

New Life: Freedom

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to continue on our series on Romans with Romans 6.

It's on page 943. And I also want to mention that we're going to be looking at the front of the bulletin as well a little bit in our sermon. So page 943 in your Bibles.

We're looking at the second half of chapter 6. And as you're looking for that, I'd like to begin by letting you know that I will be asking someone in the congregation here today to give a testimony as part of my sermon.

So if that doesn't keep you on your toes, nothing will. But I need to tell you that I've already talked to that person, so you can relax if it's not you.

So last week it was a real blessing for us to hear about the fact that we are under grace. David and Jim preached about what it means to be united with Jesus.

[1 : 04] And that when you trust Jesus, you can consider your baptism and look back and know that Jesus has released you, you have died with him to sin, and that you come into a new life.

He gives you new life in which you are alive to God. Not only that, you look ahead. You look at a resurrection. That is Jesus' resurrection that you will share with him as well.

It is grace that is so astonishing that Paul knows there's a question that is asked. And that is in verse 15.

Are we to sin because we are not under the law but under grace? In other words, he says, since your present and your future is secure in Jesus Christ, why would I struggle against sin?

Why would I bother with it? Why would I not do whatever I wanted to, whatever I felt led to do? If it's not keeping the law but Jesus himself who saves me, why keep the law?

[2 : 10] Well, the answer is very simple. And that is that grace reveals to us that there really are, all of humanity has to serve something.

And Jesus has set us free to obey God. And that we receive life from that as well. Look at verse 16. It reveals to us these two ways to live.

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey? Either of sin, number one, which leads to death, or of obedience, secondly, which leads to righteousness.

You see how grace reveals to us the spiritual condition of every person in the world. And that is they are either serving the master of sin, or they are serving the master of obedience to God.

And that leads to righteousness, to goodness. In our staff Bible study, at this verse, somebody mentioned Bob Dylan, his song, Gotta Serve Somebody.

[3 : 20] And I realized we had quite a range of ages in our staff meeting, in that there was a fair number of blank stares when we mentioned that name. But he was actually pretty helpful for us, because the chorus puts it very simply and clearly.

He says, you're going to have to serve somebody. It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you've got to serve somebody. And that indeed is what grace is revealing, that there is another way, there is another master for us.

This is something that humanity cannot accept, that all of us have to serve somebody. Because the thing that the world understands is that there is freedom.

There is freedom from God that can be had. Freedom from constraint. Anything that might constrain you. And that is the powerful deception that Adam and Eve fell into as well.

Do you remember the temptation of the snake? It was to eat the forbidden fruit, so that you will be like God. Your eyes will be opened, and you will know good and evil.

[4 : 30] In other words, you will have the freedom to determine for yourself what is right. and what is wrong. You are free from God, independent of Him.

That is something that is continually believed now, but the painful reality is that that disobedience broke the close and loving relationship Adam and Eve had with God, and it led to the suffering and death that we see around us in our world.

So that promise of independence from God is a powerful lie. And it's powerful because there is freedom that is in it.

This is what Paul himself tells us. There is a type of slavery in a person's, or I should say a type of freedom in one's slavery to sin. Look down at verse 20.

It says, When you were slaves to sin, you were free. Free in regard to righteousness. In other words, in the midst of slavery, you were free from seeking to honor God with all that you have and with all that you are.

[5 : 40] You were free from that. You don't have to give up anything for God. You don't have to suffer for His sake. You don't have to be different from the world around you.

And it's that freedom that blinds people to the reality that they are enslaved to the desires that lead them away from God. It is a terrible freedom that means that they have to live in such a way that they are without reverence for God.

They cannot please God. They can't know God. They must be separated from Him and the life that He gives. As Paul says in verse 21, The end of these things is death.

So at some point, Paul is saying, there will come a time when that freedom is revealed as slavery to sin and death. But in the meantime, there is this reveling in the freedom, the autonomy from righteousness that takes place.

And we see that in the thinking of the world around us. But Paul says in verse 17 and 18, Thanks be to God. And it's a heartfelt thanks.

[6 : 52] He says, Thanks be to God that you, believers in Jesus in Rome, who were once slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.

And verse 18, Having been set free from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness. These are the key verses in our passage.

It is the story of every person who comes to have faith and trust in Jesus Christ. There's a massive transfer that takes place in everyone's story as a Christian.

And that is we've been set free from slavery to sin in order that we might become slaves of obedience to God and righteousness. It's not unlike the story of the people of God in the Old Testament.

They are set free from Egypt. For what reason? It is not to wander aimlessly, but to serve God, to worship Him, and to know the blessing of that.

[7 : 53] We have been transferred to slaves of obedience to God. And because this is a testimony, because these verses are about every Christian story, it's right that we hear a testimony right now.

And so Edie, I'd like you to come up and share. I'll ask you a couple questions. And the thing that you might not know is that Edie's birthday was Friday.

And so it's very appropriate that we're talking about her new birth in Christ. 59. 59. So maybe it's also appropriate because this is about Freedom 55 then too.

But I want to ask you a question, Edie. I know you became a Christian 25 years ago. I think that is coming now. Whoops. Okay. And you have been a Christian since.

You've experienced what it means to follow Him, to serve Him. But I know that there was, it was difficult to think about becoming a Christian 25 years ago. What was holding you back?

[9 : 01] Well, I think what held me back was largely the fact that the person that the world thought they knew and my friends thought they knew was not who I was.

I was held captive, I think, to my inner secret life. I had a horrible secret of 20 years of an eating disorder that I was struggling with.

I was a very successful business person and known to throw great parties, had a very active social life. But the longer I lived, the more I became convinced that I was never going to be a good enough person to be acceptable to God, which I had really thought I needed to do, was be a good girl and God would accept me someday.

And so I realized that I had this awful self-image that nobody knew about except me and God. And what was your impression of the Christian life and Christians at that time?

Well, I had some Christian friends who had been witnessing to me and told me about Christ, so I knew that I needed a Savior.

[10:18] But I also looked at them and I thought, oh, gee, they're kind of in bondage. They have to pay 10% of their income to the church and they don't seem to have much fun.

And I was having the time of my life or so I thought. When I was listening to you, I thought I did know what freedom in not obeying God was. And why did you become a Christian? How did that happen? One word, desperation. I finally came to the end of myself and realized that I was spiraling downward, never going to be good enough for God. And just, I knew I needed a Savior. And at that moment, it became instantly clear I was never going to be good enough and it didn't matter.

God wanted me the way I was. Now, you've been a Christian for 25 years. What is your life in Christ like now? What's it like to serve Him?

[11:19] And does it bear resemblance to what you were thinking it would be like before you were a Christian? Well, it's the entire opposite. I realized that part of my captivity was the lie of Satan and thinking that there would be no freedom if I became a Christian.

And what I found was absolute, utter freedom. There's a line in a hymn that's one of my favorites called Amazing Love. And the last two lines say, My chains fell off, my soul went free.

And I did. I just felt the burden of all my sin lifted from me. I had an immediate freedom from that 20-year eating disorder. And I've just walked into such freedom to be fully who I am.

That's the only way I can explain it. I want to ask one question I didn't ask at nine. You've been serving God in full-time ministry for quite some time.

Is it, does it feel like, what is that slavery or that work like? I wouldn't trade one minute of this slavery for all of the excess and so-called joy that I thought I had.

[12:33] It's been an amazing privilege to follow Christ and go where He leads me. And I'm very thankful He led me here quite a few years ago. Well, thank you very much, Heidi.

We're very thankful He led you here too. There's a massive change there that Edie was talking about that took place in her life and every Christian's.

And the question is, how does that change happen? Well, if you look at verse 17 again, right at the end of it, Paul says that when you believed in Jesus, God committed you to the standard of teaching.

I want you to look at that word committed because literally it means He handed you over. Now, where else in Romans do you hear that phrase, God handed over humanity?

It was in chapter 1, wasn't it, where we hear about the consequence of sin, that God hands people over to the lusts of their heart. And in verse 26 of chapter 1, God handed them over to dishonorable passions.

[13:38] That was judgment on sin. Now what happens is that there is an incredible reversal that God hands us over not to the place of curse, but to the place of blessing.

And He has allowed us to come under the power of His word. That's the place of blessing. Under the power of the teaching of the good news of Jesus. It's a wonderful thing because He is talking here about the immense power of the Holy Spirit working through the word of God.

Just as we had been under the grip of sin in chapter 1, now God hands us over to another power, to the grip of His word. Paul calls it the standard of teaching, which literally means the pattern of Jesus' teaching.

And he uses that word because it means our lives were gripped by Jesus Himself. And that when we heard the good news and placed our trust in Him for our life in God, God began changing us so that we are being powerfully conformed to the pattern of Christ Himself, to His life through the word of God.

It is a powerful force to be under in a wonderful way. It brings change. And the second way that this change happens for Christians is right in the middle of verse 17.

[15:00] So just before that, it says, you have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching. And here again, Paul is describing the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

He's saying that as you heard the good news of Jesus, God changed your heart. And that's fulfillment of promises through the Old Testament that God will place a new heart within us.

And he does this as God pours His love into your heart through the Holy Spirit. We heard that in chapter 5 in Romans. And so the thing that you desire most is to return that love.

To love Him by obeying Him. And that's what's so wonderful about being under grace. By the work of the Holy Spirit, we are so overcome by God's kindness and love in Jesus that our desire is to

obey His commandments.

We want what He promises. And so that's the answer to the question at the beginning of our passage. Do we sin because we are under grace? No. Grace actually brings us heartfelt obedience. [16:11] An obedience far deeper than we could ever have if we didn't know the grace that we are under. The love of Christ controls us, as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians.

Now, Edie was sort of right when, before she was a Christian, she looked at Christianity and saw bondage or slavery because Paul says to us, you are a slave to righteousness.

But the nature of that slavery is very important for us to know. It's very different from what the world knows. And Edie described it as freedom. The collect of peace earlier puts it very well.

It says, the service of God, we say that every morning prayer, is perfect freedom. The service of God is perfect freedom. And it is only true that that prayer is true only because we have been freed so that we can choose this slavery.

It is a slavery that has nothing to do with fear or coercion. It's a heartfelt obedience, Paul tells us. And so our great desire becomes to serve God in costly ways because we have been gripped by his gospel.

[17:23] And we are compelled to do this because in doing that service, we experience the freedom that Jesus gives us. We experience what we were made to do as human beings.

Now I want to look a little bit more at that freedom because it's very important for us. At the front of the bulletin, if you look at that, there is the Westminster Catechism chapter 20 that I put in there. And the reason I put it there is because it is helpful for us because much of this has been revealed in Romans already. Chapter 20 teaches what Jesus frees believers from and what he frees them to. And, you know, take some time when you go home to look at that. It's actually, it's wonderfully encouraging. I particularly want to look at the bottom of what we have freedom to.

So it says that the liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their free access to God and their yielding obedience unto him not out of slavish fear but a childlike love and a willing mind.

[18:32] That very clearly tells us the nature of our slavery. That we yield complete obedience to God our Lord not out of slavish fear but childlike love and a willing mind.

And Edie was talking about the freedom of serving in that way even though that serving is often costly. A helpful way to describe this further baby, my two boys, they are five and eight years old and that they, at that age there are some challenges as far as obedience that we deal with from time to time sometimes more frequently than others but there are great bright spots as well that take place and one of these was a couple weeks ago I was in Toronto for Archdeacon's meetings and Catherine had hurt her back and she couldn't do much physically and so I said to the boys when I was on the phone with them you'll need to be really helpful to your mom.

Well the next morning it snowed and several inches down in Richmond and the driveway needed to be shoveled it needed to be cleared. The boys saw that it was snow and this is a big event in their lives and the first thing they did was to put on their winter clothes by themselves without being told in record time which is a minor miracle in itself and they ran out and they shoveled the driveway the whole thing and they worked slavishly for that time and then they came running in after it was completely cleared and they said with very joyful voices mom we cleared the driveway for you.

Well of course that melted her heart and Catherine told me about it on the phone that day but I want to tell you there's two things that compelled those boys to do that to work so hard one was their love for Catherine and the other one was their love for shoveling snow they love doing it and I think that this illustrates something because we are freed by Jesus to obey with childlike love for God a little bit like the boys love for Catherine and to obey with a willing mind a little like the boys readiness to shovel even though it got very difficult as well.

That's what the gospel means for us practically today as we are in church because Jesus calls us to obey in a new reality that he has set us free in incredible ways that are listed there in the bulletin.

[21:10] This is what the book of Romans is so far there's almost six chapters about God and what he's done for us to save us before there's any command for us to follow and what Jesus does for us in the richness of grace is he calls us to respond and he calls us to respond in the context of changing our heart of giving us a deep love for him a childlike love and a willingness to follow in our minds and that brings us to our application because Paul in verse 19 gives us something to do in the context of this grace it's the only imperative in our passage so we've got to pay close attention he says in the second sentence in verse 19 for just as you once presented your members as slaves

to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification so what Paul is saying here is that before they were believers the Roman Christians were deeply dedicated in fact they were zealous about the idols of living for oneself the idols of money and pleasure and power and lust and gaining the approval of others now Paul says

Jesus has set you free from the power of sin so pursue righteousness with the same with greater zeal present your members meaning all of your body parts your hands your feet your tongue your brain everything about you commit yourself to honoring and pleasing God this is what the call is that comes out of grace and there's a warning and a deep encouragement for us that we that we are closing with the warning is this that even though you are united to Jesus free from sin there is a constant temptation in every Christian's life to present yourself as a slave to sin the danger is something that is acute because when we do that we fall more and more under sin's power and we must always be vigilant about falling into that our world pushes us to have a very cavalier sense of sin but the master of sin is powerful this is what Paul is telling he says it leads you away from the life of God look at verse 21 it says what fruit were you getting at that time from the things that you are now ashamed and by the way we're always taught not to be ashamed but what was the fruit he says the end of these things is death there is a trajectory that we are led towards when we present ourselves as a slave to sin and we need to know that this is a temptation to resist but the second thing is an encouragement and it is a deep one it says that Jesus has freed you so that you can give yourself to God every day to serve him it is actually a privilege that is yours in Christ and it doesn't matter what has happened the day before

God in his mercy gives us the gift of repentance this is what he frees us to and he allows us to be able to come to him every day and say to God I present myself to you I want to honor you in the way that I make decisions at work I want to honor you in the way that I speak to my wife or my husband I want to honor you in the way that I teach my children I want to honor you in what I do with my bank account and with the time that I have and I want to honor you as I seek to obey you in what I read from the Bible and so Paul is saying be zealous be zealous to being a slave to God and that is because there is great benefit to us look at verse 22 it says that being a slave to God leads to sanctification meaning it makes you more and more like Christ this is this is the power of God's word in your life and it ends in eternal life that's the trajectory of being a slave to God and what this means is that God works in you very powerfully through your obedience first of all you will know the joy of presenting yourself in love to God as his willing servant that is a joy you share with Jesus because that is what happened with Jesus every day of his life he knew the joy of daily presenting himself to God in obedience and secondly you are beginning the life of heaven already as you present yourself to God that way because this is what it means to worship God this is some of the most exciting activity of heaven that we will be worshiping God by presenting everything about ourselves to him in loving service and finally not only are these things true but as you obey God you will truly know him this is very very important this comes out of this loving obedience from the heart I want you again to look at the front of your bulletin because at the end of it there is a quote from John Calvin and what he says there is that we know God through the obedience to his word and he says he says there that I am just starting in the middle that the first step in true knowledge is taken when we reverently embrace the testimony which God has been pleased therein to give of himself for not only does faith full and perfect faith but all correct knowledge of God originates in obedience and so you see why Paul calls us to present ourselves as slaves of obedience it is so that we can know God this is what eternal life is that we will know him and wonderfully this is how we love him more deeply this is how we understand who he is for us is in our acts of obedience of responding to his word that's the significance of what we're being called to and you know the devil wants us to forget the incredible significance and difference that this new life is that we have in Christ but our passage ends in verse 23 by making it clear how different things are just as Edie was describing in her own life but it says this it says the wages of sin is death in other words sin is the master death is the end and the way we get there is wages you earn it but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus in other words there is another master it is God and the end of serving that master is eternal life the eternal life that is in Christ and the way you get there is the free gift it is by being under grace and responding to what God has done for you and freeing you to be a slave to obedience and so the question we're left at with is how will we act on this and I think the best way is to look at the question to all the people of God as they went into the promised land

Deuteronomy 30 it says this I call heaven and earth to witness against you today I've set before you life and death blessing and curse therefore choose life that you and your offspring may live loving the Lord your God obeying his voice and holding fast to him for he is your life Amen