery to be a perpetual institution by pointing out the contextual discontinuity between the testaments and between the Bible and the church. If Barnes could demonstrate that aspects of American slavery, for instance, were inconsistent with slavery as practiced in the Old Testament, then he could demonstrate the further inapplicability of the Old Testament to American slavery. Barnes demonstrated such contextual discontinuity between the Old Testament and nineteenth-century America, between the New Testament and nineteenth-century America, and between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Slavery in the Old Testament and in America

If American apologists were trying to establish the practice of American slavery based on the practice of various forms of servitude in the Old Testament, then (in Barnes' way of thinking) the degree to which the Old Testament form of slavery differed from the American form of slavery would demonstrate the sinfulness of the American institution and practice. In general, therefore, because the differences were so many and so profound, the number and significance of the Old Testament proof-texts was necessarily minimized.

Barnes presented at least two clear examples of this. The first was in regard to Abraham's servants taking up arms and going to battle along side their master.²⁶ Barnes pointed out the inconsistency between Abrahamic servanthood and American slavery by painting a mental picture of American slaves being issued guns by their masters. After Nat Turner's slave rebellion in 1831 in Southampton, Virginia, the idea of slaves being issued any kind of weapons would horrify the slaveholding South.²⁷ This was exactly the stark contrast Barnes attempted to draw by pointing out this inconsistency. The second example of

²⁶ Barnes, Inquiry, 76-77. See also Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 95; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 10. Brookes argued that slavery, when properly practiced, tends toward the benefit of both the master and the slave. He cited Abraham's successful campaign to free Lot from four kings in Genesis 14 as an example: Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 5. See also Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 464.

²⁷ Nat Turner, The Confession of Nat Turner: The Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, Va. / As Fully and Voluntarily Made to Thomas R. Gray, in the Prison Where He was Confined, and Acknowledged by Him to be Such, When Read before the Court of Southampton; With the Certificate, under Seal of the Court Convened at Jerusalem, Nov. 5, 1831, for His Trial (Richmond: T. R. Gray, 1831); William Crane, Anti-Slavery in Virginia: Extracts from Thos. Jefferson, Gen. Washington and Others Relative to the "Blighting Curse of Slavery"; Debates on the "Nat Turner Insurrection" (Baltimore: J. F. Weishampel, 1865); William Leslei Farrar, Jr., "The Nat Turner Rebellion: The Impact of a Slave Revolt on Southern Thought and Legislation 1831-1832" (M.A. thesis, Southern Illinois University, 1964); Henry Irving Tragle, The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material, Including the Full Text of The Confessions of Nat Turner (New York, Vintage Books, 1973); Charles E. Morris, "Panic and Reprisal: Reaction in North Carolina to the Nat Turner Insurrection, 1831," (M.A. thesis, North Carolina State University, 1979); Eddie Lee Grays, "An Historical Analysis of Nat Turner: His Relationship with the Black and White Community of His Era, and His Relationship with the Contemporary Black Minister in America Today" (M.Div. thesis, Ashland Theological Seminary, 1987); James Thomas Baker, Creators of the American Mind, vol. 1, Nat Turner: Cry Freedom in America (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998); Scot Andrew French, "Remembering Nat Turner: The Rebellious Slave in American Thought, 1831 to Present" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2001).

contextual discontinuity was the voluntary nature of slavery in ancient Israel.²⁸ Under Mosaic law ancient Hebrews were allowed to be employed by other Hebrews.²⁹ This would lead Barnes to conclude, “The sanction of Moses could be adduced only in favour of the system which *he* established, and not in favour of one which has scarcely a feature in common with his.”³⁰

Slavery in the New Testament and in America

Barnes was an abolitionist. There is no question about this. Sometimes, however, he would oppose his fellow abolitionists on certain issues. When it came to the contextual discontinuity between the apostles and the abolitionist pastors and seminary professors of America, however, he stepped on a few toes. This, however, further advances his point that the contextual discontinuity between the New Testament and modern America is yet another reason to minimize the number and significance of the proof-texts used in the American slavery debate.

It must have seemed strange to Barnes’ fellow abolitionists to read statements such as this.

In inquiring into the manner in which the apostles treated the subject of slavery, it is clear that they did not openly and everywhere denounce it as an evil; that they did not make immediate and direct war upon it; that they did not declare that a slaveholder

²⁸Barnes, Inquiry, 76. Although apologists were more discerning regarding two different classes of slaves found in Mosaic legislation: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 26-29; Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 476; Alexander Campbell, “Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law,” 516; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 389.

²⁹Barnes, Inquiry, 145.

³⁰Ibid., 196.

could in no possible circumstances be a Christian; that they did not demand the emancipation of slaves as an indispensable condition of admission to the church; that they did not forbid all fellowship with those who held slaves, or require others wholly to separate from them; and that they did not encourage efforts to promote insurrection among the slaves themselves. These things seem to me to lie on the face of the New Testament, and whatever argument they may furnish to the advocates of slavery, or whatever difficulty they may present to the enemies of slavery in disposing of these facts, it seems plain that the facts themselves cannot be denied.³¹

Rather than cover up such facts or skirt around them, Barnes met them unapologetically.³² He elaborated on these facts by arguing the following five points. First, he pointed out that slave-holders were fully members of the church and not disciplined for holding slaves.³³ Second, he maintained that slave-holders could rightfully be considered genuine Christians.³⁴ Third, he recognized that the apostles did not publicly pronounce slavery to be an evil.³⁵ This was perhaps his strongest of rebukes against the abolitionist community. Barnes was admittedly ashamed of such behavior and found it inconsistent with the primary principles of Christianity (as was slavery). Fourth, the apostles gave instructions to those that were already in the master-slave relation.³⁶ Absent from such instructions was any indication that Christian leaders ought to encourage slaves to run away from their

³¹ Ibid., 260.

³² Apologists had been pointing out these same matters of contextual discontinuity: Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 498-9; Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 854-5.

³³ Barnes, *Inquiry*, 260-3.

³⁴ Ibid., 264-5.

³⁵ Ibid., 265-7.

³⁶ Ibid., 268-70.

masters, for example. A fifth matter of contextual discontinuity was the fact that American Christians were able to vote in such a manner as to move slavery to its ultimate demise. Christians in the Roman era enjoyed no such authority or input.³⁷ If nothing else, these matters of contextual discontinuity between the apostles and abolitionists may have caused abolitionists to reconsider their own use of proof-texts before continuing in their behavior toward slave-holders and apologists.

Slavery in the Old and New Testaments

Another instance of contextual discontinuity that might cause a further minimizing of the number and significance of the proof-texts is that found between the two testaments. In order to apply the Old Testament texts on slavery to the American slavery debate, it is first necessary to prove that the content of those texts was not significantly altered by the events and teaching of the New Testament. Barnes said,

It is essential to this argument from the Mosaic institutions, to prove that what is tolerated at one period of the world is always right; that what was tolerated three thousand years ago under the Hebrew system of legislation is proper under the Gospel. The argument implies that what is allowed at one period of the world, is right at all times, and in all places, and under all degrees of light and knowledge.³⁸

This brings up a larger question of applicability. That which was fulfilled in the New Testament caused a change in the way God's people were to live. Sacrifices, for example, were no longer necessary as a frequent ritual in the lives of God's people because

³⁷ Ibid., 304.

³⁸ Ibid., 111.

Jesus Christ replaced them all in His once-for-all sacrifice on the cross.³⁹ Barnes would include slavery among those things that were practiced in the Old Testament (at least to some degree), which were no longer to be practiced in the New Testament and church eras. In the previous quote one can see the direct relationship between contextual discontinuity and the non-permanent nature of slavery. Such contextual discontinuity advocates the position that certain practices legislated and tolerated in the Bible are not necessarily to be universally perpetuated. In this way Barnes attempted to minimize the number and significance of the texts directly addressing slavery by demonstrating their degree of inapplicability to the American slavery debate.

Descriptions, Prescriptions, and Sanction

Another means by which Barnes minimized the number and significance of slavery-related texts is his argument that the mere documentation in the Bible of a historical fact does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that God approved of the attending behavior. It is a matter of distinguishing description from prescription.⁴⁰ A most poignant example of this line of reasoning would be pointing out that sins recorded in the Bible are accurately recorded but not in any way condoned. When it came to slavery Barnes made this same point in three different contexts.

According to Gen 17:12-13 Abraham bought servants with money. In dealing with this passage Barnes states:

³⁹ Hebrews 9.

⁴⁰ Consider also Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 114.

In the case, moreover, of Abraham, it should be remembered that it is the record of a mere *fact*. There is no command to buy servants or to sell them, or to hold them as property—any more than there was a command to the brethren of Joseph to enter into a negotiation for the sale of their brother. Nor is there any approbation expressed of the fact that they were bought; unless the command given to Abraham to affix to them the seal of the covenant, and to recognise them as brethren in the faith which he held, should be construed as such evidence of approval.⁴¹

Barnes makes the same case with the patriarchs in general.

The truth is, that the mere record of *a fact*, even without any sentiment of approbation or disapprobation, is no evidence of the views of him who makes it. Are we to infer that Herodotus approved of all that he saw or heard of in his travels, and of which he made a record? Are we to suppose that Tacitus and Livy approved of all the deeds the memory of which they have transmitted for the instruction of future ages? Are we to maintain that Gibbon and Hume believed that all which they have recorded was adapted to promote the good of mankind? Shall the biographer of Nero, and Caligula, and Richard III., and Alexander VI., and Cæsar Borgia, be held responsible for approving of all that these men did, or of commending their example to the imitation of mankind? Sad would be the office of an historian were he to be thus judged. Why then shall we infer that *God* approved of all that the patriarchs did, even when there is no formal disapprobation expressed; or infer, because such transactions have been *recorded*, that *therefore* they are right in his sight?⁴²

The same argument was made with respect to slavery, polygamy, and divorce under Mosaic law. “The truth in regard to this point is, that Moses found servitude in existence, just as he did polygamy and the custom of divorce; that it can be no more inferred that he would have originated the one than the other; and that the fact that he legislated for the one can be no more regarded as evidence that he approved it as a good and desirable system, than the fact

⁴¹Ibid., 70-1.

⁴²Ibid., 80. See also Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 184.

that he legislated for the other.”⁴³ “. . . we are not to infer from the fact that [Moses] tolerated it, and legislated for it, that he regarded it as a good and a desirable institution.”⁴⁴

Despite the obvious nature of this argument, Barnes felt it necessary to make it in response to apologists’ simplistic claims that because slavery was found in the Bible it is therefore justified as a divinely approved moral institution in America.⁴⁵ Rather than leave the argument there, however, he advanced it one step further. In one place in his Inquiry he argued beyond the fact that description does not necessitate prescription by claiming that prescription does not necessitate sanction. In other words, just because the particulars of Hebrew slavery were legislated or just because masters and slaves were given instructions regarding their relationship with one another outside of the church it does not necessarily follow that God sanctioned the practice.

It is not fair to infer from the manner in which they prescribed the duties of masters and slaves *in* that relation, that they approved the system, and that they desired its perpetuity. To prescribe the duties of certain persons while sustaining a certain relation to each other, cannot be construed as an approbation of the relation itself. It might not be desirable for him who gave directions about the right mode of acting *in* a certain relation, to attempt to disturb it at that time, or it might be impossible at once to remove certain evils connected with it, and yet there might be important duties which religion would enjoin while that relation continued.⁴⁶

⁴³Barnes, Inquiry, 113.

⁴⁴Ibid., 115. See also Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 30; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 64, 76, 115.

⁴⁵Barnes, Inquiry, 32; Alexander Campbell, “Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law,” 521; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 148; Hodge, “Bible Argument on Slavery,” 860.

⁴⁶Barnes, Inquiry, 273.

To state that there are plenty of things in the Bible, which are described but not prescribed is an assertion needing little proof. However, to state that there are some things that are prescribed but not sanctioned requires more proof. Barnes attempted this by emphasizing that the prescriptions were not issued to promote slavery as an end in and of itself but to promote certain things with respect to an already existing institution by which it might eventually be overturned or cease to be practiced among God's people. An examination of how brotherly love might eventually cause a Christian master to free his Christian slaves, for example, will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter of this current work.

Philemon

There is another argument Barnes used, which ought not to receive much attention as it is likely issued with proverbial tongue in cheek. Apparently there may have been apologist simpletons in his day, who attempted to win the American slavery debate by advancing a single-word argument: "Philemon." "The epistle to Philemon is often referred to by them as full proof that the sanction of the New Testament is given to slavery; and, indeed, it would seem to be regarded as so clear on the point, that all that is necessary is to *name* this epistle as settling the whole matter in debate."⁴⁷

Since Barnes does not substantiate this with a footnote, it may be that he is referring more to casual conversations with apologists rather than well-thought-out academic

⁴⁷Ibid., 318.

works.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Barnes' refutation of this alleged argument from some apologists further demonstrates the lack of applicability of such single-word arguments often based in particular proof-texts. This goes hand-in-hand with his argument against the necessity of a descriptive thing being a prescribed thing. The mere mention of it does not necessarily lead to its sanction.

Argument from Silence

As mentioned in the previous two chapters of this current work, Barnes frequently appealed to an argument from silence. Throughout his Inquiry he compiled a list of things that a slavery-related text must contain in order to be directly applied to the American slavery debate. The degree to which those things were not present in those texts directly corresponded to their degree of inapplicability to the American slavery debate. His frequently used argument from silence played an important role in his minimizing the number and significance of proof-texts to be applied to the American slavery debate.

Most of the arguments so far referred to in this chapter of this current work to one degree or another are related to an argument from silence. Barnes often cast the burden of proof on the apologists by challenging them to furnish any explicit evidence of God's approval of the various practices involved in the institution of slavery as practiced in nineteenth-century America. To the degree that they were unable to furnish such evidence Barnes maintained that the texts, in and of themselves, proved to be inadequate.

⁴⁸Barnes' Notes were widely- and well-read even before the American Civil War. His commentary on Philemon drew the direct criticism of apologists like Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 370-3. Barnes was undoubtedly privy not only to well-thought-out criticism such as that of Bledsoe but also that of less critical thinkers of his day.

There are many examples of this. For instance: there is no command to enslave people.⁴⁹ The implications of the lack of such a command were that apologists were not able to refer to any proof-text alone to advocate God's condoning the purchase of slaves.⁵⁰ There is no evidence that Israel engaged in the selling, trading, or purchasing of any slaves or their being treated as a commodity.⁵¹ While slave-trading was a well-known, well-established enterprise among Israel's neighbors, there is no mention of its being carried on within Israel's borders. Even though slave-trading was a well-known, well-established enterprise in the Roman Empire, there is no sign of any master's engaging in slave-trading or treating slaves as a commodity after the master became a Christian.⁵² There is also no sign of heredity-based enslavement.⁵³ This was, however, a central feature of American slavery. There was no hint of African inferiority anywhere in the Bible.⁵⁴ Despite efforts to turn

⁴⁹ Barnes, Inquiry, 71.

⁵⁰ Although apologists tried to do just this from the mention in Gen 17:13, 23 of Abraham's buying people with money: Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 467-8; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 153-4. A similar attempt was made from the mention in Lev 25:44-46 of purchasing slaves from the Gentiles: Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 37-8; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 474-6; idem, "Letter to a Brother in Kentucky," 512; idem, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 502, 507; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 126-7, 131, 134, 153; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 340-2.

⁵¹ Barnes, Inquiry, 71, 209, 212-3, 226.

⁵² Ibid., 265.

⁵³ Ibid., 76, 209. Remember, however, that Lev 25:46 authorized the inheritance of slaves: Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 5; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 342.

⁵⁴ Barnes, Inquiry, 207.

Noah's curse of Canaan into such, there were no signs of African inferiority.⁵⁵ There is no indication that any group of slaves was perpetually kept as slaves throughout Israel's history.⁵⁶ Despite the reputation of their neighbors, Israel was not known as a nation of slaveholders.⁵⁷ If they were engaging in the slave trade, then it stands to reason they would be listed among the marts for slaves.⁵⁸ There is no mention of any masters being excluded from congregations or from missionary funding.⁵⁹ Nothing is said about how long a Christian master might continue to hold slaves.⁶⁰ As can be seen even from these few examples, Barnes frequently relied upon an argument from silence in an attempt to minimize the number and significance of slavery-related texts used to support either position in the American slavery debate.

Barnes Not Alone

Barnes was not alone in cautioning his readers about the careless use of proof-texts in the discussion on American slavery. Those on each side of the debate argued that

⁵⁵ Priest's entire argument is based on his theory that God pronounced judgment against the descendants of Ham as a result of his moral inferiority: Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery.

⁵⁶ Barnes, Inquiry, 209.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 226.

⁵⁸ E.g. Joel 3:3-8. Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 108; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 66; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 17-19; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 142-5.

⁵⁹ Barnes, Inquiry, 263-4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 265.

those on the other side were guilty of misusing slavery-related texts. Stringfellow, for example, deplored the frequent use of arguments from silence and called for proof-texts that were more direct in their attitude toward slavery. “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.”⁶¹ Priest chided his opponents in the discussion by calling for a consistent treatment of all of the proof-texts used in the slavery discussion.

Abolitionists . . . are a strange set of *logicians*, inasmuch as when the law of Moses is appealed to as an evidence of the *legal* enslaving of the negro Canaanites, then that law is found to be *antiquated*, out of date, and of *no* force; but when, in the *same law*, there happens to be found a passage that seems to make in favor of any of the dogmas of abolitionism, *lo*, it is seized upon with avidity, and held to be of the greatest force and authority, and by no means antiquated, or inefficient, being first rate Scripture.⁶²

In the same manner as Barnes cautioned his readers to consider the context in which these texts appeared carefully, so also did Bledsoe warn his. In a discussion of 1 Cor 7:23 he said,

We find in this passage the words: “Be not ye the servants of men.” These words are taken from the connection in which they stand, dissevered from the words which precede and follow them, and then made to teach that slaves should not submit to the authority of their masters, should not continue in their present condition. It is certain that no one but an abolitionist, who has lost all respect for revelation except when it happens to square with his own notions, could thus make the apostle so directly and so flatly contradict himself and all his teaching.⁶³

Hodge agreed, “Wherever the Scriptures either in the Old or New Testament recognize the lawfulness of holding slaves, they are tortured without mercy to force from them a different response; and where, as in this case, they appear to favor the other side of the question,

⁶¹Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 461.

⁶²Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 402.

⁶³Bledsoe, “Liberty and Slavery,” 377.

abolitionists quote them rather to silence those who make them the rule of their faith, than as the ground of their own convictions.”⁶⁴

Abolitionists, however, leveled the same charge against their opponents.

Paxton, for instance, noticed, “The most thorough-going partisans are often persons who look almost wholly at those parts of Scripture that appear to favour their own opinions, and give little attention to those that are in favour of the other side.”⁶⁵ Sunderland lamented regarding the misuse of Deut 23:15 as a proof-text:

This is supposed to refer to the case of a servant who had fled from an idolatrous master, and gone over to the children of Israel; if so, admitting the justice of the present system of slavery, would there not be precisely as much propriety in applying this passage to the cases of those slaves who now run away from their wicked and cruel masters, as there is in quoting other passages of Scripture to justify this system of slavery?⁶⁶

Modern scholars notice the problem existing on both sides of the debate.

“Each group thinks its own position is certainly the right one, and the opposite view the wrong one, with varying degrees of sincerity, intelligence and ignorance exhibited by both.”⁶⁷ Regarding Paul’s words on slavery in 1 Corinthians 7, Bartchy said that “no thoroughly convincing interpretation of 1 Cor. 0721 has ever been made on the basis of an analysis of its grammar and syntax alone. For this reason interpretations of other parts of 1 Cor. 7 and presuppositions about slavery in the first century A.D. have always played

⁶⁴Hodge, “The Fugitive Slave Law,” 813.

⁶⁵Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 62.

⁶⁶Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 28.

⁶⁷Buswell, Slavery, Segregation, and Scripture, 9-10.

decisive roles in the explication of this verse.”⁶⁸ Levinson refers to this phenomenon as “the temptation of selective attention.” “Confronted with the fact that the message of the text is not what they wish, interpreters are tempted to ignore those elements of the Bible that speak against the desired message and to concentrate only on those that can be made to seem to speak for it.”⁶⁹ The misuse of slavery-related texts caused a plethora of problems in the debate. “The Bible provided a multitude of answers, some of them profound, others outlandish, and many even contradictory.”⁷⁰ Regarding American Protestants in the nineteenth century, Berends said:

Instead of regarding the Bible as a voice of authority to be interpreted by church leaders and guarded by creeds, some people viewed Divine revelation as the only authority, and their own interpretation as singularly valid. Conflicting interpretations of the sacred text pushed and pulled evangelical religion in sundry ways.⁷¹

Both during the discussion and after, it was well recognized that both sides of the debate had been abusing the scriptures by misapplying proof-texts. To some it seemed an insurmountable obstacle. To others, like Barnes, it was a welcome challenge to find a way to use slavery-related texts in a valid way to shed light on the problems related to slavery.

⁶⁸ Bartchy, ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ, 173.

⁶⁹ Jon D. Levenson, “Exodus and Liberation,” Horizons in Biblical Theology 13 (December 1991): 146.

⁷⁰ Berends, “Thus Saith the Lord,” 15.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

The Reconstruction of a Biblical Argument Based
on Proof-Texts and Primary Principles

When attempting to solve the problems related to nineteenth-century American slavery, it was altogether fitting to consult the Bible as a primary source of authority. First of all, as has already been demonstrated in the third chapter of this current work, the Bible was the acknowledged standard of morals in nineteenth-century America.⁷² If those on both sides of the debate conceded to the Bible's teaching on the matter—much like two parties concede to the ruling of a neutral judge—then it would be fitting to consult the Bible in an attempt to solve these problems. From those participating in the discussion, who have already been quoted in this current work, it can be seen that the Bible was regarded as a primary source of authority because it was considered the Word of God (who was considered to be the ultimate source of all moral authority). Second, the Bible—sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly—addressed issues related to slavery.⁷³ If the Bible had nothing to say about slavery, then even if it had been an authoritative source on moral issues, it would have been fairly useless to solve problems related to slavery. The fact that the Bible, as the Word of God, was considered to be an acknowledged standard of morals in nineteenth-century America, and the fact that the Bible addressed issues related to slavery, meant that it was altogether fitting to consult the Bible as a primary source of moral authority to solve the problems related to slavery.

⁷²Barnes, Inquiry, 21, 28; Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, iii; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 461; Armstrong, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 7; Buswell, Slavery, Segregation, and Scripture, 9-10, 49; Shriver, "Bible and Southern Ethics," 94; Giles, "Biblical Argument for Slavery," 12; Berends, "Thus Saith the Lord," 9.

⁷³Barnes, Inquiry, 22.

Still, when not handled properly, the Bible has been used to reach contradictory conclusions.⁷⁴ As has been seen so far in this current chapter, biblical arguments that rely exclusively on texts directly addressing slavery are at least somewhat unstable. Since Barnes still relied heavily on the use of these texts, however, it can be determined that he did not throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water by ignoring those texts that addressed the problems related to slavery.⁷⁵ The question then arises as to how one might determine how to apply scripture correctly to a modern social issue such as slavery. Barnes would emphasize a sound understanding in three areas of Bible study.

Exegesis of the Proof-Texts

First, those wishing to apply a slavery-related text to a modern social issue must have a sound understanding of the proof-text itself. This is a matter of sound exegesis.⁷⁶ Sound exegesis requires a sound understanding of the words found in the proof-text themselves. In the slavery debate, the more authoritative contributors carefully considered the key words used in the texts as they appeared in the original biblical languages. Discussion of the semantic range of 'ebed, for example, assumed a prominent role in the

⁷⁴ Although this has been demonstrated in this current work with regard to slavery, the same holds true in many other moral debates as well: Jim Hill and Rand Cheadle, The Bible Tells Me So: Uses and Abuses of Holy Scripture (New York: Anchor Books, 1996).

⁷⁵ This appears to be the driving thesis of Hill and Cheadle's work, for example.

⁷⁶ The current discussion of what sound exegesis entails will be limited to elements Barnes relied upon heavily. Textbooks on exegesis and hermeneutics would promote a much more thorough understanding of the factors that contribute to sound exegesis.

discussion.⁷⁷ Another indispensable study took into account the semantic range of *dōulōs*.⁷⁸ The secondary words denoting various forms of service was also invaluable to a proper understanding of the texts directly addressing slavery.⁷⁹ Another requirement of sound exegesis relates to grammar. Whether Hebrew terms denoting a purchase could be stretched to include the purchase of one's time or just people themselves as chattels is an example of this necessary linguistic consideration.⁸⁰ Sound exegesis also requires a broad understanding of the Bible as literature. Slavery-related texts appeared in every genre of the Bible—narrative, legislative, poetic, prophetic, didactic, and apocalyptic. Conditioning one's understanding of a text based on the genre in which it appeared is indispensable to sound

⁷⁷ Barnes, *Inquiry*, 67-70; Weld, *The Bible against Slavery*, 105; Charles Elliott, *Sinfulness of American Slavery*, vol. 2, 337; Junkin, *Integrity of Our National Union*, 25-9; Alexander Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law," 516.

⁷⁸ Barnes, *Inquiry*, 64-7; Paxton, *Letters on Slavery*, 143; Sunderland, *Testimony of God against Slavery*, 83-6; Bourne, *Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument*, 77; Charles Elliott, *Sinfulness of American Slavery*, vol. 2, 337; Joseph Thompson, *Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery*, 16; Alexander Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law," 517; Junkin, *Integrity of Our National Union*, 45, 63, 66, 70; Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery," 360-4; Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 501.

⁷⁹ Paxton, *Letters on Slavery*, 144; Sunderland, *Testimony of God against Slavery*, 98; Bourne, *Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument*, 77; Junkin, *Integrity of Our National Union*, 26-9, 58; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 476; idem, Stringfellow, "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 501-3; Alexander Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law," 516-7; Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*, 389.

⁸⁰ Barnes, *Inquiry*, 75-6; Paxton, *Letters on Slavery*, 63; Bourne, *Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument*, 48; Junkin, *Integrity of Our National Union*, 50.

exegesis.⁸¹ Proof-texts are more likely to be properly applied if they are properly exegeted by those attempting to apply them correctly.

Understanding the Cultural Context of the Proof-Texts

Besides a sound exegetical understanding of the proof-texts, it is helpful to understand the cultural context in which these texts appeared. Abolitionists were quick, for instance, to point out the unique relationship of Abraham with his “318 trained men.”⁸² As another example, when attempting to apply texts related to Israelite bondage in Egypt correctly, it was considered helpful to understand what such bondage entailed. When a nation is “enslaved” by a foreign king, this type of relationship is usually referred to as “tributary service.” In this type of relationship a king exacts money, goods, and/or services from a conquered people.⁸³ The tributaries still maintain their national identity but are considered as a lower caste than citizens of the king’s nation are.⁸⁴ Barnes was careful to give extended consideration to these factors before attempting to apply proof-texts related to

⁸¹ Abolitionists emphasized this very point, for example, when they argued that just because actions related to slavery are described in narrative sections of the Bible, it does not necessarily follow that God approved of the system of slavery or its perpetual continuation forever: Barnes, Inquiry, 79-80; Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 184; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 30; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 64, 76, 114-5.

⁸² Barnes, Inquiry, 76-7; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 95; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 53; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 10.

⁸³ Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 100; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 87-89; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 260; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 378-9; Stringfellow, “Letter to a Brother in Kentucky,” 517.

⁸⁴ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 113.

Egyptian bondage to American slavery.⁸⁵ The form of Hebrew slavery and Roman slavery in general also became a study in and of itself, so it could be seen how it differed from or was similar to American slavery.⁸⁶ Understanding the various forms of slavery in existence among the people to whom the slavery-related texts were originally written was indispensable to the proper application of those texts to a different cultural context. Klein states:

A text without a context is a pretext. . . . This principle focuses on a serious abuse of Scripture. Here we define “pretext” as an alleged interpretation that only appears valid; in reality it obscures the real state of affairs. This principle serves as a warning against the popular tendency to engage in invalid proof-texting: quoting biblical passages to prove a doctrine or standard for Christian living without regard for the literary context. . . . Such proof-texts are merely ‘pretexts’ when the interpretation fails the principle of literary context. There is nothing wrong with quoting verses to prove a point provided we understand them according to their contextual meaning (under the correct circumstances proof-texting can be valid). Before listing any verse in support of a position, we should first check the literary context to insure that the passage is about the same subject and really does have the meaning that proves the point. Otherwise the text is only a pretext, a passage that seems on the surface to prove some belief but in actuality does not. Such a pretext carries no divine authority.⁸⁷

Understanding the Cultural Context in Which the Proof-Texts are to be Applied

It has been alleged that modern evangelical seminary education includes superb training in how to exegete scripture and understand its cultural context but has at the same time failed in training students how to understand modern culture and how to apply the proof-texts to their various modern cultural situations. McQuilkin writes:

⁸⁵ Barnes, Inquiry, 83-96.

⁸⁶ Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 37-8; Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 485; Barclay, “Paul, Philemon and Slave Ownership,” 166.

⁸⁷ William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Introduction to Biblical Interpretation (Dallas: Word, 1993), 160-1.

The inerrant words of Scripture were so important that we developed a whole discipline for establishing the text and called it textual criticism. The task of exegesis or determining the meaning of the original author was so important that we developed rules for correct exegesis and called the discipline “hermeneutics.” We trained budding pastors diligently in these disciplines. And then we sent them out to proclaim the truth of Scripture, to apply it to contemporary faith and life. But we did not develop the guidelines for doing so. There was no discipline to bridge the gap between exegesis and application. It was every man for himself and the devil seemed to take not only “the hind-most” but some of the foremost as well!⁸⁸

A good understanding of the biblical and modern cultural contexts is essential to correct application of proof-texts. McQuilkin adds:

It is helpful in establishing the meaning of a passage to see it in the cultural context of the author and his original audience. Furthermore, it is helpful in making an authentic application of biblical truth, to see it in the cultural context of the contemporary audience. But if an understanding of some biblical cultural context or some contemporary cultural form is used to contravene the plain meaning of the text, Scripture itself is no longer the authority. Thus, the meaning, recipient, and application must be established within the limits set by the data of Scripture.⁸⁹

Failure to consider both the biblical and modern cultural contexts when attempting to apply proof-texts to modern situations can result in the Bible’s being rejected as a helpful source of modern moral authority.

The complex hermeneutical issue in reference to both the general principles and the specific injunctions is how they “translate” into modern life. In what sense do contemporary Christians hear God’s word in them? Each individual Christian must develop an answer to this question, and the answer will no doubt be influenced by the assumptions that are held in reference to the Bible and the particular circumstances of one’s life. But even allowing for great individual differences the Christian should be open to having God’s Word in these words of Scripture. To ponder them, debate

⁸⁸ J. Robertson McQuilkin, “Normativeness in Scripture,” chapter in Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 220.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

them and struggle with their relevance is certainly in order, but to ignore them or write them off as anachronistic is to run the risk of failing to hear God speak.⁹⁰

The opposite problem is to downplay the differences between the biblical and modern contexts. This is another leading error in the application of proof-texts. Thiselton refers to this error as “premature assimilation.” “*Premature assimilation* into the perspectives projected by the horizons of readers leaves the reader trapped within his or her own prior horizons. Worse, in such a case the reader may stand under the illusion that the texts have fully addressed him or her.”⁹¹ Goldingay adds:

We easily assume that the experience to which the text witnesses mirrors our own; we look down the well and see ourselves. So here objective, historical approaches can help us to respond in trust and obedience to the scriptural texts themselves, because they help us actually to hear these texts aright.⁹²

An integral part of understanding the modern cultural context is correctly factoring in the prejudices and predispositions of those attempting to apply proof-texts to their modern situations. Goldingay asserts:

We have to seek to understand texts in their historicity; but we have to do so out of our own historicity, the assumptions and horizons that affect how we see and what we see. . . . It has long been a familiar idea that the scriptures themselves, like any other texts, belong in history and have to be understood in the light of the historical contexts in which they came into being. The crucial insistence of hermeneutical study since Dilthey is that we as interpreters also belong in history and have to go about understanding in the light of the historical contexts in which we live. We have to do this in the sense that we cannot avoid it. The experiences as human beings and as

⁹⁰Duncan S. Ferguson, Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986), 125-6.

⁹¹Anthony C. Thiselton, New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 8.

⁹²John Goldingay, Models for Interpretation of Scripture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 257.

believers that we bring to the text, our perceptions and our questions regarding life and God. and the shared assumptions that make thinking and communication possible in our culture — all these shape what we are open to seeing in the text.⁹³

Klein has even suggested understanding the terms of the Bible as being “unequivocal and analogical.” By “analogical” he means that the Bible said one thing to one audience, and it serves as an analogy to people today as they try to figure out how to apply it. “The Bible conveys truth to us analogically in its didactic sections, poetry, apocalypses, and narratives though they were uttered or written to people long ago. We learn by analogy when we discover that truth in the Bible applies to life and situations in the modern world.”⁹⁴ Amid all of these theories and ways of looking at applying scripture, one thing stands clear: a proper understanding of one’s own cultural context is essential to the correct application of proof-texts.

During the generation before the American Civil War, when the slavery discussion was at an all-time high, information regarding how American slaves were treated was essential to the biblical side of the discussion and to the debate as a whole. Books such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin played a significant role in the debate because it helped the world understand what transpired in on a slave-holder’s plantation.⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid., 230.

⁹⁴ Klein, Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, 20.

⁹⁵ Although the authenticity of the facts in Stowe’s work have often been debated, the effect her work had on the slavery discussion cannot be overemphasized: Joel Parker and Anson Rood, The Discussion between Rev. Joel Parker, and Rev. A. Rood, on the Question “What are the evils inseparable from slavery,” Which was Referred to by Mrs. Stowe, in “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” (Philadelphia: H. Hooker, 1852); F. Colburn Adams, Uncle Tom at Home: A Review of the Reviewers and Repudiators of Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Mrs. Stowe (Philadelphia: W. P. Hazard, 1853); Nicholas Brimblecomb and Harriet Beecher

Among the abolitionists contributing to the American slavery discussion, Elliott seems to have relied most heavily on the cultural setting of slavery in the Old South.⁹⁶ A good exegetical study of the proof-texts, a decent understanding of the cultural contexts in which those proof-texts first appeared, and the ability to discern the unique circumstances of the cultural context to which the proof-texts were to be applied are all invaluable in correctly applying proof-texts to a modern social issue such as slavery.

Barnes' Suggestion for Bridging the Contextual Gap: The Primary Principles of Scripture

An objection could rightly be raised at this point because there were still participants on both sides of the American slavery debate who possessed a deep level of understanding in all three of these areas (exegesis, biblical context, and modern context). Barnes and Hodge, for example are still well known for their status as premier biblical scholars and theologians in the nineteenth century. Even to this day Barnes' Notes and Hodge's Systematic Theology are in common use in America. Yet Hodge was every bit as much an apologist as Barnes was an abolitionist. Both carefully considered the exegetical and cultural factors related to the Bible and slavery, yet they still disagreed. Having an

Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin in Ruins! Triumphant Defence of Slavery! In a Series of Letters to Harriet Beecher Stowe (Boston: C. Waite, 1853); Edwin Bruce Kirkham, "Harriet Beecher Stowe and the Genesis, Composition and Revision of Uncle Tom's Cabin" (Ph.D. diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1968); Mason I. Lowance, Ellen E. Westbrook, and R. C. De Prosopo, The Stowe Debate: Rhetorical Strategies in Uncle Tom's Cabin (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1994).

⁹⁶ Charles Elliott, The Bible and Slavery.

expertise in these three fields still did not guarantee a consistent application of the proof-texts to the problems related to slavery in nineteenth-century America.

There is much talk among modern biblical scholars regarding bridging the gap between the biblical *sitz im leben* and the modern *sitz im leben*.⁹⁷ A mental picture is drawn of a river dividing two bodies of land. The land on the far side of the river represents the biblical *sitz im leben* and the land on the near side of the river represents the modern *sitz im leben*. In this picture, the river represents cultural differences (time, location, culture, climate, etc.) that divide the two. Certainly, in those situations in which the biblical *sitz im leben* is most similar to the modern *sitz im leben*, the river does not seem so wide, but where the differences are greatest, the ability to apply a proof-text correctly seems most difficult. One stands on the ground on the near side of the river wondering how to bridge this gap.⁹⁸

It may be that Barnes' key contribution to the nineteenth-century American slavery discussion was to bring the discussion beyond the texts that most directly addressed slavery to a principle-driven approach as a necessary supplement to proof-text ethics. He did this mostly in practice by measuring the application of proof-texts against the primary principles of scripture. If an inconsistency arose between the two, then the application was not valid. "If it shall appear, in the course of this discussion, that . . . [God] has asserted great principles in his word, which cannot be carried out without destroying the system; that he has

⁹⁷ Goldingay, Models for Interpretation of Scripture, 259-60; McQuilkin, "Normativeness in Scripture," 220.

⁹⁸ As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, Barnes frequently used this contextual discontinuity between biblical and modern culture as an argument in and of itself: Barnes, Inquiry, 76-7, 145, 196, 260-70.

enjoined on man, in the various relations of life, certain duties, of which slavery prevents the performance; . . . and that *it is the tendency and design of the Christian religion, when fairly applied, to abolish the system*, it will be apparent that slavery is a moral wrong.”⁹⁹ Barnes clearly hoped that the application of this hermeneutical method would bring an end to slavery: “It would be obviously demanded of honest men in these circumstances, that they should lay down such fundamental principles of morality as, when fairly applied, would show that the system was evil, and that the religion which they aimed to promulgate was opposed to it, and would ultimately remove it. It would be clearly improper that they should advance any principle which, if *fairly* applied, would tend to sanction or to perpetuate it.”¹⁰⁰ If the argument were clearly won using this hermeneutical method, Barnes’ theory of natural emancipation would prevail.

The fair influence of the injunctions on this subject in the New Testament, so far as a Christian master would feel himself addressed in them, would be to induce him to emancipate his slaves. If there was no explicit authority given to him to hold them in bondage; if they were considered to be in all respects by nature on an equality with himself, and as having the same rights as he; if they were regarded as Christian brethren, redeemed by the same blood, and heirs of the same eternal life, the effect on the mind of a conscientious man would be inevitable.¹⁰¹

*“The principles laid down by the Saviour and his Apostles are such as are opposed to Slavery, and if carried out would secure its universal abolition.”*¹⁰² “The Saviour and his apostles inculcated such views of man as *amount* to a prohibition of slavery, or as if acted on

⁹⁹Barnes, *Inquiry*, 57.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 314-5.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 340.

would abolish it. In other words, they gave such views of man, that under their influence, no one would make or retain a slave.”¹⁰³ From these quotes it can be seen that Barnes was optimistic that if the slavery discussion was to be brought beyond the texts that most directly addressed slavery to a principle-driven approach as a necessary supplement to proof-text ethics, a sort of natural emancipation would eventually occur.

A few questions remained, however. How can one distinguish between what is a primary principle and what is not a primary principle? Who or what decides these criteria? How does this “measuring” of proof-text applications by the primary principles actually work? What would it look like if American slavery came into conformity with the primary principles of scripture? Proposed answers to these questions will be discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 341.

CHAPTER SIX
THE PRIMARY PRINCIPLES OF SCRIPTURE: AN OBJECTIVE
STANDARD BY WHICH THE APPLICABILITY OF
PROOF-TEXTS MIGHT BE MEASURED

As stated previously in this current work, there were many angles from which the nineteenth-century American slavery discussion was approached (economic, political, medical, biblical, philosophical, etc.). By the time Barnes' Inquiry was first published in 1846, much of the biblical portion of the discussion had deteriorated to a biased selection of certain proof-texts. Paxton, for example, lamented the extremism of both positions, "The most thorough-going partisans are often persons who look almost wholly at those parts of Scripture that appear to favour their own opinions, and give little attention to those that are in favour of the other side."¹ Until Barnes and Stringfellow published their works on the Bible and slavery in 1846 and 1844 respectively, the works on the Bible and slavery were nowhere near exhaustive, and after their being published, other works on the Bible and slavery added little to the debate.² Seeing that an argument based exclusively on slavery-related texts would only bring the discussion so far, Barnes suggested that any application of slavery-related texts to the problems related to American slavery should be measured against the

¹Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 62.

²Kledzik, "Stringfellow and Barnes."

primary principles of scripture. If a proof-text's application came into direct conflict with one of scripture's primary principles, then the application must be abandoned as contradictory to the Word of God. "If it shall appear, in the course of this discussion, that . . . [God] has asserted great principles in his word, which cannot be carried out without destroying the system; that he has enjoined on man, in the various relations of life, certain duties, of which slavery prevents the performance; . . . and that *it is the tendency and design of the Christian religion, when fairly applied, to abolish the system*, it will be apparent that slavery is a moral wrong."³ In the following pages examples will be given of primary principles of scripture. Emphasis will be given to those principles that were used in the nineteenth-century American slavery discussion as guiding parameters for the application of proof-texts to the problems related to American slavery. After listing these primary principles, a brief look at the criteria used to determine which principles are best fitted to this task will be undertaken.

Examples of Primary Principles of Scripture

Throughout the Bible, but especially in the New Testament, certain principles are stated that are more general than particular laws. These principles are often regarded in the various texts themselves as superior to the particular laws. The New Testament as a whole is filled with principles that are expressly intended to replace particular laws. Many of the teachings of Jesus and Paul serve as good examples of this. Not every one of these principles was used in the biblical portion of the American slavery discussion, but from the

³Barnes, Inquiry, 57.

time Barnes' Inquiry was published onward, much attention was paid to the primary ones among them. Following are some examples of the more primary principles of scripture and how they related to the discussion of American slavery.

The Greatest Commandments

One day when Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem near the end of His public ministry, He was questioned by a certain scribe as to what the primary commandment was among all of the commandments.⁴

“Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, ‘Master, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said unto him, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’”

—Matthew 22:35-40

A difficulty arises when attempting to use this first and greatest command as a measurement of the validity of the application of other proof-texts to slavery. If the issue

⁴The exact details of Luke's account differ from those of Matthew's and Mark's accounts of what has been supposed to be the same event. In Mark's account the questioner is described as a γραμματεὺς, but in Matthew's and Luke's account he is described as a νομικός. In Matthew's account the questioner asks Jesus what the ἐντολὴ μεγάλη ἐν τῷ νόμῳ is; in Mark's account the questioner asks what the ἐντολὴ πρώτη πάντων is, and in Luke's account the question relates to obtaining ζωὴν αἰώνιον. In Matthew's account Jesus adds that this supreme love for God is the μεγάλη καὶ πρώτη ἐντολὴ. In Matthew's and Mark's accounts Jesus is the first to answer the question, and the questioner basically repeats His words, but in Luke's account Jesus requires that the questioner answer the question. Since the earliest days of New Testament commentaries, explanations and speculations have been offered regarding the differences between these three accounts of the same conversation. Rather than flesh out the details here, suffice it to say that if Jesus did not actually speak these words Himself, He at least approved of the priority of these two laws among all of the Old Testament laws. For the sake of argument in this current work, these words will be simply spoken of as Jesus' own words, but it is acknowledged that He may have approved of them as His own only after the questioner said them.

were pluralism or polytheism, for example, this command would apply well. Since there is only one God, then any text used to support the acknowledgment or worship of other so-called gods would be invalid. When it comes to slavery, however, the institution as a whole and the practices in particular are not directly related to God. Slavery is a relationship between two human beings. The only way to link the master-slave relationship to this command is to go about it circuitously through Jesus' saying "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it to me" (Matt 25:40, 45). Sunderland may have been the only abolitionist to attempt this connection:

Hence, it is indisputable, that Christ considers the good or the evil which is done unto one of the least of his followers, as actually done unto himself. Now suppose for one moment, that slavery is not an evil; suppose it is consistent and right for a Christian to buy and sell men women and children, and hold them as his *property*. Is there any professing Christian, or any minister of the gospel who would deal thus with the person of Jesus Christ, were he now here upon earth? How does it seem to the reader, to think of JESUS CHRIST, set up at auction, *bought* and *sold*, *yoked with an iron collar*, *chained*, *scourged* and driven to work with a club or cowhide? But this is the kind of treatment which many of his *disciples* receive, and this too from those who claim to be their *Christian pastors*, and their brethren in the Lord!⁵

This, however, was a stretch not often resorted to in the American slavery discussion.

Sunderland's comments here may fit better within the discussion of the second commandment anyway. Although the law of supreme love for God is the first and greatest commandment, it is relatively unhelpful as a measurement for the applicability of proof-texts to American slavery.

The second commandment, in stark contrast, is the most frequently referred to principle in all of scripture against which the applicability of slavery-related texts were

⁵Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 76.

measured.⁶ Barnes, for example, claimed that American slavery could not continue to exist if the “golden rule” were applied to its various practices.

One of the great and leading principles of the religion of the Saviour is expressed in the golden rule: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.” Matt. vii. 12. This rule he evidently designed should be incorporated into his religion as essential to the system, and it is manifest that nothing inconsistent with the fair application of it can be in accordance with the spirit of Christianity. Yet its bearing on slavery is obvious. . . . (1) No one, under the influence of this rule, ever made a man a slave. . . . (2.) No one is exacting from another unrequited toil, or feeding him on coarse fare, or clothing him with coarse raiment, far inferior to what he himself possesses, or in depriving him of the privileges of reading the Bible, or of rising in political life, or of being eligible to office, ever did that which he would wish others to do to him. (3.) No one ever subjected a fellow-being to the operation of the laws of servitude, as they exist in this country, by the fair operation of this rule. . . . (4.) It may be added, that few or none,⁷ under the fair operation of this rule, would ever continue to hold another in slavery.

In other words, the golden rule touched upon so many features and facets of American slavery, that such slavery should not persist under the guidance of this rule. Abolitionists were quick to agree with Barnes on this point as he made it from Matt 7:12.⁸

⁶Regarding the synoptic gospel accounts of Jesus’ conversation with His questioner, see Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 75-76; Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 154. Maston pointed out that the application of the golden rule to racially-based ethical issues is facilitated by the example Jesus gave in His telling of the story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the identity of one’s neighbor. A neighbor is defined as someone in need—regardless of, and sometimes despite, racial differences: Maston, The Bible and Race, 72-74.

⁷Barnes, Inquiry, 248.

⁸The distinction in this verse is that the emphasis is not on love but on action. Jesus did not say to love one’s neighbor here but to do to one’s neighbor as one would want it done to them. Other abolitionists who used this verse in the same manner were Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 137-8; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 74; Channing, Slavery, 120, 124; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 278-9; vol. 2, 266.

The golden rule is found in several passages throughout the Bible—not only in the conversation between Jesus and His questioner.⁹ The earliest occasion of its appearance is in Lev 19:18 “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.” Elliott commented, “The Israelites were instructed ‘to love such as themselves,’ while at the same time they were reminded of their own oppressive servitude in Egypt, as a reason why they should love, and therefore treat kindly, every oppressed person.”¹⁰ The next occasion was in Obadiah 15 “For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.” Bourne warned slave-holders and apologists of the consequences of holding slaves.

Reciprocity is a principle acknowledged by all mankind, incorporated with all our feelings, and adopted in all our intercourse, and when it is equitably and impartially administered, it furnishes a safe ground of conduct in all our relative acts. *As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee; thy reward shall return upon thine own head.* This retaliatory doctrine, demonstrates that the bondage of the human species, must be contradictory to truth and right; because they who are guilty of the highest oppression, would not admit the validity of the claim, were an attempt made to enforce it upon themselves.¹¹

⁹ Many arguments were launched from the golden rule with special reference to a combination of these verses or from a more general angle: Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 162, 167; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 12; Minutes of the 1818 General Assembly, 29; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 65-6, 114-5, 121; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 3-4; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 275-8; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 27-8; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 50.

¹⁰ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 264. See also Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 25.

¹¹ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 148.

In the New Testament all of the occasions of the golden rule are attributed to the lips of Jesus. Besides those passages already discussed above (Matt 7:12, 22:35-40, 25:40, 45; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28), there are also Luke 6:31 “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise;” and John 15:12, 17 “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. . . . These things I command you, that ye love one another.”¹²

Apologists did not totally ignore the role of the golden rule in the discussion on American slavery. Stringfellow in particular agreed that all of the Old Testament laws fit under these two greatest commandments. However, he was careful to point out that the laws related to slavery were no exception. They too fit under the golden rule.

The laws which [God through Moses] gave them emanated from his sovereign pleasure, and were designed . . . to make known those principles of action by the exercise of which man attains his highest moral elevation, viz: supreme love to God, and love to others as to ourselves. . . . With these views to guide us, as to the acknowledged design of the law, viz: that of revealing the eternal principles of moral rectitude, by which human conduct is to be measured, so that sin may abound, or be made apparent, and righteousness be ascertained or known, we may safely conclude, that the institution of slavery, which legalizes the holding one person in bondage as property forever by another, if it be morally wrong, or at war with the principle which requires us to love God supremely, and our neighbor as ourself, will, if noticed at all in the law, be noticed, for the purpose of being condemned as sinful.¹³

Stringfellow gave two specific examples of how the golden rule upheld the apologists' application of various proof-texts. First, he claimed that it validated the purchasing of

¹²Regarding Jesus' words in John 15, Sunderland stated, “And how can the system of slave-holding stand in the presence of these words? *This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you.* That is, you should love one another as really, and as sincerely, in your sphere, as I have loved you in mine.” Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 77.

¹³Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 473-4.

slaves.¹⁴ Second, he claimed that it justified the treatment of slaves as any other domestic relation.¹⁵ Priest maintained that the golden rule does not alter the institution itself but is entirely consistent with it.

Even the famous words of our Lord called the *Golden Rule*, cannot apply *here*. Neither does this rule appear with power to break down any *civil* establishment of society; it was not so intended or understood, by the first disciples and writers of the New Testament. It was not intended by that great and good doctrine, that *servants* and *masters*, *debtors* and *creditors*, *rich* and *poor*, should change condition, or even to be put on a *par* with each other by that precept of the Lord. It signified nothing more than that all men, under *all* circumstances of trouble, should do by each other in all kindness, just what they would reasonably desire done to themselves in like circumstances. This precept, therefore, was not meant to reach the case of slavery, as to its *abolishment*.¹⁶

Junkin cited the golden rule while arguing against immediate emancipationists.¹⁷ He wrote:

To turn out slaves into the kind of freedom which they enjoy—rather which they endure and suffer in our Free States, . . . with the habits, the education, the ignorance of men and business which they mostly labor under, would be to act a cruel part, directly in opposition to the Saviour's golden rule. No man but a fool would wish to be thus set free. . . . the man in whose hands the Divine Providence has thrown any of his fellow men in this form, is bound by every tie that can bind the soul of man, not to set them free, until he can do it to their advantage. . . . he is bound, by God's authority, to sustain the charge, to endure the labor of caring for them, making them work, feeding, clothing, and instructing them, and thus fitting them for the use of freedom, and so leading on to that result, whenever it can be done consistently with the highest interests of the community. . . . We have a sample of it often in the treatment of children. Some parents take no control over their children. . . . God's law requires and commands parents to rule their children. They have no right to set them free, until they are first educated and fitted to provide for themselves. So masters are bound to keep their servants in bondage, until they are fitted to be free.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 479.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 480.

¹⁶ Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*, 398.

¹⁷ Junkin, *Integrity of Our National Union*, 77.

Immediate abolition would be, in almost all cases, a gross violation of the universal law of love.¹⁸

While the golden rule may rightly strip away the most heinous abuses of the system, apologists believed that it in no way invalidated the institution as a whole.¹⁹ Barnes, among other abolitionists, would argue to the contrary that if the golden rule were applied to the various practices related to slavery, what would be left would not be involuntary chattel slavery but some voluntary form of employment.²⁰ The implications of the golden rule are far reaching in general with regard to racial issues, and they relate profoundly to the issue of American slavery.²¹

Equality

Another primary principle that played a key role in the American slavery discussion was that of equality. On this principle Barnes argued:

The doctrine that all the race are on a level before God; that all are redeemed by the same blood; that all are equally the heirs of life; that all are moral and responsible beings; that all are descended from the same parent. The instructions of the Saviour do not go against all distinctions in life. They recognise the relations of father and son; of ruler and subject; of the rich and poor, as those which are not inconsistent with his grand fundamental position—that in the matter of redemption all men are on a level. In these relations all are to be recognised as men; as capable of redemption; as free moral agents; and no one by nature is supposed to have any priority or superiority

¹⁸ Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 77-78.

¹⁹ “How, therefore, is it true, as abolitionists say, that the enslaving of the race originated in the foulest wickedness? It is not true, never was and never will be, except in the *abuse* of the institution.” Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 411.

²⁰ Barnes, Inquiry, 57, 292, 314-5, 340-65, 377.

²¹ Francis Gerald Ensley, “On Loving One’s Neighbor as Oneself,” chapter in The Pulpit Speaks on Race, ed. Alfred T. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 50-51.

over the other. But slavery *always* supposes that there is a distinction *different* from that which arises from regarding them as sustaining the relation of parent and child; as qualified to govern or not, and as fitted for different occupations of life where all may be free. It is supposed to be such a distinction in nature as to make it proper that one should be a master and the other a slave. . . . Yet it is clear that [the philosophy behind slavery] is entirely at variance with the fundamental doctrine in the plan of redemption.²²

In this manner Barnes hit on a foundational issue behind American slavery: the presupposition of superiority based on race or caste. Elliott would follow in Barnes' footsteps and later come to the same conclusion:

The natural equality of mankind is one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, on which the whole system is based, and which sends its influence into all parts of the system. One of the fundamental doctrines of slavery, that one class of men is superior to another, is at variance with this Scripture doctrine. . . . the doctrine of the essential equality of mankind, will prove fatal to slavery: that all men have one common father, that the same blood flows in all human veins, that all are redeemed by the blood of Christ, that all are partakers alike of Christian privileges, that all are bound to perform the same everlasting inheritance—these great truths, flowing from the equality of human nature, are directly subversive of slavery, and at no distant day they will overthrow it.²³

Thompson went further by adding, “The principle of equality which the New Testament lays down for the government of its disciples, wrought out the abolition of Slavery first in the Church, and by the Church throughout the Roman Empire.”²⁴ Involuntary systems of slavery generally rely upon the presupposition of inequality.

There are three passages in the New Testament, which received special attention in reference to the relationship between the Bible's teaching on equality and

²²Barnes, Inquiry, 246.

²³Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 308-9.

²⁴Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 42.

American slavery.²⁵ The first is Acts 10:34 “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, ‘Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.’” Bourne, for one, used this passage to support the equality of all people.²⁶ A century later Maston would make the same case from this verse in relation to racial equality. “He does not look on or judge men by the color of their skin or by their general external conditions; he looks on the heart.” . . . Since God expects his children to be like him, we should not be respecters of persons.”²⁷ These words in Acts 10:34 begin a speech Peter made at Cæsarea when he began his ministry to the Gentiles in that region. It was a groundbreaking moment in the history of Christianity, for God was sending Peter, for the first time, to the Gentiles to graft those who believed into the family of God. Peter’s statement was revolutionary; for the first time people were allowed into God’s family apart from the rite of circumcision. While the statement is directed most specifically toward Jews and Gentiles, it was used in the American slavery discussion to promote equality as one of the primary principles of scripture.

The second passage is Gal 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Paul was reproving Christians in Galatia, who were falling prey to Judaizers. He reminded his readers of the equality all members have in the body of Christ. As examples of

²⁵ Besides these three passages, it was also argued that Jesus, in general, taught equality. Special attention was given to the Sermon on the Mount, for example. Thompson wrote, “Christ reasserted the unity of the race; the equality of all men before God.” Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 27.

²⁶ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 167.

²⁷ Maston, The Bible and Race, 33.

distinctions that no longer matter among God's people, Paul listed bond and free. Thompson handled this verse as a proof-text, and as an application argued that it called for the abolition of the institution of slavery.

There is neither Jew nor Greek—there are no favorites in this spiritual commonwealth; there is *neither bond nor free*—no distinctions of caste are here allowed; there is neither male nor female—no tyranny of the stronger sex over the weaker, no special privileges whatever in this kingdom; for ye are all ONE in Christ Jesus. . . . What then is the *duty* of Christians toward [slavery]? . . . They may not be able at once to do away with the law of Slavery in the State; but they should practically abolish in the Church the distinction of bond and free, and give to the slave his equal rights as a man.²⁸

The self-styled “conservative,” VanRensselaer, attempted to accomplish no more than ridding slavery of its dependence upon the idea of the inequality of people. “The long-existing middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, was at length overthrown by Christianity. Thenceforward, all mankind stood in the new relation of a common brotherhood.”²⁹ There was virtually no response by apologists to any use of this verse.

The third passage is Acts 17:26 “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.”³⁰ Abolitionists made a similar point with respect to this verse: since all people are descended from one man, there is a physical equality among all

²⁸ Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 41-3.

²⁹ Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 45.

³⁰ Once again Maston would eventually apply this text to racial segregation and racial inequality: Maston, The Bible and Race, 16, 24.

people and, therefore, an overall equality before their Creator.³¹ Apologists, on the other hand, disagreed. Priest, whose entire argument hanged on the pre-supposition of the inferiority of the Negro race, argued most vehemently that God miraculously created two new races when Noah's sons, Japheth and Ham, were born.³² According to Priest, Ham was the first of the Negro race; "there was never any negro blood in the veins of Adam, nor blood which produced the black or African race."³³ Priest would then go on to explain in detail that Luke, being a doctor, intended to reflect that all people have one blood but with two different "secreting principles:" one for the race descended from Japheth and one for the race descended from Ham.³⁴ Stringfellow, who argued that these primary principles do not necessarily destroy the institution of slavery or its most necessary features, argued the same regarding Paul's words here and their impact on the institution of slavery. "All these nations were made of one blood. Yet God ordained that some should be 'chattel' slaves to others,

³¹ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 132, 164, 166; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 3; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 307-8.

³² "GOD, who made all things, and endowed all animated nature with the strange and unexplained power of propagation, superintended the formation of two sons of NOAH, in the womb of their mother, in an extraordinary and *supernatural* manner, giving to these two children such forms of bodies, constitutions of natures, and complexions of skin, as suited his *will*. Those two sons were JAPHETH and HAM. Japheth he caused to be *born* white, differing from the color of his parents, while He caused Ham to be born *black*, . . . It was, therefore, by the miraculous intervention of the Divine power that the *black* and *white* man have been produced, equally as much as was the creation of the color of the first man, the Creator giving him a complexion, arbitrarily, that pleased his Divine will." Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 33.

³³ *Ibid.*, 160-1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 162-3.

and gave his special aid to effect it.”³⁵ Apologists were required to limit the semantic range of “equality” in order to have it pertain to things unnecessary to the system of slavery, whereas abolitionists had to broaden its range in order to apply it to the essential aspects of slavery. The equality of all members of the human race was frequently a matter of discussion during the nineteenth-century American slavery debates.

Family: The Brotherhood of All Christians

The equality of all people is the basis for the golden rule. Loving others as one’s self or doing to others as one would have others do to the one is impossible without an understanding of equality. The same is true for the next principle under investigation: the brotherhood of all Christians. Barnes himself argued that the idea of Christian brotherhood and the practice of slavery are inconsistent with one another.

Under the gospel, and in accordance with its principles, no relation was to exist, which would be inconsistent with the honest recognition of all who bore the Christian name and image as *brethren*. They were to be regarded as Christian brethren in all respects, and there was to be nothing in their condition which would make the application of the term to any and to all improper. Matth. xxiii. 8. “One is your master—καθηγητης: *and all ye are brethren*—πάντες δὲ ὑμεῖς ἀδελφοί ἐστε. . . . To apply the term *brethren* to those who are *slaves*, is a departure from all just use of the language, and is a mockery of the feelings which it is condescendingly designed to soothe.”³⁶

³⁵Stringfellow, “Examination of Elder Galusha’s Reply,” 493. Charles Elliott would counter this argument. “It is argued that the negroes are by nature *inferior* to the whites, and may therefore be justly held as slaves. If the argument mean that they are a *different race* from the whites, it is the reasoning of an infidel, and not of a believer in divine revelation, which asserts that God ‘made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth,’ Acts xvii, 26.” Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 244.

³⁶Barnes, Inquiry, 246-7.

This is the same point Barnes believed Paul was making in his letter to Philemon (especially v. 16).

The principles laid down in this epistle to Philemon, therefore, would lead to the universal abolition of slavery. If all those who are now slaves were to become Christians, and their masters were to treat them “not as slaves, but as brethren beloved,” the period would not be far distant when slavery would cease. This would probably be admitted by all. . . . For, a state of things which would be destroyed by Christianity is not right at any time. Christianity, even in its highest influences, interferes with nothing that is good and would annihilate nothing which is not wrong.³⁷

A decade earlier Sunderland had made a similar point relying, as his proof-text, on 1 John 3:16. “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” Sunderland wrote, “It is a strange fact, that the wicked enslavers of the human species, such as make no pretensions to any religious principle in the regulation of their conduct, will never refuse to risk their lives in their efforts to keep the slaves in bondage, and yet how few, how very few professing Christians and Christian ministers are found, who will run even the hazard of losing a little property, in order to restore to their brethren the unalienable rights of which they have been so unjustly deprived.”³⁸ In the same year Barnes’ Inquiry was first published, Bourne reminded his readers of the adopted family ministry ancient Israel had during its days under Mosaic law. “The native Jews and their posterity, were to ‘inherit’ or ‘possess’ these adopted foreigners and their posterity, by circumcision and incorporation into the body of the nation, after which the latter became as much ‘brethren’ and ‘children of Israel’ as the lineal descendants of

³⁷ Barnes, Inquiry, 330.

³⁸ Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 98.

Abraham were.”³⁹ Elliott would apply Jesus’ statement in Matt 23:8 (wherein He instructed His disciples to consider themselves as equal brothers) to slavery’s incompatibility with each family member’s duty in the family of God.

The brotherhood of Christianity is at variance with slavery. All Christians were to be regarded as *brethren*. . . . This is the uniform language of the New Testament. There is nothing to hinder its proper use when the rich address the poor, or princes their subjects, or preachers their people; but there is much to prevent its use when applied by masters to their slaves, or of slaves to their masters. To apply the terms brethren and sisters to those who are slaves is a departure from all just language.⁴⁰

The golden rule and the principle of brotherhood among God’s family members are inexorably related to the principle of equality. All three of these principles are among the most prominent in scripture and directly related to the problems related to American slavery.

Oppression

So far, the primary principles discussed in this chapter have been positive ones: loving God, treating one’s neighbor well, the equality of all people, and the family bond Christians share in Christ. Not all of the primary principles of scripture are positive, however. For example, the Bible also warns against oppression.

Barnes made this argument primarily from passages in the Psalms.⁴¹ Three examples of such passages are Pss 12:5, 72:4, 140:12. Barnes puts American slaves in the

³⁹ Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 48.

⁴⁰ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 348.

⁴¹ He does, however, come to the same conclusion based on passages elsewhere, especially Isa 58:6; Barnes, Inquiry, 220-4.

position of the poor when applying these texts to the problems related to slavery. To Barnes, slaves were not just victims of kidnaping, they were the poor people in the community.

The idea is that God, in all his attributes, in all his providential arrangements, in all his interpositions on earth, would be found to be on the side of the oppressed, the afflicted, and the wronged. He has no attribute that can take part with an oppressor or a wrong doer. The wicked cannot come to him with the belief that he will be on their side: —the righteous—the oppressed—the afflicted—can.⁴²

Other abolitionists joined Barnes in naming withheld wages among the chief ways American slave-holders were guilty of oppressing their slaves.⁴³ This argument was made from Mosaic legislation (especially Lev 19:13 and Deut 24:14-15).⁴⁴ Jer 22:13 was another staging point for this argument.⁴⁵ The connection between withheld wages and oppression was also made from Mal 3:5.⁴⁶ Elliott seized on Jesus' statement that "the laborer is worthy of his hire" in Luke 10:7 to make this same argument.⁴⁷ Paul's instructions to masters in Col 4:1 forbids

⁴²Barnes, Notes, 4:302; see also idem, Inquiry, 106-7, 245.

⁴³Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 148-9, 156; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 24; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 127; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 262, 275.

⁴⁴Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 115; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 45; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 114, 118.

⁴⁵Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 64; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 114, 261-2, vol. 2, 279.

⁴⁶Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 15-6, 156; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 118.

⁴⁷Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 261-2. Elliott made the same argument based on the similar wording of 1 Tim 5:18. See also Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 49.

this same kind of oppression.⁴⁸ Sunderland made this connection from 1 Thess 4:3, 6.⁴⁹ It also would have been impossible for abolitionists to miss the cry of jilted laborers coming to the ears of God in Jas 5:4.⁵⁰ The sheer volume of passages in scripture referring to withheld wages as oppression is enough to warrant its candidacy for one of the primary principles of scripture. Abolitionists were quick to apply these passages to the poor economic condition of American slaves.⁵¹ “The law of love requires us to act justly toward all men. Hence, it requires masters to render to their servants a *just equivalent* for their services. But slavery refuses to do this.”⁵²

Depriving a worker of his just wages is only one form of oppression. Besides economic oppression American slavery was notorious for its physical oppression.⁵³

⁴⁸ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 161; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 261-2.

⁴⁹ Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 90.

⁵⁰ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 156; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 13-4.; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 97; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 114, 118, 262; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 28.

⁵¹ Brookes, among other apologists, would argue that slaves were given every necessity of life, and were certainly better off than their counterparts in Africa or even among the poorer white families of America: Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 38.

⁵² Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 275.

⁵³ Documentation from that era regarding the treatment of slaves went beyond Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Thomas Branagan, A Preliminary Essay on the Oppression of the Exiled Sons of Africa (New York: Arno, 1804); Mary Dudley, Scripture Evidence of the Sinfulness of Injustice and Oppression Respectfully Submitted to Professing Christians, in order to Call forth Their Sympathy and Exertions, on behalf of the Much-Injured Africans (London: Harvey and Darton, 1828); Le Mabbett and Elisha Burritt, Stolen Goods: Or, the Gains of Oppression (Ohio: Managers of the Free Produce Association of Friends of Ohio

Hodge was careful to warn abolitionists not to throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water.

The grand mistake, as we apprehend, of those who maintain that slaveholding is itself a crime, is, that they do not discriminate between slaveholding in itself considered, and its accessories at any particular time or place. Because masters may treat their slaves unjustly, or governments make oppressive laws in relation to them, is no more a valid argument against the lawfulness of slaveholding, than the abuse of parental authority, or the unjust political laws of certain states, is an argument against the lawfulness of the parental relation, or of civil government.⁵⁴

We readily admit, that if God does condemn all the parts of which slavery consists, he condemns slavery itself. . . . That many of the attributes of the system as established by law in this country, are condemned, is indeed very plain; but that slaveholding in itself is condemned, has not been and can not be proved.⁵⁵

Likewise, Priest reminded his readers that the Mosaic calls for mercy were found in the same context as legislation for slavery. A point he took to mean that they could easily coexist.⁵⁶

Most abolitionists, however, could not ignore how essential physical oppression was to the forced, involuntary form of labor known as slavery. Sometimes accusations of oppression appeared as a summary argument between discussions of particular proof-texts.⁵⁷ Sometimes they were attached to particular texts that directly addressed

Yearly Meeting, 1850); Wilson Armistead, A 'Cloud of Witnesses' against Slavery and Oppression (London: W. Tweedie, 1853); C. Gray, Slavery, or, Oppression at the North as Well as the South! (Worcester, Massachusetts: Gray, 1862).

⁵⁴Hodge, "Bible Argument on Slavery," 850.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 853.

⁵⁶Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 107, 111-5. See Stringfellow's similar argument from the prophets in "Examination of Elder Galusha's Reply," 500.

⁵⁷For instance, "We enjoin it on all Church Sessions and Presbyteries, under the care of this Assembly, to discountenance, and, as far as possible, to prevent, all cruelty of whatever kind in the treatment of slaves; especially the cruelty of separating husband and

oppression. For example, abolitionists frequently made reference to Egyptian bondage. It was called “oppressive” by God and, to one degree or another, resembled American slavery.⁵⁸ Moses included anti-oppression language in his laws.⁵⁹ God is portrayed as standing up for the poor and oppressed throughout the historical books of the Old Testament.⁶⁰ There are plenty of references to the oppressed in the poetic books of the Old Testament, which were frequently the subject of anti-slavery arguments.⁶¹ However, there are even more frequent references to the prophets’ denunciations of oppression—especially as that oppression related to various forms of servitude in the prophetic era.⁶² Elliott and

wife, parents and children.” Minutes of the 1818 General Assembly, 33. There are too many generic references such as this one for it to be practical to list them here, but following are several prime examples: Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 75, 98, 115, 120; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 54-5; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 1; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 183, 260-1; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 48.

⁵⁸ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 188; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 100; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 1; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 261, 264, 279.

⁵⁹ Exod 22:21; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 45.

⁶⁰ See Sunderland’s detailed discussion of the matter in Testimony of God against Slavery, 29-37.

⁶¹ Sunderland also treats this in detail in Testimony of God against Slavery, 37-50. Ps 12:5; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 8; Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 261. Ps 77:4; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 261. Prov 22:2-23; Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 156-7. Eccl 4:1-3; Joseph Thompson, Voice of God, 3-26. Eccl 5:8; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 261; Joseph Thompson, Voice of God, 3-26.

⁶² Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 110-2; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 54-55. For special reference to Isaiah, see Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 54-58; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 8; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 260. Emphasis was also given to passages in Ezekiel: Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 156; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 68-69; Pond,

Thompson championed the same cause Jesus did relative to the oppressed of His day.⁶³ Throughout the Bible there are so many references to the poor and oppressed that it warrants the designation of “primary principle.” One can well see why Barnes would write, “The conclusions which I am authorized to draw from this signal interposition in behalf of an oppressed people, are, that such oppression is hateful to God; that the acts of cruelty and wickedness which are necessary to perpetuate such oppression, are the objects of his abhorrence.”⁶⁴ The negative side of this principle is not to oppress people. The positive side is to stand up for the oppressed and offer them a helping hand.⁶⁵ The fact that oppression and poverty relate so directly to American slaves furthered the helpfulness of this principle as those in the discussion sought to measure the applicability of proof-texts to the problems related to slavery.

Other Biblical Examples of the Primary Principles of Scripture

Among the primary principles of scripture, the golden rule, equality, brotherhood, and oppression were most frequently used by Barnes as measurements by which proof-texts were applied to the American slavery discussion. There are other principles of

Slavery and the Bible, 8.

⁶³ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 87; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 3-4, 27.

⁶⁴ Barnes, Inquiry, 104.

⁶⁵ “The biblical injunction for Israel as a state is to protect the weak, the helpless, and the poor. . . . These laws reflect an understanding of the reason for poverty and try to deal with its victims non-violently.” Matthews, “Anthropology of Slavery,” 125.

scripture, nearly as important, which, for various reasons, were not as frequently referred to or relied upon as heavily. Some of them are identified indirectly; some of them were used by other abolitionists but not by Barnes. Among these are Jesus' great commission, the fruit of the Spirit, the Ten Commandments, and the commands found in Mic 6:8. How these principles were used and related to the discussion on American slavery will be discussed briefly.

The Great Commission

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’ Amen”
—Matt 28: 18-20

“And he said unto them, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.’”
—Mark 16:15

Immediately before Jesus ascended into Heaven He gave His disciples this commission. As was previously demonstrated in the second chapter of this current work, Barnes' leadership and involvement among New School Presbyterians was related, in large part, to his passion for personal evangelism and spiritual revival. Barnes was quite put off that American slaves were being deprived of opportunities to hear the gospel and grow as Christians. In his discussion of Moses' provision for religious improvement Barnes wrote that “Slaves were to be stately instructed in the duties of morality and religion.”⁶⁶ There was also much emphasis given to the spiritual and educational benefits of attending the

⁶⁶Barnes, Inquiry, 130.

various national and family feasts.⁶⁷ Evangelism and discipleship were high priorities with Barnes. Any application of a proof-text that hindered the spread of the gospel or the spiritual growth of a slave was therefore suspect.

The Fruit of the Spirit

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

—Gal 5:22-23

Paul contrasted these nine virtues to fifteen “deeds of the flesh” (vv. 19-21).

Most telling is Paul’s giving priority to these nine virtues with the words, “against such there is no law.” In other words, try as one might, there is no law that hinders the practice of these virtues. These nine virtues, also known as the “fruit of the Spirit,” served as primary principles of scripture in the American slavery debate. Any application of proof-texts, therefore, should take these virtues into consideration.

Love is the first virtue.⁶⁸ It had already been demonstrated to be a vital part of the slavery debate as it pertains to the golden rule.⁶⁹ In 1 Corinthians 13 it certainly had a

⁶⁷ Ibid., 129-32, 177, 182-3.

⁶⁸ This is the term ἀγάπη—an unconditional love. Maston, The Bible and Race, 80.

⁶⁹ Barnes, Inquiry, 57, 248, 292, 314-5, 340-65, 377; Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 148, 154, 162, 167; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 12; Minutes of the 1818 General Assembly, 29; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 65-6, 114-5, 121, 137-8; Channing, Slavery, 120, 124; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 25, 74-77; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 3-4; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 264, 275-9; vol. 2, 266; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 27-8; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 50. See also Stringfellow, “The Bible Argument,” 473-80; Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 77-78; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 398, 411. Priest, however, argued that love is secondary to judgment in the case of

priority among the spiritual gifts as well.⁷⁰ Love was frequently used as a measurement for how proof-texts were applied to the problems related to slavery.⁷¹

Priest argued that joy takes a back seat to God's judgment.

It is said, by this class of men, that the *benevolence* of the Gospel contemplates the personal happiness of every human being; and as *individual freedom* is an item in the sum of moral enjoyments, therefore, the Gospel, in its *spirit* and tendencies, is against slavery of every description, and demands its abolishment.

But, we answer this position, by saying, that, although the spirit and tendencies of the Christian religion most assuredly does contemplate the entire and perfect *moral* happiness of the whole human race, upon certain *conditions*, as obedience to its commands, &c., yet it does *not*, and *cannot* interfere, as we have before said, with the *judgment, decrees, or judicial* acts of God, until the *purposes* of such acts are accomplished in the earth.⁷²

According to Priest's way of thinking, there are plenty of things in life, which do not produce joy, but this does not mean that such things are wrong. Joy, he would correctly argue, is not a very helpful primary principle when it comes to measuring the applicability of pro-slavery proof-texts to the American slavery discussion.

Hodge rightly accused a great number of abolitionists of thwarting peace in God's family by conducting themselves the way they did during their efforts to abolish slavery. He created two categories of anti-slavery people in the North. The first category

God's punishing the descendants of Ham: Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*, 336-7.

⁷⁰Love is a prominent feature in John's writings especially but also throughout the whole Bible.

⁷¹Bourne wrote "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; but slavery works the greatest ill: it is contrary to love." Bourne, *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable*, 154. See also Paxton, *Letters on Slavery*, 67; Sunderland, *Testimony of God against Slavery*, 77, 98; Joseph Thompson, *Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery*, 39.

⁷²Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*, 397.

was full of peace-loving people who want to see the minds of their counterparts in the South change toward slavery. The second group was comprised of the abolitionists who wanted the ends to be accomplished despite the inappropriateness of the means. Hodge contended that the latter category of people is subject to criticism as being against the Christian virtue of peace.⁷³ Barnes had already warned them of the same.⁷⁴

Gentleness (or sometimes “kindness”) was also used as a primary principle to analyze the problems related to slavery. From his studies of the Laws of Moses, Barnes found that “if a master in any way mutilated a slave; if he merely deprived him of one of his teeth, he had a right to liberty. In this country, however, neither by wrongs done to him or his family, nor by purchase by himself or his friends, can the slave claim his freedom.”⁷⁵ In general, “the Mosaic system enjoined affection and kindness towards servants, foreign as well as Jewish.”⁷⁶ The same priority of kindness over particular laws can be seen elsewhere in scripture as well.⁷⁷ It would be difficult to prove that gentleness is essential to the perpetuation of American slavery. Gentleness did, however, provide a helpful parameter to the master’s behavior toward his slaves.

⁷³Hodge, “Bible Argument on Slavery,” 872.

⁷⁴Barnes, Inquiry, 30, 260-70.

⁷⁵Ibid., 189.

⁷⁶Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 46.

⁷⁷Eph 4:32 is perhaps the best example; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 88.

Goodness naturally flowed from the other virtues. "This law of love is kind. It teaches to do good to all. If we love our neighbor, we will endeavor to promote his happiness and do him good. It certainly can not be doing him good to seize on him, and his property, and his family, and appropriate to ourselves."⁷⁸ Goodness naturally overflowed into benevolence toward others. "The principle of the kingdom is benevolence. The subjects are required to serve each other according to their respective abilities and necessities. All despotic domination is forbidden in Christianity."⁷⁹ It was difficult for many to see the goodness in the system of American slavery.

Abolitionists also pointed to the violent nature of slave-holders as contradicting the virtues of meekness and temperance. "How does the idea of *meekness* and *Christian humility* agree with that of a *soul-driver*, or *slave-holder*?"⁸⁰

The brutal outrages of masters to each other can only be accounted for, that slaveholding leads those who are engaged in it to such overt acts. Slaveholders, exercising from childhood irresponsible powers over human beings, become, in a great measure, unfitted for self-control, in their intercourse with each other. Tempers unaccustomed to restraint, in reference to slaves, will not be well controlled toward equals. The state of society in slave states producing duels, open murders, so that the murderers are lauded as honorable men, is nearly allied in spirit with the treatment toward slaves. When slaveholders are in the habit of caning, stabbing, and shooting each other, to an extent not found in the free states, we must criminate the slave system as the cause.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 275-6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁸⁰ Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 87.

⁸¹ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 2, 75.

Elliott went to great lengths to prove that such behavior was commonplace among slaveholders. He showed how practicing one's rights as master often led to a loss of self-control.

While one might agree with Paul that against these virtues there is no law, one might also wonder how helpful these primary principles were in determining the rightness or wrongness of slavery. Longsuffering and faithfulness, for example, were not generally picked up in the discussion. Certainly slaves might be encouraged to endure the harsh treatment of their masters, but such longsuffering would not justify or necessitate the perpetuation of the institution. Faithfulness to God might also be encouraged among slaves, but it likewise had little to do with the system as a whole. Of these nine virtues, perhaps love, gentleness, and temperance would be the most helpful as primary principles. If a master could not show love to his slaves, or if the slaves could not show love to their masters while applying certain proof-texts to the problems related to slavery, then perhaps the proof-texts were being misapplied. To encourage a slave to be longsuffering was no justification for the master to lack gentleness and temperance. As a group, the fruit of the spirit was generally a helpful guide to living the Christian life, but these three virtues may have been more relevant to the American slavery discussion. The other virtues were important too, but slavery most directly related to these three.

The Ten Commandments

Among the Old Testament laws, the Ten Commandments held a place of distinct prominence. They were not ignored by those on either side of the American slavery debate. George Bourne, for example, made stealing and kidnaping his primary foci

throughout his 1816 work, The Bible and Slavery Irreconcilable. In this manner he related the eighth and tenth commandments.

The ancient Jews understood the words in the decalogue, *Thou shalt not steal*, of *man-stealing*; and thought that the other sorts of thefts were implied in the last precept, *Thou shalt not covet*. Under the Mosaic law, *man-stealing* was the only capital robbery; for the theft of property was expiated by ample restitution. But to *enslave a Jew*, was deemed an equal crime with *murder*; and as it virtually involves the same consequences, it insured the same punishment: and it was no subject of inquiry, whether the slave was actually kidnapped by the claimant, or purchased from another; but if it could be manifested, that such a person was detained by him *contrary to the law of God*, no alternative existed, *death was his immediate portion*.⁸²

Bourne also argued that slave-holding in America often prohibited children from obeying the commandment to honoring their father and mother.⁸³ Elliott, however, may hold the distinction of presenting the most extensive and elaborate argument based on the decalogue of anyone on either side of this debate. He went into great detail on how every commandment was violated in the practice of slavery.⁸⁴ In general, the apologists only used the fourth and the tenth commandments to demonstrate that, right from the beginning of Israel's national history, God recognized the need to legislate the practice of slavery.⁸⁵

⁸² Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 123. See also pp. 155-6; idem, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 19, 39, 63. Other abolitionists argued from the eighth and tenth commandments as well: Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 20-2.

⁸³ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 168. The same argument would be made from Paul's instructions to families in his epistles. Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 161, 168; Minutes of the 1818 General Assembly, 33; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 56; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 27; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 94, 258, 285-7, 315-6; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 48-9.

⁸⁴ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 310-43.

⁸⁵ Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 23, 29; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 468, 473; Alexander Campbell, "Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law," 515-7; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 104; Brookes, Defence of Southern Slavery, 13-14.

Weld, however, would counter, however, “If that proves *servants* property, it proves *wives* property.”⁸⁶

Although the Ten Commandments were widely recognized as the foremost of the laws of Moses, they were not equally used by those on either side of the debate. Just as was the case with the fruit of the Spirit, so also the individual commandments vary in their applicability to the problems related to American slavery. Since slavery is a relationship between people—not between people and God, the commandments related to God (such as the first and second) were, at best, only indirectly applicable to the problems related to slavery. The presence of slaves in the fourth and tenth commandments reflected the possibility that the institution might exist in at least some utopian form—but not in the image of American slavery. Bourne was correct when he related the eighth commandment to stealing people; this is highly applicable to slave trading at all stages. Somewhere in between the most and least applicable of the Ten Commandments is the seventh commandment (not to commit adultery). This was an error related to slavery which sensitive Christians on neither side of the debate could easily overlook.⁸⁷ In summary, some of the Ten Commandments would be more helpful to the American slavery discussion than others.

Mic 6:8

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

⁸⁶ Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 76.

⁸⁷ Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 149-58, 329, vol. 2, 106; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 183-4.

It is not unusual for biblical scholars to recognize the commands in this verse as primary principles of scripture. Bourne referred to the inconsistency between slavery and these commands.

What an intolerable evil! How incredible! How disgraceful! that men in the Land of Liberty and filling official stations under the authority of the BOOK, require to be instructed, that to steal, buy and sell men, women and children is contrary to the Gospel; that to defraud the labourer of his hire, to rob the mind of necessary light and the heart of indispensable melioration, and to doom the human race to labour lasting as their existence, without food, raiment, a habitation, and other necessaries to support life and recruit nature exhausted by endless fatigue; are totally incompatible with the precept, *do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God*; and that all who engage in this odious and most criminal violation of the eighth commandment, should cease every pretension to Christianity.⁸⁸

Barnes never referred to this verse during his contributions to the discussion on American slavery, nor did many other abolitionists. Still, its place in the Old Testament seems to warrant Bourne's use of it as two primary principles of scripture. Justice correlated with goodness in Paul's fruit of the Spirit. Either side might claim that it is good to practice or not to practice slavery. Even walking humbly with God was not so directly related to slavery for the same reason that the greatest command, faithfulness to God, and the first two commandments are not so directly related—they deal primarily with one's relationship to God. Mercy, on the other hand, is related to slaves seeking better wages or even emancipation. A system of slavery without mercy could be argued to be a system

⁸⁸ Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 148-9.

inconsistent with the mercy of God.⁸⁹ In nineteenth-century America, however, such displays of mercy were so rare that they were almost non-existent.

Among the primary principles of scripture listed above, the most helpful to the slavery discussion may very well have been the golden rule, equality in the church in particular and in the world in general, oppression, evangelism and discipleship, gentleness, temperance, stealing, coveting, and mercy. Along the way in this chapter, each principle has been informally evaluated as to how helpful it might have been to the discussion on American slavery. To conclude this discussion of primary principles and their role in the slavery debate, it would be wise to lay down some objective parameters for choosing principles for the task of evaluating the applicability of proof-texts.

Criteria Used to Determine Which Principles
are Best Fitted to the Task of Measuring
the Applicability of Proof-Texts

Based on the preceding data it has been reasonably demonstrated that the hermeneutical method Albert Barnes applied to the debate on American slavery required that the biblical texts directly addressing slavery be supplemented by a principle-driven approach. In closing, however, one stone still remains unturned. When modern scholars seek to evaluate Barnes' methodology to American slavery, they still must decide which principles of

⁸⁹ Even in ancient Israel there were regular times of mercy shown to all slaves. See, for example the discussions already alluded to in the third chapter of this current work: Barnes, Inquiry, 143-56; Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 79, 91; Sunderland, Testimony of God against Slavery, 25, 28; Weld, The Bible against Slavery, 134; Bourne, Condensed Anti-Slavery Argument, 39, 47; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 87; Joseph Thompson, Teachings of the New Testament on Slavery, 13; Van Rensselaer, Letters and Replies on Slavery, 44-45; Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 30; Stringfellow, "The Bible Argument," 475; Priest, Bible Defence of Slavery, 407.

scripture were most primary and most helpful. Just as the same slavery-related texts were often used by both sides of the debate to come to opposite conclusions, so also the primary principles of scripture, if manipulated enough, could face the same demise. In short, what criteria might modern scholars use to objectively evaluate the helpfulness of a proposed primary principle of scripture to the American slavery debate? Based on the examples specifically listed in this chapter, there are two criteria one might find especially helpful in identifying which primary principles should be used for the task of evaluating the application of proof-texts to American slavery.

Criterion #1: Not Too General, Not Too Specific

Some primary principles of scripture are so broad that they are susceptible to being able to be used by anyone for any reason. Goodness is an excellent example. Both apologists and abolitionists were convinced that their opinions regarding slavery were the right ones. If each was correct, then each could claim the virtue of goodness for their side. In other words, apologists would claim that slavery is good, and any attempt to say otherwise is a proverbial slap in the face of goodness. Love, although more directly related to the particulars of slavery, is another example of a primary principle that would be too general to be helpful. Abolitionists claimed that the ultimate act of love for a slave-holder would be to emancipate his slaves.⁹⁰ Apologists, on the other hand claimed that it would be quite unloving to turn out slaves on their own without carefully preparing those that might make it

⁹⁰Paxton, Letters on Slavery, 69-70, 121; Pond, Slavery and the Bible, 4; Charles Elliott, Sinfulness of American Slavery, vol. 1, 277-9.

for the cruel realities of free life.⁹¹ When the primary principle is too broad it proves to be unhelpful as a measurement of the applicability of proof-texts to a social issue such as slavery.

On the other hand, some primary principles of scripture are so narrow that they are susceptible to losing their status as “primary” or “central.” None of the principles introduced above are too narrow. If anything, most may be danger of being too broad. An example of a narrow principle may be found in Exod 21:16 “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.” In 1816 Bourne treated this verse as a primary principle among the Mosaic laws and based most of his argument upon measuring proof-texts against it.⁹² No matter what proof-text from the law of Moses an apologist might use, Bourne measured it against Exod 21:16. Although the contents of this verse may indeed summarize a few of the other laws of Moses, it is far too narrow to be seriously considered a primary principle of scripture. The same is true of the curse of Canaan in Gen 9:25 “And he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.’” In 1850 Priest subjugated any proof-text to the curse of Canaan. Declaring that the curse was judiciary rather than prophetic and related eternally to Ham’s descendants rather than only to the Canaanites who occupied the Promise Land, Priest dismissed any proof-text that crossed racial barriers. He insisted throughout his Bible Defence of Slavery that no proof-text, no matter how clearly anti-slavery, would shake the

⁹¹ Junkin, Integrity of Our National Union, 77-78; Alexander Campbell, “Slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law,” 514.

⁹² Bourne, The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable, 105, 119, 121, 123-5, 148-9, 153, 199.

principle of God's curse of the Hamitic race. Once again, however, the principle is too narrow. In reality the curse is little more than an obscure text that ancient Israelites did not even take seriously with respect to their Canaanite neighbors.⁹³

If a primary principle were to be too broad, it could be used by anyone for any reason under any circumstances. If the principle were too narrow, it might not be general enough to cover a particular set of proof-texts. It may be considered only a proof-text in and of itself.

Criterion #2: New Testament Principles over Old Testament Ones

Something rather drastic changed during the New Testament era. Jesus initiated an understanding of Old Testament laws by New Testament principles. His Sermon on the Mount is filled with examples. Even the distinctions once made according to the laws respecting slavery were now meaningless in the face of dignity and equality found in the New Testament.⁹⁴ In short, when a law of Moses respecting slavery is measured up against a primary principle from the New Testament, the principle should take over as the governing factor for how the proof-text should be applied. In the end, this is what made the abolitionists' arguments most valid. Swartley notes:

Abolitionist writers gave priority to theological principles and basic moral imperatives, which in turn put slavery under moral judgment. The point we should learn from this is that theological principles and basic moral imperatives should be primary biblical resources for addressing social issues today. These should carry

⁹³ Barnes, Inquiry, 207.

⁹⁴ Gal 3:28.

greater weight than specific statements on a given topic even though the statements speak expressly to the topic under discussion.⁹⁵

Using primary principles—especially from the New Testament—that are neither too broad nor too narrow and dealt with slavery in a fairly direct manner, abolitionists greatly strengthened their applications of specific proof-texts to the discussion on American slavery.

⁹⁵Swartley, Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women, 61.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The hermeneutical method Albert Barnes applied to the debate on American slavery required that the biblical texts directly addressing slavery be supplemented by a principle-driven approach. Barnes studied, understood, and used almost every text in the Bible that directly addressed slavery. In the third and fourth chapters of this current work Barnes' exhaustive inquiry of these texts was demonstrated at length. In the fifth chapter of this current work, however, examples were given of Barnes' minimizing the impact of arguments based on proof-texts alone.¹ His conclusions regarding the semantic range of the Hebrew and Greek terms for slave afforded him the advantage of being able to challenge any proof-text containing these terms.² Barnes made it difficult for Priest and other apologists to make their racially-prejudiced points regarding Noah's curse of Canaan based on the observation that the ancient Israelites did not even apply that proof-text to their own situation.³ Barnes repeatedly emphasized the temporary nature of the few laws respecting

¹Barnes, *Inquiry*, 377, 381.

²Barnes, *Inquiry*, 64-70.

³*Ibid.*, 207.

servitude arguing that their actual design was to overthrow the institution eventually.⁴ The discontinuity alone between the biblical particulars of slavery and the American particulars of slavery made direct applications of slavery-related texts few and far between.⁵

Barnes did not simply discard the Bible as a source of moral authority, however, to solve the problems related to slavery. He argued that the texts directly addressing slavery must take into consideration the primary principles of scripture. If a proof-text's application came into direct conflict with one of scripture's primary principles, then the application must be abandoned as contradictory to the Word of God.⁶ Barnes relied heavily upon primary principles such as the golden rule, equality, the brotherhood of all Christians, and the sinfulness of oppression to make this point.⁷ In the final analysis, this method of measuring the American slavery discussion's most widely-used proof-texts against the primary principles of scripture is what caused the tide to turn in favor of the abolitionists.⁸ Barnes' principle-driven approach became a necessary supplement to proof-text ethics.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 167-8, 219-21. He made a similar argument from the prophets (pp. 225-6), and from the New Testament (p. 273).

⁵ Barnes, *Inquiry*, 76-7, 145, 196, 260-70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 57

⁷ *Ibid.*, 57, 104, 106-7, 245-8, 292, 314-5, 330, 340-65, 377.

⁸ Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women*, 61.

The number one social issue in Barnes' lifetime was slavery.⁹ Today however, slavery is no longer an ongoing issue in America.¹⁰ Slavery has been replaced in America by civil rights and bio-ethical issues.

Many of the arguments regarding race in the slavery discussion carry over into the modern discussions on race. Americans have come a long way in a century and a half regarding the problems related to racism, but there is still ground to be covered. The fundamental shift in racial issues between the Old and New Testaments is as relevant to the modern discussion as it was to the slavery discussion. From the same passages referred to by

⁹Runners up would include women's rights, prison reform, and intemperance.

¹⁰It is sadly, however, still an issue in certain places. Junius P. Rodriguez, The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1997). During World War Two, for example many Japanese women were reduced to sexual slaves: Toshiyuki Tanaka, Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation, in Asia's Transformations (New York: Routledge, 2002); Yoshiaki Yoshimi and Suzanne O'Brien, Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II, in Asia Perspectives (New York: Columbia University, 2000); Akira Maeda, War Crimes and Human Rights: Thinking of Sexual Slavery by Japanese Army (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 1998); Heybhin Kim, "The Comfort Women" (M.F.A. thesis, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1998). There are countries today in southeast Asia, who reduce citizens to slaves under certain conditions: Georges Condominas, Formes extrêmes de dépendance: contributions à l'étude de l'esclavage en Asie du Sud-Est (Paris: Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1998); "Slavery in 1997," Asian Labour Update (July-September 1997); Anthony Reid and Jennifer Brewster, Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia (New York: St. Martin's, 1983). Prisoners of war in the Sudan have also been reduced to slavery: Jok Madut Jok, War and Slavery in Sudan (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2001); Michael Kiju Paul, "Churches Response in Slavery in Contemporary Sudan" (M.T.S. thesis, Virginia Theological Seminary, 2000); Amir H. Idris, Sudan's Civil War: Slavery, Race, and Formational Identities (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2001); Angela Maria Velasquez, "Contemporary Slavery in the Sudan: A Modern Crisis in Human Rights" (M.A. thesis, UCLA, 1999); Cal R. Bombay, Let My People Go!: The True Story of Present-Day Persecution and Slavery (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 1998); Taj Hargey, "The Suppression of Slavery in the Sudan, 1898-1939" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 1981).

the abolitionists to establish equality as a primary principle of scripture, those engaging in racial discussions today may find helpful direction.¹¹ The golden rule, equality, and humility are three primary principles of scripture, which should be used to measure the applicability of biblical texts to modern racial issues. A proper understanding of the Bible's teaching on race-based issues can straighten out prevailing misconceptions and point the modern discussion toward proper thoughts, words, and deeds regarding race.¹²

Another popular topic is homosexuality. The three main lines of discussion seem to relate to the morality of homosexuality, the source of homosexual tendencies, and the civil rights of homosexuals. The Bible speaks directly to the morality of homosexuality; the texts directly addressing the morality of homosexuality apply fairly directly without much

¹¹ Acts 10:34 mentions that God no longer shows partiality between people based on their race as was the case before the Christ's death on the cross. Gal 3:28-29 teaches that racially-based distinctions have no place in the church, for all Christians are to be considered Abraham's offspring. Acts 17:26 puts the common source all people have into perspective within racially-based discussions. Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 remind the church that diversity ought not to be ignored but used to engender unity and growth among the body of Christ. Ephesians 5:21 encourages Christians to go beyond equality to the point of subjecting themselves to one another—a difficult thing to do when feelings of racial inequality are prevalent.

¹² Jerome Walters, One Aryan Nation under God: How Religious Extremists Use the Bible to Justify their Beliefs (Naperville: Sourcebooks, 2001); Bryan J. Grapes, ed., Interracial Relationships (San Diego: Greenhaven, 2000); Ken Ham, Carl Wieland, and Don Batten, One Blood: The Biblical Answer to Racism (Green Forest, Arkansas: Master Books, 1999); Kenneth E. Harris, "Racism and Agape: A Scriptural Response to the Sin of Racism" (Th.M. thesis, Western Theological Seminary, 1998); Steven L. McKenzie, All God's Children: A Biblical Critique of Racism (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Joseph G. Koranda, "Aftermath of Misinterpretation: The Misunderstanding of Genesis 9:25-27 and Its Contribution to White Racism" (B.D. diss., Concordia Theological Seminary, 1969).

need for factoring in the primary principles of scripture.¹³ With respect to the cause or source of homosexual tendencies, Paul's teaching in Rom 1:18-32 deals with this directly as well. The use of primary principles of scripture may not shed light or help in this particular part of the discussion beyond what is taught in this passage.¹⁴ Regarding the rights of homosexuals, or how homosexuals are to be treated in general, however, the primary principles of scripture would be helpful guides to ensure that proof-texts are not misapplied.¹⁵ The unusually harsh treatment by Christians of people whose sins relate to homosexuality in contrast to the toned-down response to people whose sins relate to other

¹³In general the Bible seems to present a positive picture of heterosexual marriage and single chastity but a negative picture of homosexuality. Gen 19:5-8 is an ancient narrative depicting unsolicited and aggressive homosexual advances as more wicked than pre-marital sex; see also Judges 19-21. Lev 18:22, couched in a list of sexual sins, refers to homosexual intercourse as *tôw 'êbâh* ("abominable," "detestable"). Lev 20:13, also found among a list of sexual sins, requires the death penalty in Israel for those involved in male homosexual intercourse. 1 Cor 6:9 identifies homosexuals—not just the thoughts and actions but the people themselves—as the unrighteous who will not inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Tim 1:10 provides an interesting juxtaposition of homosexuals and slave traders among a list of unrighteous people who practice things contrary to sound teaching, and are thus in need of laws to regulate and punish their behavior. By association, also, references to the Sodomites are negative throughout the Bible; see especially Genesis 19; Matt 11:24; Luke 10:12.

¹⁴Paul argued that the cause of homosexual thoughts and actions comes from God's giving over idolaters and those who know better to their degrading passions and unnatural actions. In Rom 5:12-21 Paul describes sin in general as an inherited condition, but the Bible makes it plain everywhere that each person is responsible for their reaction to that condition.

¹⁵People distinguished according to domestic relationships (husband and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters) may commit sins, but their identity itself is not referred to as sinful (as was demonstrated with respect to homosexuals in the previous footnote), nor did Paul's list of archaic distinctives in Gal 3:28 bring out moral distinctions such as "righteous" and "unrighteous." Therefore, arguing that the issue of homosexual rights is an identical issue to the rights of people based on domestic relations, race, or employment runs into difficulty.

areas can find no valid justification in proof-texts when the primary principles such as the golden rule and the equality of all people are applied to this matter. The Bible ought to function as a source of authority regarding the immorality of homosexuality and as a guide to how such people ought to be treated by the Bible-believing community.¹⁶

With the possible exception of racism, the issue of abortion may have been the most widely discussed ethical issue of the twentieth century. It remains first and foremost among the various bio-ethical issues. Arguments made and conclusions drawn in this discussion have profound ramifications for almost every other bio-ethical discussion. The Bible is used a great deal in the discussion of abortion, but unlike the slavery discussion, the Bible is not equally used by those on both sides of the debate. Most of the arguments made

¹⁶Robert A. J. Gagnon, The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001); R. T. France, A Slippery Slope?: The Ordination of Women and Homosexual Practice; A Case Study in Biblical Interpretation (Cambridge: Grove, 2000); Michael Mazzalongo, Gay Rights or Wrongs: A Christian's Guide to Homosexual Issues and Ministry (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1995); John J. McNeill, The Church and the Homosexual, 4th ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1993); Dean Merrill, The Bible and the Homosexual (Boise: Dean Merrill, 1992); Robert Allen Rearick, "The Church and the Homosexual Debate: The Authority for Christians?; Bible, Morality, Ethics, Psychology" (M.Div. thesis, Lexington Theological Seminary, 1992); James B. DeYoung, "Biblical and Historical Precedent for the Criminality of Homosexual Behavior" Evangelical Theological Society papers (1988); idem, "The Meaning of 'Nature' in Romans 1 and its Implications for Biblical Proscriptions of Homosexual Behavior," Evangelical Theological Society papers (1987); David Day, Things They Never Told You in Sunday School: A Primer for the Christian Homosexual (Austin: Liberty, 1987); Brian K. Obermann, "Is It Possible to be Both a Christian and a Homosexual?" (M.Div. thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, 1982); Mark A. Karls, "Homosexual Ordination: A Psychological, Theological, and Logical Integration" (M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1980); Gregory J. Hamaan, "Homosexuality as an Etiological, Theological and Sociological Issue: A Critique of and Response to the Book, Is the Homosexual my Neighbor? by Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott" (M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1980); Richard W. Crane, "Problems of the Homosexual in Relation to the Church" (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1977).

from the Bible come from the mouth and pens of anti-abortionists, but there are a few exceptions.¹⁷ Surprisingly, the Bible's teaching on abortion is rather indirect.¹⁸ Those who argue from the Bible against abortion attempt to do so in two steps. First, they argue that the Bible teaches that life begins prior to birth; therefore, pre-born children are as much "people"

¹⁷ Robert M. Baird and Stuart E. Rosenbaum, The Ethics of Abortion: Pro-Life vs. Pro-Choice, 3d ed. (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2001); Reinder Bruinsma, Matters of Life and Death: An Adventist Pastor Takes a Look at Abortion, Cloning, Physician-Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia, Capital Punishment, and Other 21st Century Issues the Bible Writers Never Had to Face (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific, 2000); Larry L. Lewis, ed. Proclaiming the Pro-Life Message: Christian Leaders Address the Abortion Issue (Hannibal, Missouri: Hannibal Books, 1997); William Patrick Crowder, "The Truth about Abortion and Life: A Pro-Life Topical Bible Reference" (M.A. thesis, Regent University, 1995); Drake H. Torp-Pedersen, "The Use of the Bible in the Discussion of Abortion in Early Jewish and Christian Writings" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993); G. Gerald Harrop, What the Bible Says: About Human Sexuality and Its Expression, Abortion, Capital Punishment, "A Preferential Option for the Poor" (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot, 1989); Tj Bosgra, Abortion, the Bible and the Church (Lewiston, New York: Life Cycle Books, 1987); Paul D. Simmons, Personhood, the Bible & the Abortion Debate (Washington, D.C.: Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, 1987); John Hugh Channer and Eric Lionel Mascall, Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985); Graham Spurgeon, The Bible Favors Abortion, 3d ed. (Asheville, North Carolina, Madison & Polk, 1983); Richard W. Hawks, "Abortion in History and the Bible" (M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1979); Daniel Christiaan Overduin, The Bible Does Speak on Abortion: A Lutheran Appraisal (Minneapolis: ForLIFE, 1978); Harold O. J. Brown, Death before Birth (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977); Donald P. Shoemaker, Abortion, the Bible, and the Christian (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977); C. R. Mancari, Abortion and the Bible (New York: Vantage, 1976).

¹⁸ Exod 21:22-23 contains a law which calls for the punishment of one who injures a pre-born child. It is similar to Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; and Deut 19:21 in which the punishment for an injury is the same as the injury itself (eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life). See Ron Du Preez, The Status of the Fetus in Mosaic Law: A Critical Comparison and Exegetical Evaluation of Various Viewpoints Concerning Exodus 21:22-25 and Its Relation to Abortion (1988). Sometimes the sin of offering children to Molech is called upon to prove abortion is wrong (Lev 18:21, 20:1-5; 2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 32:35), but even this is indirect. It could be countered that all worship of any kind offered to another god is a sin: Eldon Woodcock, "A Biblical Condemnation of an Abortion-Like Procedure: An Affirmation of the Unalienable Right to Life Endowed by Nature's God" Evangelical Theological Society papers (1997).

or “human” as children are after they have been born.¹⁹ If an adequate case can be made from the Bible that pre-born children are not essentially different from post-born children, then the next step is to apply all biblical texts and primary principles related to post-born children to pre-born children as well. Among the primary principles used in the slavery debate, the golden rule, equality, oppression, gentleness, and mercy would readily apply to any attempt to use the Bible to justify abortion. A prominent method of arguing against abortion is to promote the value of human life. Under the assumption that a pre-born child has life, biblical texts and primary principles regarding the protection of life would be fair game for application to this issue as well. This is why so many anti-abortionists prefer to call their position “pro-life.” The Bible can indeed be used to argue with authority against the modern practice of abortion, but it should be realized by those doing so that their arguments are mostly indirect ones.

As of the writing of this current work the newest bio-ethical issue in first-world countries seems to be human cloning. Since the attempts to clone humans was virtually unknown until the twenty-first century, the Bible does not directly address the issue. Slavery, by stark contrast, has been around many millennia. At the outset, the discussion seems to be taking the same path as the discussion on abortion. Those in favor of human cloning are arguing on the basis of rights and health-improvement. Those against human cloning are arguing on the basis of the value of human life. At this point in the technological process, those wishing to clone people seem to desire to do so in order that spare body parts will be available for transplants. Those opposed to this practice assign “life” status to any

¹⁹Ps 139:13-16, for example is a leading proof-text of this.

embryo created in this manner. They argue that human beings created solely for the purpose of terminating their lives, so that their body parts can be harvested and made available for transplanted, is nothing short of murder and the deprivation of that person's most essential rights. The Bible does not address human cloning directly, but much can be ascertained indirectly.²⁰

While it can be argued that the same Bible has been used by opposing parties to come to opposing conclusions, it should not be argued that the Bible is therefore an unhelpful source of authority on modern social and ethical issues.²¹ Like any other source of authority, the Bible can be used imperfectly by imperfect people. There are, however, objective rules that can be used when applying scripture to modern social or ethical issues.²² Barnes found one method that helped along the use of the Bible in the discussion of the main social issue of his day. It is up to modern scholars to continue to research methods to help along the use of the Bible in the main social and ethical issues of today.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.
I have taken an oath and confirmed it,
that I will follow your righteous laws.
I have suffered much;
preserve my life, O LORD, according to your word.
Accept, O LORD, the willing praise of my mouth,
and teach me your laws.

²⁰ Bruinsma, Matters of Life and Death.

²¹ Hill, The Bible Tells Me So.

²² Swartley's work on Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women is full of examples of this, as are many of the leading textbooks on biblical hermeneutics.

Though I constantly take my life in my hands,
I will not forget your law.
The wicked have set a snare for me,
but I have not strayed from your precepts.
Your statutes are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.
My heart is set on keeping your decrees
to the very end.”

—Ps 119:105-112 (NIV)

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