

God's Great News for Humanity's Great Problem
Paul's Letter to the Romans

God's Victory over Human Evil: We Are Bondservants of Christ
Romans 6:15 – 23

Exegetical Outline

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

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?

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, 18 and having
been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.
For just as you presented your members as slaves
to impurity and
to lawlessness,
resulting in further lawlessness,
so now present your members as slaves
to righteousness,
resulting in sanctification.

20 For when you were slaves to sin,
you were free in regard to righteousness.
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.

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

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

Introduction: Remember Who You Are

Tonight we're going to be talking about Jesus healing and transforming us. Let me begin by telling you a little bit about my kids. (SLIDE 2) This is my son John in September of 2006 when he started kindergarten at the Charles Taylor School. (SLIDE 3) This is my daughter Zoe at the same time when she started pre-school at the Murphy Community Pre-School. Currently, both John and Zoe go to the Charles Taylor Elementary School in Mattapan, where they are the only Asian kids in their classes. Almost all the other kids are either Haitian or Black American. So every day, they go through their little morning routine. We get up. We snuggle a bit. That's especially important to Zoe because her language of love is physical touch. Gotta get that love in. The kids practice their piano a little bit and then they watch their favorite morning TV cartoon on PBS Kids, Martha Speaks. During that time, they eat their breakfast and we make their lunch – either turkey and cheese or peanut butter and Nutella. After that, they brush their teeth. Then Mommy or Daddy reads the Bible to them. Right now, we're in Deuteronomy and we're going through almost all of the Old Testament. On the days that I drive them to school, we play guessing games in the car. And when we get close to the school, sometimes I'll remind them what their names mean, because their names are reminders to them of the identity that we as their parents hope they will understand. John means 'beloved of God.' His middle names are Athanasius, which means 'no death,' and Yang-Guang, which means 'looking towards the light.' Athanasius was also the brilliant and courageous fourth century Christian theologian who argued for the deity of Jesus, who was exiled from the Roman Empire over and over for his insistence on the truth. Zoe's name means 'life,' and in the context of the Gospel of John means 'the life of God.' Her middle names are Anastasia, which means 'resurrection,' and Jen-Guang, which means 'true light.' Jesus had said in John 11, I am the resurrection and the life, and the Greek words are: 'I am the anastasis and the zoe.' The reason I remind them of their names is because I want them to know the truth behind them, especially if they ever feel left out or confused or frustrated. I want them to know they are loved by God, and that the resurrection life of Jesus is available to them. And when they're getting out of the car, I say, 'Now remember who you are.'

If you have truly come to Jesus, the essence of the Christian life is to remember who you are. My encouragement to you is to remember who you are, now that you are joined to Jesus, and he lives in you and defines you. Nothing else defines you. Not your parents, not your successes, not your failures. Jesus defines you, period. And that is especially true as you walk into your days and nights as college students. By the time you walk out of here tonight, I want you to have a really clear understanding of who you are and what that means. If you are not a follower of Jesus, I want you to have a fairly clear picture of what that could mean if you are considering Jesus.

Context:

We are in the book of Romans, chapter 6:15-23. Two weeks ago, we studied how we are united with Jesus in his Cross and Resurrection. We go through his death and resurrection with him, and that changes us so deeply that we are brand-spanking new people. Who you are--your deep, core identity--is defined by Christ. In light of that, last week we studied how the rest of the Christian life is just being consistent with who we already are. We are to bring the rest of our bodies--our hands, our feet, our ears, our voices--to God so that we check in for duty. In this section, Paul reiterates this again: the rest of the Christian life is just being consistent with who we already are.

You Are Bondslaves to Jesus: v.15 – 16

In v.15 we have the same question we had in v.1 of chapter 6, except approached from a different angle. Again, Paul imagines a hypothetical person who asks a question, 'What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?' And again we're faced with the concern: 'Now that God's grace covers all and surpasses the Law, isn't it okay to sin? Paul answers by saying, 'NO!!!' 'May it never be!' Why? Because our identity is fundamentally changed. In v.16, Paul gives the second of the four great metaphors in Romans 6 – 8: bondslavery. We saw the first metaphor in baptism. Now, Paul draws on another great word picture that people in his culture understood: bondslavery.

Verse 16 begins, 'Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as bondslaves for obedience, you are bondslaves of the one whom you obey...' That word 'bondslavery' might be surprising. Isn't slavery a negative thing? In some ways, yes, and Paul will qualify his own metaphor later in this passage. But let's understand how Paul uses this idea. Imagine that you aren't students at BC in 2009. Instead, you are a young man or young woman in Rome in the year 57. You are not a native Roman, but a foreigner, brought captive from afar some time ago. In fact, you are a slave in that hot city, possibly running your master's errands at the shops in the colonnades of the Circus Maximus on the Palatine and Caelian hills. The ring in your ear identifies you as belonging to your master, an officer in the Roman army, who loves to threaten you by showing you the whip hanging on his belt. He's a short, cruel, man who loves threats and sarcasm. He is a tyrant, and you have no friends in that household. As much as

you long to get away, there is no hope for escape. Then one night, a young traveler comes to the door. He is very kind, and he makes conversation with you. In fact, he's the first person in your life that treats you like a real person. And in his eyes you see something that you've never seen before: mercy, a mercy that comes from understanding things you've never known. Late that night, you're awakened by the announcement that this young traveler has paid an unbelievable amount to buy you. He wants to welcome you into his household, but only if you come as a bondsman to him for the rest of your life. You're not sure what that means, but anything would be better than your current master, so you make the biggest decision of your life. You roll out of bed and come downstairs where the young traveler is standing by the door. He takes out the old ring from your ear. You give the man your hand, and he puts his small golden ring on your finger, signifying his ownership of you, and your freedom from your old master. He quickly opens the door and the two of you walk out. Behind you, you hear your former master erupt into a drunken rage, calling down curses and threats on you. But your new master reassures you, 'You don't need to listen to him anymore. You belong to me.' You look down at the ring, the ring that symbolizes the complete change in your identity, as you are eternally freed from your old master, and inseparably tied to a new master. That is who we are. We are bondsmen. We've been bought by Jesus at the Cross, we are free us from our old master, sin, and we now live as bondsmen in the household of our new master, Jesus himself.

In Greece and Rome in classical times, there was a special type of slave called a 'duolos,' or 'bondslave.' Ordinary slaves were usually allowed to buy their freedom or work their way out of slavery by a prearranged amount of 7 years or so of service. Sometimes, however, finding a brand new line of work or finding a place to live was very difficult. In fact, many slaves would have to face homelessness and total poverty. So the slave had the choice of becoming a 'duolos,' which was a permanent slave that voluntarily chose to belong forever to the house of one master. The master would then put his ring on the finger of the bondslave, designating that slave as his. In some ceremonies, the duolos would stand next to the doorpost of the master's house. The master took a pin and pierced the ear of the slave against the doorpost, and then put a ring there. That ring identified the slave as a bondslave, a voluntary lifelong servant of one master. Paul applied the word 'duolos' to himself in Romans 1:1, when he introduced himself as 'Paul, a bondslave.' For Paul, it meant wholesale commitment to the will and purpose of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ owned him completely, and Paul belonged to him and to him only.

Now in this case, there are only two possible masters we can have. There is sin and there is Jesus, since Paul asks, 'either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?' And Paul is sure to highlight what it's like to be bondsmen to each of these figures. If you are a slave to sin, the consequence will be bad (Paul calls it 'death'), and we'll discuss that later. But if you are a slave to Jesus, the consequence will be righteousness. That is the fundamental choice man has: Will I be mastered by sin or by God?

How does Paul apply this concept of bondslavery to us? By applying it first to our identity. Focus in on the word 'yourselves' back in v.16 because that is how Paul's great logic begins. Your core self is distinct from your members, as we also read in v.19: 'For just as you presented your members...so now present your members...' We also saw this in v.13: 'Present yourselves to God...and present your members.' There are two parts of you: your core identity and your members. Right now, Paul is describing the great change that happened to our core identity. Your core identity is joined eternally with Jesus Christ, if you have faith in him. He defines who you are by being in relationship with you, in fact, by indwelling you. If you wanted to say something about yourself, you could say, 'I am a son or daughter of Mr. and Mrs.---' That reveals something about you. You could say, 'I am a student.' You could say, 'I'm Asian American.' Or you could say, 'I belong to Jesus Christ' which says who you are foundationally at the deepest level. Being in relationship with him is stronger and more definitional than being in relationship with anyone else; it's stronger than blood or social class. If you are a Christian, then you are defined at the core by Jesus Christ alone.

I said this before when we studied Romans 6:1 – 11, but I'll say it again. You do not have two identities. A lot of well-meaning people run around saying that Christians have two natures. One nature sides with God and the other nature is selfish. That's only partially true, because you have only one identity, because one nature goes deeper than the other. The essential 'you,' then, is profoundly changed and joined with Christ. Notice the use of the word 'you' in this section. In verse 17, Paul says, 'YOU WERE slaves to sin.' But then 'YOU BECAME' obedient from the heart. Then in v.18, 'YOU BECAME' slaves of righteousness. You were but you became. There's a change that has already happened to us when we came to faith in Jesus Christ.

Illus: We get a great picture of this in Les Miserables. Jean Valjean is a convict that leaves from prison on parole. And as he looks for a job, he finds that no one will hire him because no one forgives him for the crimes he's done in

the past. So he wanders from town to town in dejection until he's surprised by one man, a silver haired old man who turns out to be a bishop. The bishop smiles, speaks to him with such respect, and says, 'Stay at my house for dinner and shelter.' But during the night, Jean Valjean says, 'This is too good to last. I'm going to take advantage of this bishop guy before he changes his mind.' Then he takes the silverware; he just rips the bishop off. He runs off, the police catch him. But when they bring him back to the bishop to press charges, the bishop totally surprises him again by saying, 'But my friend, you forgot these.' And he presses the last things he owns, the silver candlesticks, into Valjean's hand, and brushes away the accusations. The smiling bishop then becomes the clearest Christ-figure in the whole drama because what it costs him to pay for Jean Valjean's freedom. In the musical, the bishop sings these words:

And remember this my brother, see in this some higher plan.
You must use this precious silver to become an honest man.
By the witness of the martyr, by the passion and the blood,
God has raised you out of darkness; I have bought your soul for God

In the same way, Jesus gave every last thing he had to give us everything. He gave up a comfy pad in heaven, came down to earth to take on a human body that he continually had to struggle with, and in the end, gave up every last thing he had on earth, for us. He gave his life so that he would come out on the other side of death as a fresh new kind of human being, a God-drenched human being. So when anyone comes to him, Jesus can raise them out of darkness by sharing his new life with us. He has bought our soul in the sense that he died the death we were already dying in order to give us the life we could never live on our own. If we've given our lives to Jesus, then we are his. So remember who you are.

Present Your Members to Christ Because You His Bondslaves: v.19

In verse 19, Paul says, 'I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.' That seems either like a random insertion or a put down. What Paul is saying is that he's speaking in human terms by using this metaphor of bondslavery. Bondslavery is a metaphor, but Jesus is not really a master that barks orders and stands back with arms crossed. He comes to live in us, to live his life out through us. So Paul doesn't want anyone to get any negative impressions of what a relationship of love with Christ is like. That's where the metaphor breaks down. But, the metaphor of bondslavery is useful in the sense that it illustrates how Jesus Christ totally owns us, and how we are to be exclusively obedient to him. Our flesh, which is weak-willed in regards to righteousness, needs to be constrained by our bondslavery to Christ. Therefore, Paul pushes onward to apply the metaphor of the duolos to its logical conclusion.

Having finished talking about our core identity, what do you think Paul would talk about? The rest of us! Paul thinks of us on two levels: our core identity and the rest of us which he calls 'our members.' Look at the rest of v.19. 'For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.' This is where we have practical, ongoing choices. The choice is between presenting our members to sin or righteousness. Righteousness again means the full character of God displayed in Jesus Christ, a character which is meant to be our character. So in effect, our choice is again between sin and Jesus Christ.

Now to be a little more persuasive, Paul argues from consequences, and he says, 'You don't want to go back to serving your old master, sin! Look at the results!' The result of serving sin was 'impurity and lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness.' Now, this is one of the most clear definitions of why sin is such a cruel master. Sin leads to more sin. It's like a vicious cycle that just sucks you downwards. Now, if you're anything like me, you're saying, 'Whoa, this is a strong claim! Is there any evidence for this?' Let's consider the evidence.

If you present your body to drug abuse, you get more drug abuse. One hit is stimulating, but it leads to more. Eventually, it takes more and more of the drug to hit the same high until your life is wrapped around it. If you present your eyes to pornography, it leads to more pornography. It starts small, but winds up big. A man might start out simply looking, but then more and more stimulation becomes necessary. Soon, you find yourself on the web, watching obscene movies, or even going to strip tease joints as the fascination deepens. Eventually, a whole heap of perversions are necessary to achieve the same sensation. Or, if you're a woman, you might be tantalized by those romantic novels that are specifically designed only to manipulate your emotions, so that you feel stimulated by illusions. If you present your tongue to lying, it leads to more lying. In pastor Ray Stedman's book on Romans, there is the interesting account of a man who told a little white lie. He thought that would be the end of it, but he had

to tell 42 other lies – he counted them! – before he finally woke up from what he was doing and admitted the truth. If you present your emotions to bitterness against another person, it leads to more bitterness. It leads to you seeing only the negative things about someone else that you want to see. It leads to gossip, which can really do some damage. It brings about self-pity as you sit there and rehearse your anger and your victimized feelings. It brings self-righteousness as you feel so entitled to demand revenge. It even leads to depression in some cases, since depression is often frozen rage.

But I'm convinced that in our day and age, sin leads to more sin when we give our minds, hands, voice, etc. to greed. Because of greed, many of you are tempted to choose a major and career that isn't really meaningful, but just because it has status or it pays the bills of an expensive lifestyle or because – especially if you're a guy – you think your sex appeal has to do with how much money you make. What a lie. Because of greed, we neglect our friendships. We neglect the mission of Jesus to engage all kinds of people. Because of greed, you feel like you have to get really good grades. Why? So you can buy things nobody needs. Why? So you can impress people you don't even know. So you can buy things for your kids to try to make up for the time you should have spent with them. So you can make your children repeat the same meaningless cycle. Because of greed, we don't care about inner cities and care only for defending our turf in affluent suburbs, which exacerbates urban problems. Because of greed, we develop prejudices against less educated people, illegal immigrants, urban youth, the poor, which leads to judgmentalism and racism. That's what our society is based on. It is an endless cycle of greed begetting more greed. No wonder Jesus, when he compared two bondslaveries, said, 'You can either serve God or Mammon!' There is no mixing. There is nothing in between.

So clearly Paul is correct. Impurity and lawlessness lead to more lawlessness. When we present our hands, feet, mind, emotions, sexuality or whatever to sin, we get more sin back. That is a sobering thought!! In the second half of v.19, Paul tells us what we can do to break whatever cycle of sin we're in. 'So now, present your members as slaves to righteousness.' The word 'present' is the same word back in v.13. It means 'to place beside, to offer at someone's disposal.' This carries the same connotation as being in military service and reporting for duty, except now in the metaphor of bondslavery it is even more fitting than it was last week. We are bondslaves, and we are to be thoroughly consistent with who we now are. We already presented ourSELVES to Jesus Christ. Now, let's present the rest of us--our minds, hearts, mouth, arms, hands, legs, and feet--to him to be fully available to him, so that he can reverse whatever cycle of sin we were in, and bring great healing to us.

Application

Now, I'm going to be very specific about how this applies to us in one specific aspect of following Jesus. Jesus cares for the poor. He commands us to care for the poor. He comes within us to care for the poor. He empowers us to do that. With regards to money, you need to talk with each other and with Jesus about giving your mind, emotions, hands and energy to caring for the poor, and not to greed.

My wife and I along with another family have committed to try to live at under the living wage. In Boston for a family of four, that is \$58,000. You can check it out for every city and zip code at this website:
<http://www.livingwage.geog.psu.edu/>

But I'd like you to discuss how caring for the poor can be done in your major and career field. I'm going to break us up into four fields. In each of these fields, there is a systemic problem that hurts the poor.

- **Education:** The problem in education is that public schools are funded by local property taxes. That is why rich neighborhoods have amazing schools while most poor neighborhoods have struggling schools. They have worse buildings, gyms, computers, bathrooms, workshops, and sometimes teachers. This system reproduces class and racial inequality. Educator Jonathan Kozol writes in his book *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, that segregation of black children is at its highest level since 1968, when we were trying to dismantle segregated schools because of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The question for you is: What are you going to do about this? Will you advocate for more equal funding? Will you teach in a public school? What?
- **Health related fields (pre-med, nursing, science research):** The problem in health is that 90% of the world's health care resources go to serve 10% of the world's population. We fund research into rich people's diseases, but very few people study malaria, which would benefit millions of people. I understand that is how 'the market' allocates resources. But we are called by Christ to do more than 'the market.' So the question is: Will you serve a disadvantaged population? Will you address health care disparities?

- Law and Policy: The problem in law and policy is that we only have a system of citizens' rights. We do not have human rights. For all our talk about human rights, we just don't have them, and we probably never will. We have only ever had citizens' rights. The U.S. started with giving citizens' rights to white, land-owning males, and everyone who was not in those categories had to fight to be included. But we are called by Christ to fight for all people's rights: the unborn, the immigrant, the citizen of another country like Iraq and Afghanistan. What does it mean to care about Iraqis and Afghans? That will produce tensions because most U.S. citizens only think about using their tax dollars to protect themselves. But we are called by Christ to do it. So the question is: What will you do on behalf of the unborn, the immigrant (including the illegal immigrant), and citizens of other countries?
- Business and finance: The central problem in business and finance is that the central objective is making profits for a few people who are shareholders, and not benefiting other people who are not shareholders. The video documentary *The Corporation* says that the corporation externalizes costs to make someone else absorb them. So it is with advertising products directly to children, making food with no nutrition, making lots of plastic which is killing us, making other bad products like soda and tobacco that hurt people, destroying the environment, and so on. For those of you going into business, you can wrestle with so many ways of caring for the poor, like microfinancing and microenterprise development, or financial reform in the U.S. to reign in Wall Street, or bringing employment to people in inner city Boston or a developing country like Honduras, to thinking about just prices or fair wages, or measuring the social impact of the business, and maybe even the spiritual impact as well. In some ways, there are tons of ways to be creative in caring for the poor in business.

So, as you break up into your groups and discuss this more with people who are learning the same things, please share things that you've learned in class or outside class that have inspired you. I know there are great stories that some of you have heard about, or organizations you've heard about. Let's benefit from each other's learning and help each other take a practical step. Maybe this will shape what summer internship you take. And maybe that will shape your future...