

Selling Oneself into Slavery:
Additional Evidence from Justinian's *Digest* and the Gospels
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Although evidence exists that free persons sold themselves into slavery sometimes (e.g., Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 15.23; Petronius *Satyr.* 57; *1 Clement* 55.2), scholars have argued that such examples are merely hypothetical or too given to rhetorical or humorous purpose to be taken seriously (Harrill 1995; R. Horsley 1998). However, Justinian's *Digest* provides some additional evidence that ought to be considered in the debate. For example, Ulpian posed as a theoretical example what should happen to completely free twenty-somethings who tried to pass themselves off as slaves (*Dig.* 40.12.7, preface). It represents a ruse some free persons used to derive access to the price of their own sale and thus the ability to manage monies generated by the purchase price (Buckland 1908; Crook 1967). In this paper I shall examine this and related transactions in the *Digest*, together with parabolic material (e.g., Mt. 24.45-51//Lk. 12:42-48; Lk. 16.1-8) that probably depict persons involved in the same type of servile stewardships the examples drawn from the *Digest* presume. I conclude that many persons—if given an honest choice—were willing to forgo paltry freedoms to become slaves of wealthy persons and so lead lives which must have been better, in many respects, than that available to free but poor persons.