

Title: Slaves to Righteousness

Scripture: Romans 6:15-23

Series: God's Saving Grace

1. Introduction:

- a. Today's sermon challenges the believer to consider their lives from the perspective of slavery.
 - i. We are to ask, which master do I serve:
 1. In other words, do I serve **sin** or **righteousness**? Am I a **slave** of the devil or God?
 - a. Furthermore, we are to consider the outcome of slavery. If I serve sin, the result will be **death**, but if I serve **righteousness** (Jesus Christ), the outcome will be **eternal life**.
 - b. We must be mindful that our service will receive either a **wage** earned by sin or a **gift** of grace received because of Christ's righteousness.
 - b. With all this in mind, let us look at slavery.

2. Verses 15-16: Allegiance to Only One Master: What then?

Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! (16) Do you not know 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?

- a. In verse 15, Paul opens the paragraph precisely like the previous one with a rhetorical question: **Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?**

- i. Having already denounced such thinking in verse 1, Paul again offers the strongest negation he can, **By no means!**
 - 1. The Christian should never look at **grace** as a license to sin.
- ii. In divine grace, Paul sees a liberating power from sin and a constraining power desiring holiness. This holy constraint is a willing obedience from a renewed heart and mind. The source of this desire is God, the Holy Spirit.
 - 1. **Galatians 5:18-24** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (19) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (24) And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
- b. The phrase, “**Do you not know,**” in verse 16 introduces a fact that each Christian should already know; “**presenting**” oneself to something or someone makes that person a slave of that something or someone.

- i. Christians, who have been set free from sin by their union with Christ, must recognize that if they constantly submit to the voice of temptation, they will effectively become slaves of sin again. The Lord Jesus makes the same point:
 - 1. **John 8:34** Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.
 - 2. No Christian should ever be in the habit of practicing sin. We are not to normalize that which God hates!
- ii. Paul wants to make clear that “**slavery**” is ultimately not just a “**legal**” status but a living experience.
 - 1. Beloved, notice that Paul is writing to Christians, and we, too, must not forget that to habitually and unrestrainedly sin is to submit ourselves as slaves to sin all over again.
 - a. Christians, who are no longer **slaves of sin**, must no longer live as if they were still **slaves of sin**.
- c. The last part of the verse demonstrates the seriousness of the matter by making it clear that there are two, and only two, options open to every person and that these options carry consequences.
 - i. Either one is a **slave of sin** or a **slave of obedience**.
 - 1. **Matthew 12:30** Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

- ii. Paul makes it clear that there is no “possibility of neutrality.” No human being is ever free from having a master, and anyone who thinks that they are free is under an illusion created by Satan. Jesus called the Pharisees slaves of sin, and this judgment was true of them and is true of every unbeliever today.
 - 1. This might offend you. You might protest, “I am not a slave to anything or of anyone!”
 - a. We have found that characteristically, the most enslaved person is the one who argues that they are the most free.
 - i. **John 8:33-34** They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’” (34) Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.
- iii. Therefore, the choice that each person faces is not “Should I remain free or surrender my freedom and submit to God?” This is a false narrative. The true choice is, “Will I serve as a slave of sin, or will I serve as a slave of God?” But you will be a slave!
- iv. Because we are all enslaved people, in one way or the other, Paul enumerates the consequences of both types of slavery.
 - 1. **Slavery to sin** brings forth **death**, which includes physical death, spiritual death, and

eternal death, which is the final exclusion from God's presence.

2. **Slavery to righteousness** refers to final justification: that ultimate forgiveness of sins and the blessedness of eternal life that comes to the believer on the last day.

d. Remember, obedience has always been the universal mark of slavery, and it is the same for the different enslavements we experience today. It is very possible to sit next to a slave and not realize it. Some people are enslaved to their work. Some are enslaved to possessions. Others are enslaved to their habits. The bad-tempered are slaves to their tempers, the sensual to their bodies. We obey the things that enslave us.

i. Therefore, the key to a full life is profound slavery and obedience to God.

3. Verses 17-18: God, Our New Master: But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, (18) and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

a. Verses 17 and 18 teach us that the Christian has been set **free from sin**. Paul **thanks God** for the change of spiritual obedience that the Christians have demonstrated. Once, Paul says, “**you were slaves of sin**”; but now “**you have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.**”

i. The phrase, “**You have become obedient,**” points to the time of conversion, when the

Christians first bowed their knee to Jesus the Lord. The phrase speaks of saving, transformative faith.

- ii. And this saving, transformative faith is a heart issue. The Christians in our Epistle had **become obedient from the heart**. In other words, God had given them a heart transplant, a new heart that loves God and longs to be faithful.
 1. **Jeremiah 29:13** You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.
 2. Every genuine Christian will seek God with all their heart because every Christian has received a heart transplant.
- iii. The new heart is the source of man's spiritual life, and this is where the Christians' obedience is rooted. It is not just a formal obedience. It comes from the center of their being. This is the example of slavery Paul holds up for us all: a heartfelt obedience to Christ and his Word. We follow the **standard of teaching**, meaning the pattern of apostolic teaching found within Holy Scripture.
 1. To these ancient Christians, slavery to Christ was not just a vague commitment to follow him. It was a commitment to live by specific standards of behavior derived from the teaching of Christ.
 - a. **Psalms 119:10** With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!

- b. Verse 18 teaches us that the Christian has been set free, but this freedom does not mean we are now in charge of our lives. It is not about self-direction but the freedom of being delivered from the power of sin that once dominated us. We know live under God's rule.
 - i. Therefore, Christian freedom is, at the same time, a **slavery**. We are bound to God and his will, enabling the Christian to become truly **free**—to be what God wants each Christian to be.

- 4. Verse 19: Synergistic Sanctification: I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.
 - a. Having explained slavery, Paul now calls each Christian to complete **slavery to righteousness**.
 - i. This is a powerful call to commitment, obligation, and accountability.
 - b. With the zeal that we once sinned, we must walk as **slaves of righteousness that leads to sanctification**.
 - i. In other words, our goal and heart desire is to be holy, not out of legalistic self-righteousness but because of overwhelming gratitude for our great salvation.
 - c. The Christian is concerned with sanctification. He actively sheds this world and its evil.

- i. **2 Peter 1:10** Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

5. Verses 20-22: The Futility of Sinfulness and the

Blessedness of Righteousness: For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (21) 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. (22) 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.

- a. In verse 20, Paul reminds the Christians that they were formerly slaves of sin and admits that the unbeliever has a certain freedom. But it is freedom from the only thing that matters; they are **free regarding righteousness**.

- i. Freedom from righteousness produces all sorts of shameful deeds. It is the root of our sinfulness.
- ii. As **slaves to sin**, the unbelievers are **free** from the power and influence of God, the Holy Spirit. They are deaf to God's righteous demands and incapable of responding to them even when they hear them.

1. To varying degrees, those outside Christ can recognize right and wrong, but the power to do the right (to live for God and His glory) and turn from the wrong is not present in them. They are incapable of doing God's will.

- a. **Romans 3:9B** ...For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,
 - b. In verse 21, Paul highlights the terrible condition of each Christian before he was saved. **Freedom from righteousness** in the past only produced rotten **fruit**, which is now a source of great shame. Do you remember your former life? How terrible each of us lived? What filthy and vile sin we enjoyed? What awful fruit?
 - c. But what is **slavery to God** like?
 - i. Beloved, it is better than any perceived freedom to sin offered in this world!
 - d. Our past slavery brought only shame and death. But our enslavement to God brings not only freedom from sin but sanctification and eternal life. It brings the practical experience of growing to be more and more like the Master.
6. Verse 23: Works vs. Grace: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- a. The old slavemaster (sin) pays wages-death. Death works now in the lives of those under his pay, and one day, death will make its final payment. The more we sin, the more death we earn.
 - i. Every sinner who dies apart from Christ has earned death.
 - ii. God is just and gives to each man who has refused grace what that man has earned.

- b. The new slavemaster does not pay wages. No one can earn salvation based on their own goodness. What God gives is grace.
 - i. **Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (9) not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
 - ii. **2 Timothy 1:9** (God) who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,
- c. What draws us to obedience and righteousness is not duty but grateful love. Once we have received this grace of eternal life in Jesus Christ, we should be willing to crawl over broken glass to honor and praise him for that grace. After all, we are God's slaves!

7. Benediction:

- a. **1 Peter 1:14** As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,

Public Reading of Scripture **1 Peter 1:13-19**