

Are You a Slave to Sin or to Righteousness? (Part 2)

Romans 6:15-23

Sermon-in-a-Sentence: "The greatest slave is he who serves sensual pleasures." (*T. Robinson*) The man who experiences the greatest freedom is he who serves righteousness.

"Slavery to God is the greatest freedom a human can ever know. We are never so free as when we are living in harmony with our created purpose. When we 'serve righteousness,' we not only please God, we do what is best for ourselves" (*Charles Swindoll, Insights on Romans, pp. 142-43*). When we serve righteousness, we are fulfilling the purpose for which God created us and thus we experience the greatest satisfaction and freedom.

In Romans 6:15-7:6, Paul addresses the objection that his emphasis on grace gives people a license to sin.

15 What then? Shall we sin [are we free to sin] because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

- All of us are slaves.
- As Christians, we have a choice of master, but we must understand that we are slaves of the master whom we choose to obey.
- We are either slaves to sin, which leads to death or we are slaves to righteousness, which leads to eternal life.
- To his Jewish readers: Either you are seeking God's favor by trying to live under the Mosaic Law or you are coming to Him in accordance with His provision of Grace in Jesus Christ—Law or Grace.
- To us today: Either we are seeking to earn God's approval by adherence to a legalistic set of religious do's and don'ts or we are living in dependence on Christ's finished work on the cross and His Resurrection from the dead—Legalism or Grace.
- We are all slaves and true freedom from sin is found in bondage—bondage to righteousness and to God.
- True freedom from sin is found only in obedience to God's Word.

19 I 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.

- Paul is using the analogy of human slavery to illustrate the principle of spiritual slavery, either to sin or to righteousness.
- When people choose to be enslaved to sin, they are enslaved to a master who is seeking their absolute destruction!
- Sin as a slave master is never satisfied—it continually entices us to go deeper into more and more impurity and farther into ever-increasing wickedness.
- In contrast, to be enslaved to God is to be in the service of a Master who loves us and

wants us as His servants to grow in holiness and righteousness—to be participants in His very nature. (Cf. 2 Peter 1:3-4)

- It is faith in and obedience to the precious promises of God’s Word that enables us to participate in His divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.
- It is the Word of God together with the work of the Holy Spirit that enables us to overcome the evil desires of our sinful nature. (Cf. 1 Timothy 4:7)
 - 1) Growth in godliness is a divine-human partnership.
 - 2) As we grow in our obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ in submission to the work of the Holy Spirit, we will increasingly become more and more like Him in our character and our conduct.

20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

- As we begin to grow in the Christian life, we begin to recognize that sin is a very deceptive master.
- For many years, sin convinced us that the Christian life would be boring and laborious, the greatest kind of bondage. And even now, it promises us freedom but the more we indulge it, the more it enslaves us.

21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!

- Are we ashamed or are we comfortable with those behaviors that we know are displeasing to God?
- Guilt and shame are very powerful, uncomfortable feelings. But as unpleasant as these feelings are, they can serve as indicators that we need to seek the Lord’s forgiveness.
- It should be a real warning sign to us when we are able to commit sin but we’re not ashamed of it! At that point, we’re getting into a spiritual condition that Paul described as “having a conscience that has been seared as with a hot iron.” (1 Timothy 4:2)
- When we are no longer embarrassed or ashamed of our sin, we have drifted far from the Lord and it’s time to repent!

22 But 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.

- Paul is not saying here that holiness produces eternal life; rather, that the pursuit of holiness enables us to enjoy the benefits and blessings of eternal life.
- Eternal life is not just something we are looking forward to when we depart planet earth; rather, it is a new quality of life that we begin to enjoy in this life and that will only intensify when we step out into eternity. (Cf. John 10:10)

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

- The best way to think of death is in terms of separation. Our sin has earned us eternal separation from God.

- God's free gift is eternal life in Christ Jesus Our Lord. There's nothing we can do to earn it or deserve it. (Cf. John 1:10-12; Titus 3:4-5; Ephesians 2:8-9)

CONCLUSION

I. The Contrast

- A. Slavery to impurity leads us to ever-increasing wickedness
- B. Slavery to righteousness leads us to ever-increasing holiness

II. The Consequences

- A. The fruit of sin is shame
- B. The fruit of righteousness is holiness

III. The Climax

- A. The wages of sin is death
- B. The free gift of God is eternal life

(Adapted from J. Lyth)

In Christ, we are set free:

- 1. From disgraceful impurity to true holiness (vss. 19-21)
- 2. From dishonorable servitude to true freedom (vss. 20-22)
- 3. From death and condemnation to eternal life (vss. 21-23)

(Adapted from W. Hauck)

A Four-Step Process for Dealing with Temptation:

Offering Ourselves to Righteousness Rather Than to Sin

- 1. *Flee temptation*; that is, change your circumstances. Physically move from where you are and quickly go somewhere different, even if it's just for a few minutes.
- 2. *Do something that brings honor to God as an alternative.* Prayer is good, but I suggest adding something more tangible. Systematically answer the urge to sin with a godly activity.
- 3. *Thank God* for providing the freedom to choose Him over wrongdoing and *ask Him for encouragement.* Spiritual warfare is exhausting!
- 4. *Try to discern what triggered the temptation* and take practical steps to steer clear of the same situation.

(Chuck Swindoll, Insights on Romans, pp. 146-47)