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# Why Did So Many Christians Support Slavery?

Key reasons advanced by southern church leaders

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Image: Grafissimo / Getty Images

Many southern Christians felt that slavery, in one Baptist minister's words, "stands as an institution of God." Here are some common arguments made by Christians at the time:

## Biblical Reasons

- Abraham, the "father of faith," and all the patriarchs held slaves without God's disapproval (Gen. 21:9–10).
- Canaan, Ham's son, was made a slave to his brothers (Gen. 9:24–27).
- The Ten Commandments mention slavery twice, showing God's implicit acceptance of it (Ex. 20:10, 17).
- Slavery was widespread throughout the Roman world, and yet Jesus never spoke against it.
- The apostle Paul specifically commanded slaves to obey their masters (Eph. 6:5–8).
- Paul returned a runaway slave, Philemon, to his master (Philem. 12).

## Charitable and Evangelistic Reasons

- Slavery removes people from a culture that “worshipped the devil, practiced witchcraft, and sorcery” and other evils.
- Slavery brings heathens to a Christian land where they can hear the gospel. Christian masters provide religious instruction for their slaves.
- Under slavery, people are treated with kindness, as many northern visitors can attest.
- It is in slaveholders’ own interest to treat their slaves well.
- Slaves are treated more benevolently than are workers in oppressive northern factories.

## Social Reasons

- Just as women are called to play a subordinate role (Eph. 5:22; 1 Tim. 2:11–15), so slaves are stationed by God in their place.
- Slavery is God’s means of protecting and providing for an inferior race (suffering the “curse of Ham” in Gen. 9:25 or even the punishment of Cain in Gen. 4:12).
- Abolition would lead to slave uprisings, bloodshed, and anarchy. Consider the mob’s “rule of terror” during the French Revolution.

## Political Reasons

- Christians are to obey civil authorities, and those authorities permit and protect slavery. ...