

I am a Slave

Romans 6:15–23

Studies in Romans #25

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I AM a slave. Are you? I was recently trying to explain to someone what it means to *be* a Christian. The person asked, “What do I need to *believe* to be a Christian?” And I explained. Then the person asked, “Do I need to *do* anything?” As I talked it became clear that the person was suffering from a confusion that exists in our culture with believers over-emphasizing two aspects of Christianity. And I should say, is it any wonder there is such confusion? We have a presidential candidate who claims to be a Presbyterian, yet who says he has nothing to ask forgiveness for! “Why do I have to repent or ask for forgiveness, if I am not making mistakes? I work hard, I’m an honorable person.”¹

Here at the end of Romans 6 Paul is answering the big question asked in verse 1 and now again in a different way in verse 15: **What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!** If we say we are justified or declared righteous before God not because of our righteousness but because of Christ’s received by faith alone, does this mean

¹ <http://www.christianpost.com/news/trump-why-do-i-have-to-repent-or-ask-for-forgiveness-if-i-am-not-making-mistakes-video-141856/#w8pULU57jOhls7VU.99>

we are freed from the need to live righteously? His answer in verses 3–14 was to say that we are vitally joined to Jesus’ death and resurrection by faith. It was the image of union with Christ. Now in verses 15–23 he explains with the slavery image. A Christian is a slave. I am a slave. Is that your identity, too? After all, that’s what it means to be redeemed. We believe that Jesus has redeemed or purchased us from servitude to sin. And now we live in servitude to God.

Willing Servitude (vv. 16–19a)

I am a slave. As a slave of God, I am characterized by *willing servitude*. Paul asks, **Do you not know**, then he makes a comparison: **that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?** He’s not talking about the forced slavery of ancient wars or the abominable practice of man stealing that western society is guilty of perpetrating. He’s speaking of *willing servitude*. In Roman society you could willingly become someone’s servant for life. And so as he goes on to say in verse 19, he’s using this human analogy to say that whichever master you present yourself to, you are its servant.

Before I came to Christ, I lived in a state of willing presenting myself to **sin, which leads to death**. But there's another option: I can willingly submitting myself to **obedience, which leads to righteousness**. It's one or the other, as Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24).

Then Paul breaks out into doxology, **But thanks be to God!** Why? Because of what has happened to us in our conversion. He praises God as he thinks back about what I was, what I did, what happened to me, and what I have become.

He praises God as he considers what I was: ***you...were once slaves of sin*** as Jesus teaches (John 8:34) and as Paul teaches (Eph. 2:1-3).

He praises God as he considers what I did: ***you...have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed***. I sincerely believed the teaching of the gospel, which he describes as a **standard**. This is the word translated "type" in 5:14 of Adam being a type of Jesus to come. It's literally a mold into which metal was poured. And interestingly note that Paul does not say that the doctrine was committed to us—which we expect—but that we were committed to it!

He praises God as he considers what happened to me: ***you...hav[e]...been set free from sin***. So what happens when a person in

prison is let out? He is a slave of whatever masters him. Jesus has freed us from the prison of sin but he masters us as we leave.

He praises God as he considers what I have become: ***you...have become slaves of righteousness***. You can now say, “I serve the King!”

Servitude’s Freedom (v. 19b–23)

I am a slave. But for us as post-enlightenment, post-democratic westerners, this is so hard to grasp. We think of forced slavery. Or we think of the great California gold rush, where you could work for the company, live in the company housing, and shop from the company store. But it cost \$1 a day for a room, \$1 a day for food, and \$1 a day to rent a shovel. Problem was, you only made \$2 a day. So the company gave you a line of credit for the \$1 a day. You were forced labor. You were a slave. The irony is that after willingly becoming a slave of God I experience *servitude’s freedom*. And to be honest, this is something that I have a hard time explaining to people; it can only be experienced after the fact.

Whether you realize it or not and whether you like it or not, you are a slave to someone. You **once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness** (v. 19). But

having been set free he exhorts us **so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification** (v. 19).

“But I thought we believed we were still sinners?” Yes, we do. But we are able empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve God sincerely. That’s why he goes on to explain: **For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness** (v. 20). You were **free**, meaning, you could not obey God. In fact, you did not want to as chapter 8 says. Then he asks, **But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death** (v. 21). Then he explains your new free servitude to God: **But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord** (vv. 22–23). I am a slave. I was once imprisoned. I was once forced to work. I once had no hope of freedom. But now I am freed from the slavery of sin! I now I willingly serve the one who freed me, and in his service I find perfect freedom. Amen.