

Anglican Church Noosa
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Romans 6:15-23
Slaves to Righteousness
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I thought I'd start by checking in with how you've all gone after last week - being dead to sin and alive to God. How have you been going putting that into practice?? Are you getting better at **NOT** listening to sin's voice? Have you gotten out of the mud?

Cause if you're not doing so well, or if you forgot about it during the week, I could leave this go for today, so you can keep reflecting on last week.

We live in a culture that worships the idea of autonomy. The modern dream is simple:

- be your own master,
- write your own rules,
- and don't let anyone tell you what to do.

We think of freedom as the complete absence of restriction.

We believe that if we can just break free

- from traditional expectations,
- from institutional authority,
- from moral boundaries,

then we will **finally** be happy.

But Paul shatters this illusion in Romans 6.

He looks at our modern quest for radical independence and says, "Mistake."

Paul argues that boundary-less freedom is a myth. Human beings are never completely autonomous.

We are hardwired to serve something. We are always under some sort of authority.

The only real choice we have in this life is not whether we will serve a master, but which master we will serve.

This morning, we are looking at Romans 6:15–23.

Here, Paul uses a deeply provocative first-century metaphor to explain the mechanics of the Christian life.

He talks about slavery. Specifically, he contrasts being a "slave to sin" with being a "slave to righteousness."

For a contemporary audience, the word "slavery" rightly triggers horror and disgust.

For those who have made themselves aware, we are horrified of the different sorts of slave trade that exist today, with young children being used and abused in some clandestine mining operations; with girls and women being traded on the sex market.

We think of the brutal, racially driven slavery of the transatlantic slave trade.

And it is vital to note that Paul is using the cultural framework of the Greco-Roman world—where slavery was an economic reality rather than a race-based system—he's using it as an analogy to describe spiritual ownership.

He is actually asking a fundamental question that cuts straight to the heart of our 21st-century lives:

Who owns you?

What drives your choices; what drives your desires; what drives your identity?

Let's dive into the text to see how **true freedom is found, paradoxically, in the absolute surrender to Jesus Christ.**

Paul begins v.15 with a rhetorical question that he knows his listeners are thinking: "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!"

To understand why Paul asks this, we have to look back at what he just established.

In the first half of Romans 6, Paul argues that Christians have died to sin and been raised to new life with Christ.

He declared that we are no longer under the crushing condemnation of the Law, but under the radical, unmerited favour of God's grace.

Naturally, the human heart tries to exploit this. We noted it last week, didn't we ... the distorted logic goes like this:

"If God loves to forgive sin, and if my standing with Him depends entirely on His grace and not my performance, then it doesn't really matter how I live. In fact, if I sin more, God gets to show more grace! Let's keep sinning!"

Paul's response is immediate and explosive: "By no means!" (In the original Greek, it is an incredibly strong word - it could be translated as "**God forbid!**").

Why is Paul so single minded on this point? Because to think that grace allows us to keep sinning shows a profound misunderstanding of what grace actually does.

Grace does not just change our legal status in God's eyes; it changes our citizenship, our nature, and our loyalty. Grace is not a license to sin; it is the power to break free from sin.

Look at verse 16: "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

Paul lays down an unchangeable law of spiritual dynamics: Your master is revealed by your obedience.

We like to think we can flirt with sin without becoming its servant. We think... I can check out this website just this once.... I can indulge this bit of gossip.... I can harbour this resentment.... I can let my career consume my family life just for this season.... I am in control.

Paul says, "No, you aren't."

Every time you give your mind, your time, or your body to a sinful habit, you are presenting yourself to that habit as a slave.

Think how this plays out in contemporary life:

What about Career: We think we are just ambitious. But when our work demands our weekends, our integrity, and our emotional presence at home, we aren't driving the career—the career is driving us.

What about seeking Approval: We think we are just people-pleasers. But when the fear of what others think dictates what we say, how we dress, and what we value, we are enslaved to their opinions.

What about Consumerism: We think we are just enjoying our money. But when our debt climbs because we must have the latest tech, the best car, or the perfect home aesthetic, we are serving material things.

Sin is a cruel master. It always promises freedom, but it actually controls. It promises fulfillment, but it results in addiction, exhaustion, and broken relationships. You cannot compromise with sin without eventually being consumed by it.

But thank God, the story does not end there. vv.17 and 18 bring us the glorious gospel pivot:

"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

Notice the order; how did this transformation happen?

It wasn't because the Roman Christians woke up one day and resolved to try harder. It wasn't a self-help program.

It was a work of God.

Paul says, "thanks be to God."

It was God who initiated the rescue.

And notice how they responded: they obeyed "from your heart the pattern of teaching."

This "pattern of teaching" is the Gospel—the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day to reconcile us to God.

True Christian conversion is not just an intellectual agreement with a set of doctrines.

It is heart-level surrender to a Person. The Gospel "claims your allegiance."

When you see the beauty of what Jesus did on the cross—how He was bound so that you could go free, how He poured out His life to pay a debt He didn't owe—your heart melts.

You don't serve Him out of cold duty or fear of punishment. You serve Him out of deep, overflowing gratitude.

Paul says the result is definitive: "You have been set free from sin."

If you are a believer in Christ today, sin is no longer your master.

It may still harass you; and tempt you; and trip you up.

But it does not own you.

Its legal claim over your life has been completely cancelled at the cross. You have a new owner.

You are now a slave to righteousness.

In v.19, Paul speaks in human terms because of their natural limitations. He gives a practical, daily command:

"I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. 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."

This is the core of Christian discipleship.

It's what theologians call sanctification.

It is the daily process of becoming what God has already declared us to be.

Paul points out that before we knew Christ, our growth in sin was progressive: "ever-increasing wickedness."

Sin is never static. It accumulates. It drags you deeper.

One compromise leads to the next, worse compromise.

But righteousness is also progressive!

Paul says we must now offer the parts of our body—our eyes, our ears, our tongues, our hands, our minds—in service to righteousness, which leads to "holiness" (or sanctification).

How do we do this practically on a Tuesday morning?

Instead of feeding our minds with lust or envy on social media, we offer our eyes to read Scripture, to see the needs of the hurting, and to appreciate God's creation.

Instead of using our words to tear down, gossip, or manipulate, we offer our tongues to encourage, to speak truth, and to pray for others.

Instead of hoarding wealth for personal luxury, we offer our resources to support the local church, bless the poor, and advance the global mission of the Gospel.

Sanctification is a series of daily, hourly choices to say "No" to the old master and "Yes" to the new One.

It is retraining our reflexes under the Lordship of Jesus.

Paul concludes this section by drawing a stark, unforgettable contrast between the two lives and their ultimate destinations. He asks them to look at their past lives.

vv.20–21: "When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!"

Paul appeals to their memory. He says, "Think back to when you lived without God. What did that lifestyle produce? What were the dividends?"

The answer is shame and emptiness. The things we once thought were sophisticated, rebellious, or freeing, are the very things that now bring us regret.

And the ultimate trajectory of that path is death—both physical death and eternal, spiritual separation from God.

But look at the contrast in 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."

The service of God pays completely different dividends. The immediate benefit is holiness—a life that is beautiful, ordered, peaceful, and reflective of Jesus. The ultimate outcome is eternal life—the unbroken, joyful fellowship with our Creator that begins now and lasts forever.

Then, Paul summarises the entire argument in one of the most famous verses in all of Scripture, v.23:

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

Look closely at the words Paul chooses here. He switches metaphors from slavery to economics, and the contrast is profound.

First, "The wages of sin is death."

Wages are something you earn. They are what you are owed based on your labour. If you work for sin, if you let sin run your life, the pay slip it hands you at the end of the day is death. It is the fair, earned compensation for turning your back on the Author of Life. God does not arbitrarily sentence people; He simply allows them to receive the full, finished product of the master they chose to serve.

Second, "But the gift of God is eternal life."

Paul does not say "the wages of righteousness is eternal life." He changes the word from wages to gift (in Greek, *charisma*—a gift of pure grace). You can earn death, but you can never earn eternal life. It is not a pay slip for your good behaviour. It is a free, unmerited gift, paid for in full by the blood of Jesus Christ.

And notice where this gift is found: "in Christ Jesus our Lord." It is not a package God ships to you from a distance. It is wrapped up in a relationship with a Person. To have the gift, you must have the Lord.

We began this morning by talking about the contemporary obsession with absolute freedom. We want to be independent. We want to be our own bosses.

But the Gospel reveals that true freedom is not found in autonomy.

True freedom is found in alignment with our Design.

Think of a train. A train is only free when it is locked onto the tracks. When a train stays on the tracks, it can run at high speeds, carry massive loads, and fulfil its exact purpose. If the train says, "I want to be free! I want to break away from these restrictive tracks and drive through the open field," what happens? It crashes. It gets stuck in the mud. It ruins itself. It loses all its power.

The tracks do not constrain the train; the tracks are the very condition of its freedom.

God's righteousness—His lordship over your life—is the track you were built to run on. When you submit to Jesus as your Master, you aren't entering a prison. You are stepping onto the tracks.

You are discovering the joy, the power, and the purpose for which you were created.

So, who owns you today?

If you are exhausted from trying to serve the masters of career, perfectionism, comparison, or secret sin, listen to the invitation of the Gospel.

Jesus is the only Master who died to save His servants.

He is the only Lord who does not exploit you, but empowers you.

Let's turn away from the wages of sin, embrace the free gift of God, and offer ourselves fully, joyfully, as slaves to righteousness.

Amen.