

FREE AT LAST

"UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT" ROMANS 6:15-23

We must make a decision in our day like the decision the Israelites had to make in Joshua's day. As God's redeemed people, Joshua told them: "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Jos 24:14-15). As God's redeemed people, Paul tells us: "Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to ever-increasing holiness" (Ro 6:19).

The Israelites made the right choice. They accepted Joshua's challenge, saying: "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will

God begins his influence by working in us that we may have the will, and he completes it by working with us when we have the will.

– Augustine

serve the LORD, because he is our God" (Jos 24:16-18). They chose to serve the LORD, in part, because of what God had done for them.

We, likewise, should accept Paul's challenge because of what the Lord has done for us. After all, thanks be to God, though we used to be slaves to sin, we have come to obey from our heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed our allegiance. God has set us free from sin and has made us slaves to righteousness (Ro 6:17). To choose otherwise would be nonsense.

This Week's Core Competency

Salvation by Grace – I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by his grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Justification is by grace *alone*; sanctification is by grace *and* works. Works play no part in justification. People are not declared righteous before God by doing good works. However, works do play a part in sanctification. While sanctification is the gracious work of the Spirit in the lives of those who are justified, those who have been *declared* righteous are *made* righteous by working together with the Spirit of God. The relationship of grace and works in sanctification is summed up by Augustine. Echoing Philippians 2:12b-13, he writes: "God begins his influence by working *in* us that we may have the will, and he completes it by working *with* us when we have the will" (Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*, 17.33, italics added, cited by Thomas C. Ogden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 52). So, what are justified people, who believe in their hearts that they should be like Christ, to do?

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Progressive sanctification, which ends in conformity to the image of God's Son (Ro 8:29), begins with the *intention* to be like Jesus, for as one author says, "it takes intentional, repeated actions of *growing* intensity for virtues to grow" (Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 97). In Romans 6 terms, we must choose our master. Either we will offer ourselves to sin (even though it no longer has dominion over us), or we will offer ourselves to righteousness. Clearly, *intention* is required. We must intentionally offer ourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to ever-increasing holiness, just as we used to offer ourselves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness (Ro 6:19). We have two choices. Either we *do* intend to offer ourselves as slaves to righteousness, or we *don't*. There's no third possibility. Either we *do* intend to be like Jesus or we *don't*.

But once the intention is there, how do we proceed? Echoing 1 Timothy 4:7, "train yourself to be godly," Dallas Willard correctly argues that we cannot be like Jesus by just *trying hard* to be like him, but what we can't do by trying hard we can do by *training wisely*. "There are certain practices—solitude, prayer, fasting, celebration, and so forth—we can undertake, in cooperation with grace, to raise the level of our lives toward godliness" (*The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 69). John Ortberg illustrates the difference between trying hard versus training wisely when it comes to running a marathon. "This race becomes the great passion of your life. To run the race well—to win it if you can—becomes the central focus of your existence. It is the chance of a lifetime. Then it dawns on you: Right now you cannot run a marathon. More to the point, you cannot run a marathon *even if you try really, really hard*. Trying hard can accomplish only so much. If you are serious about seizing this chance of a lifetime, you will have to enter into a life of training. You must arrange your life around certain practices that will enable you to do what you cannot do now by willpower alone. When it comes to running a marathon, you must train, not merely try. This need for training is not confined only to athletics. Training is required for people who want to play a musical instrument or learn a new language or run a business. Indeed, it is required for any significant challenge in life—including spiritual growth" (*The Life You've Always Wanted*, 46).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 6:15-23

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

19 I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. 20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline "sin" in vv. 15, 23.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 15, 17, 22, 23.
- * Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 15, 19.
- * Circle "slaves" in vv. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22.
- * Double underline "sin" in vv. 16, 17, 18, 20, 22.

- * Bracket "death" in vv. 16, 17, 23.
- * Circle "righteousness" in v. 16.
- * Bracket "pattern of teaching" in v. 17.
- * Box "just as" indicating *comparison* in v. 19.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. The question in verse 15, which he answers, "By no means," is similar to the one he answers the same way in verse 1. Explain the difference.
2. Paul *contrasts* "slaves to sin" and "slaves to obedience" in verse 16. "Obedience" to what or whom?
3. *Contrast* the outcomes of the two types of slavery Paul discusses.
4. Testify to verses 17-18 from personal experience.
5. Explain the *comparison* in verse 19.
6. What does verse 19 indicate about sanctification?
7. Do a benefits analysis of slavery to sin (vv. 20, 21) versus slavery to God (v. 22).
8. Explain the *contrast* in verse 23.
9. **Discussion:** What does your behavior imply regarding the identity of your master—sin or righteousness? Do you think it's possible to be a slave to neither one?

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Romans 6:15 opens with a question that Paul answers in the same way as he answered a similar question in verse 1. "By no means!" His forceful reply is variously rendered in English translations: "God forbid!" (KJV); "May it never be!" (NASB); "That's unthinkable!" (NOG); "Absolutely not!" (NET). However, the two questions are slightly different. "The difference lies in the tense of the verb. In v.1 the question was 'Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?' Now the question is 'Shall we sin [in any given case, or sin at all] because we are not under law but under grace?' (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:73). It seems Paul's gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone led his critics to object that such a message promotes sin. But in 6:1, the question is one of sinning in order to gain more grace, while in 6:15, the question is one of sinning because of grace.

According to Romans 6, our freedom *from* sin does not give us the freedom *to* sin. In fact, according to Paul, there is no such thing as absolute freedom. We are free only in that we get to choose our master—either sin which leads to death or obedience which leads to righteousness. In other words, Christians are not free to do what they want; rather they are only free to obey God—willingly, naturally, and joyfully. So, the subject of this passage is not freedom; it's slavery. Who do we want for a master? If we obey sin, we make it our master; if we obey righteousness, we make it, and indirectly God, our master.

In verses 15-18 Paul *contrasts* his readers' present and past conditions. They were once slaves of sin. They let sin control the way they lived and gave in to their sinful desires thereby turning their bodies into instruments of evil to serve sin (vv. 12, 13a). But they've been set free from their slavery to sin—they "died to sin" (v. 2)—and have become slaves to righteousness. God, in fact, set them free to become slaves of righteousness. Of course, the same is true of all the recipients of salvation who do not live under law but under grace.

Verses 15-18 describe the *indicative* of our Christian experience. Verse 19 presents the *imperative*. In verse 19 Paul *commands* us to become slaves of righteous living which will lead to holiness or Christlikeness. Just as we used to use our bodies

to do wrong so now we must use them to do right, i.e., with the same enthusiasm. After all, our "bodies" belong to God (1Co 6:19-20; Php 1:20-21) and he wants to use them for his glory. One author writes, "The Bible tells of people who permitted God to take and use their bodies for the fulfilling of His purposes. God used the rod in Moses' hand and conquered Egypt. He used the sling in David's hand to defeat the Philistines. He used the mouths and tongues of the prophets. Paul's dedicated feet carried him from city to city as he proclaimed the Gospel. The Apostle John's eyes saw visions of the future, his ears heard God's message, and his finger wrote it all down in a book that we can read.

"But you can also read in the Bible accounts of the members of the body being used for sinful purposes. David's eyes looked on his neighbor's wife; his mind plotted a wicked scheme; his hand signed a cowardly order to the woman's husband to be killed. As you read Psalm 51, you see that his whole body was affected by sin: his eyes (Ps. 51:3), mind (Ps. 51:6), ears (Ps. 51:8), heart (Ps. 51:10), and hips and mouth (Ps. 51:14-15). No wonder he prayed for a thorough cleansing! (Ps. 51:2)" (Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:533).

Verses 20-23 explain *why* we should obey the command in verse 19. On the one hand, we gained nothing from our old way of life. The things we did back then are things we're ashamed to talk about now. On the other hand, we've gained everything from our new way of life. We've been set free from sin to serve God, and the things we do now lead to final holiness and eternal life. One commentator explains: "Sanctification is seen here as the intermediate condition between what was true of believers before they were converted and what will be true of believers at the resurrection, where they will inherit eternal life. Sanctification is then something that is supposed to lead to eternal life, not merely happen when one obtains eternal life, just as iniquity in this life leads to death" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 174). For sin pays its wage—death; but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord" (GNT).

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Believers, who are no longer slaves to sin, are to offer themselves as slaves to righteousness, ultimately leading to their final sanctification and eternal life.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the message of Romans 1:1-7 and your response to it.

Explain whether you think the decision to offer yourself "in slavery to righteousness" (v. 19) is made *once* or *repeatedly* and why you think so.

Paul says, "You have been free from sin" (v. 18). Is that how you feel—set free?

Describe what offering yourself "in slavery to righteousness" looks like for you.

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 15 **What then?**

Now that we are not under law but under grace (cf. v. 14).

v. 15 **shall we sin**

"Paul's question here is not a repetition of verse 1. There he asked if we could 'continue in sin' or 'go on sinning.' Here he said, Shall we 'sin'? There he was looking at continual sinning. Here he dealt with specific acts of sin" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 98, www.soniclight.com). "In 6:1-14, Paul responds to an objection that the very abundance of God's grace in Christ encourages sin by arguing that Christ, in fact, sets believers free from sin. In 6:15-23, Paul responds to a similar objection by emphasizing the 'flip side' of this freedom from sin: slavery to God and to righteousness" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 396). "A Christian does not throw morality to the winds. To the contrary, he exchanges sin for righteousness as his master" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on Ro 6:15-23).

v. 16 **slaves**

Obedience makes you a slave to the one you obey. "Paul insists that even 'under grace' there are obligations of obedience that must be taken seriously. For, as Paul makes clear, there is no such thing as human 'autonomy,' a freedom from all outside powers and influences. Either people are under the power of sin, or they are under the power of God. The question is not, then, whether one will have a master, but which master one will serve. Serving sin, Paul shows, leads to death; serving God, to life" (Moo, 397). "Undoubtedly the background for the concept of being the Lord's 'slave' or 'servant' is to be found in the Old Testament scriptures. For someone who was Jewish this concept did not connote drudgery, but honor and privilege. It was used of national Israel at times (Isa 43:10), but was especially associated with famous OT personalities, including such great men as Moses (Josh 14:7), David (Ps 89:3; cf. 2 Sam 7:5, 8) and Elijah (2 Kgs 10:10); all these men were 'servants (or slaves) of the Lord' (the NET Bible, **sn** on Ro 1:1).

v. 16 **to obedience**

I.e., either "teaching" (v. 17) "to God" (v. 22). "Don't you know that you are slaves of anyone you obey? You can be slaves of sin and die, or you can be obedient slaves of God and be acceptable to him" (CEV).

v. 16 **death**

"What is meant by 'death' in this instance is difficult to determine. Most probably it is used inclusively to refer to death in all its aspects, culminating in that eternal death of 'everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power' (II Thess. 1:9). Sin is deathly and death in every respect follow in its wake" (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 231). "'Death' may include reference to physical death and present spiritual death, but in this context it means mainly 'eternal' death: the final and eternal exclusion from God's presence that is the ultimate result of sin" (Moo, 399).

v. 16 **righteousness**

I.e., righteous living and ultimately being made righteous, which is the goal of sanctification. Paul has practical rather than positional righteousness in mind (cf. vv. 13, 17-20), i.e., "moral righteousness, conduct pleasing to God" (Moo, 400). "You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living" (NLT).

v. 17 **claimed your obedience**

Believers are said to be entrusted (NET) to "the pattern of teaching" rather than vice versa. "This unusual way of putting the matter is intentional; Paul wants to make clear that becoming a Christian means being placed under the authority of Christian 'teaching,' that expression of God's will for NT believers" (Moo, 401). The fact that most of the uses of "pattern" (Gk. *typos*) refer to believers being examples to other believers may suggest the personal nature of the instruction. The use of the passive "were entrusted" implies divine action, i.e., God entrusted us to Christian teaching.

v. 19 **human limitations**

"Paul's point would appear to be that human nature produces a weakness in understanding that can be overcome in this life only by the use of (imperfect) analogies" (Moo, 404).

v. 19 **offer**

The verb in the imperative expresses a command. Christians are to be as devoted to doing right as they once were to doing wrong (cf. v. 13). The aorist tense should not be taken to denote a once-for-all handing over to either slavery to impurity or slavery to righteousness (see James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, *Romans 1-8*, 346).

v. 21 **What benefit**

The verse can be punctuated differently (cf. the NLT). The answer to the question isn't expressed in the NIV, but it's assumed to be negative. It is expressed in the NLT, i.e., things of which they are now ashamed.

v. 23 **For**

"This verse not only explains the contrasting 'outcomes' of death and life specified in vv. 22-23 but also brings the entire chapter to a fitting climax" (Moo, 408). "Death is earned, eternal life is purely gratuitous" (Murray, 238).

v. 23 **in**

"None of the blessings bestowed by the Father, however much the gratuitousness appears, are apart from Christ nor are they enjoyed except in union with him" (Murray, 238).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Last weekend I had the awesome privilege of watching my senior son conduct the last song in his high school's Wind Symphony Full Orchestra Spring Concert. He was amazing. At the end, when he turned around to face the audience, they were all on their feet clapping, whistling and shouting out. He said in that moment he thought, "Wow! I could get used to this." I've heard from other stage performers that they thrive on the applause at the end of a great show. We are all slaves to something. For some it's the affection of an audience. For others it's a successful career or raising great kids. For some it may be a habitual sin. Whatever we obey or make an idol in our lives becomes our master. We will do anything to serve that to which we are enslaved. Our text tells us that all those things lead to death. We, as Christ followers, have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God. The benefit, according to our passage, is holiness and eternal life. As parents, we want our kids to excel at many things. We pay good money and spend valuable time in training, tutoring and equipping so they will be excellent at that thing they do. Today, I'm asking myself if I put as much effort into their training in righteousness as I did in other activities. Let's hold one another accountable, parents, to making sure our kids have one Master.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 6:15-23

1. What does being a slave to sin lead to?
2. What does being a slave to obedience to God lead to?
3. Look at verse 23. Contrast what sin offers to what God offers.

What Do You Think

1. How would you know if something becomes an idol or master in your life?
2. In what ways can you make sure God is your Master and you are pursuing righteousness?

What R U Going To Do

It is not wrong to have fun doing things you love—like baseball or dancing or computer games! Keep track of how much time you spend doing that activity this week and compare it to how much time you spend at church or with God. Need to make adjustments? Do it!

Core Comp

Salvation by Grace - I believe I become a child of God through faith in Jesus, not because of anything I do.

Memory Verse

Romans 8:2 - Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

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Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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