

Slaves — Never to Be Emancipated

A Study on Romans 6:14b-16

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Slavery did not end when President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation over a hundred years ago. There are still slaves today. While it is true in a political and social sense that there are very few slaves who are physically in bondage (and we thank God for that), yet in a spiritual sense everyone is a slave. Every human being is either a slave to God and righteousness, or a slave to sin and self. Slavery to Christ issues into eternal life; slavery to sin issues into spiritual and eternal death. There is no middle ground; no one can straddle the fence. Those who are slaves to Christ will never be emancipated, and they do not want to be. They have found that only through acknowledging Christ as Lord and being in bondservitude to him can they find happiness.

In Romans 6:15-23 Paul contrasts what a person was in Adam before salvation with what he is now in Christ. In the old headship of Adam, a person was a slave to sin, serving sin with no alternative because his sin nature made him a slave to sin. At salvation, Christ freed the person from the bondage of sin so that it no longer reigns over him. He is no longer a slave to sin as he was in his unsaved state. The saved man, the Christian, has now been made a slave to God in Christ.

In Romans 6:1-14 Paul dealt with the subject of one's union with Christ, showing that the person who trusts in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour actually shares the death and life of Jesus Christ. This is God's divine work in every true Christian. In Romans 6:15-23 Paul deals with man's responsibility as a Christian. He wants us to know that it is through obedience, self-surrender, and yielding ourselves to God that we are slaves to God and therefore committed to obedience.

Paul ended the argument of Romans 6:1-14 by stating that the Christian is "not under the law, but under grace." He was saying that the Christian no longer is to live by the Mosaic Law as a means of justification and sanctification, but he is to live by grace in Christ Jesus. Law brought servitude to sin, but grace in Christ brings the desire and power to live a sanctified life. (Although the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law as a rule of life, many of the principles of the Law are applicable to him, for the Mosaic Law was a reflection of God's character, especially the Ten Commandments.)

THE PROBLEM — Romans 6:15a

“What then? shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace?” This question would be asked by a legalist who did not understand the grace of God. A legalist is one who wants to put the Christian back under the Mosaic Law for salvation (justification) and Christian living (sanctification). He would say a person has to keep laws or codes to get saved and remain saved. He adds a works system to God’s grace. This question would never have come up had Paul not taught the grace principle for Christian living.

The Christian is under law, but that law is the eternal, moral law and the law of Christ. The Mosaic Law is a manifestation of the eternal law that was specific to its own time and place. This does not mean it is irrelevant or inapplicable today, but it does mean that its modern application must be based on the eternal law which the Mosaic Law depicted.

The question in 6:1, “Shall we continue in sin?” was asked by a libertine, one who reasoned that because a person was saved out of sin by God’s grace, that person could go on sinning after salvation because God is gracious and will forgive. Paul’s reaction was, “God forbid!” He went on to show that because the Christian is in union with Christ, he shares Christ’s death to sin and his resurrection to life. God has broken the power of sin in the Christian — it remains but no longer reigns — so the true Christian cannot live a life of habitual and repeated sin, although he does do acts of sin. God has done a divine work in each of his children so that sin no longer has dominion over them.

After being saved, can a person live in sin as a habitual pattern? Is there to be no change in our lives when we become Christians? Paul’s answer is that we cannot continue in sin. This is such an important thing because if there is no change in our lives after we receive Christ, there is a serious doubt that we ever received him at all. If there is no change, if our attitudes are the same, if our outlook is the same, it is questionable whether we were ever really saved. Spurgeon said, “An unchanged life is the mark of an unchanged heart, and an unchanged heart is a sign of an unregenerate life.”

The question in 6:15 deals with the subject of law and grace. This question arose because of a Christian’s *state in grace*, not because of his *salvation by grace*. It is specifically stated in 6:14 that the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law for either salvation or sanctification. This might lead the legalist to think that since a person is not under the law principle, there is nothing to restrain sin in his life. He reasons that if there is not a strict list of do’s and don’ts, such as the Mosaic Law, then a person will live as he pleases. Law brings fear of punishment and makes people “toe the line.” For a legalist, fear rather than love becomes the motivating factor for salvation and service.

This legalistic attitude is seen in our Christian culture today by the list of taboos men make up as a standard for spirituality. The idea is that people cannot be restrained unless put under church laws.

Society, government, and non-Christians know of no way to restrain sin but by law and its penalties, but the Christian is restrained by the Christ life within him through the working of the Holy Spirit. Under grace, the Holy Spirit restrains the Christian from within, and the standard God uses is the law of Christ, a perfect manifestation of the eternal law. Whereas a law can only work outwardly and generally, the Holy Spirit, indwelling the Christian, takes notice of the slightest sin and convicts him of it. The Christian is under the law of Christ, the law of love, and love is produced by the Holy Spirit:

“To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ)” (1 Cor. 9:21).

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23).

A person may put up a sign on his newly planted grass, “Do not walk on the grass!” But it is not long before a path is beaten through the grass where people walk. Law aggravates sin. Yet when one has the law of Christ, the law of love, he loves his neighbor and respects his rights, and so does not walk across the newly planted grass.

FIRST ANSWER — Romans 6:15b

“God forbid.” It is inconceivable, blasphemous, to think that a Christian would deliberately sin because he is not under law but under grace. A truly regenerate person does not want liberty to sin; he wants power for holiness. If a professing Christian habitually yields himself to sin and obeys its commands, he shows that he is still sin’s servant and the end of that service is spiritual death.

SECOND ANSWER — Romans 6:16

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield [present] yourselves servants to obey, his servants [bondslaves] ye are to whom ye obey?” The answer for the restraint of sin in the

Christian is his slavery to God. Who or what a person obeys shows his real master. In the former unsaved state a person was disobedient and enslaved to sin which would ultimately have led to eternal death and separation from God forever. But in the saved state, Christians are obedient to God, which leads to righteousness. This whole section contrasts the old slavery to sin with the new slavery to God; it does not contrast a believer's serving both sin and righteousness. This is a contrast of the saved and unsaved states.

The word "servant" means a "bondslave." Every Christian is a slave to Christ. What are the characteristics of a bondslave? He is one who is ruled by another. The Christian is not to be willful, but voluntarily to obey the will of his Master. He is one who serves another, disregarding his own interests. The Christian is to keep the will of God central in his thinking, setting himself aside. A bondslave is subject to his master not just for a time, but for all his life. The Christian can never be set free from this position of slavery. A slave must render obedience, for he is not his own. A Christian must obey God for he is not his own, he has been bought with a price. A slave to God is not only bound to obey, often he is made willing to obey. Our prayer should be, "Lord, make me willing to obey!"

Paul is simply saying that a man becomes the moral subject of what he is and does. If he yields himself to sin, sin gets a grip on him. If he yields to God, God gets a grip on him. The unsaved are servants of sin because they willingly present themselves to sin. The saved voluntarily present themselves to righteousness and become the servants of righteousness. Christ taught that a man becomes a slave to what he loves.

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other, Ye cannot serve God and mammon [riches]" (Matt. 6:24).

"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34).

If we love money, then money will become the all-consuming goal in our lives. If we love pleasure, then the single most important thing will be to find pleasure, no matter what the cost. If we love status, then the passion of our lives will be to raise our social standing with men. If we love God, the consuming passion of our lives will be to be slaves to him. Our lives tell who or what we really love. There is no middle ground.

"Whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." "Death" speaks of spiritual and eternal death (damnation), which is the logical fruit of sin. Conversely, righteousness is the logical fruit of obedience. Bondservice to sin results in death; bondservice to God results in righteousness.

CONCLUSION

A Christian is a slave to God. His new Master is Christ. If he is to find happiness, peace, and joy, it can only be found as he voluntarily yields or surrenders himself more and more to God through Christ.

If you are without Christ, the Scriptures have spoken about your condition. You are voluntarily a slave to sin and self, and you need a new Master. Only Jesus Christ can free you from your slavery to sin and make you a slave of righteousness. If you will admit you are sinful, turn from your old life, and come to Christ as your personal Saviour from sin and as the Lord of your life, he will forgive your sins and give you eternal life. At that moment you will become a slave to Christ, giving allegiance to him as Lord and King. Only when Christ is Lord and King is one free from sin.