

# Are You a Slave to Sin or to Righteousness?

## *Romans 6:15-18*

**Sermon-in-a-Sentence:** Ironically, true freedom from sin is found in bondage—bondage to righteousness and to God.

We are all slaves; the question is, who or what do we serve? In Romans 6:15-7:6 the Apostle Paul indicates that we are either slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness. In Christ, we have the power to choose our master. Which master do you choose on a daily basis?

"Every soul must know something of the degrading, mysterious slavery of sin. It is felt to be at once a fault and a misfortune. One voluntarily yields to the voice of evil, and at the same time finds himself unable to refuse. Deliverance comes through faith in Christ whose service is true freedom. Such is the message of Paul as he here describes true Christians as free from sin and servants of righteousness." (*Charles Erdman, Romans, p. 73*)

### **15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!**

- This is the second of four questions that Paul deals with in Romans chapters 6 and 7. These four questions appear to be objections that his Jewish readers might raise in response to his teaching of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - The overall question that Paul appears to be addressing might be expressed in this way: "What is the relationship between Sin-and-Death, the Mosaic Law, and God's Grace?"
  - The overall answer that Paul provides is that the law does not and cannot conquer sin and death, but God's grace gives to the followers of Christ the power they need to conquer both sin and death.
- 1) **Romans 6:1-2** – "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"

**Answer:** Absolutely not! Why not? Because sin does not bring more of God's grace into our lives; it actually prevents us from experiencing God's grace and blessing in our lives.
- 2) **Romans 6:15** – "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?"

**Answer:** Absolutely not! Why not? Because each of us is a slave. If we are seeking to earn God's favor by living under the law, then we are a slave to sin that leads to death. But if we are living in dependence on God's grace, then we are a slave to righteousness that leads to eternal life. [Note the table on the last page]
- 3) **Romans 7:7** – "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin?"

**Answer:** Absolutely not! Why not? Because, even though the law points out and even stimulates sin in our lives, it is nevertheless holy, righteous and good.
- 4) **Romans 7:13** – "Did that which is good, then, become death to me?"

**Answer:** Absolutely not! Why not? Because, the problem is not God's law; the problem is Man's sinful nature!
- Paul emphatically rejects the idea that we are free to sin because we are no longer under the Mosaic Law.

- Being “under grace” does not give us a license to sin; it gives us the freedom to not sin.
- Our fallen sinful nature is always looking for an excuse to sin, but God’s grace does not provide that excuse!

**16 Don'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?**

- Everyone, each of us, is a slave to someone or something.
  - Possibilities: People, possessions, a pastime, production, a practice or a principle.
  - In Christ, we have the privilege and power to choose our master; we can choose to be slaves to God and to righteousness rather than sin.
  - “In a man’s heart (the religious center of human existence) only two options are available for his obedience. A man chooses as his master either sin or God. To choose to be free to follow one’s own desires is actually to choose sin as master (v. 12). Sin leads ultimately to eternal death; obedience to God leads to eternal life (v. 23).” (*Johnson, Freedom Letter, pp. 101-02*)
  - We are either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. (cf. Matthew 6:24)
- Giving in to temptations to sin results in bondage to sin: enslavement, bondage and addiction. Bondage to sin results in death. (Cf. John 10:10)
  - “Giving in to sin results in people increasingly becoming obedient slaves to sin... This kind of activity eventually leads to death, not implying that genuine believers can actually lose their salvation but that sinning leads them in that direction, away from full enjoyment of life with Christ... Those who give themselves utterly to sin will die (face eternal punishment).” (*ESV Study Bible, pp. 2167-68*)
  - Believers who persistently continue in sin may, in fact, be punished by God with physical death (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30). At the very least, sin interferes with our fellowship with God.

**17 But 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. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.**

- For many people, the Christian life means you have to give up all kinds of fun things. In their minds the Christian life is duty, drudgery and self-deprivation.
  - When we really begin to understand what the Lord is offering us in salvation, we realize we’re not giving up any thing of real value! We’re giving up the pleasures of a prolonged and miserable death (in one form or another) in order to gain the joys and benefits of eternal life, the abundant life Christ promised His followers in John 10:10.
  - Verse 18 is not a promise—it is a statement of fact. In Christ, we are set free from sin and are now slaves to righteousness. This is the victory over sin which Christ has won for us on the cross. We don’t strive to gain the victory, we strain to live in the victory!
- The **form of teaching to which you were entrusted** is specifically the gospel message that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead for our justification.
  - This “form of teaching” was in contrast to the Mosaic Law which the Jews were trusting in for their salvation.

- They had to choose between the two; which one would they put their faith in? Which one would they obey?
  - 1) The real test of our faith is not what we profess with our mouth, it's what we do with our lives!
  - 2) The key to deliverance from bondage to sin is obedience to the Word of God. It's not giving mere mental assent to the truth that, in Christ, we have been set free from the power of sin; it's living in faith and obedience to that truth—putting it into practice in our daily lives.
- **Counterfeits to the true knowledge of God** (*Dr. John Snyder, Behold Your God: Rethinking God Biblically*)
  - The trap of **assuming that because we affirm the Bible's veracity, therefore we automatically possess the things of which the Bible speaks.** "If [a Christian] agrees with the words of Paul, then he is sure he possesses the reality of Paul's words. If he accepts every word of Paul as inspired, then every experience that Paul describes in the Christian life must already be his." (*p. 15*) Saying "Amen!" is not enough!
  - **It is one thing to affirm the truth of God's Word; it is a very different thing to live on it.** "...having a mind crammed full of right words that lie dormant, not affecting your life any more than the things you know to be lies [is to live in self-deception]. Take [the truths of God's Word] out of the back room of your mind, dust them off, reacquaint yourself with those truths, and live on them." (*A.W. Tozer p. 16*)
  - "If there is one fact, or doctrine, or promise in the Bible, which has produced no practical effect upon your temper or conduct, be assured that you do not truly believe it." (*Edward Payson, p. 16*)
- It is one thing to affirm that we have been set free from sin through our faith in Christ; it is quite another to live in victory over sin in our daily life!
  - "True Christians will never live as slaves to sin, for God has transformed their hearts at conversion, so that they will now grow in their love of righteousness and in living according to God's Word." (*ESV Study Bible, p. 2168*)
  - If we are living comfortably in our sin, without any feelings of guilt, or shame or remorse for our sin, there is a very high likelihood that we are not truly born again by the Spirit of God. At the very least, we are deceiving ourselves and living according to a counterfeit knowledge of God and His Word.
  - A genuine Christian cannot live in bondage to sin in a state of carefree contentment.
  - The Word of God, the Spirit of God, the people of God, the nature of God that was implanted within us at our salvation, will not permit such a thing! (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- "Being a slave in the ancient world meant being owned by a master. Whether slaves obeyed did not change their status as slaves, although it would affect the relationship between slave and master. The question is one of obligation. A person who has been freed from sin can act as though still a slave to sin (v. 16), or that person can live as a 'slave' to righteousness, as a servant to a kind master who gives great rewards." (*ESV Study Bible, p. 1889*)