

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: The Illustration of Slavery, Romans 6:15-23

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INTRODUCTION: Last week—on Easter Sunday—we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We talked about how our identity in Christ makes us dead to our sin, buried with him, and raised up with him. When we live in Christ, we are alive now—until eternity. We don't really have to fear death.

Today, we continue on our study of Paul's letter to the Romans. We left off on verse 14 of Chapter 6: *For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.*

Under grace, we have a new master. The word for master is also translated as “an owner with full authority or control.” It is used to describe someone who rules over another. Sin has some power to rule our lives; can we all agree? But, now, because of Christ's love for us displayed on the cross and his defeat of sin and death in his death, burial, and resurrection—we are not under the Law, condemned, but rather, we are under grace. We are freed from sin.

So, to illustrate this freedom from sin and our new reign of grace, Paul chose to use a familiar everyday concept the Romans would have been familiar with—slavery—to show them what it means to be alive in Christ right now.

When I write sermons, I try to find illustrations that connect to your understanding. I might use a science illustration or a sports illustration or a movie illustration—maybe even an illustration from my own life which I know many of you have experienced similar stories. So, here we see Paul, too—appeals to the Romans, with all their cultural baggage and particular thinking with the image of slavery—to describe the new life in Christ.

OVERVIEW: There are three points to my message today:

1. We are all slaves to either sin or righteousness.
2. Freedom comes from obedience of the heart.

3. A new slavery to God has eternal benefits.

First, WE ARE ALL SLAVES TO EITHER SIN OR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

BACKGROUND: The Romans were very familiar with slavery. Romans used slaves in their houses as well as for their manual or farming labor. They could be bought and sold—rented. Freedom was a privilege, not a right. And, freedom came at a cost—another had to be enslaved for another to be free.

While some Romans were good to their slaves, life was often harsh, and an owner could kill them without fear of being punished. They had no rights—no legal status or right to be an individual and pursue what they wanted in life. Slaves couldn't own property. Instead, they were the property of their slave owner.

Paul preached something that would have been revolutionary to the Romans: We are all slaves. As a Roman citizen, slavery was an impossibility. It is kind of like us, as Americans. Owning a person is against the law.

Just like an American citizen, as a Roman citizen, one had privileges and rights. But, here Paul asked them, verse 16:

SCRIPTURE: Romans 6:16 ¹⁶ *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?*

The point is: We either offer ourselves to sin, or we offer ourselves to obedience. It is either one or the other—sin or obedience. We are all slaves. We are owned by one or the other.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION: Jesus had a similar conversation with the Jews who believed in him in John Chapter 8. He said to them,

SCRIPTURE: John 8:31-36 *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

³³ *They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. [in their current generation]. How can you say that we shall be set free?"*

³⁴ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

EXPLANATION: Jesus offered freedom, but the Jews he was talking with didn’t think they had ever been slaves to anyone. This is the problem—We cannot be set free unless we realize we are in bondage.

ILLUSTRATION: You take a person who has an addiction—let’s say for the purpose of illustration, to drugs or alcohol. We all know, a person who has an addiction like that, has to hit rock bottom before they can get help. How many people with habits have said, “I can quit anytime.” And, they quit for a few hours, and then they pick it back up again?

APPLICATION: Until we realize we are in bondage, until we realize we are slaves to sin or to an awful habit, or to whatever, we cannot be set free.

Listen again to Jesus’ reply to the Jews: *everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*

And, he explained that a slave doesn’t have a permanent place in the family. When you are a slave to sin, you don’t belong in Jesus’ family.

Jesus explained what family you belong to if you are serving sin—

SCRIPTURE: John 8:44 ⁴⁴ *You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

EXPLANATION: If you carry out Satan’s desires—you do not belong to the truth.

ILLUSTRATION: I think possibly the worst kind of slavery is slavery of bad attitude, slavery of selfish attitude, slavery of sour disposition. Or, how about this?—the slavery of letting others rob you of your joy!

APPLICATION: When we believe lies, our father is Satan. But, if we choose to believe Jesus—the author and finisher of our faith, we will have freedom. So, a slave to God, a slave to obedience is also a slave to freedom. That sounds like a contradiction. We can turn our eyes away from ourselves and the lies we hear and live by the power of Jesus’ Word. What are the lies we hear everyday? The lies we hear are: *You’re no good. Don’t forget that sin from years ago. God’s really not forgiven you of that.* Don’t we hear things like that? Don’t we hear the lies that tell us *we’re inadequate? We really can’t do that thing God is calling us to do. We can’t take that step of faith. We can’t really give extra in any way because we might run out.* Lies come at us all the time.

But, when you are set free—you have a new freedom. You are a child of God. You are a son or a daughter of God. So, as the scripture says, and as Jesus says, the slave has no permanent place in the family. The slave is owned by the family. But, when a person is free and the person becomes a follower of Jesus, the person becomes a part of the family.

Review—

- We are all slaves to sin or righteousness.

Second, FREEDOM COMES FROM OBEDIENCE OF THE HEART.

SCRIPTURE: Go back to Jesus’ words in John Chapter 8. John 8:31-32 *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

EXPLANATION: We must hold to his teaching. This word, “hold” is also translated as “abide,” “remain,” “stay.”

SCRIPTURE: Romans 6:17-18 ¹⁷ *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. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness*

EXPLANATION: Truly abiding and remaining in the Word means your heart is obeying it. You are not just hearing the Word. You are believing it. You’re not just studying the Bible as a novel or as a book of clever sayings. You’re letting it soak in. You are doing it. Now, you are a slave to righteousness—as a child of God.

Here's some background: Being set free from slavery would have related to the Romans in a unique way. The Romans had an interesting system where slaves could be freed. Roman owners could free their slaves just because they wanted to. Or, they could also be bought out of slavery. This process involved a Roman magistrate, and upon freedom, a freed slave would become a full Roman citizen, as were their children born to them.

Take the parable of the prodigal son. He asked for his inheritance early and went and blew it... He became a slave to his sin. But he returned home, was forgiven, and was free again. And, he was free in a new way. He had seen the world he didn't want. You see, he was free when he left home. He knew what it was like to be a slave to sin, and now he wanted to return home, and when he did, he was free again.

Let me review—

- We are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness,
- Freedom comes from obedience of the heart, and—

Third, A NEW SLAVERY TO GOD GIVES US ETERNAL RIGHTS.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 6:21-23 ²¹ *What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!* ²² *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.* ²³ *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

EXPLANATION: Paul asks the Romans what the benefit was of serving sin. Now they are ashamed of the things they used to do, but at the time even—what was the result? He answers, “Death!” There were no benefits. But, now, what is the benefit of being a slave to God? Paul says, first, holiness, and then eternal life. Isn't life full of choices?—slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. There's really no neutral ground—one or the other.

Then, listen to that great verse again—

SCRIPTURE: Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Wages—this is an interesting word. I don't think of sin as something you receive wages for because I take wages as a positive word. Wages are something you work for. So, we see, then, when we are slaves to sin, we are working for it. We are serving it. We are striving and trying to live a certain way. And, what is the payment for working for sin—for having sin as your employer? Paul says the wages is death. Not a good benefit, is it?

But, then, he talks about the opposite—not a wage we worked for, but a gift from God—our master. We have a new master, who doesn't pay us for serving him—because we can never do enough. Paul started off Romans by telling us our works do not save us. Paul repeated several times—that works do not save us—only repentance of sin and trust in Jesus save us. Only the grace of God saves us, and that's it.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION: The prodigal son who returned home didn't work for the love of his father. Quite the opposite! The father loved him unconditionally. The father gave him an undeserved gift.

ILLUSTRATION: I'll hear Dave Ramsey on the radio. People call into Dave Ramsey and say, "How are you doing?" And, he has his answer, "Better than I deserve." What a true statement for all of us. "How are you, believer in Jesus Christ?" "Better than I deserve." Because we know what we deserve, don't we? We know our works can't save us. We know our works are no more than filthy rags when it comes to salvation.

SCRIPTURAL PARAPHRASE: Ephesians 2:10 tells us God has created us for good works.

But, it's a by-product of salvation in Jesus Christ. It's not a means to salvation. Don't we have a hard time accepting the fact there's nothing we can do for ourselves in the spiritual realm? It's all because of Jesus.

APPLICATION: And, when we receive the love from Jesus, we are accepting the gift of eternal life. On our own, we are earning death. Think about that—the unsaved sinner has a job, and his job is working for sin. And, he's working really hard for the retirement package. And, his wages as he's working for sin, when payday comes, is death. And, when retirement comes, the retirement package is hell.

But, the believer in Jesus Christ realizes we are not working. We are receiving. We are repenting and receiving. We have another way to live, and that is forever as God's children. And, the retirement package is eternal life.

CONCLUSION: So, we have a choice to walk away from this gift—we have to choose to walk away from hearing the Word—this good news of life and love—we have to choose to let other things nag at our attention, we have to choose to let the lies of the enemy steal our life and joy. Or, we can, as Jesus tells us—remain in his Word. We need to let it stay in our hearts. We need to become slaves to righteousness—a slavery that is not of fear of punishment but an obedient response to who Jesus says we are. We are his children, bought out of sin at a great cost—the cost of the life of Jesus.

So, are you free? The answer is no. You're either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. I want to ask you this morning, "Where are you? Who owns you?" *Well, I'm my own man. I'm my own woman.* Not according to Romans 6. You're owned. As believers, you've been bought with a price, so don't allow yourself to be a slave to sin. Repent of sin. Remember the old saying, "You sin everyday, and you don't know it." Really? I don't think so. Because the Holy Spirit is here to convict us of our sin. And, when we sin, we should repent, and we should trust Jesus even more.

If you are running today, it's time to stop running. If you are a slave to sin, be like the prodigal son. Let it go, and return home. And, you'll see the Father at a distance, ready to welcome you with open arms. Your earthly family might not do that. Your friends might not do that. But, our heavenly Father will do that because Jesus has already paid the price for your sin.

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