

Romans 6:15-23
(Joshua 24:14-15; Matthew 11:25-30)
“Whom Do You Serve?”

Introduction

At the end of Romans chapter five, Paul wrote, “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (5:20), and even as he wrote the words, he realized that they would be dangerously misunderstood, so he followed immediately in chapter six with the rhetorical question, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (6:1). We looked at this passage last Sunday, and read its powerful conclusion, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (6:14). But, once again, as soon as Paul wrote those words, he realized that there would be those who misunderstood them and who would think that the law no longer applied to them.

So, using the same basic form of rhetorical question and emphatic denial that he used in verse one, Paul now asks, “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” (6:15). In our passage, Paul sets in contrast the trajectory of two different kinds of lives: one lived as a slave to sin and the other as a slave to righteousness. Now, he will stop in mid-argument and confess that the analogy of slavery is misleading if pressed too far. Slavery to righteousness, which he also describes as slavery to obedience and slavery to God, turns out not to be slavery, but freedom; yet insofar as slavery describes being totally bound to someone, it provides a powerful analogy in making Paul’s argument. Nevertheless, he does interrupt himself in mid-thought and say, “I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations” (6:19). Thank you for reminding us of our limitations, Paul. We are well aware of them whenever we try to understand you. Even the apostle Peter said of Paul’s letters, “There are some things in them that are hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16).

This morning, I would invite you to trace with me the contrasting trajectories that Paul describes, and to ask God’s Spirit to apply these pictures to the trajectory of our lives, as best we can trace it out. Are we truly free, or are we living in a false freedom that will lead us at last to bondage and death? “Choose this day whom you will serve.”

Body

1. Paul describes the trajectory of a self-centered life.

A self-centered life feels at first like freedom (6:20).

A self-centered life feels increasingly like slavery (6:21a).

A self-centered life leads increasingly to shame (6:21b).

A self-centered life leads finally to death (6:21c).

2. Paul then describes the trajectory of a God-centered life.

A God-centered life feels at first like slavery (6:22b).

A God-centered life feels increasingly like freedom (6:22a).

A God-centered life leads increasingly to holiness (6:22c).

A God-centered life leads finally to eternal life (6:22d).

Conclusion

If we spend our lives pursuing this world's idea of freedom, namely freedom from God and from his righteous law, we will find ourselves in a deadly bondage from which nothing but grace can free us. In the end, we will get what we have earned: the final death of eternal separation from God, who is the source of life and of everything we desire that is good, and true, and lovely.

But if, instead, we spend our lives in what may at first appear to be slavery to God and his way of righteousness, we will find true freedom, freedom to be what we have always longed to be, whether we realized it or not, because it is the freedom to be what we were created to be: holy as our Lord Jesus was holy, a wholeness and health that flow from love for God and for one another. In the end, we will receive the greatest gift of all: eternal life in fellowship with God and his people for ever, intimately experiencing the truth, goodness and beauty for which we have always longed. "Choose this day whom you will serve," for "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

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