



Last week in the first half of Romans 6 the Apostle Paul, using the image of baptism, argues how we are dead to sin, united with Christ, crucified with Christ, raised with Christ, and alive to God. His response is an attempt to answer a rhetorical question, *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!”* (Romans 6:1-2a). The thinking of some Christians in Rome was, “If I am saved by grace through faith, then why not sin more so that grace may increase?” Paul brings up essentially the same question again, but with a subtle nuance in verse 15, *“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!”* The small shift in the question is, “Well then, since we are free from the law and under grace, we are free to do whatever we want. Let’s sin!” Paul’s answer to both questions is absolutely not. Sin should not be practiced at all. Then he’ll tell us why.

The issue Paul is dealing with, when you think about it, is a very practical one. If you are a follower of Christ, you’ve dealt with it plenty of times: What happens when a Christian sins? What happens when we deliberately give in to sin? I’m talking about those times when we say to ourselves, “You know what, I’ve been really good, I owe this to myself. It won’t hurt anyone. It will be fun. No one will know. It will make me feel good. I’m not going to hell because of this. Why not give in just this one time? We are not under law, but under grace anyway!” So we visit that website or have that extra drink or pick a fight with our spouse or whatever. Can anyone appreciate and see the full force of Paul’s question here? I sure can!

In the second half of Romans 6, Paul deals with that issue by using a common image of his day—slavery. Here’s what he’ll argue: Enslavement to sin results in shame and eternal death, while enslavement to God results in sanctification and eternal life. I know it sounds weird to compare our relationship with Christ to slavery and Paul actually apologizes some for it. But, when you think about it, the metaphor makes sense. As a Christian, God is our master and our Lord. That means we owe him absolute and total commitment. But, there is another master and another power that is constantly vying for our allegiance. Let’s dive into our text and see why Paul is so concerned about this issue. Turn with me to Romans 6:16-19.

“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which

leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.”

Enslavement to Sin Results in Shame and Death

Sin makes you a slave

Remember the question, “Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” Paul’s answer is no because sin makes you a slave. The metaphor of slavery can be really misunderstood in our modern context. Paul is not talking about the horrors of African slavery or that of modern day slavery. Slavery in the Greco Roman cultures of the New Testament was more like indentured servanthood. And even though up to one-third of the people in Rome were enslaved, most of that slavery was voluntary. If you were extremely poor and couldn’t feed yourself, you would offer yourself to someone as a slave in order to be fed and housed. Likewise, Paul says this type of slavery to sin is a voluntary act of the will, we “offer ourselves.”

Paul is stating a fact about the human condition, one that you may not like; we are made to be mastered. Somebody has to master us. Everybody serves somebody, to quote the great theologian Bob Dylan. Everybody worships something. There is always something in your life that controls what you do and how you do it. Maybe it’s some idea, some person or some feeling.

There are three major categories the Bible says we are slaves to: our self, sin and the devil. If you are like me, you have habits you can’t break, thoughts you don’t want, emotions you don’t like, fears you can’t hide, regrets you can’t let go of, and you say things you wish you didn’t say. Am I right? Yes. The Bible calls this sin. And the funny thing about the word *sin* is the letter “i” is right in the middle. Whenever I place myself at the center of my life, I sin. Just because you are saved and follow Jesus doesn’t mean that you are free from having a master. You are either a slave of sin or a slave of obedience that leads to righteousness. But you can’t be both and you can’t be neither. Paul is saying here that no one is free! Rebecca Manley Pippert, in her book *Out of*

the Saltshaker and into the World writes, "Whatever controls us is our lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by acceptance. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our lives."

Here in the Bay Area I see slavery to career and success every day. My son was just telling me about one of his friends who after school, goes to the library until his parents finally pick him up at 7:30 pm. Not only do his parents rarely see him during the week, they have extremely high scholastic expectations for him. He has to read 1000 pages of a book every week, go to tutoring, and learn the piano. This kid loves basketball and I've only seen his parents once at a game last year, and it was the championship game. Now, hear me, I am not trying to pass judgment on this family or anyone else. As far as I know, they are not followers of Christ and I'm sure they are doing their best to parent. But, we have to consider all the ways we make ourselves slaves to career and success, especially if we are a follower of Christ. Here's something I see all the time, and something I struggle with. Why am I on my phone checking work email when I should be fully present at home or at my kids game?

In this passage, Paul is talking about two kinds of slavery. One was before we came to Christ, the other is after. We are either a slave to sin or to obedience that leads to righteousness. Before we placed our faith in Christ, we had no choice, we were slaves to sin because we were born in Adam. We were born with a sin nature. Then, at some point in our lives, many of us placed our faith in Christ and found out that we still sin. So, what happens then? How is it that we are free in Christ, yet we go back and choose to do the very things we don't want to? Paul says that whenever you give yourself over to sin, you become its slave. Jesus put it this way, **"Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin"** (John 8:34). Paul is pointing out that people serve either obedience, righteousness and God, or they serve sin. There is no middle ground.

Let me give you a few examples of how this works in our lives. Take lying for starters. Whenever you tell a lie, it's never just one lie, right? To cover up that one lie, you always need to tell several more! Once we choose to lie, we become a slave to it. How about anger? Whenever I choose to get angry with someone, you know what happens? They get angry back at me! And I have to continue to justify my anger to myself and feed it and think about it. Then I get even more angry and before I know it things go from bad to worse. Just ask my wife or my kids. That's slavery to anger. Sin not only takes you further than you want to go but it always infects others too. Like, are you ever in a bad mood for no reason at all? I get that way sometimes. When that happens it always hurts my marriage, my family, my kids, and the people I work with. When all this happens, do you ever feel out of control? Do you feel like it's too hard to go back and to change? That

is the power of sin! Sin is a powerful force just waiting to enslave you. If you ever tried to quit smoking you know about this principle better than anyone. I've heard people say, "It's easy to quit smoking, I've done it dozens of times!" Not only does sin make you its slave, but one of the results is shame. That's what Paul says next in verses 20-21.

"When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?"

Sin results in shame

Is there anything from your past that you are ashamed of? That's a dumb question, because we all know the answer—of course there is. When you think about all the junk you did in the past, doesn't it leave a bad taste in your mouth? It does for me. Sin, no matter how small and insignificant, will always lead to shame. Whether it was something we did or something we said years ago, that sin can leave us with the terrible feeling of shame. Shame is different from guilt. When we sin, hopefully we feel guilty. Guilt is a good thing that drives us to repentance. Just don't wallow in guilt. But, shame can be destructive.

Brené Brown has written some incredible things about the power of shame. If you have never watched her Ted talk on shame, I'd highly recommend it. She writes, "Shame is not guilt. Shame is a focus on self. Guilt is a focus on behavior. Shame is, 'I am bad.' Guilt is, 'I did something bad.' Guilt says, 'I am sorry, I made a mistake.' Shame says, 'I am a mistake.' Shame is highly correlated with addiction, depression, violence, aggression, bullying, suicide, and eating disorders."

Sometimes people from my past will request to friend me on Facebook and there have been several times where I've felt that sting of shame come upon me because of something I've done or said years ago. Sometimes I accept their friend invitation. Others times I've declined. Shame is powerful. Whenever I struggle with shame, I have to remind myself from the Scriptures that the old Rob Hall is dead. The Rob Hall who did those things, the Rob Hall who sinned in those ways, was nailed to that cross with Jesus Christ, and all of his sins, all of your sins—past, present, and future—were paid for in full on the cross of Jesus Christ. You have been sanctified "once and for all" He remembers your sins no more And you no longer need to feel shame for those things, because those things have been completely atoned for.

The final outcome of being enslaved to sin is found in verses 21b-23.

"...Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Sin results in death

The final outcome of sin is spiritual and moral death. That's its ultimate destination. Sin doesn't just want to make your life miserable, it wants to bring condemnation and separation from God for eternity. It wants to bring shame for eternity. The irony here is that most people today believe that **not** being able to sin makes your life miserable and boring! But, that's the power of sin. It has an incredible way of sneaking up on us and darkening our lives. It often limits us from opportunities to be used by God. It claims to offer freedom and joy, but what it brings is death, destruction and brokenness. Just think about the brokenness of life that sin brings: selfishness, lust, bitterness, pride, materialism, worry, driven-ness, fear, and a whole list of other things. Sin is a power. But, Paul describes another power—grace. Paul says that sin actually pays wages; you get what you deserve, death. But, God gives a free gift, something you don't deserve. So let's turn the corner and look at another type of slavery—slavery to God.

Enslavement to God Results in Sanctification and Eternal Life

Paul ends this chapter with a paradox: slavery to God is the greatest freedom. Slavery to God actually results in sanctification and eternal life. Listen to a few of these verses again and how they describe our life as slaves of God:

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

Grace now empowers us to obey God from our heart. And what we obey is the pattern of teaching, that is the gospel, the life transforming message of Jesus Christ. The gospel has claimed your allegiance. If you are a follower of Jesus then you are a slave to God.

Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness (verses 17-19).

Instead of offering ourselves to sin, impurity and wickedness, we now offer ourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. Think about all the people who seek fame, money, power or physical fitness as their number one goal in life. Paul says, in the same way you ran after those things, run after God. Paul is talking about sanctification here. Sanctification is the ongoing work of the Spirit to make you more holy. More like Jesus Christ. More like you want to be but haven't been able to be. In chapters 1-4 righteousness is used to talk about what we are. Righteousness and justification are often synonyms early on in Romans. Now in chapter 6, righteousness has more to do with our behavior. What we know and believe are inseparable from how we live.

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (verses 22-23).

People today believe they are the ones who are truly free and we Christians are oppressed by the demands of our religion. But, the opposite is really true. Paul wants us to remember who we belong to. Everyone is a slave to something. We are not slaves to sin but slaves to God. That's where true freedom is found. And it's our slavery to God that brings two incredible benefits: holiness and eternal life. Holiness means we are set apart to serve God freely. Holiness and wholeness go hand in hand. In Christ we are a whole and holy person. We live lives that are integrated and connected. We live the lives we were created to live. We are most human and whole in Christ. In Christ, we are also slaves to obedience that leads to righteousness. That's where we get our sense of worth, a sense of security, and assurance that you are loved and valuable to God. And the final outcome of being a slave to God is eternal life. John 17:3 says, *“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

Let me summarize Paul's argument. He says that before we were Christians we were slaves of sin. The result was shame and the final outcome was spiritual death. Now that we are Christians, we are free from sin, slaves of God, the result is the ongoing process of sanctification, and the final outcome is eternal life. In other words, there are really only two ways to live—slavery to sin or slavery to God. Enslavement to sin results in shame and eternal death, while enslavement to God results in sanctification and eternal life. Jesus said something similar about life but instead of slavery he chose the image of a road. One road is wide and leads to destruction and many follow it. The other road is narrow but it leads to life and only a few enter it (Matthew 7:13). Paul also wrote to the church in Galatia and said, *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery”* (Galatians 5:1). If you know Jesus Christ personally. If you have submitted to him as your master, then the challenge for us is to learn how to live free.

There's a story that's been told from Civil War days before America's slaves were freed, about a northerner who went to a slave auction and purchased a young slave girl. As they walked away from the auction, the man turned to the girl and told her, “You're free.”

With amazement she responded, “You mean, I'm free to do whatever I want?”

“Yes,” he said.

"And to say whatever I want to say?"

"Yes, anything."

"And to be whatever I want to be?"

"Yes."

"And even go wherever I want to go?"

He answered with a smile. "Yes. You're free to go wherever you'd like."

She looked at him intently and replied, "Then I'll go with you."

And that's really the choice we have before us. It's really not a choice; it's an invitation to offer ourselves to the One who purchased our freedom. Why would we possibly pass up what he has to offer for slavery to sin and to death?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2016 Central Peninsula Church North, San Bruno, CA
Catalog No. 1418-14N