

The Master-Slave Relationship

📖 Romans 6:15-19

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Q: Did I understand you to say that discipleship does not involve a point-in-time commitment? I am thinking of Arnold Fruchtenbaum's idea of a once-for-all commitment?

A: This is a good question and I did mention this in passing in Romans 6:13. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum is a Messianic Jew who went to Dallas Theological Seminary in the late 1960's. He now has a ministry known as Ariel Ministries that emphasizes teaching the Bible from a Jewish perspective. His largest influence was Charles Ryrie. I have read most of Fruchtenbaum's books as well as Ryrie's and have been influenced greatly by both of them. I was referring to Fruchtenbaum's view on Romans 6:13 when I made a brief comment to the effect that it is *not* referring to a once for all presentation of ourselves to God. Fruchtenbaum holds that in Romans 6:13 the command to "present yourselves to God" is referring to a once for all dedication that introduces one to discipleship. He maintains that view because of the aorist tense. He says, "In the Greek text, the word is in the Aorist Tense (Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2), and that emphasizes a decisive, singular act. It is an irrevocable act of surrender."¹ In another place he says, "The fact that the Scriptures use the Aorist Tense implies that it is only once; we need to make a one-time-only dedication of ourselves and our body to the Lord's use." He goes on to admit that we can fall away from this dedication vow but if we do we don't need to re-dedicate our lives since that is a once-for-all event done initially. Instead we simply need to be restored in order to get back on track where we got off. The way this view comes across to me, and I hope I'm not misrepresenting, is that you become a believer, that's by faith alone, but then at some point in the Christian life you have a decision to make, a once-for-all decision to dedicate yourself to the Lord. Once you do this you are a surrendered Christian. This does not mean that you don't fall from that dedication vow but there is no need to repeat the once-for-all dedication act. I struggle with this interpretation because it smacks too much of the idea of Keswick theology that says that some Christians come to a crisis moment that results in them being introduced into a higher life. That may not be what Fruchtenbaum is saying but it sounds a lot like that and I don't find that teaching in Scripture.

I would point out that Fruchtenbaum is correct in noting the aorist tense in Rom 6:13. However, the question is what class of aorist is it? How is it functioning? There is not a one function fits all for the aorist tense. Dan Wallace, in his *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, categorizes the aorist in Romans 6:13 as a Pure Ingressive aorist. He says of this aorist, "The stress is on the beginning of an action that the context usually makes clear is *not* a momentary action."² The context here is the first part of the verse where he commands "do not present yourselves" with a present tense and in 6:12 where he commands "do not let sin reign," also with a present tense. Probably then Wallace is right in arguing that the command of 6:13 "present yourselves to God" is an aorist ingressive meaning, "begin presenting yourselves to God." While the aorist tense does not reveal anything about the progress of the action from that time forward the other commands in the context seem to indicate the need to continually present oneself to God. Paul then is saying they should begin to present themselves to God. The context would argue for the need to continue to make that presentation. So while one may not have realized the need to start making this presentation, now that they know they need to they should begin making this presentation and continue to make this presentation.

Back to our verse-by-verse in Romans 6. We are working with the doctrine of sanctification. We said the word sanctification is from what Greek root? *αγιαζ*. What does it essentially refer to? "The setting apart of an object for a specific purpose." What's the object? We are the object. We are set apart in how many phases? Three phases. We have been set apart for God's purposes, we are being set apart for God's purposes and we will be set apart for God's purposes. Sanctification occurs in three phases and Paul's concern in Romans 6-8 is the second phase, the gradual setting apart of the believer for God's purposes. How does this sanctification proceed? What are the principles? What does God do? What do we do? These are the kinds of things Paul is clarifying. It is right here in these chapters that I think believers across the world are failing miserably. On Thursday I received this in an e-letter from Pastor Dennis Rokser. He classifies several of the confusions that exist about how one is sanctified. He says, "Too many know little to nothing of the freedom from sin that is theirs due to their co-crucifixion, co-burial, and co-resurrection with Christ (Romans 6). Too many are living practically under the bondage of law and legalism instead of by God's sufficient and enabling grace. Too many struggle daily in an effort to pump out or crank out the Christian life via the flesh while seeking to "do their best for Jesus" and as a result, they live in the failure and frustration of Romans 7. Too many acknowledge that the Christian life is lived by the power of the Holy Spirit (with their help, of course) yet miserably fail to live a supernatural kind of life. Too many have never grasped that God never asked them to produce His fruit, but to bear it (John 15:4-5). Too many have followed pied pipers down the Hansel and Gretel trail of mysticism which makes them temporarily "feel spiritual," and yet they fail to hold fast to Christ and their completeness in Him (Colossians 2:9-10, 18-19)." I quote him because there are a number of ways to botch sanctification. And if one of these describes you and you have trodden down these trails toward sanctification and only found frustration and failure then Romans 6-8 should be the most important thing in your life. Here we find step-by-step instructions related to the principles for sanctification.

Basically what has Paul said so far in Romans 6? That when we were unbelievers we were unregenerate people. What kind of disposition or nature did we have when we were unregenerate? We had a sinful disposition. What came out of our sinful disposition? A whole course of life characterized by personal sin. What happened once we believed in Christ? Our old unregenerate person was crucified with Christ, buried and we were raised new regenerate people. What's our disposition now? We have both a sinful disposition and a holy disposition. Which one are we obligated to? Having died to the sinful disposition we are no longer obligated to obey it as we once were when unregenerate. So we are obligated to obey our new holy disposition but we find that there is a war that wages within us. So what we're trying to learn is how the holy disposition can be victorious. Paul takes his time and repeats himself often in this section because these are critical truths. He basically says there are three things. First, truths we need to know; verse 3, "do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" Verse 6, "knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with..." Verse 9, "knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again..." Second, there are things we are to believe. Verse 8, "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." Third, there are things we are to reckon to be true. Verse 11, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." There's more but those three things are essential; know, believe, reckon...

We've worked, for the most part through some facts that we are to know. We are to know that our old unregenerate man died with Christ and now we are a new regenerate man alive in Christ for the purpose of living a new life. Paul taught that by giving a death-life analogy. In light of that truth verse 12 gives an imperative, "do not let the sin nature reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts." This is a present tense command meaning continually do not let the sin nature take the position of king over you such that you obey its lusts. We are not to just say no to the sin nature one time but continually to say no the sin nature. The moment we stop saying no we are saying yes to the sin nature and obeying its lusts. Verse 13 gives another imperative, "and do not go on presenting the members of your body to the sin nature as weapons of unrighteousness." Believers can clearly be used by their sin nature as weapons of unrighteousness. Therefore behavior cannot be a measure for whether someone is a believer or not. As long as they can make this presentation their bodies can be used to do evil. This is not something that believers should do but something they can do. The command is another present tense, continual command to not present the members of your body to the sin nature so that the parts of your body are not used as weapons to accomplish unrighteousness. But rather, he says, "present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness to God." The command here is the aorist tense we mentioned beforehand. It is most likely commanding them to *begin* presenting themselves to God as regenerate people and their members to Him as weapons of righteousness. Surely Paul expects the same of all believers. Once we realize this principle we should begin presenting ourselves to God because the moment we stop we are letting the sin nature reign over us so that we obey its lusts. Verse 14 gives the cause, "Because the sin nature shall not be master over you, for you are not under law

but under grace." The word "master" begins a new analogy; this is the master-slave analogy that Paul will expand in the following verses.

For now we are to understand that we "are not under law" as a governing principle for sanctification, "but under grace." Being under law refers to putting yourselves under a set of standards outside of ourselves and trying to keep them. This was the situation of the OT saint. He had the 10 commandments and the entire law stemming from those commandments but the problem was that he was limited to his flesh as a means of obeying. Under these principles sanctification does not proceed. Therefore, rather than being like an OT believer under the governing principle of law we are under grace as a governing principle. Grace refers to the new capability of living by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Because of our new holy disposition we have the desire to please God but since we can't accomplish it we need to live by faith so that the Spirit lives through us. So even in sanctification we can't produce it. We have to come to the point of humble faith, of dependence upon Him. That is the only way. If we could produce it then there would be room for boasting. But there is no room for boasting.

Today we come to the master-slave analogy that Paul hinted at in Romans 6:14. "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace." Why use this analogy? In verse 19 he explains that he is using the master-slave analogy because of the weakness of their flesh and explains that the weakness of their flesh is due to the fact that when they were unregenerate they continually presented their members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness which lead to more lawlessness. This created a dullness to understanding spiritual truth that is carried over into the regenerate life and still impedes their progress. It's a critical point to understand that when you became a Christian the past weaknesses of your flesh that you had developed by sinning in those areas over and over were not suddenly erased so that they are no longer a struggle and no longer a hindrance to understanding spiritual truth. So because of these habitual sin patterns that we built up as unbelievers and the fact that we still have those Paul uses an analogy between the master-slave relationship which was a subject of common knowledge in the Greco-Roman world.

As far as this relationship is concerned, Showers says, "The key idea in the word that Paul uses for "master" is that of a legal position of authority."³ Another key word is "slave" which Wuest says, "one who's will is swallowed up in the will of another." Putting those two ideas together we find that in Paul's day the master had the legal right to dominate and control every aspect of his slave's life. There was no room for the slave to exert his own will. The slave was obligated to render complete obedience to the master. This relationship gives trouble to those who hold that an unbeliever has free will. When I use the term 'free will' I mean the ability to choose contrary to one's sinful nature. Since the sinful nature was master and the individual was slave then the slaves will was swallowed up in the will of the sin nature. Therefore I do not believe that an unbeliever ever will choose Christ left to himself. Left to himself he will continually choose to follow the dictates of his sinful nature which is master. This is why there must be a pre-salvation work of God the Spirit in order to draw the person to choose contrary to their sinful nature. This happens in conjunction with Scripture. This is the only way for an unbeliever to willingly

choose contrary to his sin master, in the moment of believing in Christ. At that moment he is legally set free from that old master.

Now Deissmann, in his *Light from the Ancient East*, says that the very language and formulas used by Paul are attested to by the historical records of a slave being set free. From what we can gather, a slave was set free by a price being paid, so here I am bringing in the concept of a redemption price being paid. Once a slave was freed he was prohibited, under heavy penalties, from ever returning to slavery again. The prohibition of re-enslavement, however, was difficult to stop. It occurred to me that this pictures with precision the very situation in the Christian life. When we first believed we were set free by the shed blood of Christ which paid the redemption price. At that moment we were freed, Paul prohibits us from returning to slavery again. Multiple times in this chapter we are implored to no longer live by the sin nature. These are all prohibitions against re-enslavement. Nevertheless, re-enslavement is difficult to stop. In the real world believers often sell themselves back into slavery to the master of the sin nature. This keeps them from realizing victory.

Paul is making the argument that once we were free at the moment of faith in Christ, we are to remain free. He says elsewhere, it was for freedom that Christ set us free. At the same time he says we are slaves of Christ, slaves of God and slaves of righteousness. It follows then that the whole picture is summed up by the two expressions in 1 Cor 7:22 that we are at the same time the Lord's freedman as well as Christ's slave. Free to righteousness, a slave to Christ. This is why in Galatians it is so wicked for someone "to spy out our liberty, which we have in Christ," because they are seeking to "bring us into bondage." Anyone who is seeking to put you under law as a governing principle is trying to bring you into legalism. What I mean is not that there are not standards for the NT Christian. Of course there are standards. But what I'm referring to is people coming in with commandments that are not for the NT Christian. In the last three weeks I have had two individuals pressing upon me strongly to abandon grace principles and turn to legalism. Both of them were wholly committed to what they were doing. By one I was told that the OT law was a valid means of sanctification for Jewish believers. Often Gentile believers think the same thing. They want to keep all the feasts of Israel and do other Jewish things because they think this somehow is contributing to their sanctification. It doesn't do that. Christ is the end of the law for those who believe in Christ Jesus. Doing those things is an area of freedom and you can keep them if you want to, to some extent. But just know that they don't contribute one iota to your sanctification. Not one iota. Then I had the home church movement being pushed on me and all that goes with it over the last forty years. They say you've got to meet in a home and not a building because the early church met in homes and you're pagan if you meet in a building. This is turning a practice into a precept. That it's patently false is seen by the fact that Paul rented the school of Tyrannus and Jesus taught on hillsides, from boats and even from a cross. It's legalism to say you have to meet in a home. You can meet inside, outside, in a building, it doesn't matter. It's the people that are the church, not the building! Home church doesn't want elders to shepherd their souls or deacons to be servant ministers, even though the NT commands their appointment and clearly marks out their responsibilities. Nor do they want a person to be trained to teach from the original languages and get paid to teach the Bible, even

though the NT commands multiple times that those who minister to you in spiritual things are to be remunerated with material things. Remember the verse, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." The point is don't hold back a good teacher. Give him what he needs financially so he can focus on studying and teaching the word. Nor do they want any holidays to be celebrated like Christmas because they're not in the Bible. Even though I point out that Jesus kept Hanukkah and Purim, neither of which were biblical feasts! All that is legalism and I point it out because they are seeking to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ. And it's not going to help you grow spiritually to follow all their little nitpicky rules and regulations. They feel that they are getting closer to God but they are not. God could care less. You can do all those things in the flesh. Therefore by definition they are not spiritual. And you just have to resist this stuff or you'll be brought into the very state of bondage they are in, a bondage Christ set you free from never to be enslaved again.

Now that's the background and in verse 15 Paul says, **What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!** In other words, is this a logical conclusion to verse 14? If we're not under law as a governing principle but under grace then is grace a license to sin? We should point out that this is the one usage of **sin** in 6:1-7:13 that refers to a personal act of sin. And he's asking the age old objection to telling people they are free. If you tell people they are really free in Christ then they'll turn around and do what with that freedom? Use it as a license to sin. That was the argument of the counter-Reformation when the Jesuits were given the intellectual task of undoing what the Reformers had done. They're argument was that if you tell people they are free then they're just going to head off to sin city! They're going to abuse grace. Is that a logical conclusion? Paul says, **May it never be!** The grace principle of governance is not a license to sin and when you sin, in fact, you are not free at all but you have returned to slavery! Any time you sin you are a slave to sin. That's what verse 16 is saying.

You're not enjoying freedom when you sin, you're a slave! You're in shackles. Verse 16 actually says that at all times you are under a master. There's no such thing as being free from any and all masters. There are but two masters according to verse 16, one is the sin nature and the other is righteousness. And you have a choice which one to serve, but serve one you will. **Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey?** That's the principle and Paul says, don't you know this principle? What a joke to think you have free will. Now you can choose to serve one master or the other but you can't choose to be without any master. If you truly had free will then you could choose to be free from any master. But that's a choice that you don't have. You have to offer yourself up to one master or the other. The verb **present** means "to offer up, to put at the disposal of another." The only question then is who you offer yourself up to? And that is Paul's next statement, **either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?** Now it's one or the other, you are a slave of one or the other, there is no other choice. You have this choice but you have no other choice. You cannot choose to be master, you must be slave. And you are either going to be a slave of the sinful nature or a slave of righteousness. There's nothing else and you are a slave to one or the other all the time. So don't come crying to me.

Now I'm going to suggest that the one you are most going to offer yourself up to is the one that you are listening to the most. In other words, here in the verse you see the words **obey** and **obedience** and I mentioned this a few weeks ago but this word is from two words, it's a compound word, *υπο-* meaning "under" and *ακου-* meaning "to listen or hear." So to listen under or we'd say, to listen so as to obey. The one you listen to the most is the one you are going to offer yourself up to the most and verse 17 is going to clearly point out that there is teaching here that you are listening to, that you are taking in and that the form of that teaching is absolutely critical to the sanctification process. Ultimately in the end we're going to find that the word of God and the Spirit of God are at the center of sanctification. You can never separate those two. We've got people all over the Christian world talking about how the Holy Spirit did this and the Holy Spirit did that and all this extra-Biblical work of the Holy Spirit. Nonsense. I don't buy it for a minute. I think when they are saying that they are trying to tell you how spiritual they are that they got a special work of the Holy Spirit for them. I think that is arrogance. I think they are compensating for their lack of spiritual growth. It's a façade. Now once you tell them that the Holy Spirit always works in conjunction with the word of God they will say that what you are doing is limiting the Holy Spirit. I say that if that is limiting Him then it is a self-limitation, imposed by the Spirit Himself because this is what He has written, this is His word. What does Prov 1:23 say, "I will pour out My Spirit upon you, I will make my words known to you." The way you reveal yourself to someone is in words and the Spirit reveals Himself to us in words, not with feelings or impressions, that is mysticism and you might as well go be a Buddhist. What we are interested in is what the Spirit of God is interested in: words. What words? The words of Scripture. The Spirit of God is not working outside of that. He is working with that. The problem is people don't want to listen. It's too hard to listen. They'd rather just feel. But verse 17 says that form of teaching and that's words, and Romans 8 is real clear, to set your minds on the things of the Spirit. Well, what things would those be? Not contemplating your navel. Contemplating the words of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Maybe then you'll learn something. Maybe then you'll be taught.

All I'm suggesting here is that, in verse 16, the one you listen to the most is the one you're going to present yourself to the most and that's the one you're going to obey the most. It's real simple; how much time are you spending studying the word of God vs listening to the word of man? It's just as simple as it can be. You are going to be a slave but look at the ends of the two different slaveries. If you present yourselves to the sinful nature then what is the end of that? **Death**. What's death? Some kind of separation. Death is always a separation. What separation is in view here? Separation from fellowship. It doesn't have anything to do with separation from the relationship; that would be loss of salvation. That's not what's in view, what is in view is loss of fellowship, separation from intimacy with God. On the other hand, what's the result when we present ourselves as verse 18 puts it, as slaves of righteousness? Righteousness. We might as well say "life" because Paul does in verse 22, 23 and back in chapter 5. The point is that a positive product comes into the world. We'd call it the fruit of the Spirit. Something God generated, not human generated. Something to give God thanks for, not to pat ourselves on the back for. It's about what He does through us when we submit to Him, when we present ourselves to Him as

slaves for His service. Then and only then is there a positive product. We can do morality. This isn't morality. This is pure motives underlying the morality. It's the purity of motives, what God sees. None of this is about what man sees. It's about the hidden person of the heart. Man looks at the outside; God looks at the heart. That should be the end of the debate about who is and who is not a believer. The issue is not your external behavior, the issue is your internal thoughts. And you can't see that in anyone other than yourself. So leave it be! What you really need to be concerned about is whether you are submitting yourselves to God's word.

I just want you to learn one thing today. You are free. You are never to return to slavery to the sinful nature. You are free to do righteousness by depending upon the Holy Spirit. This comes by setting your minds on the things of God, that form of teaching that I have been investing in you. Set your minds on the things above and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Walk by the Spirit and you will not fulfill the deeds of the flesh. The life you live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God. Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh? Who has bewitched you? Over and over the NT teaches this same basic principle.

¹ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *MBS: 140, The Spiritual Life and Discipleship*, p 5.

² Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1999), 720.

³ Renald Showers, *The New Nature*, p 63-64.