

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 2, 2016

Romans 6:15-23

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom 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 wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. 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 to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Do any of you know what happened on December 6, 1865? December 6, 1865 was the day the state of Georgia ratified the 13th Amendment to add it to our country's constitution. The 13th Amendment bans slavery in this country. This is a good thing. It means we don't have to worry about someone buying us and forcing us to do something we don't want to do. It means we are free to go wherever we want and don't have to worry about our master trying to catch us.

The 13th Amendment abolished slavery in our country, but it was common place in the Roman world. Paul makes use of this common practice to help illustrate his point to the Romans. He writes, **"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"**

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Paul uses the concept of slavery to help the Romans understand the spiritual battle which is going on inside of them. Slaves belong to a master and Paul tells us there are two masters which are battling for control over our hearts. One is sin and the other is righteousness. He says the Romans show who their master is by the things they do. They once were slaves to sin and could only do what sin wanted them to do. This meant they were free from righteousness and they didn't do the things God wanted them to do.

Paul says this slavery to sin leads them even farther and farther away from God because all slaves to sin want to do is sin. What will this slavery to sin lead to? **"I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness. 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! For the wages of sin is death." Paul tells the Romans slavery to sin is of no benefit to them. Why? Slavery to sin leads to one place: hell. Slavery to sin means the person has rejected God and chosen to live a life free from righteousness. The sinful slave wants nothing to do with God and has zero desire to change. Eventually, if this person refuses to change, the only place they can end up in is hell.

Paul tells us the Romans were slaves to sin. Now, they are no longer slaves to sin because they have been freed from sin by God's righteousness. When did this change happen? Paul explains this change a

few verses earlier in chapter six. **“We died to sin; we were therefore buried with (Jesus) through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”**

“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.”

“And offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.” Paul tells the Romans their slavery to sin ended the moment they were brought to faith. The Romans were transformed from being slaves to sin into slaves of righteousness. This slavery made them people who loved to serve God. It made them hate their old way of life and living as slaves of sin. It made them ashamed of their old life because it wasn't the way God wanted them to live.

What is Paul's whole point of reminding the Romans they are slaves to righteousness and not sin? Paul's goal is to encourage the Romans to work their lives of sanctification. Wait, some of you might be wondering, “What does sanctification mean?” Sanctification means living a life which makes it obvious that you are a Christian. It means letting your light shine in this world by doing what God wants you to do.

Paul makes it clear our lives of sanctification can only be based in what Jesus has done for us. Jesus made our lives of sanctification possible when he took our old self, which was a slave to sin, and crucified it with him on the cross. Jesus' death and resurrection have freed us from our slavery to sin. The miracle of faith worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit means we are able to love and serve God with our actions. We show this through our life of sanctification.

Paul encourages a life of sanctification when he says, **“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”** Jesus has made us slaves to God able to live a life of sanctification. Paul makes us the promise that if we continue in our lives of sanctification we will end up in heaven. Why? Our life of sanctification shows Jesus is our master since we listen to his word. It shows we know and trust his promise of eternal life.

This leads me to ask you the question which is our theme today. Who is our master? I would hope we would quickly say Jesus is our master. We are slaves to righteousness. We aren't slaves to sin. I know this would be our answer, but I still have one more question. Can other people tell who our master is? Can they easily tell we belong to Jesus and are slaves of righteousness? Or would they look at us think we are slaves to sin?

I want you to evaluate your life with me as we explore this question. Can others tell who my master is? What do you do in these situations? Do you think you are underpaid and undervalued at work? Is management making stupid decisions which make you scratch your head? Do you wonder if your job

will be the next one cut? Do these things tempt you to cut corners at work or do you do everything you should? Do you give work your all or get by with doing as little as possible because leadership is a mess?

How do you act around the house? Kids, do you listen to what mom or dad tells you to do? Or do you try and get away with doing things they won't let you? Are you happy with the clothes they buy for you? Or do you complain that they are out of style and no one wears them anymore? Men, do you put effort into helping around the house or do you put more effort into getting your next beer or watching TV? Women, do you encourage your husband to help or do you nag him to do it?

What happens when someone asks you to do something to help someone else out? Do you willingly want to help? Or do you think is this going to help me? Or is it going to hurt me? All of these things I listed are opportunities to show who our master is. How do you react in them? Slaves to sin are lazy and cut corners at work. Slaves to sin complain about what parents don't do. Slaves to sin care more about the next beer than helping around the house. Slaves to sin nag to get things done at home.

Slaves to sin look at their lives and wonder what is in it for me when I help someone out. I see many times in my life where I people would think I am a slave to sin rather than righteousness. Don't kid yourselves. I know you can too. We all can. Why? We are sinners who, despite the fact we have been freed from sin, still have a sinful nature which loves to sin. Our sinful nature longs to be free from God's righteousness and serve self rather than God.

This desire to serve self and be free from righteousness destroys our life of sanctification. It snuffs out our light of faith. It makes us slaves of sin which leads to spiritual death and to hell. Going from being slaves of righteousness to slaves of sin is a scary thought. How do we prevent it? How can we fight to make sure we stay slaves of righteousness? **"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted."**

"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." We remember Jesus has set us free from sin. He is our master. Not sin. We are slaves to righteousness and doing what God wants.

How can we remember Jesus is our master and not sin? Work at our lives of sanctification. Find a way to listen to Jesus more than just once a month or week. Find a way to listen to Jesus every day. What will happen when we find a way to listen to him every day? He will remind us that he is our master and we are free to serve him. He will tell us we can serve him by giving our all at work. He will help us appreciate our parents, spouse or the opportunity to serve others since this appreciation is love for him.

Slavery is a topic which isn't extremely familiar to us in America because of the 13th Amendment. The 13th Amendment is a great blessing to us. However, I hope slavery to righteousness is something which we all will know and love our whole lives because slavery to righteousness leads to eternal life in heaven. Amen.