



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

“Slave Labor of Love”

Romans 6:15-23

The advertising motto for "Outback Steak House" is "No rules, just right." I'd bet you that Outback Steak House doesn't embrace their own motto. Try going to your local Outback Steak House, order and eat a meal, then try to leave without paying for it.

You might say that “no rules, just right” is wrong!

In a sense, that was what the critics of the apostle Paul were saying. They understood his emphasis on the grace of God to mean that there were no rules and, thus, everything was “right,” meaning you could do whatever you wanted to - including continuing in sin.

But does emphasizing grace over rules, rites, rituals and regulations really open the door to all manner of sinful behavior? That’s our subject as we close out Romans six.

Romans 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!

The chapter opened with a similar question. The Jews and other critics of Paul claimed that his emphasis upon the grace of God would open the door to all manner of sinful living.

Paul meets this criticism head-on. Grace opens the door to all manner of godly living! We are set free to **serve** the Lord, *not* to **sin** against Him.

David Guzik explains it like this:

God has made us “safe” for grace by changing us as we receive God’s grace; He sets us free and equips us to live righteously before Him. Since we have died to sin, it is unthinkable that we could continue our former practice of sin. Once the caterpillar has been made a butterfly, the butterfly has no business crawling around on trees and leaves like a caterpillar again.

Illustrations can be helpful when discussing spiritual truths. Slavery was a reality in first century Rome. Paul’s readers would immediately relate to it as an illustration.

Romans 6:16 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?

You are constituted in such a way that you *must* “present yourselves slaves” to a master. As Bob Dylan sang, *You Gotta Serve Somebody*.

*It may be the devil, Or it may be the Lord
But you gotta serve somebody*

In your natural state you were a slave who presented yourself to “sin leading to death.” In other words, you were a sinner by nature and by choice whose destiny was “death,” meaning separation from God for eternity.

When you get saved you’re still a slave but now your master is God. Because He is your master when you present yourself to Him you find yourself walking by “obedience leading to righteousness.”

I think by that Paul means that you find yourself walking in obedience because it pleases God, your master, to do so. You *want* to obey Him and that’s a better motivation than *having* to obey Him.

Remember what we said earlier: God has made you safe to be motivated by grace by changing you.

Romans 6:17 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.

“God be thanked” because salvation is His free gift to us. We did not and could not earn it. While we were yet slaves of sin, ungodly, God saved us. Jesus’ death on the Cross redeemed us from slavery to sin as He paid the price necessary to set us free.

“Obeyed from the heart” is a way of describing faith. You are saved by believing. You believe God and He declares you righteous.

You obey “that form of doctrine.” First, this means, in general, the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

But that’s just the beginning. God’s Word continues to affect you. The word “form” was used of castings into which molten metal was poured. He’s saying that after you are saved you go on to be cast into an image.

Whose image? After you are saved you are predestined to be conformed – molded and shaped – into the image of Jesus.

“To which you were delivered” means that when you were saved it was just the beginning. You were delivered *from* sin, but “to” something as well. You were delivered to this work of becoming more like Jesus.

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

It’s possible to be set free but still think like and live like a slave. I’ve been using the more modern analogy of a prisoner. If all you’ve ever known is prison life, you find it hard to live out in the world as a free man. You often end up right back in prison.

As Christians we should be yearning for and learning more about the righteousness of God. Why go back to the prison of sin?

Grace definitely does not lead you to sin! You may choose to sin, but that is not the fault of God’s grace.

Because of the frailty of man, the Christian at infrequent intervals does yield to the evil nature and sin. But the point is, God has so constituted him, that he need not do so (Kenneth Wuest).

Jesus Christ tells us to no longer behave as if we were slaves to sin. We have been set free from sin. To use the prison analogy, if I am released from prison, it's no longer where I live.

Romans 6:19 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.

Paul explained that, in using the illustration of slaves and master, he was speaking in human terms. He was using a familiar illustration from everyday life. He seemed somewhat apologetic. After all, many of his readers were still slaves of their Roman masters! But, at the same time, that is precisely why the illustration was so powerful.

Before our conversion we surrendered our bodies as slaves of all kinds of uncleanness and to one kind of wickedness after another. Now we should dedicate our same bodies as “slaves of righteousness,” so that our lives would be holy.

God's purpose in setting you free from sin is not to give you the freedom to do as you please. It is to give you true freedom, which is to do as He pleases – which is for you to live right and become more-and-more like Jesus.

Romans 6:20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Most people think themselves basically good; or at least more good than bad. If they fall into bad behavior they might seek reformation of some kind.

It's true that most people are decent, honest, law-abiding, helpful and even religious. But apart from grace they are totally separated from God's standard of righteousness. They are “free in regard to righteousness” thus

means **they were unable to achieve it**. The only freedom a sinner knows is freedom *from* righteousness.

Romans 6:21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

Paul was speaking to folks who had converted to Christ later in life. If you converted to Christ later in life you, too, have “fruit” from your former life to be “ashamed” of.

Don’t dwell on it. Just realize that “the end of those things is death.”

When you put it like that, why would a person choose to yield their body back to the sin leading to death from which they have been delivered? They wouldn’t – or at least they shouldn’t.

Romans 6:22 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.

Again Paul stresses you *have been* set free from sin. It is something that has **already** been accomplished. You’re not working towards it; it was done for you on the Cross.

Likewise we have “become slaves of God.” Perhaps this example will help. God’s people were once literally slaves in Egypt. He delivered them. When God commanded Pharaoh to let His people go He said this about their freedom: “that they may **serve** Me in this wilderness” (Exodus 7:16). They would become God’s willing slaves.

You’re free ***but only in terms of who you choose to serve.***

You are now a willing slave of God. You can’t wait for Him to tell you what to do.

- He tells you to forgive people you’ve held grudges against for years and you do it.
- He tells you to remain patient in your troubles and you settle in to them.

- He tells you to serve others and you roll up your sleeves.

You have “fruit to holiness.” It means that holiness is the fruit you produce. Holiness is simply being set apart for God’s use. It is the theological counterpart to calling you a slave. You are a slave eager to do His master’s will. His will is for you to be holy – set apart for His use.

Even in nature, fruit is a result, a byproduct, of other factors. The lemon doesn’t have to work hard to be produced! It just results from the right conditions.

“And the end, everlasting life.” Your willing slavery, which produces holiness, will one day terminate in everlasting life.

This stands in contrast with the word death in Romans 6:21 and shows its reality. One is just as long in duration as the other; and if the one is limited, the other is. If those who are saved shall be blessed with life forever, those who remain lost will be cursed with death forever.

Everyone will live forever. If it were up to me nonbelievers would be annihilated at death. It’s not up to me. God sends no one to Hell; but many will end up there.

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

The word translated “wages” describes the pay of the Roman soldier. Sin is thus represented as a king, a mighty monarch; sinners are his subjects and vassals, his servants and soldiers, who fight under him, and for him, and all the wages they must expect from him is death.

Death is the wages of sin, because, like the pay of the soldier, it is just what was agreed upon. God told Adam and Eve that, in the day they ate of the forbidden fruit, they would die. It was clearly spelled out.

But “the gift of God” stands in stark contrast to our natural wages. We earn death; we must be given eternal life as a gift.

“In Christ Jesus our Lord” brings us back to a major theme in Romans six. It’s not just through Him that we are saved, although that is true. We are *in* Him. What happened to Him happened to us. He died on the Cross; we died in Him on the Cross. He rose from the dead in newness of life; we have risen in Him with newness of life.

As believers, we have experienced a change of ownership. Sin is no longer my master. **God is!**

I don’t have to obey Him, but I *get to* and I *want to*. Thus I am encouraged to present myself to God, to yield myself to His service. It’s the only reasonable thing to do!

It is safe to walk by grace. I don’t need to obey a set of outward laws or rules or regulations because my heart is set on pleasing the One Who set me free from sin. Love is a superior motive to law.

If the apostle Paul did slogans he might have said, “No rules, just righteousness.”