

16. Whose slave are you?

July 27, 2008

Let's say you have a new job interview coming up. Your current job is just miserable and grueling. The boss is never satisfied with you; the pay is awful and the retirement package is like from hell. Some of you are thinking, "Ha, it sounds like my real job."

The reason why you've been staying in this job until now is because the boss owned you. You were bankrupted completely and your boss got you for it.

The interview date finally arrived. The interview was beyond fantastic. The new boss really loves you in spite of all the shortcomings you have. The benefit package is unreal. The retirement package is out of heaven. He not only hired you on the spot, but also he even told you that he would pay off all of your debt to your old boss.

You couldn't believe your own ears. This is too good to be true.

When you told your old boss that you are leaving him, he cursed at you and blurted out, "I will get you back. You are gonna crawl back to me soon."

Of course, by now you know what I am talking about. The old boss is none other than satan who used to own you. The life with him was a misery. Now that you have a new boss from heaven, your future is secure. But the old boss satan is not that easy to give up on you. He entices you with never-ending temptations, threatens you with doubts of not knowing God's will for you from beginning to end.

In the middle of this Christian journey, there were times that you actually thought about going back to the old job because somehow you thought it was good 'ol time like the Israelites who were wandering in the wilderness after they escaped from Egypt. They were longing to go back to Egypt where they were miserable slaves with no future. Like them, we often activate our temporary selective amnesia for all the bad memories of before our salvation in Christ.

Just because we came to know Jesus as our Savior, it doesn't make us to be sin free people. It would have been nice if it was. We still sin because our sinful nature, but we don't have to dwell in sins. We now have the new Master our God to serve.

Whether people would like to admit or not, we all serve somebody. Either God or satan.

A. MORE SINS BECAUSE OF GRACE?

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

In 6:1-14 apostle Paul described our new life in Christ in terms of dying and being raised with Him. He used an illustration of baptism to explain it to us. But here in verses 15-23, he communicates the same truth – the absurdity of using grace as a license to sin – with a different illustration, that of slavery.

What he is saying is that the lifestyle of habitual sin is not compatible with one whose life is changed by the grace of God.

Our God's way leads to love, righteousness and eternal life. There is absolutely no reason why we would sin against God except our flesh is craving for carnalities. That is where our spiritual battle rages.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

B. WHOMEVER YOU OBEY

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?

Whoever or whatever you present yourself to obey, you become its slave. We may not have carved or molded idols for people to worship nowadays, but we still have many invisible idols which we often turn to. One very important thing we cannot forget is that even if it is good things, if it takes the place of God in your heart, that is an idol – that is including your spouse or ministry you are involved.

God wants an intimate relationship with you more than your service to Him.

According to Paul, we only have two choices. We can either serve sin, which leads to death, or we can serve Christ in obedience, which leads to eternal life. The words of Jesus echo in the background of Paul's instruction:

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Jesus wasn't saying that money was evil. He was saying that we can't be equally devoted to God and our own appetite for material things. This same exclusivity applies here. We serve either Christ or something (or someone) else.

C. THE DOCTRINE THAT SET YOU FREE

Romans 6:17-18 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.

In these two verses, apostle Paul summed up the effect of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We know who our new Master is – Jesus Christ God our Savior. We have heard the Gospel which apostle Paul mentioned it as "form of teaching" and trusted Jesus Christ with our hearts, our souls and our eternal destiny. It does mean that Christ has rescued us from the cruel reign and mastery of sin and brought us under His loving ownership.

In v17 it says "obeyed from the heart." There is a great difference between compliance and obedience. Compliance is just doing what he or she was told while obedience is doing it with willingness. Our God wants us to be obedient to Him, not just comply.

Let's talk about this word 'doctrine'. Like many of you, when I was young in the Lord, I was influenced by charismatic Bible teachers to learn not to like doctrines of Christianity, but go after spontaneous praying and praising of God. I don't see a problem with spontaneous prayers and praises to our God. I highly encourage people to do so. But when we ignore the Word of God for that sake of spontaneous praying and praising of God, then I have a major problem with that.

If spontaneous prayers and praises to our God are the only things we get, we don't have the right spiritual nutrition to sustain our spiritual life. It is like having sweet desserts only during a meal time. We need balanced meals including all those green stuff and meats and potatoes to have a full nutrition.

'Doctrine' is 'didache' in Greek and it means 'teaching'. If you are going to ignore the blue print when you build a house, your house will not come together. It would be worthless. Can you imagine following Jesus Christ without learning how to follow Him? Christian doctrines are that important, we need to learn and cherish them.

Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

Many churches in our country want to teach 'Jesus Light' to their congregation. These pastors and leadership of seeker-sensitive churches don't want to bog down their congregation with the truth that demands changes in the people's lives. So they give them light sermons that talk about encouragement, how to get along with others, etc. No, give them Jesus. That is what they need. When they have Jesus, they will have encouragement, they will know how to get along with others.

D. BEING SLAVES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

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.

As far as I can tell, everybody wants to be free. Nobody wants to be a slave to anyone. They say, "I am the captain of my own fate. Nobody tells me what to do."

Whether people would like to admit this or not, if they are not born-again Christians, they are slaves of satan. They just don't know about it. I didn't know and you didn't know. But when we became born-again Christians, we chose to become slaves of righteousness in Christ Jesus. This illustration was very familiar to the Roman Christians because the majority were slaves themselves.

Unlike their earthly masters, Jesus was a different Master. His Father adopted these Roman Christians as His own and they became the joint heirs with Jesus Christ. If that is not mind-boggling enough, Jesus called them friends.

John 15:15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

The same things apply to us.

The proper understanding of 'members' in this verse is a part of your body, not person in the church.

The longer we are slaves to sin, the more enslaved to sin we become. We deteriorate morally. But once we are set free from sin and set apart to God as slaves of righteousness, instead of deteriorating, we progress – we grow in Christlikeness. This is known as the process of sanctification.

Galatians 6:8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

Remember the opening illustration? Can you imagine? A new job, and the first day on the new job you leave work at lunch time and go to your old job and ask your old boss what he wants you to do. That ain't right. That is like when we go back to our old lives and dwell in sins.

How are we going to remain in God instead of running back to our old boss satan?
2 Corinthians 10:4-5 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ

E. SLAVES OF SIN WITHOUT GOD

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

Apostle Paul reminds us what we had when we were slaves of sin. We were without true freedom and righteousness. We were spiritually dying.

A good example of this was the Prodigal son in Luke 15. When he was at home, he decided he wanted his freedom, so he left home to enjoy himself. But his rebellion only led him deeper into slavery. He was the slave of wrong desires and wrong deeds. Finally he became a literal slave when he took care of the pigs. What he thought was freedom turned out to be the worst kind of slavery. It was only when he returned home and yielded to his father that he found true freedom.

F. THE WAGES OF SIN, THE GIFT OF GOD

Romans 6:21-23 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.

In the old life, we produced fruit that made us ashamed. In the new life in Christ, we produce fruit that glorifies God and brings joy to our lives.

Deserved payment versus an undeserved gift. Death is a wage rightly paid for a life of sin. Physical death occurs because we live in a world contaminated by Adam's and Eve's original sin. And spiritual, eternal death awaits those who remain in that sin and do not turn to Christ for forgiveness. That's what we deserve. But God gives us what we don't deserve – the free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

G. APPLICATION

After the Israelites conquered the Promised Land, Joshua gathered up all the people and told them about the history of the Israel to that point. Then he challenged his people with this:

Joshua 24:15 choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua had discovered the same thing Paul would write about centuries later: You've got to serve somebody. No one is completely free – not in the sense of being absolutely independent from authority or control. We'll either love and serve the true God or we'll serve whatever gods we make for ourselves – false images, ambition, desires, money, or even ourselves – which are extensions of serving satan. Whose slave are you?