

We Are Slaves for Jesus

By The Voice of the Martyrs

On a recent trip to Laos, VOM workers enjoyed fellowship with Christians from several people groups, including the Khmu. Although the Khmu are the original inhabitants of Laos, many Laotians look down on them as culturally backward. Sometimes people call them *kha*, meaning “slave,” an insulting reference to a time when the Khmu were taken captive by invaders.

The Khmu, of course, resent being called slaves. But the Greek word for “slave,” *doulos*, is also the second most common word used to describe Christians in Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The word *doulos* occurs more than 100 times in Greek manuscripts, second only to *mathetes*, meaning “disciple.”

It is difficult to find the word “slave” in most translations of the Bible. From the first translation of the New Testament—Greek to Latin—the shocking term for “slave” was toned down with a more socially acceptable word meaning “servant.” A look at the word “servant” in *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* reveals the additional, enriching meaning behind the word.

Greek manuscripts of the New Testament use several different Greek words for “servant,” including *diakonos*, *sakir*, and *misthos*. These words convey the meaning of a servant who performs a service and who may sometimes be paid. However, a *doulos* is more than a servant. A *doulos* is bought for a price and is bound to serve his master.

As bought and paid for *douloi* (plural of *doulos*), we understand that “freedom in Christ” does not mean we are free to serve Jesus only when we feel like it. Remaining in Christ, being bound to Him as a slave to a master, provides true freedom from the desires and priorities of the world. In 1 Peter 2:16, the apostle writes that although we are “as free,” we should live as *douloi*, or fully committed slaves of God.

References to freedom in the New Testament do not imply freedom from Jesus, but rather freedom from sin or religious customs of men. In one sense, even Jesus was not “free” to do what He wanted. In John 8:29, Jesus says that He came to do the will of His

Father. We, His *douloi*, are commanded to follow in His steps. Although Jesus calls us His friends (John 15:15), He lovingly and jealously regards us as His committed slaves. Jesus uses the *doulos* metaphor notably and powerfully in Matt. 20:27 and 25:21, Mark 9:35, and John 15:20. The term *doulos* continues to appear throughout the New Testament, including several times in the Book of Revelation as a title of honor for the saints.

As slaves of Jesus, one reason we may be persecuted is that the world sees our commitment to following Him and is angry that it can never own us; we have been bought by the blood of Christ. Our true freedom is being bound in a relationship with our Master, and the world can never take this freedom away from us.

The VOM workers asked the Khmu Christians how they felt about losing homes and being beaten because they are Christians. Surprisingly, many of the Khmu replied that these sufferings encourage them. They said that their own suffering proves that Jesus is God because He told them in the Bible that Christians would be persecuted.

We wonder if these *kha*, loyal slaves of Jesus Christ, know that Jesus Himself took the nature of a slave. Jesus became a *kha* for us all, submitting to the Father with unquestioned obedience in order to secure our salvation (Phil. 2:5–11). Likewise, He requires us to be of an obedient mind and complete the will of His Father, no matter what we may face.

To many in the world we will always look like losers, but Jesus’ strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). Like Jesus, we are more than conquerors: Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are victorious over the flesh, the world, and ultimately the grave.

Whenever we Christians are insulted in the courts, in the press or in the classroom, we—like the *kha*—are free to rejoice that these attacks from the world prove that Jesus is God. We are free to ignore seemingly terrible consequences in order to share His saving grace and love with more passion. As *douloi* of Jesus who were paid for with the price of His blood, He owns us. We are His. He is our Lord.