

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
MAN’S RUIN & CHRIST’S REDEMPTION – Chapters 4-7

LESSON 20 – THE FREEDOM OF SLAVERY – Romans 6:15-23

In this lesson we learn the amazing truth that being a slave to Christ actually results in our freedom.

Whenever the Gospel is preached, someone is sure to pervert its message and claim that it promotes a dismissive attitude toward sin. In other words, we who believe the doctrine of eternal security believe the Bible teaches that we have a license to sin. It’s encouraging to all of us who’ve heard this argument to discover that Paul strongly shoots down this idea.

In this section of chapter 6, we find Paul asking some questions in order to answer those who reach a false conclusion about the freedom that belongs to every believer in Christ.

In our last lesson we found Paul’s answer to those who thought they should continue sinning so that God’s grace could continue to grow. He responded to this idea by asking, “Since you’ve died to sin, how can you go on sinning?” When he made the statement in verse 14, “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace,” he was actually introducing what is discussed in the rest of this chapter.

The New Problem

Romans 6:15, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?”

This sounds familiar. It is almost the exact question that Paul asked in verse 1 but with a significant difference. Verse 1 asks, “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” Verse 15 asks, “Shall we sin because we are under grace?”

Once again Paul anticipates the response of his readers. If we are no longer under the law but under grace, doesn’t that allow us the freedom to sin? Those who were teaching this false doctrine were saying there were no longer any moral restraints and that

everyone who is saved can do anything they want to do. This is the same argument used against preachers of true grace today.

Jude 4, “For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”

The New Protest

Romans 6:15, “By no means!”

Paul answers the question here just as he did the question from verse 1.

The difference between verse 1 and verse 15 was that the false teacher in verse 1 was saying, “Let’s keep on sinning so grace can increase.” The false teacher in verse 15 was saying, “Let’s keep on sinning because grace is increased.”

The purpose of grace is not to free us to sin, but to free us from sin. Grace not only justifies the Christian it changes the Christian.

The New Principle

Romans 6:16, “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?”

In reality, Paul’s illustration of slavery doesn’t grab us like it did the readers in Paul’s day. Paul was actually using the example of a certain type of slave. In Rome, there was such a thing as a voluntary slave. Someone trapped in poverty could offer themselves as a slave simply to be fed and housed. Whenever someone chose this, they gave up all freedom and became totally subservient to their new master. This is the example Paul uses to explain our slavery to sin or to Christ.

Paul tells us that we are slaves to the power we obey. If we choose to sin, we are then slaves to it. If we choose to follow Christ, we are then slaves to Him.

The reality is that we are slaves to sin, which leads to death; or slaves to obedience, which leads to life. Jesus made it very clear to us.

John 8:33-34, “They answered him, We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free? Jesus replied, Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”

Every unsaved person is a slave to sin. They are unable to commit anything but sin because of its control. Sin controls the thoughts, words and actions of everyone under its power.

The other slavery is the slavery to Christ...obedience that leads to righteousness. In a strange play on words, this slavery leads to freedom.

It is impossible to be a slave to both of these masters at the same time.

Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”

The New Persuasion

Romans 6:17-22, “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. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. 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! 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.”

Paul thanks God that his readers are no longer slaves to sin. When he says, “used to be slaves to sin” he is stating the reality of their salvation and freedom from the control of sin.

Paul goes on to describe how these believers had a genuine life-changing experience and how they were not just going through the motions. Paul has made it abundantly clear so far in Romans that we can never be good enough on our own for God to accept us. A true Christian will “obey from the heart.”

One of the things this passage proves is that it is impossible for anyone to stay the same as they are. We are either getting more and more holy or more and more sinful.

The Result of Slavery to Christ

The Freedom – free from sin!

The Fruit – fruit unto holiness!

The Future – everlasting life!

The New Promise

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

As we finish this chapter of Romans, we are reminded that the central theme...the central character in this story is Christ Jesus our Lord. His name appears in the last verse of chapters 5-8. It seems clear that the Holy Spirit doesn't want us to forget that our life is in Him.