**Romans**

**Lesson 11: Slaves to God! Romans 6:15-23**

In the first half of chapter 6, Paul explains that through the believer’s union with Christ, he died with Christ in his death, arose with Him in his resurrection, and now he lives this new life known as the Christian life. The man he once was no longer exists. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”   
The key to this new relationship with God is the believer’s **union** **with Christ**, which happens the moment he truly believes when he is born again (John 3). He has been set free from the   
law’s penalty and sin’s power and dominion. Now the believer is to consider himself dead to   
sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ (6:11). He is no longer to offer the parts of his body (mind, hands, feet, eyes, etc.) to sin; instead, he is to use these parts of his body for righteousness. No longer living under condemnation of the law, he lives under God's immeasurable grace and mercy.

After this lengthy explanation, some still have a problem understanding grace. It seems too easy. If a man is free to live under God’s grace, why shouldn’t he just go on sinning? Paul addressed this question in the first fourteen verses of chapter 6. The believer cannot continue in sin because of his union with Christ, which was formed at conversion. Paul then explains how a man’s actions correspond to his union with Christ. While verses 1-14 dealt with what happens to the believer **internally**, verses 15-23 deal with what the believer does **externally**.

Paul begins his second response to the charge that grace is a license for immorality. Think about it—if a Christian is forgiven all of his sins (past, present, and future), why can’t he just do as he pleases? Doesn’t grace allow this option? Paul responds, “Absolutely not!” and continues,

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? (6:15-16)

Paul emphatically declares, “No!” We, as believers, shall not and will not sin simply because we live under God’s grace rather than the law. Paul uses slavery as an analogy to illustrate how this principle works in everyday life. Contrary to what most people believe, no one is free; therefore, everyone is a slave. Everyone offers himself to someone or something, e.g., success, popularity, happiness, money, or religion. These are some objects, other than God, that people choose to worship. Keller says,

We can say we “offer ourselves” to whatever we “seek” as our highest good in life, whether power or acceptance or some cause. Then we become “slaves” of whatever that may be. Thus, no one is in control of his life or her life. We are controlled by that to which we have offered ourselves. Whether we call ourselves religious or not, we all have a god. We are all worshipers.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Paul’s argument boils down to this: We are either slaves to sin or obedience. We can be slaves to sinful desires or God, but we must understand the consequences. Slavery to sin always leads to death, whereas slavery to obedience always leads to life (righteousness).

Sin is like a magnet that attracts each of us from birth. We are born with desires, some of them sinful. These desires cause us to be easily tempted by the world system under Satan's control. Satan knows we have powerful desires (appetites), many of which are God-given and good, such as hunger, thirst, sex, and even pleasure. These desires, in and of themselves, are not evil, but Satan uses worldly influences and entices us to satisfy our desires in ungodly ways. The result is sin, and sin, by nature, is never completely satisfied. Any satisfaction is fleeting and temporary. Each time a man surrenders to these appetites and desires, they grow stronger, and eventually, what began as a small surrender becomes a deep addiction or slavery to the consuming desire. Sinful surrenders that become habitual to the point of addiction are called “strongholds.” These sins, when fully embraced, give birth to death and destruction. The sin sequence is well-described in James: “But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (1:13-14).

In the Bible, death symbolizes separation from God. Our sin separates us from the One who is the source of life. As we are all born in sin (Psalm 51:5), we are all born separated, spiritually, from God. We remain separated from God until we are drawn to Jesus by faith, and our sins are forgiven. This is the new birth (John 3). In that moment of faith, we are justified (declared righteous) by God, completely forgiven, and receive the gift of eternal life. After the new birth, our sin doesn’t separate us from God relationally, as we can never lose our relationship with him. However, sin severs the fellowship a believer has with God until he confesses it, and fellowship is restored. This is why Christians must live in a constant state of repentance. For believers, confession is the doorway to restored fellowship with God.

For nonbelievers and believers alike, sin leads to death, but in very different ways. The nonbeliever has never received the gift of eternal life. He is alive physically but dead spiritually. Thus, sin hardens his heart and drives him further from God. He is dead and doesn’t even know it, nor does he understand what it means to experience spiritual life. Hence, he never experiences real peace, joy, and contentment.

In contrast, when a believer sins, he experiences the feeling of death though he is still very much alive. He has eternal life, which he can never lose. For the believer, sin brings guilt and shame and can lead to other anomalies such as anxiety, fear, and depression until that sin is confronted.

Again, confession is the door that restores fellowship and brings cleansing of the conscience, thereby healing the heart and mind. Hebrews 10:22 states, “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

In this chapter of Romans, Paul uses slavery to demonstrate how everyone is enslaved to something or someone. Nonbelievers are enslaved to their sins of choice. On the other hand, believers have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. This new enslavement began when the believer heard the word of truth, the gospel, and believed. At that moment, he was set free from sin. Again, this doesn’t mean the believer doesn’t sin anymore. It simply means that he has been set free from sin’s condemnation and rule over his life. The believer has been given a new power (Romans 8) to resist temptation to be free to live for God. As the believer begins to live a more righteous life, he begins to experience life, joy, peace, and contentment in this new power. He has a new desire to be holy and to experience the joy of holy living. When he sins, he experiences death, but it is only a temporary break in his fellowship with God. It is crucial to understand a believer’s relationship with God can never be severed. Romans 8:38-39 states, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is Christ Jesus our Lord.” *Nothing* can separate the believer from God.

Paul concludes chapter 6 with this reminder: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 23). If you are in Christ, then know and declare that you have been set free from sin. Sin is no longer your master. Now you are a slave to righteousness. Believe this and begin to live in the freedom you have in Christ. He will help you and pick you up when you fall. His grace is limitless. NOTHING can separate you from his love. Remember when you sin, confess it as soon as possible. Experience God’s grace and mercy and begin to live again in his strength and power. You are a new creation in Christ.

DAY 1

1. In Fritz Ridenour’s book, *How to Be a Christian without Being Religious*, he writes,

Paul is saying that becoming a Christian means that you will not only start to follow Christ but that you also identify with Him—you become a part of Him. And just as Christ conquered the power of sin with His death and resurrection, Christ also struck a telling blow against the old, sinful nature that is part of every one of us.

The question is, do you want to let that telling blow work in your favor or do you want to still fight your own battles? This is the paradox. Christ doesn’t force His way into your life. He doesn’t walk in and say, “I’m taking over. From now on you do things my way, or else.” He gives you a choice. You are no longer under sin’s complete domination, but neither are you a robot.[[2]](#footnote-2)

* 1. According to Ridenour, what does Paul say we should do?
  2. What choices do we have?
  3. How do you become like the one you obey (sin or Christ)?
  4. Give a personal report. Where do you see yourself? How are you doing spiritually?

DAY 2 . Read Romans 6:15-23.

1. What does it mean that a believer is “under grace” and no longer “under the law?”   
   Use the following to help answer this question:
   1. Romans 3:20-24
   2. Galatians 3:21-25
2. Paul uses slavery to illustrate how everyone is a slave to something or someone. Explain.
3. (Personal question) Have you ever felt or realized that you are a slave to something?   
   If appropriate, share your experience with the group.
4. How does slavery to sin lead to death (James 1:13-15)?
5. How does slavery to obedience (to God) lead to righteousness (life) (Psalm 1; 1 John 1:5-7)?

DAY 3. Read Colossians 3:1-17.

1. Romans 6:18 says, “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” According to the Colossians passage, where should the believer’s mind   
   and heart be focused? How might this help a person lead a more holy life (a life that experiences more and more freedom from sin)?
2. Colossians 3:3 states, “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”   
   What does this mean?
3. In verse 5, what are we to put to death, and of what are we to rid ourselves? List some practical ways to do this.
4. According to verses 12-14, what are we to put on, or with what are we to clothe ourselves? List some practical ways to do this.
5. What does it mean to let the “word of Christ dwell in you?” How do you accomplish this?

DAY 4 . Read Titus 2:11-14.

1. What does the grace of God teach us?
2. What do we, as believers, await? How might this help us live more godly lives?
3. Verses 13-14 say: “While we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”
   1. According to these two verses, who is Jesus Christ?
   2. From what have we been redeemed?
   3. What does Jesus desire to do for those of us who belong to him, who “are his very own?” What does this mean to you?

DAY 5 . Read Romans 6:15-23.

1. As a believer offers himself in “slavery to righteousness,” to what will this lead?
2. What does it mean to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16)? Does this mean a believer stops sinning?
3. According to verse 22, what benefit does a person receive by being a slave to God?
4. A wage is something earned. What is/are the wage(s) of sin?
5. What is the gift of God? How does one receive it (John 3:16)? Have you received this gift?
6. How does Jesus define eternal life (John 17:3)? Do you know Him?
7. Read 1 John 1:1-3 and 5:13. Can we know if we have eternal life? Explain.
8. What is the greatest truth you have learned from this lesson?

1. Ibid., 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fritz Ridenour, *How to Be a Christian without Being Religious* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)