

In 1999 a film was released that became a cultural phenomenon. It was one of THE defining movies of the Millennial Generation. It was probably best known for its groundbreaking visual and sound effects (it won the Academy Awards for Best Visual Effects and Best Sound and Sound Editing), but the storyline was equally compelling. The movie was The Matrix. And the premise of the film is that the world as we know it is an illusion. The things we see and hear and feel, the experiences we have, the people we know and love and hate, the food we eat, the decisions we make, our jobs, our relationships, our marriages, our kids are all a computer simulation that is being pumped into our minds, our consciousness, so what seems and feels real to us is completely imaginary. While the people in the movie believe the year is 1999, in fact, the year is 2699 (700 years in the future), machines

rule the world, and they use sedated humans as an energy source to power them. But because they need the minds and bodies of these humans to be active in order to produce energy, they keep them in this computer-generated reality called the matrix. So everyone in this simulation, everyone in the world, THINKS they are free, autonomous beings with wills and moral agency, but, in fact, they are all slaves. Well there comes a point in the movie where the main character is given the choice to continue to live in this imaginary world as a slave to the computers OR to be liberated from his captivity and truly be free from anyone and anything. There is no fate. There is no destiny. There is no preordained future. People have the ability to be totally free from the control or influence of anything or anyone else.

In Romans 6, the Apostle Paul paints a picture that begins very much like The Matrix. He says that all people, despite the illusion of freedom and independence and self-determination as we live and move and exist in the world, are born as slaves to a power much greater than ourselves, the power of sin. And everyone is presented with a choice to remain a slave to that force, to that binding authority. But unlike The Matrix, the other option is NOT absolute freedom and independence. The other option is to become a slave, a bondservant, to something better. To become a slave to God. No one is without a master. The choice is which master do you want to serve. Like Bob Dylan sang in 1979 hit, you're gonna have to serve somebody. Paul says it a little differently. His main point is this: because everyone is either a slave to sin, leading to death, or to obedience and God, leading to

righteousness and life, and because Christ has set believers free from the tyranny of sin, therefore, present yourself as a slave to righteousness.

So I want to invite you to take your Bible and turn with me to the NT book of Romans, to the sixth chapter, to the 15th verse. And as we read and dig into this passage, I want you to see how Paul presents two principles regarding this servanthood we are bound to, the personal application of those principles to followers of Jesus, and the practical response we are commanded to give. So if you would follow along as I read from Romans 6, and I'm actually going to back up to v.14 because the rest of the passage is a response to the idea introduced in v.14. So Romans 6:14-23 [READ].

Paul begins **with a question**. Because of what we read in v.14, should that motivate us to sin? Should the fact that we are not under law but under grace motivate us or free us to sin? Now if you remember back a couple of weeks, Paul asked a similar question in Romans 6:1 [READ]. But there, the question was, “Should we sin in order to gain MORE grace?” If God gives super-abounding grace in response to our sin, should we sin more to provoke more grace from God? Here, the question is a little different. Here in v.15, the question is, “Should we sin because we already HAVE grace?” Because we have been freed from the law, should sin even matter to us anymore? And before we get to his answer, I want to look at the claim. What does it even mean to be “under the law?” Well, to be under the law (and we will look at this in more depth when we get to Romans 7) means to be under the reign or

lordship of the written Mosaic Code, the list of commands God inscribed on tablets of stone and gave to Moses. To be under the law means that one's conduct is directly regulated by this law, that one is bound by these demands. The law commands it, you do it, and if you don't there is judgment. And like I mentioned, over the next two weeks we're going to see how the law gives sin its power.

But Paul says we are not under the law. For followers of Jesus, our conduct is not directly regulated by a list of commands written on stone. We are not bound by its unbending demands. Instead, we are under grace. We have entered into a new era, a new age of redemptive history, the history of how God works to save His people. We are now under the reign of God's unearned, undeserved, unmerited favor. It's the kind of intimate

relationship that we could never merit through keeping the law. But that leaves us with a pretty big question. Or maybe it's an assumption. Since we are free FROM the law, are we then free to BREAK the law? If you're free from the rules, can you break the rules? If I'm not under the direct authority of the speed limit, can I just drive as fast as I want? If I'm not under the direct authority of the Texas legal code, can I steal and murder? Since we are free FROM sin (Romans 6:7), are we then free TO sin? And that kind of makes sense, right? I mean, that seems like a logical inference. And if that's not the case, then how is sin restrained apart from the law? I mean, that seems pretty intuitive as well, doesn't it? If you want people to be good, you give them rules. And if you want them to be better, you give them more rules. And if you want them to be really good, you give them a whole lot of rules. We like

to think that more rules equals more righteousness. Won't freedom FROM the law naturally lead to more lawbreaking?

And what is **Paul's answer**? It's the same answer he gave to the similar question in v.1. Is grace a license to sin? Does freedom from the law lead us to sin? Should we sin because we have been freed from the law and are under grace? By no means! May it never be! God forbid! Just because you are not "under the law" as a controlling force, that doesn't then free you to break the law or to sin. Grace is not a license to simply do what you want. Being free from the law doesn't equal freedom from doing God's will. Because grace isn't just a thing that forgives you and frees you to your own will. It is also a force that constrains us

and transforms us and redefines who we are and what we do.

And so, to prove his case, Paul lays down a **couple of principles**. The first is this: you are a slave to what or who you obey. Jesus said it in John 8:34, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.” You submit yourself to the person or the desire or the urge or the impulse or the motivation that you obey. It’s certainly true of addictions. You have an urge to drink; if you consistently obey that urge, you show yourself to be a slave to alcohol. You have an impulse to view pornography; if you repeatedly obey that urge, you prove yourself to be a slave to pornography. You have a compulsion to gamble; to the extent you obey that compulsion, you are a slave to gambling. But it’s also true

in regard to things we normally wouldn't think of as addictions. I have a natural drive to pursue physical pleasure (sex, food, comfort); to the extent I allow that drive to determine my choices, I am a slave to pleasure. To the extent that I allow financial gain to determine my actions, I am a slave to money. To the extent that the pursuit of fame or popularity controls my behavior, I am a slave to fame or popularity. To the extent that my striving for success athletically or academically or professionally controls my decisions, I am a slave to success. To the extent that my relationships (family, friends, spouse, children) determine my ultimate choices, I am a slave to my relationships. To the extent that I am driven by self-exaltation, self-advancement, or self-preservation, I am a slave to myself. To the extent that my desire for power or dominance controls me, I am a slave to power. To the

extent that I love and obey the opinions of other people, I am a slave to the opinions of others. What you love you will obey, and what you obey is what you become a slave to. And not just theoretically, but truly and experientially.

You become absolutely subservient to these things to the point that you couldn't break free if you wanted to. But we don't want to, which is the problem. So that's the first principle. You are a slave to the thing or person you obey.

The second principle is this: there are only two options and two outcomes regarding who or what you serve. You only have two alternatives, and each of those leads to a necessary end. And I know it seems like I just gave you a whole bunch of options, a whole bunch of alternatives of things you could be a slave to. But in reality, all of those examples all fall under a single heading. Being a slave to

any of those things I just named is to be a slave to sin.

That's the first alternative, to be a slave to sin, both the general power of sin, but also of the specific, practical acts of sin. And the outcome of that alternative is death, both the ongoing experience of all aspects of death around us (death of hope, death of peace, death of relationships, death of love, death of joy) but all culminating in eternal death, the everlasting destruction promised in 2

Thessalonians 1:9 to those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel. The other alternative is to be a slave to obedience, a slave to God. And the ultimate end of that servitude is righteousness. Again, both the final declaration of righteousness that God grants His children in the end, but also the righteous acts and behaviors and habits that we exhibit now. Slavery to obedience leads to

practical righteous deeds AND the final justification pronounced over us at the end of time.

But I want you to notice a few things about these alternatives. First, there is no third option. You are a slave to one or the other. You are either a slave to sin, or you are a slave to obedience to God. Second, you can't be both at the same time. You can't straddle the fence and be a little bit slave to sin and a little bit slave to God. It's one or the other. And third, you can't be neither. There is no such thing as having no master. There is no absolute autonomy. No radical independence. Like those people in the matrix, you might think you're free, that you're not a slave to anyone, that no one tells you what to do, that you only serve yourself. But to serve yourself it to be a slave to sin.

When you drop down to v.23, Paul expounds on this a bit more. If you are a slave to sin, he says, you are free FROM righteousness. You CANNOT produce good fruit, results that last, a life that has eternal value. Slaves to sin have no concern for righteousness. They are totally unbothered by its demands. Is that you this morning? Do you have zero interest in pursuing righteousness. If so, you are a slave to sin. You wholeheartedly belong to it. You have not other loyalty or desire other than sin. And the fruit of those shameful pursuits (those things that believers look back on in their own lives with deep regret) is death. That is the only possible outcome. Deadness in all its aspects now and then death in its ultimate expression of wrath and judgment at the end of time. But to be free FROM sin is to be a slave to God. And the fruit of that path

is sanctification resulting in eternal life. If you submit yourself to God as HIS bondservant, you get life, starting right now and extending and expanding until the final consummation of life in eternity.

And Paul sums this principle up with a familiar and often-used verse, declaring that the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And I don't know if you've ever heard that verse before, and if you have, if you've noticed that the contrast is not just between death and life. It's between wages and a free gift. Wages are earned. Wages are merited. With wages, you get what you deserve. Wages are inevitable consequences. Slaves of sin WILL receive their just due, their earned income, their wages. On the other hand, eternal life is a free gift. It is unmerited. It is the result of

grace alone. Those who have it have it ONLY because God has seen fit to give it freely. When wages are in operation, the end is death; when grace is in effect, the end is life.

So two principles: you are a slave to what you obey, and there are only two alternatives and two outcomes. But these principles don't just exist in a vacuum. They aren't just theoretical. And so Paul moves to the **personal application** of these principles, specifically for the lives of believers, for committed followers of Jesus. In vv.17 and 18, Paul says that these two principles were set in motion in you and for you personally when your ultimate allegiance, your supreme loyalty, your foundational identity were changed the moment you trusted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. If God brought you to that point

in your life when you were convicted of your own sin against God and understood that your sin carried a penalty of judgment and there was nothing you could do to rescue yourself from it; when you understood that God made a way for rebel sinners to be forgiven and made acceptable to Him through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son; when you repented of your sin and abandoned all hope in your own goodness and your own efforts and your own works and instead cast all your hope and trust on the person and work of Jesus, something profound and real and permanent happened to you. You were brought from death to life, from darkness to light, so that now you are no longer neutral in regard to these two masters.

Believers are not up for grabs. Genuine Christians are not equally prone to serve both sin and God. And it's no thanks to you or any other person, but thanks be to God!

This transformation is due to HIS work. HE rescued you through faith in Christ.

When you trusted in Jesus, you who were once slaves of sin submitted to God and earnestly, deeply, from the heart became obedient to the teaching of Scripture, to the sound words Paul tells Timothy to follow in 2 Timothy 1:13, to gospel teaching, which includes the gospel message prosper AND all its real-life implications. Paul says that when you believed, you were delivered to this teaching. It wasn't delivered to you; you were handed over to it. God transferred you from one kingdom to another, from one master to another, from the possession of sin to the possession of righteousness. When He cut you free from sin, you became a slave to righteousness. Before, you could not resist the influence of sin; now you can! So if you

CLAIM to be “under grace” yet live as a slave to sin, your claim is empty. If you are “under grace” you have a new master, God, and are set free from the old one. This is not a command or an aspiration; it is a present reality for every believer.

And just as a side note – Paul even treats it like an “oh, and by the way” – this slavery image is not a perfect analogy. Our new life in Christ isn’t like slavery the way it’s been practiced in our nation’s history and in much of the world. That slavery was characterized by injustice and humiliation and degradation and dehumanization. The Christian life is only like slavery in its depiction of total service and commitment to our Lord, in its sense of belongingness and obligation and obedience. But its necessary for Paul to put it in these imperfect terms

because our frail flesh cannot conceive of this kind of belongingness and will not submit in this way without this kind of picture. Because we are inclined to live according to our fleshly desires, we need this kind of picture to communicate wholehearted obedience.

So we've seen Paul's two principles and how they apply to believers personally. But there's still one step: a **practical response**. Because the principles are true and because they have been applied to followers of Jesus (God HAS freed you from the tyranny of sin), consider the way you once presented every part of yourself (your tongue, your eyes, your ears, your mind, your hands, your feet, your heart, your affections) as slaves to sin. You freely and willingly and gladly presented yourself to impurity, to uncleanness, to corruption and defilement. You presented

yourself to lawlessness (utter and intentional disregard for God's law) which only brought forth more lawlessness.

When sin was your master, your desire for these things was greater than your desire to be free from them. But now, because God has given you better desires, higher desires, so now present every part of yourself (those same parts once given to sin) as slaves to righteousness. And when you do that, the result is sanctification, growing holiness in heart and life. Since you have been enabled to resist sin and submit to righteousness as your new master, **DO IT!** Yield to God as your master because **HE IS!** Live as one who has been claimed and delivered by Christ because **YOU ARE!** And do it with the same passion and dedication with which you once pursued your previous affections.

I close this morning with this. If you have never trusted Jesus and had your sins forgiven and your life transformed, you are a slave to sin. And you cannot break the chains that bind you to your master. But God can. And He has provided the means for that to happen, by casting yourself on His mercy and placing your faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. And then, for the believer, it is not optional for you to present yourself as a slave to righteousness. It is what you must do. The power of grace show to you and the freedom from sin and the law that you have experienced necessarily leads to a transformed life. The evidence of being “under grace” is the practice of righteousness. So let me ask you today, who do you serve? Sin or God? To whom are you a slave? There isn't a third choice. You can't serve both. You can't

serve neither. You gonna have to serve somebody. Who will be your master?