

Romans 6:15-23

PREVIOUS

ROMANS ROAD

to RIGHTEOUSNESS

NEXT

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Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work "[Jensen's Survey of the NT](#)"

Romans 6:15-23

Our New Life in Christ Pt 5

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

Romans 6:15 What then ? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace ? May it never be! **16** Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness ? **17** But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, **18** and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. **19** I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. **20** For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. **21** Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed ? For the outcome of those things is death. **22** But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. **23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord

You had better believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 15 says that if we don't believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, we don't believe the gospel. We are not saved. In the Book of Romans, the word "resurrection" appears two times. Once is in the chapter we are studying, and I want you to see it. But first it appears in chapter 1, as he is beginning to introduce the gospel—the good news of God. It's what God can do, not what man can do.

Paul says in Romans 1:4, speaking of Jesus, "who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord." It was the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave that vindicated who He was. It did not make Him the Son of God. He was already the Son of God. But it declared to the world that He was who He said He was.

The resurrection also declared with power who the Lord Jesus really was. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, died as a man, the

God-man, then was raised from the dead by the awesome power of God.

In chapter 6 the Apostle begins to deal with some significant issues in the church: the fact that we are saved by grace and we're not under law, and the fact that we have justification by faith in Christ alone. He begins to address a question: "Can we continue in sin that grace might abound?" In doing that, he brings the resurrection up again. He shows believers how important the bodily resurrection of Jesus is to you and me daily as we live obedient unto God.

Look in Romans 6:4-5: "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." "United with" is the word that means we are absolutely intertwined into. When Jesus died, that became **my** death. When I put my faith in Jesus Christ, He baptized me into His body with His Holy Spirit, identified me with His death on the cross, and then identified me with His resurrected life.

Now what does that mean to me as a believer? First of all, it means that the same glorious power of the Father that raised Jesus Christ from the dead has done the same thing for me. Think about that! The actual power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead is the very power that He has also applied to me when I put my faith into Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 1 the Apostle Paul begins to pray that the believers at Ephesus could understand this truth. What does it mean to be identified with the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a believer? In Ephesians 1:18-19 Paul is asking for 3 things. He said, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you might know [1] what is the hope of His calling, [2] what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and [3] what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places."

In other words, the same awesome power that raised Jesus from the dead is what allows these things to be a part of our own lives. Paul is saying that this power that raised Christ from the dead is the power that raises us up out of the death to sin that we entered into in Adam. He lifts us out of Adam and the same resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead takes us and puts us into the body of Jesus Christ.

Now folks, that's exciting! We've been identified with His death. Our old man is dead. What we used to be in Adam is gone. We were living in sin and death, but as we put our faith into Him, Jesus lifts us out and puts us over into Himself.

What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean to me as a believer? How does it affect my living day by day? Look at Colossians 1:13: "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son." So what does "the resurrection power" mean? What does it mean that I've been identified with His resurrection? It means that the same God, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that has taken me out of Adam, which I was born into, and has put me into the kingdom of His dear Son. I'm a brand new creature today because of the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, it also means that I am now in a brand new realm than I've ever been in before. You see, a believer dies with Christ and rises with Him to walk in newness of life. The power of God to resurrect Christ from the dead is the same power that now lives in us. Have you thought about that? The same God that raised Jesus from the dead as a man is the God that lives within me. He gives me the power now to live life on a higher plane. He gives me the power to say **no** to sin and to say **yes** unto God. He has put me into a new realm. I am **in** Christ and Christ now is **in me**! It's a brand new situation. How could I go back and think about living like I used to live? Why, I've been completely transformed! God, the resurrection power, has come to live in me.

When the Lord Jesus identified Himself with our sin (and you must understand this theologically) He did not identify Himself with our sin until He went to the cross. On the cross He identified Himself with sinners and there all of our sin was taken upon Him. He died for us there on the cross—as a man! (You must understand what I'm saying. Jesus Christ died as a man on the cross. God does not die!) When He rose from the dead, the God-man, glorified now with the Father, His relationship to that sin that He had taken upon Himself on that cross was totally changed. He never had the relationship to sin you and I have. He wasn't a sinner. There was no sin in Him, but He took sin upon Himself. After the cross, He was in a brand new relationship with the Father. The God-man was and is at the right hand of the Father.

In the same way, when I died with Him, everything that I used to be was nailed to the cross with Him, and the same power that brought Jesus back to life as a man was the same power that put that new life into me! I am never again related to sin like I once was. I am a brand new creature. The resurrected power of God is living in me in the Person of the Holy Spirit of God.

All of this in chapter 6 of Romans is in relationship to the power we now have of choosing against sin and choosing to obey Christ. Do we understand that sin is a choice? No one has the excuse as a believer that "the devil made him do it"! No believer has the excuse of saying, "Well, I just can't stop that habit in my life." Oh, yes we can! The resurrection power of God lives in us to transform us and to put life where there used to be deadness. Do you understand what I am saying? Can you say, "I understand that because I

experienced it this past week"? "Somebody treated me wrongly, and I couldn't love him. But I turned to God, and the power within me, the Holy Spirit, produced a love in my heart that I've never known before. God gave me the resurrection power to forgive when I couldn't forgive before."

You see, we now have the power to make the choice. Sin is no longer a habit to us. Sin is no longer a lifestyle to us. Sin is a choice to a person who has experienced the resurrection power of God. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that raised me up out of Adam and out from under the penalty of death and placed me into His body so that now I'm a part of His kingdom forever. We have all, as believers, experienced the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should be experiencing it daily. I can do what God tells me to do because He has empowered me with His resurrection power to do just that.

Look back at Romans 6:16-18. Speaking of choices that believers need to learn to make, the Apostle Paul gives us a universal truth. (As a matter of fact, it holds true whether you are lost or saved.) A person is a slave to what he chooses to obey, and with the choice comes the consequence. Do we understand that? Do we realize that, whether we are lost or whether we're saved, we are products of what we choose to obey? Before I became a Christian, I had no real choice. I was forced to obey sin because that was my nature. But now that I'm a Christian, I'm partaking, as Peter says, of the divine nature of God. The Holy Spirit has come to live in my life, and I am now responsible for my choices. Whoever it is that we serve they become our master, and as a result of that, there are going to be consequences in our lives.

Look at verse 16: "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?" Choosing to obey Christ is the testimony of every believer. In other words, keep the context in mind. Paul is asking, "Can we go back and live like we used to live and call ourselves Christians?" He says, "May it never be!" We've participated in the resurrection power of Jesus Himself. He has taken us out of the domain of darkness. He has placed us into His kingdom. We're different now! The Holy Spirit lives within us to give us the power to live differently. We can't go back and live that way any more. In fact, Paul says, the testimony of every believer is that he's now made a choice and that is to obey the Lord Jesus. If you say, "That's not my testimony," then you're not a believer. The testimony of every believer is you're turning your back on what you used to be and you're turning to the Lord Jesus. You're casting your faith into Him and you're making a conscious choice.

"You became obedient" is aorist active indicative. That means **you** participated in the choice. You made up your own mind. **You** did it! You did it yourself. Nobody made you do it. Nobody forced you to do it. This is what Christianity is all about. Turning to the One who can rescue me in His resurrection power and turning to the One whom you choose to serve for the rest of your life.

Let me show you this in the scripture. Verse 17 says, "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart [Aorist active] to that form of teaching to which you were committed." The word for "form" is when you take an instrument, strike it, and it makes an indelible imprint on something. It marks or identifies something. Something has been traumatized by something else. That's what the word means. In the context here, he says that you were delivered over. This is what you are now committed to. This is the teaching that rules and reigns in your life.

What is that teaching? It is that Jesus is Lord of my life. That truth is indelibly imprinted upon every believer by the traumatic experience of conversion. When he turns to Christ, the gospel—particularly that Jesus is absolute Lord of his life—is indelibly imprinted upon his life. And Paul says, "You have already made that choice. Why would you ever think about going back and living like you used to live? Your whole testimony rests on the fact that your choice is to obey the Lord Jesus."

Then verse 18 shows how they knew they made that choice: "and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." Now, there are two Greek verbs here that end in two o's. Those two o's mean something when they are put together. When he says you became or you were freed from sin, he means it was put on display for everybody to look at that you had become free from a lifestyle of sin. This was their testimony in Rome, which was a pagan area at that time. He is writing to believers in Rome. Paul says, "Everybody there knows you've been freed from sin. They've seen it!" How had they seen it? "You became slaves of righteousness." (It's a double "o" verb.) You were **shown** to become slaves of righteousness. Paul is saying, "Do you remember when you got saved and turned to Jesus and surrendered to Him? Do you realize that everybody in Rome saw the difference in your life? Your whole lifestyle changed."

When you say, "I'm going to go back and live like I used to live in sin," you are denying your own testimony. It is the teaching to which you are committed. It's not just the gospel, but it's the specific part of the gospel that says that Jesus is absolutely Lord of a believer's life. You are surrendered to it by a conscious choice. We have choices that we continue to make, but we have already made the most important choice. That choice is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ daily in our lives.

So we see the truth that is universal: whomever or whatever you choose to serve becomes your master, and there are going to be consequences to that choice. Secondly, the testimony is that you have made your choice. In the resurrection power of Christ, you have chosen to become His slave forever.

Now we move to verse 19. In verse 19 we see the treasure that obedience to Christ brings the believer. The reason I chose the word "treasure" (it's not in the text) to give my point is that you start discovering something you never knew before the moment you made that choice to walk in obedience to Christ. Hebrews 5 says you train your senses unto righteousness. You begin to teach yourself to learn to present all of yourself to Christ at all times. When you do that you are going to make a discovery that you have never had before.

Have you ever tried to be holy? The holiness that man tries to come up with is so far short of what God produces in a person's life that it doesn't even bear mentioning. What we are going to discover is a holy lifestyle, but you only discover it as you learn to walk in the resurrected power of Christ, obedient to what God says in His word. We've been saved by the resurrected power. Now it lives in us to enable us to do what God wants us to do. As we learn to appropriate it in our lives, as we learn to yield to it, something happens.

Look at verse 19: "I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification." The King James Version says "holiness." Don't panic, it's the same word. "In holy living," "in sanctification". Let's talk about that. He says, "I am speaking in human terms." The word for "human terms" is *anthropinos*. It means that which refers to, belongs to, or pertains to fleshly mankind.

What is the weakness of the human flesh? What is it that Paul says, "I want to relate to you on an area that all of us have"? What is that weakness that we have? We are such weak and anemic beings as fleshly beings. We are all servants. Did you know that? If you are a human being on planet earth, you have been created weak in Adam, and not only that, you are a servant. It doesn't matter if you're serving Christ or if you're serving the devil. You are a servant. You can do nothing but serve.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, "No man can serve two masters" There are only two! There will never be more than two. You'll serve one, love one, and you'll hate the other. "No, no, no," you might be saying, "That's a bad translation. I love God. Even though I'm serving my flesh I still love Him. I'm in church. I still love God." No you don't. Jesus said, "If you love me, you'll show that love my obeying me." He says, "You'll love the one and you'll hate the other."

Who is your master? The resurrected power of Jesus has given you the power to choose. Jesus continually and eternally remains your Lord. Why would a Christian ever choose to put himself in the proximity of something that is going to drag him down the path of death and destruction when he's got the power within him to pursue life and holiness and righteousness which is going to be eternally beneficial in his life? That's what Paul is saying. He is saying, "You are a slave either way you go."

So Paul points back. He says, "For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness." The verb is aorist active indicative. He is pointing back to a specific point in time. He says, "Back then you were a slave. When you were in Adam, you were a slave." He says you served impurity and lawlessness. Now what in the world is he talking about? The word "impurity" refers to outward and inward sin. "Impurity" is the word that has to do with those immoral impulses on the inside that you tend to yield to. "Lawlessness" is the acts that you do as if nobody is watching over you.

Then Paul goes on and says you also served lawlessness. In other words, you lived as if there were no law over you. How many people do you know like that? They do what they want to do, when they want to do it, as if there were no standard of God that holds them accountable. He says, "That's the way you used to be." Then he shows you what it brought in your life. Let me remind you of I Corinthians 6:9. You see, sometimes we forget what we were like when we were lost. "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" That means habitually unrighteous. "Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers shall inherit the kingdom of God." Then Paul is quick to remind them, "And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God."

You see, what Paul is saying is, "You used to live as a servant habitually serving impurity and lawlessness." What was the result? He said the result was further lawlessness. Remember:

*"Sin will take you further than you ever wanted to stray and
keep you longer than you ever intended to stay, and
cost you a more than you ever dreamed you would pay."*

You commit one sin, begin to yield to it, and it'll take you into further lawlessness, deeper and more consequential, deeper and more consequential. Paul says, "Haven't you learned anything? Do you think you can continue in sin? You mean to tell me that you haven't learned anything from being lost? You used to live that way, and it was like a magnet dragging you down into the cesspool of death and hell. Do you want to go back and serve the flesh again? You want to make a choice after having been set free from all of that? **May it never be!"**

Paul says that sin is like a cancer. It aggressively reproduces itself until the whole person is destroyed. You don't want to go back and serve sin again. As a matter of fact, it's impossible. The Spirit of God lives in you now, and the resurrection power of God is there to cause you to live differently.

Then he says, "Now in Christ, you are a slave." You were a slave in Adam, and now you are a slave in Jesus. That's the commonality that all human beings have: we're created weak, and we're created as servants. Who is your master? Whoever you're choosing to serve is your master, controlling you and the consequences are either sin and death or life and what God produces within a person.

Paul says, "so now present your members as slaves to righteousness resulting in sanctification." Slaves to righteousness. Yield to Him and His power to do so. Yield to Jesus, and the result is not further lawlessness, but the result is sanctification. The word is *hagiasmos*. The word "*hagiasmos*" means that which God affects within a person's life. It not only means He made us holy by putting His Holy Spirit into us (that's how He set us apart at salvation), but it also means He is causing the result of that to be worked out in our lives as we obey Him.

Now this is the discovery that you make. You try to be holy. It's amazing what people do to try to be holy. We have this set of rules to be holy. People are in churches hoping somehow they can be holy unto God, and they're doing everything they know to do it! Paul says the result of learning to surrender to Jesus Christ is a holy life that others can see. You can't get it any other way. It's something God does from the inside out. It's not something you do from the outside in. The result is holiness. A lifestyle.

What is it about a person who is serving the Lord Jesus Christ? It's not perfection! Why, you can find fault in anybody if you look hard enough. It's not that. That's not what he's talking about. He's talking about God causing a person to become holy and holier and holier as he lives, and the longer he lives the more and more and more his behavior begins to line up with the behavior that a Christian ought to have. You can't do it any other way. You choose to let Jesus be your master, and Jesus will work out the sanctifying process in your life. Sanctification, holy living, becomes something **He** is affecting. It is not something we are doing and asking Him to bless it. It's a treasure... a discovered treasure. It's discovered when you learn to obey the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then Paul quickly turns and says, "Let me remind you of the tragedy that you used to be in Adam." You can see him going back and forth. He's trying to show them, "You can't go back. Don't go back! You're changed! God lives in you! Don't ever forget what it was like when you served sin."

Look at verses 20 and 21: "For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are not ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death." Paul is pointing them back and showing them how bad it used to be. He says, "When you were slaves you used to live that lifestyle of serving sin and serving unrighteousness. Haven't you learned anything?" He says, "Back then, when you were in Adam, you were free in regard to righteousness." What does that mean? The word for freedom, *eleutheros*, which we have seen quite often, is the word that means you were unrestrained. There was no check on your life, no accountability. You were independent. You lived like you wanted to live.

He reminds them, as he continues, of how fruitless those days were. Verse 21 reads, "Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death." The word "benefit" is the word *karpos*, literally "fruit". There is obviously none! "Deriving from" is the word that means to have or to hold on to. Paul is saying, "What was it that you had that was worth anything that you could hold on to back when you were living as a slave of unrighteousness? Not a thing. You were ashamed." Now, as we look back, we are ashamed. The word means that we are embarrassed, humiliated, disappointed and discouraged.

We have to learn at some point to make the right choices and to reap the consequences of right choices, not only the bad consequences. He says, "For the outcome of those things is death." The end. The word for end is *telos*. The accomplishment of those things is death.

The last thing he talks about is the triumph that we now have in Christ. Verses 22 and 23 say, "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit [Here's where the fruit is] resulting in sanctification and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Wages! Think about that! "You mean to tell me, when I sin that's work?" Yes, it's work. For a Christian to go back into sin, it takes labor and work. It involves not only the energy to do whatever it is, but the energy you have to spend covering it up so nobody will find out about it. One day the paycheck comes for all that labor. But you've chosen not to be a servant of Christ. You've chosen to be a servant to your flesh. The paycheck will come one day, and on it will be zero! Death! "The wages of sin is death." For a Christian that death is separation from all the things God would have shown you if you had just listened.

Can I ask you a question? In light of Romans 6, who is your master?