

Who's Your Master?

(Romans 6:15-23)

Story on Slavery: On January 1st 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that all slaves in these United States were free. Sadly nothing really changed for them. They kept on working for their white landowners in the Southern states for the next several decades. The majority of the first-generation slaves never left their plantations.

One elderly slave in Alabama was asked what he thought about President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and he answered, "I don't know nothing about Abraham Lincoln, except folks say he set us free. And I don't know nothin about that either."

There is a powerful parallel between this fact of history, and the great spiritual truth the Apostle Paul is revealing to us in Romans chapter 6. Paul wants us to know that God has set us free from slavery to sin to serve Him in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is the good news presented in Romans 6. Look at verse 7, Romans 6, verse 7—"He who has died is freed from sin." Our faith in Christ Jesus has set us free from bondage to sin. We are no longer slaves of sin.

Intro: In Romans 6:1-14 Paul has shown that God's abundant grace in Christ has provided believers with freedom from sin's tyrannical power over us. Our old life in Adam, dominated by sin and resulting in death, has been crucified with Christ that we should no longer be slaves to sin. Paul concluded in verse 11 that as born-again believers we are to consider/reckon ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Sin is no longer master over us, for we are no longer under law, but under grace (v. 14).

Paul's point in Romans 6 is that it is the grace of God that breaks the power of sin in the believer's life. The Mosaic Law cannot do it. We don't live by a code of do's and don'ts. We live in obedience to God out of love and gratitude for what He has done for us. Obedience is an internal response to God's grace. External obedience to the Law has no power to enable us to obey. However, God's grace provides us with spiritual enablement to live a life of service to God and others. We have been given God's indwelling Holy Spirit who provides us with the power to overcome sin.

A. No longer slaves to sin (6:1-23)

1. Dead to sin, alive in Christ (6:1-14)
2. Free from Law, enslaved to God (6:15-23)

In the passage before us this morning, Romans 6:15-23, Paul continues his explanation that believers have been set free from bondage to sin and can now live a life of righteousness to God. In verse 15 Paul responds to another objection posed by his imaginary Jewish opponent.

a. Paul's opponent's question and his response (vv. 15-16)

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?”

This is a slightly different question than the one raised back in verse 1. If you compare the two questions you will see that the first question suggested that *we should sin in order that God's grace may abound*. Here, Paul is addressing his opponents conclusion *that since we are no longer under law, we can sin because God's grace does abound*. A major difference between these two question, one that is brought out in the Greek verb tenses is this: In verse 1 the reference is to continuance in sin. A life dominated by habitual sin. The reference here in verse 15 is to isolated acts of sin. Paul's opponents would conclude that since they were no longer under law, and were covered by God's grace (6:14), then surely it wouldn't hurt to sin once in a while.

Paul's response (vv. 15b-16)

“May it never be!” (*megenoitō*)

Paul is going to show that the grace God has freely given us in Christ Jesus does not grant us the freedom to do anything we want. We have been set free from the bondage of sin in order to live a life that reflects the nature and character of God. Paul's basic premise is “no man can serve two masters.” He will either serve sin or he will serve righteousness. He will either serve Satan or he will serve God.

The question Paul raises is “**Who's Your Master?**” Who are you going to serve? The concept of slavery dominates this passage, with the words *slave* or *enslave* occurring **eight times**. Slavery is the topic of this passage. Paul will show that the Christian's *freedom from sin* is NOT *freedom to sin*. The reason believers shouldn't sin even once in a while is because sin leads to slavery, i.e., bondage. We become slaves to whomever we serve. Paul sets forth two masters: one is sin, and the other is obedience [to God] verse 16

16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves

for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

Prior to coming to Christ, we all served sin, it was master over us. But when we came to Christ by faith, we exchanged our former master for another. Our former servitude to sin has been replaced with servitude to God. The master we now obey is a clear indication of whose slave we really are. There is no room for compromise. The Lord Jesus taught this same truth, “No one can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24). Prior to his death Joshua challenged the Israelites at Shechem, “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, as for me and my house we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15).

There are two very different outcomes derived from the master we choose to serve. Choosing sin as our master leads to bondage and death. Choosing God and obedience as Master results in righteousness and eternal life.

b. Paul’s thankfulness (vv. 17-18)

In verses 17-18—Paul expresses his thankfulness to God that these Roman Christians had chosen Christ as their Master.

17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, **18** and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Paul thanked God, that even though these Roman Christians were formerly slaves of sin, they had chosen to become obedient to the form of teaching that had been delivered unto them. The teaching they had committed themselves to was the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The truth concerning His death, burial, and resurrection. Notice that they had committed themselves to this teaching from their hearts. They had willingly embraced the Lord Jesus by faith. Their commitment to Christ provided freedom from sin, and resulted in their becoming slaves of righteousness [to God] (v. 18).

It must be noted that dedication to God is voluntary, not automatic for the Christian (cf. v. 13; 12:1). If a believer does not truly dedicate himself or herself to God, he or she will continue to practice sin (v. 16). Paul you recall had exhorted these believers back in verses 12-13 to stop letting sin reign in their mortal body, that they should obey its lusts. He urged them instead to present themselves to God as those alive from the dead, and their members as instruments of righteousness.

c. Paul's reason for using the slave-master analogy (vv. 19-22)

1) Our lack of spiritual discernment (v. 19)

Paul explains his reason for using the slave-master analogy in verse 19. He says in v. 19 "I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh." Commentators have pointed out that Paul may have used the slave-master analogy because so many people in his day were slaves. An estimated one third of the population of Corinth, from which he was writing, were slaves. Many people actually sold themselves into debt slavery as a means of livelihood. While estimates for the prevalence of slavery in the 1st Century Roman Empire vary, it is estimated that there were upward of two to three million slaves in Italy alone, roughly 35-40% of the population.

Paul desired to emphasize his point that every human being is either a slave of sin or a slave to righteousness. **This is the very heart of his argument.** He continues in verse 19 "For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification."

Prior to their coming to faith in Christ, these Roman Christians had yielded their members as slaves to sin, resulting in further lawlessness. Now they needed to voluntarily yield, present or offer themselves as slaves to God (cf. vv. 13, 16). This would result in their progressive sanctification—the daily *setting apart* of ourselves to God. All of us must make a choice of which master we will serve. Obedience to God leads to holiness, yielding to sin promotes bondage and increasing wickedness.

2) Our former slavery to sin (vv. 20-21)

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Prior to coming to faith in Christ, when we were still slaves of sin, we were free in regard to righteousness. We were controlled by sin working its vile deceit through the members of our body. Sin failed to provide any moral righteousness. Paul continues in verse 21

21 Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.

The only benefit Paul's readers derived from their former slavery to sin was shame. As they thought about their former slavery to sin, they felt nothing but remorse. As you all know, sin brings death to everyone involved. Sin brings death to a person's relationship with God. Sin results in death to everyone who practices sin. It destroys relationships, marriages, families, churches, pastors, employers, employees. Our nation is so rife with sin, it is leading to our inevitable collapse. Whereas shame is the immediate result of sin, death is its final fruit.

3) Our present slavery to God (v. 22)

In contrast to sin's tyrannical rule, believers have been set free because of their union with Christ Jesus, v. 22

22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

Through faith in Christ, believers have been freed from sin's bondage, and have become slaves of God. The benefits of accepting God's gracious gift are enormous. The reward for serving God is growth in holiness. This is called progressive sanctification. As the name implies, it is progressive growth in godliness, which results in eternal life. Eternal life is actually the immediate and the ultimate product of progressive sanctification.

Paul concludes in verse 23 with a stern warning and a solemn promise.

d. Paul's conclusion (v. 23)

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul's warning is that the wages paid by slavery to sin are death. However, the free gift that God gives to believers is eternal life in or through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. The word "wages" is a military term designating the wages paid to a soldier for services rendered. Sinners earn what they will eventually receive, death—eternal separation from God, who alone is life. Believers on the other hand, by yielding to God's gracious gift of salvation through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, are given the gift of eternal life.

Conclusion:

I love the way John Stott sums up this passage: “By birth we are slaves of sin, by grace and faith we become slaves of God. The slavery of sin yields no return except steady moral deterioration, and finally death. The slavery of God yields the precious return of sanctification and finally eternal life.”

Why in the world would we ever want to go back to the miserable and wretched slavery to sin? That’s what Satan wants us to do. He is going to do everything in his power to get us back under sin’s control. You can count on it friend. He will keep coming and whispering in your ear, “Go ahead and do it. “You’re forgiven in Christ. “Besides, your no longer under Law but under grace. “And besides, God in His marvelous grace will forgive you. “Go ahead and do it, just this once.”

You’ve heard those words before haven’t you? Hopefully, not in audible terms, but those thoughts have come to your mind. Now, you know where they come from. They come from Satan, the arch enemy of our souls. The question is, what are you going to do when your tempted to sin? If you have understood the message of the first half of Romans 6, you are going to tell the Devil to get lost. Tell him that you have died to your old life dominated by sin. You have been crucified with Christ, and your old body of sin has been stripped of its power. You have been freed from sin to serve the living God.

If you understand the second half of Romans 6, that we have just looked at, you will tell him something like this. Satan, you must be crazy! Even one sin will lead to slavery, and eventually to death. I have been set free from slavery to sin. Why in the world would I ever want to go back to sin again?

Are you willing to take this truth from Romans chapter 6 and translate it into life? “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” **Absolutely not?** How shall we who have died to sin live any longer in it? Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus (v. 11). Victory over the indwelling power of sin is found in reckoning ourselves as dead to sin and alive in Christ (v. 11), and yielding or presenting ourselves to God and the controlling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (vv. 12-14). What then? Shall we sin because we are no longer under law but under grace? **May it never be!** God forbid! Don’t you know dear Christian that whoever you present yourself to you become the slave of that one you obey; either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness. Will you surrender your life to God this morning? When you’re confronted with the question Who’s your Master? What will you say?

Application: If you want to experience victory over sin: 1) Ask God to make you a slave of Christ. 2) Reckon yourself to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus (v. 11). 3) Stop allowing sin to reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts (v. 12). 4) Present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness in service to God (v. 13).

Closing Prayer:

Closing song: "In My Life Lord, Be Glorified"

Closing Benediction: