

Blessed Bondage – Romans 6:15-23

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Last Week -

1. Remember how we ended last week? V. 14 –

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

2. Did you remind yourself of it this week? That you are not under law but under grace?

3. Monday morning I was doing a little shopping. One of the employees greeted me then said, “I remember; I’m not under law, but under grace!”

4. We’re not under rules, regulations & religious rituals. We’re in God’s delight & pleasure.

5. Being under grace *means* God isn’t waiting for you *to perform*;

It means → He’s waiting //// **FOR YOU!**

B. Ever Been Misunderstood?

1. But Paul knew from much experience that some *misunderstood* this. Have *you* ever been misunderstood?

2. In NYC, many people don’t own a car; they either walk or take a cab.

a. One evening a couple called up a cab to take them cross town to a new restaurant.

b. They turned on a night light, turned the answering machine on, covered their pet parakeet & put the cat outside.

c. When the taxi arrived & honked, they opened the door to leave but the cat shot back into the house.

d. They knew they couldn’t leave it in the house because it always tried to eat the bird.

e. So the wife went out to the taxi while the husband went back inside to get the cat.

f. It decided to play coy & ran upstairs.

g. The wife didn’t want the cab driver to know the house would be empty for the night so she said her husband was just saying good-bye to her mother who lived with them.

h. A few minutes later, the husband got into the cab saying, ”Sorry I took so long. She was hiding under the bed. Had to poke her with a coat hanger to get her to come out. She tried to take off so I grabbed her by the neck. Then I had

to wrap her in a blanket to keep her from scratching me. I hauled her downstairs and threw her in the back yard!"

- i. The cabdriver hit a parked car.

C. Paul Misrepresented!

1. Paul's Gospel of Grace hadn't just been *misunderstood*, he'd been *misrepresented*.
2. His opponents *twisted* his words, claiming he taught, "Since we're under grace & free from the penalty of sin, sin doesn't *matter*. We can do what we want."
3. He confronts that distortion with –

II. TEXT

A. V. 15

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!

1. As we saw in the first half of ch. 6 last week, Paul made it clear God's grace doesn't dispense with the call to holiness.
 2. When true grace comes, *it changes everything*.
 3. A relationship with God is going to have a dramatic impact on *every other* relationship.
 4. The great NT scholar FF Bruce said it this way, "To make being 'under grace' an excuse for sinning is a sign one is not really 'under grace' at all."
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5. Paul now comes at this whole thing from a different angle, one that would have been a potent metaphor for the Romans – *Slavery*.

B. V. 16

¹⁶ Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

1. Slavery was a *hot topic* in Rome so this illustration definitely grabbed their attention..
 - a. About *a third* of the population of Rome were slaves!
 - b. Not long before Paul wrote this letter there'd been a movement to make all slaves wear a uniform.
 - 1) Opponents quickly quashed the idea.
 - 2) They reasoned if all slaves wore the same thing, they'd see how many they were & revolt.
 - c. Historians say that while a third were slaves, *another 15%* were slaves who'd gained their freedom.

- d. In the 1st Century, the Gospel spread rapidly among slaves & virtually every congregation around the Roman Empire had many slaves as members.
 - e. Because we're *equal* in Christ, distinctions between slave & free were left at the door of the church & all sat side by side.
 - f. Critics of Christianity *used this* as support for their charge that Christians were dangerous radicals seeking to turn society *upside down*.
2. We know the Church at Rome was filled with both the free & slaves. They'd wrestled with this issue at length. So Paul's use of slavery as a picture of the Christian life was especially meaningful to them.
 3. It's not so much for us because we tend to think of slavery in a narrow historical sense – Plantation slavery; the kind practiced for decades in the early United States & South that lead to the Civil War.
 - a. That was mostly a cruel trade of Africans shipped to the New World to work the fields.
 - b. But we need to remember that slavery is an ancient institution stretching back thousands of years.
 - c. And different societies have had different *rules* regarding slavery.
 - d. At rare times & places slavery has actually been *chosen* by those in bondage.
 - e. They chose bondage because serving their master proved more satisfying & rewarding than living free & serving themselves.
 - f. God even made a provision for this in the Law of Moses.
 - 1) In Israel, slavery was limited to 7 years, then slaves had to be set free.
 - 2) But—if when it came time to emancipate a slave, he/she had come to love their master & though their life as a slave was better than being free, they could choose life-long service & become what was called a “bond-slave.”
 4. Not every master was a cruel, brutal tyrant who abused his servants.
 - a. Many of them understood people are better motivated by love than fear.
 - b. So instead of the threat of violence, they took excellent care of their slaves.
 - c. They fed, housed, & clothed them well.
 - d. They gave them *plenty of latitude* when it came to most decisions.
 - e. They *encouraged* them with words of appreciation & *praised* them for work done well.
 - h. They *rewarded* them with special gifts when the fields or business excelled.
 - i. Many slaves of such masters had far better lives under their master than they had when free.
 5. In fact, some masters understood that giving their servants an *incentive* went far in maintaining a good relationship with them.

- a. So they paid them a small wage, encouraging them to save it up.
 - b. Because one day, they'd have enough to buy their own freedom!
 - c. That's how a significant portion of the population of Rome had at one time *been* slaves.
 - d. They'd served masters who *helped them* attain their freedom.
6. So as we consider Paul's use of slavery as a picture of the Christian life, think of it more in this classic Roman way.
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7. Paul's thought runs like this – *Obedience* is the universal hallmark of slavery.
- a. There's a *master* & a *slave*:
 - 1) The master *commands*, the slave *obeys*.
 - 2) That pretty much sums up their relationship.
 - b. And in that sense, *everyone is a slave* because we *all obey* some master.
 - c. *Something* governs our choices, our decisions.

We all obey something

- d. Someone might say, "No way Jay! I obey no one. I do *what* I want, *when* I want, *how* I want. I'm free!"
 - e. *THAT* freedom, looked at from another angle, is only *slavery to self*.
 - 1) You're still obedient; it's your desires you're obeying.
 - 2) *They* are your master.
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8. Now, a master can be either cruel or good.
- a. In Rome, masters either treated their slaves as
 - 1) *objects to use & discard* or as
 - 2) *people to honor & take care of*.
 - b. Paul says that → In the end, our obedience will be to either a good or cruel master.
 - 1) Sin is cruel & leads to death.
 - 2) Righteousness is good & leads to life.
 - d. There's no middle ground – it's one or the other.
 - e. Either we serve sin or righteousness.
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9. We're all slaves, obedient to something.
- a. Our slavery can lead in 1 of 2 directions; *bondage* or *freedom*.
 - b. If we serve the cruel master Sin – we fall deeper & deeper into *bondage*.
 - 1) And with that bondage comes a creeping loss of what makes us human.
 - 2) Bondage brings blindness & slowly consumes the power to choose.
 - 3) Think of *addiction*; like drug addiction.
 - a) At first the appeal is to exercise the freedom of personal choice & get high.
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- b) Though conscience says “Don’t do it,” other factors shout it down.
 - c) The high feels good, & even though there are consequences, the person does it again, & again, & again.
 - d) Addiction sets in. *Want* becomes *NEED* & trumps everything else.
 - e) *All the addict thinks about* is scoring the next fix.
- 4) Drug addiction is an apt picture of the *spiritual addiction* of all sin.
 - 5) One of the *telling symptoms* of *spiritual addiction* to sin is the claim of freedom!
 - 6) Those most bound are the ones who *most loudly* declare they’re free.
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c. *Obeying sin results in bondage.*

d. *But serving righteousness leads to freedom.*

- 1) When we chose what’s right & good, we’re doing what we were *created for* & life works.
 - 2) While sin *eats away* at our humanity, righteousness *restores* it.
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10. Elizabeth Eliot was visiting Scotland & saw a marvelous picture of this.

a. She watched while a collie tended a herd of sheep.

b. He was bred & trained for it & performed his task to perfection.

1) He circled left & right; barked, crouched, & nipped at stubborn straying sheep.

2) His eyes never left the flock, making sure they were safe.

3) And while his *eyes* were locked on the sheep, his *ears* were given to his master, the shepherd, who stood nearby with a metal whistle.

c. Eliot writes, “I saw 2 creatures who were in the fullest sense ‘in their glory’: A man who had given his life to sheep, who loved them and loved his dog; and a dog whose trust in man was absolute, whose obedience was instant & unconditional, and whose very meat & drink was to do the will of his master.”

11. As men & women, we are ‘in *our* glory’ when we’re obeying God.

a. Contrary to popular thought, obedience to God isn’t bondage, it’s *freedom* because fellowship with God is what we were created for.

b. *Bondage* is what happens when we obey sin.

C. Vs. 17-18

¹⁷ But God be thanked that *though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.* ¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

1. The key to what Paul means is found in his use of the word “form” when he says, ***. . . you obeyed from the heart that FROM of doctrine . . .***

- a. The word referred to the *contents* of something.
- b. It was used of an *example* people looked to for guidance.
2. Paul knew the Roman believers hadn't just been told to "follow Christ" without a clear idea of what that meant.
3. We know from many of the Early Church Fathers that there was a uniform body of teaching on what constituted a *normal Christian life* in terms of morality & ethics.
 - a. They didn't just learn *what to believe*, they'd been taught *how to live*.
 - b. It was expected that as a person matured in faith they'd grow in grace & the fruit of the Spirit.
 - c. Following Jesus meant that over time believers would look more & more like Him.
4. That was the report Paul had received about the Church at Rome.
 - a. Though they'd once had lifestyles dominated by sin,
 - b. Now they had a reputation for being servants of God.

D. V. 19

1. After commending them he issues a rousing call to moral excellence in v. 19.
2. Because they're *already* committed to righteousness he urges them to more.
3. But he *begins* with . . .
- ¹⁹ **I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.**
 - a. This is similar as when today we say, "Let me spell this out for you." Or "Let me make this perfectly clear."
 - b. He's admits the illustration he uses here might be *simplistic*, so he warns them not to miss the point.
4. Here it is -

For just as you presented your members = [the parts of your body] as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.
5. This repeats what we saw last week in vs. 12-13.
6. Salvation applies to all we are. It includes our body, as well as our soul, & spirit.
7. Before we came to faith in Christ, we used our bodies in the service of sin.
8. Now that we're born again, we're to present ourselves, *including our bodies* to the service of God.

E. Vs. 20-22

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. ²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

1. The best way to explain this is to use another illustration.
2. We live across from a park. WE have 2 dogs which usually stay in the backyard. But if they're inside & we leave the front door open, they will bolt out that door & take off.
 - a. They've gotten out a few times & they nearly always do the same thing.
 - b. About the only way to get them back is to get in the car & drive down the street where they're discovering new smells.
 - c. We open the door & call them over. Thinking we're taking off & there's an adventure they might miss, they come running over & jump into the car.
 - d. Then we turn around, drive back home & put them in the boring backyard.
 - e. Because they run off & won't come back without getting tricked like this – we don't let them out without a leash.
3. But ***every day*** our neighbor takes their dog for a walk in the park w/o a leash.
 - a. Their dog stays with them. It may run off a short distance to chase a bird or check out some new smell,
 - b. But when their master calls or they get far enough away, they run right back on their own.
4. Which dog is free –
 - a. Mine, who ***disobey*** so have to stay on a leash & only go for a walk in the park once in a while,
 - b. Or the neighbor's that go ***every*** day, ***without*** a leash, because it ***obeys*** its master?
5. By ***disobeying***, my dog ***chooses bondage***. But by ***obeying***, the neighbor's dog is ***free***.
6. We are no different. Freedom is found in obedience to Christ. The ***greater our submission*** to Him, the ***freer*** we are & the more of our humanity is reclaimed.
Because we were created to obey God.

III. CONCLUSION

A. V. 23

²³ For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. The meaning of this verse unfolds as we remember the potential for a slave to gain his/her freedom.
2. The harsh master treated his slaves as objects to use & discard.
3. The good master honored the dignity & humanity of his servants & *offered* them a route to freedom.
4. Sin is a cruel master. The only reward it gives its slaves is death.
5. If you're not a Christian, don't think that you are somehow going to *escape* sin's payday.
 - a. The wages of sin is death. You called the tune, you **WILL** pay the piper.
 - b. You can no more avoid the consequences of sin than you can jump out a window & fly.
 - c. Gravity is an unbreakable rule.
 - 1) It may take a while till you meet the pavement
 - 2) And you're moment of free-fall may seem like freedom –
 - 3) But a hard reality is coming quickly → You are in bondage to gravity.
 - d. Just as surely, Sin's *payday* is coming.
6. But God's *gift* is eternal life.

B. Reach Out

1. One day, many years ago, I realized I was in a free-fall toward death.
2. I was a slave to my own desires & in bondage to sin which blinded me to me true condition.
3. Oh – I thought I was free!
4. Then, in answer to my mother's prayers, God opened my eyes to the fact I wasn't free, I was in a free-fall, & the end was approaching fast.
5. I cried out to God, Who rescued me.
6. I took hold of the gift of forgiveness He offered.
7. His grace, His love has transformed my life from beginning to end.
8. What He did for me, He can & wants to do for you.