Rebuttal to a Pro-Slavery Document
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Slavery was perhaps the biggest blemish in American history. This system existed for many years and was a major reason why the country eventually fought a civil war. A certain group of people were considered below human due to the color of their skin. While the northern states did have slavery early on, they eventually emancipated their slaves. In the South however, slavery was too intertwined with everyday life to be abolished so easily. Many southerners defended this system until the bitter end. In “A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony On the Institution of Slavery” by Thornton Stringfellow, we get a sense how supporters of slavery defended their system with a religious undertone.1

“A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony On the Institution of Slavery” by Thornton Stringfellow was written for The Religious Herald, which was a Southern paper that was conservative. Religion was a huge part of Southern culture and was used to justify slavery. Stringfellow, in his article, emphasizes four points that supposedly means that slavery was created and supported by God. First, he writes that slavery was sanctioned by the “Almighty in the Patriarchal age”. Second, he says that slavery was included in the only constitution created by God himself. Thirdly, Stringfellow stated that slavery was recognized and considered legal by Jesus Christ and existed in his kingdom. Lastly, he justifies slavery as “full of mercy”. The author spends time proving each point by looking at the Bible and providing evidence for each point.

Stringfellow begins his article by saying that slavery was approved by God in early history. He writes, “…this state, condition, or relation, did exist in the patriarchal age, and that the persons most extensively involved in the sin, if it be a sin, are the very persons who have been singled out by the Almighty as the objects of his special regard—whose character and conduct he has caused to be held up as models for future generations”. While slavery existed in the past, it does not mean that it should exist in the future. As a society, we must show an ability to grow. Yes many of the people God shows reference for actually are slave owners but that is not the reason God respects them. These are good people who happened to own slaves, which was perhaps necessary at that time. Slave owners from around the 19th century are not the same as the special characters from the Bible.

The second point Stringfellow tries to prove is that slavery was incorporated in the only constitution created by God. “In the criminal code, that conduct is punished with death, when done to a freeman, which is not punishable at all, when done by a master to a slave; for the express reason, that the slave is the master's money”. Here, Stringfellow claims that since God has created a code of laws on how to deal with slaves, that means he approves of the institution. Laws are not absolute. The United States, like most countries, has the ability to overturn laws that are perhaps outdated or useless. A reason the Bible might mention laws pertaining to slaves is because slavery existed before the Bible was created. Since already in existence, perhaps God wanted to give his people rules in ruling over their slaves, not necessarily approving of the act itself. Also, maybe the creators of the Bible had slaves so they added slavery to the Bible in order to make it seem more acceptable.

Another point the author presses on is the legality and recognition slavery receives from Jesus Christ. He argues that God would have created a commandment if he wanted to end slavery. “Such an omission or oversight cannot be charged upon any other legislator the world has ever seen. But, says the Abolitionist, he has introduced new moral principles, which will extinguish it as an unavoidable consequence, without a direct prohibitory command.” Everything we do is not written down. Some things are just common sense. Nowhere is it written that we must say hello or thank you in certain situations but we all know when the right moment to say each is. Slavery being bad is not written in the Bible, but anyone with a heart can see that the system is deeply flawed. There is no way God would approve of any group of people being treated the way blacks were while enslaved.

The last point Stringfellow tries to prove is that slavery is “full of mercy”. The author says this because many prisoners of war were not killed so they could be used as slaves. If slavery did not exist, all these prisoners would be dead. However, two wrongs do not make a right. It can be argued that being in a state of slavery might be worse than being dead. Many African mothers killed their babies in order for them to not experience the hardships of slavery. Also, the Southern plantation owners were not the victors of war against the enslaved, so they had no right to enslave them. The only reason the whites wanted to keep the blacks enslaved was to exploit them.

Slavery was such a harsh institution. It is incredible that some people actually tried to defend this system, in order to protect their investments. Slavery provided extremely cheap labor and also gave them a sense of elitism. Rich whites used blacks in order to join the support of poor whites from the South. The arguments the slave owners used to protect their system was flawed and eventually slavery was abolished. This was just the beginning of the fight for blacks in the United States.