

## Romans 6:15-23 "A Slave of God"

### Introduction

- Every time I walk to our online service streaming site in Tsukishima, I pass 3 tsukudani shops (a traditional preserved seafood rice topping) in a row. Each shop has a sign out front, advertising their specialties. Interestingly, the signs don't actually focus on the actual taste of the food, but rather emphasizes the origin of their ingredients and the age of the store itself.
- Each store touts the title of "original" or "birthplace" and seems to be competing on who is oldest with their 1837 and 1859 founding dates in bold. You would think since they are tsukudani shops, they would be competing based on the actual taste of their tsukudani but instead they seem to be taking most pride in their origin and history.
- If you were to put up a billboard or sign for yourself, how would you introduce people to who you are? It might surprise you to know that in today's Bible passage, we are introduced as "God's Slaves". I am sure no one gets a good feeling even hearing the word "slave", much less being called one. So what does this mean? What could be the benefit and (I hope to show) even joy of being God's slave?

### Romans 6:15-23

15 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,<sup>3</sup> you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 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. 19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

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

- Through the slightly shocking passage we just read, we are going to look together at what characterizes a person who believes in Jesus and how they should live. Firstly, we will discover who we are and that whether we like it or not, we are slaves. Without exception, each one of us is either following the path of sin or following God.
- Secondly, what we follow will ultimately change the path of our lives. We will talk about what it looks like to lead a life of slavery to sin versus a life that follows God. And thirdly, I want us to think hard about the end of this life. I want us to consider whether we will in the end receive the punishment of death and reap destruction, or if we will receive the joy of eternal life. 1) We are all slaves to something 2) The difference between being a slave of sin and a slave to God 3) The end of life

## 1. We are all slaves to something

- The theme of today's passage is this: now that we are freed from the Law, how do we find what motivates our daily lives. What causes us to live morally and dutifully if the Law no longer binds us to do so. Our salvation was a gift from God, it was not a result of our moral living or good works. So why then are we obligated to follow God's Law? If we are not saved by our morality and good works, then what is our motivation for doing them?
- For example, many consider it a good thing to try and obey the 10 Commandments found in the Old Testament, but what is the Christian's motivation for doing this? On top of this, Jesus commanded us to do seemingly impossible things like loving our enemies and even praying for those who oppress and persecute us. Why in the world would we do this? What even is our motivation for things we say are good practices like attending weekly worship, and pursuing daily prayer and Bible reading? Look at verse 15 and 16.
  - "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 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?"
- According to what Paul writes here, we humans have two masters. Everyone is following one of those masters in their life. We are either a slave to sin or a slave to obedience (v16). According to verses 17 and 18, we are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. And according to verse 22 you are either a slave to sin or you are a slave to God.
- According to this passage, all people are following the leadership of (are all slaves to) something. All people are giving their lives to something (or someone). And we are all controlled by the person or thing to whom we give ourselves through how we spend our time, use our abilities, give our possessions, or conduct our relationships. This control has its roots in the fact that we all need a reason for living. Doesn't everyone want to live their life for someone or something? In choosing to live your life for some end or purpose, you become a slave to that thing.
  - For example, there is a man in the Bible named Zecchaeus who was a slave to money. He accumulated wealth and power and lorded his social position over others, looking to show his own success and significance to those around him. He sacrificed his family and gave all that he had to this pursuit of money. In the middle of the night, a righteous Bible teacher named Nicodemus secretly came to Jesus. His goal was to give his whole life to obedience to God's Law, and in doing this receive recognition from others and receive God's grace. Therefore he was never able to fully accept Jesus, and continued with his half hearted efforts and sacrificed many people in pursuit of his own glory.
- So, as you can see, whatever gives us success, significance, joy, anything that gives our life purpose, we give ourselves over to it. So whatever we think will give us that success and power, whatever will give us the praise and respect of others, whatever will give us joy and purpose in life, those things control us. And therefore we cannot avoid following it.
  - This summer I read a book that I highly recommend you pick up, the Pacific War novel *Wounded Tiger*. It focuses on the life of Navy Colonel Fuchida Mitsuo, and how the Gospel of Jesus connected 3 lives in an amazing story of God's grace. But why did this war continue to escalate, why did the enemies grow in hatred towards each other and fighters put their lives on the line as they battled against

each other? Isn't it because in war in order to gain victory, joy, and the better life that you hope will come, you give your whole self to winning in battle? You give your whole life to the war and in the end you become controlled by it, you become a slave to war.

- Paul says there are basically only two masters. If you are a slave to sin, you are literally bound to a life that leads only to death. But, if you become a slave to God, you are led by righteousness and holiness, you receive love, joy, peace, and patience and these are the things control your life.

## 2. The Difference between a Slave to Sin and a Slave to God

- However, no matter what, there is some discomfort in being called a "slave". Usually, a slave is seen as the property of their master. Often in these relationships, a person's is robbed of their human rights to the point that they are not really treated as human at all. It is often an incredibly tragic situation. Especially in modern times, the slavery practiced is incredibly horrific, and it casts a dark shadow over our society. So all the more, it is normal to experience a range of negative emotions towards being called "God's Slave".
- Knowing this, Paul attempts to illuminate the difference between being a slave to sin and being a slave to God. All of us were born a slave to sin. But the phrase being a "slave to sin" does not mean is that we are always and completely doing what those around us would consider "bad" things.
- The definition of sin is putting your happiness in anything other than God. It is the natural tendency to ignore God and selfishly pursue success, happiness, and significance. This is our heart's primary setting, but it is a misdirected way of life. Unfortunately, none of us by our own power can run away from this life of sin. That is why we are called slaves to sin. And Jesus says that all evil comes from this place. Mark 7:20-23
  - "And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.""
- But, brothers and sisters, already in Romans we have been told it is possible to leave this slavery to sin and enter into a new situation, a new life. The basis of our new condition is called the "norm of teaching" in our passage. This condition starts when we receive God's true message, or in other words, from when we accept the Gospel of Christ. Even more, it says "from the heart" because this God's truth is able to capture our hearts. See verses 17 and 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, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."
- Christianity is not a matter of blind trust or superstition. However, it is also not a religion of ritual obedience to law. It is when we intellectually understand God's message of the Gospel and it moves our heart that it is made clear how we have been made slaves and are giving over our life to sin.
  - There was a woman in her twenties who because she was valued by her boss, was feeling purpose and happiness in her life. She worked overtime without issue, she was put in a position of leadership, and she ended up becoming the manager of 20 other people. But when a problem arose between her and her

boss, it mentally and emotionally consumed her. Through Bible study, this woman came to know Jesus and joined a community group where she shared her situation and came to pray over it.

- When it finally came to the week she was to be baptized, I received a call from her on preceding Monday. She had reached such a state of panic and anxiety that she couldn't go to work or ride on the train, and she wasn't sure how she would be able to get to her baptism that next week. Her mother came to help her and that Wednesday I went to meet her. She came to realize that this woman had become a slave to her value at work. "When I am valued at work, I am on an emotional high, and I realized now that is why I have worked long overtime hours up until this point. My value at work has become my idol. I have to exchange this idol for the one who loves me so much that he gave his life for me - Jesus." This is how she was freed from her slavery to sin, and was joyfully baptized into her new life.
- So, brothers and sisters, when the truth of the Gospel pierces our hearts, our entire life begins to change. Even Paul himself says "Thanks be to God", recognizing that this is God's gracious gift to us.
- In summary, when we trust in God who through Christ loved us and forgave us our sins, we come to desire to follow God's heart. This is not only thinking about it but when you read and meditate on God's word and find how it applies to your life, you will come to follow God. This is what it means to be a slave to obedience, a slave to righteousness, a slave to God. This is when we truly become ourselves.
  - 6:19 "I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."
- Those who believe in Jesus, by his wonderful Gospel are now freely able to joyfully follow the way set out by God. Then, through following God, your nature and personality are changed to become more like Christ. Through this maturing in holiness, it becomes easier and easier to follow God's commands.

### 3. End Goal of Life

- Brothers and Sisters, now that we have looked at what it means to be slaves to God, let's look closely at the end result of our lives. Whether it's in our jobs or in our lives, when we focus on where we would like to end up, it gives us motivation and strength and becomes easy to see what actions we should take to get there. At the end of chapter 6, Paul straightforwardly shows us the end of each person. See verses 22-23.
  - 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- The Bible shows us how God works to save both our lives and the whole world. Let's look at the goal of our lives from God's perspective. Even beginners who go to climb a mountain know where the summit is and what path they are going to take to get there. A marathon runner imagines his goal and plans out in detail his pace for each of the 42.195km in order to reach it.
- I want you to hear me when I say this. If you continue to ignore God and try to make your life plans without him in it (this, by the way, is slavery to your sin), then you will receive death as a result. But the death I am talking about here is not just the bodily

death at the end of all humans' earthly lives. Said in another way, death is being separated from God.

- In Genesis 3, there is a story about when humans disobeyed God's law, and in trying to become like God, they sinned against him. And this led to their death. Although bodily death had not yet come to them, because of their sin they were separated from God and their identity as united with him "died". They became anxious of the weight of responsibility of their sin and the resulting shame in who they had become.
- Additionally, their relationship with God "died". When God called their names, they feared his judgement and instead of coming to him as they had before their sinful act, they hid among the trees. Even the relationship between husband and wife was broken. Adam acted out of self pity and pride, blaming the woman and blaming God who made her for what happened.
- In this way, all who are slaves to sin continue in this pattern of envy, pride, self-pity, guilt, fear and anxiety. These small deaths repeatedly attack like waves on those outside of Christ, and in the end those who live as sin's slaves are fully cut off from God and received eternal death. According to the Bible, if you are a slave to sin, this is the recompense, these are the wages or "payment" you can expect.
- But if your heart is changed by the work of Christ and you come to follow God, there is a completely different end promised to you. Of course in the same way that death comes even now to the sinner, you who are in Christ can even here and now begin to taste the eternal life in store for you. Brothers and sisters, all who give their life in obedience to God will begin to see the fruit of holiness, the fruit of the Spirit grow in their lives. Galatians 5:22-23.
  - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. Against such things there is no law.
- I want you to take care to remember that eternal life is God's grace, his wonderful gift to us. It is difficult, isn't it to live in obedience to Jesus and follow God? But I want to encourage you that through the grace of the Gospel of Jesus and through trusting in the love of God you will see God begin to lead you in your efforts to follow him. Brothers and sisters, let's once again decide today to continue to taste the joy of the Gospel of Jesus together. Let us redirect our path to follow and obey God.