

Romans 6:15-23 – “A Better Freedom”

(Pew Bible Page: 943)

Intro: Many people in our world rule out any thought of becoming Christians because they believe that to become a Christian is to give up freedom. Their idea of Christianity is that it is a kind of straight jacket – a religion of joy killing laws, rules and regulations developed as one wag said because of a persistent fear that someone, somewhere was being happy, and it needed to stop. That is what Satan wants the world to believe. Opposed to that is the passage of assurance we have before us tonight. These verses encourage our hearts by revealing to us that far from Christianity making us slaves to misery, our faith in Christ brings us into true freedom. A better freedom than anyone in Adam can ever experience. It is true that we are still slaves. But in Christ we are slaves with a better Master; a better Law and a better Life.

Proposition: Because we are in Christ, we have entered a better freedom than those in Adam can ever experience.

Billboard:

- (vv.15-16) A Better Master
- (vv.17-18) A Better Law
- (vv.19-23) A Better Life

(vv.15-16) A Better Master – In his discussion of the assurance of salvation for all who are in Christ, the apostle Paul in chapter 6 of Romans has been answering objections non-Christians might raise to the fact that all who are in Christ are eternally secure in Him. As we saw last week, he first dealt with the objection that such assurance of salvation was bound to lead some to abuse grace.

Romans 6:1 – *Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?* The imagined object is that some will certainly reason, “If we are saved no matter what, let’s go out and sin a lot so that grace will abound even more.” As we saw, such an attitude is out of the question for those who are in Christ. Tonight, Paul deals with a second objection, the danger of presumptuous sin because we are taught that the Law no longer has authority over those who are in Christ. The imagined objection is, “But the Law is the only way to restrain sin! Do away with the Law and sooner or later those believing such a thing will inevitably begin to live slack, morally shoddy lives!” This is where we pick things up tonight. Paul’s answer is that this cannot possibly happen because those in Christ have a better Master than those in Adam. **Romans 6:15–16 - 15** *What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16* *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?* Paul’s answer to this objection begins by pointing out that those who are in Christ have switched masters. In Adam, we were slaves to Sin. Sin dominated our lives, ordering us around and there was nothing we could do about it. All who are slaves must obey their master, for they have no choice. *You ARE slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.* Slaves obey their masters because they ARE slaves. Now that we have died to Sin and have been Born Again to new life in Christ, we are still slaves. But now our slavery is turned into a better freedom because we are now in Christ slaves to Righteousness rather than slaves to Sin. In Adam we were slaves to disobedience leading to death. Now, in Christ, we are slaves to obedience leading to Righteousness.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] In Christ we have a better freedom because we have a better Master.

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[ILLUSTRATION] Anyone who has read even a little history of the horrible institution of slavery realizes that nothing good can be said about it. Human slavery dehumanizes its victims, taking away their freedom, dignity, and self-respect. While there was never anything good to say about slavery it is plainly apparent that having a *kind* master – one who allows his slaves more freedom, grants them a measure of dignity, encourages them to have self-respect – this kind of master is infinitely better than suffering under a cruel taskmaster bent on tearing down those who serve him. As believers, we must face the fact that because of the presence of sin in this world, we will necessarily be slaves to someone all our lives. The issue for us is not, “Am I a slave or am I free,” but rather, “Because I am in Christ, I am a slave to Righteousness and have a better freedom than those who are still slaves to Sin in Adam.” Being a slave to Christ is superior to any kind of freedom our fallen world can offer.

[APPLICATION] Let’s encourage ourselves with this truth: Because we are in Christ, Sin no longer has dominion, the right to boss us around. We have now received the life of Christ, the Holy Spirit. He leads us relentlessly to devote ourselves to Righteousness. It is true that we are still slaves and will not enter our full freedom until we are finally in the presence of our Savior at His coming. Until that time, it is necessary for us to have a Master who will not let us go. One who “*ever lives to make intercession for us.*” And we have such a Master. Our call, then, is to willingly, gratefully, follow His commands. Being a slave to Righteousness is far preferable to being a slave to Sin as we’ll see later in tonight’s study.

(vv.17-18) A Better Law – It is important for us to remember that Paul’s purpose is to strengthen the assurance of those to whom he was writing. Look at how these verses reassure anyone trembling with questions after reading verses 15-16: **Romans 6:17–19 - 17** *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, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.* Paul expressed great confidence in his readers’ spiritual condition: “*You who were once slaves of sin have become... Slaves of righteousness.*” How can he be so confident? Because he knows that their condition depends on their position in Christ, rather than on their work for Christ. While affirming their security, Paul also answered the objection raised that those no longer under Law would descend into moral mediocrity or worse because there would no longer be any restraint to Sin in their lives. On the contrary, he replied: a better law is now at work in the lives of those in Christ – the Law of Love. When Paul notes that his readers have “*become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which*” they had been committed, he is speaking of the high morality based on Christ’s command to “*love one another*” taught in all the churches. It is true that those in Christ have died to the Law, but that does not make us lawless, because we now live under that higher law. This truth becomes crystal clear when we think about the nature of the Old Testament commandments and the moral standards believers are called to in our New Testaments.

- The Old Law was *negative* in nature. The New Law is *positive*.
 - “Thou shalt not kill” vs. “Love thy neighbor as thyself.”
 - “Thou shalt not steal” vs. “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”
 - “Thou shalt not commit adultery” vs. “Husbands, love your wives.”

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Do you see it? The Old Testament Law sought to restrain Sin through NEGATIVE PROHIBITIONS. The New Testament Law of Love restrains Sin’s vestige in believers through POSITIVE COMMANDS. Those in Christ are never lawless. We are instead ruled now by a better law, one that calls us not merely to refrain from Sin, but rather to devote ourselves actively to the practice of Righteousness. This is the essence of Christ’s teaching in The Sermon on the Mount: that those who would populate His kingdom must have a *higher* Righteousness than that of merely keeping the Law.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] In Christ we have a better freedom because we are under a better law.

[ILLUSTRATION] If you’ve ever lived in another country, perhaps a country less devoted to freedom than ours, you will see immediately that not all laws are created equal. In many lands, laws are not intended to encourage freedom, but more often to restrict freedom. Now, it is true that in Adam we were under Law, and that Law was perfect. It revealed God’s character; it restrained Sin’s practice, and it passed judgment on anyone who violated its strictures. That Law was good, but all its power was negative, restrictive of what we might consider our freedom. But now, in Christ, we are under a better Law – a Law that doesn’t merely prohibit Sin but overwhelms Sin with Righteousness. This Law doesn’t restrict our freedom, it releases us to our full godly potential.

[APPLICATION] How blessed are those who are in Christ! Far from living in a legal straight jacket that restricts our freedom and happiness, we have entered into true freedom by becoming no longer slaves to Sin, but now slaves to Righteousness and the joy of the Lord. This calls for celebration. We don’t *have* to live moral lives that result in happiness; we *get* to live moral lives that bring us joy. Our glass is no longer half empty – it is gloriously half full today and tomorrow will be finally and forever filled to overflowing. What a life we have been given! We have a better freedom because we live under a better law.

(vv.19-23) A Better Life – Having affirmed his reader’s position in Christ, Paul now urges them to live a better life than those who are in Adam. **Romans 6:19–23 - 19** *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. 20* *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21* *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. 22* *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. 23* *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Paul first explained why he used the illustration of slavery to make his point. He did that because he realized that his readers would very well understand issues of slavery, masters, laws, and lives, probably because most of those receiving this letter were likely slaves. He spoke theology in their language! Next, he urged them to live daily in the reality of their new position in Christ: *For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.* As we saw last week, the things we know to be true about ourselves in Christ must be put into practice if we are to enjoy their benefits. Having expressed these things, Paul put forward a comparison between the lives of those in Adam and those in Christ in verses 20-22. What fruit is borne by those in slavery to Sin and what is its result? Verses 20 and 21 tell us: the fruit of living in slavery to Sin is shame and

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the end of such a life is inevitable: death. Verse 22 gives us insight into the lives lived by those who are in Christ and are slaves to Righteousness: we have entered a better freedom and bear the fruit of Sanctification, the end of which leads inevitably to eternal life. Now, don't think that Paul was saying that those in Christ *earn* eternal life because of their behavior. The wonderful summary statement of verse 23 rules out any such misunderstanding: **Romans 6:23 - 23** *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Those who are in Adam and are slaves to Sin ARE EARNING a wage: death. But those who are in Christ and are slaves to Righteousness ARE NOT earning eternal life – it comes as a FREE GIFT in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] In Christ we have a better freedom that calls us to a better life.

[ILLUSTRATION] I suppose that the ambition of every good parent for their children is that their kids would be able to live a better life than they have experienced. Toward that end, we teach our kids morality; we insist on getting them the best education we can acquire; we encourage, correct, and hold them accountable to do what's right. Why do we do these things for our children? Because we love them, and we want them to have the best lives they can live.

[APPLICATION] In this same way, God loves His children in Christ. He insists that we live up to the high position in Christ that He has given us as a free gift. He has guaranteed eternal life given as a free gift to everyone in Christ. What love is this? Instead of searching our consciences to see how we've disappointed Him, we ought to be rejoicing our heads off and singing His praises at the top of our lungs. He loves us! He has *given* us a better freedom. A better Master. A better Law. A better life. All gifts to us from a loving Father.

Conclusion: The devil wants to keep us in the dark view of God that those in Adam are deceived by: that God is a tyrant who restricts our freedom. A taskmaster who demands we live joyless lives. A hard boss whom we can never quite satisfy. But it's all a lie. In Christ we have been GIVEN a better freedom; a better Master; a better Law, and a better life. What an amazing gift. What a wonderful Savior.