

## WHOSE SLAVE ARE YOU?

*Series: Righteousness Revealed*

Romans 6:15-23

Chadron Berean Church

At the end of last week's service we had the opportunity to yield our lives to Christ. To commit our lives to Him, saying, "Lord, this life, this body, all that I am, is yours. I want to serve you and not sin. Use my hands, my feet, my mind, my mouth, for Your purposes as instruments of righteousness." Well, I understand that some of you did that. You responded to God's Word in obedience, dedicating or maybe rededicating your lives to Him. However, I am aware that some may not. You may have tuned it out or said in your heart, "I'm not going to yield to the Lord. I'm going to do my own thing, at least for a while." That's the prevailing mindset of man without Christ. He thinks he is free from the Lord to do whatever he wants. The world will tell you to live your own truth. Be free. Live however you want. Don't let anyone tell you how to live. However, just because a man doesn't yield to the Lord, that doesn't make him free, because in denying the Lord he's just yielding to something else. We all yield to something. None of us are truly free. None of us are really our own masters, even if we think we are. That's what we want to talk about today as we continue working through Romans 6. The question we're going to ask is, "Whose slave are you? Who is your master?"

At the end of Romans 5, Paul was careful to make sure that his famous grace statement ("*where sin increases, grace increases all the more*") would not be misunderstood as promoting sin. He covered this common error by posing the question, "*Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*" His answer was, "*God forbid! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*" Paul expanded on that by teaching how we as believers can live victoriously over sin by number one, **knowing their new identity in Christ and our union with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection**. Knowing your union with Christ will revolutionize your life. Victory in the Christian life begins with knowledge. Proverbs says, "*As a man thinks within himself, so he is.*" Paul says to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Peter says to grow in the grace *and knowledge* of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we want to grow, we need to know some things. That's true with any pursuit we want to be successful at. In the old west they posted signs that said, "Wanted: Dead or Alive." Well, for the believer, he is both dead and alive. The old man (not a reference to your dad, but your old self) has died and you are alive in Christ and freed from sin's power in your life. Sin is inevitable, but never necessary. We can't say the devil made us do it anymore. We're free from sin's power, able to choose to walk by the Spirit and not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Secondly, we are to **reckon**. We are to count it as true. To consider this as true, because it is! We are to take that knowledge and work it into our hearts, internalizing it. It needs to go from head to heart (which for some is the longest journey they'll take in life). Some never make that journey. They think knowing about Jesus is enough and they never develop a heart relationship with Him. They never personally apply the gospel. But this reckoning is something we should continually

do. Moment to moment, temptation to temptation, we say with faith, “I’m dead to sin. That’s not who I am. God has given me new life in Christ and I want to do what glorifies Him.”

But it’s not enough to know and reckon so third, we are to **present/yield** our lives to the Lord in a once and for all moment of dedication. We are to give Him our lives, and quite literally, our bodies as **instruments/weapons of righteousness**. Paul is saying, don’t give your weapons to the enemy. Use them to glorify God. Amen?

Then Paul seemingly ended his argument with the statement, “*For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*” The “**law**” he’s referring to could be **the Old Testament Law of Moses** with its 613 commandments or it could be **a general principle of living by law** (living by rules and regulations and codes). But just like the statement at the end of chapter 5, it’s one that he is going to have to explain because people misunderstand this all the time too. Many people misunderstand law and grace. They say, “*Without law won’t people just go on sinning? Don’t we need the law to curb sin? And doesn’t grace encourage sin?*” There’s a strong inclination in us to think the law will prevent sin and that grace is insufficient for restraining sin. It’s the reason why there are so many Christians are legalists and so many groups under the heading of “Christendom” who still live under the Law or many laws. It’s the same reason why we have a hard time letting our teenagers or other people be free from certain rules and penalties. We think they’ll go off on a sinful tailspin. But sometimes grace is not only right, it’s essential because grace teaches us to live righteously, willingly (Titus 2:11-12).

So in part, Paul has already answered his question. The key to victory doesn’t lie in the Law. It lies in **faith in Christ** and our **union** with Him. We live by faith in the Son of God. Paul is going to spend all of chapter 7 explaining **why we must make grace in Christ as our master and not Law**. Already Paul has explained that the **law justifies no one**. No one will be justified/declared righteous/saved by keeping the Law. Second, he has mentioned how **law increases transgression**. It entices sin, tightening sin’s grip on us. He’ll explain why soon enough. He will also say that **we were made to die to the Law that we might bear fruit for God** (Gal. 2:19). Those kinds of statements would’ve rocked the first century Jew, and there were Jews in the churches in Rome. So at this point, it’s helpful to put yourself in the shoes of a Jewish Christian in the first century and think about what Paul just said. You’re a Jew, used to living by the written code of the Law and the commands contained in it. Paul and his New Covenant teachings are upsetting hundreds of years of tradition. It’s a new “pattern of teaching” (6:17), learning to serve God not in the oldness of the letter but in the newness of the Spirit (7:6; 2 Cor. 3). Now, Paul introduces the principle of slavery. In Romans 7, he will use the **metaphor of marriage** to explain our relationship to the Law. In Romans 6:15-23, he begins with the metaphor of **master and slave**.

## **I. THE PRINCIPLE OF SLAVERY. (VV. 15-16)**

*15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the Law but under grace? May it never be!*  
*16 Do you not know that the one to whom you present yourselves 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?*

Slavery is a fitting illustration because there were countless slaves in the first century. It's said that at least 1/3 of the population in Rome were slaves of some kind and many who were freed were previously slaves. Slavery in the Roman Empire was complex, but it was part of the everyday social fabric. And what is slavery known for? What is the hallmark of slavery? Obedience. And as slaves, we all obey some sort of master. That's the principle Paul pulls from the metaphor.

**Everyone is a slave to sin or righteousness.**

Though at times we think we are our own masters, the reality is that none of us truly are. All of us, in the decisions we make, are yielding to something. In **every situation**, we can **choose to obey sin or righteousness**. To pull an illustration from my daily life this week, I can respond to that person who cut me off or who is tailgating me with road rage or with mercy and patience. Some of us are slaves to our **jobs**—our job comes before anything else, even faith and family. Some of us are slaves to our **possessions**. They say the more you possess, the more it possesses you. How true it is that the more you have, the more you want and the more your life is dominated by taking care of those things. Some are slaves to **other peoples' perceptions**—what other people think of them. What do they think of my hair? My clothes? My personality? My teaching? Some are slaves to addictive **substances**—drugs, alcohol, tobacco—or addictive habits—social media, food, etc. There might not be anything inherently sinful about some of these things but we get addicted and lose self control. A substance can dominate someone's existence from the day they try it. That first puff of a cigarette leads to lung cancer. That first sip in their teenage years leads to bondage until the day they die an early death from it. They saw it as freedom, but it became a cage that controlled them more and more until the day they die from it. Just like that Paul will make the point that sin has **power of development**—to increase its grip on us. It results in **further lawlessness** (6:19).

**Everyone is increasingly a slave to sin or righteousness.**

You crave more and more, and not only more, but a stronger, more unconventional and sensational lawlessness. What started with tobacco might end in fentanyl. Lust leads to pornography leads to predatory rape. Sin starts out fun but as it goes, "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay." It becomes your master more and more, and the more you think you are free, the more you are becoming its slave.

Most people don't see themselves as slaves and never will. Like a bird comfortable in its cage, they don't see their need to be set free. We find an example of this in John 8. When Jesus said to the Jews, "*The truth will set you free,*" they said, "*We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free?'*" Jesus answered them, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin*" (John 8:33-34). A lot of people think that by rejecting Jesus and His Word, they will be free from those "restrictive" commands. On the contrary, they're just enslaved to the cruel master of sin and its consequences. Those of us in Christ have come under realization that Jesus commands actually set us free.

**So all of humanity serves one of two masters: sin, which leads to death, or obedience, which leads to righteousness.** We ultimately either serve one or the other. There is no middle ground.

We can serve the Lord Jesus Christ or we can serve sin, but the end of the day, we're yielding to one or the other. We're obeying one or the other. In verses 17-18, Paul gives thanks to God for the Roman churches he is writing to who, after being freed from sin, had become slaves of righteousness as good examples.

## II. THE EXAMPLE OF ROMAN CHRISTIANS. (VV. 17-18)

*17 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 entrusted, 18 and after being freed from sin, you became slaves to righteousness.*

In Paul's praise of the Romans, we see some important grace principles. Really, there's just a lot of great and helpful principles today that we're turning over in our minds.

**We must be free from sin to become slaves of righteousness.**

It's *after* being freed from sin through faith in Christ that they learned to become slaves of righteousness. All people are servants of sin unless they accept the gospel message and are saved. At that moment, they are delivered from the power of sin through their union with Christ and can choose not to sin. They are freed from its dominating power in their lives. They die to it and become new creations. Before Christ, all men have is the sin nature. They only have one option: slavery to sin. After being placed in Christ, however, we have the divine nature of the Spirit and can choose to walk by the sin nature (flesh) or the divine nature (Spirit). We now have an AM (Adam Man) and FM (Faith Man) as we talked about in chapter 5.

**The Spirit gives us new, willing hearts.**

What turned these believers from being slaves of sin to being slaves of righteousness? It's safe to say that the Spirit of God did the work. The Spirit of God transforms our hearts so that we willingly become obedient. He softens the hard hearts of the sons of Adam and gives us a new heart. We become sensitive/aware/tuned to the things of God. We serve in the newness of the Spirit and not the oldness of the letter/written code of the Law (Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3). When you're born again by the Spirit, your new heart longs for the things of God. Your new identity longs to do what God desires of you. Obedience springs forth not from a list of do's and don'ts but by a willing heart.

Even way back in the day when God gave the Law to Israel, He said that they wouldn't keep it because they needed new hearts (Dt. 29:4). They needed some sort of spiritual renewing. Well, that's exactly what was promised in the **New Covenant**. God said he would make a new covenant that is *not like the old one*. He said, "*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh*" (Ezek. 36:26). It's not merely external obedience but an obedience from the heart. We live now by the law of Christ (Gal 6:2). By faith in Christ. We don't go back to the Law Sunday after Sunday and model our lives around the dietary structures and priestly codes; we model our lives after Jesus and His death, burial, and resurrection. This is the **pattern** of apostolic, new covenant teaching that he's talking about (Gal.

2:15-21). The word for “pattern,” “model,” or “mold” that Paul uses (**tupos**) referred to the mark of a blow or a stamp struck by a die. In this verse, it refers to a mold such as a craftsman would use to cast molten metal. It’s a deeply engraved image or pattern. The point is that:

**When the Gospel is pressed on the believer, it is reproduced in us.**

Just as Jesus died, so we die to sin. Just as Jesus was raised to new life, so we are raised to new life. We are new creations, made to serve God in righteousness. We are free to serve Him!

**Dog Illustration:** Over the years I’ve often shared the illustration of two dogs: the country dog and the city dog. **The city dog** lives under restrictions. It has boundaries. A leash, a collar, a chain, and a fence to keep it from getting loose and running free. His obedience is forced upon him. “No, no, no,” he is told. So what’s the first thing the city dog does when you let him off his leash and open the gate? He wants to book it! To run free! He’s tired of it! – same with the Law. Law produces rebellion. Paul says the power of sin is the law. It’s a supercharger for sin (2 Cor. 3:6-12; Romans 7). The problem is not in the Law, but in us. We have a law of sin at work in the member of our body that is triggered by the Law (Rom. 7).

**The country dog**, on the other hand, lives under grace. It doesn’t have the restrictions a city dog has. When I lived in the country at our family farm, our dog never had a leash or chain or fence. It didn’t even have a collar for that matter! A country dog has all the freedom in the world to run around and explore and have a good time! But where do you find the country dog most of the time? Right at home, sitting peacefully on the porch, waiting eagerly for his master to come home. Grace has a similar effect on us. It produces this overflowing obedience that the master desires. Doing the will of our master is our meat and drink!

This is why we want to be actuated by grace and not law. Grace will always be a more powerful incentive for living for God. We live and serve Christ from our grace position in Him. Coming up in Romans 7, we’re going to study the deadly effect that Law has on us spiritually. **But let’s take note of grace’s effect on our lives from Romans 6.**

1. Freed from sin.
2. Slaves of righteousness.
3. Willingly obedient from the heart.
4. We are sanctified.
5. We become ashamed of our old ways/old man.
6. We are given abundant life/eternal life.

After explaining the slavery principle and the example of the Romans, he calls them to action.

### **III. THE CALL TO OBEY RIGHTEOUSNESS. (VV. 19-23)**

*19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented the parts of your body as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your body’s parts as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. 20 For*

*when you were slaves of sin, you were free in relation to righteousness. 21 Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. 22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

So Paul speaks about how this whole illustration with slavery is speaking **in human terms**. It's not a perfect illustration, but an illustration from the natural realm that helps teach us because let's admit it: in our worldly, fleshly thinking, some of this is hard to understand. It's hard to wrap your mind around your union with Christ and how powerful grace is. But the illustration leads us to point of decision again. Just as at one point we presented our bodies to impurity and further lawlessness, so we should present ourselves to God as slaves of righteousness, resulting in **sanctification**—a big word that means we become more and more like Jesus. We are made righteous, not just declared righteous (justification). We're never more justified, but we can become more sanctified—more holy, saintly in our conduct, and set apart for God.

But this is a powerful call to total commitment and sanctification. And it's God's will for your life. What is God doing today? He's changing lives! He is transforming lives through the Gospel! The question is, Are you on board? Have you believed? Have you decided to follow Christ? Is sin or Christ your master? Do you yield to sin, serving sin? Or yield to Christ, serving Christ? It's not automatic. It clearly requires some action on our part. Just like Deuteronomy 31, we have to choose this day whom we will serve: Law and sin or grace and Christ. You can't serve two masters.

### **Present yourselves as slaves to Christ.**

If you choose to continue in sin, Paul warns that there will be deadly consequences. That word “**benefit**” in verse 21 is a word that could be translated as “**fruit**.” Every decision is like a seed we sow. We reap the fruit of what we sow. If you sow sin, you will reap corruption and death. It has a deadly effect on your life and eternity. Think about it: What's the fruit of words spoken in anger? Broken relationships. The fruit of lust? A broken marriage and family. Maybe some disease. The fruit of unforgiveness? Bitterness and depression. To refuse Christ is to earn death, now and forever.

### **Eternal life is a free gift received through faith in Christ. It begins now!**

However, eternal life is *not earned*. Paul reaffirms that **eternal life is a gift of grace received through faith in Christ—now and forever**. When many think of eternal life, they're thinking about heaven. In the Bible, sometimes that eternal life is talking about the here and now. Scripture speaks of eternal life as both the immediate and future. Eternal life begins now with a changed life; a higher quality of life; an abundant life. Learning to live God's design. The fruit of the Spirit now is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, thankfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things, there is no law! If we all walked by the Spirit, in step with the Spirit, being slaves of righteousness, there would be no need for laws at all. We would live in harmony with God and with each other.

As a community of believers, let's come before God in communion and remind ourselves that we are saved by faith in Christ and live by faith in Christ. Let's reaffirm our decisions to yield to Him with the pursuit of being those kind of people who bring about a holy change to the world—to live in such a way that people see Jesus. Or maybe today you need to call out to Jesus for salvation for the first time. I encourage you to do that right here and now. Your life will be changed forever as you learn to walk with Him.