

“Freedom in Serving God”

Romans 6:12-23

Take your Bible and be finding your place this morning in the sixth chapter of Romans. We've been in this chapter for the last couple of weeks. As far as the Christian life is concerned, there is no more important of a place to turn to than Romans 6-8.

Earlier in Romans, the apostle Paul made a tremendous statement about the gospel:

Romans 1:16—“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

“Power”—*word is dunamis and speaks of explosive power*

This Greek word entered our English language way back in 1867 when a Swedish chemist by the name of Alfred Nobel made a discovery that became his fortune. He discovered a power that was stronger than anything the world had known up until that time. He asked a friend of his who was a Greek scholar what the word for ‘explosive power’ was in Greek. To which his friend gave him this word—‘dunamis.’ Alfred Nobel decided to call his discovery by that name, so he called his explosive power ‘dynamite.’

The gospel is the ‘explosive power’ of God that leads to salvation and life change. In Romans 1-5, the apostle Paul explains what God has accomplished **for** us in the gospel. In Romans 6-8, he explains what God has accomplished **in** us through the gospel. He says that believers are brought into union with Jesus Christ. It is our union with Christ that brings us security and confidence.

Three key words in chapter 6 are:

- “Know”
- “Consider”
- “Present”

In view of our union with Christ, we are to yield our lives to Him as willing and submitted servants. Yielding to God is an act of the will based on the knowledge of what Jesus Christ has done for us. This is why the first half of chapter six is so important. Here in the second half, Paul reminds his readers that a man is a slave to the one he commits himself to obey. To be a slave of something is to become an instrument in serving its interests. Who will I serve?

This analogy of slavery would have been one that these Romans would have well been familiar with. The Roman Empire was known for its slavery. As much as a third of the empire was made up of slaves. (In fact, the population of slaves was so large that a suggestion that slaves be made to wear a distinctive style of clothing was abandoned because it would reveal their numerical strength.)

Many free men had once been slaves. It is very likely that more than half of the Roman church either were enslaved or had been enslaved at some point.

Slavery in ancient Rome took on two different forms. One form involved capturing an enemy, destroying anything that might tempt him to return home, and transport him to Rome for sale as a slave. Though this happened, it was not the most common form. The most common form of slavery was known as ‘voluntary indenture.’ The poorest people could offer themselves as slaves to someone wealthier in order to have something to eat and a place to live. It was a willing acceptance of servanthood in order to have basic needs met. That’s the idea that Paul has in mind here.

All of us serve something, it is just a matter of who or what. Some are slaves of their occupation. Driven by a desire to achieve at any cost, these slaves cannot

turn their phones off for fear of missing an email. They take vacations, but they bring their work with them while their spouses and children are neglected. I've known men who were so engrossed in their job that they missed the most important moments of their kids' lives.

Some people are slaves of material gain, driven by the illusion that contentment comes through just a little bit more. They never take the time to enjoy what they have because they are enslaved by the endless desire for more.

Then, there are some who are slaves of sensuality. The sexual revolution of the 1960s promised to cast off the chains of sexual oppression and liberate. Ironically, it has given rise to a generation of men and women who are enslaved to the very things that they boast as being their freedom.

All of us serve something, it is just a matter of who or what. It is fundamental to human design. God created us in His image to love and serve Him and bear that image all throughout creation. He intended for man to exercise dominion over the created order. Adam was created as a vice-regent, made in the very image of God. Sin has left that image marred. Yet we will always be mastered by something. All of humanity is either in Adam or in Christ. To be in Adam is to be the servant of sin. To be in Jesus Christ is to be a servant of righteousness.

The key to a full life is slavery to the right Master. God's purpose in saving sinners from their sin is not to give them freedom to do as they please or to live for themselves. His purpose is to give them the freedom to do as He pleases, which is to live righteously. An illustration of this is seen in the Exodus:

Exodus 7:16—“And you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, ‘Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness.’”

Sin is a cruel master that enslaves and brings death. And fallen humanity is in bondage to sin and is therefore under its condemnation. Like Israel, we are in need of rescue.

God delivers us from slavery to sin for the sole purpose of becoming slaves to righteousness. The paradoxical truth of the gospel is that humanity finds its truest freedom as we are yoked together with Christ as our Lord.

Here in the last half of Romans 6, the Bible says that sin, the old master, is dedicated to the destruction of those who serve it. The new master, obedience, seeks righteousness and those things which please God and give life. Since all of us will serve something, the critical issue is this—Whose slave am I? To whom will I yield my life? I want to show you from this text how freedom is found in serving God.

1—The ACTION that is required (6:12-14)

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

Slaves do the bidding of their master. They are their master’s instruments, used by him to accomplish his desires, whatever they may be. Before we were saved, we were in bondage to sin. It had dominion over us. Jesus Christ has changed all of that. That’s why Paul says in verse 12, “Don’t let sin reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.” As a monarch, sin has been deposed. Christ is now enthroned in your life. Don’t let sin have any ground. We must be proactive and intentional in the matter.

It requires at least two things:

Negatively (v. 13a)

“Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness...”

“Present”—a Greek verb that means to place beside or near; means to yield or come under

This word is used five times in the last half of the chapter and is very important. Again, if you go back through the chapter, Paul has said that Christian living is a matter of knowing, reckoning, and presenting. I need to know what God has done for me in Christ, and that involves my mind. Then, I need to consider it to be true, and that involves my heart. But then I must present my body to the Lord, and that involves my will.

Serving God involves all three—mind, heart, and will. I am not to ‘yield’ the members of my body to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.

“Instruments”—word in Greek refers to weapons of war

The idea here is that we no longer present our bodies as weapons to be used by sin to accomplish evil ends. Now it involves a battle, but since sin isn’t your master anymore, you don’t have to use your body to serve it. Even though sin doesn’t rule over you, it can still harass you. Sin does this by trying to establish a beachhead in our ‘mortal body’ from which it can launch its attacks. It still wants to make you its slave, but we don’t have to obey it anymore.

Positively (v. 13b)

“...but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”

The negative action must be followed up by the positive. It is not enough that I not present my body to sin as an instrument for unrighteousness. At the same

time, as one who has been brought from death to life, I must present my members to God as instruments for righteousness.

The idea here is that we no longer present our bodies as weapons to be used by sin to accomplish evil ends, but to become foot soldiers in the interest of righteousness. Paul will say the same thing later:

Romans 12:1 — “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

He uses the same word there, the word ‘present.’ On the basis of what God has done for you in Jesus Christ, and since you are a new creature in Christ, as an act of the will you must ‘yield’ your whole person to Christ as His willing and submissive servant.

Look at the declaration he makes in verse 14:

“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

In other words, because we have been set free from the bondage of sin, we are now free from the penalty of the law. Christ received the penalty in Himself. And now, we are under the domain of His grace.

Not only do we see an action that is required, but notice:

2—The ARGUMENT that is made (6:15-18)

“What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which

leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”

Once more, Paul presupposes a question in the mind of his readers. On more than one occasion, he had been falsely accused as being ‘antinomian’ or anti-law. His detractors had accused him of undermining and seeking to subvert the law of God.

The question is related to the one he asks rhetorically in the first verse. Notice now in verse 15 that he asks:

“Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?”

He answers his question in the same way with the same emphatic statement —“By no means!” As those who have died to sin, how can we still live in it? And as those who are now slaves to God, how can we still serve it?

Once again, Paul says it is a matter of truth that we know. Look at what he says in verse 16:

“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?”

In other words, a man is a slave to the one he commits himself to obey. To be a slave of something is to become an instrument in serving its interests. Jesus said this:

John 8:34—“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”

Someone says, “But when I sin, I’m only doing what I want to do. I’m not become anybody’s slave!” Not according to what Jesus says, and not according to what Paul says here in Romans 6. The one who practices sin reveals that he is enslaved by it because he serves its interests.

Behind every choice that a person makes is a calculation in which they say, “If I do this, it will lead me to happiness.” No matter who a person is or what a person believes, he or she is a worshiper. Again, we've been made to serve. It is fundamental to our existence. God created humanity with certain needs. In the beginning, those physical, emotional, and spiritual needs were filled as humanity lived relationally in the presence of God. After the fall, we looked to sin to fill the void that was left.

Nature abhors a vacuum. Something has to fill the void.

To worship and serve something is to attach ultimate value to it because it is something you determine you must have in order to be happy. Without it, life isn't worth living.

Whatever that is, Paul says it controls your behavior. You will do whatever you have to do to get it or keep getting it. He uses the word ‘present’ again in verse 16. It is the word of religious devotion. He is saying that you yield yourself up or offer yourself to this thing like a sacrifice in worship.

What might some of these be that we become enslaved to? Tim Keller, in his book “Counterfeit Gods,” mentions at least four categories of idols that we often turn to:

- **Power**—Some people love influence and recognition. They seek it through things like money and status because that is often how it is achieved.
- **Control**—Some people want everything to go according to their plan. They don't like uncertainty. They have to have things happen on their terms.

- **Approval**—Some crave to be accepted. They can't be happy unless certain other people admire them or desire them. Criticism is devastating to them, as well as is not being affirmed.
- **Pleasure**—Some long for physical delight, whether it be sexual or material. They stop at nothing to get it, whether it be the nicest house, the best vacations, the newest car, or creature comforts.

When a good thing becomes a 'god' thing, it enslaves. The old master seeks the destruction of those who yield to it, but the new Master gives life and leads to righteousness.

A change of masters has taken place in the Christian's life! Before you were saved, you habitually served sin. When Christ is your Lord, you habitually serve Him from the heart because a change has taken place in you.

Jesus said as much:

Matthew 6:24—“No one can serve two masters; for 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 God and mammon.”

Look at verses 17-18:

“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”

Notice how Paul says that believers have become obedient 'from the heart.' God doesn't change us from the outside in but from the inside out. Grace is inward transformation that results in outward obedience. That's what He promised:

Jeremiah 31:31-33—“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,

not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

As those who have been transformed from within the heart, these Roman Christians were those who became obedient to ‘the standard of teaching to which they were committed.’

Kent Hughes—*“In other words, the Romans’ slavery to Christ was not just a vague commitment to follow Him. It was a commitment to live by specific standards of behavior derived from the teaching of Christ...they realized that their Christianity demanded a profound slavery.”*

Literally, Paul refers to the ‘form of teaching into which you were delivered.’ We think of a believer as being someone to whom God’s Word has been delivered. Well, Paul says that he is also someone who has been delivered into God’s Word. God’s Word is given to me, and I am given to it.

He is saying that a believer is someone who is delivered ‘into’ God’s Word. The idea is that when God makes a new spiritual creation of a believer, He casts him into the mold of divine truth. His life is brought in line with the truth.

Romans 12:1—**“Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold, but let God remold your minds from within.”**

The gospel is not whatever we want it to be. There is a divinely revealed content to the gospel. The person who rejects any portion of that content gives evidence that he is not seeking God’s rule and righteousness, and is therefore not a Christian.

Let me tell you something—Christians are those who are obedient to Jesus Christ from the heart.

They have received new life...

They are given new passions...

They live with new hope...

They labor from new ambitions...

The gospel doesn't simply spray sinners with a coat of religious whitewash. No, the gospel is 'dunamis' that changes them entirely from sinners into saints who serve God from a heart that has been made new.

3—The APPLICATION that is given (6:19-23)

“I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Freedom from sin (v. 19-20)

“For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.”

Notice that phrase ‘free in regard to righteousness.’ The idea is that before they were saved, they enslaved to sin and had no righteousness and could not live righteously.

Fruit unto sanctification (v. 21-22)

“But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”

The end of sin’s slavery is death. Ironic, isn’t it? Sin claims to bring freedom. It boasts of freedom from God and His oppressive laws. Yet in reality, there is no greater form of bondage.

I put something out on my social media page on Friday:

The very ideas that gave rise to liberty on the American continent are now under attack in the name of liberty, and will ironically lead to loss of liberty. As a nation, we’ve gone out on a limb and are sawing away...

Next September will mark the 400th anniversary of the voyage of the Mayflower. In September 1620, the ship set sail from Plymouth, England, carrying 102 passengers. Each of them hoped to start a new life on the other side of the Atlantic. They were English Separatists who fled in the name of religious freedom and hoped to establish a new church in the New World. We often refer to them as the “Pilgrims.”

It was the ideas that they brought with them to the New World that led to the rise of the colonies and the ideas that eventually led to the American Revolution as a bunch of colonists stood up to the world super power of the day and won their freedom and independence. If you can’t look back on this nation’s history and see the providential hand of God, then you’re blind.

Those original ideas of freedom—freedom of religion and freedom to worship God, and Jefferson’s idea that the state would not interfere in the affairs of the church—all of those freedoms are now under attack. The sexual revolution and postmodern ideas of gender fluidity and the worship of the self at any cost are only going to lead to bondage. Like Israel of old, we’ve turned from God who liberates to gods of slavery and oppression. These gods are vicious and cruel task masters.

One of these mornings, we’re going to wake up to discover that there is an enemy at the gate—and we’ll be powerless to do anything about. History is full of the rise and fall of nations, and you are mistaken if you don’t think that the same fate can happen to us.

The perfect gentleman that He is, God will give a society of people over to the gods they choose to serve. And He will let that society of people reap the consequences of serving at those forbidden altars.

The Bible says in verse 23:

“For the wages of sin is death...”

Sin pays wages. Serve it, and you will receive its awful payment. It enslaves you and takes you to hell.

However, thank God the verse goes on to say:

“...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

John 8:36—“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”