



Text: Romans 6:15 -- 23<sup>1</sup>

Series: Right Living: God's Righteousness Transforming Our Lives

Title: Part 8 – Whose Slave Are You?

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**“...you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God”  
Romans 6:22**

Underneath everything I want to say this morning is a simple Biblical principle and it's this...

**True freedom comes in fulfilling the purpose for which God made us**

We often make the mistake of thinking that true freedom is found in unfettered self-determination. Freedom is sometimes defined as the ability to pursue our dreams without restraint or limitation. But that's not God's definition of freedom.

There's a second principle that underlies what I want us to think about and it's this...

**Asking the right questions is often as important as knowing the right answers**

There are two questions that inspired Paul's words here in chapter 6 and both of them are bad questions. They are bad questions because they are the product of a spirit that seeks to abuse the grace of God to serve selfish ends. This morning I want to share with you **four good questions** that I hope will lead us to live grace-filled lives to the glory of God.

We sang a few moments ago the words of Norman Clayton...

“Jesus, my Lord, will love me forever.  
From Him no pow'r of evil can sever.  
He gave His life to ransom my soul;  
Now I belong to Him.  
Now I belong to Jesus....”

Clayton's words are based on a passage in Romans chapter 14, which reads...

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**“For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.” Romans 14:8-9**

If you have received Christ as your Lord and Saviour, you belong to Him. You are “the Lord’s.” There’s been a change of ownership in your life.

Let me amplify that idea of the change of ownership by quoting another of Paul’s declarations. He wrote to the Corinthians...

**“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” 1 Corinthians 6:19-20**

There’s been a change of ownership. At one time we belonged to another master, but now we belong to Jesus. We were ransomed, we were bought with a price – the life of Jesus Christ himself -- and now we belong to Him. In Romans 6 Paul tells us who that “other master” was. Paul told the Romans...

**“you ... were once slaves of sin” Romans 6:17**

Years ago, when he was still writing overtly Christian songs, Bob Dylan wrote a song entitled, “Gotta Serve Somebody.” (Copyright © 1979 Special Rider Music) In the verses of the song he listed people who in the eyes of the world are the power brokers, the people who are in charge, politicians, businessmen, rock stars. He listed the “salt of the earth” people: construction workers, barbers, the poor. But it didn’t matter whether you were a “mover and shaker of the world” or an average “Joe”, because as Dylan wrote in the chorus: “It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.” Because in the end, we’ve all “gotta serve somebody.”

He had his finger on a truth, even if he got it a little skewed. You see, the Bible never says that we are “slaves of the devil,” but it does tell us that we’re either slaves of sin or slaves of God. So the question I want to ask you today is a simple one...

### **Whose slave are you?**

The Bible only gives us two options. We’re either slaves of sin or we’re slaves of God. Either we’re in submission to the sovereign Creator of the universe who has given us life in this world of His, or we’re living in rebellion against Him. That’s it. Those are the options. So I ask again: Whose slave are you?

This question comes out of a very practical consideration by Paul. Paul’s preaching on the grace of God raised a question in the minds of many people and Paul phrased that question for the believers in Rome so that he could decisively answer it. Here’s the question he was often asked...



**“Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Romans 6:1**

The answer to that question is found in the answer to my question: Whose slave are you? Are you a slave of sin or a slave of God?

Now why would people ask that kind of question? In his preaching about the grace of God, Paul had told people that living moral lives according to the commandments of God did not make them right with God. He said...

**“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” Romans 3:20**

In other words, keeping the law of God in all its moral and ceremonial aspects does not make us right with God. The law, Paul tells us, is designed to identify the existence of sin in our lives, not remove it from us.

The Gospel that Paul preached was that right standing with God comes...

**“through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” Romans 3:22-24**

So, some people thought, if right standing with God comes to us as a gift of God's free grace through faith in Jesus, does it matter at all how we live? Does grace free us from all concern about right living?

Let me give you Paul's short answer to that question...

**“By no means!” Romans 6:15**

I find the variety of translations of this little phrase interesting. The KJV translates it...

**“God forbid!” (KJV)**

The NASB translates it...

**“May it never be!” (NASB)**

But my favourite rendering is the NLT...

**“Of course not!” (NLT)**



What a ridiculous idea! God's grace cannot be used as an excuse for sin. But tragically, we do it all the time. Whether in small ways or in big ways, we trade on grace, expecting that God will forgive, because in His grace, He does! As the French cynic, Voltaire, once put it, "God will forgive, that's his 'business.'" We can respond to the marvel of grace with that kind of mocking cynicism that treats God's grace as if it were our right or we can respond to grace with the tear-stained, conscience-stricken wonder of John Newton who wrote...

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!"

We are grateful for God's flood of grace that overwhelms all our sin, we are embarrassed by its limitless flow and we are humbled by the fact that our persistent sin requires it to flow again and again over us.

God's grace is truly, remarkable, astoundingly, overwhelmingly free! That's why we call it "Amazing Grace"! D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, one of the great British preachers of the twentieth century, was a man known for his preaching of the doctrine of grace. He understood that when grace is correctly preached it can easily be abused and made the excuse for sin. He once said...

*"The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace." (As quoted in Jerry Bridges, Transforming Grace, p. 74)*

Some years ago, Phil Yancey, the American Christian writer, was invited to dinner by a friend. During the dessert course, the man finally got around to the reason for his invitation. He told Yancey that he had decided to leave his wife of 15 years and his three children and take up with a woman he had met who, as he put it, made him feel alive like he hadn't felt in years. He knew the damage his action would have on his wife and children but he wanted to know Yancey's take on a question that hung in his mind. "The reason I wanted to see you tonight," he said, "was to ask you... 'Do you think God can forgive something as awful as I am about to do?'"

Yancey posits a question: "Do we fully appreciate the scandal of unconditional grace? How can I dissuade my friend Daniel from committing a terrible mistake if he knows forgiveness lies just around the corner?" As Yancey points out, what Paul addresses again and again in chapter 6, 7 & 8 of his letter to the Romans is precisely this question: does grace open the door to sin? (© Philip Yancey, "Will God Forgive Me for What I'm About To Do" *Christianity Today*, November 23, 1992)



What would you say to this person if you were asked a similar question? I'll let you think about that for a bit. I'll come back to it later and give you Yancey's answer. But when you think about it, this man's question reflects that same process of thinking that Paul addresses here. "Does God's grace free me to sin?"

I want you to ask yourself this simple question this morning. I want you to ask it in the honesty of your spirit before the Lord. I don't want you speak it out. I don't even want you to write it down. Simply, quietly in your heart answer this:

### **To whom do I belong?**

If you have received God's grace, you are not your own, you have been bought. You are no longer a slave of sin. The ownership of your life now rests in the possession of God. As believers in Christ we are, as Paul puts it, "slaves of God."

Paul almost seems to apologize for using the term "slave" to refer to our relationship with God. He says...

**"I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations."  
Romans 6:19**

After all, doesn't he write to believers in his letter to the Galatians to tell them that in Christ they are no longer slaves but sons? (Galatians 4:6-7) And doesn't Jesus say that through faith in Him he no longer calls us servants but friends? (John 15:15) Is Paul apologizing for his use of the term "slave"?

No, I don't think so. The question is: what "natural limitation" is it to which he refers? Let me suggest something. Take a look at the context of this passage. At the beginning of this chapter, Paul poses a question that he has heard when people respond to his teaching on grace (cf. Romans 3:8).

**"Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" Romans 6:1**

And then again, at the beginning of this section we're thinking about this morning, he poses another, similar question that he's encountered in his teaching...

**"Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Romans 6:15**

In both cases his response is...

**"By no means!"; "God forbid!"; "May it never be!"; "Of course not!"  
Romans 6:2, 15**



Both of these are bad questions. As one Bible scholar suggests, the “natural limitation” to which Paul refers “is likely to be the insensitiveness and proneness to self-deception which characterize the fallen nature even of Christians.” The phrase translated as “your natural limitations” is more literally, “the weakness of your flesh.” (cf. NASB 1995) Paul often uses the term “flesh” to describe our fallen human nature. This self-deception and fallenness is the source of the thought that grace would ever inspire or condone sin. In order to drive home his point that believers are not their own but now belong to God, Paul uses the only word in his vocabulary that expresses “the total belongingness, the total obligation, the total commitment and the total accountability” which characterizes the life under grace. (C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 1985, p. 144)

Instead of questions inspired by the “flesh” that are designed to cater to and give opportunity to our fallen human natures, the believing Christian should be asking questions that help him or her resist the desires of the “flesh” which war against our souls. (1 Peter 2:11) Questions like...

### **To whom do I belong?**

That’s the question that kept Joseph from sin when he was tempted by Potiphar’s wife to commit adultery with her. Her husband had placed his trust in Joseph and given him free reign over the household, over everything except his wife.

**“How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” Genesis 39:9**

What she wanted him to do was an offense against Potiphar’s friendship and trust, it was Joseph’s allegiance to God that stood like a wall against her tempting invitation.

When our flesh inspires us to betray our allegiance to God we should be asking questions like...

### **Whose voice do I obey?**

A slave belongs to somebody. A slave follows someone’s instructions. Whose directives do you follow? Whose word is your command? Who calls the shots in your life?

Paul asked a good question of the Romans...

**“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” Romans 6:16**



Remember, sometimes asking the right questions is as important as knowing the right answers. This question highlights a very important truth. Remember Paul has told us that we are either slaves of sin or slaves of God but here in this question he says something that is surprising and I don't want you to miss it because it's really important. Notice that Paul says that if we present ourselves to "anyone" as slaves we are the slaves of the one we obey, either slaves of sin or slaves of...

### **"...obedience" Romans 6:16**

You'd expect Paul to say, "either of sin ... or of God," but he doesn't. He says, either of sin or of obedience. Here's the point...

### **The essence of sin is disobedience ... disobedience to God**

You might think that that's obvious – I hope you do. That means you have a Biblical frame of reference. Not everyone today understands sin as disobedience to God. This past Easter season *USA Today* ran an article by Cathy Lynn Grossman entitled "Has the 'notion of sin' been lost?" ([http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-03-19-sin\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-03-19-sin_N.htm))

While there seems to be a lot of "sin-talk" about today, as David Kinnaman of Barna Research, a Christian polling company put it, people tend to define sin "in a very personal self-congratulatory manner' – I have to do what's best for me; I am not as sinful as most."

One popular pastor from New York City notes that he has to talk about sin in order to be faithful to his calling as a preacher, but this is how he defines sin for his three congregations totalling about 5000 people.

*"Around here [sin] means self-centredness, the acorn from which it all grows. Individually, that means 'I live for myself, for my own glory and happiness, and I'll work for you happiness if it helps me.' Communally, self-centredness is destroying peace and justice in the world, tearing the net of interwovenness, the fabric of humanity."*

Okay, in his definition of sin I see "me" and "you" – do you notice Anyone missing? Where's God in this equation? His definition of sin is wrong. The essence of sin is not "self-centredness" – as sinful as "self-centredness" might be. The essence of sin is not failing to help you until I've helped myself. The essence of sin is not listening to God!

I am thankful that there are still preachers like Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, WA, a church that is bringing thousands of young adults to faith in Jesus Christ in the one of the most secularized cities in North America. Driscoll is also quoted in the *USA Today* article, and he defines sin as...



**“...anything contrary to God’s will.”**

When I obey my own voice, my biggest problem isn’t selfishness, it’s disobedience to God. When I listen to my own voice, instead of to God’s voice, I’m listening to the voice of sin! Sin is not something out there – sin is in me. Rebellion against God is in me. Disobedience against God is in me. Yes, my sin against God has ramifications that affect other around me but it all starts with disobedience to God.

In the Old Testament King David demonstrates this reality. David commits the sin of adultery with a woman by the name of Bathsheba. Then, in order to cover up his sin, he has her husband, Uriah, a general in David’s army, placed at the front of the battle. He then orders the troops to withdraw from around him and Uriah is killed by the enemy. The child born of this union dies just days after it is born. Lives are damaged, people are hurt by David’s sin, but when David confesses his sin before the Lord he writes...

**“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight....” Psalm 51:3-4**

David actions had corrupted Bathsheba, murdered Uriah and killed an infant and the root of his action was disobedience to God.

Again, I want you to answer this question. In the quietness of your heart, in the privacy of your spirit, you need to ask and answer...

**Whose voice do I obey?**

We need to ask the right questions, questions like...

**Whose heart do I share?**

Paul encouraged the Romans to obey God’s voice, but not merely to obey. He told them...

**“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” Romans 6:17-18**

Did not you notice the heart? Paul is thankful that they are now “obedient from the heart.” How is that possible?



In the Old Testament there is a promise that one day God's people will obey him, not merely from compulsion, but from the heart. The prophet Ezekiel, speaking as a vehicle for the very words of God, wrote of the coming day when...

**“And I will give you a new heart, and new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” Ezekiel 36:26-27**

Up to this point in Paul's letter to the Romans he hasn't talked too much about the role of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer. But all that's about to change. In chapter 7, verse 6, he just touches on the role of the Spirit when he says that...

**“we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” Romans 7:6**

Then in chapter 8, the Holy Spirit just explodes onto the scene and we'll look at those passages in the coming weeks. But this morning I just want us to see that it's "the new way of the Spirit" that enables us to be "obedient from the heart."

The moment that we came to faith in Jesus Christ, we were given a new heart and a new Spirit. That new heart and new Spirit enable us to **serve** God – the word is literally **“to be a slave”** – in a new way.

When I was a child, my dad was a salesman for a major tire company. He had a territory that he travelled just outside Ottawa where we lived. As a kid, I remember travelling with him to visit clients in service stations and tire shops in the Ottawa valley – it was great fun to drink an ice-cold bottle of Pepsi from the old water-cooled pop machines they used to have in those stations!

My dad liked his job and he was good at it. Then one day, the tire company reorganized its sales force. Instead of travelling on the road, my dad was moved into a tire shop in the city, stuck behind a counter and told he was lucky he had a job. After all the years of faithful service he had given to that company he felt like he had been treated callously and without humanity. He quit – and he went to work in the tire shop of a man who had been one of his largest customers when he was on the road.

Now here's the interesting thing – what was he doing in that new tire shop? Exactly the same thing he had been doing in the old one! He was behind a counter serving customers. What made the difference? The heart. My dad's new boss made sure that my dad was involved in the profit sharing plan and the pension plan. He treated him like he cared. And my dad wanted to be there. He served "from the heart." Same job – different heart.



Again this morning I ask you to answer a personal question in the privacy of your own heart...

### **Whose heart do I share?**

Finally, one last question for this morning. We've asked: To whom do I belong? Whose voice do I obey? Whose heart do I share? The last question we need to answer today is...

### **Whose purpose do I fulfill?**

Remember, sometimes asking the right questions is as important as knowing the right answers. Paul asks the Romans another good question. He asked them to think back on life before they became "slaves of God" through faith in Jesus Christ. At that time, they had been "slaves of sin." (Romans 6:20) And Paul asks them...

**"But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life." Romans 6:21-22**

A slave works to serve the purpose of his or her master. The purpose of sin is death. The purpose of God is life. Jesus said...

**"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." John 10:10**

Jesus said...

**"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide..." John 15:16**

The fruit we produce isn't the product of our own efforts. It's the work of the Spirit of God in us and through us as we listen to Him and yield ourselves to Him for His purposes. Jesus said...

**"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5**

If we serve the purposes of Jesus, our lives will be fruitful and purposeful because His Spirit produces life and fruit in us. The life produced by Jesus in us comes to us, as Paul says, as a gift, not a reward. Paul says that...

**"the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23**



But if we choose to live life our own way... well, the Bible says...

**“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”  
Proverbs 14:12**

And here we come back to Philip Yancey’s dinner conversation. Remember his friend’s question: “Do you think God can forgive something as awful as I am about to do?”

Here’s what Philip Yancey told him.

*“Can God forgive you? Of course. Read your Bible. David, Peter, Paul – God builds his church on the backs of people who murder, commit adultery, deny him and persecute his followers.*

*But because of Christ, forgiveness is now our problem, not God’s. What we have to go through to commit sin distances us from God – we change in the very act of rebellion – and there is not guarantee we will come back. You ask me about forgiveness now, but will you even want it later, especially if it involves repentance?”*

Yancey’s friend made his choice several months later – he left his wife and family. He broke off connection with his Christian friends, claiming they were “too narrow-minded and judgmental,” and looked for new friends who could “celebrate his newfound liberation.”

*“To me,” Yancey wrote, he “does not seem very liberated. The price of his ‘freedom’ has meant turning his back on those who cared about him most. He also tells me God is not a part of his life right now. ‘Maybe later,’ he says.”* © Philip Yancey, “Will God Forgive Me for What I’m About To Do” *Christianity Today*, November 23, 1992

This man’s choice to presume on grace was costly. The price? The death of his relationship with God.

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

Are you fulfilling the purposes of God or sin? Are you bearing fruit for life or for death?

As we come today to participate in the Lord’s Table, God’s Word encourages us to “examine” our lives (1 Cor 11:28), to see if we are approaching this remembrance of Christ’s death for us with the proper heart attitude. Let me



suggest this morning that we use the four questions we've explored as a guideline for the examination of our hearts.

**To whom do I belong?**

**Whose voice do I obey?**

**Whose heart do I share?**

**Whose purposes do I fulfill?**

If you find something in your life that isn't consistent with being a "slave of God," I encourage you to bring it in confession and repentance to the Lord, asking for his forgiveness and receiving it from him because...

**"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9**

- Invitation to the Lord's Table
- Songs of Communion:
  - I Will Sing of My Redeemer (#309)
  - The Wonderful Cross
- Benediction