

No Longer Slaves, Romans 6:6-23, 9/17/20

Remember last week Paul asked rhetorical question: v.1 *What shall we say then? Should we go on sinning so that grace may increase?* He rephrases and repeats the question: ¹⁵ *What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?* Do I have a spiritual visa card with an unlimited sin balance? Well Paul answers that question emphatically. *By no means!* That is Greek for "Heck No!" Paul gives us three reasons why the gospel does not teach license to sin, but teaches power over sin. And the first, most critical way the gospel gives us power over sin is because it gives us a *new identity in Jesus Christ*. Because we are united with Christ in his death and his resurrection- his past is our past, his future is our future. Last week I left you with a challenge- to renounce your past guilt, identity and the sins that keep you sitting on the sidelines and defeated. And to reclaim your future- your new identity in Christ. I received several encouraging emails last week from our church family of how this truth has made an impact in their lives. Let me read one:

"I wanted to thank you so much for your sermon yesterday. It truly hit my heart and I heard God speaking directly to me. I have been struggling with the sin of gluttony for a long time. This has been my greatest stronghold and has left a heavy shadow over my spiritual life. Repeatedly the Lord has called me to surrender this to him. I now realize that I have failed over and over because, instead of renouncing, I have been reclaiming a sin from my old self. A sin that I had forgotten was already paid for! Your clarification of the beginning of Romans 6 helped me to get this truth from my head to my heart. I felt the Holy Spirit lift a huge burden from me as I said the prayer you displayed for us. I now understand what it means that "our old self was crucified with him". I am left with absolute humility and awe at my Savior who freed me from this burden that led to death. It is nothing I could have done! God was asking me to simply accept this gift of freedom from a sin that held me down for so long. I feel again a sense of freedom that I haven't felt since my conversion. Whenever the enemy tries to entangle me again in the sin of gluttony, I will pray the truth of Romans 6. All glory and honor to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Amen! This is the business that God is in- transformed lives! And this is our business and we will keep preaching the gospel because it is the only truth that has the power to transform lives.

Paul continues his argument for why the Gospel has the power to break the power of sin.

#2 We have a New Master

I'm sure you noticed the theme of this passage when you heard the Scripture read. Paul uses the analogy of the slave-master relationship throughout this section.

Romans 6:16

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?

We hear these words "offering yourself to someone to obey them as a slave" and that seems shocking to us but not to the original audience. When we hear slavery, we immediately go to

the context of American history. The slavery in America was race-based, dehumanizing, people groups taken by force, and it was lifelong. But in the first century, if you were faced with a debt could not pay off, you may decide to sell yourself to someone to work for them as a “doulos” and indentured servant or slave, to pay off the debt, at which point you would be freed again. Legally, that master had control over your life until your debt was paid. This was part of the economic system of the day. Now, let’s be clear- All forms of slavery are abhorrent, an abuse of power and go completely against what the Bible says about how we are all created in the image of God with inherent worth and dignity. Paul tells us in verse 19 that he’s borrowing this as an illustration, this isn’t the Bible condoning slavery...which I hope is obvious but needs to be said.

Paul says, in the same way that a 1st century person in debt offers himself in slavery to his master- so too every one of us have spiritual masters that we offer ourselves to. And here Paul is saying the only choice you get is **which master- either sin is your master or God.** I’ve used the quote many times from the late David Foster Wallace, the highly respected, non-religious author. It is simple and self-evident: ***In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.***¹ There is no one without a god. God made our hearts to worship- to give ourselves over to something or someone in dedication, pursue, passion and obedience to. We all live for something, we have primary ways of finding significance, value, security. Whatever that “something” is it’s a spiritual master. You do not control it, it controls you.

What do these spiritual masters look like? Before we go any further, we need to recognize what they are before we can break free from them. So let’s do some heart-level discovery. And they might be different from what you thought.

Look at what Paul says in verse ¹² ***Don’t let sin reign (have dominion) in your mortal body, so that you obey its evil desires.*** The word evil is actually not in the Greek- it’s just one word: **epithumeia- Literally over, or inordinate desires.** He’s not just talking about desire for bad and evil things, but rather inordinate, over desires, misplaced desires for good things. Taking a good thing and making it an ultimate thing², a meta-narrative for our lives. Or biblically speaking- it is breaking the 1st commandment- “Have no other gods before me.” Something or someone has taken the place of God in my life as the object of my worship.

Now this concept has broadened and deepened my understanding of my own sin: from merely the sin I commit to the deeper idols, spiritual masters that vie for my worship. Christian counselor and author David Powlison provides some **helpful 4 categories for our spiritual masters.**³

¹ David Foster Wallace, Kenyon College Graduation Speech, 2005

² Tim Keller- *Counterfeit Gods*

³ David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*

1. Power: Some of us have epi-desires of influence and recognition. They seek that through things like money, status, education, the person who has all answers or you need in order to get something.

2. Control: Some of us have the epi-desire that everything goes according to their plan, and want to know that in the future that everything will continue to go according to their plan. They don't like uncertainty and they have to have things happen on their terms and according to their timetable. If that timetable is thrown off or others aren't getting in line with their wishes, they become irritable, impatient, angry and manipulative.

3. Approval: Some of us have the epi-desire to be loved and accepted. We can't be happy unless certain other people are happy with them, admire them, or desire them. So, criticism is devastating to them. Not being affirmed is devastating. Feeling like they are not attractive enough is devastating. Being picked last is devastating.

4. Pleasure: Some of us have the epi-desire for physical delights, comfort, experience. The good life is sexual pleasure, a nice house, best vacations, a nice car, good food, or escape from the discomforts of reality through gaming, eating, hunting, golfing. Remember the old 80s song- Everybody's working for the weekend? Basically, our work, our relationships, our hobbies are all a means of serving our spiritual master of pleasure.

Power, Control, Approval, Pleasure- These certainly aren't the only Spiritual Masters but that's a great start. If you are honest? Which of these 4 is your biggest struggle? Now, turn to your neighbor and say, "I know what yours is!"...Just kidding. Notice again- that none of them are bad in and of themselves. Wanting respect and influence, things to be orderly, to be accepted, to have pleasure and fun... Good things, that become god things.

OK- you are starting to get a clearer diagnosis, let's go one layer deeper to discerning: Tim Keller in Counterfeit Gods. Three ways to know:

Epi-Anger: When something blocks you getting a good thing, you get upset. That's normal and fine. But if something blocks you from getting an ultimate thing, you get *epi-* angry. You snap. You rage.

Epi-worry: If something good in your life is threatened, you get worried. If I found out my kids were in danger, I'd be worried. That's natural. But if something ultimate in your life is threatened, you are paralyzed. Your fear has become *epi-*fear. You are so anxious that you cannot think right.

Epi-Sadness: If you lose something good in your life, you grieve and weep. Again, that's normal. But if you lose something ultimate, you despair; you fall apart; you feel like life is not worth living.

These 3 emotions point to places where something has displaced God as the Master of your heart. You say, “OK thanks a lot Nate, I thought I was doing pretty good, but suddenly I realize I have rival spiritual masters in my life. What do I do?” Well there is good news.

Romans 6:13,17-18

¹³ 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; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Paul says, the answer is not “grit your teeth and stop sinning.” It’s not just trying to no longer want power or pleasure. It is recognizing and believing that we have a new master. It all goes back to knowing who we are now. Not only does embracing the gospel give us a new identity, it gives us a new master. That the old masters have no real power over us except the power we give him. We take our desires for power, pleasure, control and acceptance and we direct them toward obedience and worship to God. #1 We have a New Identity, #2 We have a New Master... this leads right into the third- #3 We have a new Motivation.

Romans 6:20-23

²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!

²² 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. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notice what Paul says are the results of following our spiritual masters- v. 21 shame and death. Our spiritual masters are also masters of disguise. They veil themselves to promise fulfillment, freedom, joy and life...but they actually deliver the opposite. Our spiritual masters are not trying to produce life in us, goodness, joy, character... instead they kill joy, they kill goodness, they kill life.

We know this and yet we don’t know it. Listen again to David Foster Wallace- he continues. “And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship — is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things — if they are where you tap real meaning in life — then you will never have enough. Never feel you have enough. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. Worship power and you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart — you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. And so on. On one level, we all know this stuff already — it’s been codified in proverbs and parables: the skeleton

of every great story. The trick is keeping the truth upfront in daily consciousness. Look, the insidious thing about these forms of worship is that they are unconscious. They are default-settings.”⁴

I’ve never been to a greyhound racetrack...apparently they are popular in the deep south. I heard a pastor share about his experience and how it illustrated this spiritual point. He said that they bring this [Picture] fake rabbit named Rusty, the announcer goes, “Heeeere’s Rusty!” Those dogs get worked up in a frenzy, they are banging against the door of the cages and when they open them they tear off after Rusty, rounding those corners like it’s Talladega. They get all the way to the end and that “rabbit” suddenly disappears... Later in the kennel, they’re like “AHHH I was SO CLOSE this time!” Their friends are like, “Gosh, ME TOO! You think we’ll ever see that rabbit again?” “I don’t know.” Sure enough, the next day, HE’S BACK! And they chase him around and around again. We think, “Man, what a dumb dog!” But everyday we wake up and our spiritual masters are saying to us, “Heeeere’s Rusty!” They off we go chasing them. And the thing that’s the most sad is when the dogs actually catch the rabbit. They chew through it and they go, “Hey... wait a minute. I’ve been duped. *This isn’t even a real rabbit.*” And they say that if that ever happens, that dog loses almost all motivation to even run the race. And spiritually for us, that may be the grace of God to give you what you’ve always wanted so that we realize it’s a false promise. It can’t deliver. It steals, it kills, it destroys. That’s where some of you are. You caught Rusty. You got the car, moved into the house, gotten the corner office, you are in the relationship. And you say...that’s it?

When our eyes are unveiled to our new Master who gives us life- Jesus and his beauty, his truth, his promises redirect our desires to fulfillment in him. **We are given a new motivation**- to please Him because He is what your soul has always been looking for. His acceptance never falters, his stock never crashes, his love never fades. When we finally turn the corner to realizing that God’s not trying to make us miserable- but to truly give us the good life in Him by freeing us from that which enslaves, that when we begin to see freedom.

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⁴ David Foster Wallace, Kenyon College Graduation Speech, 2005