

# Freedom to Serve a New Master

## Romans 6

Bob Dylan won a Grammy for that song in 1979. It went on to enjoy a run in the Top 40, and was also covered by several other artists. For sure it's a catchy tune and fun lyric, but what's so profound about the song is that articulates one of the basic, inevitable truths of life, "you're gonna have to serve somebody." That's life.

Bob Dylan wasn't the first to communicate this idea. We find the same principle in the passage we'll explore this morning as we continue looking at some of the major realities of life in this series we're calling, #thatslife.

"That's life" moments are times we run into things that are an inevitable part of life. They're not good, but there's nothing we can do. They're just part of life. Basements get wet. New things get damaged. We're disappointed in a relationship. They happen to everyone sooner or later. Sigh, that's life.

Then there are other "that's life" moments that capture the essence of what we love about life. Sitting on a beach. Floating on a lake. Looking out over a mountain range. Ahhhh, that's life.

I've enjoyed seeing the photos several of you have texted or emailed in response to last week's sermon. The first one I got was three brothers' feet propped up on the edge of a bed while they played Xbox. #thatslife. I saw some other feet propped up at a beach. Dina snapped a picture of ours on a blanket at Ravinia. Cheese and crackers and a piano concerto outside on a perfect summer evening? THAT'S life!

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In this series we're tackling four of the major inevitabilities of life, and asking, what difference does a relationship with God make. Each week, my goal is to give us an opportunity for a new perspective. One that can transform our experience from shrugging our shoulders in defeat, saying "that's life," to confidently saying, "that's life!"

To do that, we're going to be guided by Romans 5-8 because these chapters clearly contrast the sin and death (that are part of life in this world) with the hope and life that are found in God.

Last week we saw how death became part of life because sin entered the world and came to all of us through our association with Adam. We looked at God's grace in breaking the curse of death by offering the gift of life through his son, Jesus Christ. And we saw how our perspective on death can change from fear and uncertainty to joy and anticipation because, in Christ, it is not death to die.

So, death is an inevitable part of life, but Jesus Christ has broken the curse of death for all who are associated with him, who have become part of the race of Christ through faith.

This week we're focusing on a second inevitability of life—servanthood. Like the song says, "it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody." Bob Dylan saw it, and the Apostle Paul agrees. We all serve somebody. That's life.

The question is, which master are you serving? That's the question taken up in Romans 6. And that's the question I'm inviting us to wrestle with today.

Lets' look together at Romans 6. We'll jump around a bit, pulling out several phrases to see how life is described under these two masters, and what is at stake in our choice of whom we will serve.

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**In a similar way that Romans 5 presents two corporate identities—Adam & Christ, Romans 6 presents two masters—sin and righteousness.**

We see this most clearly in verse 16. *Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or obedience which leads to righteousness.*

**1. The analogy of slavery—What slavery was like in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Rome**

Dan Wallace points out that slavery in the first century was quite different from slavery in early American history, or the oppressive slavery that still exists in many parts of the world today.

- a. The word translated here as “slave” usually referred to those who had voluntarily sold themselves into servanthood, or sometimes slaves who had been taken as captives after a war. People also sometimes were sentenced to slavery to repay a debt.
- b. In Roman culture, although masters had absolute rights over slaves, they generally showed them respect and offered them a life of dignity, allowing them to marry, accumulate wealth, purchase their freedom, run a business, etc. Typically a slave was set free within seven years, or by the time they reached 30 years old.
- c. There were exceptions, and in response to Spartacus’ revolt in 73BC, Rome treated slaves much more harshly.
- d. Here in Romans 6, the language is clearly referring to slavery of the voluntary sort. The NIV uses the word “slave” but some other translations use the word “bondservant.” It’s the idea of voluntarily entering a binding contract of servanthood.

The implication is that we can and must choose whom we will serve.

**2. In Romans 6, we see what life is like serving sin as our master. We are:**

**a. Ruled by Corruption**

- i. Sin reigns in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires (12)
- ii. Who among us naturally wants what’s good for us? I sure don’t. I’ll take Doritos over celery any day of the week. I’d much rather sit in front of the TV than go running. I’d rather sleep in than get up early, read sports news than read the Bible, and complain rather than pray.
- iii. Of course there are more serious examples. It’s easier to tear people down than build them up. To seek our own good at the expense of others. To want revenge on those who’ve wronged us. To hate rather than to love.

**b. Controlled by Addiction**

- i. Slaves to impurity and ever-increasing wickedness (19)
- ii. Like Lays says, no one can eat just one. Whether it’s food addiction, alcohol addiction, gambling addiction, sex addiction, control addiction, or some other insatiable craving, our self-serving appetites just keep growing as long as we keep feeding them.

**c. Unrestrained by Conscience**

- i. Free from the control of righteousness (20)
- ii. In the NT book of James we hear this warning: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth

and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

- iii. In terms of our emotions, anger is one that feeds on itself, if left unresolved, will fester and grow until it explodes. Sometimes in actions we never imagined we were capable of.

**d. Weighed Down by Guilt & Shame**

- i. Doing things that make us ashamed (21)

**e. Condemned to Die**

- i. Earning the penalty of death (23)

You don't have to live long before you begin to experience some combination of these effects of sin. Because sin has entered the world and shown up in all our lives, we have all been slaves to sin. But the good news is that we have Freedom to Serve a New Master.

**3. In Romans 6, we see also what life is like serving righteousness as our master. We are:**

**a. Free to live a new life in unity with Jesus.**

- i. We see this in verses 3-7.
- ii. Just as Jesus died and was raised to a new life, so also our old identity/way of living has died and we have received the ability to live a new life.
  - 1. This is because Christ's submission to death has absorbed the power death had over us as the penalty for our sin (i.e. we died, so sin can't do anything more to us), and his power to live has become ours.
- iii. **This is a big point of connection with Paul's logic.** In the previous chapter he makes it clear that sin brings death. That's what it has the power to do. So, once a sinner has died, that's it. Sin's work is done. When Christ submitted himself to death, sin did to him all it could do. Consequently, when he rose to new life, there was no power left for sin to claim over him. He was free.
  - 1. **ILLUSTRATION.** I was fired from a job once. The whole time I worked at that job, I was unsettled. I didn't feel like I could trust my boss, I felt like leadership decisions were questionable, and wondered constantly how I found myself in this situation, and how I could get out. Then one day I got called into a meeting, and I found out my job was cut. That hurt. It was painful and humiliating, and I hope I learned enough in that experience to avoid a situation like that in the future, but there was also something else I felt after it was all over with. Freedom! That employer had exercised the only power it had over me, and now that it was done, it had no power over me anymore. I was free. I was broke. But free!
- iv. **In a way, sin is like a bad boss in a dying organization.** It tries to bend your thoughts and actions to do what it wants. It makes you think ignoring God and living for yourself is the only way you'll make it, but, in reality sin always moves toward death, and it wants to drag you down with it. Ultimately, if you die without discovering the gift of life in Jesus, sin has won. It has leveraged its only power over you.
- v. But verses 3-5 tell us that if you have been "baptized" into Jesus, that is, you've left your association with sin in Adam and have become associated with Jesus by believing in him and following him, then sin has leveraged all its power over you, and yet you live.
- vi. The result is that you and I still live a dying organization (a corrupt world) that is under the thumb of a bad boss (sin), but because Jesus has overcome the world,

so have you. You're free to reap the lasting rewards of living in unity with him both today and into eternity.

- vii. **All this is symbolized in baptism.** The meaning of baptism is that, in the way God relates to humans (i.e. through corporate identity with either Adam or Christ), we were there in Christ, dying to sin and rising to new life. We are united to him.

- 1. **Baptism Service—August 27. Take this step. Learn more and sign up online.**

**b. Free to experience eternal life today.**

- i. We see this in verses 8-10.
- ii. In Christ, our eternal life has begun. Though our physical bodies will one day expire, our true life in Christ will never end because death no longer has power over him (8-10).
- iii. As we saw earlier, sin has done all it can do to Jesus, and he cannot die again. He is experiencing eternal life today!
  - 1. ILLUSTRATION. Overlapping timelines of physical and spiritual life.

**c. Free to receive the benefits of serving God.**

- i. Verses 22-23.

**4. What choices we have before us.**

**a. Claim Christ but serve sin so grace gets shown more and more (1)**

- i. Chapter 5 emphasized the grace of God in giving the gift of life to undeserving sinners in response to Christ's obedience. Should we respond by sinning more so grace looks all that much better?
- ii. This sounds like the logic of a child trying to get away with something.
  - 1. ILLUS. Dad, you're such a good parent. You really do give me more than I deserve. In fact, the less I deserve all the things you give me, the better you look as a dad. So, I'm just going to ignore everything you tell me, and do whatever I want. That way all your dad friends will be really impressed with how kind and generous you are.

**b. Claim Christ but serve sin because we're not under the law (15).**

- i. This sounds like the logic of someone who understands freedom to mean he can run any direction he wants.
  - 1. ILLUS. When a quarterback hands the ball to a running back, the rest of the offense works hard to block the other team so the running back has freedom to run forward toward the end zone. Sure, he is also free to run sideways or backward, or keep changing directions, but that's not how you win. Using your freedom to run sideways or backward doesn't get you anywhere good in life, only using your freedom to run forward.
  - 2. Sadly, as absurd as that logic is, it's how we roll far too often with God.
    - a. Jesus said, "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength."
    - b. If you're a Christian, you might say, I know my relationship with God should change every area of my life, but that would really conflict with getting ahead at work, or what I do with my friends. I feel guilty, and one day I'm really going to try to do things differently, but until then I know you'll forgive me, and that's what's great about being a Christian.

- c. If you're not a Christian, maybe this is what's holding you back. If you do this, you know what it means for your life, and you're not ready. If that's you, I respect your integrity and intellectual honesty. I hope as you explore the change God can make in your life, you'll find it compelling enough, even today, to believe in Jesus and follow his teaching.
- d. Either way, the question is, is continuing to live selfishly the way to respond to God's grace? Of course the answer comes emphatically, "by no means!"

**c. Claim Christ and serve righteousness as your master.**

- i. Verse 19b
- ii. Verses 11-14
  - 1. He moves from the general to the specific in terms of our relationship to sin (i.e. don't let sin reign ... don't offer any part of you) and to God (i.e. offer yourself to God ... offer every part of you).
  - 2. It's total commitment. There is no middle ground.
  - 3. Jesus said, "you cannot serve two masters."
  - 4. As Joshua led the Israelites into a new homeland, he said, "choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."
  - 5. So Bob Dylan was right. No matter who you are:
    - a. You're gonna have to serve somebody, yes  
You're gonna have to serve somebody  
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody
    - b. That's life.
  - 6. The good news is we can choose a master with whom a life of slavery is a life of freedom.
  - 7. And THAT'S life.