

“FROM SLAVERY TO SLAVERY.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 6:15-23

Introduction.

In Romans 5:20 Paul makes a famous statement, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”

No matter how much sin there is, God’s grace is always greater. But Paul knows how quickly our sinful minds will misunderstand his words to promote sin.

Romans 6:1-2 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

We must think of ourselves as dead to sin. We have died with Christ on the cross, and so now we can live in newness of life in Him. Remember we have moved from our justification by faith to our sanctification, which is living out our faith by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

As one commentator put it, “To make being ‘under grace’ an excuse for sinning is a sign that one is not really ‘under grace’ at all” (F.F. Bruce). Grace is liberation from sin, not liberation to sin.

Last week we talked about how sin wants to be on the throne of your heart to make us obey it.

So Paul ends this first argument with:

Romans 6:14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

But saying that opens another can of worms.

Romans 6:15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Remember no one is saved by the works of the law, by what they do or don’t do. When we are taught this, we can get the idea, OK, since the law is dead, we are free to sin so grace may abound, we are saved by grace, not by works of the Law.

“May it never be. Don’t go there, don’t even think about it. But then Paul says something that messes with our minds, especially our 21st century American minds. He starts talking about slavery.

We are going to have trouble understanding Paul because we are Americans and we have a certain way of thinking about freedom and liberty. We think of it as being completely, free from traditions, inhibitions, limits, obligations, laws. No one can tell us what to do, we can do whatever we want. This is why Americans have so much trouble with authority and authority figures, why we resist and rebel against authority.

True freedom is not just freedom from something. True freedom always requires “freedom for.” We are creatures with a purpose. True freedom is only found in willing submission to God.

Paul wants to explain the nature of our true freedom and liberty, and he gets our attention by using the metaphor of slavery to describe our relationship with sin and with God.

Vs. 16 The Reality.

Who of us would ever choose to describe our relationship with God as slavery? Who does that? Do you object to being called a slave to anything? Why didn't Paul say that back in the day we used to be slaves to sin, but not now of course, we are free in Christ?

The truth is we are never free, in one sense absolute freedom is a lie. We are a slave to something or someone.

This is uncomfortable language. Translators hate having to translate this section, they want to tone it down, soften it, make it more palatable to our ears. They like bondservant because it sounds less offensive. These are God's words, don't shy away from the strong language God uses to wake us up

Paul says a Christian is a person who has moved from the degrading position of being a slave of Satan, to the infinitely exalted/glorious position of being a slave of righteousness.

What is a slave? A slave exists to do the will of his master. The hallmark of slavery is obedience. This is a person who says their wish is my command.

This is the litmus test to know who/what you are a slave to. You are a slave to what you obey. You can say you are a slave to Christ, but if you are obeying sin, then guess what, you are actually still a slave to sin.

There are only two options, there is no middle ground, no neutral territory. There is no spiritual Switzerland.

You cannot be a slave to no one. You cannot be autonomous, to your own self. If we say we are slave just to ourselves, we are actually a slave to sin, because sin at its root is selfishness.

As Bob Dylan sang long ago:

You're gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the Devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody

Every person in this room is sitting next to a slave. Someone in bondage to money, work, their possessions, their appearance, the American dream, lust, greed, pride, self, what others think of them, some habit they can't break.

Of the two possible slaveries Paul mentions, every human being who has ever lived has been subject to the first slavery. Jesus says so:

John 8:31-34 Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”

And the more loudly someone proclaims their freedom from the bondage of sin, the more certain it is they are enslaved to their sin.

Vs. 17 The new reality, the transfer of allegiance.

Paul goes from saying we are all slaves to saying thanks be to God.

Thanks be to God that you who used to be slaves to sin are no longer, you have been transferred from that slavery, set free from that slavery, to become enslaved to God. You have a new allegiance, a new master.

But thanks be to God.

Who talks this way? What are we thankful for? Salvation, mercy, grace, goodness of God. What does Paul give thanks for? That we who were once slaves to sin, have become obedient. Who of us are grateful for our obedience? Oh, I know we sin and disobey, but are we grateful for our obedience, our slowing growing obedience to Christ and His teachings?

Giving thanks for our obedience reminds us it is not our own doing, it is the mercy of God who has done this. Giving thanks also reminds us how good God is, and should stir up in us greater desire to hate sin and flee from it.

Christian sanctification is not just grace, mercy, faith, hope and love, it is obedience, a long obedience in the same direction. It is an increasing heartfelt love for and conformity to the doctrines and teachings of Jesus.

This is true freedom. Freedom from to freedom for. True freedom always requires “freedom for.” Remember when God called Israel out of their bondage in slavery to Pharaoh. Six or seven times God tells Moses to say to Pharaoh, “Let my people go.” But that isn’t the whole sentence, there is a comma. The complete sentence is “Let my people go, that they may serve me” (Exodus 7:16; 8:1; 8:30; 9:1; 9:13, etc.).

God didn’t set Israel free from slavery to Pharaoh so they could be free to do what they wanted. He set them free so they would become His. The exodus was a transfer of ownership, from one master to another. Only in service to God do we find perfect freedom.

The paradox of being a slave to Christ, is that it is also the greatest freedom you can know. Every other freedom is actually bondage apart from Christ. Slavery to Christ is a unique type of slavery. It is a slavery through which we are made free. Spiritual freedom begins with slavery to Christ.

A train on the tracks is more free than a train off the tracks. Being a slave to Christ is what we were created for, what most fits who we are.

The two slaveries are very different.

We are transferred from a cruel slavery to a gracious slavery.
From a slavery that leads to death into a slavery that leads to life.
From lawlessness that leads to more lawlessness, to righteousness leading to more sanctification.

Under the old slavery I was miserable, ashamed. Under the new slavery I am free from that, and I freely surrender to God's enslavement.

In writing this way Paul is exposing the folly of a Christian going back to sin.

In Berlin, Germany there is a museum called Checkpoint Charlie Museum near where the Berlin wall was. In there they commemorate the thousands of people who tried to escape from the bondage of East Berlin to the freedom of West Berlin. Do you know what there is no record of ever happening? Someone trying to climb the wall to go from West to East.

No one who has tasted freedom goes back to that kind of bondage. But that is what Satan and sin are constantly tempting us to do. That is our sinful human nature, our default setting, to go back to the law, to living by law and works rather than grace.

When you were enslaved to sin you have no interest in or desire for holiness and righteousness. You ignored that, you felt yourself free from it. But what was the fruit? Death, misery.

When you give yourself over to sin, what happens, sin is fruitful and it multiplies.

If you try to tolerate sin in your life, if you hang on to hidden, secret sins, it's a little like trying to stay a little bit pregnant. It doesn't work. Your sin will grow, it will multiply, it will expose itself.

Sin has a snowball effect, lawlessness leads to more lawlessness. Sin is never under our control, sin will get you cross lines you said you wouldn't cross.

Vs. 20-23. The Reward.

But when you believe the Gospel, when you leave sin behind through repentance, the result is good fruit, holy fruit, you start to bear more of a resemblance to Jesus.

There is a fruit, there is a harvest, there is a reaping of what was sown.

Here is the triumphant summation: The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life.

Paul switches from harvest to wages.

They say, "Sin never pays." False, sin always pays, sin never misses a payroll. Everyone who sins gets their wages, and the wages of sin is death.

The wages of sin is death but notice Paul doesn't make a parallel statement, that the wages of righteousness is life. Life is not a wage, it is a free gift, pure grace. Our new master doesn't pay wages, He gives what cannot be earned, it is free gift. Our salvation is entirely the grace and pure kindness of God.

Our eternal life depends not only on justification, but also on sanctification. If a person says, "Oh, I am justified by faith and therefore I don't need to renounce sin and pursue

holiness," that person is probably not saved. And without being freed from that slavery to sin, he will not inherit eternal life.

These steps are not optional. This is the only path that leads to eternal life: being freed from the slavery to sin, enslaved to God, [obeying His Word] bearing fruit in a life of holiness, and finally eternal life. That is why holiness and the fight against sin in this chapter is so serious. We are not playing games. Eternal life is in the balance. Eternal life comes to the person whose faith in Christ is real. JP

Implications and application.

Romans 6:15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Why? Because we are no longer slaves to sin, but joyfully, willingly obedient slaves to Christ and recipients of all the glorious benefits we have in Him. Obedience is the hallmark of a heart truly set free.

We are all slaves to something/someone. Whose slave are you?

Why do we often fear surrendering our lives completely to God, allowing Him to be our Master?

Paul is writing to Christians, justified sinners who are now seeking to be obedient from their heart. I know you are sinners, I know some of your sin, I know that many of you are not slaves to sins, but by grace are slaves to righteousness. Thanks be to God who makes us set free from sin and obedient to Him.

Are you growing in that obedience, can your spouse or parents or friends see the slow change in your life? I want to be a slave to God, and I wish I was more so. I want to be submitted to God's Word, and I pray for Him to make me more so.

As Moses said to the people of Israel so I say to you:

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. 16 If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, ... 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, 20 loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life."

Prayer:

Colossians 3:12-14 [give] thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.