

The Freedom of Slavery *Romans 6:15 - 23*

*¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!
¹⁶Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.
¹⁸You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. ¹⁹I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²²But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Fortunately, we know very little about slavery on a personal, first hand basis. We have lived as free people with rights and liberties not afforded many in our world. Spiritually, Christ came to set us free. He came to liberate us from sin and to make us “slaves” to righteousness (see verse 22). We all serve a master (see verse 16). The only choice is which master we have selected to follow. Christ calls us to follow Him. Paradoxically, real freedom is found only in slavery to righteousness.

Slavery to sin can lead to death (see verse 23). Slavery to Christ and righteousness leads to life.

In both 6:1 and 6:15, Paul began with a brief rhetorical question. This device was intended to compel his readers to think and work through these spiritual matters addressed in chapter six. Paul also cautioned his readers with both questions to realize that, even though we are not under the law, we do not possess a license to do as we please when we please. We are under God's grace as God's people. As such, we should not trample that grace. But rather, that grace should enable and inspire us to pursue righteousness with the thirst of a sun-parched man. Grace should never be twisted or manipulated into a license to re-enter bondage to sin. Paul could not have spoken clearer about this matter in verse 15. He declared “by no means!” David Jeremiah wrote about the subtle differences between the two responses to the questions Paul raised in 6:1 and 6:15. *“The difference between Romans 6:1 and Romans 6:15 was that the antagonist in Romans 6:1 was saying, ‘let us go on sinning that grace may abound.’ The antagonist in Romans 6:15 was saying, ‘let us commit sin because grace does abound.’ But the purpose of grace is not to free us to sin*

but to free us from sin. Grace not only justifies a believing sinner; it transforms him."

In verse 17, Paul wrote about the contrast that comes to pass through our confession of faith in Christ. Though once when we were slaves to sin and dead in sin and separated from God, we have been reconciled with God and now follow a new model for life. We have the very words of life entrusted to us. Verse 18 teaches us that we have traded masters and the principles that control us. We are now aligned with the righteousness of Christ. David Jeremiah, Joseph Stowell and others have argued that in verses 17-18, there is a progression of faith in Roman Christians that goes something like this...

1. They were enslaved to sin...
2. They were enlightened by God's Word and Spirit at work in them...
3. They were emancipated from sin...
4. They were enslaved again, though this time to Christ...

We can easily see that the same progression is at work in the twenty-first century too. Our faith story if we are Christians follows that template too. We must often remind ourselves that though we are free from sin, we are slaves to Christ and His ways. Ironically, only through slavery to Christ do we find real and lasting freedom.

John MacArthur wrote, *"Jesus Christ calls to Himself those who are willing to be inwardly transformed by Him, who desire an entirely new nature that is created in His own holy likeness. He calls to Himself those who are willing to exchange their sinfulness for His holiness."* Note how often the words "Him" and "Himself" were used in that quote. Our lives must always be about Him!

Applications . . .

1. Memorize Romans 6:23. Be able to explain the meaning of this verse to someone with little understanding of Christ and His ways.
2. Consider the place where you work or encounter different people each day. How can you practice righteousness for them to see?
3. Dedicate yourself today to being a slave to Christ. Not just a follower or Christ or a "Christian," but a slave to Him!