

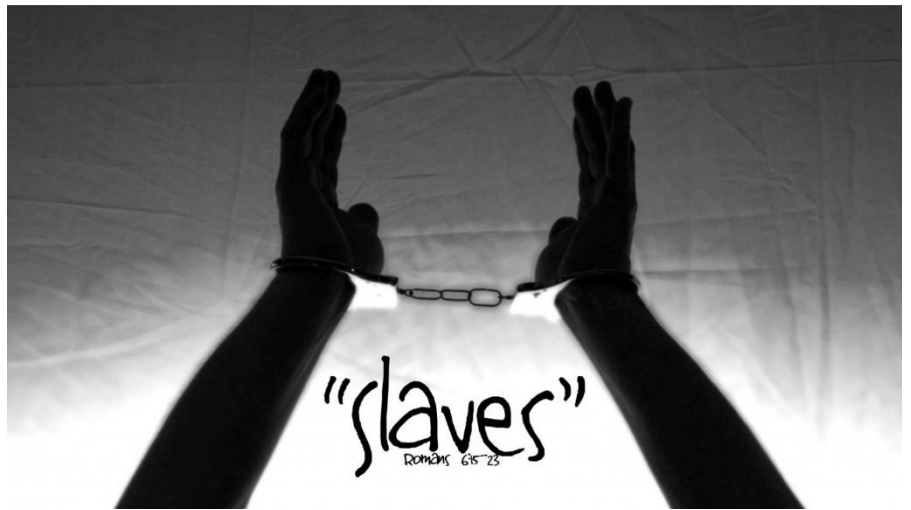
“Slaves”

- Romans 6:15-23 -

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Romans 6:15-23 *What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to*

righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



...“God is my co-pilot.” ...“Jesus is my homeboy.” ...“My boss is a Jewish Carpenter.”

Somewhere along the way it seems we have lost something intrinsic in our thinking towards our Creator. If you listen to the average news or TV program it is not unusual to hear the players use the term “radical” to describe someone who is outside the mainstream...someone who is overboard when it comes to their beliefs or behaviors. Usually it is used to label someone as evil or dangerous based on their religious beliefs. In the case of Christianity, it is often used when describing believers who are profoundly committed and deeply adherent. Almost without fail, it is presented in a negative light. Yet in business, in sports, and in self-expression, the principle is acceptable and most often embraced! But not with following Jesus. The world does not allow that. But are Christians supposed to be radical according to the Bible?

The fact of scripture is that it clearly presents Christianity as divinely radical. But sadly, our faith has over time been placed alongside all of our other life priorities and worldly pursuits...positioned next to all the mediocre interests of our lives... the passive relationships... the tacit commitments. Jesus is a *part* of our lives...or so we imagine, but is that the dynamic that God wants and the vehement all-consuming relationship that scripture prescribes? The great truth about the bible is that it speaks in such extreme language, and yet, incredibly, we ignore or disregard that intense calling and relegate our faith to something that we *do* rather than something that *we are*.

The use of the word **radical** today describes someone or something that is far-reaching or extreme from the fundamentals of what most people believe or do, and strongly insinuates that the beliefs that are held are not true. Originally however it described someone or something that is faithful to the fundamentals of what is true, what is fact, and what mattered, and lived accordingly no matter the cost. The question is, what changed?

The answer lies in biblical illiteracy, disbelief, and our modern practice of “truth is in the eyes of the beholder.” The word radical did not change, only the perspective of how the word is used and the people using it. Thus in our desire to “get along” and “not offend” we have allowed the world to dictate the limits and the boundaries for the practice of faith in our generation. Many who call themselves Christians openly call for the rejection of fundamental Bible doctrines because they might “offend” someone or *they* are offended by them. Of course this

is in direct contradiction to what the Bible and Jesus himself taught. For Jesus Himself readily accepted the principle that He was *and is* an “offense.” (see Isaiah 8:14) One must wonder just how far we can drift from the Biblical mandate and still call it Christianity? I know that what a lot of folks call Christianity today is a far cry from what it is that I see as my biblical call to faith. Nowhere else in our world can we follow half of the directions and expect the full result of the prescription.

Scripture is literally full of these “radical” ideals:

Matthew 18:8-9 *“So if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one hand or one foot than to be thrown into eternal fire with both of your hands and feet. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.”*

Luke 14:26 *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”*

Luke 14:27 *“And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”*

Luke 14:33 *“...whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”*

Proverbs 3:9-10 *“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the **firstfruits** of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”*

We have learned some incredible truth so far in this study of Romans. As reborn, we are dead to sin, alive to God, and must reckon it so (Romans 6:1-11). We have died with Jesus on his cross, and been baptized into His death, so now we can live in newness of life with him (Romans 6:1-5). Right now. Not later. Newness of life right now. Also, there is a battle happening (Romans 6:12-14). Sin desires to sit on the throne of our lives. It wants to enslave us. It is trying to take our bodily appetites and turn them against us, and make us it’s slaves. Sin seeks to enter in, and, though we are born again, we become enslaved, *saved but subjugated*. The problem with the whole concept of servitude to God and community lies in the illusion that we have the option of freedom in the sense that we are in control of our own destiny and path. And while I will acknowledge that we can independently make choices and can at times make certain aspects of life a reality, to say that we are “free” and that we are in control of tomorrow is an illusion at best and at worse a fallacy.

Christianity and scripture has always taken a cultural hit because of what is said to be “condoning slavery.” The problem lies in our concept of slavery in a society that envisions the modernistic practices of American race-based slavery pre-civil war and the atrocities of human trafficking. Yet like so many of the radical principles in scripture, the Bible ventures forth to present the truth and facts of Christianity without the glossing over of what such a life looks like, nor does it water it down to fit the fragile sensibilities of our modern culture. Do we really have to be told that our being a “slave to Christ” is not a call to be a slave to a plantation owner and treated inhumanly if we do not pick enough cotton? That is not at all what Paul is calling us to be herein. Our call is to be a slave to God...a slave to Christ, and that cruel indenturement is not how God sees us.

In fact, even our American history is often fraught with the Hollywood affect which skews our perception. I was speaking to an African-american woman recently literally a ‘stones throw’ from some of the largest American plantations in Louisiana, and she was lamenting that people would regularly ask her if the big live oak in the front of her business was a “hangin’ tree” and she would snap back “there is no such thing as ‘hangin’ trees!” She went on to say that while such an event was not unheard of, it was extremely rare because slaves had great value to their owners and you didn’t often kill something of such value. That same principle can be applied to what we are being called to herein, whatever discomfort such may give us. For God sees us as great value...and not for what we can do for Him for He can do anything He wants all by Himself. For John 15:15 tells us the words of Christ... *“I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.”* All of this is not a position that God sees us as His

slaves, but for us to *see ourselves* as HIS slaves! Or better, the principle of slavery to the calling, the commitment, the “no turning back” principles...the “all in” idea of bond to our faith!

Mark 10:44-45 says “*And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

However, bearing all this in mind, we cannot do what some scriptural translations do, and that is to see such a call as a position of “servant.” This because a “servant” is not a “slave.” For a servant can quit, and a servant “punches out” each evening and returns to his or her life outside of the position. Sadly, many Christians see their commitment level in these terms, and it is *that* which Paul is rebutting here in this passage. Yes, it *is* a radical concept! This is not club we are participating in! We are to be bound to God forever and in all ways!

Many desire to receive the Lord’s *salvation* without His *Lordship*. Now we don’t want to add to the simplicity of Christ’s redemption, for there are indeed “no strings attached.” But isn’t one’s understanding of salvation fundamentally flawed by seeing the work of Christ as only having a *redemptive* aspect? According to the book of Romans, the very nature of re-birth presents a *new life*. In the “shared-death” with Christ, our “*old man*” dies and a new life is resurrected in his place that innately possesses Christ-like characteristics. A new life with a shared Christ spirit possessing much of His attributes and passions for serving and pleasing the Father. Jesus led the way in this concept of servitude saying in Mark 10:45... “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” And again in Luke 22:27 “*For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.*” And John 13:14... “*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.*”

This position before God, as a believer, must never be seen as optional or some archaic ideal no longer applicable. For Jesus desires, *herein through his man Paul*, to make clear that such a profound spiritual transformation is not an “option” or a “bonus.” It is a concrete aspect of the work of salvation. For Christ not only desires to save us from our sin, but to *save us from ourselves!* So we must reject a Christianity without transformation because it doesn’t exist.

Mankind has always desired a way to continue in their flesh and sin, to continue in what they perceive to be the “control of their life,” while avoiding hell and punishment. Much of the wider church today not only condones such thinking, but actually feeds it! But Romans speaks loud and clear: *No such path exists.*

Once again, mankind wants to believe that we are not under any such control. We believe we are no one’s patsy, but Paul points out that in truth we are indeed a slave to *whoever* or *whatever* we obey. And to be a slave to one’s own flesh is a problem of course... understanding that our flesh is innately evil! This is why mankind has always attempted to deny that we *are* evil. We keep telling ourselves that “man is basically good.” This, because we don’t want to believe we are a “slave to unrighteousness.” We continue to boast of our freedom and independence!

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.” Heb 6:4-6

The writer of Hebrews...*who I believe to be the apostle Paul*, was not therein saying a person could lose his salvation status. But he speaks rather of the foolish person who insists on living as he once did even after he came to know the truth. The guy who thinks that he is still “free” to live according to his own will, plan, and dreams. Such an individual is lost and always was for he is left with no other path of redemption! He has refused the “only name under heaven in which there is salvation.” (Acts 4:12)

Such is essentially the same issue as presented here in Romans, and that is the reality that we not only must *move on* in Christ, but more importantly, we *will*. We will if we are indeed born again! We are being called to produce the fruits of salvation. To tie ourselves to God and His plan and kingdom pursuits. He has received *us*, but have we really *received Him*?

6:18... “*And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*”

This verse clearly and completely declares the “bottom line.” The passion, the drive, the commitment, and the *righteousness* that is being called for. Are we so consumed by these issues that we are indeed *slaves*? Or are we still weighing each instance, and each decision, on whether we will stand righteous or *not*? Whether we will acquiesce or whether we will go our own way? That’s not slavery, that’s an *employee*. One that can quit anytime that things get a little rough, boring, or time-consuming.

Paul says in verse 19 that he was being forced to speak in simplistic “human terms” because of their immaturity. He was being gracious to the listener both then and now. But as already stated, grace is no excuse to continue in the flesh, *nor is it an excuse to not wise up and grow up*. How long will we remain little children in the faith? How long will we try to “walk the line” between true Christianity and ‘secular living with a little church participation?’ How long will we fail to get life radical about this radical salvation?

Paul’s plea was that we “get a move on.” To not just play “defense,” but move *offensively*. To “present our bodies, our minds, and our spirits ...all of who we are to God.” But not in some hyper-spiritual esoterical way, rather in real and practical ways. We like Peter, being called to “step out of the boat.”

Paul calls us to “look back” in verses 21-22. To look back and see the trail behind us! For living out the life of the flesh we leave a path of chaos. We just live it all out, and then we die. Will we just lie in our death bed and wonder “what was all that about?”

“Marcus Rains Ford has drawn up such a life inventory, as follows: 1. Faculties abused. 2. Affections prostrated. 3. Time squandered. 4. Influence misused. 5. Best friends wronged. 6. Our best interests violated. 7. Love outraged—especially the love of God. Or to sum it up in one word—SHAME.”

That was the bondage...*the slavery*, we inherited. So if you want to be offended...if you want to be angry about the concept of slavery, get mad at that. Because without Christ you are a slave to Satan and to your flesh, and you have nothing to say about it. And that taskmaster will beat you and take away all real joy and peace. *This* bondage that Paul tells us of, is by choice and we become “bound” to Jesus: His death, His resurrection, His power and glory! Slaves? *THIS* is slavery? Ah, yes, and it is a grand bondage!

Verse 22 begins with “*But now...*” Ah! Those are great words aren’t they? **But now** we have been set free! An individual who knows redemption *and* His Lordship embraces those words and understands what they mean. In slavery we have found the only freedom that is to be found in this world, and it is not even of this world! We are free from the bondage of sin, and we bear “fruit of holiness.” What is the “fruit of holiness?” It’s the stuff that comes with walking in the Spirit: peace, joy, rest, His care, His direction, His oversight, His companionship, His love.

And then all of that crescendos with the bonus. *Eternal life*. The devil *pays his* slaves *with eternal death!* But what God gives is a gift. Not wages, for we could never earn such a prize. Sin always comes with wages. And the wages are steep. The irony of this is that such death is actually *earned*...and many of us are spending our lives “earning our wages.”

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Rom 12:1-2