

Sermon 48: Romans 6:15-16: Whose slave are you?

OUTLINE

Are we free from service?

Only two kinds of service

The outcomes of service

INTRODUCTION

What is freedom? One of our present society's biggest mistakes, which carries with it terrible consequences, is its definition of freedom. Ironically the Western influenced world in which we live is called the 'Free World.' It does not have Communism but democracy, we have a free market, free trade, freedom of speech and expression. But ironically our present unbelieving society is far from free we are tyrannized on every side. We have unprecedented rates of prisoners, sexual crimes, alcoholics, pornography addiction, financial debts, single mothers, broken homes, child abuse, etc. So how is the world defining freedom?

Freedom in a consumerist society is to have unlimited choice, a smorgasbord of options to tantalise my every desire and sate my every whim. Choice is the god that is driving consumerism, we want options, not because we want to buy all of them, but because we have bought the propaganda that retailers who do not have options are losers. Would you go to a shoe shop that only sold 2 or 3 types of shoes? The best you could find, but the whole shop was just filled with many sizes of just one shoe, we wouldn't shop there.

Freedom in an indulgent society is the freedom to pursue all of one's desires unhindered. Freedom to pursue sexual pleasure despite the consequences; freedom to pursue intoxication; freedom to have the services of prostitution, casinos, more bars, and no censoring of sexual material, this is what people are calling freedom today.

Freedom in an idolatrous society that has replaced the God of the universe with humanity has placed our wills and right to choose over His will and living to please Him. I am allowed to end my own life that God gave to me if I choose; I should be allowed to kill the baby in my womb if I choose; I should be allowed to pursue whatever path of sexual preference if I want to, this is freedom by the world's definition. We don't care about the consequences of our actions, as long as we chose them ourselves. Choice is the idol that trumps all control be it government, parental or even God Himself.

Freedom in a materialist society is the freedom from all spiritual truths about God, ourselves, and our universe. Freedom from heaven and hell, freedom from guilt and sin, freedom to view the world as the be all and end all of our existence, this was the freedom John Lennon was singing about in his song *Imagine*. We want to be free from seeing ourselves as a body and a soul, and want only a body.

Freedom in a post-modern society which believes that there is no truth, or that we cannot know it truly, is the freedom from any system of beliefs be they Christian or not. We cannot know the truth so let everyone have their own set of beliefs without trying to change anyone's mind. The trouble with this view is that you would need to know all things in order to make the judgement call that the truth cannot be known. And secondly, that truth can't be known sounds like a truth statement and is self-defeating.

Freedom in our individualist society endorses our reactionary moves in defining ourselves resisting all outward authorities and influences. We protect our freedom in defining our own individuality, from all that we find within, not those things outside of ourselves. This leaves us with very little resources, and a poor and poisoned well to drink from.

True freedom, the freedom that we find in Christ is a paradoxical freedom. Because of the sinful world we live in the truth does not 'work' the way that things normally work when they are consistent with sin and not God. This statement sums up the mysterious and paradoxical nature of true freedom. 'Freedom is found in bondage to Christ.' True freedom is not to be without all external laws and governed only by your own desires, but freedom within boundaries, the boundaries of God's law. On account of the fall all of our 'instincts' regarding freedom cannot be trusted. We conceive of freedom as freedom to sin, freedom from responsibility and consequence; a freedom that is essentially selfish at its core that defines freedom around that which puts my immediate happiness first. True freedom is not defined by us for we are creatures. We can no more define freedom than we can truth or love, or holiness. God is the one who made us and so true liberty is found not in freedom from God, but rather doing what you are made to do. God has made us to be image bearers who were intended to reflect an analogy of His love, holiness, truth, joy, etc.; and to experience the joy that He experiences within Himself as He relates to Himself in the perfect community of the Trinity. We will only know the joy and fittingness of being what we are; the full potential of all we were made to be flowing freely, when we do and be what God made us to do and be.

It is now to these issues of freedom and slavery that Paul addresses as he goes on with Romans 6:15-16, 'What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?' If you compare this verse with 6:1 you will notice that the question and themes are quite similar. In 6:1 Paul is addressing the complaint that we should sin more in order to glorify grace more. Here he is addressing the issue that if we are not under law and under grace, then we are free to sin. Here we see Paul addressing once again the antinomian response. 'If grace is free and forgiveness is free and not by the law, then we can just go and sin and get free forgiveness. Obedience doesn't matter at all!' Paul has answered this issue from the point of view of our union with Christ, that there are new realities about us and our relationship with sin that make living in sin impossible for the Christian. Paul will now show that being free from the law does not mean we are free to sin, but free for obedience to God, true freedom. Jesus said that those whom

the Son sets free will be free indeed (John 8:36), this is the freedom that we have been set free into, slaves to God and righteousness.

As we look at these verses we will discuss how the Christian is no longer under law; the fact that everyone is a slave to something/one, and the results of the various servitudes.

Are we free from service?

Does the fact that I am not under law mean that I no longer have to keep the law and be holy? Although Christians are no longer under the condemnation of the law, and are no longer under the Mosaic law, this does not mean that the Christian is without law altogether. Let's quickly remind ourselves of how the Christian is not under the law, how the Christian is under the law, and how we are never under the law.

There are three ways in which the Christian is no longer under the law. Firstly, we are no longer under the covenant of works in Adam. Adam was put in the Garden of Eden and was commanded to obey God's commands with the hope of earning the reward of entering into a new life with his people by his obedience. He should have obeyed God, been confirmed in righteousness and won for us a new world full of the wonders Christ has won for us. Adam failed and we are born into this law covenant. However, Christ was also born under the law (Gal. 4:4) in order to fulfil it on our behalf. He obeyed where Adam failed and fulfilled the covenant, thereby putting it away. Christ is no longer under the covenant of works because He has fulfilled all it required and now any who are in Christ are no longer under the law in Adam. Secondly, the Christian is not under the condemnation of the law. The law of God is written on every heart and it speaks to us about our sins and condemns us. It is a mirror that exposes our sin. Whether we are Jews with the 10 Commandments, or Gentiles with the law on our hearts, we are all aware of our sin and are under the sentence of death because of our sins. Once again Christ has paid our sin debt by His death and filled up all that is required for our righteousness by His life and we are free from the condemnation of the law. Thirdly, law was also given to Moses to regulate the relationship between God and Israel in preparation for the saviour of the world. The law consisted in what Reformed theologians call three parts, the civil law of Moses which related to those laws that we use to govern Israel as a political state. There were also ceremonial laws whose primary function was to picture the principles of redemption in blood sacrifices, representative priests, and other aspects necessary to our redemption from sin. And then there is what is called the Moral law which is essentially those laws of God which He demands of all men everywhere as they are not temporary like the laws of the land of Canaan; nor to be fulfilled like the laws that related to the sacrifices and the priesthood. The moral law is the eternal law of God that gives expression to His holy character and will for man. We are not under the laws of the land of Israel; nor are we to obey the laws of the tabernacle and temple, but we are to keep the law as it is outlined predominantly in the 10 Commandments.

Now let us consider how the Christian is still under law. Paul gives us an instance of this in his first letter to the Corinthians. He is talking about being all things to all men, so sometimes this would mean observing the strict OT diet of the Jews when he was preaching

to them. However, Paul also talks about being without law when with the Gentiles. Being without law is not a reference to all moral instruction from God and obligation to God, but rather specifically the Mosaic law, 'For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.' (1 Cor. 9:19-22). The law of God has been written on the hearts of every born again Christian so to indicate that the Holy Spirit teaches them inwardly in accordance with the law of God, Ezekiel 36:27, 'And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.' Secondly, although the law is a mirror to show us sin and given to kill us that we might seek our life in Christ. The law is also a light to our path and embodies the will of God for our lives here on earth. Some have tried to say that we are not under any form of law except to love, but the folly in that is that love fulfills the law, 'Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.' In this regard a Christian is still under obligation to God, under law. There is no such thing as God saving us in order to set us free from every commandment of His to be a type of free spirit. He saves us to the liberty of His law (James 1:25).

Now we do need to consider how Christians and human beings have never been under law. There are two ways we were never supposed to be under law, not even for a time like the Mosaic administration. We see these illustrated in the Gospels in the lives of the Pharisees. We are not under the laws of man. The Pharisees added their own laws to the laws of God and enforced them as God's laws, Jesus threw off these laws that had to do with washings and legalistic interpretations of the law. Secondly, we are not under the law in a mere responsibility to the letter but not the spirit of it. In other words, we must make sure we are not under a form of law that restricts itself to a shallow outward, but not a heart obedience. Christ came to free us from externalism.

Only two kinds of service

Once again as in verse 2 Paul flatly denies the conclusion that being under grace and not under law equals licentiousness, he says, 'By no means!' Now denial is not an argument, so Paul adds one to prove that those who are under grace cannot live in sin. In verses 1-14 his argument was because of the new ontological reality of our union with Christ which crucified the old man and engrafted us into Christ's resurrection life. This is a new reality we now need to live out and can live. In verses 15-23 Paul is going to further apply this reality of our union with Christ. When we were born again we were set free from sin and made slaves of righteousness, we experienced a change of ownership, and the breaking of our

former chains and given a new strength and vitality for the new tasks we are saved to. Paul expressly states this in v17-18, 'But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.' You will notice that Paul is using the image of slavery here to illustrate the reality of our union with Christ. We were once slaves to sin, but that led to death, and now we are slaves of righteousness and that leads to sanctification (v16, 22).

The first thought we want to latch onto is the fact that we are all slaves to something. This is the humbling truth about ourselves that we are always running from. When God created us He did not create us as gods equal to Himself and as independent and self-ruling as He is. God made us to serve Him, but in our sinfulness we have strayed and served everything but Him. We have made gods of our lusts, our intellect, our freedom, our bodies, our hobbies, our work, our opinions, our families, false gods, etc. As sin has turned us from God towards self, we have taken all these various gods to serve us as we have pretended to be God and not a creature of His making. We willingly enslaved ourselves to anything that pleased us. This is what Paul is talking about in 6:16, 'Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?'

So with Paul let us divide the human race into two groups, those who are obedient slaves to sin, or those who are slaves to righteousness; those who serve self through sin or those who serve God by righteousness. In this initial division we may think that there are a lot of people in the group that serves God. We might feel tempted to put all those people who belong and work for charities, all the do-gooders of other religions, every loving mother and father, and no doubt yourself, in the category of those who are on the path of life by serving God in righteousness. But we do need to clarify that those who are servants of sin are not necessarily addicts. There are many people who are successful business people, who have healthy families and strong marriages, who look after their bodies and are responsible citizens who are slaves to sin. There are those who pursue good deeds, not out of a love for God and neighbour, not out the new heart that the Holy Spirit has wrought in them, but rather through self-interest because they like to feel good about themselves and have others think well of them. Sin takes many forms and we too easily brand anything that is outwardly destructive as sinful, but sin is defined not by the consequences but whether it is done for God or self. We need to throw off the world's definition of sin as anything that is anti-social to anything that is contrary to God's will. Sin is against God not man.

Next we need to stress that every person is born a slave to sin. None of us, apart from Adam, Eve and Christ come into this world sinless. There is movie and song called, 'Born Free' which is all about lions, as human beings born to Adam we are not born free but as slaves, like the infant of a heroin addict. Instead the bible describes us as stillborn, dead in trespasses and sins. We are born with a slave's nature and willingly surrender ourselves to sin. We have a type of mental illness that willingly engages in destructive behaviour as we pursue sin. We gladly destroy our bodies, our relationships, our finances, and hurt loved ones as we serve self. Paul gives a description in Ephesians 2:1-3, 'And you were dead in

the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--- 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.' There are many who have changed a lifestyle addicted to drugs to a lifestyle addicted to money and success. Or there are those who have made an idol of freedom and new experiences. Many of us are unadventurous but are idolaters none the less as we quietly feather our nests in creature comforts and hidden indulgences. Any way you cut it we are servants of sin and self, we are not born free. The message of the media today is that you are basically a good person who needs the latest formula, or to believe in yourself, or the government to give you a leg up, or to win the lotto, and a million other things, but the truth about you is that you are not free but a slave of sin. Jesus put it this way when He was trying to convince the most religious people in Israel that they were slaves to sin and needed Him for salvation, John 8:31-36, 'So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'

We all need to be set free by Christ, we all need the Gospel. If we will but come to Him in the bondage of our chains, if we will come in the poverty of what we are and plead for Him to free us, forgiving our sins and save us. Then Christ will give the ransom of His own life to redeem you, to buy you from the slave market. He will wash you and clothe you, He will bring you into His home and take off your chains, He will heal your wounds and instead of crushing you will serve work He will release you into satisfying, significant and joyful service. He says, 'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'" Yes you are saved to work, not to be free go sin but to do what you were always made to do, God's will. Eph. 2:10, 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.'

The nature of our servitude to God is one of true freedom. A guitar is being destroyed when it is used a paddle on a canoe, but when it is strung and tuned and used as a guitar it produces more good than what it was once used for. Serving God is not a slavery is a joy and a privilege. We must not think that because the word 'slave' is used with regard to righteousness that this is negative. In the Roman world slavery was often a way of progressing and bettering oneself. A man in debt could sell himself into the service of a good man and become like son to him. Slaves were known to be lawyers, doctors, teachers, and even politicians in Rome; the slavery we have been bought into is a sonship. We must throw all the negative connotation of the word. We have been freed from sin and been freed into service, freed from self-abuse to true joy. And now we can be put in prison

and paralysed but we will always be free, but without Christ you can win the lottery and be a slave.

Outcomes of service

Let us conclude with just one last comment on these verses. You will notice that Paul has been drawing a parallel between the two different forms of slavery. One is to sin the other is to righteousness, the one results in death the other results in..., we would expect find here the word, 'life', but instead we find 'righteousness.' This is a wonderful point that Paul makes. You see we are not saved by our works, but we are sanctified by them. Life cannot come from our good works because we are justified by faith in Christ and His righteousness is imputed to us, we are not saved by works but faith. However, the good works we do are not without an effect, God imparts the righteousness of Christ into us as we work in His service. We can be transformed as we go about His will.

So then, are you free? True freedom is in bondage to Christ, all other freedoms are slavery. Serving Him is true joy, serving sin is self-abuse.