

The True Nature of Human Freedom (6:15-18)

Misunderstanding Freedom (6:15)

6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

What Does “We Are Not Under Law” Mean?

- It does not mean that we are “lawless.” Lawlessness is sin (1 John 3:4), and those who commit lawlessness are rejected from Jesus’ presence forever (Matthew 7:23), since He hates lawlessness (Hebrews 1:9).
- The continuing work of Jesus’ Great Commission to us, making “disciple of all the nations,” is carried out by “teaching them to observe all that [Christ] commanded” (Matthew 28:18-20). Further, He makes it clear that we do not really love Him unless we obey Him (John 14:15,21,23,24; 15:10). The apostle Paul begins and ends this letter to the Romans by linking saving faith and obedience (Romans 1:5; 16:26).
- To be “under the law” means being bound to the Old Testament ritual requirements and under the law’s penalty for violating the Law of God:
 - The Old Testament ritual requirements were fulfilled by Christ and are no more.
 - Christ paid the penalty for our violations of the Law, so that we are no longer under its curse for disobedience.
- The moral parts of the Law are still in effect, and are commanded again in the New Testament. These reveal God’s righteous will for our lives, no matter what age or culture in which we live.
 - The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17// Deuteronomy 5:6-21).
 - The “greatest commandment” (Deuteronomy 6:5).
 - The “second-greatest commandment” (Leviticus 19:18).

- Being freed from the ritual requirements of the Law and forgiven of its curse against our disobedience doesn’t mean we are freed from the commandments of God over the lives of His people. This is the mistake Paul now corrects.

Freedom and Slavery (6:16)

6:16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

- The apostle is building upon Jesus’ own teaching here: “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin” (John 8:34).
- Paul’s language is symbolized in the civil law of old covenant Israel, the law of the bond-servant: READ Deuteronomy 15:12-17; see also Exodus 21:2-6.

A Life of Freedom (6:17,18)

6:17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 6:18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Give Thanks to God for Your Obedience

- Paul gives thanks to God for the obedience of the Roman believers because it is God Who is the Author and Power of Christian obedience. We cannot boast in our obedience to His revealed will in the Bible, for He is the One Who works this obedience in believers by the power of His Holy Spirit.
- True biblical faith involves obedience; in fact, to come to Christ is described as being “obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7), the writer of Hebrews says that Christ “became to all who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Hebrews 5:9).

- Paul makes the connection between our Christian obedience and the work of God clear in his letter to the church in Philippi:
READ Philippians 2:12,13.¹
- God receives the glory not just for saving believers, but for their growth in Christ and obedience to the Bible. Without this grace in our lives, we would not obey a single word of the Bible. So give Him thanks.

Teaching and Freedom

- “That form of teaching” is described elsewhere as “sound teaching” (1 Timothy 1:10), “the standard of sound words” (2 Timothy 1:13), “sound doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1), and “the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching” (Titus 1:9). It’s not just the words of the Bible, but those teachings and confessions that explain, summarize, or apply the Bible.
- Carefully note the wording: Paul does not say that the “form of teaching” was “committed” to the Roman believers, but that they had been “committed” to it!

Freed from Sin

- Paul doesn’t mean that we have become sinless – that doesn’t happen until we enter into glory. He does mean that Christians are not under the control of sin. We do not have to sin. We are freed from its clutches and have the grace of Christ and the help of the Holy Spirit available to us. We have but to ask.

It’s an Illustration (6:19a)

6:19a *I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.*

¹ See also Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews 13:20,21.

- Just in case the reader/listener might think Paul’s “*slaves of obedience*” and “*slaves of righteousness*” language is a really unpleasant way of speaking of eternal life in Christ, he clarifies that he is speaking by way of illustration.
- Paul’s illustration is an echo from the Law: “...*watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD Who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery* [עֲבָדִים]. *You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship* [תַּעֲבֹד] *Him and swear by His name*” (Deuteronomy 6:12,13). Both the words translated “*slavery*” and “*worship*” are the same Hebrew verb (עֲבָד). The difference is the master!
- Unbelievers can only use their free will in service to rebellion against God’s commands in His Word. Believers in this life are enabled by the grace of Christ and the power of the Spirit with the ability to choose obedience to God’s Word. It is only in glory that believers will be truly free (since sin is slavery to death) and will only perfectly choose what glorifies God.

Believer, You Must Seek Holiness (6:19b,20)

Your Previous Life (6:19b)

6:19b *For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness...*

- This is an echo of the language found in 6:13.
- Unbelievers can only break God’s Law. They can do nothing else. As children of Adam and Eve, sin directs their hearts/emotions/desires away from what God commands; sin twists their reasoning/thinking to lead them to justify their own violations of God’s commands.

What You Must Do Now (6:19c)

6:19c...*so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.*

- Here (6:19c) and 6:22 are the only two places in Romans that Paul uses the word “*sanctification*.”² Becoming holy is God’s purpose for our lives.³
- **This is the command of today’s text!**
- Let me use Deuteronomy 6:6-9 as a way of plugging this into everyday life:
 - “*These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart*” (6:6). Not only is something we actively do (Psalm 37:31; 40:8; 119:11; Colossians 3:16), it is the promise of God to us (Jeremiah 31:33).
 - “*You shall teach them diligently to your sons*” (6:7a). This is not just the children of our family, but our spiritual children (Matthew 28:18-20). Who are you discipling?
 - “*...and shall talk of them when you sit in your house...you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates*” (6:7b,9). The way of the house and the stewardship of the property should serve God’s righteousness.
 - “*...and when you walk by the way*” (6:7c). Your daily business should serve the Lord’s righteousness.
 - “*...and when you lie down*” (6:7d). Your rest needs to serve God’s righteousness; this includes daily physical rest, but also that Lord’s Day dedication to the things of the

² For other New Testament uses of this word, see 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3,4,7; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:2.

³ READ Ephesians 1:3,4,13; 5:25-27. The purpose of God’s saving us is that we would be holy like He is holy (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Peter 1:14-16). His holiness is the song of heaven (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8)! Oh, God, give us an unceasing and ever-growing desire for Your holiness to be present in our lives!

- Lord which symbolize the eternal Sabbath.⁴ Also, I would add that the other things that happen in lying down besides rest need to serve God’s righteousness (Proverbs 5:18,19; Hebrews 13:4).
- “*...and when you rise up*” (6:7e). Your day begins focused on the Lord and His righteousness.
 - “*You shall bind them as a sign on your hand...*” (6:8a). The righteousness of God as revealed in His Word controls your work.
 - “*...and they shall be as frontals on your forehead*” (6:8b). The righteousness of God is plain to others as they see you.

This Life Is Not Like Your Previous Life (6:20)

^{6:20}*For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.*

- Paul has said that slavery equals obedience. When we “*were slaves of sin*,” we had to obey sin, and were not bound to God’s “*righteousness*.” We were “*free*” from righteousness because we were enslaved to sin.
- It’s possible that Paul is being sarcastic here. Unbelievers think their rebellion against God’s Law is true freedom.⁵

⁴ “The correct observance of the [Lord’s] day requires two things: rest and the sanctification of that rest. The rest required is the cessation from all work which might hinder divine worship” (William Ames, 1576-1633, in his *The Marrow of Theology*, 2.15.36-37). When we start looking for rules defining what can and can’t be done, we’re already on the wrong track; the desire of the believer on the Lord’s Day should be how to devote the day to Him most fully, not how little of the day to give Him.

⁵ READ Psalm 2:1-3. The unbelieving peoples regard God’s Law as “*fetters*” and “*cords*” to be cast off. True life and freedom, though,

The Benefits Package (6:21-23)

The Benefit of Shameful Sin (6:21)

6:21 Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.

- “Benefit” in 6:21,22 is literally “fruit” (as in the E.S.V., H.C.S.B., K.J.V.). Paul uses this agricultural figure of speech in a similar way in his letter to the churches of Galatia: READ Galatians 6:7,8.
- One of the ways we can be assured that we are truly saved is that we are “ashamed” of our lives before Christ and those times when our lives now don’t reflect Christ. Those things of which Christians are “ashamed” produced only a fruit of death, no matter how pleasurable they were in the moment. “Death” isn’t just physical death or eternal spiritual death, but “death” in our relationships, health, and stewardship in this life.

The Benefits of Belonging to God (6:22)

6:22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

- The fruit of “having been freed from sin and enslaved to God” is a progressive holiness (sanctification) that ultimately leads to eternal life.
- Don’t read this apart from the Gospel; Paul isn’t saying that if we work at holiness we can live forever. Remember the earlier part of this chapter – remember your faith-union with Christ as told by your baptism: READ Romans 6:4-11.

come only from submission to God’s reign and reflecting His image as Sovereign in all of our beings (this is the image of God from Genesis 1:26). Anything else is against God and His purpose for creating us.

- Salvation is not just a past event in a believer’s life. We were saved when we were justified (declared right before God) by faith in Jesus Christ; we are being sanctified (being made holy by the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in us); we will be saved when we are glorified perfectly and finally in eternity.⁶
- Summing up this chapter visually looks like this:
Faith-union with Christ/baptism → sanctification/obedience by the Spirit → eternal life

Summary (6:23)

6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- In 6:22, Paul said that “eternal life” comes through being “freed from sin and enslaved to God” and “sanctification.” This freedom, new Master, and holiness have their root only in “the free gift of God” given through “Christ Jesus our Lord.” In other words, being obedient and serving God’s righteousness as revealed in His Word do not negate the fact that salvation and eternal life are both part of God’s “free gift...in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- “Eternal life” is not just unending life. **It is quality in addition to quantity.** The Spirit’s lyrics through David, “in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever” (Psalm 16:11). Whatever “joy” and “pleasures” there are in this world are ever-increasingly eclipsed by the reality they palely reflect in God’s presence forever.

⁶ Our confession of faith, the Baptist Faith & Message 2000, shows this by discussion “Regeneration” (being born again), “Justification,” “Sanctification,” and “Glorification” all under the heading “Salvation.”