

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor

[Swift Creek Baptist Church.com](http://SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

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Romans 6:12-23 “Who’s Your Master?”

Intro. The title of my message today is, “Who’s Your Master?” Some may quickly object and say, “I have no master. I’m enslaved to no one.” Well I want to challenge you on that. The average taxpayer works about 5 months to pay all his taxes. You don’t have much choice about that. You might say that for 5 months/year the government is your master. If you have taken out a loan, the lender is your master until you pay off that loan. Proverbs 22:7 warns, “The borrower is servant to the lender.” When you go to work, your boss is your master. He or she tells you what to do. Sometimes our personal & family relationships can feel like slavery at times.

Man is a created being. He is not autonomous. He is not and never has been his own master. And in this text of Scripture Paul mentions 2 masters. You are either the slave of your own sin nature or the slave of God. It is one or the other. Many people would like to believe that they do not have to serve either one, but there is really no alternative. And these two masters are mutually exclusive. If sin is still your master, then God is not. If God is your master, then sin is not. Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters....” By the way, Paul seems to apologize in v.19 for using slavery as an illustration due no doubt to its painful associations. But we need illustrations to help us understand spiritual truth.

This morning I want to present the clear choice you have of being a slave of sin, or a servant of God. You must choose either to serve sin, or to serve God. The choice you make will make an eternal difference and it will make a difference in the quality of life here and now. And if you choose to be a servant of God, I want to show you what is involved in living as servants of God. We must move from theory to practice. So the way I want to approach this is to talk about 3 kinds of people. I want you to be honest with God, & see if you fall into the first two types of people. If you see yourself there you especially need to keep listening, and I will show you the third type of person, which describes what you should be. So let’s consider the first type of person we will examine:

I. UNBELIEVERS ARE SLAVES OF SIN

The Bible makes it very clear that until Christ becomes your Savior and He sets you free, you are a slave of sin. We see several evidences of this truth in our text. In v.12 he speaks of sin “reigning” in someone’s mortal body. There sin is pictured as a king who reigns over us. In v.16 he says some are slaves “of sin leading to death.” In vv.17 & 20 Paul refers to the past experience of the Christians in Rome. He says they “were slaves of sin.” The tense of “were” is in the imperfect tense. That describes the years they lived as slaves of sin. Jesus taught the same truth. In Jn. 8:34 He said, “He who sins is a slave of sin.” Also, according to 2 Tim. 2:26, the unsaved are held captive by Satan. He works with our sin nature to control us.

You probably know or remember what the reign of sin feels like. When sin has the mastery over us, we do wrong even though our conscience tells us not to. We get into bad habits we can’t break. We may promise and resolutions, and we can seem to keep them for very long. Sin is the force behind addictions we can’t break.

In our text Paul tells us some of the ways sin exercises control over us. In the days of slavery, what would keep someone serving as a slave? The whip was used. Threats of death would be used. So how does the sin nature keep you sinning? One way sin will try to rule is through lust, or desire. Look at v.12, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” Now, to what does the word “it” refer, to the sinful nature or the body? Based on the Greek, it refers to the body.¹ Sin uses our bodily desires to keep us sinning. James 1:14 says, “Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” Peer pressure is another means of slavery to sin. You know that some activity is wrong, but you yield to the pressure and go ahead and sin, for we so desire the approval of others.

Now if you have not yet turned to Jesus Christ for deliverance from sin, I want to encourage you to stop kidding yourself, and stop letting sin deceive you into believing that he is a good master. Sin offers pleasure, but it is only temporary, and after a while you will not find much pleasure even in sin. Sin offers the approval of other sinners. As you serve sin they will applaud you as you get wasted or engage in other sinful exploits. But let me show you the dark side of the mastery of sin. Look at v.19. Before they became Christians, Paul said, “you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness [*akatharsia*].” Sin wants to control the members of your body. Sin will pressure you into engaging in unclean acts. Tens of millions of people have venereal diseases, and the numbers continue to rise. Some even engage in the unclean acts of homosexuality. When sin reigns another result is lawlessness, according to v.19. Without the constraints of law, people spin out of control like a spinning top. There is ruin and destruction everywhere sin reigns. Furthermore, when sin is your master, it delivers the final blow of death. In v.16 Paul says that serving sin leads to death. In the last of v.21 Paul says, “For the end of those things is death.” Likewise, v.23 says, “the wages of sin is death.” The contrast between “wages” and “gift” emphasizes the fact that death is what the sinner deserves. “Wages” in v.23 is used of the daily rations of a soldier. Such “wages” of sin are not only paid in a lump sum at the end of our earthly life, but are measured out day by day; it constitutes a state of a living death. Eph. 2:2 speaks of unbelievers who are dead in sin; dead to God, separated from God even while they physically live. However, the primary emphasis of these verses is that sin leads to mortal & eternal death.

So why would you serve such a master? You should consider what service to sin will do to you. Sin does not pay. Oh, the wicked may apparently prosper for a season; but the mobster will probably be gunned down by a rival, and sent to hell before he is old.

If God opens your eyes to what a terrible master sin really is, He will surely also show you who can set you free. It is Jesus! He died on the cross to forgive you of your sin, and set you free from its power. Jesus said in John 8:36, “if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” So turn to Jesus. Put your faith in Him. That is the first step to breaking free from sin’s control & mastery over us.

So as we look over the human population, we see many who are still slaves of sin because they have not yet turned to Christ. Now let’s consider another group of people:

II. SOME BELIEVERS ARE STILL LIVING AS SLAVES OF SIN

This is demonstrated by our text. Paul is writing to Christians. In vv.1-11 we see the wonderful truth of what God has done for us in Christ. In some spiritual sense our old self died with Christ the moment we believed in Him. We have new life in Christ. Paul says in vv.6-7,

¹ The pronoun is neuter, and the word “body” is neuter, whereas the word “sin” is feminine.

“knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.” God says we have been freed from sin. Sin is no longer our master. Yet, quite a few Christians continue to live as though sin still reigns over them. Otherwise, Paul would not need to make the appeal found in v.12, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” Based on the Greek text, Paul is saying, “Stop letting sin reign in your mortal body....”² He is speaking to Christians here! Though the death through which we have passed is positional; conditionally, sin is very much alive within us. So it is quite possible for a Christian to live as a slave to sin, even though Christ has set them free.

I believe it is quite clear both from Scripture and from our own experience that sin is still present in our lives as Christians. It will continue to seek to exercise dominion over us. Sometimes sin reigns over us due to ignorance. We just haven’t been taught properly regarding our victory over sin by virtue of our union with Jesus Christ. Sometimes sin regains dominion over us when we stop depending upon the Lord daily. Some stop praying, and stop trusting. They drift away from the Lord, and sin takes over.

When sin regains the upper hand in a Christian’s life, it can lead to the same problems that an unbeliever experiences. It can lead to impurity & lawlessness. But one that I will add is shame. Paul asks in v.21, “What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed?” The only fruit accruing from the service of sin was the things which now fill with shame.

This past week former presidential candidate John Edwards has been in the news. I hear he is supposed to be a Christian. And yet it has been revealed that he had an affair while his wife was being treated for cancer! Imagine the shame he must have experienced. Imagine the shame his wife and children experienced. Sin brings shame.

So let me warn you, if you as a Christian allow yourself to be enslaved by sin once again, you will commit sins that will bring shame upon you and your family. You may even get your name listed in the newspaper for being charged with some violation of the law. Something like that only adds to the shame.

I am speaking mostly to Christians. I hope you don’t want to be in that second group of people. So I am going to show you from this text of Scripture what you must do to live free of sin’s control. I want you to be a part of a third group of people that we read about in our text:

III. SOME BELIEVERS ARE LIVING AS SERVANTS OF GOD

The only way you can live free from sin as your master is to make God your Master. You need a new Master who is more powerful than sin. You have an important choice to make. You will either serve sin or God. We see this truth in v.16 in the form of a question, “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?” If you obey sin, then sin is still your master. But if you obey God, and live a righteous life, then God is your Master. I want to challenge you to turn your life over to God, and let Him be your Lord and Master.

Now there are several things you need to do to complete the transformation from the lordship of sin to the lordship of Christ. First:

² The verb is present imperative with the Greek negative *me*, which construction forbids the continuance of an action already going on.

A. Assert Your Liberty from Sin – Since according to v.11 you are indeed “dead to sin, but alive to God,” v.12 says, “do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” We are not to allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies, for sin does not have authority over the believer in Christ. This is confirmed in v.14, “For sin shall not have dominion over you....” This is a statement of assured fact, and should not be interpreted as imperative or as pointing to a blessing reserved for the future. And it is for that reason that the exhortation of v.12 can have validity and appeal. So to live so that sin does not reign, we must conform to the knowledge of our place in Christ. This is a matter of faith, not feeling.

Our relationship to sin is precisely the same as Christ’s relationship to sin. We are to keep on reckoning these facts as absolutely true, and then, as we believe these truths, they will become powerful in our lives, for we become what we reckon ourselves to be. When sin makes its appeal, we must refuse to recognize it by reckoning that we died to it in Christ, and at once it will go, its power broken.

In the last of v.14 Paul give a reason why we should no longer allow sin to reign over us, “for you are not under law but under grace.” Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are not under law, but this does not mean that we are lawless; far from it! The reason Paul makes this statement is because law does not help us against the sin problem. Why is that? First, law can do nothing to justify the person who has violated it. Instead, it condemns us. Secondly, law can do nothing to relieve the bondage of sin; rather, it accentuates and confirms that bondage. If all we have is law, we will still be under the bondage of sin. The Christian can rise to no spiritual heights so long as he is living under legalism and self-effort. Many true Christians honestly believe that they can grow in obedience to God by some system of law-keeping, or by following a legalistic approach to Christianity. But Paul refutes that idea. So get out of your mind any idea that the way to break free from the bondage of sin is through law or rules.

How, then, can we live free from the reign of sin? It is not by law, but by God’s grace. Believers have come under all the resources of redeeming and renewing grace. By grace the power of God comes and delivers men from the servitude of sin. Sometimes in the Roman Empire, a person would redeem someone from slavery by grace, and because of love. Remember that grace is God working on our behalf as a loving gift. Because this is so, to be “under grace” is the guarantee that sin will not exercise the dominion. Grace supplies that power to obey. Also, grace provides a better motive for obedience. We are no longer mere servants, but friends (Jn. 15:15); and more than that, we have been made sons (Jn. 1:13; Gal. 3:26).

To illustrate the power of grace of law, consider this story. A man is left a widower with two small children, so he hires a housekeeper to be his servant. He tells her what to cook, how to keep house, how to dress and care for the children. He goes about the house from time to time to see that all is in order and that she is obeying his instructions. He watches her management of the children and corrects her in a manner suited to the relationship of master and servant. After a year or two, he marries this woman. The relationship is now entirely changed. He no longer follows her around to oversee her work, nor does he tell her what to cook for dinner. She is his in a relationship of love and she delights to do his will. She asks what he would like for dinner, and goes to some trouble to prepare it. She is no longer under law but under grace. [Barnhouse, p.135].

Now notice Paul’s question in v.15, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” Being free from the law has nothing to do with being free to sin. We are no longer under law as a system or covenant so that we can be free from sin by

God's grace. Paul said in Gal. 5:18, "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." One of the great gifts of God's grace is the Holy Spirit. He leads us, and enables us. That is far better than mere external law!

There is one specific area of our lives where we need to stop yielding to the dominion of sin. Paul says in v.13, "And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin...." Sin will also seek to control the members of your body. Sin will use your hands, tongue, mind, sex organs, or any other part of your body in sin. For example, the thief offers his hands to carry out the sin of stealing. Another person yields the mouth to his master Sin, and speaks profanity, or speaks lies, or hurts people with cutting words or gossip. Paul brings the issue of sin and holiness down into concrete terms.

So to break free from sin, you need to accept God as our Master, and assert your liberty from sin. Then, you need to:

B. Present Yourself to the Service of God – Paul says in the middle of v.13, "but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead...." The word translated "present" (*paristemi*) is used several times in this text. It literally means "to stand by," & thus it can mean "to place at one's disposal," or "to stand by ready to serve." It even can mean to offer as a sacrifice. That same word is used in Romans 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

Picture in your mind a servant who stands by, ready to take orders from his Master. This word is used in Matthew 26:53 where Jesus said, "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide (*paristemi*) Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" He is saying that His Heavenly Father would place 12 legions of angels at His disposal, ready to serve Him. In Luke 1:19 the word is used by the angel Gabriel, who said to the father of John the Baptist, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God....," no doubt ready to obey any command of God. This word was used in Luke 2:22 of the parents of Jesus presenting & dedicating Him to God when He was just a baby.³ They knew Jesus was to serve God.

Even so, we are to present ourselves to God for His use and service. I believe there should be a decisive moment in every believer's life when we present ourselves to God as servants, ready to obey Him as Lord & Master. In fact, look again at v.13, "And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God...." In v.13 the tense of the word changes. It the first case it refers to an ongoing presentation of yourselves to the serve of sin. Then the aorist tense is used of the Christian making a decisive, once and for all dedication of yourself to God.

Notice that in v.13 Paul gives one motive for presenting or dedicating ourselves to the service of God, "as being alive from the dead." Paul gives the picture of one who has been rescued from death, who now feels an obligation to serve the one who has saved their life.

Do you recall an episode of the Andy Griffith show when Andy saved Gomer's life? He went to the gas station one day and found that smoke was billowing out & he rescued Gomer from the smoke & put out the fire. After Gomer realized what Sheriff Taylor did, he wanted to show his gratitude for saving his life by constantly offering to follow him around, and be

³ Romans 16:2 says, "that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and **assist** her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also." 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to **present** yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

available to do anything for him. Even though Gomer had good intentions, he became an annoyance with his constant devotion to repay his debt to Andy. So Sheriff Taylor decided that he could be relieved of Gomer's constant attention by saving his life, and they could call it even. So he saw Gomer coming and made it look like he had succumbed to a gas leak from a heater. When Gomer came in, he saw what was happening and tried to close off the gas line. Meanwhile, he passed out from the gas fumes and Andy had to rescue him again!⁴

The point I want to make is that we all understand that if someone saves your life, you owe them a life of service. Even so, we owe Jesus a life of service, and we should obey His every command. After all, He saved us from eternal death! Yes, present yourself to God, "as being alive from the dead."

Once again, we need to get more specific in what it means to present ourselves to God, to be His servants. Paul says in the last of v.13 that we should also:

C. Present the Members of Your Body to the Service of God – Look at the last of v.13. He says that you should "present ... your members as instruments of righteousness to God." The word translated "instruments" (*hoplon*) refers to any tool or weapon that one may use in service of another. "Why does the Lord want your body? To begin with, the believer's body is God's temple, and He wants to use it for His glory (I Cor. 6:19-20). For example, your mouth should be used to speak words that build up, and words of praise, and words of witness for the Lord. Also, in this day and age, God primarily works through people. "He has no hands but my hands; He has no mouth but my mouth."

Notice that we are to first yield ourselves to God, then yield the members of our body to God. Don't try to substitute yielding your hands or feet to God for giving yourself to the Lord. Too often people are willing to give their money to the Lord but not themselves. They will give some of their time and service to the Lord, but not their soul. It wonderful to do good works, like helping children & youth in the community. But that is no substitute for giving your heart & life to God.

D. Deliver Yourself to Obedience to New Testament Teaching – Paul says in the last of v.17, "you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered." Once we present ourselves to God, He delivers us over to one of the primary means that He uses to instruct us & commands us what to do. He gives us over to the "form of doctrine" that we have received, the Word of God. Paul's gospel was a definite body of teaching. We are not to criticize and change the Word; rather, we are to change to conform to the Word!

The word translated "form" originally referred to a mark or form made by a mold or some other device. God's Word is to mold us into the image of Jesus. It is our standard. We are to "obey" the Word of God. In this instance there is stress upon the ethical implications of gospel teaching. Christianity does have ethical teachings. You can call them rules if you wish.

And notice the manner of our obedience. Our obedience should not be reluctant & grudging, but "from the heart." Love motivates us to obey the Lord much better than law does. We not only need to know doctrine in our head, but also in our heart. Too often, our "heart" is not into obeying Christ and serving Him. Mere outward conformity is not good enough.

This certainly means that we must read & study the Word of God to learn how we should live and serve the Lord. We also need to be faithful to believe God's Word. Never turn away

⁴ Originally aired March 16, 1964.

from God's Word. Stick with it. There is no other guide to Christian living that God has given us.

Conclusion: The master of sin and the mastery of the God of grace are as different as night and day. Tyranny is replaced by love; defeat is wiped away by triumph; death is swallowed up in victory. Who is your Master? Is sin still your master, or is God?

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, "God's Freedom" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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