

Whose Slave Are You?

Romans 6:16-23

16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Before we expound the passage for this message, note that it speaks of people identified as "slaves" in some translations but "servants" in others. There were various sorts of *servants* in the Greek New Testament text: a voluntary minister to others (*diakonas*, whence *deacon*, in Matthew 23:11); an attendant to a person of rank (*pais* in Luke 1:69); a household or domestic servant (*oiketēs* in Acts 10:7); an officer or attendant of a civil authority (*hupēretēs* in Matthew 26:58); one who served out of love (*therapōn* in Hebrews 3:5); a hired servant serving for wages (*misthios* in Luke 15:17, 19). But here is a *slave* (*doulos*), "properly the 'bond-man,' one who was in a permanent relation of servitude to another, one whose will was completely subject to the will of the other" (*Trench's Synonyms of the New Testament*).

Note also that this passage speaks of *spiritual*, not *physical*, slaves. Not all people are *physical* slaves, for many are physical freemen. But all, even physical freemen, are *spiritual* slaves.

In the passage now before us, Paul the apostle cites the word "slaves" eight times: "16 ... to whom you present yourselves *slaves* to obey, you are that one's *slaves* whom you obey. ... 17 ... you were *slaves* of sin 18 ... you became *slaves* of righteousness 19 ... as you presented your members as *slaves* of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as *slaves* of righteousness for holiness. ... 20 ... you were *slaves* of sin 22 ... [you have] become *slaves* of God"

I. All are slaves. All of us by nature (our native state, that in which we were born) are "slaves of *sin*" (vv.16, 17, 20) and "slaves of *uncleanness* and of *lawlessness*" (v.19). Some of us have become "slaves of obedience" (v.16) and "slaves of *righteousness for holiness*" (v.19; also v.18) and "slaves of *God*" (v.22). But none of us is free from spiritual slavery. Whose slave are you?

II. All are slaves voluntarily. Our slavery is not forced upon us against our will. This is evidenced by the fact that we have "presented" ourselves to our master in the sense of placing ourselves at the disposal of our master (v.16): "Do you not know that to whom you *present* [*yield* in KJV] yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" All who are in their natural state have "*presented* [*yielded* in KJV] your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness" (v.19). But some will willfully and voluntarily obey the exhortation to "*present* [*yield* in KJV] your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness" (ibid). I have done so. Will you?

III. All are by nature slaves of sin. We have already stated this fact. But we here will expound upon it. And it should not escape our attention that natural men are identified as "slaves of sin" thrice (vv.16, 17, 20). Furthermore, Jesus Christ declared that "whoever commits sin is a slave [*doulos*] of sin" (John 8:34).

1. Slaves of sin are slaves of *the governing sin within them*. Note that the word "sin" here is not a *verb*, but a *noun*. This "sin" is the governing principle or power acting through the members of our body, having its seat in our will. It is the "sin that dwells in me" (7:17, 20), and which governs the flesh through "the law of sin which is in my members" (7:23, 25). Our physical body is therefore the "body of sin" (6:6), the flesh in which this governing sin resides. Slaves of this governing sin evidence its mastery over them in their lives (Ephesians 2:2f adapted): "They walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan], the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also they all conduct themselves in the lusts of their flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and are by nature children of wrath." Slaves of sin naturally sin because sin is their master, and they are its slaves, and obediently do its will. Slaves of sin must sin, and can do nothing sinless.

2. Slaves of sin are furthermore “slaves of *sin leading to death*” (v.16). “For the wages of sin is death” (v.23a). Sin’s slaves justly receive sin’s wages, which will be the “second death” in the everlasting “lake which burns with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 20:14; 21:8).

3. Slaves of sin are also “slaves of *uncleanness*” (v.19). This “uncleanness” is the moral pollution and defilement of the soul, which makes it unholy. Slaves of uncleanness must do unholy things, and can do nothing holy. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!” (Job 14:4).

4. Slaves of sin are also “slaves of *lawlessness* leading to more lawlessness [*iniquity* in KJV in both instances]” (v.19). This “lawlessness” is complete disregard for God’s law, which makes the soul guilty. Slaves of lawlessness must violate God’s law, and are incapable of doing anything righteous. Their “lawlessness leading to more lawlessness” denotes the proclivity of their soul to disobey God and their intention to devote themselves to doing so. Slaves of sin are also “free in regard to *righteousness*” (v.20) in the sense that righteousness has no authority or power over them.

5. Slaves of sin are also slaves of *Satan*, the author of sin. He is their slave-master, for they are, apart from divine enablement, unable to “come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:25f). They furthermore delight in doing Satan’s will, for Jesus tells them, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do” (John 8:44).

IV. Believers in the gospel have presented themselves to God as “slaves of obedience leading to righteousness” (v.16). They did this when they obeyed the gospel (vv.17f): “17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine [the gospel] to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” They “now [have] been set free from sin, and [have] become slaves of God” (v.22). They are like Saul of Tarsus, who said at his conversion, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (Acts 9:6). They imitate Jesus Christ in saying, “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30).

1. Believers are “slaves of *obedience leading to righteousness*” (v.16) – which is the opposite of what they were before, “slaves of sin leading to death” (ibid). As “slaves of obedience”, they are in the service of God, obeying Him in all things, just as they formerly served Satan. Their obedience is “leading to *righteousness*”, which righteousness is not that which is *imputed* or *implanted*, but rather *practiced*. Slaves of obedience to God prove themselves to be so by the righteousness they practice (1 John 2:29; 3:7, 10).

2. Believers are also “slaves of *righteousness*” (v.18): “And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” Their liberator is their righteousness, for He is to them “Jehovah Our Righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6), and they have submitted to His lordship and made themselves to be His slaves, and obey Him.

3. Believers are also “slaves of *righteousness for holiness*” (v.19) – which is the opposite of what they were before, “slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness” (ibid). They have yielded and presented themselves to their new master, and willfully live according to God’s law, doing what is righteous and holy. They imitate Christ in saying, “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8).

4. Believers are therefore “slaves of *God*” (v.22): “But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.” God is good to His slaves!

Slaves of God obey the exhortation of verses 12-14: “12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

Whose slave are you? Are you a slave of Satan and sin? or a slave of God and righteousness?

– Daniel E. Parks (August 27, 2017; #980)