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**Freed to be Enslaved  
(Part 1)  
Romans 6:15-18**

**Introduction:**

In his autobiography, *A Life in Our Times*, **John Kenneth Galbraith**, America's most famous **economist** from the **1950's** through the **1970's**, who was a professor at **Harvard University** and also served in the administrations of four presidents, **illustrated** the **devotion** of his family's housekeeper, **Emily Gloria Wilson**.

He said, "It had been a wearying day, and I asked **Emily** to hold all telephone calls while I had a nap. Shortly thereafter the phone rang and she answered it. 'This is **President Lyndon Johnson** I need to talk to **Mr. Galbraith**.' To which **Emily** politely replied, 'He is sleeping, **Mr. President**. He said not to disturb him.' 'Well, wake him up. I want to talk to him,' **Johnson** remarked. Holding her ground, **Emily** then said, '**No, Mr. President**. I work for **him**, not **you**.'"

**Galbraith** went on to say, "When I called the **President** back, he could scarcely control his pleasure. He said, 'Tell that **woman** I want her **here** in the **White House**.'"

**Emily Wilson's** unwavering **submission** and **devotion** to her employer, **John Galbraith**, is similar to the kind of **obedience** that we as believers are to have toward our **Lord** and **Master**, Jesus Christ, which we will **begin** looking at this morning. Now thus far in **Romans 6:1-14** we have seen where the apostle Paul gave *four requirements* on how we as believers can turn our **vital union** with Christ into **victorious living** for

Christ. Now as we come to **vv. 15-23**, Paul continues to **address** the issue of **sin** in the life of the believer and he **structures** this paragraph the same way that he did the previous one.

**In Romans 6:15-23 we see six aspects of Paul's concern that we as believers should live in total submission to Jesus Christ and His righteousness and not fall back into our former sins.**

This morning we will be looking at only the **first three aspects**.

The **first aspect** of Paul's concern is this:

**I. The Introduction: Abhorring another appalling Question**

- A. Look at **v. 15**: What then? Shall we **sin** because we are **not under law** but **under grace**?
1. The **doctrine of salvation** by **grace alone** through **faith alone** in **Christ alone** has always been subject to the **false charge** of giving people **license to sin**. We saw this in the **first** appalling question in **v. 1** where Paul **anticipated** from what he had said in **5:20** "...where **sin** increased, **grace** abounded all the more," that some would say, "Are we to **continue** in **sin** so that **grace** may **increase**?"
  2. He is **shocked** and responds in **v. 2**, "**May it never be!** How shall **we** who **died to sin** still **live** in it?" And then in **vv. 3-14** he **explained** how true believers are **dead to sin** and **alive to God** by their **union** with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.
  3. But having said in **v. 14** that believers "...are not **under law** but **under grace**," Paul again **anticipates** a **second** appalling question, though this time **slightly different**. He knows that

some will say, “Shall we **sin because** we are **not under law** but **under grace?**”

4. Believers are **free** from the **Mosaic Law**, in that, it has **absolutely no power** in itself to **save** or **deliver** us from the **penalty** and **power** of sin, only God’s grace through faith in Christ can do that. Therefore, some might say, “**No law** means **no rules**. **Go** for it! We are **free** to sin as we please because God’s grace is always there to **forgive** us.”
  5. **Douglas Moo** accurately states, “In both **vv. 1** and **15** Paul asks whether the **grace of God** should **lead** to sin. However, in **6:1** it is a question of sinning **in order to gain more** grace, while in **6:15** it is a question of sinning **because of** grace.” (pg. 398)
  6. **Thomas Schreiner** says it this way, “The **questions** are the **same** in that the **same result** is contemplated: Does the **presence of grace justify** or **encourage** continued sin?” (pg. 329)
  7. And yet no matter **how** the question is asked, the **answer** is always the **same!**
- B. Look at Paul’s **response** at the end of **v. 15**, “**May it never be!**”
1. As we have seen **three times** before (3:4, 6; 6:2), the statement “**May it never be!**” (me genoito) is the **strongest** negative expression in the Greek. It indicates shock, abhorrence, disgust, and outrage.
  2. It has been translated as: “**Never!**” “**No way!**” “**Not at all!**” “**Certainly not!**” “**By no means!**” “**God forbid!**” “**Perish the thought!**” “**Not on your life!**” and “**Not in a thousand years.**”

3. Paul is **abhorred** by this **second** appalling question. The very **suggestion** that God's grace is a **license to sin** is **absurd!**
4. This is because the **purpose** of **God's grace** is to **free** man **from** sin not free man **to** sin. But we must be careful not to **look** at God's Law in a **wrong way**.
5. Whereas in **one sense** we are **not under law** in the way we once were, in **another sense** we are **still under** the **law of Christ** (Gal. 6:2). Therefore, being **free** from the Law does not mean that we are **free** from its **moral commands**.
6. Being "**under grace**" means that we as believers now have the God-given **resources** and **power** through the indwelling Spirit of God to **keep** the **moral norms** of God's law. Because of this, we can never say, "**Sin doesn't matter.**"
7. For it was **sin** that caused the **eternal God** to step out of heaven to become the **God-Man** in the Person of Jesus Christ. He came for the **purpose** of **dying** on the cross as our **Substitute** to pay in full the **penalty** for sin that we deserved and to break its power in our lives.
8. **John 1:29** declares that He is "...the **Lamb** of God who takes away the **sin** of the world."
9. Because **sin always matters** to God, Paul goes on to **explain why** we as believers are **not** to **take sin lightly**.
10. The **second aspect** of Paul's concern is this:

## II. The Principle: Obedience leads to Slavery

- A. Look at v. 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**?

1. As he did in **v. 3**, Paul once again says to the Roman Christians, “**Do you not know...**” He **assumes** that they should **already know** the **truth** that he is about to say.
2. And the **truth** is this: “...that **when** you **present yourselves** to someone as **slaves** for **obedience**, you are **slaves** of the one whom you **obey...**”
3. The **metaphor** of “**slavery**” dominates this paragraph, for the words “**slave**” or “**enslave**” is used **eight times** in **vv. 16-22**. Since the **majority** of the **population** of **Rome** were **slaves**, the Roman Christians **understood** exactly what Paul was saying.
4. And many of these slaves were in slavery **voluntarily**. This is why when Paul says, “...**when** you **present yourselves** to **someone** as **slaves** for **obedience**,” this was not an **uncommon situation** in the ancient world.
5. Sometimes people would **voluntarily** sell themselves into slavery in order to **avoid** financial ruin and **secure** a livelihood for their families. But a **slave** was a **slave**.
6. He had no **rights** or **will** of his own. He became the **property** of his **master** and was in **total submission** to him.
7. Now as we saw last time, the word “**present**” (paristanete) means to **offer**, and to **place** at the disposal of another for service. The term is used **five times** in **vv. 13-19** and is a very important word for the **believer’s responsibility** in the New Testament.

8. Using **human slavery** to picture **spiritual slavery**, Paul wants believers to know that when we **constantly present ourselves** (present tense) **voluntarily** to a **master** as **slaves** for “**obedience**,” we are **slaves** of the one whom we “**obey**.” The words “**obedience**” (hupakoen) and “**obey**” () here speak of the **total submission** and **absolute devotion** of a slave to his master.
  9. **Obedience** was an **essential ingredient** in **slavery**. It was the **responsibility** of the slave to **do** what he was told **without question**.
- B. Notice the **two masters** that Paul is talking about at the end of **v. 16**, “...either of **sin** resulting in death, or of **obedience** resulting in righteousness.”
1. Everyone who has ever existed is a **slave** to **one** of **two masters**: We are either a **slave** of “**sin**” or we are a **slave** of “**obedience**.” There is **no third option**.
  2. Now why would **contrast** a **slave** of “**sin**” with a **slave** of “**obedience**,” instead of a “**slave of God**” which we see in **v. 22**, or a “**slave of righteousness**” as in **vv. 18-19**? He says “**obedience**” because he wants to **emphasize** that “**under grace**” the believer’s life is to be **characterized** by **total submission** to God and His will.
  3. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:24**, “No one can serve **two masters**; for either he will **hate** the one and **love** the other, or he will be **devoted** to one and **despise** the other. You cannot serve **God** and **wealth**” or anything else for that matter. (Lk. 16:13)

4. Since we cannot serve **two masters** at the **same time**, the **master** we **choose to obey** shows **whose slave** we are. We have already seen that in the **first Adam** the entire human race is the “**slave of sin.**”
  5. Therefore, regardless of how much an **unbeliever** may hate sin’s **bondage**, he can do absolutely nothing in himself to **free** himself from the **dominion** of sin. Only Jesus Christ can do that.
  6. It is only when a person **receives** Jesus Christ as his **Savior** and **Lord** that he is **no longer** a **slave to sin** and is **freed** from its power (vv. 6-7). However, although every believer now has a **new Master**, Jesus Christ, we can still **choose** to **return** to our **old tyrant master** of **sin**.
- C. Look at the **inevitable results** of choosing to **present ourselves** to these **two masters** at the end of **v. 16**, “...either of **sin** resulting in **death**, or of **obedience** resulting in **righteousness.**”
1. **First of all**, obedience to the tyrant master, **sin**, is **deadly**. “**Death**” (thanaton) here is **all-inclusive** and refers to **spiritual, physical**, and ultimately **eternal death** if the person is not a Christian and God’s grace does not intervene.
  2. **John Murray** rightly states, “Sin is **deathly** and **death** in every respect **follows** in its **wake.**” (pg. 231)
  3. We are told in **Proverbs 14:12**, “There is a **way** which **seems right** to a man, but is **end** is the way of **death.**”
  4. **Sin** always begins the downward process of **destruction** and **death** in everything (Jan. 1:15). Whenever we as believers **choose** to **obey** it even a little, we **open the door** for **sin’s**

- mastery** once again in our lives, although we have been **promised** in v. 14, “...**sin** shall not be **master** over you.”
5. **Sin** always **seeks** to once again gain control of our lives. It works like this: Since **one sin** will quickly **lose** its level of satisfaction (i.e. Law of diminishing returns), it **demand**s more and more to reach that same level, until the person is finally **enslaved** or **addicted** by his chosen sin.
  6. Another **example** is the **sin** of **lying**. The **first time** one **lies**, he may be **horrified**; the **second time**, only somewhat **bothered**; the **third time** lying seems far more **natural** and **easy** because the sin of lying has enslaved him.
  7. Now although true believers can and do **commit sin** (1 Jn. 1:8, 10), a “professing” Christian who is living a life **characterized** by an habitual, unbroken pattern of sin **proves** that he is still shackled to the **tyrant master** of **sin**, and does not truly belong to the Lord. (1 Jn. 3:9-10)
  8. **John MacArthur** said, “Grace not only **justifies** but also **transforms** the life that is **saved**. A life that gives **no evidence** of moral and spiritual transformation gives **no evidence** of salvation.” (pg. 343)
  9. **Paul’s point** here is that we as believers must take **sin** in our lives **seriously** not **lightly**! Living **under grace** does not grant us **permission** to sin.
  10. Since in Christ we are “**dead to sin** and **alive to God**” (v. 11), we are to continually “**walk by the Spirit**” (Gal. 5:16) or live in **dependence** on Him and be **controlled** by Him in order to

victoriously **fight against sin**, instead of **clinging** to the chains of sin that have us bound.

11. Instead of **presenting ourselves to sin** resulting in **death**, we are to continually **present ourselves** to “**obedience** (to God) resulting in **righteousness**.”
12. The word “**righteousness**” (dikaiosunen) here is probably best seen as referring to **righteousness in all respects**. It has to do with our **declared righteousness** by God as we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ; primarily our **moral and ethical righteousness** in transformed behavior that is pleasing to God; and our **final righteousness** when we are one day made **perfect** in heaven when the very **presence** of sin is removed.
13. May we as believer **never forget** that we are **responsible** to keep on **presenting ourselves to obedience** to God, which results in **righteousness** of life. This is the **only way** that we will become more and more like Jesus Christ.
14. For if we don't, then we will be **choosing to present ourselves to sin**, which will always result in death no matter how pleasurable sin may be for a season. The **principle** is this: Our **obedience** leads to **slavery** to the **master** we **choose**.
15. Now having stated this **principle**, Paul now **applies** it not only to the Roman Christians, but also to all believers. We see this in the **third aspect** of Paul's concern, which is this:

### III. The Application: Salvation involves changing Masters

- A. Look at v. 17: But **thanks** be to **God** that though you **were slaves** of sin, you became **obedient** from the **heart** to that **form** of

**teaching** to which **you** were **committed**, and having been **freed** from sin, you became **slaves** of **righteousness**.

1. So **decisive** and **radical** was the **internal change** that has taken place in the **hearts** of the Roman Christians, and **all** other believers, by the **grace** and power of God at the **moment** of their salvation that Paul **bursts forth** in a spontaneous **doxology**, “But **thanks** be to **God...**” for **all** that He has done for us in Christ.
  2. Notice that Paul **thanks God** for **four realities** about believers: The **first reality** is: **Our slavery to sin is over**. Look again at **v. 17**, “But thanks be to God that though **you were** (i.e. past tense) **slaves of sin...**” (Stop there)
  3. **Before Christ** came into our lives, no matter how **outwardly moral, upright, or benevolent** we may have been, God’s Word tells us that we were in a **constant state** of being **characterized** as “**slaves to sin**” ultimately under the lordship of **Satan**.
  4. **But now** by God’s **grace** through **faith** in Jesus Christ our **slavery** to sin is **over**. Although sin is not yet completely **removed** from our lives, the **power of sin** in our lives is broken.
  5. Therefore, we are not **neutral** in our **battle** against sin. Our salvation involved a change in masters from the old **tyrant master** of **sin** to our **new Master**, Jesus Christ.
- B. The **second reality** about believers is: **We obeyed God’s truth with sincerity**. Look again at **v. 17**, “...**you** became **obedient**

from the **heart** to that **form** of **teaching** to which **you** were **committed.**”

1. This is the **pivot point** in every believer’s salvation history. The moment we became” **obedient** (aorist indicative) from our “**heart,**” our innermost being **sincerely believed** the **truth** of the gospel, God **saved** us.
2. The word “**obedient**” (hupekousate) here is **synonymous** with our **initial faith** commitment to Christ. Here we see that our **faith in Christ** and our **obedient commitment** to Him as **Lord** are **inseparable.**
3. This is elsewhere called the “**obedience of faith**” (1:5; 16:26). **John MacArthur** describes this well, saying, “**Faith** and **obedience** are inescapably related. There is **no saving faith** in God apart from **obedience** to God, and there can be **no godly obedience** without **godly faith.**” (pg. 346)
4. Now notice again that our **wholehearted obedience** was “...to that **form** of **teaching** to which **you** were **committed.**” We might have expected Paul to say “that form of teaching which was **committed** (paredothete) or **delivered you,**” as the **KJV** translates it.
5. But instead, Paul says that **believers themselves** are the ones who are **committed** or **delivered** to this form of teaching. The **NKJV** corrects this and translates it “that form of doctrine to which **you** were **delivered.**”
6. So what does Paul mean here? The word “**form**” (tupon) here refers to a **mold, pattern** or **standard** of teaching.

7. So what is this “**form (or pattern) of teaching,**” **Everett Harrison** states, “The teaching of Jesus and the apostles, especially in terms of the **demands of discipleship,** the **ethical requirements** of the faith, and the **principles** that must guide believers in their **relations** one to the other and to the world **became** in time **so definite** and **fixed** that one could go from one area of the church to another and find the **same general pattern.**” (pg. 73)
  8. It has to do with **sound doctrine.** **Paul’s point** is that all believers have already been **committed** (aorist passive indicative) or **delivered** to this **standard** of sound doctrine **by God** and we are to obey it and live by it. Becoming a Christian is not some **vague commitment** to follow Jesus; it is a **total commitment** to **obey** the **truths** of the Word of God because we have a **new Master** (Jn. 8:31; 14:21, 23-24; 15:10).
- C. The **third reality** about believers is: **We permanently are liberated from sin.** Look at the first part **v. 18:** and having been **freed** from sin...
1. As **Americans** we live in a country where we have the privilege of enjoying so many **freedoms** that other people around the world do not enjoy. But just because people may be **free outwardly** does not mean that they are **free inwardly.**
  2. **No one** is ever **free** from a **master.** To think that we are **independent** and “our own boss” is nothing but an **illusion created** and **sustained** by **Satan.**
  3. **Independence** or **human autonomy** is **spiritual suicide.** It is like a **skydiver** in an airplane at **10,000 feet** announcing to

the pilot, “I want to be **free**, so I’m **not** going to use my **parachute** this time.” **How insane!**

4. And yet, that’s the **insanity** of **sin**. **C.S. Lewis** perceptively observed, “[The lost] enjoy **forever** the **horrible freedom** they have **demande**d, and are therefore **self-enslaved**.” (Mac. pg. 98)

5. We see sin’s insanity in the last stanza of **William Earnest Henley’s** famous poem entitled “**Invictus**,” which is so often quoted and praised by man. It says:

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
**I am** the **master** of my **fate**,  
**I am** the **captain** of my **soul**.

6. In reality, no human being is “the **master** of his fate” or the “**captain** of his soul.” Sure, the **human will** can accomplish many incredible things, but sinful man can never **deliver himself** from being a “**slave of sin**.”

7. **Only God** can do that and He has to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul says that we have already been “**freed** (eleutherothentes—passive voice) from sin.”

8. Only Christians can **know** and **experience true freedom** and **deliverance** from sin. For we have been **rescued** out of the lordship of **sin** into the lordship of **God**, out of the **dominion** of darkness into the **kingdom** of Christ (Col. 1:13).

D. The **fourth reality** about believers is: **Our freedom is enslavement to righteousness**. Look at the last part of **v. 18**:  
...you became **slaves** of **righteousness**.

1. Here we see that the moment we placed saving faith in Jesus Christ it was God Himself who made us “**slaves** (edoulothete— aorist passive indicative) of **righteousness**”.
2. Once again, the word “**righteousness**” (dikaiosune) is probably best taken to refer to **righteousness in all respects**. But our **moral** and **ethical righteousness** in transformed behavior that is **pleasing** to God, which is the **primary focus** in this context.
3. Because we as believer now have a **new Master**, as **Christ’s slaves** (1 Cor. 7:22) we now for the **first time** in our lives are **truly able** to live **righteous, Christlike lives** the way God intended by the **power** of the indwelling Spirit of God. We are “**freed** to be **enslaved**” to Christ and His righteousness.
4. This is **true freedom**. For Jesus said in **John 8:36**, “...if the **Son** makes you **free**, you will be **free indeed**.”
5. Therefore, we must never confuse **liberty** with **license**. Remember that the **purpose** of **God’s grace** is to **free** man **from** sin not free man **to** sin.
6. Freedom is never the **right** to do as we **please**; it is the **responsibility** to do as we **ought**.

### **Conclusion:**

In closing, being “**under grace**” is to be **characterized** by “**obedience**,” our **total submission** to Jesus Christ and His Word, and is to be **lived out** in a life of **righteousness**. To what **master** are you **presenting yourself** as a **slave** for **obedience**? Don’t return to your old master, sin, but live under the lordship of your new Master, Jesus Christ.