

## Whose Slave are You?

Romans 6:15-23 *what then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*

### Introduction

We all serve something; its just a matter of what!

Some people are slaves of their work. These servants of busyness and achievement can't shut down their laptops for more than a couple of hour's at a time and their electronic devices are surgically implanted in their hands. I know someone a little bit like that! There is always another project deadline.

Some people are slaves to possessions. Driven by fantasy that contentment can be found in the having of things. How much is enough?

Some people are enslaved to relationships. They change into different people that will gain them approval of others. They switch between self-acceptance and self-loathing, dependant upon the affirmation or criticism they receive. They don't want to be alone and sacrifice themselves for it.

Some people are enslaved to the god of themselves. Psychologists call them narcissists. The name comes form a Roman mythology names Nacissus, who fell in love with his own reflection in a stream. Narcissists serve themselves. This, like other forms of slavery, only leads to greater emptiness.

Question -What do we serve?

Romans 6:15-16 *what then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness.* Paul concluded his response to the question are we to continue to sin so that grace may increase (Romans 6:1) with the statement (Romans 6:14), *For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*

In other words, because believers can now choose **NOT** to sin, they have the freedom to rise above the law.

Paul gave a second rhetorical question *what then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?* With an emphatic *Certainly not!*

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In verse 16 Paul reminded the readers that a person is a slave to the one he commits to obey. To be a slave of something is to become an instrument in serving its interests. Because **grace** has freed us, we now have a choice between two masters. The old master **sin** is dedicated to the destruction of those who serve it. The new master **obedience** seeks righteousness, those things that please God and give life to those who serve Him.

In the American South after the Civil war, many freed slaves had no other choice but to become **sharecroppers**. Which gave them land and livelihood, but required them to share most of the livelihood with the landowners. This was servanthood with a kinder name.

Paul asked the question – why would you choose a master whose dedicated purpose was to keep you enslaved and ultimately kill you?

We have a choice between two masters – to whom will we go? Whose interest will we serve? One promises life, the other, death.

Romans 6:17-18 ***But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. <sup>18</sup> And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*** Paul broke out with spontaneous doxology – Thanks be to God! Something happens immediately a person receives the grace of God through faith. They are given a new heart, a new nature that hates sin and desires to obey it's new master: righteousness.

Romans 6:19 ***I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.*** The truth Paul taught here is really a paradox. Slavery to God is the greatest freedom a human can know.

When God created Adam and Eve, they bore their creator's image. They lived in perfect harmony with God and ruled over the rest of creation. Never was mankind so free as when they were **slaves to righteousness**.

When we **serve righteousness** we not only please God, we do what is best for ourselves. But humanity exchanged truth for a lie and looked to sin rather than their Creator to meet their basic needs. That decision only perpetuated sin and intensified the bondage. This is the downward cycle of sin.

The grace of God changed all that. Just as service to sin binds us closer to sin, service to righteousness frees us to live in harmony with God and rule over creation. Paul called this **hagiasmos**, which is commonly translated **Sanctification, holiness, consecration or purity**. For Paul this is both a state of being and a process. While it appeared only twice in this letter (6:19,22) it is nevertheless the central theme of this larger section.

Romans 6:20-22 ***For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. <sup>21</sup> What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. <sup>22</sup> But now having been set free from***

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*sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.* Again Paul clarifies the believer's choice. Sin and righteousness are mutually exclusive. Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, *no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.* God created mankind with basic needs. In the beginning, those physical, emotional, and spiritual needs were filled as mankind enjoyed peace with God. After the fall we looked to sin instead. Paul asked in effect, when you were trying to meet those God given needs by pursuing sin, what did you gain?

Paul reminds the reader that once we have been freed from the bondage of sin, we still have needs that must be filled. And we will look to something to fill them. The believer having been freed from bondage to sin may now look to the Creator for fulfillment. While the pull of sin is downward, the cycle of sanctification draws the believer closer to God. Increasing dependence on the Lord provides meaningful satisfaction and, ironically, greater freedom. And rather than leading to death, slavery to God ultimately leads to eternal life.

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* This verse is commonly used to explain the gospel to those who have yet to believe but Paul wrote it to encourage believers in sanctification. In chapter 6 Paul stated that those who place their trust in Jesus Christ and receive God's grace through faith are baptized into Him. Believers are therefore identified with Him. His blessings become our blessing. His power becomes our power. We have everything by our being *in Christ*. We are dead to sin(6:11) Moreover, we receive eternal life by being in Christ (6:23).

This *in Christ* becomes the key to understanding everything Paul tells his readers in the following chapters. The believer's life derives from being *in Christ*, our joy is found *in Christ*, our success depends on resting in Christ, and we fellowship with others *in Christ*.

Paul declared that we are no longer compelled to serve or accomplish the purposes of unrighteousness (Romans 6:15-21). We may freely choose to obey sin and then reap its consequences, or we may choose to obey Christ and they share in His joy (Romans 6:20-23).

Believers must learn to embrace their freedom and recognize temptation for what it is. When tempted:

1. Flee temptation. Change your circumstances. Physically move from where you are and quickly go somewhere different.
2. Do something that honours God. Prayer is Good but do something tangible with a godly activity.
3. Thank God for giving you the freedom to choose Him over wrongdoing and ask Him for encouragement.
4. Try to discern what triggered the temptation and take practical steps to steer clear of the same situation.