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Paul versus Paul: Understanding the Battle over Slavery between Religious Communities in the Ante-bellum Period

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Abstract:

Recent scholarship on the writings of Paul in the New Testament has uncovered a substantive shift from the radical Pauline emphasis on equality to the post 70 CE “pseudo-Pauline” emphasis on hierarchy in the evolving Christian community of the 1st century. This scholarship has revolutionized the way in which New Testament scholars approach the New Testament as a literary document and the way in which they understand the historical development of the Christian community. Most of this scholarship has remained rooted and grounded in the study of the 1st century. This paper attempts to take the fruits of this scholarship and apply it to the debate over slavery in the ante-bellum period of American history. As has been well researched, both sides of the debate over slavery appealed to the New Testament to substantiate their views. What has not been researched or discussed is the fact that both sides of the debate relied on different “Pauls”. This paper will show that the abolitionist movement relied heavily on the authentic Pauline epistles in their attempt to argue that the true message of Christianity was opposed to slavery whereas the moral defenders of slavery utilized primarily the pseudo-Pauline epistles to defend the hierarchical construction of society and the existence of a permanent class of subservient slaves.

The New Testament and Slavery: An Overview

Within the New Testament scholarly community over the past century, there has been a somewhat contentious debate over the relative importance of Jesus and Paul to the development of the early Christian community’s worship, ethics, and organization.¹ Without negating the importance of this debate or the difficult scholarly questions that it has raised, it is important to note that the consensus view among New Testament scholars is that when it comes to the issue of slavery the Apostle Paul was the key person in the evolution of early Christian ethics.²

This is not to deny that the original Pauline message concerning slavery was rooted and grounded in his own appreciation for the “Jesus message” but it is to simply assert that the authentic sayings of Jesus (those which are acknowledged by scholars to be sayings of the original Jesus and not the interpolations and/or interpretations of later Jesus followers) do not directly address the issue of the morality of slavery as a social institution within the larger Roman world. As an itinerant preacher within the Jewish context of first century Palestine, Jesus’ revolutionary message was that the world as both Jews and Romans understood it was drastically out of line with the reign of God. The insistence of his claim that the “kingdom of God is at hand” and the “kingdom of God is within” clearly expressed his belief that the eschatological end of the world was at hand.

¹ See Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994); Richard Horsley, editor, *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, International, 1997); John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus, A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988); Stephen John Patterson, “Paul and the Jesus Tradition: It is Time for Another Look,” *Historical Theological Review*, Vol. 84 (1991), 23-44; Adolph Gustav Deissman, trans. William E. Wilson, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* (NY: Harper & Row, 1957).

² See Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

As a consequence, we do not find a fully developed ethical system within the authentic sayings of Jesus; rather the eschatological insistence of his message led him to emphasize personal repentance and preparation for the coming of the kingdom and (thus unlike John the Baptizer who preceded him) kept him from directly confronting the existing ethical system of either the Roman or Jewish world.³ Since Jesus clearly believed that his coming marked the end of the world as it existed in time, his message called for personal transformation in anticipation of the divine action of cosmic transformation.

It was thus left to his followers to create social communities consistent with the personal message of transformation and repentance which had been proclaimed by Jesus. Chief among these followers was Saul, who later became known as Paul. Simply put, the Pauline influence on the evolution of early Christianity cannot be overstated.⁴ It was Paul who travelled to regions distant from the Judean countryside to the urban centers of the Roman world in order to form communities of Jesus followers. It was also Paul who was forced to deal with the questions about the implications of the original Jesus message raised by converts from non-Jewish backgrounds who made inquiries (either by word or through action) about the relationship between this new message and their old way of life. Finally, it was Paul who penned the first Christian epistles and thus represents our only non-filtered insight into the thoughts and practices of early “Jesus follower” communities in the pre-70 CE (pre-fall of Jerusalem) context before the early Christian communities began to establish themselves institutionally into communities led by hierarchical leaders designed for a more permanent existence within the Roman Empire.

Furthermore, of the 27 “books” contained within the New Testament, although none are written by Jesus, thirteen are attributed to Paul. Even though scholars now recognize that of these “thirteen”, only “seven” are undisputedly Pauline whereas the others were written by followers who penned their epistles “in Paul’s name” long after his death; it is significant that they bear his name and testify to the importance of Paul in the emerging self-understanding of early Christian communities. Furthermore, when you add the book of Acts to this list, in which Paul is the main character, over half of the New Testament is either written by or is about Paul.⁵

Quite clearly then, in the history of Christianity, no one (other than Jesus) equals Paul in importance. It can be argued persuasively that although Jesus remained the central focus of Christian worship, it was the Pauline and pseudo-Pauline writings that definitively shaped the development of Christian ethics and dogma as well as the evolving nature of its hierarchical structure. Augustine, the most important theologian in the Latin West, claimed to be converted from Manicheism to Christianity by reading the letters of Paul. John Chrysostom, the most important theologian in the Greek East, likewise developed his moral and ethical teachings primarily from the writings attributed to Paul in the New Testament. In similar fashion, the leaders of the Protestant Reformation relied on Paul to a remarkable extent. Martin Luther experienced his spiritual transformation while preparing a series of lectures on Paul. Paul became the foundation of his theology, especially his perception of a Pauline contrast between law and grace, faith and works, that became the hallmark of Lutheran theology. John Calvin, another early Protestant reformer, also made Paul central to his theology with his emphasis on “union with Christ” in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Two hundred years later, Paul played a central role in the birth of the Methodist Church. Its founder, John Wesley, experienced a “call to reform” the Anglican Church while listening to a reading of Luther’s commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans. And, to complete this brief survey of Paul’s importance to Christianity, it is worthwhile noting that Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed June 29, 2008 to June 29, 2009 to be the “Year of Paul” for all pious Roman Catholics.

³ See John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity* (NY: HarperOne, 1998) and Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (NY: Penguin Books, 2003).

⁴ See John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul* (NY: Harper Collins, 2004).

⁵ Although it is beyond the pale of this paper to enter into the argument over whether the book of *Acts* can be trusted as a historical document, the author of this paper falls into line with the consensus view of New Testament scholars who argue that the *Acts of the Apostles* cannot be trusted as an accurate historical record of the activities and thoughts of the authentic counter-cultural Paul. Written after the fall of Jerusalem, the *Acts* clearly reflects the second- and third-generation perspectives of Romanized Christians who in the text project their own accommodationist views back onto the historical counter-cultural Paul of the 50s and 60s.

For all of this attention to Paul, however, it has only been within the last half of the 20th century that scholars have attempted to place him within the historical context of the 1st century Roman world and thus to understand his message contextually rather than dogmatically or theologically. As mentioned above, one of the results of this historical approach has been to separate those letters that can be assuredly believed to have been written by Paul and those that were written after his martyrdom in the 60s. The consensus of contemporary scholarship accepts only seven letters as authentic: Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Philippians. Three letters are accepted as authentic only by a minority of scholars but rejected by the majority: 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, and Colossians. The remaining three letters that bear Paul's name (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus) are universally understood to be non-authentic. They were written in the name of Paul (a practice not deemed dishonest or unethical in the first century) but not by Paul himself. As two of the most important New Testament scholars alive today (Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan) have noted, "thus there are three 'Pauls' within the letters attributed to him."⁶ They label these "Pauls" as the "radical Paul" (author of the 7 authentic letters), the "conservative Paul" (author of the disputed letters) and the "reactionary Paul" (author of the Pastoral Epistles –the undisputed inauthentic letters).⁷

The conclusion these scholars reach is one that is shared by the vast majority of New Testament scholars today and represents the consensus of opinion regarding the evolving nature of New Testament attitudes towards Roman cultural values (including slavery). Believing, as he did, that the resurrection of Jesus confirmed the radical nature of the kingdom soon to break into and overthrow the natural order by radically restructuring and/or destroying the existing hierarchical institutions of the Roman world, the "radical" (or, as I prefer to call him, the counter-cultural) Paul thus zealously promoted the rejection of existing social norms in anticipation of the egalitarian community of love he believed would be established with the second coming of Jesus and the subsequent inauguration of the kingdom of God on earth. As Crossan has written, "since God's judgment on this world is imminent, withdrawal from its normalcies might be wise or even necessary. The Apostle Paul is an example of that combination."⁸

Thus, the counter-cultural Paul missionary activity was aimed at established " sleeper cells " throughout the Roman Empire. These radical communities of "Jesus followers" were instructed to live the kingdom life in anticipation of the soon-to-be established kingdom of heaven on earth. In these " sleeper cells , " according to the teaching of the counter-cultural Paul, the followers of Jesus were to live " kingdom " lives in which the " worldly hierarchical distinctions " of gender and class did not exist. As he proclaimed in the early letter to the Galatians (c. 50 CE), "There does not exist among you Jew or Gentile, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ."⁹

In fact, for this Paul the existence of slavery in the Roman world was an effective counterpoint to the radical nature of the community of Jesus followers he was establishing. In his letter to the Galatians, slavery functions as a metaphor for the earthly kingdom soon to be destroyed while freedom functions as the supreme metaphor of the heavenly. The opening lines of the epistle proclaim the break with the established norms and cultural values of the Roman world that the Jesus followers were called to embody: "We wish you the favor and peace of God our Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age."¹⁰ The letter itself was occasioned, as he explains, by the infiltration into the Galatian communities of "certain false claimants to the title of brother" who "wormed their way into the group to spy on the freedom we enjoy in Christ Jesus and thereby to make slaves" of those who had responded to Paul's message. The heart of the "good news" Paul was proclaiming was thus "freedom" – as he explains, "While we not yet of age we were like slaves subordinated to the elements of the world, but when the designated time had come, God sent forth his Son." The proof of their membership in the heavenly kingdom the counter-cultural Paul emphatically describes as: "You are no longer a slave but a son."¹¹

⁶ Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The First Paul*, 14.

⁷ In this paper, I have chosen to name the radical Paul the "counter-cultural" Paul and to combine the conservative and reactionary Pauls into one and label him the "accommodationist" Paul.

⁸ Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, 285.

⁹ Galatians 3:28

¹⁰ Galatians 1:4

¹¹ Galatians 4:3-4, 7.

The fact that this Paul uses slavery as the backdrop against which to describe the new life of the Jesus follower communities cannot be overstressed. According to the counter-cultural Paul, the “spirit of the gospel” is in direct contradistinction to the “spirit of the age” – which spirit Paul sees as both imaged and made present in the institution of slavery. Therefore, in the coming kingdom there will be no slavery; as he categorically exclaims, “Cast out the slave girl and son together; for the slave girl’s son shall never be an heir on equal terms with the son of the one born free. Therefore, my brothers, we are not children of a slave girl but of a mother who is free.”¹² In fact, Paul asserts: “It was for liberty that Christ freed us. So stand firm and do not take upon yourself the yoke of slavery a second time.”¹³

Other letters of the counter-cultural Paul contain a similar message – slavery is incompatible with the ethics of the kingdom. Slavery will be destroyed at the second coming of Christ. Slavery is a part of the sinful structure of this world which is passing away – as a result, those who have entered into the kingdom must not compromise or enter into a negotiated settlement with the spirit of the age. They must stand aloof – and remain vigilant in their kingdom centered lives.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul strikingly tells the members of the Corinthian community: “You have been bought at a price! Do not enslave yourselves to men.”¹⁴ It is true that he does not counsel slaves to rebel but instead encourages each one to “continue as he was when he was called.” But this advice, in Paul’s mind, is not an endorsement of the present age but only a temporary compromise the slave should undergo because “the time is short ... the world as we know it is passing way.”¹⁵ It is not necessary for the slave to take action to free him- or herself for two reasons. First, he is already internally free – “the slave called in the Lord is a freedman in the Lord”. And, secondly, his time of slavery is short. When Jesus returns and builds the heavenly kingdom on earth, one of his first acts will be to permanently set free all those who are enslaved and to proclaim a permanent and enduring year of jubilee – the time when, according to Old Testament law, all slaves were set free.

We see this same emphasis in the letter to Paul’s follower, Philemon. Onesimus, one of Philemon’s slaves, having run away to the urban center of Rome has encountered Paul and been converted to the Jesus faith as a result of his experience with Paul. The letter which Onesimus is carrying back to his master is a personal entreaty calling upon Philemon to receive Onesimus as a “brother” and not as a “slave.” The entire letter, which is a remarkable example of personal entreaty and skillful manipulation, confirms the counter-cultural Paul’s abhorrence of slavery and his belief that slavery was incompatible with the ethics of the heavenly kingdom each local community of Jesus followers was called to follow.

The death of the first followers of Jesus as well as that of the Apostle Paul in the 60s combined with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE radically altered the presuppositions of the early Jesus communities. Established as “sleeper cells” and/or “frontier outposts” for the coming of the kingdom, the second and third generation members of these communities found themselves in a new situation for which they had been unprepared. Paul and the other early Jesus followers had been mistaken in their belief in the imminent return of Jesus; furthermore, it was equally clear that any protection they had received through their identification with the Jewish diaspora had come to an end. As a result, the counter-cultural egalitarian communities of Jesus followers gradually reshaped themselves as Christian (an identity consistently framed in opposition to that of the Jews) by abandoning the egalitarian structure of the earliest communities and adopting the existing Roman hierarchical structure to ensure both continuity with the past and survival in the future.¹⁶ The four Canonical Gospels reflect this change, especially by highlighting the conflict between Jesus and Jewish leaders, as do the pseudo-Pauline letters which were also written in the post-70 CE period. In these letters, we clearly observe the leaders of the Christian communities deradicalizing the earlier counter-cultural teachings of Paul to bring them more in line with the social cultural norms of the larger Roman society in which they were now forced to live.¹⁷

¹² Galatians 4:30-31.

¹³ Galatians 5:1

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:23

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:29, 31.

¹⁶ It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the details of this transformation. See the bibliography in Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, for an extensive reading list on this subject.

¹⁷ This accommodation is outlined clearly in Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*.

Although gradual in nature, the shift from opposition to accommodation can clearly be seen in the changing teachings on slavery (and gender). The earliest pseudo-Pauline letters to address slavery are the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. Both letters endorse the ethical system of the Roman world vis-à-vis by “baptizing” patriarchy and hierarchy into Christian concepts. Ephesians commands slaves to view their masters as standing in the place of Christ and to render them obedience with “the reverence, the awe, and the sincerity you owe to Christ.”¹⁸ The theological idea of the internal freedom of the Christian slave, emphasized by the counter-cultural Paul in 1 Corinthians 7, has been replaced in this new context with an accommodationist emphasis on the God-given authority of the master and the God-ordained responsibility of the slave to obey: “Give your service willingly, doing it for the Lord rather than men.”¹⁹ Colossians continues this theme by emphasizing a continuity between physical and spiritual servitude: “To slaves I say, obey your human masters perfectly ... in all sincerity and out of reverence for the Lord. ... Be slaves of Christ the Lord.”²⁰ Again we note that the counter-cultural Pauline opposition between spiritual freedom and physical bondage has been replaced by an accommodationist connection between the two so that the slave now serves God in and through his service to her human master.

The later pseudo-Pauline letters make this connection even more secure. In his letter to Philemon, the counter-cultural Paul had insisted that to enslave a Christian “brother” was incompatible with the gospel message. However, the counter-cultural Paul rejects this message, instead insisting in 1 Timothy that “all under the yoke of slavery must regard their masters as worthy of full respect. Those slaves whose masters are true brothers in the faith must not take liberties with them on that account.”²¹ The letter to Titus reiterates this and in so doing reinforces the accommodationist position: “Slaves are to be submissive to their masters. They should try to please them in every way, not contradicting them, nor stealing from them, but expressing a constant fidelity by their conduct, so as to adorn in every way possible the doctrine of God our Savior.”²²

Thus, the evolution of New Testament teaching regarding slavery clearly shows a contradiction between the teachings of the early counter-cultural Paul and those of his later followers who, in his name, radically shift his emphasis away from a rejection of slavery as being incompatible with the kingdom to an endorsement of slavery as an ethically acceptable institution which carries for the Christian slave a heavier obligation to obedience and reverence to the earthly master. Although later generations of Christians would valiantly attempt to square the circle and make these two disjointed ethical teachings consistent with each other, modern scholars have clearly demonstrated that this attempt is untenable. In conclusion, the New Testament expresses two radically different ethical stances towards slavery: one counter-cultural and one accommodationist. As we shall see, the implications of this contradiction were to have enormous consequences in the United States as Christians of all denominations struggled with the existence of the slavery in the Republic.

Case Study: the Methodist Episcopal Church in America

Wesleyan Methodism was introduced into the United States in 1766 by a small contingent of Methodist immigrants from Ireland. Upon hearing of their attempts to establish Methodist circles, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism in the United Kingdom, sent two missionary preachers, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, to the United States in 1769 and the first Conference of American Methodists was held in 1773. In the early years of Methodism, the Annual Conference was held every two years; this was changed to every four years in the 19th century.

Early Methodists, following the lead of their founder John Wesley, were outspoken in their opposition to the institution of slavery in the years immediately following their immigration. For example, the “Apostle of American Methodism,” Bishop Francis Asbury was adamant in his journals about his “pious opinions” of the “institution.” In an entry in 1780, he wrote that he had spoken to “some select friends about slave-keeping, but they could not bear it; this I know, God will plead the cause of the oppressed, though it gives offense to say so here. O Lord, banish the infernal spirit of slavery from thy dear Zion. I am grieved to see slavery and the manner of keeping these poor people.”²³

¹⁸ Ephesians 6:5

¹⁹ Ephesians 6:7

²⁰ Colossians 3:22, 24

²¹ 1 Timothy 6:1-2

²² Titus 2:9-10

²³ *The Journals of Bishop Francis Asbury*, Vol. 1, 289.

At the Conference of 1780, the following action was passed on the issue of slavery. Formed in the traditional pattern of catechism prevalent in early Methodist catechesis, the Conference passed the following resolution:

Question 17. Does this Conference acknowledge that slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man and nature, and hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion, and doing that which we would not others should do to us and ours? Do we pass disapprobation on all our friends who keep slaves, and advise their freedom?

Answer—Yes.

In 1783, it was decided that local preachers would be given one year to free their slaves upon penalty, if they refused or delayed, of losing their license to preach. However, in 1784, at the official Conference of the Methodist Church, this ruling was amended to exclude all clergy residing in or ministering in the state of Virginia. Theoretically, this was because the laws in Virginia forbade the manumission of slaves, but in reality it demonstrates the emergence of a split within the ranks of Methodism that would blossom into a total divide in the 1840s.

The Conference however was emphatic that in allowing slave-owning among its members in those states where manumission was prohibited was simply a practical decision made to preserve church unity without in any way altering the basic principles adopted by earlier Conferences.

Question 42—What methods can we take to extirpate slavery?

Answer.—We view it as contrary to the golden law of God, on which hang all the law and the prophets ... to hold in the deepest abasement, in a more abject slavery than is, perhaps, to be found in any part of the world, except America, so many souls that all are capable of the image of God.

This statement is significant, as we shall see, because it is the first official attempt on the part of those opposing slavery to base their opposition to the institution of slavery on actual words found in Scripture (in this case, the Golden Rule as expressed in Matthew 7:12 which states “In everything do to others as you should have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”). However, once again, this ruling is amended in a brief statement at the end of Question 42 stipulating that these statements which required church members to abstain completely from slave-owning on pain of excommunication from the assembly “are to affect the members of our society no farther than as they are consistent with the laws of the State in which they reside.”²⁴

Bishop Asbury noted in his journal that even at this early state, the statement adopted by the Council gave rise to great agitation among some members of the Conference: “I found the minds of our people great agitated with our rules against slavery. ... Col.---- and Dr. Coke disputed on the subject, and the Col. used some threats; next day, Brother O’Kelly let fly at them, and they were angry enough.”²⁵

The southern members of the Conference mentioned by Bishop Asbury who were vocal in their opposition to the denunciation of slavery were in the minority at the earliest Conferences and thus did not prevail in changing the adopted guidelines and rules of discipline. Their presence in the Conference however was soon to grow as Methodism continued to expand southward and to gather the majority of its converts from among the slave-owning class in southern states. As early as 1785, in the annual Minutes, the following note was inserted, indicating the rising strength of the pro-slavery contingency within the church: “It is recommended to all our brethren to suspend the execution of the minute on Slavery, till the deliberations of a future Conference; and that an equal space be allowed all our members for consideration, when the minute shall be put in force.” This note was however followed by another note which stated in unequivocal terms that “we do hold in the deepest abhorrence the practice of Slavery and shall not cease to seek its destruction, by all wise and prudent means.”

This ambiguity towards slavery continued to manifest itself in the meetings of the Conferences throughout the remaining part of the 18th century. In 1796, members of the Conference reaffirmed their opposition to slavery calling it a “great” and “enormous” evil.

²⁴ Quoted in Lucius C. Matlack, *The History of American Slavery and Methodism, from 1780-1849, Part First*. (NY: Fisk University Library Negro Collection, 1849, 1971), 15-16.

²⁵ *Journals*, Vol. 1, 384.

However, they also recognized the practical difficulties of members living in slave states and refused to make the rulings against slavery mandatory for all clergy and laity residing in southern states where manumission was outlawed. It is important to note that at this early stage of Methodist history, there is no record of disagreement over the moral basis for the condemnation of slavery as the testimony of Samuel Davis, who joined the Church in 1789 and resided in the southern slave-owning states until 1826, bears witness. In a letter, dated April 8, 1838, to the Church journal, the *Zion's Herald*, he wrote:

I know that it was required of all those who joined our Church, in our district, in those early days of Methodism, that they should execute an instrument of emancipation of all the slaves in their possession ... So universally were these rules attended to, that I never knew but one single instance of any member's neglecting them. ... I have heard Bishop Asbury, and many of the early preachers, preach pointedly against slavery. At our Quarterly Meetings, where hundreds of slaveholders were present with their slaves, I have repeatedly heard some of our preachers condemn the practice of slavery, as a vile sin against God, morally, socially, and politically wrong; no one interrupting or molesting the man of God.²⁶

In 1796, the Church reiterated its opposition to slavery by explaining that “the buying and selling of the souls and bodies of men (for what is the body without the soul but a dead mass) is a complicated crime. It was indeed in some manner, overlooked in the Jews, by reason of the wonderful hardness of their hearts, as was the keeping of concubines and divorcing of wives at pleasure; but is totally opposite to the whole spirit of the Gospel.”²⁷

The defense of slave owning, when it was offered, was originally couched in practical terms not theological. Those who wished to negate the ruling that emancipation was a requirement of membership and ordination did so on the basis of state laws and not by appealing to passages in Scripture. Furthermore, those who opposed slavery did so by elucidating general principles of freedom, liberty, and the evils of tyranny which they considered to be present in the “spirit of the Gospel” without resorting to publicly cataloguing and/or commenting on specific texts.

It was only in the early part of the 19th century that the debate over slavery, which had hither-to-fore centered on the “practicality” of manumission but not on the morality (or lack thereof) of slavery, began to assume a textual basis and to move from a consideration of state law to a detailed debate over the exact teaching of Scripture on slavery. In 1784, slaveholding was condemned because it was declared to be contrary to the “Golden Rule”. In 1796, it was declared to be contrary to the “spirit of the Gospel.” However, as Methodism spread south, the vagueness of these statements was increasingly questioned and preachers began to argue strenuously in support of slavery as an institution sanctioned in Scripture.²⁸

By 1808, all language requiring members and preachers to emancipate their slaves had been dropped from official church discipline. For 12 years, from 1796 to 1808, the issue of slavery was not addressed in official Church Conferences, and when it reappeared in 1808, the legislation bore little resemblance to the earlier condemnations already mentioned. Instead of adopting a Church-wide ban on slavery, the Conference instead delegated to each region and its Annual Conference the right to “form their own regulations relative to buying and selling slaves.” And, in 1824, the next time the Church addressed officially the issue of slavery, the focus was on the “righteous” treatment of slaves rather than their manumission.

3. All our preachers shall prudently enforce upon our members the necessity of teaching their slaves to read the word of God, and to allow them time to attend upon the public worship of God on our regular days of worship.
4. Our colored preachers and official members shall have all the privileges which are usual to others in the district ...
5. The Annual Conference may employ colored preachers to travel and preach, where their services are judged necessary ...²⁹

²⁶ Quoted in Matlack, 21.

²⁷ Signed by T. Coke and F. Asbury. Quoted in Matlack, 21.

²⁸ The history of early Methodism reveals it to be primarily a southern church. All of the Conferences up until 1787 were held in slave-holding states and in the period from 1777 to 1783 not one preacher north of New Jersey was appointed. In 1783, out of a membership reported to be 14,000 only 2000 were said to reside in what became known as the “free states.”

²⁹ Quoted by Matlack, 32.

In 1840, Bishop Soule, in his annual address to the General Convention confirmed the movement of the Church away from its earlier stance of absolute opposition to one of accommodation by stating that “in all the enactments of the Church relating to slavery, a due and respectful regard has been had to the laws of the State, never requiring emancipation in contravention of the civil authority, or where the laws of the State would not allow the liberated slave to enjoy his freedom.”³⁰

Finally, in 1844, the presiding Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America attempted to enforce a gag rule on any who would seek to resurrect a more strident opposition to slavery by insisting that “no new ecclesiastical legislation on the subject of slavery” is called for.

Some bishops and members of the Church encouraged by the Senior Bishop’s ruling sought to enforce it in their particular region. In particular, two bishops from the New England States issued a “Pastoral Letter” to the ministers and preachers of their diocese in which they steadfastly denied preachers the right to preach on the subject of slavery, insisting that “if any persist in so doing, whether from the pulpit or otherwise, we earnestly recommend to our members and friends everywhere, by all lawful and Christian means, to discountenance them in such a course. ... We advise the preachers, the trustees, and the official, and other members to manifest their disapprobation, and to refuse the use of their pulpits and houses for such purposes.”³¹

In 1836, the house of bishops addressed the members of the entire church gathered in Conference by calling for the enforcement of a “gag” rule. The bishops reminded those present that the question of slavery in the United States “is left to be regulated by the individual states themselves, and therefore is put beyond the control of the general government, as well as that of ecclesiastical bodies.” The bishops then continued that they had “come to the solemn conviction that the only safe, scriptural, and prudent way for us, both as ministers and people, to take, is wholly to refrain from the agitating subject, which is now convulsing the country and consequently the Church from end to end, by calling forth inflammatory speeches, papers, and pamphlets. While we cheerfully accord to such all the sincerity they ask for their belief and motives, we cannot but disapprove of their measures, as alike destructive to the peace of the Church, and to the happiness of the slaves himself.”³²

The bishops thus preferred to view slavery as an issue on which legitimate differences of opinion could be held, and when pushed to defend their “gag” position appealed to statements in the New Testament which emphasized the importance of unity – such as the accommodationist-Pauline command to “make every effort to maintain the Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” in Ephesians 4.³³ In 1836, Bishop Hedding refused to allow an anti-slavery proposal even to be introduced for vote at the annual meeting of the New England Conference, and at the General Conference of the New Hampshire Conference actually censored two of its members for attending an anti-slavery meeting.

The Rev. Luther Lee, a leading Methodist preacher in the antebellum period and a strong advocate of the abolitionist position, noted in his autobiography that “the General Conference of 1836, held in Cincinnati, discussed the subject. On the part of slave-holders it was discussed very violently, and they demanded silence on the part of the northern branch of the Church, and called upon the northern members to put their foot upon the abolition viper and crush it out.”³⁴

The northern bishops were however fighting a losing battle. As the abolitionist movement in the north grew in both influence and notoriety, many preachers and members of the Church in New England became convinced that the course of the bishops was in violation of both the “spirit of the Gospel” and the traditional discipline of Methodism. As Methodist historian Lucius Matlack notes, “a deep abhorrence of slavery was becoming more general and petitions were prepared and signed by thousands of members, praying the Annual Conference to take some action on the subject.”³⁵

³⁰ Bishop’s Address to the General Convention of 1840. Quoted by Matlack, 35.

³¹ Letter from Bishops Elijah Hedding and J. Emory, September 10, 1835. Quoted by Matlack, 39-40.

³² Signed by Bishops Robert R. Roberts, Joshua Soule, Elijah Hedding, James O. Andrew in Cincinnati on May 26, 1836. Quoted by Matlack, 43.

³³ Ephesians 4:2

³⁴ *Autobiography of the Rev. Luther Lee* (NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984), 134. Reprint. Originally published: NY: Phillips & Hunt, 1882.

³⁵ Matlack, 45.

The matter came to a head in the New Hampshire Conference meeting in 1837, when Bishop Waugh addressed the Conference and for the first time presented a theological justification for slavery, arguing that the Bible did justify slavery under certain circumstances. Bishop Hedding, at the 1837 Annual Meeting of the New England Conference, also offered an impassioned defense of slavery, arguing that the Golden Rule established the norm – “All acts in relation to slaves, as well as to every other subject, which cannot be performed in obedience to this rule, are to be condemned, and out not to be tolerated in the Church. If no case can be found where a man can own a slave, and in that act obey this rule, then there is no case in which slave-owning can be justified. But if one case can be found where a man may hold a slave, and by the civil law own him, and in that act obey this rule, then there may be ten such cases, or ten thousand. ... If I did not believe this, I could not do the duties the Church requires me to perform.”³⁶

This is a remarkable reversal – in 1784, the Golden Rule was used to justify the Church’s universal condemnation of slavery; in 1838 the same Rule was used to justify its opposite. The Bishop furthermore concluded with a challenge to the abolitionists in the Church, arguing that their opposition to slavery could only stand if “you can produce a precept of the Divine Law equal to this, thus said the Lord, ‘Thou shalt not own a slave.’ But this precept does not exist.”³⁷ In 1838, the Georgia Annual Conference went even further by adopting a resolution that “slavery, as it exists in the United States, is not a moral evil.”³⁸

The statements of the bishops encouraged the anti-abolitionist/pro-slavery wing of the Church to increase its activities. Thus, in the late 1830s and early 1840s the defenders of the status quo began to proffer Scriptural arguments in defense of slavery. This defense tended in two directions. The first argued that the Church’s role was confined to the spiritual lives of its members and not to the “civil and political relations of society in our country—one which, as Christians, they have no right to disturb.” Pro-slavery advocates were quick to point to Jesus’ words, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” and to Jesus’ actions in accepting the authority of the Roman government as proof that the goal of Christianity was to prepare people for heaven and not to reorganize political or social institutions.

The second, and for the purposes of this paper more important, defense of slavery arose out of the accomodationist-Pauline epistles which directly address the relationships of master and slave. Dr. Fisk, president of Wesleyan University, argued that “the general rule of Christianity not only permits, but in supposable circumstances, enjoins a continuation of the master’s authority.” He continued, “In the primitive Christian Church at Colossae, under the apostolic eye, and with the apostolic sanction, the relation of master and slave was permitted to subsist. The New Testament enjoins obedience upon the slave, as an obligation due to a present rightful authority.” Likewise, Dr. T. E. Bond, editor of the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, likewise argued in a private letter to Joseph Boyd in 1840 that “slavery itself is no where expressly forbidden in the Scriptures, although the practice of slavery in its most oppressive forms, and in unmitigated severity, was universal during the time of the Lord and his apostles. ... Yet there is no express prohibition to Christians to hold slaves.

Thomas Thornton, president of Centenary College in Mississippi, in similar fashion asserted that “in the precepts of the New Testament, the relation of master and slave, is not only acknowledged but remained undisturbed, each one having his appropriate duty pointed out; and that the rights of the master, as the owner of slave property, are protected by express law. The act of holding a slave then, under all circumstances, God being judge, is not sin.” E. D. Sims, professor of theology at Randolph Macon College in Virginia, argued along parallel lines by citing passages from the writings of the accomodationist Paul. After listing the passages with commentary, he concluded that “these extracts from holy writ, unequivocally assert the right of property in slaves, together with the usual incidents of that right; such as the power of acquisition and disposition in various ways, according to municipal regulations. The right to buy and sell, and to transmit to children by way of inheritance, is clearly stated.”³⁹

These statements reveal the dependency of pro-slavery advocates on the accomodationist-Pauline epistles. The statement in Colossians to slaves: “Obey your maters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.

³⁶ Quoted by Matlack, 58.

³⁷ Quoted by Matlack, 59.

³⁸ Quoted by Matlack, 62.

³⁹ Quoted by Matlack, 85.

Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord, and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ” (3:22-24) and that in Ephesians that slaves must “obey their masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ, not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord” (6:6-7) were continuously repeated as proof that the ethical precepts of the New Testament affirm the morality of the institution of slavery.

The members of the Methodist Church who were deeply committed to the anti-slavery cause responded to the challenge set forward in these declarations. Northern Methodists were among the earliest members of the Abolitionist movement. In 1834, the first Methodist Anti-Slavery Society was formed in New York. A second society was formed the next year in New England and a few months later a third was formed in New Hampshire. Within a year the members of these Societies issued an “Appeal” on the subject of Slavery addressed co-jointly to the members of the New England and New Hampshire Conferences. In this appeal, they asserted: “No man has or can have a right to hold a fellow man, for one moment, in bondage as property. ... The Bible condemns this kind of slavery, in precisely the same way it condemns many other things which are allowed by other Christians to be sin against God. ... (There is a) palpable inconsistency in a Christian’s attempting to justify slavery from the word of God.”⁴⁰

The authors of this appeal and their co-members in the Anti-Slavery Societies were not unaware of the passages quoted by their pro-slavery foes from the epistles of Colossians and Ephesians (in addition to those quoted from Timothy and Titus). Faced with the clear words of Scripture without the knowledge of the evolution of the New Testament discovered by modern scholars, anti-slavery Methodists were forced to rely on earlier authentic Pauline texts and to argue that these texts express the true and authentic “spirit of the Gospel” that condemned slavery while admitting that there was evidence of social accommodation in the later Pauline epistles to the “spirit of the age.” Rev. Albert Barnes, a prominent northern Methodist preacher and author, argued that the spirit of the New Testament is against slavery, and the principles of the New Testament, if fairly applied, would abolish it. In the New Testament, no man is commanded to purchase and own a slave ... Nowhere in the New Testament is the institution referred to as a good one, or as a desirable one.... The proper application of the principle of the New Testament would abolish slavery everywhere ... when the gospel shall be fairly applied to all the relations of life, slavery will not be found among those relations.⁴¹

Among the earliest and most ardent defenders of the Methodist anti-slavery position was Orange Scott who wrote openly in the Methodist Abolitionist paper, *Zion’s Herald*. Scott prepared a series of 16 articles on slavery for the *Herald*, commencing December 30, 1834. A stridently anti-slavery publication published in New York City by La Roy Sunderland, the *Zion’s Herald* championed the abolitionist position and sought to defend it both biblically and theologically. In the first edition, Sunderland laid forth the position his paper would take: “It is our object to defend the discipline of the Methodist Church against the sin of holding and treating the human species as property. We purpose to show that Christianity always did, and always will condemn the practice.”

The most interesting and important arguments for our purpose are found in the 16 articles written by Orange Scott. Framed as an ongoing debate with the leading pro-slavery voice in the Methodist Church, Dr. Fisk, Scott advanced both biblical and theological justifications for his anti-slavery position. In the official organ of the Methodist Church, the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, Fisk had authored a series of six articles in which he attempted to demonstrate that the doctrines and measures of the abolitionists were revolutionary in their character and tendency, beyond the pale of Scriptural teaching and established Methodist doctrine, and would result, if tolerated by the Church leadership, in the division of the Church. These articles were an attack upon every abolitionist in the Church; Fisk stigmatized them as schismatics and revolutionists and great sinners who were intent on tearing apart the Church of Christ.

Scott took up the challenge presented by these articles and responded with a vigorous defense of the anti-slavery position as being both authentically Methodist in doctrine and Scriptural in basis.

⁴⁰ Quoted by Matlack, 99.

⁴¹ Albert Barnes, *The Church and Slavery* (Philadelphia: Parry and McMillan, 1857), 23.

Another well-known abolitionist preacher, the Rev. Luther Lee also responded to Fisk's challenge by publishing a series of articles in the *Herald* in which, as he explained, "I demonstrated that slavery was a great and God-defaming and humanity-corrupting and crushing evil in the Church, and that purity should not be sacrificed to union."⁴²

Since the accomodationist-Pauline epistles contain very clear endorsements of the status quo when it comes to slavery in the ancient world, the burden of proof in the debate lay most clearly on the shoulders of the abolitionists. Their arguments tended to go in two directions. On the one hand, as I have already demonstrated, they sought to attack slavery on general theological grounds that it violated what they called "the spirit of the Gospel." Lee was a chief advocate of utilizing this approach in the debate. Without the insights of modern scholarship, it was difficult for him to explain away the clear endorsement of slavery found in Ephesians, Colossians, Timothy, and Titus. Therefore, he advanced more general theological arguments against the institution of slavery – i.e, 1) that slavery usurps the prerogatives of God by robbing men of the power and means of obeying God; 2) that slavery, by calling human beings property, blots the divine image from the soul of man; 3) that slavery, by giving some men power over the lives of other men, degrades man from the dignified rank assigned him in the scale of creation according to which the rights and authority which God gave to the first man belong equally to all men; and 4) that slavery subverts the God-ordained social relations of men and women, by attacking the Biblical institution of marriage and by rendering null and void the obligations growing out of the relation of parents and children.⁴³

Many of Oscar Scott's arguments against slavery ran in this vein as well. In his series of "Letters to the Editor" of the *Zion's Herald* on the subject of slavery, he sought to remove the discussion of slavery from an "abstract" consideration of slavery as an institution (where he indicated pro-slavery advocates wished it to remain) to a "specific" discussion of the treatment of slaves themselves. In so doing, Scott advanced example after example of the mistreatment of slaves, always drawing the same conclusion: "Slavery, in its mildest form, is bondage and oppression; and in its worst form, its victims die a thousands deaths in dying one. ... Suppose our sons and daughters were among the host who are covered with nothing but blood and stripes? Or suppose that this great army of sufferers were whites? Should we then content ourselves by merely saying that we are opposed to slavery in the abstract? And yet, in the sight of God, the case is the same."⁴⁴ For even, he concluded, if "some slave-holders treat their slaves as kindly as the system of slavery will permit," it remained nevertheless true that "Slavery would be a great evil; I hesitate not to say, *sin*. It would be bondage and oppression, and unjust assumption over the rights of man. ... But, however many kind masters there may be among slave-holders, the instances of cruelty which have come to our knowledge, are sufficient to show the *tremendous power* which slave-holders possess. And is such a system to be looked upon by the statesmen, the philanthropist, the Christian, or even the minister of the gospel, with indifference? ... God forbid!"⁴⁵

Scott's initial argument was therefore based on the general theme of the "spirit of the Gospel"; he repeatedly asked his readers how a Christian could condone a system of oppression in which human beings were treated as "mere animals and articles of merchandize" and remain faithful to the gospel itself.⁴⁶ He also sought to apply the Golden Rule by repeatedly asking his readers if they would condone a system of slavery that treated "their white neighbors thus? Will the American tyrant dare to plead at the bar of God the color of the skin as an apology for his crimes?"⁴⁷

Scott also advanced the argument that slavery encouraged debauchery and sexual immorality. As he wrote, "slavery is a legalized system of licentiousness." Noting that in his travels to southern plantations, he had observed "as many shades of color among the slaves, as there is in the system of Slavery," Scott correctly deduced that slave masters were routinely raping their female slaves and impregnating them. Thus he noted, "The resemblance of many of the mulattoes to their owners and drivers is too striking not to be noticed. Nothing is more common than for a father to sell his own child, and the son his brother or sister."⁴⁸

⁴² *Autobiography of the Rev. Luther Lee* (NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984), 140. Reprint. Originally published: NY: Phillips & Hunt, 1882.

⁴³ *Autobiography of the Rev. Luther Lee* (NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984), 140. Reprint. Originally published: NY: Phillips & Hunt, 1882.

⁴⁴ Letter to the Editor, *Zion's Herald*, January 28, 1835.

⁴⁵ Letter to the Editor, *Zion's Herald*, February 11, 1835.

⁴⁶ Letter to the Editor, *Zion's Herald*, February 25, 1835.

⁴⁷ Letter to the Editor, *Zion's Herald*, March 4, 1835.

⁴⁸ Letter to the Editor, *Zion's Herald*, March 11, 1835.

The *Zion's Herald* pursued an additional line of argumentation in its publication of an "Appeal to the Members of the New England and New Hampshire Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church" in 1835. Arguing that the Bible "condemns" slavery, the *Herald* began to lay out its scriptural argument by appealing to the Golden Rule as expressed in Matthew 7: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Anticipating the objection that the passage does not specifically mention slavery, the *Herald* challenged its readers: "if the system of slavery may be justified ... because Jesus Christ did not mention it by name, then by the same principle we may justify offensive and wicked wars, the various games in vogue among the Greeks and Romans anciently, and so we may also justify bull-baiting and the bloody gladiatorial exhibitions which also prevailed among the nations when our Saviour was upon earth—neither of which practices were mentioned by Christ particularly."

The key passage to which the *Herald* appealed however was 1 Corinthians 7:20-23, in which the counter-cultural Paul argues strongly "ye are bought with a price; be not yet the servants of men." The *Herald* noted in its commentary on Paul's words that "slavery is here condemned." In fact, the "Appeal" affirmed that "no authority can be drawn from any part of the New Testament" in favor of slavery. Calling the "Scriptural argument" of the pro-slavery caucus within the Methodist Church "inconclusive", the *Herald* asserted that "Christianity, by proclaiming the immortal existence of every human soul, and pronouncing all equally responsible, and equally valuable in the eye of God, stamps the stigma of libelous absurdity upon the principle that man can, in nature, be a mere article of property. Whatever may be the temporary state of subjection, which Christianity itself may, in prevention of higher evils, rightfully retain in transient existence, it does at the same time, attest the innate ascendancy of his nature, by which he must inevitably rise about this fictitious and unnatural position of a mere chattel, into an elevation worthy his true character."⁴⁹

It was left to the Rev. Albert Barnes, in his spirited *Inquiry into the Scriptural Views of Slavery*, to analyze the specific Biblical texts that discussed slavery. Interestingly, after briefly outlining the common rejoinder of anti-slavery advocates to pro-slavery members who frequently cited the regulation of master-slave relations in the accommodationist Pauline epistles that in regulating an existing social institution the Apostle was not passing judgment on the morality of that institution, Barnes moved on to discuss the two passages he considered to be crucial to the debate. Significantly, for our purposes, both passages come from the authentic letters of the counter-cultural Paul.

Barnes' primary appeal was to the Apostle's letter to Philemon. According to Barnes, the defenders of slavery were incorrect in their exegesis of Scripture because they put the regulations of existing slave conditions in a prior position to the advice and commands of Paul to his friend and co-laborer Philemon. As he wrote, "In pursuing the inquiry whether the precepts addressed to masters furnish a sanction for slavery, there is a propriety in examining, with a somewhat more rigid attention, the case of Onesimus, the servant of Philemon." In other words, according to Barnes, the letter to Philemon establishes the crucial Biblical norm for Christians to follow in their thinking about the morality of slavery. And what does this letter say? Barnes' commentary agrees with that of contemporary scholars who see in Philemon (as described above) a clear indication that the counter-cultural Paul believed slavery was incompatible with the ethical norms of the kingdom. Thus, Barnes wrote:

There is no evidence that Onesimus should return as a slave, or with a view to his being retained and treated as a slave. ... There is very satisfactory evidence, besides this, that Paul did not mean that Onesimus should be regarded and treated as a slave. This evidence is found in verse 16. ... He desired him (Philemon) to receive and treat him, in all respects, as a Christian brother; as one redeemed; as a man. ... But how could he do this and yet regard and treat him as a slave? ... It is impossible for a man to regard his slave as, in the full and proper sense of the phrase, 'a Christian brother.' ... 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.

The second passage to which Barnes appealed in establishing the Biblical basis for his anti-slavery views also is found in the original authentic letters of the counter-cultural Paul – 1 Corinthians 7:18-22. Barnes waxed eloquent as he argued that these words established the norm for all Christian discussions of slavery:

⁴⁹ "Appeal to the Members of the New England and New Hampshire Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church," Extra edition of the *Zion's Herald*, 1835.

His ardent soul on fire with the great salvation and the anticipations of the glory to be revealed, Paul declares that the true spirit of the gospel, instead of interfering with social relations, should cause the believer to soar above them; and that the advantages and disadvantages of all early conditions ought to be forgotten and swallowed up in the thought of those transports and raptures to which he is hastening. In the verse just copied, he says liberty is to be preferred to slavery, ... Slaves were directed, if possible, to obtain a release from their hard condition. They were taught to prefer freedom, and to obtain it ... Here there is a distinct assertion that freedom is preferable to slavery, and that the slave should not regard his condition as the best and most desirable ... Slavery was a great evil.

Barnes then drew the following conclusion: "From the arguments thus presented in regard to the relation of Christianity to slavery, it seems fair to draw the conclusion that the Christian religion lends no sanction to slavery; that it is not averted in the New Testament either as a good and desirable relation, or as one that religion would have originated for the good of society, or as one which is desirable."⁵⁰

By the late 1830s, therefore, the theological and biblical "battle lines" had been drawn. Southern supporters of slavery within the Methodist Church appealed to the accommodationist Pauline epistles that sanctioned slavery and warned the abolitionists not to "split the Church" over the issue. Northern abolitionists within the Methodist Church appealed to the "spirit of the Gospel" and the writings of the counter-cultural Paul to advance their argument that slavery were incompatible with both Scripture and theology. The bishops' vain attempt to impose a "gag" order on the Church in the 1830s was quickly overturned by the activities of zealots on both sides in the 1840s. The resulting battle was resolved in 1848 as the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States split into two opposing groups: the northern Methodist Episcopal Church which condemned slavery and the southern Methodist Episcopal Church which condoned it.

Later Methodist historians have sought to depict southern Methodist pro-slavery advocates as being hypocritical in their use of Scripture by portraying them as "biblical opportunists" who "cherry-picked" verses from the New Testament to find support for an economic system to which they were already committed and from which they would not budge. However, it is the contention of this paper that this historiographic position does a great disservice to the sincerity (albeit misplaced and misguided) of the southern apologists who truly were seeking to be faithful to Holy Writ. In fact, far from "cherry-picking," southern Methodists were able to build a solid Biblical foundation in support of slavery. Of course, the same was true of the Northern Methodists who condemned it.

The ultimate source of disagreement is not to be found in the supposed hypocrisy of southern Methodist slave-owners, but rather in the contradictory comments about slavery found on the pages of the New Testament. It was not that the northern abolitionists took the New Testament seriously while the southern pro-slavery advocates did not; it was rather that they emphasized different passages of the New Testament in their attempts to guide Church policy and to establish normative guidelines for the ethical behavior of their members. In short, because the northern abolitionists appealed to the writings of the counter-cultural Paul while the southern pro-slavery forces grounded their position in the later writings of the accommodationist Paul, the division of the 1848 Conference that effectively split the Methodist Church into two competing Church structures was inevitable precisely because each side took the New Testament seriously. Ultimately, therefore, the cause of the ecclesiastical division between northern and southern Methodists is to be found in the New Testament itself, which espouses two contradictory and ultimately irreconcilable positions vis-à-vis the follower of Christ and the institution of slavery.

In conclusion, therefore, as pious Bible-believing Christians in the antebellum period wrestled with the institution of slavery as it was practiced on US soil, they found themselves appealing to different passages in Scripture to defend their positions and were thus unable to reach an effective compromise precisely because the New Testament itself is divided. The divisions within US denominations were caused not only by differences in geography, economic systems, and political identities, but also by an unresolved contradiction in the fundamental text to which both sides unflinchingly appealed.

⁵⁰ Albert Barnes, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Views of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Parry & McMillan, 1855), 318-330.