

Slaves for Holiness

A Study on Romans 6:17-23

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Slavery is generally a despised word in our time, for men have fought and died to be free from tyranny and slavery. In one sense the concept of slavery is not outmoded or despised. Rather, it is loved by the Christian for, in a spiritual sense, every Christian is a slave to God. When a person trusts in Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour, he crowns Jesus Christ his new Master, and is made a slave to God in Christ. He does this voluntarily. A political slave is generally forced into the position of servitude, but the Christian willingly and voluntarily puts himself in the position of slavery to God. His goal is to be faithful in that position.

REVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT

Paul asked whether a Christian should sin because he is no longer under the Mosaic Law but under grace in Christ. The legalist wants to put a person back under the Mosaic Law for salvation and sanctification, but Paul says that the Christian is free from the Law. He is under grace, which is manifested in the law of Christ which finds its ultimate fulfillment in the concept of love. However there are many positive and negative commands that must be kept if one is to fulfill the law of Christ in love.

Paul's first answer to his question is an emotional, "God forbid!" It is unthinkable that a Christian would want to sin because he is no longer under the Mosaic Law. He continues by setting forth the natural law of slavery: as a person yields himself to someone or something, he becomes its moral subject. If he chooses to yield to sin, then sin grips him and the end is spiritual death. If he chooses to obey God, the end is righteousness. What or whom we obey shows what or whom we really love.

The Mosaic Law itself cannot restrain sin, though fear of its penalties may. True heartfelt restraint is found in the truth of slavery to God. At salvation, the Christian voluntarily places himself under God through Christ and becomes his slave.

THIRD ANSWER

Disobedience to God leads to slavery to sin; obedience to God leads to slavery to righteousness.

“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin.” Paul thanks God for the sovereign grace that was showed these Roman Christians in bringing them out of deep sin into the salvation which is found in Christ Jesus. He makes a contrast between what these people were before they trusted in Christ and what they are after trusting in the Lord. Before, they were slaves to sin. The history of ancient Rome, where these people lived, is marred with immorality and vice, but God delivered some out of this condition of sin.

“Don’t you know that those doing such things have no share in the kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who live immoral lives — who are idol worshippers, adulterers or homosexuals — will have no share in His kingdom. Neither will thieves and cheaters, drunkards, slander-mongers, and robbers.

“There was a time when some of you were just like that, but now your sins are washed away, and you are set apart for God, and He has accepted you because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you” (1 Cor. 6:9-11, Taylor, *Living Letters*).

America is rapidly becoming a replica of ancient Rome. False religion, immorality, and vice are the rule of our day. Americans are going deeper into sin daily because they have chosen to obey the gods of sex, pleasure and materialism rather than the true God Jesus Christ.

Remember our unsaved state when we lived for ourselves, loved ourselves, struggled to advance ourselves, fought to protect ourselves, hated all rivals to ourselves, loved only those who catered to ourselves. We loved our sin, but it brought only misery, heartache, defeat, boredom, frustration, emptiness and unhappiness!

“But ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you [into which you were delivered].” Here is a beautiful picture of God’s sovereignty and man’s human response in salvation. The words “which was delivered you” should be translated “into which you were delivered.” In his grace God drew the person into the gospel and the person obeyed it by responding to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Man obeyed from the heart. It is not intellectualism, but a commitment of life from the heart as one is prompted by the grace of God. In this verse Paul is thanking God that by grace He delivered these people from slavery to sin to be his slaves in Christ. Something dynamic and real happened to these heathen in Rome — they met Jesus Christ and were saved!

“Being then made free from sin, ye became [were made, constituted] servants of righteousness.” Christ set the Christian free from his old master sin, and the Christian became a voluntary slave to his new master Jesus Christ, obeying God and righteousness.

In what sense are we set free from sin? We are free in a positional sense in that sin is no longer the Christian's master. The new Master is Christ and Christ alone. He is Lord and King. At salvation a person is constituted or made a slave of God positionally. Since all Christians are slaves to God in Christ positionally, then they cannot be happy and joyful until they begin to yield and submit to God for the purpose of righteousness. Christians are created slaves and can only be happy when yielded to their new Master.

“I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh.” Paul will make a human or secular illustration to make his point.

“For as ye have yielded [presented] your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity.” Before they were saved these Romans had given themselves over to sin with great intensity. They loved their sin and pursued it because it brought momentary pleasure. There is pleasure in sin and this is why men pursue it, but this pleasure is not lasting and has no depth. The lust for sin is never satisfied. But sin does not go unnoticed by God, and it soon catches up with the individual. It is like a net whose drawstring is being pulled ever tighter so that the sinner becomes a captive of his own sin. No person ever gets away with sin. When he breaks God's moral laws, sin will soon take its toll. Man may think that he can play loose and free with God, but his sin will catch up with him — if not here on earth, surely in eternity. Man becomes the moral victim of the one he chooses to obey.

“Even so now yield [present] your members servants to righteousness unto holiness [sanctification].” With the same intensity that the Romans presented themselves to sin in their unsaved state, they were to present themselves to God as slaves to righteousness. The presentation of our lives to God will produce holiness or sanctification, and the Christian will begin to experience the power of God in his life. The Christian is commanded to make this presentation of his members, and his response to the command is to be voluntary obedience.

True freedom is found only in slavery to Christ. This is the highest, and really the only, freedom. It is those who know the truth and walk in it that are free:

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:31-36.)

There is no freedom outside Jesus Christ. Apart from him whatever is called “freedom” is really bondage to sin. Today men boast of their freedom and independence from God. They glory in free thought, free government, free love, and free will. But in all his human freedoms, man only finds slavery to sin, and this sin will catch up with him.

The Christian seeks only to be a bondsman of Jesus Christ. He does not follow his own will independently, but delights to do the will of his Master Jesus Christ. He is free to be a slave of God and righteousness, and that is true freedom.

A Christian once said, “I have never yet served the Lord with the same intensity I once served sin, but my heart’s desire is to do so.”

“For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.” Before they were saved these people had no desire or concern for righteousness. They were given over to sin.

“What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?” After we are saved, we look back over the past and are ashamed of our wretched lives and our independence from our Creator. Then we loved our sin:

“You have had enough in the past of the evil the godless enjoy — sex sin, lust, getting drunk, wild parties, drinking bouts and the worship of idols — which leads to other terrible sins.

“Of course your old friends will be very surprised when you don’t eagerly join them any more in the wicked things they do and they will laugh at you in contempt and scorn.

“But just remember that they must face the Judge of all, living and dead; they will be judged for the way they have lived” (1 Pet. 4:3-5, Taylor, *Living Letters*).

It is only after salvation that we become sensitive to sin and blush when we think about our unsaved behavior. “Free” and “fruitless,” what a pair of words to describe the life of one who is going on daily towards a Christless eternity.

“For the end of those things is death.” Men outside Christ suffer the just desserts of their sin: spiritual death in time and ultimately eternal death (separation from God forever).

“But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God.” These Christians have been made the slaves of God. Christ is their Master now, not sin!

“Ye have your fruit unto holiness [sanctification] and the end everlasting life.” The result of slavery to God is a holy life which brings us into a progressive realization of the eternal life that is ours in Christ Jesus. Notice the order: bondservice, holiness [sanctification], and eternal life. Here is a paradox: The end of sin is death that never dies, and the end of sanctification [holiness] is life that never ends.

“For the wages of sin is death.” The payment that a person will receive for being a slave to sin is spiritual and eternal death.

“But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The reward for being a slave to Jesus Christ is the free gift of eternal life. The Christian’s award for slavery is life eternal, and this is a gift from God. Where is eternal life found? Only in the person of Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION

If you are without Christ, the Bible declares that you are a slave to sin. Each step into sin pushes you further into slavery until you are trapped. It is like being in a net or web where there is no hope and no human way out, but only more slavery, spiritual death and ultimately hell. But there is a divine way out of this slavery to sin. God can and will help you if you will turn to Jesus Christ, his only answer to the sin problem. If you will receive Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour from sin and Lord of your life, you will be made a slave to God in Christ, and you will no longer be a slave to sin and self. Our Lord said, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).