

Romans 6:15-23: Slavery as a Metaphor for Gospel Grace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 July 2007

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] You could get yourself out. In this context, there was no way home. You were sold into slavery in perpetuity. And in the Hebrew context, in the law code, not only could you be free from slavery, but the one who you worked for would send you on your way, loaded down with the ability to move forward.

Now, with those differences in mind, you come back to our text, and you begin to make sense then of verses 16 through 18.

Do you not know that if you present yourself to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey?

And here we see it's a story for him to teach about his gospel of grace, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.

So he's stating here the principle of slavery and its relationship to his gospel. But what does he say about that principle in verse 17?

[1 : 13] There was this change of status where you were out from under the power of sin and brought into the power of righteousness through a heart obedience in attendance to a word, the gospel, by faith, apart from the law.

That's what he's arguing, that there has been a fundamental shift in status. And he argues it from the illustration of slavery.

What a wonderful thing. Twice in those early verses, I love this phrase in verse 17, you have become, I mean, that's a change of status.

You have now become obedient from the heart. Or look at verse 18, having been set free, you are now a slave to righteousness.

I came across a powerful story this week of those who knew firsthand what effect this change of status had in regard to slavery in their own lives.

[2 : 54] It was evening time. And even now, the lower rim of the sun was already partially hidden from view and the great ball of fire appeared to be descending quickly into the water that stretched out before the company of slaves who had gathered on the beach in solemn assembly.

It was the very last day of July. The year was 1838. And that was to be the final day of legalized slavery in Jamaica.

And with the first glimmer of the morning light, the laws of emancipation would break upon the island like water that is refreshing the soul and its people would be free.

Such a mourning as that in our own country was still another 25 years in the making. And to celebrate slavery's death, the once enslaved had constructed a large mahogany coffin and they carried it with them to the beach on that night.

And in the course of time, they came one by one, each one, and with some degree of ceremony, placing the implements of their enslavement into the coffin.

- [4 : 33] Chains, leg iron, whips, padlocks, collectively playing the respective role of the courts.
- By now, the sun had gone under, buried, as it were, baptized into the western wall of water and darkness fell and at last they dug a large hole in the sand.
- The wood box was clapped, shut, lowered into its prepared resting place and what must have been an endless supply of sand easily covered it again.
- And with that, true, true story, the days of slavery in Jamaica were buried. That's the way the sun went down.
- And when the hour of midnight came, the slaves no longer sped the night away by joining their voices in song and this is what they sang.
- [5 : 49] Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts.
- Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen. Shall we sin because we're not under the law but under grace, asks Paul in 615?
- Has my gospel of super abounding grace opened the door to a licentious life? No way.
- May it never be. imagine putting that question to the Jamaican freedmen on the next morning.
- It would be absolutely nonsensical. Only an idiot would return to the grinding irritation of iron once set free to a world of grace.
- [7 : 02] and only an idiotic believer would do the same. The gospel should penetrate us in this story-like way in regard to our continuance or rather our discontinuance in a life of sin.
- Think for a moment about the power of sin in your own life. And it is a power. It's greater than you are. It's stronger. It's called sometimes this almost irresistible force that can carry someone along into an activity or a place.
- Think of that power. And it was leading you into lawlessness. which was only creating more lawlessness. Which was only wreaking more wrath.
- And a dislocation of all relationships. Think of how sin not only wreaks havoc on your own life but on all those you love and who love you.
- Why would we ever go back to the beach and dig up the box and pry open its lid and bind ourselves again in instruments of degradation.
- [8 : 37] It's absurd! Says Paul. Slavery shows that to be so. Interestingly the text moves at verse 19 doesn't it?
- And that's the moment we entered. That's when he said look I'm telling you a story because I realized people might be having trouble with my logic. But then he moves from slavery and why he chose it as a change in status to slavery and how it manifests itself in a new conduct.
- That's really what happens from the latter half of 19 to the end. The metaphor turns. Now I want you to see that he uses your memory of your pre-Christian life to be countered by the reality of your present life in Christ to motivate your behavior for Christ.
- So don't become this Christian who says I never think about the old world. I never think about what I used to be. No, I'm saved now. That's gone.
- That's done. Never enters my mind. Really? For Paul, your remembrance of who you once were is used to reinforce by way of contrast who you now are which motivates you and who you should be.
- [10 : 15] That's what he does. I'm of the opinion that when we arrive in heaven unto all eternity we will still be able to recall our unrighteous and unjust and ungodly lives.

I might be right, I might be wrong. We'll talk about it when we arrive. But it only promotes for me the glory of the cost of what Christ went through and I treasure him all the more.

So when it says God forgets your sins, it isn't if God has a defective memory. No, it's that he no longer counts them against you.

Well, consider yourself dead to sin in that way, but don't lose the memory of who you were and who you are and therefore who you're called to be. Look at the way he does it.

Verse 19 in the middle, for just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness, that's it, he's calling upon your memory.

[11 : 20] So now, he's speaking to your present position, present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

What a wonderful phrase. We are now to present our members, whatever that might mean, as slaves to righteousness.

Well, you remember, we saw this word members last week, up in chapter 5, verse 13. Do not present your members to sin as instruments, or in that case, weapons, for unrighteousness.

And we know that in that context, the members were actually like your body parts. There were allusions back to the very first chapter where we were presenting our members in ungodliness and unrighteousness.

So what we're to do now, now that we are free in Christ, Paul says that ought to lead to a whole new life of conduct. What kind of conduct?

[12 : 24] Righteous conduct. My new life in Christ should be directing me for the first time to live justly, to be concerned with righteousness, which leads to my own sanctification.

And I do that how? With my members. my hands, which before Christ might have been used as weapons of unrighteousness, are now used to work profitably and honorably.

My mind, which once ran loose and free into all things ungodly, is now by the gospel being corrected and held and confined into that which is right.

This is why Christianity is concerned with the life of the mind because it's concerned with the transformation of an understanding of life and who God is and his beautiful character and how I am to live in light of it.

my feet, which once went places they never should have been, which only incurred problems for myself, destructive in relationships around me, and wrath on the final day, are now to be shod as gospel-like moments of peace and used to walk in him.

[13 : 51] my eyes, which once saw myriad things, which are forever emblazoned upon me, to the destruction of my soul and the degradation of my life, are now to be used to look upon that which is good and honorable and look up into the glory and the face of Christ.

My heart, which once was given over to these passions that led me away from God, is now to be called back, reigned in to righteousness.

My sexual organ, itself, and yours, the way you present your members, will either be used to destroy yourself and others, or will be held in the pattern of the glorious gospel of grace, as divinely intended at creation.

all of it, given now to God. Actually, it says given, it says, to righteousness, to justice, that is.

There's all this conversation today about the Christian's role in justice. Well, here, this is the text. We should be explaining this text and those things. justice is the consequence of grace applied in living, whereas injustice, unrighteousness, is the fruit of a life bent on taking, not giving.

[15 : 35] we ought to be the most just of all people. He completes the picture again by this kind of use of memory and then to their present tense.

Look at verse 20. When you were slaves of sin, see, he's calling upon their remembrance, you were free in regard to righteousness, but what fruit were you getting at that time from the things which you are now ashamed, the end of those things is death.

But now, there's the contrast, verse 22, that you have been set free from sin and become slaves to God. The fruit you get leads to sanctification and to its end eternal life. Fakes your past, reframes you in the present, pushes you out the door Sunday after the noon to a future of righteous living.

Two things need to be said, at least in regard to 20 to 22, and it's the first phrase, which is rather problematic, and that last phrase, which is rather problematic, the first phrase, what in the world does it mean that we were once free in regard to righteousness?

And the last phrase is this phrase, now, am I to consider myself literally as a slave to God? Well, take the first one, free in regard to righteousness, or free in regard to justice.

[16 : 55] Is this saying that you were at one time free from an obligation to it? No. chapter 1 verse 18 clears that up. We were always under obligation to righteousness.

Chapter 1 verse 18 told us that for the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness are suppressing The truth!

No, we're not free from the obligation of it! It could mean, I think instead, that we were once blind to it, or we were once not under the influence of it.

It had no play in our lives. We were free in regard to righteousness. We went on through life without it. And the consequence of going on through life without it was what?

Death! The last phrase, what a phrase, verse 22. You've become slaves to God.

[18 : 01] That's very problematic for any American. Our culture has been drinking the Kool-Aid of freedom for far too long, as if we were ever free to do what we think we want to do.

Everyone ought to wipe their lips, go home, get the Kool-Aid off, bring the Bible reading back in, and it tells you very clearly that you are always and always have been either a slave to righteousness or a slave to unrighteousness.

You've never been free. Don't confuse American independence with biblical thought at this point. love. Well, Bob Dylan's the one that cures us of it.

You may be an ambassador to England or France. You may like to gamble. You might like to dance. You may be the champion of the world.

You may be a socializer with a long string of pearls. But you're going to have to serve somebody. Yeah, you are.

[19 : 18] You're going to have to serve somebody. Now, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody. See, that's why Dylan is still the master.

He doesn't drink any Kool-Aid. He just cuts it straight. And this is a positive thing then, to be a slave to God.

until you understand the glory of the gospel of grace and how it unites you to God, you're not quite comfortable speaking in terms of being his slave.

This is another aspect of the imperfections of analogy. It's just an imperfection of his analogy of slavery. When we get to chapter 8, he's going to call you a child of God, a son, an heir.

What he means here by way of illustration is that my gospel of grace will produce godliness to you, and where you once gave your life to unrighteousness, you will now shackle yourself in the way of grace and be a slave to God.

[20 : 30] And when you begin to understand that, you're able to sing for the first time, little refrains like, you are my king, you are my king.

That's an unheard of phrase, except for the Christian. Jesus, you are my king. Slave.

Sing those songs filled with joy. Amazing love. How can it be that you, my king, would die for me?

Amazing love. I know it's true, and it is my joy to honor you in all I do.

So we finish with this great incentive at the close for godly living. The fruit, verse 23, that you will get when you walk with Christ, its end is eternal life.

[21 : 49] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life. What a wonderful finish. This verse that we've used for decades to promote evangelistic witness, 623, is in its context this pinnacle moment of edification for those who believe, who understand that my goal in Christ is eternal life, and then all of chapter 6 has come together, hasn't it?

Do we sin that law may, do we sin that grace may abound? How did he open? He said, may it never be that cosmic transaction that took place with you in Christ was rooted in your baptism of water.

At the very beginning he took us back, and now by the end of the chapter he's taking you all the way to the very end. Do you live in sin anymore?

No. I've taken up with Christ when I was baptized, and I had the incentive of eternal life if I continue, and I know who I was. And by grace I know who I am.

And by the power of the Holy Spirit I will live as a son or a daughter given to righteousness. Our Heavenly Father we're grateful for this text today.

[23 : 20] And we do ask that as we've wrestled with this illustration of Paul that confirms that his gospel grows godliness.

May it take root in our hearts tonight. May there be men and women and children here who walk off the beach with the old man in the ground never returning to unlock those doors and put on those chains.

For eternal life awaits us in Christ's name. Amen. Let's stand and Thank you.