



In the first half of chapter 6 Paul says that a Christian is united with Christ and set free from his or her old life. But in the 2nd half of this chapter he explains that we are not set free to be left on our own - we belong to God, our new master - and his “wages” are much better!

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Romans 6:15-23

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 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? 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. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

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. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 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 to 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.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The Greek phrase translated “By no means” (“NO way!” in modern English!) in verse 15 occurs 10 times in Romans (3:4, 3:6, 6:2, 6:15, 7:7, 7:13, 9:14, 11:1, 11:11) in answer to what questions?

Is there any difference between this question in verse 15 and the one in 6:1?

Have you ever heard someone ask a question like that?

How many times does Paul use the terms “slave, slaves, or slavery” in this passage?

How does Paul refer to himself in the introduction to this letter? (hint: it's the same Greek word found in verses 16, 17, and 20 of chapter 6.)

What aspect of salvation does he refer to here? (*explain your choice*)
a. justification b. propitiation c. redemption

How does 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 apply to this passage? What is he specifically discussing here?

What is the warning found in 1 Peter 2:19?

Why do you think Paul uses the term “wages” in verse 23?

What teaching about freedom does Paul add in Galatians 5:1 and 13?

Offer is found in Romans 6:13, 16, 19, and 12:1. What are we supposed to “offer”, and how do you do it?

When Bob Dylan was in his “Christian” phase (who knows which one he’s in now) he wrote a song called “You Gotta Serve Somebody”. He had a good point. Do we ever become autonomous? Does real freedom mean that we are completely on our own? Why or why not?

Verse 21 asks a great question. What’s your answer?

Before coming to Christ, did you ever get the feeling that you were a slave to something?

In Matthew 11:29-30 Jesus says,
"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

What does that tell us about the kind of “slavery” that God offers us?

What other Scriptures describe what it’s like to be a slave of Jesus Christ? (hint: look up “servant” or “slave” in your concordance)

Read the excerpt from Erwin Lutzer’s book on the following page and summarize his main points. Then discuss it as a group.

Slavery

“The Roman Empire was heavily dependant on slaves to take care of its hard labor and menial tasks. Many of Paul’s Roman recipients may have been slaves, since perhaps half the population or more were under servitude.

Slaves were taken from many nations that Rome conquered, assigned to the empire’s widespread construction projects or to its mines, fed a subsistence diet and worked to exhaustion. Injuries were common, and once they were too sick or too old to work, they were abandoned.

Household slaves, however, enjoyed better conditions. Nearly every Roman home owned at least two or three servants - some hundreds.

The Bible does not directly condemn slavery as an institution, though it contains warnings about the practice of slavery. (See Amos 1:6-9, Ex. 21, Dt. 15)

In the NT, slaves were advised to obey their masters (Eph.6:5, Col. 3:22, Titus 2:9). Elsewhere, Paul counseled believing slaves to seek freedom if they could.

Under Jewish law, no Hebrew was to be the permanent slave of another Hebrew. If a slave desired to continue with his master, he would have a mark made in the ear to signify that he had chosen to remain a slave. A slave could also buy his freedom, or another person could buy his freedom for him.

Among the Romans, the owner could free a slave outright, or the slave could purchase his freedom by paying his owner. Freedom could also be arranged if ownership was transferred to a god. The slave could then receive his freedom in return for contracting his services. He could continue with his master, but now as a free man.

Perhaps Paul had that sort of arrangement in mind when he described the moral choice of which master one would obey - sin or righteousness.

Which master are you serving?”

from The Word in Life Study Bible

Here's what happens: God identifies all believers with Christ, not in some mystical or theoretical way, but by changing our legal relationships. Before our conversion, we were obligated to obey the sinful impulses of our fallen race. Even when we became tired of sin and resolved to change, the most we could do was rearrange our lives, but we could not change on the inside.

God has done what we could not do. He has given us a new nature, and the personal presence and power of the Holy Spirit so that we can say No to our old self nature. To picture what God has done, think of yourself as a tenant in an apartment house. The landlord is making your life miserable and charges exorbitant rent. He mistreats you, barges into your apartment, wrecks the furniture, and then blames you for it. One day a new owner buys the apartment complex. You now have a kind landlord who invites you to live in the apartment rent-free. You are relieved, grateful, and looking forward to a peaceful future.

A few hours later there is a knock on the door. To your amazement, here is your old landlord, looking as mean and demanding as ever. He threatens you, reminding you that you have rented from him for many years and are obligated to obey him.

What will you do? To resist him on your own is useless--he's more powerful than you are. Your best approach is to remind him you are now under a different management; he'll have to take up your case with the new landlord.

How much obligation do you have to your old landlord? Precisely as much as does a corpse buried in the cemetery down the street. Your former landlord has no more right to demand a payment from you than he does from those whose names appear in the obituary column. That's why Paul exhorted us, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 6:11). Your authority to say no to temptation is God-given.

Although before our conversion we were duty-bound to serve our inherited sin nature, this does not mean that everything we did was evil. Most people are able to control their desires, and are capable of compassion and decency.

What it does mean is that we were never free from the futility of unsatisfied desires and frustrated passions. Pride, covetousness, and sensuality were our motivational drives. As believers purchased by Christ at high cost, our allegiance is now to Him. By the Holy Spirit, He has given us the power to say Yes to a new life.

How do you apply this knowledge when you want to break a specific habit? First, you must clearly see that legally in Christ you are already dead to your sinful passions. This is a point many people resist. They think, 'I've got to become dead; I've got to pray that God will crucify me so that I will be alive in Christ.'

But they are wrong. Being dead to sin is not something which God promises you; it is not an act you beg Him to do. He simply declares it as a fact--already accomplished. Your failures and sins cannot change what God has said. Just because you get talked into obeying your old landlord doesn't change the fact of new management. It does mean that you forgot you could confidently say No to his extortion schemes.

Let's say, for example, that you are a believer who lives with fear--perhaps a fear of people, cancer, or loneliness. Then recognize those fears as a bill from your old landlord. Remember that you do not have to listen to him--much less do what he suggests. Take the matter up with your new Manager. You are no longer duty-bound to those former relationships.

Second, you must admit the need for faith in your daily life. Your identification with Christ is not something which can be proved empirically, it's not like being able to see with your own eyes that the sun is shining. And even if it could be proven by our experience, many of us would be in trouble. An honest look at our lives hardly supports the idea that we are dead to sin and alive to God. But once we understand, with the Holy Spirit's help, that our ties with sin have already been broken, we begin to see that God has not deceived us. When we shift our attention to the completed work of the Cross and insist on our privileges, our old self surrenders to God's authority. Through faith and faith alone we personalize our victory.

Let me add that your freedom from sin is never automatic. Every inch is contested. No one ever falls into maturity, even though you are already positionally complete in Christ. One danger of reading a book like this is that you may tend to look for formulas for a new spiritual technique. But there is no substitute for waiting before God, reading His Word, and then obeying the truth He has revealed.

The Christ life is a growing relationship. Applying the Cross to your life is not something you do once and for all. Nor is it sufficient to do it every week or even once a day. It is a moment by moment, daily process. As you develop sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's work in your life, you will find that saying No to the flesh and Yes to Christ will become a way of life.

From "How to Say No to a Stubborn Habit",
pp. 63-65, by **Erwin Lutzer**