

**Who Do You Serve?** Romans 6:15-23 (ESV) bible-sermons.org September 22, 2013

Paul has built a case for man being made right with God through faith alone by the grace of God. In the first half of the chapter, Paul answered the question he expected from the religious crowd. If it is all by grace through faith, then are Christians going to go on sinning so grace may abound? Paul taught that we don't take advantage of the grace of God. We have died to sin and been raised with Christ. We should be walking in newness of life. (6:4) That new life no longer finds pleasure in sin, but rather in serving God as an instrument of righteousness. Since we died to that old life, we aren't going to go on living in it (6:8).

In the second half of the chapter that we are looking at today, Paul asks a similar question and gives another reason we don't go on living in sin. <sup>15</sup> *What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!* In the first half of the chapter the answer was based on the symbolism of baptism. If we have identified ourselves with Christ in His death and burial, then we died to sin. We also identify ourselves with Him in resurrection to live a new life. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul even says the power of resurrection is at work in us helping us live that new life (Ephesians 1:19-20). This tells us that resurrection is not just about the physical body, but is also about our spirit coming alive right now (8:11).

This time, Paul is going to argue against the abuse of grace in another way. If we are under grace and not bound by the requirements of the law, then what does it matter if I cheat on my taxes or for that matter on my wife? Paul has already said if we died to sin, how can we go on living in it (6:2)? That seems to be answering those who haven't experienced the new life who are questioning grace through faith. But now he gives us who have new life a reason to not give in to temptation to go back to our old life. <sup>16</sup> *Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?* He reminds us of the bondage of sin we once experienced.

"Do you not know?" Some don't know. In fact, the more enslaved they are the more vehemently they claim they are free.

This refusal to recognize one's bondage to sin seems to be a perfect analogy of the Children of Israel in the wilderness. Before they left Egypt they were groaning under the oppression of the taskmasters (Exodus 1:11). They were crying out to God for a deliverer. Once delivered and in the wilderness eating manna for a few years, they forgot about the oppression, the sting of the whips, the hard labor, and only recalled the abundant fish, leeks, and other delicious food (Numbers 11:5). Isn't that the way of

**Commented [notes1]: Romans 6:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

**Commented [notes2]: Romans 6:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

**Commented [notes3]: Ephesians 1:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

**Commented [notes4]: Romans 8:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

**Commented [notes5]: Romans 6:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

**Commented [notes6]: Exodus 1:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.

**Commented [notes7]: Numbers 11:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.

man? We leave a situation we were miserable in and years later only recall the good. We wonder why we ever left. But if we return, it isn't long before our memory is refreshed.

If it has been a long time since you were delivered from the world, or maybe you grew up as a Christian and never experienced the world's enticements, then the glittering lures of destruction look pretty tempting. We need the reminder of newly saved believers' testimonies. **Slavery to pride, money, addictions, lust or anything the world has to offer will completely take over our life.** Slavery to sin leads to death.

Look at a few biblical examples. Samson is a good one. You'd think the guy would wake up after the first couple attempts at his life (Judges 16:15-17). It is almost hard to believe how gullible we are until that slavery to sin puts us in the same sandals. Saul's ego lost him the kingdom and the help of his most capable and loyal assistant (1Samuel 15:28). King David's lust led him to adultery and murder (2Samuel 12:9). Judas love of money ended in suicide. Demas left the high calling of God because he loved what the world had to offer (2Timothy 4:10). They each experienced slavery to sin. We are slaves to the one we obey, and when sin is the master, it leads to death.

When we present ourselves to God for obedience to Him, we become slaves of righteousness. The biblical examples abound. Hebrews chapter 11 gives us a great list of them. Almost every prophet is one. I especially think of those who faced a life of persecution because of their choice to be a slave of obedience to God as an instrument of righteousness. Jeremiah had almost the entire nation hating him because of His obedience (Jeremiah 1:18-19). Ezekiel was obedient to some of the strangest commands. How would you like to lie on one side for 390 days and then be told to turn over and lay on the other side for 40 days (Ezekiel 4:4-6)? We have the living martyrs today in closed countries who are imprisoned and tortured, but when they are released they go right back to being obedient slaves of righteousness.

***17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,*** Paul is reminding the Christians in Rome and all who read this letter that we should remember to be grateful for being set free from the bondage of sin. It is out of that heart of gratitude that we became obedient from our heart. It became our desire to serve our Savior. We committed our life to live the message we received. Paul exemplified it in the way he lived. He taught it in his letters. He pointed to the life of Jesus as the ultimate example. The Apostle's doctrine was the message of Jesus as it was to be lived out in daily life. That is what we have committed ourselves to, so how can we go back? No one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

**Commented [notes8]: Judges 16:15-17 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me where your great strength lies."<sup>16</sup> And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. <sup>17</sup> And he told her all his heart, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man."

**Commented [notes9]: 1 Samuel 15:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you."

**Commented [notes10]: 2 Samuel 12:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites."

**Commented [notes11]: 2 Timothy 4:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia."

**Commented [notes12]: Jeremiah 1:18-19 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. <sup>19</sup> They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you."

**Commented [notes13]: Ezekiel 4:3-6 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And you, take an iron griddle, and place it as an iron wall between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Then lie on your left side, and place the punishment of the house of Israel upon it. For the number of the days that you lie on it, you shall bear their punishment.

<sup>5</sup> For I assign to you a number of days, 390 days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment. So long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel.

<sup>6</sup> And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah. Forty days I assign you, a day for each year.

**Commented [notes14]: Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

*<sup>18</sup> and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.* This is our new state. How could we go back? I know at times I've been tempted to try to serve both masters. If we give in, we will only be serving one. One Master says, "Follow me!" and He isn't going the way of the world (Matthew 4:19). I've seen people who claimed to be Christians living in slavery to sin and everyone could see it but them. They try to justify it, but it controls them. They say they can stop anytime, but then why not stop now?

Freedom from sin means becoming a slave to righteousness. The early church father **Chrysostom said that slavery to Christ was better than any freedom.** It doesn't mean we don't complain at times, and even fail to be obedient, but the overall life is that of faithfulness to our new Master, Jesus, following where He leads.

*<sup>19</sup> I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.* Paul is putting this truth way down on lower shelf so we can all understand what he is saying. Before coming to Christ we gave our bodies over to serve impurity and lawlessness which only led to more lawlessness. Lawlessness is forgetting God's boundaries and doing what we please. It's making ourselves our own lord and master and ignoring the fact that there is another supreme One (Deuteronomy 4:35).

Now we are to present ourselves just as wholeheartedly as slaves to righteousness. That leads to sanctification. We give our mind, will, emotions, strength, and time to obey whatever the Spirit of God leads (Romans 8:14). That is the path to sanctification. Sanctification is increasing in Christ likeness. **The more we surrender ourselves to His service, waiting for His direction, the more we are like Jesus in His total surrender to the Father's will** (John 17:4). It is being available to God to serve at His direction.

Paul told us in the previous verse that there is a pattern or standard. That standard is to do what we know is the will of God, study the Scriptures, time in prayer, fellowship, and working as unto the Lord, but all the while we are to be available to serve at the Spirit's direction. Slavery is a human term, but it is a good analogy. A slave has general orders to serve in his area of gifting, but at any moment the master may step in and give him or her a specific order. We must wait on the Lord to receive His orders. The more we listen and obey, the more we are transformed. The joy of service increasingly becomes our pleasure. In heaven we will be serving our Savior and I'm sure that we will find great joy in doing so (Revelation 22:3). It will be one adventure after another, just as it should be even now.

**Commented [notes15]: Matthew 4:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

**Commented [notes16]: Deuteronomy 4:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.

**Commented [notes17]: Romans 8:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

**Commented [notes18]: John 17:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

**Commented [notes19]: Revelation 22:3 (NIV)**

<sup>3</sup> No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

*<sup>20</sup> For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. <sup>21</sup> But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.* Our conscience may have bothered us a little when lived in sin, but we just carried on. Righteousness didn't have any power over us. We did what we wanted regardless of the cost to others or even to ourselves. We would often lie to ourselves about the consequences. In the first chapter of this letter, Paul says that we praised others that did the same evil things (1:32). We boasted of our evil deeds.

**Commented [notes20]: Romans 1:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Paul asks what the fruit was from the years of slavery to sin? Let me list a few: a hangover, a bad reputation, a guilty conscience, broken relationships, many tears of regret, and we could go on and on. Most of us still have to deal with the fruit of those years of serving sin. Now we are ashamed of the things we did. I know I certainly am. I don't want to talk about them. I want to talk about Jesus and all that He has done, about His grace and experiencing Him today (Hebrews 12:2).

**Commented [notes21]: Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

The end of those things in our old life is death, spiritual and physical. Except for the grace of God delivering us from slavery to sin we would have ended up in hell (John 3:36). The bad fruit of what we did directed people to spiritual death. I've heard so many people say that if God had not saved them they'd either be in prison or dead. That is what Paul is saying about us all. That's why those old temptations should be shunned like a deadly virus. That is why we don't presume upon the grace of God and listen to the lie that a little sin will be alright (Galatians 6:8).

**Commented [notes22]: John 3:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

*<sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.* New life in Jesus means freedom from the enslaving power of sin. We can say no to temptation. Instead, we have become slaves of God. He gives us our marching orders. Instead of the fruit of self-destruction that we once reaped, we now reap fruit that leads to sanctification. The fruit of the Spirit is increasingly seen in us. We are more and more like our Savior as we focus our life on Him. That is the process of sanctification. It's getting us ready for heaven.

**Commented [notes23]: Galatians 6:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

The end of sanctification is not death but eternal life. Death is separation from God who is life, and goodness, and love. Death is where enslavement to sin leads. Eternal life is not just living forever, it is living now and always in communion with Life. Jesus said that He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He said life eternal was to know God and Jesus (John 17:3). Paul is not saying anything that Jesus did not say. He is just expounding on what He did say.

**Commented [notes24]: John 14:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

**Commented [notes25]: John 17:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

<sup>23</sup> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* This is another one of those verses many have memorized as a part of the Romans road to salvation. That is well and good, but don't forget the context. Paul is still answering the question of why followers of Jesus shouldn't presume upon the grace of God, why we should avoid sin like the plague. Sin ends in death. It enslaves us. It brings nothing but destruction. We can pile up a lifetime of wages by continuing in sin. What a payment will be received from the just and righteous God if we are not saved by the work of Jesus on the cross (2:5)!

God offers us a free gift, eternal life in Christ Jesus. There is payment for us as well, but it is for our service to our Lord (Isaiah 40:10). But don't leave off the last two words of the chapter. He is "our Lord". That means He is our Master. That means we are slaves to do His bidding (Luke 6:46). The difference is that His desire is for our good and to advance His goodness and life. Enslavement to sin only brings death.

Once again Paul has emphasized grace by saying eternal life is a free gift (5:17). That relationship with God that you receive by faith cost God everything, but it is free to you. Here is the real gospel (good news). All mankind is a slave of sin. All mankind can receive the free gift of salvation, but it only comes through Jesus as He becomes Lord of your life. Slavery to sin ends when Jesus becomes our new Master.

There is a double invitation here. The first is that you can be free and end the bad fruit and sin that leads to death. You can know Jesus as your Master and be free to serve Him and bear fruit that leads to eternal life. You can begin preparing for heaven and have an adventure in the process. But Jesus must be Lord of your life (John 12:26).

The second is that if you have been fooling yourself and thinking you could serve two masters, you can let Christ Jesus take back over your life and bear fruit unto God. He will give you the power, resurrection power, to live in newness of life. He can restore the relationship you once had, if you will submit to Him.

Shall we go on sinning? Of course not! We now offer ourselves as instruments of righteousness that leads to sanctification. Who will you serve? A servant of the living God is the greatest title a human can possess.

#### Questions

- 1 What is the difference between verse 1 and verse 15?
- 2 Review Bible examples of slavery to sin.
- 3 Review examples of slaves of righteousness.
- 4 What were we enslaved to? Fruit?
- 5 What should we be enslaved to? Fruit?

#### Commented [notes26]: Romans 2:5 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

#### Commented [notes27]: Isaiah 40:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

#### Commented [notes28]: Luke 6:46 (ESV)

<sup>46</sup> "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

#### Commented [notes29]: Romans 5:17 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

#### Commented [notes30]: John 12:26 (ESV)

<sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

- 6 Where does slavery to righteousness lead?
- 7 What is the standard?
- 8 Where do the two paths end?
- 9 What is the unique focus in the answer to each half of the chapter?
- 10 Who do you serve?