

Set Free

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[0 : 00] The reading tonight is from Romans chapter 16, verses 15 to 23.

Oh, sorry, chapter 6, thanks. And it's on the bottom of page 917. What then?

Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means. Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

As slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity.

So now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

[1 : 46] So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification.

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

Amen. Amen. Thanks, Samantha.

Let's pray together, friends. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would deliver us over tonight to the pattern of sound teaching given by your word, and we pray that we might grasp it with open arms and all that is hard to accept, and that we might submit ourselves to your word and have our lives impacted by it in new ways in the coming week.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, how has your week been since last week? Since we learnt from Paul that we are no longer under the dominion of sin.

[3 : 09] I hope that you've been fighting sin with new energy and new vigour. Our state has changed, Paul says. We're now in Christ.

We're died to sin. We're alive with him. And so he told us last week to stop living under sin's destroyed rule. Don't live under sin's rule anymore.

The gospel gives us freedom from guilt and from the power of sin. It's that double cure. Now, my email box was not inundated with emails as I would have hoped.

Please feel free to... If you hear something in a sermon at Holy Trinity, you can go to our website and email the preacher and say, I don't quite get that.

In fact, you could even come up to one of us after a service and say, it's in the Bible, but I don't quite buy it. You're allowed to ask those questions. Nobody asked me this question.

[4 : 07] Nobody said to me, isn't everything in Romans meant to be about faith? And so, where does Romans 6, where's faith in Romans 6?

I'm not even sure if faith is mentioned in Romans 6. So, I want to answer this hypothetical objection, just because you should have asked that. Where's living by faith in Romans 6?

The answer is, the power to fight sin, as promised in Romans 6, is only appropriated by faith, by actually believing that Romans 6 is true, that God is right when he said that we are dead to sin because of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

See, it actually takes a lot of faith, I think, a lot of trust in God to say, I'm dead to sin, when I don't feel dead to sin. It takes a lot of trust in God's promises to say, I'm no longer under sin's dominion, when my experience is, I feel under sin's dominion.

That's where by faith comes in to Romans 6. We want to live in a way that reflects that we trust God's promise over our own experience.

[5 : 23] And in time, I hope and pray that you will experience Romans 6 in your life as you fight sin. If we do not listen to God's promise, if we don't meditate on the power of the gospel, then we will just keep on sinning.

Even though we're freed from slavery to sin, we must begin this faith work of trusting God's promise and living it out. We must not let sin exercise a sovereignty which has been destroyed.

Sin has no right over our lives anymore. And tonight, in God's word, it's going to go in a new direction and we're going to need faith to appropriate this as well.

And God is going to give us some new promises and actually some new ammunition in the fight against sin. So with faith, please read with me what Paul says in Romans 6.

What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means. Sounds familiar? Sounds a bit like last week. Last week, Paul had said, right at the end of the message, 6.14, sin will have no dominion over you.

[6 : 44] You are not under law but under grace. And so a cunning person, a sinful question would be to ask, well, if we're not under law but under grace, can we keep on sinning?

And Paul says, like last week, by no means. By no means. Don't you know? And whenever Paul says, don't you know, it's like, it's something that we actually don't know.

We should know. We can know it, but it's probably something we don't know. Don't you know that, verse 16, if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are the slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness. Don't you know that something has happened in your life? You've changed slaveries from sin to righteousness, from sin to God. Paul is, in Paul's world, in the first century, there was such a thing as voluntary slavery, where you would actually willingly sell yourself and your family to be a slave in a household.

You might be in a lot of debt, and this would be a way of securing stability and safety and protection for your family. When we think of slavery, we think of the African slave trade, horrid, by force.

[8 : 13] But in the first century, slavery was different to that. I'm not trying to defend any institution of slavery, but we mustn't mix it up.

In the first century, slavery was a kind of socio-economic reality of the different strata of society. It wasn't racially based. There wasn't just one race who were slaves.

It wasn't necessarily exploitative. There was a large category of people who willingly sold themselves to be slaves to get security.

You could hold positions of expertise and management and responsibility as a slave. You could be a doctor. You could be a businessman and be a slave.

Sure, you give up certain freedoms. You, in effect, do become a second-class citizen. But it really depends on the quality of your master.

[9 : 14] And some slaves had great masters. And they were very devoted to them. And the master was very devoted to their slaves. Though I must say, I doubt any masters ever died for their slaves.

But you could have good masters. And Paul is saying, when you present yourself to Christ, you present yourself to be his slave.

You offer your obedience to him. Obedience is at the heart of slavery. And so, the Christian, it converts from slavery, obedience to sin, to obedience to Christ.

One leads to death, one leads to righteousness. righteousness. So, when you became a Christian, you renounced your slavery to sin. You were set free. You cannot go on sinning.

But, you are now under the dominion of Christ. And in fact, if you ever go to a baptism service, basically, people say things like this. They, they reject sin and all that is evil.

[10 : 20] And they make a commitment. They present themselves to obey and be loyal to and trust and follow Christ. Verse 17, Paul says, unpacking this, thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, you have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

And that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. There's a lot of repetition tonight and that's good because we need to understand this exchange of slaveries.

Thanks be to God. This is God's work in us. Five things have happened. You've become obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to which you were entrusted, set free from sin, you become slaves to righteousness.

From the heart you accepted Jesus as Lord. Not just a kind of a legalistic works, duty kind of thing, but from the heart you received Christ as Lord and you submitted to him as Lord to the pattern of teaching.

So you didn't just submit to Jesus to a new kind of law but to a certain pattern of teaching. A pattern I think is the pattern of the death and resurrection of Jesus, a life based on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

[11 : 43] You were entrusted to this form of teaching. Paul says, it's really fascinating, he says, this teaching wasn't entrusted to us, we were entrusted to the teaching. In a sense that the word is delivered, we were delivered over to this new pattern of teaching, this new way of living based on Jesus' death and resurrection.

We were transferred to the teaching, we were delivered over. Many Christians are excited about deliverance ministries and I wonder, does Holy Trinity have a deliverance ministry?

Yes we do, we are constantly delivering people over to the pattern of teaching given by Christ. The pattern to which we have been entrusted.

What is a Christian friends? We've got to be really clear on this tonight because if you're clear on this you'll know how to live the Christian life. A Christian is one who was once a slave of sin but has now been set free from sin to become a slave of righteousness.

So when Paul says, don't you know, actually, there's a lot of theology there that I didn't know that we need to know to live as a Christian. Don't you know, you're set free from being a slave to sin to be a slave of righteousness or of God or of Jesus.

[13 : 02] Is a Christian free? Is a Christian free? That's a tricky question. Yes we are, we're free from sin. Is a Christian a slave? Yes we are.

We're a slave to Christ, we're a slave to God. We've exchanged owners. The redemption that was bought by the blood of Jesus, he didn't win us by his blood and then just sort of go, off you go and ring me up sometime.

He bought us by his blood, he redeemed us and he's our new owner. Set free from sin to a new owner, the owner is Jesus. Now verse 19, don't want you to misunderstand verse 19, this is really critical.

Paul has this aside, he says, I'm speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. This is, we've got to figure out what is Paul apologising for at this point?

What is he saying when he's saying I'm speaking because of your fleshly limitations? Christians.

Some Christians at this point will say, oh, we're not really slaves, it's just sort of a metaphor for kind of slow Christians, this is sort of just a temporary metaphor.

[14 : 19] But I don't think Paul's apologising for calling us slaves of Jesus. In fact, he's going to go on to keep using the metaphor, you're a slave.

So it's almost in every verse in our reading tonight that we're slaves of Jesus. So he's not apologising for the imagery of Christians being slaves. I think he's apologising for indulging such a sinful question, because he's done it twice now.

Should we go on sinning because we're under grace? He's apologising for answering such a sinful, stupid question. If you really knew what had happened to you in Christ, you would not want to go on sinning.

But he does address this sinful question, so he apologises in a sense for going down this route. So he's not apologising for the slavery image.

He's just saying, he's speaking in human terms to indulge the question about human licence and abusing grace. So friends, let me push it home a bit harder.

[15 : 24] If you are a Christian tonight, think of yourself as a slave to Jesus. A slave to righteousness, a slave to God. You are a slave.

The first line of the book of Romans begins, Romans 1.1, Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ. Does the same thing in Philippians and Titus.

James, the apostle, does the same thing in James 1.1. James, slave of Jesus Christ. Peter, the apostle, does it in 2, Peter? First line, Peter, slave of Jesus Christ.

The book of Revelation begins this way, the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to show his slaves what must soon happen and through his slave John.

In fact, in the book of Revelation, one of the most common terms for the Christian is a slave. Now, this is a bit tricky, because in every English translation, they translate the Greek word slave as servant.

[16 : 34] So all those verses I've just said, in all our English translations say servant, even though in Greek there are very different words for slave and servant. Okay?

NIV does it, the ESV does it, the NRSV does it. I don't know why they do this. This is some kind of conspiracy against calling Christians slaves of Jesus Christ.

But Romans 6 makes it very clear, we are his slaves. The NRSV is kind of the best, because it always has a footnote telling you that it's mucked it up.

So you can always go and, you don't need to know Greek, you can just use the NRSV, and it tells you every time it's changed slave to servant. I think we have weak Christians because we have weak Christian images of who we are.

Slave to Christ is an image that for me gives some teeth and some traction to my daily obedience to my Lord. I'm redeemed by his blood.

[17 : 40] He's a great slave owner. He dies for us. He's a wonderful master. It's a wonderful thing to be a slave of Jesus. It's an image of ownership, unqualified, devotion, radical, exclusive obedience.

If you just call yourself, I'm a servant of Christ, that's just not as strong for me. A servant could kind of mean, I'm kind of a personal assistant to Jesus. I'm on duty, off duty, I go and leave sometimes. A slave is never off duty. A slave has no holiday leave. A slave has no sick leave. A slave does his master's business 24-7.

A slave is never released from that. Jesus owns us. Even when we're sick, even when we're at the movies, we're slaves of Jesus. If you're a human, and you are all human, you have to be a slave to something.

Don't be a slave to sin, be a slave to Jesus. Paul goes on in verse 19, and this is really great, great model of how slavery gives us energy for the Christian life.

[19 : 00] For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

Just as hard as you once worked for sin, work as hard for righteousness. Put at least an equal amount of effort into righteousness as you used to put into money, lust, power.

It's a happy slavery. It's a fruitful slavery that deserves our best energy. I like to look at how non-Christians energise for self-glory and for their career and self-advancement.

I love watching sportsmen how hard they've worked to win themselves a medal and think, am I working that hard as a slave to Christ? It's a happy slavery and deserves our best effort.

So again, friends, don't think, this is how you might think which is wrong. You might think, do I really want to give up my freedom to be a slave of Jesus? But Paul says, if you're not a slave of Jesus, you're a slave of sin.

[20 : 17] You don't have freedom. You must be a slave to something. The question is not, will I have a master? The question is, which master will I serve? Will I serve master sin or master Jesus?

There's no such thing as individual autonomy. There's no such thing as freedom from all external influences and powers.

Jesus said, everyone who sins continually is a slave to sin. But the follower of Jesus, Paul says, is a slave to him. If you call Jesus Lord, what does Lord mean?

Lord means master. Lord means we are his slaves. And be convinced, friends, that slavery to Jesus is a sweet thing.

And it's much better than slavery to sin. Paul says, do the maths. Verse 20, when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

[21 : 18] So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you've been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage is sanctification.

The end is eternal life. The slave to sin has a kind of freedom. The freedom is that they're free from doing anything righteous. Everything is tainted by that slavery to self-glory, to even good works, are ruined by that sinful motive of showing off or proving how good I am to the world.

the evil human heart loves to self-exalt. And so the slave to sin is free from righteousness, free I guess to choose which sins they do, but it's only sin.

And what advantage do you get as a slave to sin? Well you just end up enslaved to things that you're ashamed of, things that will bring death. Everyone in this room has done things they're ashamed of, even the kid who's brought up in the church and being a Christian all their life has done things in slavery to sin that they're ashamed of.

That's not a good way to go. The best way to go is Christ's way. What's the advantage of slavery to Jesus? Well, you've been freed from sin, the advantage is sanctification.

[22 : 47] You get holiness, you get to be who God made you to be, you get to live God's way according to his design. It's healthy, I think, for us to compare the effects of the Christian life with the effects of the non-Christian life and to say, where does the fruit lie?

Where does the advantage lie? Which slavery is better? I can honestly say that most of the time, I don't have any envy of the non-Christian, of their so-called freedoms they have.

I praise God for the burdens I bear of having to go to church and being committed to a small group and bound to obey Jesus day by day.

I don't envy the freedom of non-Christians to sleep in on Sunday mornings or Sunday nights. I don't envy non-Christians who sleep around with whoever they want.

I think I've got a better marriage than I ever have because of Christ. My whole household is in slavery to Christ and I think I have a happier household for it.

[23 : 58] I thank God for the limitations that being a slave of Jesus puts on me. I embrace them. They're a blessing. They bring sanctification. And in those times when I do find myself envying the non-Christian, the way that they're living, I take the moment to entertain that in the sense of do they really have a better life?

And I try and think it through. And I think through the consequences of how they live and the fruit of how they live. And sometimes you've got to watch a non-Christian for years to see the fruit, the negative fruit that comes out in their life.

I mean we know that eternal life will always be eternal death. But Paul says in 21-22, think about the advantage we get in this life.

In a way it's a mandate for Christian ethics saying look at the advantage of being a slave to Christ in this life. And slavery to sin brings shame and death.

And slavery to God brings sanctification, eternal life. I've got no doubt in my mind that it's the way to go in this life and the life to come. Paul concludes with a very well-known verse, though often divorced from this context.

[25 : 18] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. A well-known verse, and we all know the comparison between death and eternal life.

We know the comparison between the wages of sin and the free gift of God. But friends, think about what that verse means in light of being a slave to Jesus.

We have this gift, we have this eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. That name, don't get used to that name.

Christ means king. Through King Jesus, the one to which we are subjects, the one who is Lord Jesus, Master Jesus, he's saying through our King and Master who owns us, to whom we are his slaves and subjects, we have eternal life.

We have in Jesus a great Lord, a great owner. He is the Lord Jesus to whom we are happy to be slaves to.

[26 : 33] We were once under a cruel master, a master who hurt us, who dehumanised us, who brought on pain and pain.

But under Jesus we have a great master who brings us sanctification, who brings us life. Friends, what kind of slave are you?

What kind of slave are you? There are some here who are slaves still to sin. And they need to present themselves to God and put their trust in Jesus and repent of sin and say, I want to be your slave Lord Jesus.

I want to be your person. I want you to own me and I want you to be my Lord. That would be a good thing to do tonight. There are some people here who are juggling masters.

They're trying to serve Jesus and sin. And they're sort of caught between the two. I couldn't imagine an unhappy place to be than trying to serve two masters.

[27 : 37] Friends, let me encourage you to call yourself and to present yourself to God as a slave of Jesus. Be a full-on slave for him.

Every day wake up and say, I'm Jesus' slave. When sin puts itself in your face and tempts you, say, I've died with Christ.

I've risen with Christ. I'm a slave to Christ. Use that image to fight sin. You belong to Christ. Don't betray your owner by going back to your old master.

And be a good slave. Don't be a cold slave. Don't serve Jesus coldly when before you served sin with vigour.

Serve Jesus with vigour and life better than you served master sin. If you feel tonight that slavery is too undignified a metaphor for the Christian life, then friends, I just say, get over it.

[28 : 43] Because for Paul, it's his badge of honour. For Paul, it's his badge of honour. Jesus is a wonderful master and there's great fruit in being owned by him.

The human heart is designed by God to live for and worship and be a slave to something. Now, either that's going to be sin or that's going to be God and Jesus.

slavery to Jesus is at the heart of the gospel. Because the heart of the gospel is Jesus is Lord. If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, you're saved.

That's a confession that you are putting yourself under and into slavery to Lord Jesus. Every time you hear the title, Jesus is Lord, let it be a reminder to you that he owns you.

He's redeemed you by his blood. What a great master. And you are his. You are his slave. You owe him total and exclusive obedience.

[29 : 47] In the gospel, you have the power to do it. So, friends, present yourself to God every day as a slave to righteousness, as one who's died to sin and is now under the mastery of the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray for that now. King Jesus, Lord Jesus, Master Jesus, we put ourselves under you and remind ourselves that we are your slaves, that we have been transferred and we thank you, Lord Jesus, that by your blood, this free gift, you have transferred us from slavery to sin, redeemed us and put us under you.

Lord Jesus, help us to remember this fact this week and may it be for us life-giving and invigorating in the fight against the old master.

Lord Jesus, help us to serve you and be loyal to you, exclusively obedient to you as our master this week. By faith, Lord Jesus, we receive your gift and come under your lordship.

We pray that you would produce the fruit of holiness in our life and that we would know that it's a much better life to be under your lordship than under the lordship of sin.

[31 : 20] Deliver us, Father, and bring us to eternal life with you. Take care of us, for we are your slaves, Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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