

(Jeff Sherwood - Lesson 10 - 3.30.25) **You Gotta Serve Somebody**  
**Romans 6:15-23**

Back in the 80's Bob Dylan wrote a pop song entitled "You Gotta Serve Somebody" the lyrics of which went like this:

*You may be an ambassador to England or France  
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance  
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world  
You might be a socialite with a long string of pearls*

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed  
You're gonna have to serve somebody  
Well, it may be the Devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody*

The song goes on to state that whether we are rich or poor, a king or a pauper, famous or unknown we all have to serve somebody. Biblically speaking he is right. You gotta serve somebody. Either sin resulting in death or righteousness resulting in life. Our understanding of who we are in Christ will determine the choices we make which in turn will determine who we serve.

Paul makes that clear to us in our passage this morning Rom. 6:15-23. Verse 15 is Paul's second question about sin and grace, the first being found in verse 1. In verses 1-14 Paul answered the question: "*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*" He answered with a resounding NO! using the strongest negative expression possible "*me genoita*" or "*may it never be*".

The reason he gives is based on our position in Christ or our identity with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection and the consequent results of that identification – we are dead to sin and alive to God. Until we realize what Christ has done and who we are in Christ – our position - we will struggle with living the Christian life. Paul tunnels into that idea in more detail in our text this morning (Rom. 6:15-23).

Like a good teacher he starts with a question: '*Should a Christian choose to sin?*' Not '*can a Christian sin*' but '*should a Christian choose to sin?*'

### **I. The Question Asked: Who Will You Serve? Rom. 6:15**

The question may look the same as in v. 1 but it is quite different. In 6:1 the question is "*shall we continue in sin...?*" The question here in verse 15 is: "*should we choose to sin?*" Since we are not under law or its consequences, but instead we are under grace shall we deliberately choose to sin?

Paul's answer is "*me genoita*" – God forbid, absolutely not, may it never be. Again this is the strongest idiom of repudiation in the Greek New Testament. Paul uses the term 14 times, 10 of which are in Romans (3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11). The phrase carries a sense of outrage. The mere suggestion that God's grace is a license to sin is a logical, moral and spiritual absurdity.

We operate with a basic flaw with regards to sin – we judge if a sin is little or big. We think that a little sin won't hurt us. We don't suffer immediate consequences, or feel bad and so the sin can't be all that serious. But the truth of Scripture that Paul is about to hammer home is that when we choose to sin we become its slave.

In vv. 16-18 Paul gives four reasons why a Christian shouldn't choose to sin. 1) sin enslaves us; 2) sin leads to death (separation); 3) we have been delivered from sin's slavery; 4) our deliverance is freedom.

## II. The Reasons Why the Christian Should Choose not to Sin Rom. 6:16-18

*Don't you know...?* Paul is stating in question form that which his readers would readily acknowledge as true if they gave it the least thought. This is an axiom – a general truth that is self-evident and needs no proof.

What is that truth? Once you choose to obey you become a slave of that choice. All of us are slaves to one or the other of two masters – sin or righteousness. The remainder of this chapter teaches us that the quality of our life now depends on the master we choose. Either sin resulting in death or righteousness resulting in life. Know and remember the following four truths.

### A. Sin enslaves us 6:16a

Sin is seldom if ever presented to us in this way. Instead of being presented as slavery it's presented as the very essence of freedom. That is what the devil told Eve in the Garden of Eden when he argued *"Don't be bound by God's word. That limits you. Be free. Eat of the tree and become as God knowing Good and Evil."*

Did sin produce freedom? No! Adam and Eve and ultimately mankind became enslaved to the consequences of that choice – death.

As Christians most of us kid ourselves into believing that sin is not very serious, at least not the little ones. Paul says: *Look at what happens. You have set in operation a basic principle of life. The principle is this: if you yield yourself to sin you become the slave of sin.* The reason we are not to choose sin is because sin enslaves us and secondly because sin leads to death.

### B. Sin leads to death 6:16b

Sin results in death. That is not what the devil told Eve. God said: *"You shall surely die"* (Gen. 2:17). The devil said: *"You surely shall not die."* (Gen. 3:4). Here was a true crisis for the woman. Who was right? The woman decided to resolve the dilemma for herself and so she examined the tree, she reached the conclusion: *how can it be so wrong when it feels so right?* So she took it, ate it and shared it with Adam.

What happened? They died! First they died in their spirits instantly for the fellowship they had enjoyed with God up to this point was broken. Second they died in personalities for they were now ashamed and started to shift blame to each other. And finally at last their bodies died. Sin always leads to death. In one form or fashion.

### C. The Christian has been delivered from sin's slavery 6:17

Thanks be to God that a complete change has taken place. He then sums up our experience in four stages: 1) what we used to be (slaves to sin – 17a); 2) what we did (wholeheartedly obeyed the truth – 17b); 3) what happened to us (set free from sin -18a); and what we had become (slaves to righteousness – 18b).

The very purpose of atonement is to deliver us from sins penalty and its power. But as believers we are no longer subject to that slavery. We have become obedient from the heart. Obedient to what you might ask? Paul answers: *'The form of teaching to which you have been committed.'*

*"Form"* translates *tupos* which was used of molds into which molten metal for castings was poured. *Committed* translates aorist passive of *paradidomai* which carries with it the basic idea of *'delivered over to'* (it happened to you once in the past). So we can translate the phrase *"the form of teaching into which you were delivered"*.

As believers we are committed or delivered over to that teaching. We are handed over to the gospel pattern or mold. The idea is that when God makes a new spiritual creation of a believer he casts him into the mold of

divine truth.

The evidence of our being freed from sin is our obedience to the teaching of Scripture – which is our mold into which we are poured.

#### **D. The Christian is now freed from sin and a slave of righteousness 6:18**

*Having been* (a past completed act) *freed from sin* - not free from sinning or the temptation to sin but free from the tyranny (slavery to it) and penalty (condemnation) of sin. We have been decisively rescued out of the lordship of sin into the lordship of God; out of the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of Christ. Sin no longer has dominion.

We have become *slaves of righteousness*. Grace never means we're free to live any way we wish. Grace means that I'm free to choose righteousness or disobedience. If I choose disobedience I will have to deal with its consequences: a guilty conscience, mental anguish, offending others, reproach to Christ... But if I choose righteousness I will have its consequences: a pure conscience, peace of mind, ministry to others, glory to God and joy. Why would I choose death over life?

Since you've got to serve somebody and whoever you serve has consequences, choose wisely. That's the admonition that Paul gives in the remaining section for today in verses 19 through 23.

#### **III. The Call to Choose Rightly Rom. 6:19**

To speak in human terms is to speak in terms that the audience to whom Paul addresses his words will understand what it is he wants to communicate. Paul is trying to communicate the eternal truths of God to the finite minds of men.

Notice the progression. First there is a yielding or presenting which is followed by lawlessness followed by further lawlessness. Then inevitably leads to more sin. Because we are born as sinners with a sin nature we live out our sinfulness which results in lawlessness. Sin is like a cancer. As cancer reproduces itself until the whole body is destroyed so sin reproduces itself until the whole person is destroyed.

Notice '*so now*' in contrast to '*just as*'. As we were once 100% yielded to sin so we should now be 100% yielded to righteousness. As sin leads to more sin so righteousness leads to spiritual maturity. The more righteous you become the more you will gain victory over sin.

One of the things that should catch our attention about verse 19 is how closely it resembles verse 13. Why does Paul repeat himself? To make the point that there is no other way for us to grow in righteousness. There is no secret formula for holiness, no magic recipe. The only means is to realize who we are in Christ, the consequence of our choices and then to discipline the parts of our bodies - mind, eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and feet to act accordingly.

I cannot emphasize this point enough. God has already done everything necessary for our salvation and given us everything we need to live a consistent Christian Life (2 Peter 1:3; Eph. 1:3; Rom. 8:26-39). The command to present ourselves (*to make the right choice*) is based on something that has already happened to us.

Go through Romans chapter 6 and underline the verbs that tell in a past tense what has happened to us. Start with verse 2 we died to sin; we were baptized in Christ Jesus; we were buried; we have been united; our old self was crucified with him; we have died with Christ; we have been set free; we have become slaves of righteousness. These verbs describe the experience of all who are truly Christians. It is because of our position - what has happened to us that a life of holiness through the power of God is possible for us. New Testament sanctification is therefore to get us to realize our position and act accordingly.

In this verse Paul has urged us to make the right choice now in verses 20 through 22 he tells us what happens when we make the right choice - what are the benefits.

#### **IV. The Benefits of the Two Choices    Rom. 6:20-23**

*“When we were slaves to sin”* that is prior to faith in Jesus Christ we had no connection to righteousness – we were free in regards to righteousness. Now that we are slaves to righteousness (v. 18) what benefit do we derive from the activities that formerly brought shame (v. 21)? He is not referring here to physical death but death in terms of separation. Elements of death are present every time we sin: 1) darkness of understanding so that God’s word becomes dull, boring and comprehensible because of sin; 2) there is a lack of joy or excitement in the Christian life; 3) the Christian life becomes a duty not a liberating freedom.

But now (v. 22) that you are set free from sin and shame and have become slaves of God all the business of being limited, of experiencing death and shame is totally unnecessary to the believer. We do not have to experience death and shame. We experience it because we choose to.

Notice the benefits of grace and freedom in v. 22 - sanctification and eternal life. Here we have the exciting process of growing up and maturing as a Christian. What is the benefit of sin? Shame and death. What is the benefit of righteousness/obedience? Sanctification and life. That being the case, choose wisely.

Just as sin has a wage for the nonbeliever so it has a wage for the believer. Sin robs life of its meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. God however gives life – eternal life which starts the moment we trust in Christ and lasts forever.

#### **Conclusion**

Think of it this way: Sin put you in prison. Sin locked you behind the bars of guilt, shame, deception and fear. Sin did nothing but shackle you to the wall of misery. Then Jesus came and paid your bail. He served your time. He satisfied the penalty and set you free. There is no need or reason for you to remain in your cell. You are free. You have been discharged from the penitentiary of sin. Why, in heaven’s name would you ever want to set foot in that prison again?

Lucado: *“He is not saying it is impossible for believers to sin; but he’s saying it is stupid to sin. It’s not the literal impossibility...but the moral incongruity of the saved returning to sin.”* (In the Grip of Grace, pg.113-4)

In chapter 6 Paul prescribed four steps designed to promote practical sanctification. First, we must *‘know’* certain facts about our union with Christ, specifically that sin no longer possesses the dominating power over the believer that it has over the unbeliever (vv. 3-10). Second, we must *‘reckon’* (believe) these facts to be true of us personally (v. 11). Third, we must *‘present’* ourselves to God in dedication as His slaves to perform righteousness (vv. 12-14). Fourth, we must *‘obey’* God (vv. 15-23). If we do not, we will find ourselves falling back under the domination of sin in our lives and becoming its slaves once again. Each of these verbs has the force of an active command. Each represents something every believer should do. These are our basic responsibilities in our progressive sanctification regarding our relationship to sin