

## Romans 6:15-23 Answers Slaves of Righteousness

**Overview:** Romans has 16 chapters and 5 sections: Sin, Salvation, Sanctification, Sovereignty and Service.

**Introduction:** Today we continue on in the third section: **Sanctification** (Romans 6-8). The Bible calls us saints for a reason. In Christ we are saints, not sinners. In short, there are two types of people: the saints and the ain'ts.

Back in **5:20** Paul made two shocking statements that required defense and clarification: **1)** the Law was given in order to increase transgression and **2)** God's grace increased to match the increased trespass brought about by the giving of the law.

ESV **Romans 5:20-21** . . . the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more . . .

Paul expected these two statements to be misunderstood and distorted, so he clarified and defended them in Romans 6-8. Paul did so with a series of anticipated questions of distortion (**6:1, 6:15, 7:7, 7:13**), each followed by a strong denial (*mé ginoito*). Thus, Romans 6-8 is a further explanation of how God's grace works (Leiter, p. 147).

### Review:

**What was Paul's answer to the question of 6:1?** His answer was "By no means". The Greek here is *mé ginoito*. We who died to sin can no longer live in it. The key idea here is that we are not still living in sin. Of course there must be a sober recognition of our continuing potential to sin and our actual sin, but in Christ our lives are not to be characterized by sin (Cranfield, p. 299).

**What died, sin or us (6:2)? Does it make any difference which one died?** It is us who died, not sin. We are dead to sin, but sin is not dead in us. This makes a difference because as an operative principle, the temptation to sin will always be with us, yet its power over us is severed.

Death to sin is separation from sin's power, not the extinction of sin. It is like unplugging a lamp from a wall socket, the light goes out because the power supply is cut off. We have been unplugged (separated) from sin's power (but the electrical socket is still energized).

**Truth To Reckon With:** All those who have experienced God's grace have died to sin. We are dead to sin's beck and call. We don't have to answer. Someone who is dead is unresponsive. Romans 6 is about soaring over sin. Among other things, it states that in Christ we have **died** to sin (6:2, 11), have been **set free** from sin (6:7, 22) and sin no longer has **dominion** over us (6:14) with the result that we can bring forth **fruit unto sanctification** (6:21-22).

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**\*\*\*\*1. Even though we are not under law but under grace, why don't we sin (6:15-19)?**

Whereas we formerly were slaves of sin, we were set free from sin and are now slaves of righteousness. (6:17-18).

Paul used the vivid example of slavery to make his point. Each of us is in slavery to one of two masters: sin or God. There is no third option. No one is his own boss.

ESV **Matthew 6:24** No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

The slavery analogy expresses the total belongingness, total obligation, total commitment and total accountability that characterize life under grace (Cranfield, p. 321, 326).

**2. What wrong conclusion did Paul anticipate in 6:15?** Some people seemed to think that removing the law (of Moses) and instead teaching salvation by grace would lead to living a life style of sin. They falsely thought that under grace sin no longer matters. The answer to Paul's question (6:15) is *mé ginoito*. This (6:15) is the second of four anticipated false conclusions (6:1, 6:15, 7:7, 7:13).

**3. What statement does "then" (6:15) refer back to?** It refers back to 6:14.

ESV **Romans 6:14** . . . sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Paul said the same thing about sin going and coming: no dominion!

**Review: Why was sin able to be our slaver master under law but not under grace (6:14)?**

See 3:19-20, 5:20. The law reveals God's commands, but it does not give us the ability to obey it. No one in his own strength is able to keep all the law (3:19-20). The law only gives us the knowledge of sin (3:20) and increases transgression (5:20). However, God's grace empowers us to die to sin and to put away our old life of domination by sin.

Run and do, the law commands  
But gives me neither feet nor hands.  
Better news the Gospel brings,  
It bids me fly and gives me wings.

This is an important point; grace is not a license to sin.

**4. Based on 6:16, what problems are there with obedience to sin? 1)** You will become sin's slave (it is addictive) and **2)** it results in death.

ESV **John 8:34** Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."

The first time a person lies, he may be horrified; the second time, on somewhat shaken; the third time lying seems far more natural and easy. At last the sin of lying has him in his grasp. For other sins the story is similar (Hendriksen, p. 204).

**5. In what sense does slavery to sin lead to death for the Christian (6:16)? Compare 1 John 5:16.**

**ESV 1 John 5:16** If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life — to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.

**ESV Romans 6:23** . . . the wages of sin is death . . .

**According to 6:16, everyone is in slavery to one of two masters. Which two masters are contrasted? See also 6:18.** Everyone is in obedience to either sin or righteousness.

**No Slam Dunk:** Concerning the enslaving nature of sin and the constant struggle we face, consider:

**ESV Galatians 5:16** . . . walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do [fleshly things]. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident . . . those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

**Obedience to sin results in death; what does obedience to God result in (6:16)?**  
Obedience to God leads to righteousness.

**Note:** Paul has made in abundantly clear up to this point that righteousness comes by grace through faith, as a free gift. There is no way he is now teaching righteousness comes by obedience. The point is that obedience to God leads to a righteous lifestyle. There is positional righteousness and practical righteousness. The topic in Romans 6 is practical righteousness.

**6. What did Paul give thanks to God for (6:17-18)?** He was thankful to God that they had been freed from slavery to sin and had become slaves of righteousness.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 6:9-11** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

We don't have to change in order for God to love us. God loves us just the way we are, but He loves us too much to leave us as we are. He changes us because he loves. He changes us to make us righteous.

**7. What does it mean to be obedient from the heart (6:17)?** It is an internal motivation of thorough compliance. More than mere outward conformity, it is inward desire.

**In 6:17, to what had they had become obedient?** They became obedient to a standard of teaching, to a body of knowledge. This reveals the importance of sound teaching in the body of Christ. If the devil can keep us ignorant he has a powerful hold over us. It is critical that Christians be taught the truths of victory over sin revealed in Romans 6. We need to read our Emancipation Proclamation!

Part of the problem of unbelieving Jews had a lack of knowledge:

**ESV Romans 10:2** . . . they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

**Review: Based on 6:12, how does king sin tell us what to do?** (*Reread aloud*). Sin directs us through unholy passions.

**8. Based on 6:17, in what major way does God tell us what to do?** God gives His directions to us via teaching.

**ESV 2 Timothy 1:13** Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

**ESV Colossians 1:28** Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Look for a church where the Bible is taught systematically, expositionally, chapter by chapter, verse by verse. A steady diet of topic teachings is unhealthy.

**Example:** The truth of Romans 6 needs to be understood by every believer. We have been set free from sin. My dogs are kept in the yard because on a shock collar. A radio transmitter is in the basement and if they go out of range, it shocks them. Over the years they learned the shock lesson. Now, one collar is missing and the battery is dead in the other, but they still stay in the yard. They don't know the battery dead or the collar is missing! So too many Christians are so used to being in slavery to sin they don't realize its power over us is broken. We are free to leave sin's yard!

The obedience of redeemed people is both internal (from the heart) and external (based on a standard of teaching).

**9. Based on 6:18, what should be true of everyone who has been set free from sin?**

Everyone who has been set free from sin should instead have become a slave of righteousness.

**Application:** *Would you describe yourself as a slave of righteousness (6:18)? If not, what are you going to do about it?* “Joe, there, he’s a slave of righteousness.” “When I think of Sally, I think of someone who is a slave of righteousness”.

**10. What command are we given in 6:19?** This is an action verse. We are to consciously choose to present our members as slaves of righteousness. That this is a command shows we have to make the right choice.

**According to 6:19, why did Paul use this slavery analogy (human terms)?** The slavery analogy is fitting due to the real natural limitations we have. We can understand about a slave obeying a master. That’s simple. So too we as slaves have changed masters (from sin to righteousness).

**11. What natural limitations do we have (6:19)?** We are weak in that we still feel sin's lusts and are tempted to present ourselves to it for obedience. If we were not still weak in the sense of being liable to sin then this whole chapter would be unnecessary. Hendriksen said it refers to their weakness to grasp these great spiritual truths (p. 206).

**According to 6:19, obeying impurity and lawlessness leads to what?** It leads to even more lawlessness.

**If we present our bodies as slaves to righteousness, to what does it lead (6:19)?** It leads to sanctification.

**12. What is sanctification (6:19)?** Related words are sanctuary and sanctimonious. It is from *hagiasmos*, which is related to the word holy. The NIV renders this “holiness”. It means consecration or purification (Thayer #38). The New Bible Dictionary says sanctification is inward transformation that gradually takes place, resulting in purity, moral rectitude, and holy, spiritual thoughts expressing themselves in an outward life of goodness and godliness (NBD, p. 1068). Perhaps a synonym would be godliness.

No Christian is sinless, but he should sin less and less. Sanctification here denotes a process rather than a state (Cranfield, p. 327). As you obey righteousness you become sanctified.

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**\*\*\*\*13. What reasons are given in 6:20-23 to present our members as slaves to righteousness (6:19)?** We should do so because we were formerly in slavery to sin and free from righteousness, resulting in the bitter fruit of shame and death. Now however we are set free from sin and the fruit of slavery to righteousness is sanctification and eternal life.

Observe how 6:20 and 6:18 are opposites. You are either on or the other.

**Technical Note:** “Free” (6:20) is from *eleutheros*, “not a slave, not under restraint.”

**14. What is the answer to Paul's question in 6:21?** There is no good fruit. It results in shame and death (physical and worse yet spiritual).

**Calvin:** To be ashamed to one's past evil ways is a vital element in sanctification. Calvin said, "Only those . . . who have learned well to be earnestly dissatisfied with themselves, and to be confounded with shame at their wretchedness, are imbued with the principles of Christian philosophy" (Cranfield, p. 328).

**Based on 6:22, what is the fruit of slavery to God?** It leads to holiness and eternal life.

**Note:** Here in 6:22 Paul wrote directly of slavery to God. Previous he wrote of it indirectly as slavery to obedience (6:16) or slavery to righteousness (6:16, 18, 19)

**15. What opposites are parallel in 6:23 to wages, sin and death?** The parallels are wages/gift, sin/God, and death/eternal life.

**16. How is a wage different from a free gift (6:23)?** One is earned and the other is bestowed.

**Pay Master Sin:** Sin is personified here (6:23) as a paymaster paying out wages to workers for services rendered. The wage that sin pays is death. *Is he really who you want to work for?* By contrast, God gives away the free gift of life (Cranfield, p. 330).

**17. Why might Paul have concluded this section on sanctification with a reminder that eternal life is a free gift (6:23)?** Perhaps it was to clarify that sanctification is the result of eternal life, not a means to it. It would be easy to take Romans 6 out of context and determine that eternal life is earned by obedience (6:22).

**Decision:** The choice is yours: *Sin or God? Death or life?*

### So What?

**18. What is the main application Romans 6:15-23?** It is found in 6:19.

**ESV Romans 6:19** . . . 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.

Those who abuse the doctrine of justification by grace through faith as an excuse for living a sinful life are dangerous heretics (Hendriksen, p. 210).

**19. What role does teaching play in helping us overcome sin (6:17)?**

**Summary:** Romans 6 is God's emancipation proclamation from sin. We need to co-operate with God so He does not have to operate on us. You need reckon (count on) the fact that you have been set free from sin's domination. It is not a matter of feeling. Suppose the alarm clock goes off one fine morning and you don't feel like getting up. The clock and the sun and your watch all say it is morning. Your feelings are not relevant. You must act on it. You must know the truth of Romans 6, believe it and act on it (taken from sermon, A Life of Liberty, by Adrian Rogers, Bellevue Baptist, early 1980s.).

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
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