

## **“Freedom in Serving God” (part 2)**

Romans 6:12-23

Nearly 214 years ago to the day, on October 21, 1805, the British admiral Lord Nelson defeated the combined French and Spanish fleets at the Battle of Trafalgar. It was there that some 27 British ships led by Admiral Nelson defeated 33 French and Spanish ships in the Atlantic Ocean not very far off of the southwest coast of Spain. During the battle, Lord Nelson was shot by a French musketeer and died shortly before the battle was over. But before he died, the Admiral was able to send a final message to his navy. That message was this:

*“England expects that every man will do his duty!”*

In performance of duty, the British Royal Navy pressed on to victory, and their efforts fueled by love for their country. Their motivation was love, but it was a love defined by their obedience to the command they had been given.

Words such as ‘duty’ and ‘command’ have fallen on hard times these days. People want to be ‘coaxed’ rather than commanded. Anything that reminds us of our responsibility is quickly dismissed. This is especially true if a call to duty would prove to be a source of personal inconvenience.

**John 14:15—“If you love Me, you will obey what I command.”**

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. In the first five chapters of Romans, 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”

As a practical response to our union with Christ, we are to yield our lives to Him as willing and submitted servants. It 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?

All of us serve something, it is just a matter of who or what. It is fundamental to human design. 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. God delivers us from slavery to sin for the sole purpose of becoming slaves to righteousness. Humanity finds its truest freedom as we are submitted to Jesus Christ as our ‘Admiral’ and Lord.

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. We began looking at these verses last week...

### **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.”*

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.” Sin wants to be a master and wants to enslave. Yet as a monarch, sin has been deposed. Christ is now enthroned in your life. As someone who now belongs to Jesus, Paul is saying, “Don’t let sin have any ground!” It demands that we be proactive in the matter. We can’t afford to be passive. Rather, we must be active.

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. I don’t give my mind to sin and entertain thoughts

that are against God. I don't give my mouth to sin and use my words to gossip and tear down. I don't give my hands to sin, etc.

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 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 we 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 given (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.”*

In view of the truth that we died to sin and are alive to God, we're to present ourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life. We are to yield the totality of our lives to God as instruments for righteousness. And now, as one who has been brought from death to life, a Christian is a willing slave to righteousness.

### The place of the law (v. 15-16)

Once more, Paul presupposes a question in the mind of his readers. On more than one occasion, he had been falsely accused as being anti-law. His opponents had accused him of undermining and seeking to subvert the law of God, which was certainly not true.

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?”*

The question comes on the heels of the statement he has just made in verse 14. Sin no longer has dominion over us, since we are not under law but under grace. Does this now imply we are free to sin and free to live however we want to do because we are not under law? Is grace a license for sin? Paul says, “No way!”

I think it is important that we clarify what is meant by this statement, “You are not under law but under grace.” There is perhaps no single verse of Scripture that has been more misunderstood. Even within the church, there seems to be a lot of confusion these days as it relates to a Christian’s relationship with God’s moral law. What’s the relationship?

Maybe you’ve been hiking and found yourself on a narrow mountain ridge. In the mountains where I grew up, there was a ridge that we used to reach on the upper part of our family property. You could walk this ridge for a good ways. In some places, it was very narrow and steep on both sides of the ridge. If you weren’t careful, you could slip off either side into a steep drop down the mountain.

In a lot of ways, our relationship to the law of God is like that. On one side, we can fall into legalism which makes too much of the law. Legalism is preoccupied with our own performance and thinks that we are gain a better standing with God by it. On the other side, we can fall into license which makes too little of the law. License totally disregards God’s moral commands and uses grace as an excuse. Legalism sees the law as being ultimate. Antinomianism sees it as having no place whatsoever in the Christian’s life. The legalist says, “I’m a Christian because I keep the law!” The antinomian says, “I’m a Christian because I don’t keep the law!” In either case, you define your Christianity by the law rather than saying, “I’m a Christian because I am united to Christ.”

Why so much misunderstanding when it comes to the law?

Part of the issue stems from the fact that we live in a very antinomian society. The individual is supreme. Anything that would seem to infringe upon our liberty as individuals must be bad. We push back against any instruction that compels us to live or to behave in a certain way. We're frequently told now that Christianity isn't a religion of do's and don'ts. Any emphasis on moral imperatives is quickly labeled as 'legalistic.'

Grace frees you from the law's demands, but it doesn't free you from moral imperatives. It doesn't make you an outlaw or your own moral guide. Grace gives you a heart that truly loves God and others and desires to obey His commands.

What purpose did God have in giving His law in the Old Testament? It is important that you and I understand this as it relates to Christian living. Theologians often refer to the 'three-fold use' of the law. In other words, God's law functioned in at least three capacities.

- the political function

God's law exists in this civil realm to restrain evil and promote right living. In the very next chapter, Paul will say it is God's law that gives us knowledge of sin. The basis of civil law today is the natural law of God that He has built into human design. Even a surface level study of history will reveal that the legal system of our country began with the conviction that there is a transcendent principle of right and wrong to which all human beings are subject.

God's law as stated in the Old Testament served a civil purpose for Israel. It was comprised of laws that were moral, civil, and ceremonial.

- the pedagogical function

This comes from a Greek word, 'pedagogus.' In Roman society, the 'pedagogus' was a household servant who was responsible for taking his master's children to school.

**Galatians 3:24**—"Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith."

God's law has a 'tutorial' function in that it leads us to put our faith in Jesus Christ. It shows me how much I need Him as my Savior. Martin Luther, the great reformer, said that this is the principle purpose of the law and its most valuable contribution. He said:

**Martin Luther**—"As long as a person is not a murderer, adulterer, thief, he would swear that he is righteous. How is God going to humble such a person except by Law? The Law is the hammer of death, the thunder of hell and the thunder of God's wrath to bring down the proud and shameless hypocrite. When the Law was instituted on Mount Sinai it was accompanied by lightning, by storm, by the sound of trumpets, to tear to pieces that monster called self-righteousness...The Gospel of the free forgiveness of sins through Christ will never appeal to the self-righteous. The monster of self-righteousness needs a big axe. And that is what the Law is, a big axe. The proper use and function of the Law is to threaten until the conscience is scared stiff."

- the practical function

How else would we know what God desires for humanity apart from His law? The law is merely an expression of His original intention. It is cast in negative language at Sinai because it is now given in the context of sinners. The Ten Commandments serve as the basis of God's moral law and reflect His original blueprints for human life and society:

**1. No other gods before Me**

2. *Don't make a graven image*
3. *Don't take the name of the Lord God in vain*
4. *Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy*
5. *Honor your father and mother*
6. *Don't kill*
7. *Don't commit adultery*
8. *Don't steal*
9. *Don't bear false witness*
10. *Don't covet*

When Paul says we are not under law but under grace, does this mean that God's law has been abolished? We are free to live as we want to? He answers his question in the same way with the same emphatic statement—"By no means!" What then does Paul mean when he says that we as Christians are no longer 'under' law? Paul elaborates further on this in his letter to the Galatians.

We are not under law as a way of justification.

**Galatians 3:11—“Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”**

No person has ever been saved by keeping the law. It wasn't given for that purpose. It is faith alone that justifies. And so we are not under law as a way of securing our own justification. For that, we need grace. We come in faith to Christ and God justifies us on the basis of that faith.

We are not under law as it relates to legislation.

**Galatians 5:1—“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”**

He’s not setting aside God’s moral imperatives. Rather, he is simply pointing out that all the ceremonial aspects of Judaism no longer have any hold on our lives as Christian men and women. The civil and ceremonial requirements have all been fulfilled. They have served their purpose.

We are not under law as the dynamic of sanctification.

**Galatians 5:18—“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”**

In other words, we say no to sin and yes to righteousness, not as a result of struggling in our effort to keep the law, but by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Our motive in sanctification doesn’t come from the law. Rather, it is as we understand the love of God to us in Christ that we find ourselves delighting in God’s law that is now written on our hearts. We’ve been changed from the inside!

The idea that any Christian would want to willingly serve sin and despise God’s moral law is a total contradiction. The reason is that he has been changed from within. He’s been given a new heart! Once more, Paul says that all of this 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, you are a slave to the one you commit yourself to obey. To be a slave of something is to become an instrument in serving its interests. Again, we’ve been made to serve. It is fundamental to our existence. 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 fulfilled. Whatever it is, Paul says it

controls your behavior. 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.

The power of the gospel (v. 17-18)

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

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—“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 12:2—“Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold, but let God remold your minds from within.”**

The origins of slavery to sin and to God are different. My natural birth made me a slave of sin. But my new birth has made me a slave of God! The experience of the new birth means you now embrace new beliefs and express a new behavior. 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 ‘explosive power’ that changes them entirely from sinners into saints who serve God from a heart that has been made new.

One last thing that I want you to see in the passage is:

### 3—The APPEAL that is made (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.”*

We need to remember that verse 19 follows what Paul has just said in verse 18, “You’ve been set free from sin, and have become slaves of righteousness.” It involves:

#### The responsibility of freedom (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 you were saved, you were enslaved to sin and had no righteousness and couldn’t live righteously. The gospel has changed all of that. Salvation has put a new power into you, and sin can no longer force you to do anything.

Now, I am truly free to offer my entire self as a slave for righteousness leading to sanctification. It is the result of an active effort on my part to ‘act out’ what I know

is now true of me. As I act according to the truth, my character and will is shaped into habits of holiness and righteousness. It means I am being what I truly am.

The result of fruit (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.

How does sin bring death? If a person dies in his sin, it brings condemnation and separation from God for eternity. Yet Paul is also referring to ‘death’ here as this general brokenness of life.

**Tim Keller**—*“If you don’t obey the law of God, you become a slave to selfishness, lust, bitterness, pride, materialism, worry, drivenness, fear, etc. The specific enslaving sins depend on whatever particular ‘bottom line’ you have offered yourself to instead of God. For example, if you are enslaved to approval, you will constantly experience self-pity, envy, hurt feelings, inadequacy. If you are enslaved to success, you will experience drivenness, fatigue, worry, and fear, and so on. Anything you worship besides God promises much, but delivers worse than nothing. It is slavery—a constant treadmill of seeking to grasp, or keep hold of, something which can never really deliver. The only benefit of idolatry is brokenness.”*

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.”**

One of the greatest Bible teachers of a generation ago was Ray Stedman, who served as pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California. He told the story about how one day he was walking down the street in Los Angeles and saw a fellow standing with a cardboard sign hung over his shoulders. On the front, there was a message which said, “I’m a slave for Jesus!” On the backside, there was a simple question—“Whose slave are you?”

All of us serve something. Who do you serve?

Only the person who knows Jesus can say that they are truly free. He has overthrown the power of sin and has become enthroned in their heart. If Jesus is your Lord, what evidence is there of it in your life? Is there fruit leading to sanctification?