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Romans

And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Romans 6:18

If you peek ahead, you will see that the rest of the chapter continues to discuss the issue of slavery. The personification of sin and righteousness allows us to understand our state more clearly.

Sin was our master but we were brought out from under it and have moved to a new master; that of righteousness. But sin has a source, just as righteousness has a source. Sin came about through obeying the lies of the devil and rejecting the truth of God. Taking this in its logical form then, we were once slaves to the devil but have now become slaves of God through the work of Christ. Sin no longer has power over us because the power of the devil is defeated through the cross.

Life application: The wages of sin is death. As believers in Christ we have been set free from sin and thus we have been set free from the power of death. Eternal life, because of the work of Christ, is an absolute guarantee. Don't let anyone tell you that Christ's work isn't fully sufficient to save you. There is one gospel and it is found in the work of Christ alone.

I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. Romans 6:19

Paul begins with an idiom of the time, "I speak in human terms..." This was a way of saying that what he is telling them, and the way he is saying it, is done in order to make the argument easy to grasp. It would be like us today saying, "Let me say this so even a child could understand."

As noted in the previous verse, Paul has used the personification of sin and of righteousness to help us more clearly comprehend the state and circumstances in which we find ourselves.

The people of Rome would clearly understand the symbolism of slaves and masters. If a person is a slave to Stevius Romanus, then he would present himself to Stevius in a distinct way; as to his rightful master. Stevius likes foot rubs at noon each day and so the slave does this. However, the slave is bought by Sergious Maximus who finds foot rubs vulgar (and a bit too tickly) for his liking. The last thing that the slave would do would be to grab Sergious by the foot at noon and start rubbing. It would be contrary to his new ownership. Sergious would be displeased and there would be consequences - especially if the disobedient foot rubs continued.

This is the thought process which Paul is using. We were slaves to Sin. Sin liked uncleanness - dishonesty, sexual perversion, gluttony, etc. Because Sin was our master, we presented ourselves in this "state of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness." However, a new master has taken over - Righteousness. Now that we have this new master, we would be completely unwise to present ourselves to Righteousness in this way. Rather, he demands that we present ourselves as his slaves "for holiness."

The owner of a slave has the power of rule and authority over their slave. Disobedience may result in punishment, imprisonment, or death. And it is so with us now. As a saved believer, if we turn from Righteousness to Sin, through sexual immorality for example, we may catch a disease resulting in pain, confinement from others in society, or even death. Righteousness was abandoned and Sin did its evil work in us.

Having said this, it is important to understand that Righteousness is still our master. Just as the slave remains the property of Sergious regardless of his conduct after being purchased from Stevius, so we remain the property of our new master. We have moved from the rightful ownership of the devil to that of Christ. For this reason, we are expected to present ourselves to Christ in the manner which is pleasing to Him. He is a gentle, caring Master and as our Creator, He knows what is best for us.

Life application: In Christ, you have a new Master. He has certain expectations of you which you are expected to fulfill. He asks us to be obedient because He knows what is best for us. Endeavor to live in righteousness and not as if you were still a slave to sin.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Romans 6:20

This is a simple truth which was looked at in 6:19 and which continues in 6:20. A slave has one master and therefore the ruling authority of that master is absolute. Before we received Christ as Lord, we were slaves to sin and we were free from the master-ship of righteousness. But when we moved to Him, we were freed from sin. Error in the mind of man is easily introduced during an evaluation of these verses though. There are people who are not Christians who do really great stuff for others, for their community, for the sake of animals or the environment, etc.

And of course there are Christians who fail at any or all of these things. Their lives actually changed little after coming to Christ. This sets up a false belief in people that Christ doesn't really make anyone holy. The problem with this is that it is dealing with the slave in regard to the master, not the master's authority over the slave. The example from 6:19 was that a slave went from his previous owner, Stevius Romanus, to a new owner, Sergious Maximus. Regardless of how the slave acts, he has become the legal property of Sergious Maximus.

This is what Paul is speaking about here. Slavery to Stevius Romanus is synonymous with freedom from Sergious Maximus; slavery to Sergious Maximus is synonymous with freedom from Stevius Romanus. Now simply change the ownership titles and say the sentence again -

"Slavery to the devil is synonymous with freedom from Christ; slavery to Christ is synonymous with freedom from the devil."

It is the ownership which has changed. The slave now has a responsibility to change his life and habits to the new owner. If he fails to do so, it in no way changes the ownership. The title to deed to our slave has transferred.

Life application: Who are we going to please, our Master who loved us so much that He gave His life to have authority over us, or our old master who cares so little about us that he desired our destruction? Think it through - everything the devil had to offer was pleasing on the outside and yet rotten on the inside. Why would we want such fruits when the life Christ offers is pure and good, from the inside out?

What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. Romans 6:21

Paul's question is asking about having fruit, not so much the quality of it. The quality naturally goes along with what the source of the fruit is. This can be seen in Jesus' words found in Matthew 17:16-19 -

"You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Elsewhere in the Bible, it's noted that thorns and thistles end up in the fire, just as those who bear bad fruit will end up in the Lake of Fire. These agricultural concepts are given because anyone can figure them out. No one would pick up a thorn bush and start chewing on it and expect to get delightful nourishment from it. And so Paul asks his reader to think things through. If you were a slave to sin, of course only bad fruit would result. It isn't possible that a tree which is by nature bad could somehow produce fruit contrary to its nature.

Adam Clark states it this way: "God designs that every man shall reap benefit by his service. What benefit have ye derived from the service of sin?"

The answer is that the bad tree will, of course, bear that which is bad. The reaping then is one which is intended for death and destruction. We will see this concept reintroduced in chapter 7 as well -

"For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death." Romans 7:5

If we are a slave to sin, then our passions will work in our members to death. Think of whatever sin you wish. In the end, it always leads to death because it is destructive to the body and the soul. But more importantly than the physical death is the spiritual, eternal death which is a result of being a slave to sin. The life of sin is ultimately a life of death.

If we have become a slave of righteousness (meaning having been saved by Jesus), then why would we continue to entertain the life of sin? It is contrary to our new nature. Those things we were ashamed of when we called on Christ are no less shameful now, so don't allow your life and your actions to be returned to the very bondage from which you were purchased.

Life application: A spiritually alive being living in a spiritually dead way is a self-contradiction. If you have been born again by the Spirit of God, then you should endeavor to live in newness of life. You will bear fruit from your labors. What type will they be?