



Group Discussion Guide

Romans 6:15-23

For groups meeting March 22 evening through March 29 morning.

Paul's question in Romans 6:15 is similar to the one he asked in Romans 6:1. Does God's grace mean that people should sin? And his answer is identical: "By no means!" Paul used the illustration of a slave and master, and later in this passage he explains why. In verse 16, he wrote, "you are slaves of the one whom you obey ..." Those who sin do so because they have made themselves slaves to it, while those who obey have chosen to be slaves of God, which leads to righteousness (v. 16). Paul praised God for how He had worked in the hearts of believers to set them free from sin and help them to be obedient to His truth (v. 17). These believers, he wrote, had been set free from the master of sin. However, this freedom brought them to a new master: they were now slaves of righteousness (v. 18).

It is at this point that Paul explained why he was using this illustration of slavery; because of his readers' "natural limitations" (v. 19). He needed to relate this truth to them in a way they could understand, and in ancient Rome the concept of slavery was still very much a reality. This note from the Bible Knowledge Commentary explains this well:

To talk of being "enslaved" to righteousness and to God is not correct in one sense, Paul wrote, because God does not hold His children in bondage. But the word "slavery" appropriately describes an unregenerate person's relationship to sin and to Satan. So Paul used "slavery" for contrasting the relationship of the believer as well.

John A. Witmer, "Romans," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 464.

The contrast between slavery to sin and slavery to righteousness is laid out by the Apostle as he details the results of each verse 19. Living as a slave to sin leads to more sin (lawlessness), whereas living as a slave to righteousness leads to sanctification. Below is a shorter definition of sanctification:

Sanctification—involves more than a mere moral reformation of character, brought about by the power of the truth: it is the work of the Holy Spirit bringing the whole nature more and more under the influences of the new gracious principles implanted in the soul in regeneration. In other words, sanctification is the carrying on to perfection the work begun in regeneration, and it extends to the whole man (Rom. 6:13; 2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 3:10; 1 John 4:7; 1 Cor. 6:19). It is the special office of the Holy Spirit in the plan of redemption to carry on this work (1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13). Faith is instrumental in securing sanctification, inasmuch as it (1) secures union to Christ (Gal. 2:20), and (2)

brings the believer into living contact with the truth, whereby he is led to yield obedience “to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come.”

M. G. Easton, Easton’s Bible Dictionary (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

So then, living as a slave to righteousness leads to growing in one’s faith and becoming more like the Master ... Jesus.

Paul wrote that being a slave to sin means being free from the righteousness, but then quickly reminded his readers that living as a slave to sin only brought shame and death (vs. 20-21). Again, Paul wrote that living as a slave to sin leads to sanctification, and this time he added “and its end, eternal life,” (v. 22). The chapter closes with a verse many have learned to help share the Gospel: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,” (v. 23). Sin presents the payment of death, while God offers not payment but a gift: eternal life through Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What's wrong with the thought that we can sin because we are under grace and not under the law?
2. Paul writes, "you are slaves of the one whom you obey," (v. 16). In this passage he is referring to sin or the ways of God, but this truth can apply beyond those two options. What have you been enslaved to at times in your life (what have you obeyed)?
3. Paul rejoices over his readers' obedience "from the heart," (v. 17). Why do you think he specifically refers to their obedience being from the heart? How is it possible for someone to have the outward appearance of obedience but inside they are slaves to sin?
4. Where do you see God's work of sanctification in your life (how are you becoming more like Jesus)?
5. We all have things we have done that we are ashamed of (v. 21). How do we balance the remembrance of these in helping us to be reminded of the result of slavery to sin, while also resting in our new identity as a child of God and follower of Jesus?
6. How would you use verse 23 to share the truth of sin and death, and God's gift of eternal life with someone else?