

Whose Slave Are You?

Delivered From the Kingdom of Sin – Part V

Romans 6:15-19

Introduction – You Are A Slave!

I have an announcement to make as we re-engage in our study of Romans, chapter 6. It is an announcement that will probably startle you, so fasten your seatbelt.

You happen to be a slave!

That's right. No matter what your nationality, your color, your creed, your citizenship, your heritage – you happen to be a slave, right now. In fact:

- All of your friends are slaves.
- Your mom and dad are slaves.
- Your sons and daughters are slaves.
- Your neighbors are slaves.
- Your banker, your schoolteacher, your husband, your wife are slaves.

If that is not startling enough, you are about to discover that the Bible does not condemn this kind of slavery. In fact, in one sense it will actually command it!

Before we go any further, we had better look at the way in which Paul delivers this surprising truth. Notice Romans, chapter 6, verses 17 and 18.

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

In this paragraph, from verses 15 through 23, over and over again, you will find the word “slave”.

In fact, you could circle the eight different times the apostle Paul refers to the enslavement of human beings.

Now, you need to understand that when Paul used the Greek word “doulos,” or “slave,” he got everyone's attention in the Roman church as well. That is because all of them had been or currently were, connected in some way, to slavery.

Historians tell us that the population of Rome in the first century, was comprised of at least one-third slaves. So vast was the slave population that the suggestion that slaves be made to wear a distinctive style of clothing was abandoned because it would reveal their numerical strength.

During the time of Paul, slaves were often given great responsibility.

There were a number of ways that a person could become a slave. The primary one was simply through birth to parents who were slaves. Another equally significant way was through the practice of selling oneself into slavery in order to become attached to a prosperous family.

The cruel and heartless custom of “exposure” also brought thousands of babies into slavery. “Exposure” was the term for the legal right of the Roman father, if he did not want his newborn child, to command that it be put to death, or simply left on the doorstep, or taken to a public square and left there. From there, the babies would be taken, often by slave traders, to be raised as slaves to be hired out. Many of the female babies would be taken into brothels to be raised for prostitution.

Children were also sold into slavery in order to financially aid their parent's own desire to purchase their freedom and Roman citizenship.

Many in Paul's day, were once slaves but had earned their citizenship and freedom.^{i ii}

That is one of the reasons that Paul, on several occasions, announced that he was a Roman citizen by birth. He had not earned or purchased his freedom and citizenship. That was such an unusual status and it commanded great respect.

One commentator suggested, I believe correctly, that as many as one-half of the Roman church either were or had been enslaved at some point in their lives.

One thing is certain, everyone who read Paul's letter, immediately knew what Paul meant when he said that we are the "doulos" to sin or the "doulos" to righteousness.

Paul used this term in:

- verse 16b – "... you are slaves of the one whom you obey . . .";
- verse 19b – "... slaves to impurity and to lawlessness . . . slaves to righteousness . . .";
- verse 20a – "... slaves of sin . . .";
- verse 22a – "... enslaved to God[!] . . .".

You are someone's slave. And, what is the primary characteristic of slavery? Obedience. You are either a slave, obeying sin, your master, or a slave, obeying God, your Lord.

People will protest, saying, "I'm not a slave to anyone! Certainly not to sin!"

John Calvin said over four hundred years ago, "The greater the sinner, the more fiercely will they argue they are free."ⁱⁱⁱ

Shall We Be A Slave To Sin?

Now, let us start at the beginning of the paragraph, at verse 15.

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

By the way, that should sound familiar, right? Paul asked the same question as he began this chapter. This verse has a little different perspective, however.

The first time Paul asked this question, he was asking from the vantage point of a believer who was

under grace. Could that believer, who was now under grace, live in sin?

In verse 15, Paul is asking from the vantage point of a believer who is not only under grace, but not under law. Could that believer, who was no longer under law, live in sin?

The answer remains the same, "me genoito" or:

- "God forbid!"
- "May it never be!"
- "A thousand times no!"
- "Not on your life!"

Now, in the first part of chapter 6, Paul answered, "God forbid, you don't want to live in sin because of who you are."

Now Paul will answer, "God forbid, you don't want to live in sin because of what you will become."

Paul's response

Paul begins to develop his response by including a very encouraging reminder, in verses 17 and 18.

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Paul encourages to praise God for a change of heart

Paul begins his response by encouraging his readers to praise God for a change of heart!

You became obedient from the heart. And, this is not because the law said to do this or to not do that.

My wife cooks a certain way for me and certain things for me and our children. She does not do that because I have laws tacked up on the wall of the kitchen.

If I go to a restaurant, the cook in the back does not know me and certainly does not love me, so I give the waitress my – what? – my order! I want my eggs cooked a certain way and I want a cinnamon roll with extra icing. That cook's heart has nothing to do with it.

Paul says that we obey God, not because of the law, but out of a heart of love.

Your heart has been changed! From the inside out, you have now become obedient to the God whom you once ran from.

Notice the phrase in the latter part of verse 17,
. . . obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed

What is he talking about in this phrase? What is this form of teaching?

The Greek word that is translated “form” is the word “tupon,” which gives us our English word “type”. It is translated, “example, manner, or fashion”. In classical Greek, the word was used for the impression of a seal, the mark of a branding iron, the impression of a footprint, or even the marks left by teeth. It was the word that was used of molds into which molten metal for castings was poured. It would be like our Jell-O molds today. It becomes a graphic picture of the believer. Believers have been delivered into a mold of true doctrine.

The believer is actually taking on a new shape because they are being formed by the doctrine they have received and are now committed to obeying. J. B. Phillips translates Romans, chapter 12, verse 1, with this same thought,

Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within.^{iv}

What a great thought! We are being molded into a new shape, a new way of thinking, a new way of feeling, a new way of living!

Praise God for a change of heart!

Paul commands to practice a change of habit

Paul not only encourages his readers to praise God for a change of heart, but commands them to practice a change of habit.

Paul now changes the focus from our position to our practice. A change of heart relates to our profession, while a change of habit, relates to our pattern of life.

Notice how Paul describes the change in habit and lifestyle in verse 19.

I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Redemption, comes from a Greek word which is one of those precious words, B. B. Warfield once

wrote, and it literally means, “to buy out of slavery to sin.”

In other words, Jesus Christ bought you out of the slave market of sin. You now belong to Him; you are His slave.

Someone might say, “Well, what benefit is that? What’s the advantage of being the slave to God rather than the slave to sin? You’re still a slave . . . you’re still not free.”

I am so glad you said that because I have been wanting to say something. How would you define freedom?

Freedom is not autonomy, because no one is truly independent. In fact, in many ways, we are dependent on one another.

Freedom is not a license to do absolutely anything you want, because no one can do *anything* they want.

I have heard it said that I have the freedom to swing my arm, but as soon as my hand touches your face, my freedom has gone too far. In other words, my liberty ends where your nose begins. So no one has the freedom to do *anything*.

Would it surprise you to learn that the Bible defines true freedom as, “slavery to the right master”?

Jesus Christ was speaking one day to the religious leaders of His day. He said to them, as recorded in John, chapter 8, verse 32,

. . . you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

That really offended them and they responded with anger, in verse 33,

. . . We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, “You will become free”?

This response was so ridiculous. They:

- had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years;
- had been slaves during the period of the judges on at least seven different occasions;
- had been slaves for seventy years under the Babylonians;
- were, at the very time that Jesus was speaking to them, carrying coins in their pockets with Caesar’s impression all over them, while the Roman soldiers dominated their lives.

The Lord did not even stop to remind them of their obvious loss of historical truth, but just continued on to say, in verses 34 and 36,^v

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. . . . So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Do you know what freedom is? Freedom is:

- a clear conscious;
- redemption;
- belonging to a new Master and Lord who bought us out of the slave market of sin;
- being the slave to God and saying, “I will obey you, I will follow you, I will serve you, I will do whatever you ask!”

That is freedom.

Why do we still struggle with sin?

“Well,” you ask, dear Christian friend, “if I am indeed freed from bondage to sin, then why do I still struggle with sin?”

Let me add a few practical comments before we close. Why *do* we still struggle with sin? Let me give four reasons.

Because we like it

1. One reason is because we like it.

That is why we are tempted to sin. If we did not like sin, we would not be tempted to commit it.

Temptation is tempting because it is tempting. If something is not tempting, then it is not temptation.

I have never been tempted to eat spinach. Just because it grows on land does not mean it is not seaweed. You cannot fool me!

When I was young I was forced to eat spinach. Now, after years of counseling, the nightmares have finally stopped!

I have never been tempted to eat liver and onions at the cafeteria. In fact, the very sight and smell of it repels every fiber of my being.

I have never been tempted to perform twenty-five sit-ups. I am under the impression that if I wait long enough, the urge will go away.

We *are* tempted to gossip. As Solomon said, in Proverbs, chapter 18, “gossip is sweet morsels to our mouths.”

We *are* tempted to be prideful because we like ourselves better than anyone else.

We *are* tempted to selfishness because we enjoy meeting our own needs.

We struggle with sin, because we prefer it.

Because we seem to get away with it

2. Another reason that we struggle with sin is because we seem to get away with it.

Every time we lie, our noses do not grow longer. Wouldn't it be a great deterrent if they did?

Wouldn't it be great if God had designed a LCD display on our forehead that spelled out whatever sin we were committing?

When you go to a car dealership and the salesman comes up and says, “I've got a great deal for you,” the panel on his forehead would start blinking, “Liar, liar, liar.”

We could come to church and read everyone's forehead. When we shake hands, we would know who to avoid!

It would make my job so much easier. I could just walk up to people and say, “Are you going to confess or what?”

We forget that *God* sees and that is enough!!

Because we redefine it

3. We also struggle with sin because we redefine it.

We categorize sin so that we can do it and still feel self-righteous.

We have the category of consequential sin. These are the sins that hurt someone, and ourselves; these are the dirty dozen; the big bad three.

We also have the category of inconsequential sin. These are sins that do not seem to have any detectable negative effects; such as: gossip, lying, hypocrisy, lust, greed, and pride.

We call that stuff by other names. It is not sin, it is just an unfortunate decision. We say, “I made a miscalculation.”

We call it the way *we* see it!

A sports magazine ran an article about an incident that happened three years ago in Cuba. The seventy-four year old dictator grabbed an aluminum bat and walked to the plate in an exhibition game against Venezuela. When Castro approached the

batter's box, the president of Venezuela walked to the mound. His first pitch did not even reach the plate and Castro kept his bat on his shoulder. The next pitch was a strike, as Castro swung and missed. A couple more balls and an attempted bunt later, the count was full. Castro watched the 3-2 pitch sail through the middle of the strike zone and listened as the umpire called, "Strike ball – you're out!" Did that umpire forget where he lived? Castro bellowed, "No, that was a ball." And he walked to first base. And everyone just smiled.^{vi}

When we disobey Christ, we become the dictator of our own lives. Then, we define what is right and wrong; we call the strikes and the balls; we make up the rules – and we are pulled back into the habit of sin.

Because we ignore its offensiveness to the glory of God

4. We struggle with sin as well, because we ignore its offensiveness to the glory of God.

The life of Joseph and his temptation by Potiphar's wife provides a wonderful example of avoiding sin. Several observations that would cause you to expect Joseph to choose to sin with Potiphar's wife include:

- he was not much older than seventeen when Potiphar's wife took an illicit interest in him;
- Potiphar's wife propositioned him every day;
- his temptation was unavoidably tied to his employment (perhaps you can identify with him in that your greatest source of temptation is directly related to what you do for a living; your job puts you in harms way every day);
- Potiphar's wife made certain that detection was not a problem, or in other words, no one would know but them;
- he was a slave with absolutely no rights;
- it was his master's wife who was commanding him to sin;
- he had, in addition, already been abandoned by his brothers; betrayed by his own family; forced to endure life as a slave when he had been the favored, pampered son of his father; transplanted to a foreign land and a foreign culture.

In other words, if anyone should sin, it would be Joseph. If anyone could sin, it would be Joseph. If anyone had reasons to walk away from his faith in

God and the standard of God's holiness that he had been taught, it was Joseph. If anyone had the right to be bitter and resentful about what God had allowed, and to excuse his sin against the character and desire of God, it was Joseph.

Yet, Joseph refused to sin. And his reason was given to us in Genesis, chapter 39, verse 9b,

... How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?

In other words, Joseph understood that sin was a violation of the holy glory and character of God, to whom Joseph was ultimately responsible, and whose glory Joseph was diligent to reflect.

This is the motive that Paul wants us to remember. How can you sin against God? He was the One who redeemed you and rescued you from slavery to sin. How can you do anything but obey and honor His glory? In fact, if you have no desire at all to reflect His glory, you have not been redeemed!

The truth remains, however, that those who have been redeemed still struggle with sin because:

- we like it;
- we seem to get away with it;
- we redefine it;
- we ignore its offensiveness to the glory of God.

Conclusion – Whose Slave Are You?

I am convinced that the closer you walk with Christ, the more aware of your sin you will become. That means that a growing Christian is a confessing Christian.

Look at the last part of verse 19.

... so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Sanctification or holiness is that daily presentation of the slave to his master.

You might be sitting near someone who is a slave to their career. They have one abiding, overarching allegiance in life, and it is their career path.

Someone around you might be a slave to their emotions. They are daily following whatever seems best to them and whichever way they feel is good.

Someone around you might be a slave to their lust and passion. Their sinful habits dominate their existence. All they can think about is the gratification of their desires; everything revolves

around that and is determined by that – yet they are never gratified.

Someone near you might be enslaved to possessions. All their waking thoughts are given over to taking care of what they have or dreaming about how they can acquire more.

One church leader, responding to the materialism of the average believer, wrote, “Their possessions hold them in chains; they think of themselves as owners, whereas it is they who are owned; enslaved as they are to their property, they are not the master of their money, but its slaves.”

This church leader, by the way, was Cyprian, and he wrote those words in the third century.

The world calls sin, freedom . . . God calls sin, slavery, and He calls slavery to Christ, freedom!

Paul put it this way in Romans, chapter 6, verses 21 and 22.

Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are

now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

If the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed!

Ray Stedman, pastor of Peninsula Bible Church for many years, told of walking down the street in Los Angeles one day and seeing a man coming toward him. The man had a sign hung over his shoulders that read, “I am a slave for Christ.” After the man had passed, Stedman turned around to look after this rather eccentric individual and saw that on his back was another sign. The sign read, “Whose slave are you?”^{vii}

That is a great question. My friend, you are someone’s slave! The only question that remains is, “Whose slave are you?”

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/1/2003 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ R. Kent Hughes, Romans: Righteousness From Heaven (Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books, 1991), p. 131.

ⁱⁱ The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p. 543.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hughes, p. 131.

^{iv} David Jeremiah, Romans, Volume Two (Walk Through The Bible, 1999), p. 90.

^v James Montgomery Boice, Roman: Volume One (Baker Book House, 1991), p. 694.

^{vi} Yahoo Sports!, October, 2000, <http://www.Preaching Today.com>, 2003, Christianity Today International.

^{vii} Boice, p. 689.