

Romans
Whose Slave Are You? (Part 1)
Romans 6:15-23
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Well, it is my joy this morning to invite you to turn again to the Book of Romans. I'm excited to return to our continuing study, really now a multi-year study, of Paul's magnificent letter to the Romans. Because we stepped away during the summer to do some other things, to study some other issues (and it's been almost three months since we studied this book together), I want to begin today by reminding you of the context of where we are, by reminding you of the major flow of Paul's argument so far in the Book of Romans.

Now, you'll remember that after a brief introduction (17 verses at the beginning of this letter), then he comes immediately to the first major section which we call: the gospel explained. From chapter 1:18 to the end of chapter 4, Paul lays out the gospel. And, of course, at its heart the gospel is about justification by faith alone. He explains the need for that, he explains exactly how that's been accomplished, and how it's received by faith alone.

We're in the second major section of this letter and that is in chapters 5 through 8 and I've entitled that: the gospel experienced. And the goal of this section I believe, the entire section, is not to focus on sanctification (although, as we're seeing, **it** does deal with the issue of sanctification) but rather to give us security as true believers in the justification that's ours in Christ. This entire section both begins and ends with that wonderful assurance; and I think everything in between is about that as well.

Now, so far, we've looked at chapter 5 and part of chapter 6. Let me just remind you of the flow of Paul's thought here. In chapter 5:1-11, as he develops **the** security that we have in Christ, he begins with the immediate benefits that are ours because of justification. Chapter 5:1: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have..." and he launches into this list of benefits that are ours. The middle of chapter 5, we get to what is really one of the most difficult theological sections of this letter. Beginning in verse 12 and running down through the end of chapter 5, he explains the legal basis for justification. How can a just God, a just judge, declare

wicked people to be righteous? And there's only one answer to that. That's because we once were in Adam (he was our official, legal representative) but God, in grace, has given us a new official legal representative - Jesus Christ. And because of what He does, we get all of the credit. It is a legal...there is a legal basis for justification and that's God appointed Christ as our second Adam, as our representative, and so he can declare us just because Christ is just.

Now what Paul says at the end of chapter 5, specifically in verses 20 and 21 raises two crucial questions. We've noted this. In verses 20 and 21 of chapter 5 Paul raises this question: does the grace that comes in justification encourage us to sin? Paul answers that question in chapter 6. I'll come back to that moment. The second question that he raises at the end of chapter 5 is: what is the purpose of the law? What purpose does the law serve? Paul answers that question in Chapter 7. Now as he answers these two huge questions in chapter 6 and 7, Paul profoundly deepens our understanding of our security in Jesus Christ.

Now the last time that we studied Romans, we left off in the middle of chapter 6. So, let me remind you of where we are in chapter 6 as Paul answers the question: does grace, the grace that comes in justification, cause us or encourage us to sin? The theme of chapter 6 is this: the believer's new relationship to sin. That's the entire chapter - the believer's new relationship to sin. He wants to deal with this question. We've outlined the chapter like this: the first half of the chapter is making one basic point - we are no longer slaves of sin. That's our new relationship to sin. We're no longer slaves. He develops that, you'll notice in verse 1 of chapter 6, he raises question: what shall we say then, are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? In verse 2, Paul gives a summary answer. He says absolutely not. Why? Because we died to sin. And then he spends the rest of the first half of the chapter explaining what that means, that we died to sin. And beginning in the second half of chapter 6, Paul comes to a second point he wants to make about our new relationship to sin.

And this is where we are this morning. In the second half of the chapter, beginning at verse 15 and running down through verse 23, Paul makes the opposite point to the point he made in the first half. And that is, not only are we no longer slaves of sin, but we are now slaves of God and righteousness. We are now slaves of God and of righteousness. Let's read it together. Romans

chapter 6 beginning in verse 15: “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 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. 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. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 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. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Now, having read that, I want to make two general observations before we look at it more specifically. Obviously, you see, that the major image that Paul uses in that paragraph is the image of slavery. That factors in importantly and we’ll deal with that in a few moments. But he uses that image, secondly - a second general observation we can make is he uses that image to make a sharp contrast between our slavery before Christ and after Christ. Notice how he does this. Verse 17: “...you were...you became...” Verse 18: “...having been freed...you became...” Verse 19: “...you presented [in the past] ...so now present...” And then verse 21: “...you then... you...now...” You see the point he’s trying to make. Paul uses this slavery imagery to illustrate the controlling influences that were a part of our life before Christ and after Christ.

Understanding this is absolutely foundational. Just as we discovered in the first half of Romans 6 - you cannot deal with the sin in your life if you don’t understand these foundational things. This is who you are in Jesus Christ and this is the foundation from which we grow in holiness.

Now the main point of this paragraph, then, we could put like this: true Christians never take sin lightly because they are no longer slaves of sin but of God and of righteousness. So, he’s still talking then, in this paragraph, about the believer’s new relationship to sin but with a slightly

different emphasis than in the first half of the chapter. Now let me give you the basic outline of the second half and we'll see it unfold over the next couple of weeks.

First of all, there's a flawed conclusion, in verses 15 and 16. He presents a flawed conclusion that perhaps some opponents of the gospel, or perhaps even some professing Christians, had come to about the believer's relationship to sin. He presents it and he answers it in sweeping general terms. Then in verses 17 and 18, **he** provides us with information about the radical change that happened to us. He's really talking, in those two verses, about our conversion. This is what happened when you were converted. There was a radical change in your relationship to sin. Verse 19, he applies it - the practical ramification of the believer's relationship to sin, what you ought to do in light of this reality. This is really the only command in this section. And then in verses 20 to 23 he steps back, and he says let me describe for you the eternal consequences of your relationship to sin. Based on all I've described, if your relationship to sin is that of a believer then it means eternal life. If your relationship to sin is still that of slavery to sin, it means death.

Now let's unpack then. With that basic understanding of the flow, let's unpack what the Spirit's teaching in these verses. And we're not going to make it very far today - let me just warn you of that. Paul begins in verses 15 and 16 with a flawed conclusion about the believer's relationship to sin. Notice how the conclusion begins in verse 15: "What then?" He's saying, 'What should we conclude?' Now what's the context for that question? Go back to the end of verse 14. He says, "For sin shall not be master over you..." That's not a... that's not a command. That's a statement of fact. That's a reality. The slavery of sin has been broken for believers. Sin shall not be master over you and here's why: "...for you are not under law but under grace." Everyone on the planet, everyone in this room this morning, is either under law or under grace. But what does that mean? Well, to be under law means you are desperately trying to earn your own standing before God by keeping God's law. You are trying to be justified by your own efforts. That's under law. You're trying to establish your own righteousness on the basis of your own efforts, your own goodness, your own merit. But of course, as we've already discovered in this book, that approach never works. It's hopeless. It's hopeless because the law can never deliver us from the guilt of sin nor the power of sin. It can't justify anyone. In fact, chapter 3:20 says

it's by the law that we get the knowledge of sin. In Galatians 2:16 Paul says no one's justified by the law. In fact, the law condemns. Think about this: the law of God condemns every person who doesn't keep it perfectly. Galatians 3:10 says, "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law...'" So, if you don't keep every command, you're cursed. That's what the law does. It curses you. That's what it means to be under the law. It means you're trying on your own efforts to earn God's acceptance. If that's you this morning, you're under law. And it's hopeless. It's impossible. Look...let's look at the other side of this. The rest of us are under grace. To be under grace means that you are seeking to be accepted with God not based on your own efforts or your own righteousness, but on the basis of His grace alone; His goodness to those who deserve exactly the opposite. It is to acknowledge your utter dependence on the work of Jesus Christ, on the cross alone, as the basis of your being made right with God. Here's how Paul puts it in chapter 3:24. He says, "...being justified [being declared right with God, being made right with God] ...by His grace [as a free gift, as a gift by His grace] through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus [through the work of Jesus Christ]". So, the believer, then, is no longer under law in the sense that **he's** still seeking to be made right with God by the law. But rather, he's under grace.

That's what Paul says in verse 14 and that invites the question of verse 15. Look at what he says: "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" **Now** that's very similar to the question Paul raised back in verse 1. Notice what he says there: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?" What I want you to see is the reason I've divided the chapter where I have at verse 15, is these two questions really provide the framework for this chapter. Both of these questions deal with the same theme: the believer's relationship to sin. But there is one key difference between the questions in verse 1 and verse 15. Do you see it? The excuse for sin is different. In verse 1, are we to sin in order that grace may increase? Do we actually get more grace by sinning more? And then in verse 15 there's a different excuse. Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? Because we've been justified by grace, declared right with God, we are good for eternity - is sin a little thing, does it really matter? In both cases, the attitude towards sin is the same. Verse 1 says are we to...look how he puts it: "are we to *continue* in sin..." The Greek word translated "continue"

means “to remain, to continue, or to persist in an activity, to persevere in a continuing habit and pattern [of sin]”. Is that okay? Is it okay for Christians to persist in, to continue in, to persevere in a continuing pattern and habit of sin? This is the person who claims to be a Christian but refuses to turn from a life of sin. Verse 15, look at the question there: “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Again, this is almost certainly referring to an ongoing pattern of sin, a continuing state of sin, a settled life of sin. Christians sin, right? But no Christian lives in a continuing, lifelong settled pattern of sin. This is the flippant attitude that takes sin lightly - since I’m saved by grace sin doesn’t really matter. Listen to the Apostle John. John understood grace but here’s what he says in 1 John 3:8-9: “...the one who practices sin [and, again, he’s talking about who’s engaged in the practice, the pattern, the habit of sin, this is what marks his life] is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one [listen to that, no one] who is born of God [no one who has experienced the new birth] practices sin...” Again, the idea isn’t that we don’t commit sin. The idea is true Christians don’t live in an ongoing, relentless pattern of sin. Why? Because the seed of God abides in him. And he can’t sin in that way because he’s **a new creature**. He’s been born of God.

So how does Paul respond to this person, this person in verse 1 and verse 15 who claims to be a Christian but displays an attitude that takes sin lightly because he’s no longer under law but under grace? Look at Paul’s response in verse 15, his correction: “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!” Paul’s response to a professing Christian who doesn’t take sin seriously and who claims that he can continue to live in a pattern of sin because he’s under grace, is one of moral revulsion and outrage. That’s what that expression means - “May it never be!” Literally, ‘May it never happen!’ ‘This is unthinkable’, Paul says, ‘that a Christian would take sin lightly because he’s under grace.’

Then, as Paul did in the first half of this chapter, he lays out in verse 16 a general principle that he will spend the rest of the paragraph developing. Let’s look at the general principle in verse 16. Just start with those words, “Do you not know”. Those are familiar words if you’re a student of Scripture. Paul loves that expression. I have to tell you, as a preacher, I find great comfort in the fact that Paul has **these** phrases, these expressions, that he resorts to when he’s

trying to express the truth that grips his heart. You know, expressions like, “Do you not know” or “May it never be”. There are many others. I’m encouraged by that because I know I do the same thing, and so does every teacher. **You** find yourself wanting to communicate a truth and you go back to a way that it’s gripped your mind, it’s gripped your soul. I know you’re probably amused at times when I do that, perhaps even completing my sentences before I do in your mind. Paul did this, so it’s okay! Now, **notice** Paul loves this expression: “Do you not know”. Why? Because it was his way to remind his readers of something that was common knowledge. Most of the time he deals with things, when he asked that question, that are common knowledge to all Christians; that they’ve learned as part of the gospel, the rudimentary facts **of the** truth of the Christian faith. But here, in verse 16, it’s a little different because the question that he asks has to do with common knowledge, not merely to Christians, but to all of those who lived in the 1st century in the Roman Empire. Notice the question he asks: “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey...” Paul intentionally borrows the language of Roman slavery throughout this paragraph. Now let me just say, and we’ll talk about this more when I get there, but in verse 19 he doesn’t apologize for doing it, but he does admit that it’s not a perfect illustration, and that it has some drawbacks. It can be misunderstood. Nevertheless, this concept of slavery powerfully emphasizes the point he wants to make which is: freedom in Christ is not freedom to sin because all you did at conversion was change one Lord for another Lord. That’s why the image of slavery works. Paul wants to show how ridiculous it is to call yourself a Christian and to continue to take sin lightly and to live in sin.

So, let’s look at verse 16, really key verse. This is where it lays out the general principle and principles that he will develop throughout the rest of this paragraph. Foundational. Let’s look at these key foundational propositions that we have to understand to get the rest of this passage. Proposition number one: Paul says in verse 16 if you present yourself as a slave to something or someone, you are a slave. If you present yourself as a slave to something or someone, you are a slave. Notice what he says in verse 16. He says: “...when you present...” **The** Greek tense there has this idea: when you are habitually presenting yourself to something or someone, that is, you’re handing yourself over - another sense of this word is when you’re putting yourself at someone else’s disposal, you are a slave of that thing or that person.

Now that's a very interesting expression. Why would Paul talk about presenting yourself as a slave? It sounds odd to us, doesn't it? No one would do that, right? Well, the truth is, this was a common practice in the 1st century. In the earlier days of the Roman Republic, before the days of Augustus, piracy and kidnapping were very common. That was later outlawed. So, in the 1st century - listen carefully, this really factors into what Paul wants to teach us here - in the 1st century, most slaves in the Roman Empire became slaves in one of two ways. They were either prisoners of war - that's where the bulk of the prisoners of the slaves in the Roman Empire came from - they were prisoners of war, or they were children born to those prisoners of war. Most slaves in the Roman Empire came from that. But, if you were not captured as a prisoner of war or you were not born to a prisoner of war, the most common way in the 1st century in Rome that you became a slave was to sell yourself into slavery. Now when we hear that, of course, our minds go to the awful thing that was American slavery and, not that any slavery is good, but that's where our minds go - **is** that. And **we** ask ourselves why would anyone ever do that? By the way, I'll deal with that later because I think we have to, dealing a passage about slavery. But both Old and New Testament condemn the institution of American slavery. It's clear - I'll talk about that when we get there. **But** that's where our minds go. Why would anyone sell themselves into slavery? Well, you've got to dispossess yourself that Roman slavery is exactly the same as American slavery. It wasn't. Not a good thing. Glad it's gone. But it wasn't permanent. It wasn't permanent. In fact, in that culture (and I validated this from several key resources), in that culture most slaves were typically freed by the time they were 30 years old. And often, they didn't serve as slaves for more than seven years. It was temporary.

So, in light of its temporary nature, there were three reasons that people in the 1st century sold themselves into slavery. Number one was because it was a common way for non-Romans to connect themselves with Roman **citizens** and to receive their own citizenship. It was a brief time, you served, and you got new status in the community because of the family that you served. A second reason people sold themselves into slavery was it was a way for those who were free, but desperately poor, to gain a career and financial stability because most of the slaves in the 1st century were not shackled in chains. **They were** artisans, they were workers, they were tradesmen working under their owner. They also had property. **They** sometimes even own

other slaves, in this sense. And so, it was a way to gain security and to gain a career path. Thirdly, it was a way to pay off personal indebtedness and avoid financial collapse. You essentially indentured yourself. You sold yourself and you would then pay back what you owed by giving them that service. So that was common.

And so, Paul plays off of that cultural phenomenon and he says (notice verse 16) when you present yourselves to someone as slaves, you agree to obey him and you're a slave to the one you obey. Paul's point is, listen, if you present yourself to someone as a slave you can't at the same time expect to retain your freedom. You are a slave, and his point is the very same thing holds true in the spiritual realm. You are a slave to whomever you obey.

Proposition number two: that's here in verse 16 - in the spiritual realm there are only two masters. Only two. Notice what he says: "you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either..." and he uses a Greek word that's only used here in the New Testament. It is a word that makes it clear there are only two categories. It's either-or. This is it - either of sin or of obedience. You are a slave of sin or you're a slave of obedience, that is, to God. We are not under law as a way to earn our way to heaven but, as Christians, we are still under obedience. Literally what he says is, we are slaves of obedience. It's an interesting expression. We'll talk about that in a moment. But Paul expresses the same idea in various ways in this section. You go back to chapter 5:21 he speaks of everybody being either a slave of sin or under the reign of grace. Either you're under sin or you're under grace. In the same way that sin exercises power over unbelievers, control over unbelievers, grace reigns in the life of believers. In... down in verses 18 and 19 of this chapter, **he** contrasts being a slave of sin with a slave of righteousness. And then in verse 22, he contrasts being a slave of sin with being a slave of God. So, **he** says it different ways but he's making the same basic point. The point is this: when a slave changes masters he doesn't stop obeying. He just stops obeying his old master and he starts obeying his new master. This is how it works. Did you notice the clear implication of Paul's words here? Everyone is a slave. Everyone. No one is ever free in the sense of having the uninfluenced power to set his or her own course. This is an illusion. It's an illusion created and sustained by Satan himself.

If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, I want you understand the reality of the choice that stands before you. It's not, 'Do I decide to hold onto my freedom or submit myself to God?' That's not the choice. Really, it's just a choice between masters. Is sin going to be your master or is God going to be your master? That's the choice. One of Satan's most effective strategies, I think, is to make unbelievers think that as they indulge their sins, they are actually free. Let me just tell you, in your heart of hearts, you know that isn't true. And if you doubt that, as I've said to you before, just try stopping. Just try. Try for the next six months not to commit those sins that control you and you will discover that you are not in charge. Sin is.

But this is what Jesus taught isn't it? Turn back to John 8. This is exactly what our Lord said. John 8, look at verse 31: "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed [in] Him [or who had believed Him, rather], 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.'" In other words, **they had** affirmed the truthfulness of His claims and He's saying, 'The reality of your faith, if it's true faith, it'll be proven by your continuing to obey Me. And as you do that, verse 32, "...you will know the truth, and the truth [that truth, the truth that's in My words, as you know it and obey it] will make [set] you free. They answered [you got to love this] Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You [we] will become free'?" They mean physically, of course. But even that's a ridiculous claim. I mean, think about their history. You have the Egyptians. You have the period of the judges when they were under several different surrounding countries. You have the Babylonian captivity. And right now, as they say this, they're under the Romans. "We've never been enslaved". Jesus leaves that ridiculous claim alone and He comes back to the spiritual issue. Notice what he says in verse 34: "Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin [is committing sin. Again, it's this idea **of** a pattern of sin in the life] is the [a] slave of sin.'" And then he says, verse 36: "...if the Son makes you free [from that slavery to sin], you will be free indeed." Jesus makes exactly the same point Paul does. You are either a slave of your sin or you're a slave of His. That's it. Those are the two options.

The third proposition (back in Romans 6), a third proposition is that you can only be a slave to one of those two masters. You can only be a slave to one of them. Notice, again, verse 16: either of sin or of obedience. A slave can only have one master. Again, our Lord affirmed this

right? In Matthew 6:24 - there He's talking about serving God **or** wealth. But he makes this point. He says, "No one [that's a total complete exclusion **of** every individual] no one can serve two masters..." No one can be a slave to two masters. "...for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other." Jesus said, Paul says, you can't be a slave of both God and righteousness and of sin at the same time. It's impossible.

Proposition #4, and this is key: you can only identify your master by what you do. You can only identify who your true master is by how you live. Look at verse 16: "you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin...or of obedience..." You are slaves of the one you obey. And then he says of believers that we are slaves of obedience. Now that is a strange expression, "slaves of obedience". That's not what we expect him to say. What do we expect him to say? You're either a slave of sin or you're slave of righteousness? He does that later in versus 18 and 19. Or we expect him to say you're either a slave of sin or you're a slave of God. He says that down in verse 22. But, here, he speaks of Christians as slaves of obedience. Why? He personifies obedience as our master. Why does he do that? Here's the simple explanation: because obedience is the essence of what it means to be a slave. If you're a slave of God and of Jesus Christ, then you obey. That's what it means to be a slave. To call yourself someone's slave and not to obey that person is absurd. This is why Jesus says what He says, you remember, in Luke 6:46. He says, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' [Kurios, Kurios. Why do you call Me, 'Master, Master'] and do not do what I say?" That's illogical! If I'm your Master - slaves obey their masters. And here's the key point: the one you obey proves whose slave you really are. That's what Paul is saying here. If you obey sin as a pattern of life - again, we're not talking about the fact that...everybody understands, and Paul's going to deal with this in Romans 7, believers struggle with sin. But believers don't live in an ongoing, continuous pattern in habit of sin, where sin marks their life more than righteousness. Doesn't happen, as a continuing pattern. If you obey sin as a pattern of life, then sin is your master and you're not a believer. But if you obey God as a pattern of life, then God is your master, and you are a believer. A slave obeys his master and that shows exactly whose slave he is by whom he obeys.

Again, our Lord makes this point. Go back to Matthew 7. Matthew 7. I love this passage. **It's** really a powerful one. But beginning in verse 13 Jesus ends this most famous sermon with a

series of three warnings. He first of all, in verses 13 and 14, warns us about the wrong entrance to the kingdom. People who find the wrong gate. They think they're getting into the kingdom, but they come to the wrong gate. And, of course, He's talking about all works-based attempts to enter the kingdom versus the work of Christ and grace. So, that's one problem.

But then in verse 15 he deals with a second problem, a second warning and it's a warning about false teachers. How do people find the wrong gate? Often, it's by listening to false teachers who say, 'Here's how you know God. Here's how you have a relationship with God.' And Jesus says, "Beware of the false prophets..." They're going to come to you in sheep's clothing. In other words, they're going to come to you claiming to be My sheep, claiming to be Christians. Folks, understand this, false teachers don't show up on the television with false teacher emblazoned across their forehead. They're saying, 'We're one of you. We all believe the same thing.' "...but inwardly, they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits" - both the fruit of their own life, the fruit of their teaching, and the fruit that they produce (their teaching produces in their converts). Look at the fruit. Then in verse 21, and this is where I want to come, Jesus gets to a third warning and this warning is about false professions. Here's a person who understands the true gospel, who hasn't found the wrong gate, and who claims to have entered the right gate but hasn't. Notice what he says: "Not everyone who says to Me [to Jesus], 'Lord, Lord [Kurios, Kurios, Lord, Master, Master - not everyone who says that to Me - that's the key word. Saying it doesn't make it so], will enter the kingdom of heaven [He's talking about the future manifestation of His kingdom. You're not going to get into heaven, in other words. You're not going to get into His kingdom], but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.'" Well, wait a minute! Is Jesus teaching works salvation? No, He's saying here's how you discern a true profession from a false profession. Same thing Paul is saying. Who are you obeying? He goes on. Verse 22: "Many will say to Me on that day [that is the Day of Judgment. Many - that's a frightening word], 'Lord, Lord [Kurios, Kurios, Master, Master], did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'" They're even claiming to have done miraculous things. And, by the way, Jesus doesn't say they're lying. Could be. Maybe **they were** empowered by a different power. Verse 23: "And then I will declare to them [on the Day of Judgment], 'I never knew you; depart from Me...'" Now you read that, and true Christians can read that and be

frightened. Don't be frightened because Jesus tells us exactly who He's going to say that to in the final phrase of verse 23 - "you who practice lawlessness." If your life is characterized as a slave of sin, then you don't belong to Jesus. That's what he's saying.

And then he goes on in verses 24 to 27 to give an illustration of that very truth. I wish I had time to take you through this but let me just dispossess you of one wrong point of interpretation so you can understand that story. In that parable, Jesus is not the rock. Read it. He tells us what the rock is because the only difference between these two people who built what are apparently Christian lives, is one of them has a foundation and the other one doesn't. What's the foundation? Well in the point of the story, the foundation is the one who hears these words of mine and what? Does them. Again, not that we earn our way into heaven - we've already talked about that. We're under grace, not under law. We don't earn our way into heaven. He's talking about how do you know if you're really mine? You're really Mine because if you're My slave, you do what I tell you to do.

So, my question for you today isn't, what's your profession? I suspect almost everyone in this room would say, 'Yep, I'm a Christian'. My question to you this morning, based on Romans 6, is whom do you serve? To whom are you a slave? Who do you obey? Martin Lloyd Jones writes, "The nature of a person expresses itself in actions. And to be a Christian does not merely mean that you say you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It means that you are born again. It means that you are in Christ. There is a new nature in you and that new nature must show itself. It shows itself in obedience, and righteousness, and holy living. It does not show itself by continuing in sin."

Let's go back to Romans 6 because there's one last proposition that we learn from verse 16. These two kinds of slavery result in two radically different ends. Paul explains the results of obeying these two different masters in verse 16. Notice how he puts it. He says, "you are slaves either of sin" and then, notice this, "resulting in death or of obedience resulting in righteousness." Let's look at those two. First of all, if you live as a slave to sin the result will be what? Death. It's death. Go down to verse 23 - one of the most familiar verses in Romans. "For the wages of sin is death..." Let me put that differently. Death is the salary that sin always

pays. Death is the salary that sin always pays. What is this death? Death is the loss of everything that can be called life. That includes spiritual death - we were born in spiritual death. Ephesians 2:1: "...you were dead in your trespasses and sins." Sin and slavery to sin lead to physical death. We touched on that back in chapter 5:12 where he says that it was by sin that death came into the world. But in this context, Paul is primarily referring to eternal death - that final and eternal separation from the presence of God that comes with slavery to sin. Death is the ultimate consequence of sin in all of its forms - spiritual, physical, and eternal. The salary sin always pays is death. But verse 16 says obedience results in righteousness. Now, again, this isn't what we expect Paul to say. Think about what he...think about the contrast here. He says sin results in death so obedience, we would expect him to say, results in life. But he doesn't say that. In fact, he can't say that because that would be heresy, that would be wrong, contrary to the gospel he preached. It's a lie. If obedience produces life, then we are saved by what? Our works.

And so, what does eternal life result from? Well, let's steal from a future message. Go over to verse 23. Again, "the free gift of God is eternal life..." So, we don't earn life. Sin produces death but obedience doesn't produce life. Instead, notice what he says. Obedience results in righteousness. Now, here, Paul is not talking about the wonderful gift of righteousness we've discovered already in Romans. He's not talking about forensic righteousness, imputed righteousness that's ours because of the perfect life of Jesus Christ. He's talking about practical, moral righteousness. And we know that because of how he explains it later. Go down to verse 19. He says, "...present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in" what? Sanctification. So, a true Christian is a slave of God and that means he's a slave of obedience to God. He is a slave of righteousness. He is a slave of God. Paul's point in verse 16 - if I could step back and give you the big picture - is that a slave of one man doesn't obey another master. He obeys his own master. In the same way, it is impossible for a genuine Christian to live in a continuing pattern and habit of unrepentant, unrelenting sin and obey sin rather than God. A slave always serves his own master. And if you're a slave of sin, you will serve sin. You are under its power and no matter what you do you can't free yourself from its domination. You may hate aspects of your sin - the guilt it brings, **the** shame it brings, etc. You may, in your own mind and conscience, not like what you are becoming. You may try to stop living a life

dominated by sin. But if you're a slave of sin, you are constrained to sin. You simply can't help it. You are a slave and your only hope is Jesus Christ. For if the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed. He's the only one in the universe that can set you free. On the other hand, a genuine Christian is a slave of God and of righteousness. This is the master to whom we are now subject. Not only, listen to this, not only is a Christian commanded to obey but he is compelled to obey. This will happen. It will happen in increasing degrees throughout his life. Why? Because he is a slave of righteousness. And righteousness exercises the same power in his life now that sin once did. He can't help himself. He must obey. Here's how Charles Hodge writes in his commentary about this passage. He says, "In the case of both sin and holiness, obedience is certain. It is rendered certain by a power superior to the will of man. The great difference is that, in the one case, the subjection is destructive. In the other case, it is beneficent. But certain it is." You are either a slave to sin or you are a slave to God and obedience to God.

Can I just say to you this morning? It doesn't matter what profession you may make or what the level of your biblical knowledge may be, if your profession and your knowledge aren't producing the fruit of righteousness in your life, then you are not a slave of God. You are still a slave of your sin and it's a sham. Paul says we all prove whose slave we are by how we live. Jesus said a tree is known by the fruit it produces. Let me encourage you. Just look at the fruit of your life. Again, I'm not talking about the fact that there is sin your life. All believers have sin in their life. I'm talking about the direction of your life. I'm talking about the preponderance of your life. Is your life more characterized by a love for Jesus Christ, a pursuit of obedience to Him, then it is characterized by sin? If so, then you can have confidence from this passage because you can know whose slave you really are. But if not, then this passage reminds you that you are a slave to sin. Whose slave, are you? Everyone who is committing sin is the slave of sin but if the Son makes you free you will be free indeed - not to serve yourself, not to serve sin again, but to serve God.

Let's pray together.

Our Father what a powerful passage, what a great reminder of what You have done. Of the spiritual realities in which we live, Lord help us all to practice self-examination, to examine

ourselves to see if we're in the faith, **to** look at the fruit of our lives. Lord thank You that you don't demand perfection. You will produce perfection in us someday when we're in Your presence. But Father what You do demand, what we can't help ourselves but do, is to be slaves of You and slaves of righteousness. And so, Father we thank You that as we look at our lives, while we're not what we want to be or what You want us to be, there is a far greater desire for and pattern of obedience and righteousness than there is of sin. We thank You for the sense of security and peace that brings to our souls. Father, at the same time, I pray for those here this morning who, living in this Christianized culture of North Texas, have made a profession of faith, walked in the aisle, signed a card, prayed a prayer, but who are still, as a relentless pattern of life, slaves of sin. Father help them to see their true condition and may, today, they run to the Son who can make them free. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen!