

Week #2 – Slaves of Righteousness Romans 6:15-23

Key Concepts:

- Slaves of Righteousness
- The Power of Grace
- The Great Choice
- Wages of Sin
- Eternal Life

Background (Romans 6:1-14)

You were once slaves of sin (6:17). You did whatever your flesh or old human nature desired. As a believer in Christ, you were **united** with Christ by grace through faith. You were united with Christ in His **death** and in His **resurrection**.

Having been united with Christ in His death, the old you (the “old man” or “old woman”) **died**. The old you was free from sin.

Having been united with Christ in His resurrection, the new you (the “new man” or “new woman”) is now **alive** to God. You are now able to present the whole you as instruments of righteousness to God. You were not able to do that before being united with Christ.

Slaves of Righteousness (Romans 6:15-23)

v. 15 – The Power of Grace

Paul asks, “Shall we sin...?”

This passage began with a rhetorical question similar to that asked in 6:1, “Are we to continue in sin...?” The question asked in verse 1 is based on chapter 5; that is, those who respond to grace by faith are made righteous; they are justified; they are given the free gift of eternal life.

The question asked in verse 15 is based on 6:1-14, or believers’ identity with Christ in His death and His resurrection. The question in verse 15 should be answered based on believers’ **new position** under grace, not on the basis of their justification as described in chapter 5. The first response to this question is the same as the former question, “God forbid!”

Questions:

1. What is the significance of the different ways Paul presents the same verb in the two questions “Are we to continue in sin...” (6:1) and “Shall we sin...” (6:15)?
2. What does Paul’s initial response to both questions tell us about the new man or the new woman’s ability to *not* sin?

v. 16 – The Great Choice

Believers in Christ now have a choice. You become a slave of whatever you **choose** to obey. You can be:

- 1) a slave of **sin** (cf. *John* 8:34), or
- 2) a slave of **God**.

Questions:

1. Is there any middle ground in who believers in Christ can follow (cf. *Matt* 6:24)?
2. What are the consequences of being either a slave of sin or a slave of God? Will the Christian who sins die? Is our “righteousness” the result of our obedience?

v. 17 – Obedience to Righteousness

You who were once slaves of sin, but something **changed**. You became obedient to truth (initially believing in the Gospel and then following the teachings of Jesus and the apostles).

A few observations:

1. Christians must respond to objective **truth**,
2. Christians are handed over to the truth, not vice-versa. There is no attempt to change truth, Christians allow the truth to change them as they **obey** it through Christ (cf. *James* 1:22),

3. Christians are to be committed to the truth because it plays a part in the process of **spiritual** transformation¹ (or “sanctification;” see discussion below on v. 19).

v. 18 – Becoming Slaves of Righteousness

The result of being committed to apostolic teaching is the realization of freedom from the power of sin in daily living and constant growth in **Christlikeness** as a slave of righteousness (cf. *Gal 5:16-24*).

Questions:

1. Why should we be thankful to God for our faith in Christ? Should we be thankful to God for our daily obedience? Why or why not?
2. What role does the reading, studying and memorization of Scripture play in our spiritual growth?

v. 19 – Zealously Presenting Yourself to Righteousness

“Speaking in human terms” refers to Paul’s use of the slavery metaphor. This imagery helped communicate complex spiritual truths to an original audience familiar with slavery.

A comparison is made between the former life, as slaves of **sin**, and the new life, as slaves of **God** (i.e. “slaves of righteousness,” v. 18).

Christians now have a choice! You can present your members as:

- 1) slaves to impurity and lawlessness (cf. *2 Cor 12:21, Eph 4:19, Col 3:5*), or
- 2) slaves of righteousness.

“The term ‘sanctification’ means ‘holiness’ or ‘consecration’ and refers here to a **spiritual** and **moral** transformation in the believer ultimately brought about by the Spirit himself (*2 Cor 3:18*). The Spirit uses the word of God, the people of God, and circumstances to change us into the image of **Christ** (*Rom 8:29*). Thus the term refers to both a state as well as a process.”²

¹ See Greg Herrick, “Study and Exposition of Romans 6:15-23”, www.Bible.org.

² Ibid.

Questions:

1. Is there any middle ground in to whom Christians present themselves (see verse 16 above)?
2. What is the Christian's responsibility in his or her spiritual growth?

vs. 20-23 – *The Outcome of Choice*

vs. 20-21

Before conversion, the old man or old woman was a slave of sin. They reaped no moral or spiritual benefit from their slavery to sin. ("Reap" is an agrarian metaphor commonly used by Paul to describe moral and spiritual realities).

The outcome of sin is death.

v. 22

Now that Christians are freed from sin and united with Christ, they can choose to be a slave of sin or a slave of God. When they choose to be a slave of God, they will reap the benefit of moral righteousness (sanctification/holiness) and the fullness of eternal life (cf. *John 10:10; 17:3*).

The outcome of obedience is eternal life.

In addition to being a future reality for Christians, eternal life is an immediate, present reality enjoyed by slaves of God.

v. 23 – *"Wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life..."*

The term "wages" (*opsonia*) is a military term for soldiers' daily rations. Roman soldiers made money from booty taken in captured cities and a small wage. They lived on daily rations of *salarium* (salt) and *opsonia* (fish). The idea in verse 23 "is that a little bit of death, a little bit of separation from God, is measured out to you when you sin. The more that you sin, the more you open yourself to sin, and the farther you get from God spiritually."³

³ Allen Ross, "Exultation (Romans 5:1-6:23)", Article 5 of 13 at www.Bible.org.

On the other hand, God gives the free gift of eternal life. We accept this gift by grace through faith when we **yield** ourselves to God, or the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. When we identify ourselves with Christ, we choose to be slaves of righteousness and thus experience a grace inspired, morally victorious, spiritually abundant eternal life on earth.

True freedom comes by making the **choice** to be slaves of righteousness.

Just as we are justified by grace through faith, we are also being sanctified by grace through faith. We must have faith to keep living lives as slaves of righteousness.

Questions:

1. Is it possible for a Christian to be a slave of sin? If yes, why is that a problem?
2. Are the “wages of sin” for Christians death, or does that only apply to non-believers? Where does grace enter the equation?
3. How does anyone receive the “free gift of eternal life?” Is this gift something that concerns long-time Christians, or does it only apply to young believers?
4. How does faith impact our daily decisions? How does faith contribute to our spiritual growth?

Definition of the “Spiritual Life:”

Part 1: *“Understanding your identity in Christ ...”*

Part 2: *“... as a slave to righteousness ...”*

Key Terms:

Slave of sin
Slave of righteousness
Death
Sanctification
Eternal life
Wages

Key Verses:

Romans 6:23
Colossians 3:5
John 17:3

Scripture Memory:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
(Romans 6:23, NASB).

Homework Assignment #2:

- 1) Memorize *Romans 6:23*.
- 2) **NextStep APPLICATION:** Does your decision to obey sin or obey God impact your spiritual life? Through the course of this week, document when you have to choose between being a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness. Ask God to grant you grace for obedience. Praise God for His grace when you chose God over sin!
- 3) Read *Romans 6* and review class notes.

Next Week: Released from the Law (*Romans 7:1-12*)