

Anglican Church Noosa
Romans 6:15-23
Slaves to Righteousness
Rev'd Chris Johnson

Human beings are balls of energy.

The only question is where will that energy be directed?

Will it be in a self-directed life? Or a God directed life?

Paul talks about it in terms of slavery.

We are either

- slaves to our sinful self or
- slaves of God.

Paul uses the word slave or slavery 9 times throughout this passage. It is a strong word. Slavery binds us to another. It is not something that is nice.

But it is an apt word because he is saying that what we put our energy into controls our life. Eg. If you choose to do a law degree and put all your energy into that, it will direct your life down a certain path. Your life will be controlled by the Legal Studies department at the University. They will tell you the exams you have to pass and the prac work you have to do. Then the law firm which employs you will have all sorts of expectations of you. It could be likened to slavery, but you willingly submit to it because it is your chosen career.

But you could choose to do architecture or history or computer science you would be a slave to a whole lot of different expectations and your life would go down a different path.

Paul of course is not just talking about career choices. He is talking about the fundamental choice everybody has to make, between living for God or living for yourself, the God directed life or the self-directed life.

Paul doesn't say self-directed, he simply uses the word sin. But I think when we use the word sin most people think about 'sins' – all the wrong things, bad things that people do. Underlying all of those is that fundamental defiance of God which says I want to direct my own life my own way, and God you just stay on the sidelines please. The Self-directed life is the underlying sin, and I think that is what Paul is talking about here.

The words associated with slavery to Self, the Self-directed life are –

- sin v16, v17, v20, v22, v23
- death v16, v21, v13
- impurity v19
- ever increasing wickedness v19
- free from the control of righteousness v20
- shame v21

There are obvious examples of the self-directed life leading to death. If someone has decided to put all their energy into the eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die, philosophy of life; then I hope you can see how that already has the stench of death about it. It is a downward spiral into a lack of purpose, alcohol and drug addiction, broken relationships and a very sad life.

The words associated with slavery to God, the God-Directed life are -

- grace v 15
- obedience v16, v17
- righteousness v16, v18, v19
- set free from sin v18, v22
- holiness v19, 22
- eternal life v22, v23
- gift v23

If you put your energy into a God directed life, all these beautiful qualities emerge. I hope you can see how life giving that can be. Think Margie Grainger, Nathan and Diane Lovell, David and Zoe Browne. I could have also rattled off a long list of members of this congregation, but I didn't want to embarrass you.

Each Sunday we send ourselves out to be a living sacrifice for God. That means being slaves of God who spend our lives in service. Christians should be known in our community as people who serve and bring life.

But you know what, appearances can be deceptive. Let's try and dig a little deeper. Respectable people can be just as big a sinners as people who are obvious sinners. Being a slave to sin is much bigger than just the partying all night and getting drunk. Sin is simply a self-directed life without God. And you can choose to do that in an immoral way eg getting drunk or in a very respectable way.

Let me give you an example of the respectable way. It maybe that you put that big ball of human energy inside of you into your career. That's a very respectable thing to do, isn't it. But if that's your number one goal rather than serving God, I want to suggest there will be all sorts of pitfalls along the way.

- Maybe jealousy if other people get promoted ahead of you.
- Maybe insecurity if someone is critical of your performance.
- Maybe you will manipulate situations to make you look good and others bad.
- Maybe you will even put the knife into someone else's back to get to the top. Of course you can justify it because you know the best way to do things, and you know how to get results, and they don't!

The sin of a self-directed life is not always easy to see. It has to do with a person's motivation and that is not always easy to see. Unless of course you're very close to a person, in which case it might be blindingly obvious. The possibility of self-deception for any one of us is very real. People, even those claiming to be Christian, can appear so nice and respectable but actually be living for un-Godly motives. Eg. power or money, or maybe a deep need for acceptance or for others to affirm them. There are all sorts of subtle sins out there that can be hidden behind respectability.

If you look at Jesus teaching carefully, so many of his parables and his interactions with people were about showing how "respectable" people needed to repent just as much as obvious sinners. That is because repentance is fundamentally about turning from the self-directed life to the God-directed life. Turning from being a slave to sin/ie self, to being a slave to God and his righteousness.

But, I want to bring us back to Paul's original question. V1 *"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?"*

For Paul it was an important question for his Jewish audience because the law meant so much to them. When I say the law, think of Moses, the Ten Commandments and all that is written in the Torah those first five books of our Bible.

For the Jew keeping the law was a very important part of belonging to God's covenant community. Salvation was seen in terms of covenant faithfulness more than anything else and that meant keeping the law.

So when Paul came along preaching faith was all that was needed for covenant faithfulness, the Jews got a little upset.

- They were worried that without the law people would go off the rails.
- They were worried it would give a free license to sin and immoral behaviour.

Hence Paul's question, 'Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?'

What Paul is saying in this passage is that grace is actually a far better motivation for good behaviour than the law. Knowing the grace of God and directing your human energy into a God-directed life is itself salvation. Binding yourself to God, slavery to God is far superior in every way to slavery to sin.

Slavery to sin is self-defeating and pays its own wage which is death, Paul says in Romans 6:23.

Let me use this illustration-

Imagine driving home one night, taking your familiar route and thinking you know the way home, it should be a breeze. But then you see a sign on the side of the road which says, 'Slow Down'. Then a little further a sign which says, 'Detour Ahead', then another one which says 'Prepare to Stop'. But the road looks fine just like it has every other time you've driven it so you just keep going full steam ahead. But then you get distracted and you miss the last sign which says, "Bridge Out! Take Another Route". And all of a sudden it's too late, and you go hurtling over the edge of the bridge into the deep ravine below. You failed to see the danger signs and then it was too late to pull out.

Well tragically this is many people's lives... and maybe you know this for yourself from firsthand experience. You thought you had life worked out. You knew exactly what you wanted and with single minded determination were going for it.... but now you realise the self-directed life does not deliver all that it promises.

In contrast to that, the God-directed life is a life under grace.

It is liberation. It is freedom. It means you want to love God, so you listen to his warning signs in the Bible. You have a new heart which wants to obey them and please him. Apart from the fact that you know that they're there for your own good anyway.

Do you remember when you got your first Driver's License? Freedom! For me it meant no longer having to ask Mum and Dad to take me where I wanted to go. I could borrow the family car. And when I got my own car, it opened up a whole new world of freedom to go to new places.

However, getting a Driver's License does not mean you can go out on the road and do whatever you like. New freedoms always come with new frameworks for ensuring you truly are free. If I didn't obey the rules of the road would I really be free? It's only if I drive on the left-hand side of the road and stop at the traffic lights, and keep the speed limit that I will get to my destination in the quickest possible time, safely.

Christian freedom does not come in a moral vacuum. Christian ethics are like the rules of the road. They are not there to make our journey through life more difficult. They are there to bring order to a chaotic world and order to our chaotic lives.

More than that, Christian freedom comes in a covenant, the new covenant which is God's framework for us to truly be free. At the heart of the covenant is the grace of God seen in Jesus' death and resurrection. As we see all he has done for us we realise we owe him our allegiance and in our allegiance to him we are truly free.

So let me bring this to a conclusion.

We are all slaves to something. We are slaves to whatever we are living for. Every human being is a ball of energy which is directed towards whatever we are living for.

What has captured your life?

Dave Smith said something really profound at our staff meeting about this. He said, "Sin may attract you, but eventually it will always disappoint you."

What has captured your life? Are you a slave to the Self-directed life and sin; or are you a slave to God?

We can only be truly free in God.