

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Free-Agent Slaves

by Dan Trygg

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!¹⁶ Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?¹⁷ But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to which you were delivered,¹⁸ and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in holiness.”

Rom. 6:16-19

In our last study in Romans 6, we talked about how **it is inconsistent with God's purpose in redeeming us for us to continue to live in sin.** The apostle John tells us that Jesus came “to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins... The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (I Jn. 3:5,6,8b). It is clear from his argument that the “works of the devil” are sins. The word translated as “destroy” literally means to “loose, untie, break, release, unbind, remove, annul, dissolve, undo, demolish or destroy”. **The impact of Jesus' presence in our lives should be to unloose the stranglehold that sin has on our lives, to break and unbind the bondage of its power over us.** Jesus laid down His life to not only pay the debt that we owed, but also to set us free from any remaining obligation to serve sin. He broke its power. **True enough, there is a learning process, a “renewing of the mind”, that we must go through in order to really grasp what Jesus has done for us, and appropriate the power that enables us to walk in victory.** Nevertheless, the way to freedom *has been opened to us*, so, as Paul said earlier in Romans 6, “Even so, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (vs. 11). To continue to live in sin was unthinkable to Paul. “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (vs. 2) In fact, it was that question which sparked the apostle’s argument in vss. 3-15.

Today’s study is on the last half of Romans 6. **Once again, an anticipated objection by an imaginary opponent, ...undoubtedly sparked by real-life questions which Paul had to repeatedly answer..., provided the impetus for the argument in the last half of this chapter.** Paul had made the declaration, “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace” (vs. 14). This was a conclusion of the argument in the first part of the chapter, namely that we had died with Christ, and our old self was crucified with Him, so that the power of sin might be made ineffective, and we would no longer be slaves of sin. The objection, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” is in direct reaction to the statement made in the previous verse. As you can see, **the objection totally misses the point of Paul’s declaration. The point is that sin is defeated. It no longer has the power to dominate.** The way it was defeated was by God’s *grace*, not by works of the law. The imagined opponent twists this around to say, “Well, if we are no longer under law, but under grace, then we can sin, if we want to, right? I mean, grace will cover any sins we might commit, won’t it?” Once again, Paul is horrified. “May it never be!”

A thumbnail overview of the rest of the chapter could be summarized by verse 16, “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death (lit., “unto death” or “toward death”), or of obedience resulting in righteousness?”

Even though Jesus set you free from slavery to sin, if you keep going back there, doing that old stuff, then it is as though you remain enslaved to it. If you continue to serve that old master, ...if you continue to do those old behaviors..., you will also continue to get the results that follow, which in this case is death, *impurity and further lawlessness* (cf. vs. 19). The fruit of those old behaviors brought you *shame* before. You did things of which you are now ashamed and experience regret. The end result of those behaviors is *death* (vs. 21). That is where following sin as your master will lead you. **In verse 23, the apostle uses one more word picture to try to communicate to us the inevitability of consequences for choosing to participate in sin. He says, “The wages of sin is death...”.** Wages. Everyone understands how *that* works. If you choose to work for someone, ...if you put in so much time and effort to do the job which they hired you for..., then payday will come, and you will receive the *compensation* you have earned. It is what is *owed* you for your service. In this case, however, **the word for “wages” (Gk., *opsōnion*) is a technical military term, used for subsistence rations**, or the expense money to use to live on while engaged in military service. It is interesting that Paul chose to use *this* term, which occurs only 4 times in the NT (Lk. 3:14; Rom. 6:23; I Cor. 9:7; II Cor. 11:8), rather than the more common word for pay or wages (*misthos* – 29x). If sin is our master,

not only will we end up with death as the end result, ...even our subsistence pay, our rations, will be death! This is the *third time* Paul says that death will come to those who choose to present themselves to serve sin (vs. 16,21,23). So, **when we present ourselves to serve sin as our master, not only will this move us toward death, and the end result or fruit will be death, but we will even have to be “eating death” along the way!** Yuck! Not a very pleasant picture at all! Oh, and let’s not forget the shame, impurity and growing lawlessness that we experience as well.

These new Roman Christians chose, from the heart, to obey the pattern of teaching to which they had been delivered (vs. 17). As a result, they became freed from sin and became slaves of righteousness. **While serving sin produced increasing shame, impurity and further lawlessness, what does serving righteousness produce? It moves us toward righteousness (vs. 16) and holiness (vs. 19). The fruit of that service is further sanctification (both consecration toward God and purity of life), and the end result is eternal life** (the life of the Age to Come, the life of God’s Spirit, available for us *now* at the *present* time, as well as on into the future). While serving sin as our master, we got the subsistence rations of death, but if we choose to invest ourselves toward serving righteousness and God, we will receive eternal life as a free gift of God’s favor. So, **while serving sin, we will be subsisting on something that slowly is killing us, but when we serve God, we are freely and graciously given the empowerment of God’s Spirit to invigorate and energize us. This life is graciously given, i.e., it is granted to us way out of proportion to what we deserve, or have earned.** While wages are given in proportion to the time, effort or accomplishment involved in a job, the life of the Spirit is poured out *based upon God’s gracious heart*, ...His desire to share Himself with us..., freely. **We don’t earn the life in the Spirit by our efforts, and get a proportional payout (*misthos*), ...or a mere subsistence ration (*opsōnion*) of the Spirit.** Jesus said it best, “...I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). **God graciously fills us with His Spirit.** He loves to give the Spirit (Lk. 11:13; I Thess. 4:8). Abundantly or overflowingly are adverbs describing God desire to bless us (e.g., Psa. 65).

All of this discussion only makes sense because the Romans **had been set free from bondage to sin, and were now able to choose who or what they would serve.** Before knowing Jesus they were *bound* to sin, and thus free in regard to righteousness (vs. 20). When they were enslaved to sin, they had no other option. They couldn’t really be righteous, even if they wanted to be. **Now that they have been redeemed by Christ, bought out of slavery to sin, they were like free agents. They were no longer obligated to sin, and they could, instead, choose to present their members to whomever they wished.** Of course, God’s purpose in setting them free was so that they would choose to serve Him, but by giving them *freedom*, they could do otherwise. **Heaven will not be a place of compulsory obedience. The only ones who will be there are those who want to be there, ...those who want to serve God.** The freedom He offers is real, but the consequences are real, too. Paul was attempting to clarify that for us. Often, we do not fully realize the freedom that is available. We may have accepted Jesus, and experienced some changes in certain areas of life, but still struggle in other areas. **Paul wants us to know that the power of sin is broken, so that we would press on until we get the complete victory which Christ has made available to us.** If we do keep pressing on after Christ, God will bring us more and more victory, and the investments we make in our spiritual walk will begin to bear fruit in intimacy with God and holiness of life. We will see more and more of the power of God evident in our lives. If we instead choose to dabble with sin, and continue to present our members to serve unrighteousness, then we will find ourselves *mired down* in our spiritual experience, even *drawn toward* the sin. The investments we make toward the flesh, the seeds sown there, will begin to bear their fruit in our lives, and we will experience the frustration, shame, bondage and death that follows those fleshly choices. **God has bought us out of our bondage and blind obedience to sin, so that we could make a free choice, ...but we will reap what we sow** (Gal. 6:7).

Finally, I noticed something that appeals to the discipler in me. **The change in the lives of the Roman Christians was evidenced by the fact that they became “obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to which they were delivered”** (vs. 17). The Greek for “pattern of teaching” referred to an example, form, model or type of doctrine. The word for “pattern” caught my eye. My mind went back to Acts 2:44-47. In these verses, the phrase “upon the same thing” occurs in the Greek of vs. 44 and vs. 47. It says that “all who believed were *upon the same thing*”, and concludes with “The Lord was adding the ones being saved day by day *upon the same thing*. These verses describe the *discipline* or *follow-up program* for new believers in the early church, a *pattern of training*. Was the “pattern of teaching” described by Paul this same strategy for growth used in the early Jerusalem church? Like the early believers who *devoted themselves* to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42), the Romans also became obedient from the heart to *do* what was prescribed for them. “Teaching, sharing together, breaking of bread, and prayers.” **Disciples are to be followers of a plan, a discipline, a method of growth, a “pattern of teaching”.** Jesus said that *if we continue in His Word, then we are His disciples, and we will come to know the truth that will set us free from sin* (Jn. 8:31-36). Don’t dabble with sin. Dedicate yourself anew to go after all that God has for you.