

Good morning. I will begin today with a simple observation... It is very possible that you are sitting next to someone this morning... who is a slave and does not realize it. ... (Yes...) and it is also very probable that the person sitting next to you... is sitting next to a slave!

Some people are enslaved to their work. They have one dominating allegiance in life... and that is their job... where they live out slavish obedience. ... Some are enslaved to things...(possessions.) ... All their waking thoughts are given to taking care of what they have... or dreaming about how they can acquire more. ... Others are enslaved to sinful habits which dominate their existence. (The examples are limitless.) ... The ill-tempered are slaves to their tempers... the sensual to their bodies. ... And we obey the things which enslave us. ... [P A U S E]

The point of our study today... is a very hard one to accept. But isn't such truth (that challenges us to the core)... exactly what we need for our personal growth toward holiness...? ... I am going to give you this difficult truth... strait-up (here at the beginning of the sermon)... and then I will allow the verses of our study for today (in Romans chapter six)... to expound and defend it. ... So here is the life-changing truth of our passage:

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS ABSOLUTE FREEDOM FOR ANYONE.

Either we serve sin... or we serve God. ... There is no neutral ground. ... We need to accept this... in order to understand today's verses.

(LISTEN!) No human is free to do everything he or she may want to do. There is only One Being in the universe... Who *is totally* free... of course.

That is God. ... But all others are limited by... or enslaved by... someOne (or something.) Therefore... the only meaningful question is this: **Who or what are you serving?**

The late Ray C. Stedman... (former pastor of the Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California)... tells of walking down the street in Los Angeles one day and seeing a man coming toward him with a sign hung over his shoulders. The sign read: "*I am a slave for Christ.*" (We have all – perhaps - encountered people like this... who we don't want to establish any eye contact with - because they're "Kooks.") Well Stedman waited until the man had passed him. ... He turned around to get another look at this rather eccentric individual. That is when he saw... that on his back there was another sign that said: "*Whose slave are you?*" [P A U S E]

That is exactly the point of our passage. ... But here is the exciting and very stimulating part to this truth: *To be a slave of Jesus Christ is true freedom.*

You say... "*That doesn't excite me! I'm sorry... but I don't become overly thrilled at the thought of being **any** kind of slave. In fact... that doesn't seem to make any sense... How can a slave have any freedom...?"*

OK... let's go a little further into the weeds on this – (*since you asked.*) ... Let's try to shake off some natural thinking. ... (You know)... Freedom and discipline have come to be regarded as mutually exclusive. According to most people's way of thinking... freedom is the **opposite** of discipline. (Freedom is looked at... as a **casting-off** – of all restraint... and discipline means **intentional** restraint.) However... rather than freedom being the **opposite** of discipline... freedom is the final **reward** of discipline.

My family and I just returned from a wonderful vacation on the Oregon Coast. For the past several years we have enjoyed all being together – our daughters and their husbands... our grandkids... ... and all of our dogs! (If you are a Central Oregonian... you understand! We love our dogs... here.)

We take with us a few different breeds of dogs... that we have as pets. Some breeds (because of their nature) are disciplined in some areas... but not in others. For example... we have a beagle that comes with us. And anyone who has ever owned a beagle knows how loving they can be... but a beagle will break all discipline... when their nose informs them that something is available that they might enjoy. Another one of our dogs is a lab-mix... (and labs can be very loyal.) ... But labs love to chase birds. And the beach always has birds – lots and lots of them.

These are wonderful dogs. We love them very much. We want them to enjoy walks with us down on the beach. But guess what. The beagle and the lab remain tethered on a leash... the entire time. Because of their lack of freedom... we all enjoy those walks.

Some of us are like that. God loves us. We are His forever. ... But it has been years since we have really been free. ... We know little of the liberty of obedience.

Now we also have two smaller dogs. The nature of these two dogs is that they are more desirous of our approval... (Or perhaps they're fearful of the repercussions to being disobedient.) ... Anyway...they show more discipline to stay close to us... and to come... if we call them back (for example when we see other people and animals on the beach.) For the two smaller dogs... **freedom is the final reward of discipline.**

(LISTEN!) We can see that spontaneity and freedom are the fruit of discipline – illustrated in so many different areas of life.

It is the artist who has mastered the technique of his art most perfectly... who can best respond to the vision and inspiration of the moment. ... The professional skater... and Olympic gymnast are free to perform as they do - only because they have been subjected to countless hours of grueling work... (rigidly prescribed and faithfully carried out.)

Men are free to soar into space... because they have willingly confined themselves in a tiny capsule designed and produced by highly trained scientists and craftsmen... and they have meticulously followed instructions and submitted themselves to rules which others defined....

Once we begin to realize that freedom is the final reward of discipline... it makes better sense... when our passage proclaims: *To be a slave of Jesus Christ is true freedom.* ... And it is a radical freedom. ... (For example)... I become free to love those who act as my enemy and try to do me harm.

So... as we go now to our passage... please keep in mind these two things: #1. You are either a slave to sin... or a slave to Christ. (There is no neutral ground.) ...and #2. To be a slave of Jesus Christ is true freedom.

Romans 6:15

If this sounds familiar to you (a little like Déjà vu)... maybe it is because you were here last week... when we covered the first half of Romans chapter six. Verse one says nearly the same thing. ... Verse one and verse 15 both start with “*What then? Are we to continue in sin because...*” and both verses end with the strong negation $\mu\omicron\iota \gamma\epsilon\nu\omicron\iota\tau\omega$ (“*By no means... don't*”

even *BEGIN to think this way!*) ... And I told you how we never wanted to have our professor (Dr. Hillstrom) shout *μοι γενοιτω* at us... (in other words... “*Don’t you dare think that...*”)... when I was in Greek class back in seminary.

Both verse one and verse 15 start with “*What then? Are we to continue in sin because...*” They both end with *μοι γενοιτω* ...and then both times (even) the next verse says “*do you not know...*” ... (Last week it was “*Do you not know that you have died with Christ?*” ... and this section is “*Do you not know that you are slaves of Christ?*”) ... These two sections of Romans chapter six are very similar... and (!) the similarities do not stop there. Today’s passage is part two... of last week’s section – “How to be holy.”

In part two (that we are looking at today)... Paul picks back up with the idea of us “presenting the members of our body to the Lord.” Let me just recap a little of what was said last week about presenting the members of our body to the Lord... and then we will move on... in today’s section.

There is an urgent sense to what Paul is writing here... in last week’s section... and again in chapter 12 (verse one)... and I think he is being somewhat literal. So every day... (and no less than once a day)... we should do it several times a day... where we come before the Lord and say something like:

“God... here I am... alive from the dead. I have died and I am resurrected to new life – with Christ. Praise Your Name forever! Now here is my body. Today... I want to offer you my mind for You to use. Let me think right thoughts. Here are my eyes and my ears. Let me observe life around me the way You do. ... God... here is my mouth which has my tongue. Let it be used to build others up... and not for

*tearing down...grumbling... un-wholesome talk... or gossip. ...
(Oregon has enough forest fires burning out of control right now.) Oh!
And my heart... God... It has all these passions. Let me passionate
only about the things You are passionate about. Let me see where
my passions and Yours are not the same. Let my hands do Your
work... and my feet only take me where You want me to go.*

OK... now let's move forward with today's passage.

Romans 6:16-19

With this mention of slavery... Paul got their attention indeed! ... The ancient Romans were well known for their slavery... which took two forms. The more familiar kind of slavery involved capturing an enemy... destroying anything that might tempt him to return home... and then transporting him to Rome for sale on the auction block.

But an older... more common type of slavery was "voluntary indenture." Impoverished people could offer themselves as slaves to someone... in order to have food to eat and a place to live. In other words... people willingly accepted slavery in order to meet their basic needs.

In the American South after the Civil War... many freed slaves had no other choice but to become sharecroppers... which gave them land and livelihood... but required them to "share" most of their produce with the landowner. Of course... this was merely servitude with a gentler... kinder name. ... Nevertheless... no one chose a cruel master except as a last resort.

Paul was asking (in effect)... "*Why would you choose a master whose dedicated purpose is to keep you enslaved and ultimately kill you? That's like an emancipated slave choosing to help his old master reinforce his*

chains and build a gallows! Why would anyone willingly serve such a cruel master?"

We have been set free from a cruel master... to become a slave to one Who is kind and has our best interest at heart. Because of His grace... we should want to be His servant.

There's a story that has been told from Civil War days before America's slaves were freed, about a northerner who went to a slave auction and purchased a young slave girl. As they walked away from the auction, the man turned to the girl and told her, "You're free."

With amazement she responded, "You mean, I'm free to do whatever I want?" ... "Yes," he said. ... "And to say whatever I want to say?" ... "Yes, anything." ... "And to be whatever I want to be?" ... "Yep." ... "And even go wherever I want to go?" ... "Yes," he answered with a smile. "You're free to go wherever you'd like." ... She looked at him intently and replied, "Then I will go with you." ... [P A U S E]

Why wouldn't you want to offer yourself to someone like this? ... You and I have a choice between two masters. Either we serve sin... or we serve God. ... There is no neutral ground. ... To Whom will we go?

But the point that Paul is making... is that we must present ourselves to the Lord... as His slaves. ... (LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING!) ... No person can expect victory... who doesn't really want victory. ... [P A U S E] ... No person can expect victory... who has a soft attitude toward obeying God. ... God expects sincerity as much today... as He did when He said to rebellious Israel:

Jeremiah 29:13 (ESV)

¹³You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

This is a powerful call to commitment. It is a call to slavery — a call to total obligation... total commitment... total accountability. ... But... as I have been saying... Slavery to God is the greatest freedom a human can ever know.

When God created Adam and Eve... they perfectly bore their Creator's image. ... They lived in perfect harmony with their created purpose... which was to live in limitless communion with Him... to enjoy uninhibited intimacy with one another... and to rule over the rest of creation as His vice-regents. Never was humankind so free... as when they lived in harmony with their created purpose (or as Paul has worded it in our passage today)... "as slaves to righteousness."

When we become His indentured servants... we not only please God... we do what is best for ourselves. ... That's how the Lord created the universe to work before it was corrupted through disobedience. ... But humanity exchanged truth for a lie... and looked to sin (rather than their Creator to meet their basic needs.

But... by becoming His indentured servants... it frees us to live in harmony with our created purpose... (which is to live in limitless communion with God... to enjoy uninhibited intimacy with one another... and to rule over the rest of creation as His co-rulers.)

Romans 6:20-21

There was nothing lasting about the old life of sin. ... This is what led the apostle to ask what he did in verse 21. "*When you were pursuing sin, what did you gain?*"

(As I was saying...) In the beginning... Adam and Eve enjoyed peace with God and had all of their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs fulfilled. ... But after the Fall... mankind has looked to sin instead.

For example... people have turned to mind-altering drugs for a basic desire to feel good rather than bad. They usually find that the payoff is immediate and immensely satisfying - *in the short term*. ... But in the *long* term... they increase the user's need for the drug... while decreasing his or her body's response. ... In other words... the drug gradually creates a greater need for more... and it takes larger and larger doses to achieve the same satisfying effect. ... This "Law of Diminishing Returns" is true about all addictions (drugs... sex... gambling... eating.) Sin enslaves.

Paul would have us see that we used to be free from righteousness... (we did as we pleased)... and the only fruit that it brought us - was shame... and death.

What did you gain by doing those things? ... You were ashamed of what you used to do... and you experienced the very real sense of being alienated from God. ... What Paul asks us in verse 21... ("*What did you gain from being a slave to sin?*") is a good question to ask when we are tempted to enjoy the momentary pleasures of sin. ... (You see)... Most Christians regret the times they yielded to temptations that looked so attractive... at the time when they were drawn to sin.

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.

Romans 6:22

Do you remember the conversation the Lord Jesus Christ had with the Jewish religious leaders of his day... as recorded in John's Gospel...? Jesus had been speaking about the source of His teachings... and some of the Jews had believed on Him in a simple (but undeveloped) way. ... So He encouraged them to remain with Him... and continue to learn from Him... saying, "*If you hold to my teaching [that is, continue in it], you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:31-32).

This infuriated some of His listeners... (probably those who were not true believers)... because they did not like the suggestion that they were *not free* — (just as many resent any similar suggestion today.) ... They immediately replied, "*We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?*"

Now... This was a ridiculous answer... when you stop and think... (of course)... that the Jews had been slaves to the Egyptians for many years

prior to the exodus. ... During the period of the judges there were at least seven occasions when the nation came under the rule of foreigners. ... There was also the seventy-year-long Babylonian captivity. ... In fact... even while they were talking to Jesus... they were being watched over by occupying Roman soldiers... and they were carrying coins in their pockets that testified to Rome's domination of their economy

But instead of reminding them of these obvious facts... Jesus answered on a spiritual level... saying, "*I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*".

What kind of freedom was Jesus talking about? ... True freedom... (of course)... the only real freedom there is. ... It is not liberty to do just anything at all. ... It is the ABILITY to do what is right.

Romans 6:23

I have always used this verse as an appeal for non-believers to give their life to Christ. But the context in which Paul wrote it... is an appeal for those who are already believers - to obey Christ... and grow their holiness.

Why? ... Because keeping sin as your master... will alienate you from God. ("Death" means separation.) Paul is writing to believers about their life - right now. He is urging them to stop sinning. If you don't - God will seem far away... and you will experience emptiness of purpose and shame. But the free gift of God is a new life that starts right away. Instead of alienation from God... it is life with God (now and into eternity.) ... [P A U S E] ...

This morning... I am going to close again... with the practical words of Chuck Swindoll... as he closed his comments on Romans chapter six.

Realize first, it is possible to be a slave to something and think you are free. This is the predicament of the lost. They slavishly serve something they think will bring them fulfillment or eliminate their problems. Money, career, sex, relationships, adventure, power, recognition, education, achievement, even addictions . . . the idols of this world are legion. I see people sacrifice to keep their god alive and fear what life will be if—or when—the object of their hope passes away. And I stand amazed at their inability to comprehend the extent of their slavery as, all the while, they keep trying to convince themselves and others that life is good just the way it is. Moreover, they refuse to heed the good news for fear that submission to Christ will take away their freedom!

Second, it is possible to be free and think you are enslaved. This second problem is almost as tragic as the first. Counseling offices around the world are filled with Christians who struggle to accept the fact that they no longer must serve imaginary gods. They remain shackled to compulsions, hiding in shame, not aware that they now worship a God who doesn't demand, but empowers. They have peace with God, who does not condemn His children but longs to see them victorious over sin.

The remedy for both problems is the same: truth.

Nonbelievers need to know “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23). The “freedom” they experience is an illusion designed to draw their attention away from the fact

that sin is robbing them of everything they value and will eventually drag them into eternal torment.

Believers, on the other hand, must learn to embrace their freedom and recognize temptation for what it is. Each opportunity to sin is an invitation to submit our bodies to something. Temptation asks the following question: *“To which master will you submit your body for the next few moments: your compulsion, which always leaves you feeling emptier than before, or Christ, who always affirms your value as a child of God?”*

Frankly, I have found that simply not doing something wrong when tempted is not enough. I need something else to which I can submit my body. Here is a four-step process that I find very helpful when tempted to do wrong:

1. Flee temptation; that is, change your circumstances. Physically move from where you are and quickly go somewhere different, even if it's just for a few minutes.
2. Do something that brings honor to God as an alternative. Prayer is good, but I suggest adding something more tangible. Systematically answer the urge to sin with a godly activity.
3. Thank God for providing the freedom to choose Him over wrongdoing, and ask Him for encouragement. Spiritual warfare is exhausting!

If God is speaking to you about any area of your life - obey him now.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS ABSOLUTE FREEDOM FOR ANYONE.

Either we serve sin... or we serve God. ... There is no neutral ground.