

Romans  
Whose Slave Are You? (Part 3)  
Romans 6:15-23  
September 17, 2017  
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Well, I invite you to take your Bibles with me this morning and turn back to Romans 6, Romans 6. We're studying the second half of this wonderful chapter and Paul's point in this paragraph is simply this, true Christians are no longer slaves of sin but rather have become slaves of God. That's the image, the picture behind this entire paragraph.

Now it begins in verses 15 and 16 with a flawed conclusion about the believer's relationship to sin. Paul sort of reflects the spirit of his opponents and in verse 15 he asks, is it okay for a Christian to live in sin because he's no longer under law but under grace? Paul responds that the very idea is repulsive, and in fact, it's impossible. It's impossible because in verse 16 he lays down a general spiritual principle that you become a slave by obeying a master. And you can only be a slave of one master at a time, either of sin or of God and righteousness.

Now last week we considered why exactly that general principle in verse 16 means that a believer doesn't continue to live in sin. And the reason is because of the radical change that has occurred in the believer's relationship to sin; this is the point of verses 17 and 18. We noted, as Paul does in verse 17, our condition before salvation. It's captured there in the words in verse 17, we "were slaves of sin." All of us were slaves of sin before Christ.

But then he records the change that happened at salvation, and that change is that we were regenerated by God. Notice how he describes regeneration, that change in the heart that occurs. In verse 17, he describes it this way, "you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed." He's talking about the gospel message; you became obedient from the heart to the gospel. At the very moment of regeneration, you heard the gospel and God gave you life, called you to Himself, and caused you to have a new heart.

Now the immediate cause of that radical change in us that happened at salvation is here described as "that form of teaching." Again, the gospel, the Word of God, that was the immediate cause that God used to effect this change in us, but the ultimate cause was God Himself. Notice how the verse begins, "But thanks be to God." Paul thanks God for this radical change in us because it's God alone who has accomplished it. And then he ends the verse by saying, "you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching," notice what he says, "to which you were committed." Last week we discovered that "God committed us," literally the Greek word is, "God delivered us over" or "God handed us over," "to that form of teaching to which we then became obedient." That's at the heart of regeneration. That's the change that God produced.

Now because of that change, we noted as Paul does here, our condition after salvation, and it's this in verse 18, we were made "slaves of righteousness." Notice verse 18, "and having been freed from sin," as a result of that change called regeneration, we were freed from sin and we became slaves. A better translation would be, "we were made slaves," or "we were enslaved to righteousness." Someone caused us to be enslaved to righteousness. We now obey God from the heart because of this radical change that He produced in our souls in regeneration.

In the words of the new covenant, as we saw last week, He engraved His Word on our hearts, and God is causing us to walk in His ways. We were made slaves of righteousness. We can't help ourselves. If you're in Christ, you will grow in righteousness because you are a slave of righteousness. You have been enslaved by God to righteousness. This is why Christians can't continue in sin. True believers will grow in holiness because they have been, by God, made slaves of righteousness.

Now that brings us this morning to the third part of Paul's argument, the practical ramifications of the believer's relationship to sin. And we see this in verse 19; here Paul gets to the application, if you will, of what he's been teaching us. Now just to remind you of the flow, in verse 18 Paul explained to us who we have become in Christ. We are no longer slaves of sin, but we are slaves of righteousness. That is what theologians call the indicative. An indicative statement is just that, it's a statement. So this is the indicative, this is the statement of what God has done. But then as Paul always does, he follows the indicative, the statement of what God has already done, with an imperative of what we must do. And that imperative comes in verse 19.

Now for the moment, I want us to skip the first half of this verse and we will come back to it later. So it's kind of an aside of Paul as he explains why he's using this illustration. I will cover it, but I want to come back and look at it briefly at the end. So for now, let's look at the middle of verse 19, "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."

Now immediately, having even just read that, there are a couple of general observations that we can already make about this verse. First of all, spiritual growth, your spiritual growth, is based on your knowledge of the indicative. In other words, you will only grow spiritually to the extent that you understand what God has already done in you, who you are in Jesus Christ. And it's only as you grasp that that you will grow in holiness.

The opposite side of that, the flipside of that, is another general observation we can make and it's this, our failures in sanctification are always, notice that word, I use it intentionally, our failures in sanctification are always the result of the same problem: failing to understand who we are in Christ or failing to apply who we are in Christ. In the end, that's the ultimate reason for our failures.

Now, what we have then in verse 19, having made those general observations, what we have here in this verse are the practical ramifications, or we could say applications, of what God has done. Look again at what we must do in verse 19, “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. Now notice the key point of this verse, the comparison, “just as,” “so now,” “just as,” “so now.” In other words, Paul says there are key similarities between how we served sin before Christ and how we serve God in righteousness now. We can actually look at our past life and learn something about sanctification.

What are those similarities? Well, this is really the heart of what we learn from this verse, so let’s look at the similarities together. The first key similarity between our life before Christ and our life after Christ is this, we must serve righteousness expecting the same gradual process. This is the first main point that Paul makes here in verse 19.

Now, before we can unpack what he says, we have to define one key term. You’ll notice in the second half of verse 19, twice he uses this expression, “your members,” “your members.” What does Paul mean by “your members”? Well, let me take you back to verse 12. You remember in verse 12 he refers to our physical bodies, he calls them our mortal bodies. When Paul uses that term he always means this tent we live in, our physical bodies. And then in verse 13 he refers to the members of your body. So Paul, when he speaks of members here, means the parts and components of the human body.

In fact, that’s consistent with how Paul uses this word members throughout the New Testament. If you go through the New Testament, you find this word, you’ll find that it refers to eyes and hands and feet and ears, your head, your internal organs, and the tongue, the members of your body. But, and here’s a key point to remember, the Greek word members and the reference to the body in Paul’s use of the language includes not only all the limbs and the organs, but all the components of the physical body. It also includes your brain. Remember, your brain is the connection point between the immaterial part of you, your soul, and the material part of you, your body. And your brain is physical. So, when he’s talking about “your members,” he’s also talking about all of those things pertaining to the brain, its reasoning capacity, its thoughts, its patterns of thinking, its attitudes, its emotions, its imaginations. All of those things are your members.

Now notice what Paul says about our members, verse 19, “For just as,” he’s talking about before Christ, “just as you presented,” in the past, “your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness.” Now notice first of all that in the original language it’s very clear when he says “you” he’s speaking here plurally of all the Christians to whom he was writing. If you’re a Christian, this is true of you. Before we came to Christ, we presented our members, or we put all

of our physical faculties at sin's disposal. How did we do that? Well, we just kept presenting our bodies to sin as its slave. We did whatever sin commanded us to do.

But notice that instead of using the word sin which he's used already throughout this passage, instead of using that word sin again, he uses two synonyms for sin that describe sin a little differently. Notice verse 19, "you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness." Those are just synonyms for sin, but they are words that give us a little more insight into sin. The Greek word impurity is literally uncleanness, uncleanness. Here Paul pictures sin as a moral pollution that taints our souls.

And then he uses the word lawlessness and lawlessness is the very heart of sin, because lawlessness is a failure to obey the Law of God, whether it's the Law of God written in the Scripture, or whether, as chapter 2 describes, it's the Law of God written on every human heart. Lawlessness is a failure to obey the Law of God; and that is the essence of sin. In fact, the Apostle John, in 1 John 3:4 says, "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness," and then he says this, "for," because, "sin is lawlessness."

At its heart, sin is a refusal to obey the Law of God. So Paul says then, before Christ, we just kept presenting our bodies and all of our faculties to sin as its slave. Day after day after day, we just kept on obeying whatever sin told us to do. And what happened? Notice verse 19, "it resulted in further lawlessness." In other words, that daily pattern of obedience to sin resulted in more sin; that's what he is saying.

This is the way it always is; when we obey sin, it's never content! Get that in your mind, sin will never be satisfied. Paul personifies sin here as a tyrant. And it is, because it's never satisfied, it always wants more. You give it a little, it's not going to be happy with that, it's going to demand more of you. You can't manage or control sin. Whether you're an unbeliever or believer, understand this, you can't give sin a little because you enjoy that and expect it to stay like that. It will take more. It is a tyrant. It wants you to commit the same sin more often than you do now. And then it wants you to commit sins in darker and more sinful ways. And then it wants you to add to that other sins as well until you have become truly, in every sense, a slave of sin.

But I don't want you to miss Paul's point here. Paul's point is that sin's growth in your life before Christ was what? It was gradual. I mean, think about a sin for a moment that dominated your life before Christ, any sin that was really a huge part of your life before Christ. The first time you committed that sin, it felt uncomfortable, it felt odd, it felt awkward. But then, as you obeyed sin, again and again and again, it gradually became more comfortable, and it became more frequent, and then it became more pervasive. It began to reach out into other areas of your life. It wasn't restricted and restrained. And, in addition, its expressions became increasingly dark and sinful. And eventually you became its slave.

That's how sin always works. It's how it worked in your life. It's how it worked in my life. That sin that you tolerate today will not stay at the same level. Like a drug, it will require more and more of you in order for it to be satisfied. So slavery to sin results in more and more increasing sin.

Now look again at verse 19, he says, "just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now," he's making a comparison, "present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification." Remember verse 18, we've already been freed from slavery to sin, and God has enslaved us to righteousness. That's the indicative, that's what God has already done.

So now what are we supposed to do? Well, verse 19 says, "so now," on a daily basis, put the members of your body at the disposal of righteousness as its slave. By the way, there's an important point to be made here, when he says, "present the members of your body," it's reminding us that the body itself is not inherently sinful. In fact, your body can be used in the service of sin, and it was before Christ, and it can also be used in the service of God. That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6, "you are not your own," "you have been bought with a price: therefore [*What?*] glorify God in your body," which is God's. So put your members at the disposal of righteousness as its slave, just like you did with sin before Christ. And what happens when you do that? Notice verse 19, "resulting in sanctification."

You see, a pattern of presenting your members to righteousness, that is, a pattern of presenting yourself and everything you are to right thoughts, to right attitudes, to right actions, and doing that day after day after day, will result in your growing in sanctification. You will become more righteous. You will become increasingly purer and increasingly holier.

Don't miss the huge point here, and it's a very important one. Paul's point is that the gradual process that occurred with sin before Christ is the same gradual process required to grow in holiness or sanctification. Both before and after Christ, the process is not normally sudden or dramatic. With your slavery to sin and your obedience to it, there was a slow steady increase in lawlessness. With your slavery to righteousness, you should expect that same slow steady process in growing into sanctification.

Now don't misunderstand, that doesn't mean that there can't be growth spurts in the Christian life. There can be periods of rapid growth just like physically, you know, our kids one day are small and eating a thimble's full of food, and it seems like the next day they're huge and they're eating more food than we can keep on the table. What happened? Well, there's a growth spurt. That can happen in the Christian life as well. But normally, generally it's true, that both our growth in slavery to sin before Christ and our growth in slavery to righteousness now, are steady gradual processes. It's important to understand that. Don't buy into the holiness teaching that says there's going to be this miraculous experience; and one day you're going to be this

struggling sinner and the next day you're going to be this catapulted to a new level spiritual saint. That's not how growth in sanctification works.

But there's a second key similarity between our slavery to sin before Christ and our slavery to righteousness now and this is really, really crucial. In fact, before I give it to you, let me just say this to you. I hate to admit this to you, but verse 19, I'm afraid I have underestimated its importance in the past. I mean you read it and it's like, well that doesn't sound on the surface like it's particularly helpful. I don't believe now that there is a passage more helpful in the New Testament to growing in sanctification than this passage, so let's see it together.

Here's a second key similarity between our slavery to sin and our slavery to righteousness, we should serve righteousness using the same means of progress. What do I mean by that? Our growth in slavery to sin then, and our growth in slavery to righteousness now, both happened the same way. And what is that way? A consistent pattern of obedience, a consistent pattern of obedience. Paul has already told us this, go back to verse 16 when he introduced this section. He says, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone," watch this, "as slaves [*For what?*] for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey." So, before Christ, how did you present your members as slaves to sin? Very simply, you obeyed the commands sin gave you, you obeyed the commands sin gave you. And you did it again and again, day after day. Sin said to you, you found yourself in a circumstance where things weren't going well, and sin said to you, "Lie! Lie because it'll get you out of this. It'll make you look better." And what did you do? You obeyed sin's command, you lied!

Or, sin came along and said, "Listen, don't worry about what God says, don't worry about all that stuff, satisfy your sexual desires however you want. You're free to do what you want. You're not hurting anyone. So satisfy your sexual desires however you want." And what did you do? What did we do? We obeyed sin. Okay, that's what I'll do. Oh, maybe we drew a line somewhere and said we're not going there, but we still were willing to obey sin. That's how it worked. Slavery to sin was about a pattern of obedience to sin's individual commands day after day.

Slavery to righteousness is also about a pattern of obedience. And what do we obey now? Well, we obey God. We obey righteousness. But how does that happen? How do we obey God? How do we obey righteousness? And the answer is what Paul is telling us, "just as," "so now," "just as," "so now." In other words, the answer is, obey righteousness the same way you obeyed sin. We hear the individual commands of God and of righteousness, and we obey them.

So here's the simple process for increasing slavery to righteousness which results in growing sanctification, simply obey, day by day, the teaching to which God has delivered us over, the Scripture. Pursuing sanctification isn't passive. Pursuing sanctification is no more passive than your sinning was. Before Christ you continually put your members at sin's disposal which led to

ever-increasing patterns of sin. In exactly the same way, put your members at righteousness's disposal and it leads to increasing sanctification.

Scripture tells you in that same circumstance where once sin said, "Lie," you learned the Scripture, and you're in that moment, and Scripture says to you, "God is truth and He never justifies lying, tell the truth." And what do you do? You obey the Scripture. You obey God. And you say, "I'm going to tell the truth regardless of what it costs." Scripture comes along and says to you, "Don't try to satisfy your sexual desire except in the God given way we have been given in marriage." And what do you do? You say, "That's right. That's exactly right. And day after day I'm going to work at not pursuing the satisfaction of those things in ways that dishonor God." And you obey righteousness, day by day, in the same way you used to obey sin.

By the way, think about it, this is how you grow in anything. Daily patterns of obedience to the rules of that skill. That's how you become an athlete. You don't become an athlete because you pray for a miracle. You don't become an athlete because you look for a moment of crisis. No, you become an athlete by applying the rules of that sport, the rules of that skill, and doing it day after day after day after day. The same way you become a musician, you apply the rules of that skill, and you grow and you become a musician. This is also how you grow in sanctification. Just as daily obeying sin's commands led to increasing patterns of sin in your life and you became a more accomplished sinner, daily obeying the demands of righteousness, the commands of Scripture, leads to increasing sanctification. It's just that simple.

So being a slave of God and righteousness ultimately means only one thing, get this down, being a slave of God and of righteousness ultimately means only one thing, daily patterns of obedience to God's Word. That's it. Daily patterns of obedience to God's Word. And nothing could be more helpful to us, and yet nothing is immediately more repulsive to us, because we live in a day of Christians. And it was true when I was growing up. I remember I was exposed to some of this early on my Christian life and experience. We live in a day when Christians are looking for shortcuts to sanctification. Give me a pill I can take. Give me a spiritual secret. Or maybe it's an emotional experience I have, some sort of an ecstatic experience. I want an easy fix. I want a miraculous victory over sin. I want microwave sanctification. But those are not and never have been God's way.

God's way, listen carefully, is the hard work of, day by day, building patterns of obedience to the specific commands of Scripture. Christian, do you understand this? God has already given you everything you need. You don't need anything else. Think about it. He's given you a new heart. He's given you new desires. He's given you His Spirit. He's given you His Word. He's surrounded you with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. And God Himself has enslaved you to righteousness. He is causing you to walk in His ways. You need nothing else. Just start, day by day, seeking to obey. Don't keep looking for some secret, some experience, some miracle.

I can't say it any more bluntly than Lloyd-Jones does. I love this quote, listen to what he says, "You have already received all things that pertain unto a life of godliness. You do not need another experience. You do not need some new gift. You have been given everything in Christ. You are in Him and have been from the beginning of your Christian life." And then uncharacteristically, Lloyd-Jones, he says this, "You are just a slacker and a cad, just lazy and indolent, indeed a liar if you are not living this life." And then he makes this final statement, "That is the New Testament way of preaching holiness and sanctification." Stop focusing on your weakness and what you can't do, and start, day by day, using what God has given you to obey the commands of Scripture in the same way you used to obey the commands of sin.

Now I want, for just a moment, to go back to the first half of verse 19. Why does Paul use this picture of slavery? Notice what he says in the first part of verse 19, "I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh." Clearly, he uses this image of slavery throughout this paragraph to clarify the truth for us. That reminds us, by the way, that illustrations, even imperfect ones, help us grasp the truth. But why this illustration on slavery? I mean after all, this is an illustration that risks so much misunderstanding. In fact, some of us here are uncomfortable with this illustration. Why this illustration? Listen carefully, it's because no other illustration would help us understand the total undivided commitment we now owe God. Tom Schreiner, in his commentary, puts it this way, "The image of slavery rightly denotes that God is our master to whom we owe total commitment."

At the same time, in verse 19, Paul acknowledges that while this illustration is useful to make that point, it isn't perfect. Why? Because there are profound differences between human slavery and our slavery to God. There are a number we could make, let me give you three very quickly. Here are the profound differences between human slavery and our slavery to God. This is why it's a good illustration, but it's not perfect.

Number one, because we are not merely slaves, but we are adopted children of the Father and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. Romans 8:15 says, we now cry out, "Abba! Father!" Turn to John 15. John 15, I want you to see what Jesus Himself says in verse 15. During the upper room discourse, he says to His disciples, "No longer do I call you slaves," no longer, "for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I've heard from My Father I have made known to you." Here's why the image of slavery, it makes one major important point, but it doesn't tell the whole story, because Jesus has made us His friends. We are adopted by the Father. We are His brothers and sisters in Christ. So, that's why this illustration, as effective as it may be in one sense, is weak in another.



There's a second reason, our new Master's commands are light and true freedom. They're not slavery at all. Turns out, His commands to us give us real freedom. Look at verse 10,

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

Turns out that the commands of Christ, that some people could think are slavery, are in fact true freedom. They set us free to be who God made us to be. They give us joy. In John 8 Jesus says, "the truth will set you free." In Matthew 11:30, he says, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." In 1 John 5:3, "His commandments are not burdensome." John Chrysostom, the early church father, was right when he said that "serving Christ as His slave is better than any freedom."

There's a third profound difference between human slavery and our slavery to God. Verse, number three rather, our new master loved us so much that He offered His own life to redeem us. Again, here in John 15, look at verse 12. "This is My commandment, that you love one another," underline this, let this sink into your soul, "just as I have loved you." Christian, Christ has loved you from eternity past. But that's not the ultimate expression of His love. Notice verse 13, here's the ultimate expression, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life [*For his what?*] his friends."

Listen, your new Master is such a loving gracious Master that He bought you with Himself, with His own life, so that He could redeem you. First Peter 1:18-19,

you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

I love the way Ephesians 5:2 puts it, "Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." He gave Himself for us. That's what we celebrate in the Lord's Table. Bow your heads if you would.

Our Father, we thank You for the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You that He poured out His life in the violent death of a sacrifice, the Lamb of God, Your Lamb, offering Himself in our place. Lord, we thank You that every sin we have ever committed, or ever will commit, those of us in Christ, or those who will, someday, be in Christ, that every single sin, He paid for in full, and we are forgiven, free, justified, Your children, His friends.

Father, we thank You, we bless You. Help us to live in light of what we've learned this morning. Help us to grow in a daily pattern of obedience to You and to Your Word. And in so doing, to see our sanctification increase, just like sin did when we practiced sin before.

And Father, I pray for those here this morning who are not in Christ, whether they know it or whether they don't. Lord, strip away the comfort and the façade. And I pray that You would help them to see the reality that they are slaves of sin and it's getting worse. And it will continue to get worse, more and more lawlessness, until it's out of control. Father, may they come to Jesus Christ, the only One who can set them free, who can purchase their forgiveness and make them right with You. May they do that even today. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.