

Romans  
Whose Slave Are You? (Part 2)  
Romans 6:15-23  
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The Roman Christians to whom Paul wrote this epistle were surrounded by the institution of Roman slavery. As I mentioned to you last week, you have to sort of dispossess your mind of American slavery. There, of course, are points of similarity wherever slavery is found, but Roman slavery was not American slavery. But when Paul uses this image of slavery in Romans 6 as an illustration of spiritual realities, the Roman Christians got it, because they were surrounded by this institution. What Paul intended to say here to them was crystal clear. But we have a bit of a disadvantage. I say in one sense we have a disadvantage, we have a huge advantage on the other because it's not part of our lives. But none of us have ever been physically enslaved. And it's unlikely, although there may be a few here who have met someone who has been enslaved. Obviously, the illustration that Paul uses here still works because we've read enough of history to understand it. But when we read here in chapter 6 that we were slaves of sin and now are slaves of God, it isn't immediately as clear to us as it was to them.

This week I was trying to think, what in our culture is the closest equivalent to first century Roman slavery? There really isn't something that's close, but the closest that you can get, and I hope I don't offend anyone here, but the closest you can get in our culture to that image is when someone enlists in the military. Think about it for a moment, when you agree and you sign up your life to be a part of the military, you now are committing to do what you are told, exactly as you are told, without arguing or delay. And if you choose to disobey, there are often significant consequences, sometimes even physical ones. You live where your superiors tell you to live. You wear what they tell you to wear. You do the job they assign you. You go to bed and you get up on their command. The only time that is yours is the time that they allow you to have; the rest of the time your life belongs to them.

In Romans 6, Paul says that is exactly the kind of control that sin used to exercise over all of us and it is exactly the kind of control that righteousness now exercises over us. Romans 6, Paul is dealing with the believer's new relationship to sin. In all of the verses of this chapter, we've outlined the chapter like this, verses 1 to 14 teaches this basic point, we are no longer slaves of sin because we were united to Jesus Christ and we died to sin. That is, we died to its reign, with Him, and we have been raised to a new life where we are no longer slaves of sin.

Last week, we began to look at the second half of chapter 6 and verses 15 to 23 essentially have this point, we are now slaves of God and of righteousness. Let's read it again together, chapter 6, beginning in verse 15. We are now slaves of God and of righteousness. Paul begins in verse 15 with these words:

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 in this paragraph, as I mentioned to you last week, Paul is contrasting our lives before Christ with our lives after Christ, and he uses, throughout this paragraph, the institution of first century Roman slavery to illustrate the controlling influences that were true of us before and that are true of us now.

I have to tell you that the more I've studied this passage over the last few weeks and this last week in it again for so many hours, I am more convinced than ever of how absolutely crucial and foundational this passage is to us as believers. In fact, I would put it this way, if you don't understand who you are in Christ as Paul explains it here, you will be poorly equipped to grow in Christian maturity and holiness. If you don't get your mind around chapter 6, and I know it's mind stretching and for some of you it's like, "Can't we just skip to the good parts?" This is the good part because understanding what God has done for you in Christ is what will equip you to battle sin in your life, to grow in holiness.

Now the main point of this paragraph is that true Christians are no longer slaves of sin but are slaves of God. And that's why, verse 15, they don't take sin lightly because they have a new master. Now, as Paul did in the first half of the chapter, he begins in verses 15 and 16 with a flawed conclusion about the believer's relationship to sin. Here he is quoting either the opponents of his gospel who said, Paul, if you preach that way, if you preach that kind of gospel where we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, it's going to encourage sin, perhaps he's responding to them, or perhaps he's responding to a flawed conclusion that some believers were tempted to come to; they were tempted to take sin lightly.

Regardless, he begins by presenting the conclusion, that flawed conclusion that some may have come to. Verse 15, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Again, this is referring to an ongoing pattern of sin, a continuing state or settled life of sin. It’s a flippant attitude that takes sin lightly; we’re not talking about the normal Christian’s struggle with the sin they hate, their desire to put it off. We’re talking about a person who doesn’t really take sin seriously, “I’m saved by grace, so sin doesn’t really matter.”

How does Paul respond to one who claims to be a Christian but who takes sin lightly because he is no longer under law as a way to earn God’s favor, but rather he is under grace as the mechanism by which he comes to know God? Look at Paul’s correction, middle of verse 15, he says, “May it never be!” This is moral outrage. Paul says, “No! It cannot be.” And then following the same pattern as he does in the first half of this chapter, Paul lays out a general principle. You remember back in the first half of the chapter he raises the question and he lays out this general principle, “we died to sin,” in verse 2. Well, he’s doing the same thing here in verse 16; he lays down a general principle that he will spend the rest of the paragraph developing.

Last time, we examined that general principle. Look at verse 16, “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 chooses to use the language of first century Roman slavery to teach us a powerful spiritual lesson. Our freedom in Christ, and we revel in that don’t we? But our freedom in Christ is not freedom to sin. And the reason that’s true is while it’s true that we’re no longer slaves to sin, we are now slaves to God and of righteousness. Now, contained within verse 16 are several key propositions that I walked through with you last week. All I’ll do this week is mention them just to give you context for what we’re going to study this morning.

Here are the propositions we learned and discovered last week from verse 16. If you present yourself as a slave to something or someone, you are a slave. Secondly, in the spiritual realm, there are only two masters. There is sin or there’s God. Thirdly, you can only be a slave to one of those two masters. As Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters.” You only have one. So, either this morning, as you sit in your seat you are either a slave of sin or you are a slave of God. Those are your only two choices; there’s no “C” on the test. There’s no, “All of the above.”

Number four, you can only identify your master by what you do. In other words, look at who you regularly obey, who, in the pattern of your life, you obey? Is your life marked by a pattern of obedience to sin? Sin says, “Do this,” and you pursue it with all of your heart. Or is your life marked by a pattern of obedience to God? You can identify your true master by what you do.

And then, the fifth principle that we learned from verse 16 last week was this, these two kinds of slavery result in two radically different ends. One results, sin results, in death. If you serve sin, if you’re a slave to sin, we’re talking death, both obviously, physical death and spiritual death. But in context he’s talking about eternal death because he contrasts it in verse 23 with eternal

life. So, using the analogy or the illustration of slavery then, Paul has laid down a general principle for us that we can encapsulate in these five basic propositions.

Now in the rest of the chapter, he will fill out this concept in detail. And I want us to see this morning, he starts by explaining why this analogy of slavery works and it's because of what has happened to us, what happened to us in salvation. So, in verses 17 and 18, Paul reminds us, and this is the second part of the flow of his argument here, Paul reminds us of the radical change in the believer's relationship to sin, the radical change that has happened in the believer's relationship to sin.

This morning, if you are in Christ, if Christ is your representative, if you have come to know Him, then a radical change has already happened to you when it comes to your relationship to sin. Look at 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.

That is an amazing passage of Scripture. That is one of the clearest definitions in all of the Bible of what it means to be a true Christian.

A true Christian is not someone who has prayed a prayer. A true Christian is not someone who tries to live a good life. A true Christian is not someone who affirms the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. A true Christian is someone who has experienced a radical change in the person that they are. It is also one of the best and most profound explanations of what happened to you and to me at the moment of our salvation that you can find anywhere in Scripture. Paul's point is that as a result of what happened to you at salvation, your relationship to sin has been radically altered.

Now there is so much here in these two verses; let's take it apart together. First of all, I want you to notice our condition before salvation and that condition is this, we were slaves of sin. Notice verse 17, "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin." Notice that description, "you were slaves of sin." Now, in the original language the verb tense that Paul uses describes a continual state in the past. So, it literally means you were continually the slaves of sin. This is how you were described; this is the state in which you lived.

Now, it's vital to understand that what Paul says here was universally true of every one of us before salvation; there are no exceptions. He's writing to every believer in Rome and he says to them, "you were slaves of sin." It's also true of every sinner without exception. Every human being, apart from Christ, is a slave of sin.

Now it's very important here that we don't allow our thinking to become confused because we all know unbelievers who are or appear to be good people. We live in North Texas, there are a lot of good old boys, there are a lot of people who live what appear to be decent lives. Many unbelievers do what appear to us to be good things. They spend their time and energy to help others; as many did, for example, in the aftermath of hurricane Harvey down in Houston. We can be tempted to think this, "Surely that person isn't a slave to sin."

But you have to remind yourself that there are many different ways that sin and slavery to sin is expressed. Some are enslaved to the grossest expressions of sin. They give themselves over to gross immorality, to lives consumed with sex and drugs and violence and dishonesty and all kinds of things. Those people are described in Romans 1, represented by the pagan Gentiles. Read the list of sins there and you will see those people.

But many others around us appear to be law-abiding, decent, even good people. They're religious, maybe even claim to worship the true God, maybe even read the Scripture, maybe talk about God, try to do good things. Those people are described in Romans 2, represented by the unbelieving Jews. Paul says that God's wrath is revealed against both groups. Why? Because both groups, whatever the external expression of their sin may be, are slaves of sin.

Let me remind you, go back to Romans 3. After Paul deals in chapter 1 with pagan Gentiles, he deals in chapter 2 through chapter 3 verse 7, with unbelieving Jews. And he comes to this conclusion in Romans 3:8, I'm sorry, verse 9, "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged," here it is, Paul says this is what I have spent the first two chapters doing, "we have charged that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin." They're all slaves to sin. They're all guilty of sin. They're all deserving of the wrath of God.

And then Paul goes on, in verse 10 down through verse 18, to provide biblical proof that all men are slaves of sin. In verse 10, he summarizes human depravity, "as it is written, 'THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE.'" And Paul then goes on to use a string of Old Testament references to illustrate the depth of that depravity in verses 11 through 17. Notice the depth of human depravity; and again, remember he's talking about all unbelieving Jews and pagan Gentiles. He's talking about all human beings whatever their external expressions of sin might be. And notice how he describes their depravity. First of all, they have a darkened mind, verse 11, "'THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS.'" They have wills that are enslaved. Verse 11 goes on to say, "'THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD.'" Their wills are enslaved to sin. No human being seeks the true God and to submit himself to the true God. Even if he acknowledges the true God, he wants to retain his own autonomy, his own self-rule.

Rebellious lifestyles, verse 12, "'ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS.'" The picture here is that all of us without exception have turned aside from the path God has laid out, from the patterns of behavior that He has commanded, and we have instead created our own paths, our own predictable patterns of behavior that are contrary to the ones

He's commanded. He goes on in verse 12 to describe sinful behavior, "THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." Not one! So it doesn't matter what you or I think about the person next door, or the person at work, or that person who gives his time and effort to help the flood victims in Houston. There isn't one who does good, not one.

Paul goes on in verses 13 and 14 to talk about how depravity affects man's speech; it's toxic. Verse 13, "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE." In other words, our words reveal the decay and death that is in our hearts. If you doubt that, just read the comment sections on the Internet. "WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS." What does that mean? Our words kill and destroy; "WHOSE MOUTH," verse 14, "IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS."

And then, in verses 15 through 17, our toxic speech spills over into destructive relationships. Tragically, the sin in our hearts leaks out and infects and destroys all human relationships. Why? Because, notice verse 15, there is within us a predisposition to violent anger, "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD." There is also a pattern of destroying relationships, verse 16, "DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS."

Do you know what Paul is saying? He's saying, follow the path of a fallen human being and in their wake, everywhere you look, you will find the debris of broken and destroyed relationships. Just like if you follow the path of Irma today, you will find destruction everywhere; that's how human beings are when it comes to relationships. And we have no perception, apart from Christ we have no perception, of the path that leads to peace in relationships. Notice verse 17, "THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." Not only do people fail to walk on the path of peace that brings healing to relationships, they don't even know how to find it.

And then in verse 18, after he's described the depth to which our depravity goes, he describes the foundation of all human depravity, verse 18, "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES." There's the real problem. So if a person appears to be good, there's no real fear of God. Because if there were, they would humble themselves before God. They would acknowledge His right to rule. They would repent of their sins. They would follow Him and His Son. They would accept the work of His Son that He has freely offered. But there's no fear of God and so they don't.

Now, what I want you to understand folks is that is God's description of every person on this planet apart from those who know Jesus Christ. And that's true of you before Christ. It doesn't matter whether, before Christ, your sin took the path of the grossest sinner or the path, like Romans 2, of the religious, the moralist, the good person; you were a slave to sin.

Now if you doubt that, let me just remind you of the essence of what God demands of human beings. If you could reduce the entire Bible to the essence of what God demands of us, what would you say? Well, you don't have to guess because Jesus did it for us. He said, everything

God has commanded is summarized in two basic commands: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Now let me ask you a question? Have the people around you that you think are good, have they done that? Of course they haven't, any more than you and I have. We are all slaves of sin. Paul says it's crucial to understand our condition before salvation; we were all slaves of sin.

Now, go back to Romans 6, and notice secondly, Paul explains the change at salvation. We were regenerated by God. The change at salvation, we were regenerated by God. Verse 17, "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin," that was your condition, "you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed."

Now again, it's crucial to note here that Paul's comments are comprehensively true of every genuine Christian. He's not talking, in this verse, about some elite category of Christian. If you're a Christian, this happened to you. In the same way that all unbelievers, including us before Christ, are slaves of sin, true believers have experienced this radical change. So, what was the change? Verse 17, "you became obedient from the heart," "you became obedient from the heart." You were slaves of sin, but here something radical happens, "you became obedient from the heart."

Now what is Paul talking about here? Well clearly in verse 17, he is talking about something that has already happened. And secondly, he's talking about something that has happened to every Christian to whom he is writing. So what is he talking about? He has to be describing their conversion. So the expression, you have obeyed, or "you became obedient" points back to the time of their salvation and to the time of your salvation. This is what happened to you and to me if we're Christians; you became obedient from the heart. This points back to the time when we first bowed our knees in submission to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Now this isn't how we would normally say it, is it? We would normally say this, you from the heart believed the gospel, right? That's what we would say as we think about our own salvation. So why does Paul call faith and repentance obedience? It's because, in fact, the response of faith and repentance to the gospel is obedience; it is obedience. Or to say it another way, faith and repentance, they are obedience to the commands of the gospel. You remember how Paul puts it? "God now commands all people everywhere [*What?*] to repent." Or Mark 1, Jesus came preaching and this was his sermon, "Repent [*command*] and believe the gospel [*command*]," and this is how the New Testament presents it.

Go back to Romans 1, Romans 1:5, Paul is talking about his ministry to the Gentiles and he says, "we have received grace and apostleship to bring about [*Remember how he put it?*] the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake." What's he talking about? He's saying faith is obedience to the gospel, and I think he's also saying that faith produces obedience after you believe the gospel; both are true. Faith is obedience to the gospel and genuine faith produces obedience to God after salvation. Go over to the end of Romans, and Paul ends this

way in chapter 16 verse 25. He says, “Now to him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ,” verse 26, “and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, [Notice this, the gospel leads to what?] the obedience of faith,” “the obedience of faith.” So the word obedience then describes the heart of faith.

Now go back to Romans 6. You can see why Paul would use it. Remember, he’s talking about a change of masters. We have a new master and so the word obedience, as kind of a synonym for faith, fits perfectly; our commitment to submit ourselves to Jesus Christ as Lord. Faith is obedience; it’s a commitment to change owners.

Here’s the bottom line, our slavery to sin began the day we were born. Actually, it began the day we were conceived according to Psalm 51. And our slavery to God began when, by His grace, we obeyed the gospel. Paul says, that obedience to the gospel, notice what he says in verse 17, that obedience to the gospel is “from the heart” or literally, out of the heart. I love that. In other words, our obedience to the gospel, our willingness to repent and believe in response to the gospel message, was not coerced or forced upon us. It was from the heart, it was glad hearted, wholehearted, willing obedience to the gospel.

Now what’s Paul saying here? He’s taking us back to our salvation, and he’s saying, listen, at the moment of your salvation, you chose a new master. You became obedient to the heart from the commands of the gospel that said repent and believe. You’ve already chosen your master. You have no choice but to obey Him.

But what exactly produced this change in us? How did you and I go from being slaves of sin to being slaves of God and righteousness? Is this something we orchestrated? Is it because we were so bright, so intelligent, because we had such force of will and resolve? No! Let’s look at the causes. First of all, notice the immediate cause, verse 17, “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart,” notice this, “to that form of teaching to which you were committed.” That is a unique expression in all of Paul’s writings. He says we “became obedient to that form of teaching.” Let’s take that little phrase apart, because it’s very important. The Greek word translated form is *tupos*, from which we get our English word type, type. It’s used of a form in the sense of a mold or pattern.

This past week, they were doing some repair work on the drive coming up to the church and trying to rectify some the damage that was done to the drive through the construction. And they were putting a curb in. And to put in concrete, you have a form, you have a mold, something into which you put that material. That’s the idea behind this word. And by teaching, Paul’s referring undoubtedly to the gospel. Remember, he’s talking about what we responded to at conversion. So here’s what he’s saying, the pattern or the form or the imprint of the gospel, it molds, it shapes, it transforms those who receive it.



In other words, the effective cause behind this change in us, behind our regeneration, was the form of the gospel; it shaped us. In other words, here's what Paul is saying in clear terms, God regenerated you. He made you new. He changed you from being a slave of sin to being obedient from the heart to the gospel through His Word. That's what he's saying, through His Word. James 1:18 says, "In the exercise of God's will," this is something God initiated, "He brought us forth," He birthed us, He regenerated us, "by the word of truth." First Peter 1:23, Peter says, "you have been born again," you have been regenerated, you've been made a new creation, "through the living and enduring word of God." Do you understand that that's how God worked in your life? Maybe you had heard the gospel before many times. Maybe you had grown up in the church and the gospel was pedestrian to you. Or maybe it was the very first time you heard the true gospel message and God used that Word, "that form of teaching," to make you "obedient from the heart."

So the operative or the effective cause of our regeneration was the form or the pattern of teaching we heard and believed. That's what was the immediate cause. But what was the ultimate cause? Why did you come to Christ? Why did you obey the gospel? Verse 17, "though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching," there's the immediate cause, "to which you were committed." Now that is a fascinating expression, "to which you were committed." We expect Paul to say that the teaching had been delivered to the Romans, but what he actually says is that the Romans had been delivered to this teaching. In fact, I think the wording in the NAS here can be confusing. The word committed, that can make it sound like we committed ourselves to the teaching of the gospel, but that's exactly the opposite of what Paul is saying here.

The Greek word translated committed is most often used in the New Testament to describe someone being delivered over or handed over to another power. For example, if you go back to chapter 1, you remember three times in chapter 1, it says, "God gave them over." That's this word. God handed them over, God delivered them over to their sin. That's this word. Or in 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul talks about church discipline and he says, I handed them over to Satan. Same thing in 1 Timothy 1:20, "Hymenaeus and Alexander, I've handed them over to Satan," in church discipline. That's this word, to hand over, to deliver. You can see how this idea of being handed over fits perfectly in the context of slavery. Paul is describing here slaves being handed over from one master to another. Do you see what he's saying? Paul is arguing that, in regeneration, we were delivered over like a slave from one master to another, to "that form of teaching," to which we "became obedient."

Here's the key question, by whom? Who delivered us over? Who handed us over to the gospel? The answer obviously is God Himself. God is the ultimate cause behind your becoming obedient to the gospel. On the day you believed, God handed you over to that form of teaching and you became obedient. We were slaves of sin, but God interjected Himself into our lives, and He

delivered us over to that form of teaching to which we then became obedient. Tom Schreiner, in his commentary, puts it this way, he says,

God must be the one who causes obedience to rise in human hearts because all human beings are slaves of sin. To be a slave of sin means that one is under its lordship and dominion and unable to extricate oneself from its tyranny. God, in His grace, broke the shackles of our sin so that glad hearted obedience became a reality for the Roman Christians.

Now, this becomes even clearer in how Paul introduces verse 17. Notice what he says; it's clear that God handed us over because he begins, "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient." He's saying, listen, you don't get any credit. It's not like you did anything. You were a slave of sin. Thanks be to God that He handed you over to a new master. Paul thanks God because although God used the truth of the gospel, "that form of teaching," He alone is ultimately responsible for the change in us. So that is the change that happened at salvation.

There's a third part of this argument as Paul unfolds this radical change in the believer's relationship to sin, and that is, thirdly, our condition after salvation, our condition after salvation. And we can describe it this way, we were made slaves of righteousness, we were made slaves of righteousness. Now again, he begins verse 18 by talking about the fact that we have been freed from our old master. Verse 18, "and having been freed from sin." I'm not going to spend any time here because we've already talked about this, this is really the theme of the first 14 verses, but let me just remind you of what he says. Go back to chapter 6 verse 2. He says, "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" We died to sin. It doesn't mean we died to temptation or that we don't sin anymore. It means we died to the controlling power of sin, to our slavery to sin, to the rule of sin. You don't have to obey sin anymore.

Christian, you've been freed from its tyranny in your life. Yes, it's still there, but it's there like little roving bands of a defeated army. This is a mopping up operation. The enemy has been defeated. You're no longer a slave to sin. Go down to verse 14, "For sin shall not be master over you." That's not a command. That's a statement of fact. If you're a Christian, it's not going happen because God has shattered this slavery to sin that you once experienced.

But then you come down to verse 18. While Paul has talked about this concept, that we died to the rule and power of sin, you come to verse 18 and for the first time Paul speaks of this as freedom, as freedom. His point, however, is that God didn't free you from sin, He didn't shatter its rule in your life, so that you could go out and live a selfish life of selfish indulgence. At the same time that He freed us from our old master, He enslaved us to our new Master. Look at verse 18, "and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

Now that is a very important statement. Let's take it apart piece by piece. "You" in the original language, the concept behind you there is plural. It's contained sometimes in the pronoun, sometimes in the verb, but it's plural. "You," all of you Christians to whom I am writing, if you're in Christ, this is true of you, "you were made slaves of righteousness." Literally, "you were caused to be slaves of righteousness," "you were enslaved to righteousness."

I don't like the translation here, "you became slaves." That sounds like maybe this was your decision, this is something that you decided. No, no, it's something that happens to you. It's done in a passive voice in the original language. And the idea here is, someone did this to you. It's a statement of fact. It's not command. This has already happened at salvation. God not only freed you from the power of sin, but in regeneration He also subjected you to the power of righteousness.

Now don't misunderstand what Paul is saying here. It is true, if you're a Christian, that you admire righteousness, right? I mean you admire that. You like what you see, for example, in the life of Christ, you find it beautiful and attractive. It is also true that you desire to be that. Again, if you're a Christian, you have a desire for holiness; you want to be like Jesus Christ. It's also true that you strive to be like that. All of those things are true, but Paul is saying more here. Notice he says, "we are slaves to righteousness." In the same way that sin once controlled and dominated our lives, true Christians are now under the power and influence of righteousness. We are commanded and compelled by righteousness.

You know that I admire the Doctor, Martin Lloyd-Jones, and I love how he puts this in his commentary; listen to what he says, "We did not choose to be slaves to sin." Oh, we chose to cooperate with that slavery, we liked it, we desired it, we've fed it, but we didn't choose to be slaves to sin. He says,

We were born slaves to sin. In the same way, a man does not decide to be enslaved to righteousness. He is enslaved to it. It is done to him. It is not enough merely to say that we have become the servants of righteousness, we have been enslaved to it. It is the power of grace, it is the reign of grace that is laid hold upon us, and we are in its mighty and firm grip.

As you sit here this morning, if you're a Christian, God made you, at regeneration, a slave of righteousness in the same sense that you used to be a slave of sin. This is regeneration. This is our hope, Christian. This is the reality of what God is doing in us. You remember, the chief weakness of the law was what? That all it could do is tell us what to do, but it could never accomplish obedience; it could never produce the obedience that it demanded. But the Old Testament prophets saw a day when God would create within His people the ability to keep His law.

You remember the new covenant promises of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36. In fact, let's turn to Ezekiel. Look at Ezekiel, Ezekiel 36, here is the promise of the new covenant; and while there are elements of the new covenant that pertain directly and specifically to Israel that have not yet been fulfilled, we live under the new covenant. The writer of Hebrews tells us that. Paul said he was a minister of the new covenant. Jesus said the juice of the Lord's Table was the seal of the new covenant. And so we live under this. And notice part of the promise, the spiritual promise contained in the new covenant, verse 25, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean." This pictures the ceremonial cleansing, but God is using as a picture of deep profound spiritual cleansing. God says, I'm going to cleanse you.

He goes on to say, "I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols." God says, I'm going to clean you up; I'm going to wash you clean. This is forgiveness. Verse 26, "Moreover, I will give you a new heart." This is regeneration. I'm going to take out who you are, and I'm going to replace it with a new you. I'm going to make you a new person. And I'm going to "put a new spirit within you." That is a new grid through which to see and interpret everything. This has to do with the spirit of your mind and how you see everything and how you interpret everything. God says, I'm going to make you new. I'm going to "remove the heart of stone," (A heart of stone pictures a stubborn, rebellious heart.) and I'm going to replace it with a pliable heart, a heart that is tender toward Me.

And then I love this, verse 27, this gets to the heart of what Paul is saying in Romans 6, "I will put My Spirit within you," and notice this, underline this, I love this, "and cause you to walk in My statutes." I'm going to make you a slave of righteousness. "I will cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." This is regeneration.

Now let's put that together with chapter 6 of Romans. The form or the imprint of the teaching to which God has handed us over, that is, the gospel, it fulfills those spiritual promises of the new covenant. God has engraved His Word on our hearts and is causing us to walk in His ways. We have become slaves of righteousness. In other words, we obey from the heart because of the radical change God affected in our souls, this change called regeneration. Paul's point here in Romans 6 is that there has already been a change in our allegiance.

Christian, get this, let this sink into your soul. At the moment you were converted, at the moment of your salvation, you exchanged masters. Slavery to sin was broken, shattered. Sin is no longer your master; you don't have to obey it anymore. God freed you from that. But He did more than that, He made you a slave of righteousness.

How did He do that? He engraved His law on your heart. What does He mean by that? He gave you both the desire to obey His law, but He gave you more, He gave you a compelling power that causes you to walk in His ways. As you sit here this morning, you look back on your Christian life and experience and if you see that there has been an increasing pattern of holiness in your life, if you see that while you're not all that you want to be, by God's grace, you're not

what you used to be, you see that you have changed more into the image of Christ than the day that you were converted, why is that? It's because there is a gracious, good, all-powerful God who shattered your slavery to sin and made you a slave of righteousness, and He is causing you, by His grace, to walk in His ways. This is a test, this is a test by the apostle. True Christians will not continue to live as slaves of sin. Why? Because God freed them from that slavery and He has made them slaves to righteousness.

Christian, you have freedom in Christ, but that freedom is not freedom to sin. Because God didn't free you for that reason. God paid the ultimate price for you to become His slave. Down in verse 22, it says, we are "enslaved to God." Here's how Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God," listen to this, "and you are not your own?" Just think about that for a moment. You don't belong to you. You don't belong to you. You don't have any right to say what you do with you. Because he goes on to say, "you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." What was the price? It was the death of Jesus Christ. He died to purchase you. And you are not your own, you have no right to yourself, you belong solely and completely to Him.

And if you are a true Christian, let me just encourage you. This passage is not just a test, this passage is an encouragement. Remember, this belongs in a larger section of security and confidence for the believer. How does this function that way? Your faith, Christian, won't fail; it can't fail. Sin will not ultimately overpower you because God has freed you, and He Himself has made you a slave of righteousness, and He will cause you to walk in His ways. In the words of Philippians 1:6, "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." So, rest not in your own strength, but in His. That song we sing, "He will hold me fast," because He's at work.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for this amazing passage. In such an economy of words, how You have taught us what You have done. Lord, don't let this just be a sermon that we've heard. We've made our notes and we've listened and walk out and remain unaffected. Lord, let this passage grip our souls. Let it change our thinking about ourselves and our sin and righteousness and our circumstances. Father, may it produce gratitude in our hearts just as Paul exclaimed, thanks be to You, O God, because You have done this. You are at work, it's nothing in us.

And Father, may these truths be the foundation on which we build a life of holiness and obedience because it started with obedience, obedience You produced, to the gospel. May it continue with obedience to righteousness. Thank You, O God, that You will continue the work that You've begun, that You will continue to cause us to walk in Your ways. We find such joy, such comfort in that, because we recognize that, left to ourselves, we would never hold fast to You; You must hold fast to us. Lord, we thank You and we praise You for Your work.

I pray for those here this morning who are not in Jesus Christ, who are still clearly desperately, tragically, slaves of sin. O God, let them see it. Don't let Satan blind them. Don't let Satan make them think they're free. Father, help them to see the slavery that they are in, and may they come to the Lord Jesus Christ who, through His life and death and resurrection, is the only One who can bring true freedom. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.