

**Romans 6:15-23**  
**March 8, 2015**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: Have you ever taken the time to just make a list of all the roles we actually said “yes” to when we made our profession of faith in Christ? [Go to dry erase board and get people’s input]

- Child of God – John 1:12 “Yet to all who rec’d Him...he gave the right to become children of God”
- Brother or Sister to the Christian family- Matt 12:29 “Anyone who does the will of my Father is my brother and sister...”
- Ambassador – 2 Cor 5:20 – “We are Christ’s ambassadors...” Eph 6:20 – “We are ambassadors in chains.”
- Living Stones – I Peter 2:4 “A living stone being built into a spiritual house...”
- Priests – I Peter 2:9 “You are a chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood...”
- Disciples – Matt 28:19-20 “Go and make disciples....”
- Intercessors – Pray without ceasing
- Mentors/Teachers – Titus 2:1-10 Men teach younger men...women teach younger women...”
- Servants – Ezra 5:11 “We are the servants of the God of heaven” Col 3:24 “It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

Think about it: Before you and I accepted Christ as our Savior, we were spiritually lost. We were not grafted into the family of God. We were God’s enemies, so the last thing we could be was his child or any of these others. I promise you. When I was age 10 making my profession of faith in Christ, I did not fully understand all the roles I was being called into! Now as an adult who’s been a Christian for 44 years, it’s so humbling to look at these roles and realize the empowerment we’ve been given to serve Him wholeheartedly.

**Transition:** But there’s one more role that we have that shows up in today’s lesson: slaves of righteousness. This one is a harder one for me to embrace because the word “slave” has such a negative connotation to me because of our own history and how poorly slaves were treated and oppressed. I am more comfortable seeing myself as God’s child than his slave. It feels foreign to me.

However, it wouldn’t hurt me to become a stronger servant in His kingdom. I have always admired people I have met in my life who are ready to be of help. Their mindset every day is, “How can I help?” I wonder how much stronger my walk with the Lord would be if I asked that one question daily to people I interact with. I could become a better servant.

Today’s lesson is an invitation to get past the word “slave” and give it a positive new meaning so we can embrace this role without hesitation. I’m guessing I’m not alone. Who doesn’t want to be the kind of “slave” to Christ that he’s called us to be that comes with a freedom to serve him under the umbrella of grace, not law?! I think **every believer should yield to God as slaves of**

**righteousness because of the benefits he promises to those who will.** As we read today's text, I invite you to look for the BENEFITS of being a slave to righteousness.

**BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Rom 6:15-23]**

V.15:

- What then? Shall we sin because **we are not under law but under grace?** By no means!

V.16:

- Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

V.17:

- But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

V.18:

- **You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.**

V.19:

- I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in **slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.**

V.20:

- When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

V.21:

- What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!

V.22:

- **But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.**

V.23:

- For the wages of sin is death, but the **gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q v.15: What is one of the BENEFITS of being a slave to righteousness? [We are not under the law but under grace]

Q: Were we saved by the law or by grace? [By grace!]

Q: What are the dangers of trying to live under the law? [Legalism, which is the belief that we can become holy and please God by obeying laws. Examples of Legalism:

- Trying to please God by works in the flesh
- Measuring spirituality by a list of works
- Judging the outward, not the inward condition
- Becoming critical, unloving, and unforgiving.]

Remember Eph 2:8-9 that reminds us “For we have been saved by grace...” So one of the benefits of being a slave of righteousness is living under grace.

Q v.16: What are the two types of slaves according to this verse? [Slaves of sin, slaves of righteousness]

Observation: Paul uses the illustration of the master and servant and states the obvious – whatever you yield to becomes your master.

Q: What does yield mean? [surrender, capitulate, submit, relent, admit defeat, back down, climb down, give in, give up the struggle]

Q: In your day to day life, who do you yield to? [drivers on the road, our boss, spouse]

Q: I like the definition of “yield” described as “give up the struggle.” When we become slaves of righteousness, what kind of struggle(s) are we giving up? [Our own wills/agendas, the temptation to disobey]

So Paul in this verse alone reminds us that there are two kinds of slaves: slaves of sin, which used to be us, and slaves of righteousness, which is who we became once we placed our faith in Christ. Those who choose disobedience incur the consequence of death. But those who choose obedience to Christ will enjoy righteousness, which is a natural consequence of obedience. So another BENEFIT to being a slave of righteousness is that we were spared death.

Q v.17, 18: Paul shows some exuberance! He is so excited that he thanked God that though we used to be slaves to sin, we wholeheartedly obeyed the “form of teaching to which you were entrusted.” What “form of teaching” is he talking about? [The gospel! The good news!]

Share the gospel: [Grace, Man, God, Christ, Faith]

Q: So what BENEFIT did you receive when you became a slave of righteousness? [Freed of sin] So far the BENEFITS are that we are freed of sin, the penalty of death, and under grace. Let’s keep going.

Q v.19, 20: What is the next BENEFIT of being a slave to righteousness? [Holiness]

Observation: Notice that Paul doesn’t suggest that God holds His children in bondage. Rather, he phrases it as “*offer*” the parts of the body to slavery to righteousness.

Q v.21-23: What BENEFITS do you see in these final verses? [being slaves to God leads to holiness and the natural by-product is eternal life] If you serve a master, you can expect to receive wages. Sin pays wages—death! God also pays wages—holiness and everlasting life. In the old life, we produced fruit that made us ashamed. In the new life in Christ, we produce fruit that glorifies God and brings joy to our lives.

### **LOOK:**

Q: So if being a slave to righteousness is one of our roles, in practical terms, how does that look?

A: It begins with a commitment to be fully yielded/surrendered to Christ every day. We have been given a special life of faith, and we need to wake up each day saying “I have given myself to Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to serve Him.”

Perhaps it also includes a spirit of prayer in which we ask the Spirit “How can I help or participate in God’s kingdom today that glorifies God?” Then as we interact with our circles of influence, maybe we ask “How can I help” to see if we can minister to those around us.

## Close in Prayer

### Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 534–538). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

***Why we are to yield (vv. 14–23).*** Three words summarize the reasons for our yielding: *favor* (Rom. 6:14–15), *freedom* (Rom. 6:16–20), and *fruit* (Rom. 6:21–23).

***Favor (vv. 14–15).*** It is because of God's grace that we yield ourselves to Him. Paul has proved that we are not saved by the Law and that we do not live under the Law. The fact that we are saved by grace does not give us an excuse to sin; but it does give us a reason to obey. Sin and Law go together. "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the Law" (1 Cor. 15:56). Since we are not under Law, but under grace, sin is robbed of its strength.

***Freedom (vv. 16–20).*** The illustration of the master and servant is obvious. Whatever you yield to becomes your master. Before you were saved, you were the slave of sin. Now that you belong to Christ, you are freed from that old slavery and made the servant of Christ. Romans 6:19 suggests that the Christian ought to be as enthusiastic in yielding to the Lord as he was in yielding to sin. A friend once said to me, "I want to be as good a saint as I was a sinner!" I knew what he meant because in his unconverted days he was almost "the chief of sinners."

The unsaved person is free—free *from* righteousness (Rom. 6:20). But his bondage to sin only leads him deeper into slavery so that it becomes harder and harder to do what is right. The Prodigal Son is an example of this (Luke 15:11–24). When he was at home, he decided he wanted his freedom, so he left home to find himself and enjoy himself. But his rebellion only led him deeper into slavery. He was the slave of wrong desires, then the slave of wrong deeds; and finally he became a literal slave when he took care of the pigs. He wanted to find himself, but he lost himself! What he thought was freedom turned out to be the worst kind of slavery. It was only when he returned home and *yielded to his father* that he found true freedom.

***Fruit (vv. 21–23).*** If you serve a master, you can expect to receive wages. Sin pays wages—death! God also pays wages—holiness and everlasting life. In the old life, we produced fruit that made us ashamed. In the new life in Christ, we produce fruit that glorifies God and brings joy to our lives. We usually apply Romans 6:23 to the lost, and certainly it does apply; but it also has a warning for the saved. (After all, it was written to Christians.) "There is a sin unto death" (1 John 5:17). "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30, NASB). Samson, for example, would not yield himself to God, but preferred to yield to the lusts of the flesh, and the result was death (Jud. 16). If the believer refuses to surrender his body to the Lord, but uses its members for sinful purposes, then he is in danger of being disciplined by the Father, and this could mean death. (See Heb. 12:5–11, and note the end of v. 9 in particular.)

These three instructions need to be heeded each day that we live. KNOW that you have been crucified with Christ and are dead to sin. RECKON this fact to be true in your own life. YIELD your body to the Lord to be used for His glory.

Now that you KNOW these truths, RECKON them to be true in *your* life, and then YIELD yourself to God.

Something in human nature makes us want to go to extremes, a weakness from which Christians are not wholly free. “Since we are saved by grace,” some argue, “we are free to live as we please,” which is the extreme of *license*.

“But we cannot ignore God’s Law,” others argue. “We are saved by grace, to be sure; but we must live under Law if we are to please God.” This is the extreme expression of *legalism*.

Paul answered the first group in Romans 6; the second group he answered in Romans 7. The word *law* is used twenty-three times in this chapter. In Romans 6, Paul told us how to stop doing bad things; in Romans 7 he told how *not* to do good things. “You were not justified by keeping the Law,” he argued, “and you cannot be sanctified by keeping the Law.”

Every growing Christian understands the experience of Romans 6 and 7. Once we learn how to “know, reckon, and yield,” we start getting victory over the habits of the flesh, and we feel we are becoming more spiritual. We set high standards and ideals for ourselves and for a while seem to attain them. *Then everything collapses!* We start to see deeper into our own hearts and we discover sins that we did not know were there. God’s holy Law takes on a new power, and we wonder if we can ever do anything good! Without realizing it, we have moved into “legalism” and have learned the truth about sin, the Law, and ourselves.

What really is “legalism”? It is the belief that I can become holy and please God by obeying laws. It is measuring spirituality by a list of do’s and don’ts. The weakness of legalism is that it sees *sins* (plural) but not *sin* (the root of the trouble). It judges by the outward and not the inward. Furthermore, the legalist fails to understand the real purpose of God’s Law and the relationship between Law and grace.

In my pastoral experience, I have counseled many people who have suffered severe emotional and spiritual damage because they have tried to live holy lives on the basis of a high standard. I have seen the consequences of these attempts: either the person becomes a pretender, or he suffers a complete collapse and abandons his desires for godly living. I have seen too that many legalists are extremely hard on other people—critical, unloving, unforgiving. Paul wanted to spare his readers this difficult and dangerous experience. In Romans 7, he discussed three topics, which, if understood and applied, will deliver us from legalism.

**Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 464–469). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### 3. SERVE (6:15–23).

6:15–16. The mention that believers are “under grace” (v. 14) raised another aberrant idea that the apostle refuted. The question is, **Shall we sin because we are ... under grace** instead of the **Law**? The Greek aorist (past) tense here may have the sense of committing an act of sin now and then, in contrast to living a life of sin as stated in verse 1. Paul’s response was the same as before (v. 2): **By no means!** (*mē genoito*; cf. comments on 3:4) Again he proceeded to explain why that idea cannot be accepted. He asked, **Don’t you know** (“perceive intuitively” a self-evident truth; cf. 6:9) that in effect there is no middle ground between being a slave **to sin** and a slave **to obedience** to God. As the Lord Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters.... You cannot serve both God and money” (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). Paul also pointed out that being a slave to sin **leads to death** (cf. Rom. 6:21, 23). This is not physical death only or even spiritual death only, but death in general as the natural consequence and inevitable concomitant of sin (cf. Gen. 2:17). On the other hand being a slave to obedience (to God and His gospel obviously)

**leads to righteousness** (again righteousness in the general sense as equivalent to eternal life or glorification). Death is the normal consequence of sin (which is disobeying God); righteousness is the normal consequence of obeying God and living for Him.

6:17–18. This discussion reminded the Apostle Paul of what the grace of God had already accomplished in his readers' lives and he burst forth in praise. Before they responded to the gospel they had been **slaves to sin**, but they **wholeheartedly** (lit., “out from hearts,” thus inwardly and genuinely, not merely externally) **obeyed** (cf. “obedience” in 1 Peter 1:2) **the form of teaching to which they were entrusted**. Hearing the teaching of God's Word, they committed themselves to those truths. That commitment was evidenced by their response to the gospel and their being baptized. The result was that they **have been set free from sin and have become slaves** (past tense in Gr.) **to righteousness** (cf. Rom. 6:22). This is positional and must be manifested in daily experience, but it demonstrates again that there is no middle ground. Christians are not to give in to sin because they are dead to it and no longer slaves of it. It is totally contrary to God's plan for slaves of righteousness to become enslaved to sin!

6:19. To talk of being “enslaved” to righteousness and to God is not correct in one sense, Paul wrote, because God does not hold His children in bondage. But the word “slavery” appropriately describes an unregenerate person's relationship to sin and to Satan. So Paul used “slavery” for contrasting the relationship of the believer as well. Before developing this idea further, the apostle in effect apologized for its use—**I put this in human terms** (lit., “I am speaking in human fashion”)—**because you are weak in your natural selves** (lit., “your flesh”). Apparently Paul felt that his readers' spiritual perception was feeble so he used this terminology from human experience. Then he basically repeated the ideas of verses 16–17. Unsaved Romans had offered their bodies **to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness** (lit., “lawlessness”; cf. 1:24–27; 6:13). They had voluntarily become enslaved! But Paul exhorted believers now to offer themselves as slaves **to righteousness leading to holiness** (perfect holiness, as the end of the process [cf. v. 22]) in contrast with their former impurity.

6:20–23. Paul once again stated that slavery **to sin** and to **righteousness** are mutually exclusive (cf. vv. 13, 16). But he went on to indicate the superiority of being enslaved to righteousness and **God**. The **benefit** (this Gr. word is usually trans. “fruit”) of enslavement to sin was that it produced things that a believer is **now ashamed of**. But even worse, “the end of **those things is death**” (lit. trans.).

Responding to the gospel by faith and accepting Jesus Christ completely reverses things for an individual. He is **now ... set free from sin** (cf. v. 18) and has been enslaved **to God** with the result that he has **the benefit of holiness** (cf. v. 19), the subject of chapters 6–8. The sinful life gives no benefit (6:21), but salvation gives the benefit of a holy, clean life (v. 22). Whereas the “end” (*telos*) or result of sin is death (v. 21), the “end” of salvation **is eternal life**. Paul then summarized these contrasts. **The wages** (the Gr. word *opsōnia* originally meant a soldier's pay) **of sin is death** (eternal death here, in contrast with “eternal life” in v. 23b). This death is eternal separation from God in hell, in which unbelievers suffer conscious torment forever (Luke 16:24–25). This is the wages they have earned and deserve because of their sin (cf. Rom. 5:12; 7:13). By contrast, **the gift** (*charisma*, “grace-gift”) **of God is eternal life** (cf. John 3:16, 36). Eternal life is a gift that cannot be earned (cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5).

Three times in this chapter Paul wrote that sin results in death (Rom. 6:16, 21, 23). But believers have been set free from sin (vv. 18, 22) and are no longer slaves to it (vv. 6, 20) but are “slaves to righteousness” (vv. 16, 18–19; cf. v. 13). Because they are alive to God (v. 11) and have

eternal life (v. 23) they should present themselves to Him (vv. 13, 19) and live accordingly, not letting sin master them (vv. 6, 11–14, 22).

**Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pg. 1691). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.**

**6:16, 22** Paul's positive use of the metaphor of slavery may strike Christians today as offensive. However, slavery's pervasiveness in the ancient world helped convey his point graphically. In fact, everyone is a slave either to sin—an evil, malicious slave master—or to God. God grants His slaves eternal life and freedom from sin's destructive power. Sin pays death as wages; God grants life (v. 23).

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