

Who do we Serve?

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[0 : 00] Well, please do keep that passage open. It's quite a dense passage, but we'll work our way through it. I thought I'd start tonight, though, with a who is this person quiz.

And to encourage you to answer, I've got a \$20 KFC voucher for the first person who gets the correct answer. In fact, it's actually a universal food voucher, commonly known as a \$20 note, which I'll post to you or direct deposit into your account.

And so you've got to text the answer to Mark's number, which should be on your screen now, in case you don't have it. So here's the question. Who is this person? He is a famous singer, perhaps most famous for the fact that he cannot sing.

No, I'm not talking about Justin Bieber. He's much older than that. He was born in 1941 as Robert Alan Zimmerman. Nothing yet, Mark. OK.

He wrote songs such as Blowing in the Wind, The Times They Are A-Changing. He became known as Robert Dylan, but now goes by the name...

[1 : 13] No one yet? Bob Dylan. Bob Dylan. In fact, on the next slide is a picture of a very young Bob Dylan. Now, I know most of you will never have heard of him before, which is why it was a tough question to start with, I realise.

And I'm not sure anyone's got the correct answer still yet. Emma Moody got the answer. Well done, Emma. But Bob Dylan's actually had a huge impact on the music industry.

And in fact, in 2016, so not too long ago, he won a Nobel Prize for literature. One of his lesser-known songs, though, is the song called, You're Gonna Have to Serve Somebody.

On your screens is the chorus. And as you can see there, he says, It may be the devil, it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody.

You see, we all have different people we serve and obey in life, don't we? Whether it's the boss at work or the parent at home or the government in Victoria, we all serve and obey someone in life.

[2 : 20] But according to Romans 6 today, it all boils down to serving one of two different masters. And I wonder if you picked it up as the chapter was read to you.

We all serve either God or sin. And in Romans 6 today, Paul's big point is, If you're a Christian, then on your screens, you're being freed from sin to serve God.

That's the big point of the chapter. If you remember nothing else, if everything else is confusing, then remember that point. But to drive home this point, Paul actually makes it twice.

But in slightly different ways. So if you've got your outlines printed, you'll see that I've put the chapter into two columns. And if you forgot to print an outline, that's okay. Have a look at your screens there and you can see it, how I've set it out.

And each column follows the same pattern. So if you look down the left-hand side, where there's a question and answer, then a reason, then the application and encouragement.

[3 : 21] And so we're going to walk our way through the first column, 1 to 14, and then we'll sprint our way through verses 15 to 23 because of time.

But before we get into it, the question is, why does Paul need to say this to start with? Well, because some people thought that his gospel message actually promoted sin.

If you've got your Bibles there, have a look at the end of chapter 5. Chapter 5, verse 20, halfway through there, Paul has just said, where sin increased, grace increased all the more.

And this is the great news of the Christian message, isn't it? That if we sin, there's always more grace to forgive. I mean, that's a relief for us sinners, isn't it?

It's great news for us sinners. But for some people listening to Paul, it suggests that sin no longer matters. In fact, they say, well, why not sin more in order to increase grace more?

[4 : 23] Have a look at their question in verse 1. He says, what shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

Can you see the question that someone's asked him? If God will increase his grace to forgive us, then, well, point one, why not sin more to increase God's grace more?

Won't that make God look good? Now, there is a sense of logic to this proposal. The more we sin, the more God will graciously forgive.

That's true. But it's a perverse kind of logic. It would be like saying, well, since our health care workers are doing such a good job dealing with COVID-19, let's spread the virus more so they can do an even better job of COVID-19.

I mean, there's logic to it, but it's a perverse kind of logic, isn't it? And so Paul's answer in verse 2 is, no way, Jose, by no means, never should we do this.

[5 : 36] Why? Well, not just because it's a perverse kind of logic, but because we have died to sin, which is that point two. Have a look at verse 2 in your Bibles. He says, we are those who have died to sin.

So how can we live in it any longer? And Paul says we've died to sin. We're finished with it. We've been freed from being in a relationship with it.

Now, you may never have thought you were in a relationship with sin. You know, you never asked it out on a date. You never held hands or gazed deeply into its eyes.

What relationship? Well, the one we were all born into. As we saw in chapter 5 last week, because of the first Adam, we are all natural born sinners.

He was our representative who sinned and we inherited his sinful nature. That's why in our first reading, it spoke of Adam having children in his likeness who sinned and then died.

[6 : 45] And we saw it also with children, don't we? As I've said before, you never have to teach little children to sin or say no. It just comes naturally, doesn't it?

Well, so too with us. We are natural born sinners serving sin, whether we realize it or not. Now, people don't think they are this.

They think they are serving themselves in life or that they're pretty good kind of people. So how can they be serving sin? Well, because the essence of sin is not so much about doing bad things.

I mean, that is part of sin. But the heart of it, the essence of sin is actually ignoring God and living my way, whether that's doing good or bad.

That's why I like to write the word sin on your screens there with a capital I. Capital I for ignoring God and living how I want to live.

[7 : 49] You don't have to be bad to serve sin. You just have to ignore God and live your way. But because we're all natural born sinners who naturally ignore God and live our way, then whether we realize it or not, we were happily serving sin.

Sin was our master. That was the relationship we were in. But now, says Paul, we've died to sin. You're not in a relationship with sin anymore.

So, verse 2, why live as though you are? But hang on a second. How have we died to sin? Well, by dying with Christ.

Have a look at verses 3 to 5. He says, For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we'll also certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Now, here Paul uses the language of baptism to refer to becoming a Christian. It's a shorthand way of saying when you became a Christian. And he says, Don't you know that when you became a Christian, you died with Christ?

[9 : 24] Now, of course, we weren't nailed to a wooden cross, were we? So, how does that work? Well, it works by being united with Christ. When Michelle and I first got engaged, I was very excited about marrying her.

I mean, I loved her. I still do, by the way. But she had thousands of dollars in her bank account. And as a poor university student, it was exciting because I knew come our wedding day, the moment the minister declared us husband and wife, we were united in God's sight.

And that meant what was hers became mine. That is thousands of dollars. And what was mine, I think \$15.25 would become hers.

Of course, this is not really why I married her. And actually, she spent all that money in an overseas trip she'd already booked before we got engaged. Not that I'm bitter about it at all.

But the point is, when you're united in marriage, what's theirs becomes yours and yours becomes theirs. And it's the same when we're united to Christ as Christians.

[10 : 34] He gets our sin, we get his death, resurrection, his righteousness and inheritance. Is that not an awesome swap for us?

In fact, we read verses like this on your screens from 2 Corinthians. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.

He took our sins so that in him, united to Christ, we might get his righteousness. You see, the point is, by being united to Christ, we get his death to sin.

That's how we have died to sin. To put it differently, to take a different example, because it's a tricky concept, I realize. It's like when Australia wins an Olympic gold medal, we say, we won gold.

When all we did was sit on the couch and watch the TV. But because we're united as Australians, then the athlete's gold medal counts as our gold medal.

[11 : 43] So too, with Christ, you see. When we became Christians, says Paul, we were united or baptized into Christ such that his death to sin counts as our death to sin.

And what's more, his resurrection counts as ours too. Although it's kind of split. Verse 4, we now live a new spiritual life to God.

And one day, verse 5, we will live a new physical life to God. In other words, Christ's resurrection, verse 5, guarantees ours because we are united to him.

But again, the point is, being united to Christ, we have died with him to sin. We've been set free from sin's power that caused us to ignore God.

You know, remember the capital I? Ignore God. It blinded us to God, living his way. And now, we can actually say no to sin.

[12 : 47] And we can live God's way because we know about him now. But why was death necessary in order to break up with sin? I mean, if you're dating someone, you don't have to die to break up with them, do you?

Well, because the payment for sin is death. As verse 23 will say, the wages or the payment for sin is death. But by dying with Christ, we're not only freed from sin's power, that relationship where it had power over us to help us ignore God.

We're also freed from sin's payment. Have a look at verse 6 and 7. For we know that our old self was crucified with Christ, so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, freed from its power, that we would no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

In fact, verse 7 literally says on your screens there, For the one who has died has been justified from sin. The payment has been made.

I think it was the U.S., a long time ago in the U.S., when they hung a criminal for his crimes, they used to write in the record books, John Smith was justified today.

[14 : 21] In other words, his death paid his debt. For his sin. And now that that debt was paid, he was free to go.

Of course, he couldn't go anywhere because he was hung. He was dead. Well, because we've died with Christ to sin, then our debt has been paid.

Verse 7. And we're still alive. And so we've been freed from sin's power. Verse 6. Because we've been freed from sin's payment.

We've been justified. And yet, we're not yet free from sin's presence, are we?

Free from its payment and power, but not yet presence. Because we still struggle with temptation, don't we? And sometimes battle particular sins.

[15 : 23] Sin still, you know, knocks at our door. But we don't have to answer it. We can actually say no, because sin is no longer our boss. God is whom we can obey.

For he's also given us his spirit who works in our conscience, like a voice in our heads, helping us to say no to sin and serve God. I was speaking with someone who became a Christian later in life, and they said, look, until now, it never occurred to me to even think about God or serve him.

You see, they were serving sin without even realizing it. But now, he said, there's often a voice in my head that stops me when I'm about to sin so I might please God.

He also admitted with a sheepish look that he doesn't always listen to that voice. But the point is, while he has not been freed from the presence of sin, he has been freed from sin's payment and power.

And he has God's spirit to help him live for God, like Christ. See verse 10? Verse 10. The death Christ died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God.

[16:46] In the same way, then, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

You see, rather than sinning more to increase God's grace more, that was the question in verse 1.

No, no, we are to resist sin and serve God.

Why? Well, because we have died with Christ to sin. No longer in a relationship to it. No longer our boss. Freed. Payment paid. Debt covered.

And now, like Christ, we live to God. Which means, point 3 on your screens, use your bodies to serve God, not sin.

Have a look at verse 12. Therefore, here's the application, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.

[17:53] And offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness, because sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Verse 14 is the encouragement that sin is no longer our master, our boss. We've been set free from its power that blinded us to God.

And we've been set free from its payment of eternal death. So the application, verse 12 and 13, quite clearly, resist sin, serve God. In fact, serve God with every part of your body, every fiber of your being.

One of the songs I wish we had a chance to record is the old hymn, Take My Life. The chorus, part of the song is on your screens there.

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my moments and my days. Let them flow in ceaseless praise. And then it goes through the different parts of our body. Take my hands.

[19:00] Let them move at the impulse of thy love. Take my voice. Let me sing always only for my king. You see, this hymn writer understood this passage.

That we've been set free from sin to serve God with every part of our body, our hands, our voice, and so on. And so they wrote this hymn as a prayer that they would do that.

Do you? Well, we'll come back to this application later, but first let's deal with the second question in verse 15. We're going to run through this because of time, but have a look at verse 15.

The next question comes, What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? You see what the question is? If we're not under the law, but under grace, then there's no law telling us not to sin, but there is grace that will keep forgiving us when we sin.

And so really the question on your screen is, why not keep deliberately sinning since God will just forgive me anyway? I don't know about you, but I've actually had people ask me that question.

[20:13] But Paul's answer again is, No way, Jose. By no means, never. Why? Well, this time he again talks about being set free from sin, but not by dying with Christ, but rather he uses the analogy of slavery.

So have a look at verse 16. He says, 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.

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. Verse 16, Paul says, If you keep obeying someone, if you keep acting as though they're your boss, then guess what?

They become your boss and you become their slave. In other words, if we keep deliberately sinning, then we'll end up as slaves to sin again.

[21:28] But that's not who we are anymore. Rather, we have heard the teaching of the gospel and have abated or believed in Jesus. And so we've been set free from slavery to sin and become slaves of God to righteousness.

And so act like it, says Paul. Here's the application. Verse 19. He says, I'm using an example from everyday life.

Well, slavery was an everyday example back then because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness, leading to holiness.

He says, We are now slaves of God to live righteous lives. And as we practice living rightly, it leads to greater holiness.

As they say, practice makes perfect. Although, obviously, more holy in this world, but perfect in the next. But the point is, we are to offer every part of our body to live righteous lives as God's slaves. [22 : 48] Now, of course, it might not sound all that great going from slaves of sin to slaves of God. You know, after all, we're still slaves. That doesn't sound good.

But here, slavery to God is actually true freedom. I know that sounds contradictory. So, let me see if I can quickly illustrate. On your screens are two trains.

A life-size Thomas the Tank Engine at Puffing Billy and one of his friends derailed in the TV show. Now, which train is free?

Is it the one derailed? Or is it Thomas running on the tracks with the wind in his hair? It's Thomas, isn't it? But at the same time, Thomas can only go where the tracks go, can't he?

He's a slave to the tracks, if you like. But being a slave to the tracks is actually true freedom for Thomas because that's how he was created to live.

[23 : 52] So, too, with us. True freedom is to live as slaves of God, servants of God, because that's how we were created to live. That's the best way to enjoy this life and life eternal.

What's more, chapter 8 will remind us that we're not just slaves, but adopted sons of God and he is our father. And here in chapter 6, Paul goes on to tell us that there's actually an eternity of difference between being sin slave and God's.

Have a look at verse 20. 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. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life.

You see, slavery to sin was of no benefit to us. It only led us to do things that bring us shame. And the result? Death. Eternal death.

[25 : 00] But slavery to God gives us the benefit of right living that leads to holiness and it results in eternal life in heaven and the new creation.

You see, there is an eternity of difference between being sin slave and God's. And what's more, there's a huge difference between the two masters too.

Have a look at verse 23, our last verse. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

You see, sin gladly pays us the wage we deserve, eternal death in hell. But God graciously gives us the gift we don't deserve, eternal life with him.

And so while sin gives us shame and death, God is a gracious master who gives us life. And it's even more gracious when we remember what it costs God to give it to us.

[26 : 05] His son. That's why this gift, verse 23, only comes in or through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So slavery to God is not a bad thing.

It's a great thing. It is true freedom that comes with an eternity of difference and a master who graciously gives us life.

And so the question for us then is on the next slide, who are you serving? Because as Bob Dylan sang, you're going to have to serve somebody.

If you're not a Christian, then do you realize you're actually serving sin, which leads to eternal death in hell? Do you realize that God actually offers you eternal life, but only through Jesus Christ, our Lord?

And so will you trust in Jesus as your Lord? And for us who already trust in Jesus, then are we serving him as our Lord with every fiber of our being, with every part of our body, with our eyes, by what we watch or read?

[27 : 17] At the moment with lockdown, we all have more time to indulge in Netflix or whatever it is, and there's nothing wrong with relaxing, but do we watch shows or read books that cause us to lust or envy?

Or do we turn them off when we feel that temptation? Or do we serve God with our mouths by how we speak to others on Zoom or over the phone or on Facebook or in our house or to those of the opposite gender?

Do we serve God by building others up or do we serve sin by tearing others down? Do we serve God with our hands, putting them up to kind of read the Bible or lead us in prayer even with online

church?

Or putting them up to help cook meals, which we are allowed to do, by the way. I checked the DHS website this afternoon and we are allowed to show caregiving by dropping off meals.

And I heard recently that James and Vivian, who just had twin boys, actually have been given too much food. I mean, isn't that a good problem to have? Because people are serving God with their hands.

[28 : 31] And do we serve God with our minds? You know, do we fill our minds with God's voice by reading His words such that our minds are renewed to think His thoughts after Him?

Or do we fill our minds with sin's voice? You know, entertaining, bitter thoughts about that person who hurt us, stewing on it, dwelling on it.

Or by wishing you had what others had, like that person who won \$80 million in Lotto recently. Or do we dwell on how to fulfill those earthly ambitions we want?

As I said on your screens, the question is, whom are we serving with every part of our body? Of course, the Christian message is that there is always grace to forgive us when we serve sin.

Where sin increased, grace increased all the more. Remember, it's still true. And so if you have sinned, then do ask God for forgiveness because He will. And if you struggle to serve God rather than sin, then remember how God freed us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[29 : 43] In other words, by the high price He paid for our freedom. Let me finish with a true story I heard from another minister in Sydney actually. I was back in the days of the slave trade in America and there was this very big, strong, African-American slave brought up for auction and so the slave owners gathered together in the South of America to bid for this slave and because he was so big and strong there was lots of bidders.

But just before the auction started, this man yelled out, this slave yelled out in a loud voice, the man who buys me I will kill. At that point, many bidders pulled out but many stayed in.

despite the man continuing to say, the man who buys me I will kill. And so the auction continued, the price kept going up and up until the slave was sold for a very high price.

And as the slave stood before his new master, the slave said through gritted teeth, I said, the man who buys me I will kill.

And the new owner said to the guards, take off his chains and to the slave, you're free to go. At that, the slave just stared back in disbelief as did the guards who were slowly and carefully undoing the chains.

[31 : 13] And so the new owner repeated again, I said, you're free to go, free to live. And as the story goes, the slave then dropped to his knees, grabbed the new master's hands and said, no, I will serve you for the rest of my life.

You see, that's what's happened to us as Christians. We're being set free from slavery to sin. at the astronomically high price of Christ's blood.

And so will you, therefore, serve God for the rest of your lives with every part of your body? Let's pray we would. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you have freed us from sin's power to ignore you, freed us from sin's payment of death.

And so help us, we pray, to serve you with every part of our body. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.