

Slaves to Righteousness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 February 2019

Preacher: James Lapping

[0 : 00] If you'd like to turn your Bibles to page 1133 in the Pew Bibles, we're reading from Romans 6, verses 15 to 23.

Romans 6, 15 to 23. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means.

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 to obedience, which leads to righteousness.

But thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin, you've come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

I'm using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.

[1 : 13] When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death.

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Great. Good morning. Lovely to see you all. Thank you for coming out.

Did anyone see a bit of snow on the way in? Surprisingly earlier. It was fun. Good fun. Right. My name's James. I'm on staff team here at St. Silas. And it's my pleasure to encourage us from God's word this morning.

Let me pray for us as we start. Father, we pray that we would hear your word. We pray that we would listen and take up the challenges. What is helpful, may that be remembered and be uppermost in our hearts.

[2 : 22] And what is unhelpful, may that be forgotten, Father. Trusting in you and in your son, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Great.

Well, I wonder if you've been following the rugby this weekend. Big hooray for Scotland. Yeah. If you follow the rugby, yeah. They beat the Italians. Well done.

Maybe the only match they win. Who knows? Slightly naughty. Obviously, I'm not hoping that, but a bit more. And it's always amazing at what sports fans do to follow their game.

So I've got a picture of a guy, Ron Rutland. Ron was a banker. And he chucked it in and he said, what I'm going to do is I'm going to travel around the world following rugby world cups.

But I'm going to do this in a very particular fashion. I'm going to cycle there from somewhere really, really far away. So initially, he cycled from South Africa.

[3 : 20] He's South African. All the way to England to watch the Rugby World Cup. And what did he find? South Africa getting beaten by Japan in their first match. Very disappointing. And then last Saturday, he left from Twickenham outside Twickers with a big crowd.

Off to cycle 19,000 kilometers to Japan to go watch the Rugby World Cup there. And in his luggage, he had the whistle for the opening match, Japan versus Russia, September the 20th, 2019.

An epic journey. Has to cross the Himalayas twice. Has to go through 27 countries. And it's amazing what Ron is doing out of love for his sport.

That's the thing that's going to keep him going. He's following his passion, single-minded, and he's absolutely determined. And in the passage that we read this morning, that we had read to us by Trevor, we challenged to have the same mindset as Ron, but just for a different goal.

So we have this command at the end of verse 19. It's the only command in this passage where it says, And it's hard, isn't it?

[4 : 46] So we live in a culture that's drowning in outrage. We get very easily outraged over stuff. And to call ourselves slaves, well, that's just completely counterintuitive.

To give up our rights, to willingly serve an ideal or someone else, that's not just counterintuitive. Very often you'd be called, well, a bad person for doing something like that.

And then we think about the pressures of our daily lives. Maybe you've got a young family, a busy job, maybe relatives that are poorly at the moment.

And being a slave to righteousness just seems like another thing to do on top of an already impossible list. But in this passage and in this section of Romans, we're considering that if we are to live under the grace of the gospel, then Paul argues that this is the attitude that we are to have as Christians, that we are slaves of righteousness.

And I'll just give you the context of the passage. We have it there in verse 15. Paul's accused in verse 15, Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? And what they're saying is that, Paul, your gospel of grace is an excuse for sinning.

[6 : 10] And this offering our slaves to God is Paul's response to that. Now you've misunderstood what I've said. So here we have, Offer yourselves as willing slaves to God.

And our first point there, because it's the only alternative to slavery, to sin. And I wonder if you'll join me and just look down at verse 16.

In verse 16 we read, Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you're slaves to the one you obey.

Whether you're slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness. And the picture that Paul has been painting for us so far in Romans is that we become Christians by an act of God's kindness and mercy, and that we are freed from the realm of Adam, from sin and death, the realm of sin and death, and that we've been picked up and transferred to the realm of Christ and eternal life.

So you can imagine a field maybe. There's a field, and there's a fence or wall around the field, and there's a herd of cows standing in the field, and they're chewing the cud as cows do.

[7 : 28] I don't know what cows do. They're chewing the cud there. And there's another field next to this field. And then maybe, and that's owned by a different farmer. And there's a certain cow in the first field, and the farmer comes along, and he sells the cow to the farmer in the next field.

And what happens? The cow is picked up a strong farmer, and taken from that field, and placed in the other field, in the next door field. So that's, it's in a completely different field, a completely different realm, and it has a new owner.

And that's the picture that Paul has painted for us so far, of what it is to be a Christian. But here he adds another extension to this picture. He says that what marks these two realms, all these fields, is slavery.

So in the old realm, we were slaves to sin and to death. We couldn't help but sin, but that now through Christ, the Christian in God's mercy and kindness is a slave to God and to righteousness.

And I wonder if you notice what Paul is saying there, is that none of us is spiritually neutral. We can't claim to be sitting on the fence. We are either a slave to sin and to death, or we are a slave to obedience and to righteousness.

[8 : 59] Now, I understand that that is a difficult thing to hear. So Ron Rutland, that cyclist that we heard about earlier, he said, even in the places like Congo, where you hear about all these bad things going on, you drill down, and you still find that most people are, well, generally good.

And we like to think that, because in doing that, in thinking like that, we are flattering ourselves. We are thinking that we are good. But in many cases, if we look at our own hearts and our own lives, or if we read the newspaper, we simply know that that's not true.

So I was out walking yesterday, this car entered this junction, going far too fast, there was a pedestrian in the junction, the car started hooting, the pedestrian casually offered him some sign language, the car kept on zooming, and obviously got so distracted by the sign language, that he didn't notice, that he had slipped into the wrong lane, into the oncoming traffic, coming out of the intersection.

This absolute foolish, and he swerved at the last minute, and just avoided this little white car, this lady peacefully driving along. And it's just a sign of the absolute madness, and sinfulness, that pervades our lives every day.

And we know this for ourselves, don't we? We see this in so many different kinds of ways. And so then Paul goes on to argue that we are to offer ourselves as willing slaves to God, secondly, because he has set you free by the word of his grace, verses 17 to the first part of 19.

[10 : 44] So I'll just read it there. But thanks be to God, that though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from the heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

You have been set free from sin, and have become slaves of righteousness. So in the Christian, we see this great change, that we've been set free from being slaves to sin.

We're finally free from those things that harm us, and hurt us. And how has this been accomplished, this great setting free? That in God's kindness, we have come to obey from the heart that sincerely, earnestly, wholeheartedly, with conviction, what is it?

The pattern of sound teaching, the pattern of teaching. And that is all those things that Paul has taught us up to this stage in Romans about Jesus, that Jesus died for our sins, in our place, that the record of his perfect life has been given as a gift to us, to all who believe, and for our salvation.

But notice also that it's this word that now claims our allegiance. And what does he mean by saying that? It could perhaps also be translated that we have been entrusted to this word.

[12 : 09] The word takes charge over us. So as we sit here, and we think through, and mull over this passage together, thinking through it, and maybe we leave, and we go have a coffee afterwards, and we discuss what we've heard together, we've discussed the passage with our friends, the word, that word that we're reading about, is meant to change us, and order our lives, as we go out, and see the coming week.

But it also means that when my Christian brother comes to me, or my Christian brother or sister, Bible in hand, and they might challenge me regarding a wisdom issue from the Bible, or they might say to me that when I sleep with my girlfriend, or cheat on my taxes, or speak unkindly about someone, that I'm in the wrong.

I cannot say, well, it's okay, I'm not under the law, but under grace, because I have been entrusted, we've been entrusted, to God's word, to that pattern of teaching.

And that pattern of teaching, is meant to order, and instruct, our lives. So what were the religious people, the Jews of Paul's day saying, they were saying, Paul, your gospel of grace, that's a license, to do what you want, to carry on sinning.

And Paul's response to that is, no, my pattern of teaching, that is all that, what the Bible has been saying, tells us, frees people, from their slavery to sin, and instructs them, on how to live, in a way that pleases God.

[13 : 46] That they may be slaves, to righteousness, and no longer sin. And next, what we find is, Paul argues in this little section, that we are to offer ourselves, as willing slaves to God, in the pathway, of holiness.

And we look at the second half, of verse 19 there for us. So maybe you can just join me, I'll read it out for us. So just as you used to, offer yourselves, as slaves to impurity, and to ever increasing wickedness.

So now, offer yourselves, to righteousness, leading to holiness. And here the word, to offer is literally, putting yourself, at someone else's, disposable.

Or what we see later, in Romans, is to, offer ourselves, in the sense, of a sacrifice. And so the question, that Paul is putting, in our mind is, what is it, that you most want, out of life?

What is it, that you're going to, give up your hours, and your money, and efforts for? And then he, he says to us, well look back, look back, at the things, you used to, offer your life to.

[14 : 53] And look at the futility, of them. The sin that never satisfies, that just wants to grow, and more, and more. That pushed you, away from God. All those things, that you gave up your time, and money, and efforts for.

For impure thoughts, for idle gossip, for misspent money, for lusts that devour, and gobble up your life. But then he gives them, this command, and what does he say?

He says, so now, but now, that is no longer, your life, as a Christian. Those days are over, a new day has come, a new you, new meaning, new hope, a new pattern, of teaching, to be followed, and a new savior.

Therefore, offer yourselves, to righteousness, leading, to holiness, and we're going, to need holiness, because we're going, to heaven.

We're on a new team, we're in a new field, in a new realm. So, my height, and my sporting prowess, under 13 C team, I remember the coach, Derek Schnabel, he arrived, with a bucket of jerseys, and we all, whipped out a jersey, and we're all, under 13, we're all tiny, and all these jerseys, are massive, and stretched, and too bulky for us, and we put them on, and Derek gives out, the jerseys, and we put them on, and he says, lads, I have given you, your jerseys, I've given you, your jumpers, now fill them, and he probably, meant eat porridge, but he also meant, play as if you belong, to the team, fill your jumper, fill that in every sense, play as a member, of the team, play like you, in that team, and that you deserve it, and similarly, our destination, is heaven, we're heading to heaven, as Christians, to eternal life, and so now, we're asked to fill, our jumper, live, as a citizen, of the place, where you're going to, to heaven, so next,

[16 : 56] Paul argues, to offer yourselves, as willing slaves, to God, because these slaves, are given, eternal life, in verses 20, to 23, so maybe, join with me, in looking down, when you are slaves, to sin, you are free, from the control, of righteousness, what benefit, did you reap, at that time, from those things, of which you are now, ashamed of, those things, that result, in death, but now, you have been set, free from sin, and have become, slaves, of God, and the benefit, you reap, leads to, eternal, life, and it's not just, that we've been, set free, from something, but that we have, been saved, for something, you have been, you have been, set free from sin, and become slaves, of God, and the benefit, that you reap, leads to, eternal, life, and this is a, sure, and certain, and guaranteed, future, if you're trusting, in the Lord Jesus, today, so, the cows, in the field, next door, they might, low to all, their heart's content, they might say, come back, come back, to the field, come back, to the field, but you've been, set free, from that field, from that realm, of sin or death, you've, been transferred, to a new field, and that is, not to say, that in this new realm, as a Christian, you're always going, to lead, a perfect, and sinless life, that's not, what Paul's saying here, and to believe that, can be quite, tricky, and dangerous for us, but that we have been, set free, from the realm, of sin and death, and we have this, sure, and certain hope, for the future, of eternal, life, and so, every hard effort, that we make, every sacrifice, that we make now, is going to pale, in significance, with that great, and glorious, future, that we have, waiting for us, so we've had, we've seen,

Paul's argument there, offer yourselves, as willing slaves, to God, because it is, the only alternative, to slavery, of sin, because you've been, set free, by the word of grace, in keeping, in holiness, and because of the hope, of eternal life, but why should you, be a slave, of God, and finally, we see, offer yourselves, as willing slaves, to God, because Jesus, offered himself, up, for you, so I have this verse, that I've just, found for us, to encourage us, how much more then, shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit, offered himself up, unblemished, to God, cleanse our consciousness, from acts, that lead to death, so that, so that, we may serve, the living God, a verse there, from Hebrews, you see, Jesus died, for you, and for me, that we might live, Jesus, bought our lives, at the cost, of his own life, that we might be slaves, of God, he paid the price, but notice also, that, in giving up his rights, and offering himself, up to God,

Jesus set us, an example, that we are meant, to follow, you see, Jesus only, asks us to do, what he has already done, in the fullest way, possible, isn't it right then, that we offer up, our lives, for a king, who has given us, so much, in mutual, generosity, so what's it going, to look like, for us, offering ourselves, as willing slaves, to God, so I know this family, earlier on, Emily spoke to us, about the holiday club, I know this family, down south, the dad's the oil exec, he's a very busy job, the mom's, she's a double doctorate, pediatrician, immunology, pediatrics, and they give up a week, every year, two young boys, to run, the church's holiday club, self-sacrificially, what's it going, to look like, I've got another friend, who's recently retired, whenever there's an event on, she scrubs the pots, she clears up, she does all of that, she's never asked, she willingly gives, her time to help, and to serve, serve, so what's it going, to look like, to be willing slaves, of God,

I know this group of guys, four guys, they come together, every Friday morning, and they read, through the Bible, and they pray together, they've all got busy jobs, lawyers, doctors, engineers, all the rest, they meet, they make a priority, to meet together, to study the scriptures, to hold one another, accountable, and to encourage, one another, in the word, in the Bible, in the gospel, what's it going, to look like, for us to be willing slaves, another friend of mine, Chomper, he's a brain surgeon, he does, these incredibly, ridiculously long operations, minimum, 24 hours, he takes a jaw, off the front, and climbs through, the front of the person, to operate on it, and he'll do all of that, in his working week, and then he'll teach, all his students, and he's got his young kids, three young boys, and then, he went through his patch, six months, every Monday night, vestry meeting, sorting out, quite a difficult, church issue, in the church at the time, incredible, that's an example, of willingly, being a slave, to God, then I've got, my go on and friends,

Lloyd and Ann, retired, old, they do all the stuff, in church, wardening, ushering people, all those little, unseen bits, Lloyd and Ann, tirelessly give their time, to do those kinds, lead a small group, and then I've got, another friend, she was a primary school, head teacher, she got diagnosed, with thyroid cancer, and the doctor said to her, you've got 18 months, to live, so she put her, her slip in, said I'm resigning, from my job, she went to her local, minister, the minister, and she said look, I've got 18 months, please, put me to use, please use those moments, that I have left, for God, and for his kingdom, and these are all people, who have come to obey, from the heart, the pattern of teaching, that now claims, their allegiance, so what's it going, to look like, for us, this morning, at St Silas, in Glasgow, well, it might be, that, you have a child, or a family member, who's going through, a really difficult time, and it might mean, that you might, have to stop, doing things, that you might need, to step back, from doing things, at church, so as, to love them, in the best way possible, meeting that obligation, but for most of us, it might mean, getting more involved, challenging ourselves, a bit more, it might be, something small, like, simply coming to, midweek, central prayer, on the first Wednesday, of every month, it might be, joining a growth group, in 2019, wanting to get around, the word, and being challenged, by that, or roots, or something like that, it might mean, that you watch, how you talk, and how you live, that you don't get distracted, by all the distractions, around the word, and around the Bible, but you simply apply, what the Bible says, to your life, and you watch your, or maybe you watch your speech, with the boys at the club, or the girls at the coffee club, or the coffee shop, it might mean, that you make, an effort to change, those areas in your life, in 2019, where you know, that you haven't been, obedient, to righteousness, and that you commit, to being a person, who's known, for their holiness, and righteousness, above all things, it might mean, that for the first time, in your life, you come to obey, from the heart, the pattern of teaching, that now claims, your allegiance, accepting, that you have been, a slave to sin, but that now, you wish to be, a slave, to God, accepting that Jesus, died for you, in your place, being made holy, and righteous, looking forward, to eternal life, let me pray for us, as we close, so Father, we thank you, for this challenging passage, and Lord, we pray, that we might be people, who are known, for holiness, we pray, that we might be people, who, commit ourselves, to being slaves, of righteousness, of looking to serve, one another, encouraging one another, of looking to obedient, to that pattern of teaching, that brought us, that good and great, news of a Savior, who loved us, and died for us, in Jesus name,

[26 : 15] Amen.