

<sup>15</sup> What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup> 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? <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. <sup>18</sup> You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

<sup>19</sup> I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. <sup>20</sup> When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. <sup>21</sup> What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! <sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## SET FREE TO BE SLAVES

Dear Friends in Christ,

The theme for today's sermon is SET FREE TO BE SLAVES. *"Well, that doesn't make sense!"* you might say. On the surface, maybe it doesn't. But as the Apostle Paul tells us something about ourselves and about God, it does make sense. And as Paul makes it make sense for us, he talks about other things that really don't make any sense at all!

From the three choices I'm going to give you, I'd like you to consider what kind of person you are. Are you...

A person with a sinful past?

A Christian purposely not living a Christian life in some respect?

A sinner struggling against sin?

We are each one of these three...at least one! That makes us just like the Christians in Rome to whom the Apostle Paul wrote. And what he wrote is truly important. In fact, it's a matter of life or death for you and me every bit as much as it was for them. The bottom line here in Romans 6 is that we are SET FREE TO BE SLAVES—and that is a very good thing.

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Prior to the words before us, Paul had been urging those Christians to be alive in Christ, to not let sin rule in their lives, to not participate in ungodly things, but to offer themselves body and life to God. He said, **For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.**

And then comes our text: **What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!**

Paul was prepared for someone to think about how we, by faith, have the forgiveness of Jesus applied to us and we under his grace, his undeserved love, and then come to the conclusion that if that's the case, we can really go ahead and sin because we are

forgiven! If we don't have to keep a bunch of laws from God in order to be saved because Jesus kept them perfectly for us and has put that perfection on us so that we look holy to God, then it doesn't matter—we can live however we want. After all, we live under God's grace!

And if you think it's far-fetched that a person would think like this, listen to this snippet from Jude's New Testament letter: **I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord (Jude 3-4).** People were doing it! They felt that since they knew about God's grace, they could live immorally, against God's will. You should read the rest of what Jude says about them! But here he says what they were really doing—living like that was a denial of Jesus. Their eternal home would be in hell with Satan because they were abusing God's grace.

Boy, those people back then must have been pretty messed up, right? Have you never been tempted like this? Have you never given in to that thinking? Is this not familiar: *"I know it's wrong, but I know Jesus will forgive me."* *"I know it's wrong, but I'll just repent later because Jesus forgives."* Any thought anything like that on our parts is exactly the same thing. We're taking the grace of God given to us in Jesus and using it as a license to sin. Paul says, *"No, no, no! You don't want to do that! You'll die eternally if you do!"*

And this is where the slavery image comes in: **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?**

If I asked you if you were a slave, a servant, you would probably insist that you are not. We take great pride in our freedom in this country and simply as human beings. Historic images of slavery pop in our minds and we don't like it, we're embarrassed by it, and we are thankful that that horrific era is long gone. But you really *are* a slave.

It isn't just Paul that says so, Jesus did too. He was speaking about earthly treasures and how we either live for that in this world or we live for God and he concludes with this comment about whom a person serves: **"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money (Matthew 6:24).** Jesus says you're serving God or something else. Paul says you're serving God or your sinful nature. Both use specific Greek words that have to do with being a slave, a servant of someone else, being in a position where your will is bound by someone else and you are not in control.

Have you ever thought of it that way? If you were to use the line of reasoning that says, *"I know I can ask for forgiveness so I'm going to commit this sin (whatever it is)"* do you realize that you're not in control? I mean, it sounds like you are, but you're not. You're listening to the sinful nature—that still exists even in a child of God—and you're doing what it tells you to do—whether that's sexual sin, abuse of your body with a misuse of drugs or food or alcohol, lying, stealing, cheating or whatever else. You are making yourself a slave to sin. You're doing it willingly. You're handing over control to sin. And Paul quickly and clearly says that leads to death. If this is the way you live your life, letting sin master you, you will die eternally.

The other option before you is to willingly offer yourself as a slave to obedience of God. That, he says, leads to righteousness. Before he writes more about that he pauses to remind you and me of who we are. **But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.**

Paul wrote to Christians and I speak to you with the assumption that most here today are Christians.

Are you a Christian with a sinful past? If so, rejoice with Paul and give thanks to God like he says because **though you used to be slaves to sin**, you have since been given faith in Jesus' saving work!

If you are a Christian who used to use the grace of God for a license to sin, thank God that that slavery to sin is over and you trust in Christ's saving work and live now to follow him!

If you are a Christian purposely living a particular sin and abusing the grace of God, remember who God called you to be—a slave of his.

The result of putting slavery to sin behind and obeying the teaching about salvation through Christ is that you have been set free from sin! And so now you are a slave! That doesn't sound right! But it is. You no longer slavishly follow whatever your sinful mind and heart tells you it wants. Instead you follow him—obediently, willingly, with a love for God because of his love shown to you in the life and death of Jesus his Son! That's what it means to be a slave to righteousness. You want to serve the God who sent his only Son to serve you and pay for your damning sins. You want to live a righteous life, a life that pleases God and results in blessings here in this world and eternal blessings in heaven!

Paul continues: **Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.** In the same way that you used to eagerly live as slaves to sin, which just unraveled into worse wickedness, you now live just as eagerly as slaves to righteousness, which leads to holiness. This means immersing ourselves in God's Word so that we know what his will is. Constantly reading and studying God's

Word has another important result too—the Holy Spirit shapes and molds our hearts so that we want to live for God and he even moves us to actually do it! And that living for God is the holy life our Savior wishes to see in us. So, that's why kids listen closely in Sunday School and Confirmation Class. This is why our teens make a habit of going to Lifeliners, our youth group, and why a busy college student would take time out for campus ministry Bible study on Sunday nights. It's why you would choose to attend a Bible study. It's why you would read your Bible at home and have some kind of family devotion with the kids. This is what slaves to righteousness do.

Offering yourself to God as a slave of righteousness has all kinds of applications for our lives, like how you spend your time, what your priorities are, how you treat people, your sexuality, the management of every gift given you by God, whether that's a paycheck, children, your unique skills that make you "you," and a ton of other things. Again, God outlines his will for our lives in his Word, which means a Christian will want to get to know that better and better—if your desire is to follow God instead of your sinful nature.

And Paul says this the better choice by far! He explains it like this: **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? Those things result in death!** Slavery to sin means that righteousness is not controlling you. And the wages of sin is death! What a supremely dumb choice for someone who has been called to faith and life!

How much better is this?—**But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.** Sins of the past bring up feelings of shame and regret and are proof that we are not worthy of God's love. But what we couldn't earn, Jesus did. His life, his blood, his cross, his rising to life—they are what atoned for those sins. You know Christ and faith in his sacrifice is the bolt-cutter that removed your ball and chain of slavery to sin! In love we look to him and with thankful hearts we don't even mind being called "slaves" to righteousness because our focus has shifted from ourselves to our Savior.

It has shifted because we know the benefit of a heart and life devoted to our Savior: holiness and eternal life. And just so we never have the impression that living right, following God's will, avoiding sin (mostly...or sometimes!) earns us that holiness or is what "buys" us eternal life, Paul reminds us that **the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

We still struggle with sin and at times we fall, but there is forgiveness in Jesus. That forgiveness of sin and the eternal life we see up ahead is the gift of God. Slaves to the sinful nature don't have that to look forward to, but thanks be to God, slaves to righteousness, servants of Christ Jesus our Lord, do!

By faith in Jesus, we are freed from being slaves to our sinful nature and freed to be slaves of righteousness through our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.