

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 6:17-18 (A)

After giving us seven reasons that grace does not promote sin, Paul now moves into an analogy of slavery. It's actually two views of slavery, built upon what he said in Romans 6:16 ...

"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?"

- **The Foundational Idea:**

"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance."

While we might have expected that Paul discuss being slaves to sin and slaves to God, Paul takes a different approach. He reminds us that we used to be slaves to sin but says salvation does indeed involve an exchange of slavery.

- **An Exchange Of Slavery:**

Twice in this chapter Paul exclaimed, "God forbid!" Now he breaks into a doxology and says, "Thanks be to God!"

This exchange of slaveries is, in his mind, a source of rejoicing. Paul thinks slavery to God is worth rejoicing about. He's going to explain why as he describes our spiritual experience in four stages.

1. What We Used To Be ...
2. What We Formerly Did...
3. What Happened To Us ...
4. What We Became.

- **What We Used To Be**

"You used to be slaves to sin..." Note Paul's use of an imperfect tense describing a past time of continuous reality. "Before Christ became your master, you were the continual slaves of sin".

John 8:34 -- Jesus said -- "Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin."

An uncomfortable, inconvenient truth: Every person born into this world comes under the control of the power of Sin. Everyone.

Twice in Romans 6 Paul says we used to be the “doulos” – the bondslaves to sin. “Doulos” is usually associated with the Old Testament form of slavery that took place when some decided to stay with a master, rather than be released to go home.

The results of being a bondservant to sin: Romans 6:21 -- “The end of those things is death.” Romans 6:23 -- “The wages of sin is death.”

Humans largely believe that they are free – that they are born into this world with a neutral state – and only after years of formation become either good or bad – or a mixture of the two. The Bible holds a totally different view: Romans 3:10 -- “There is none righteous, no not one, none understands, none seeks after God.

- **What We Formerly Did: v. 17**

“But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.”

“You have come to obey ... the pattern of teaching...” This is one of the more unusual ways of describing salvation or conversion. Paul is, without a doubt, referring to the original, apostolic presentation of the Gospel. See: 2 Timothy 1:13; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:9; 2 Peter 1:16–17, 19-20.

When we couple these verses with Paul's description of “believing from the heart”, it become clear that conversion is not only trusting in Christ, but also believing and acknowledging the truth.

Salvation is a matter of the heart – but isn't it also a matter of the brain? What does the Bible say? “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength”. – Mark 12:30

Paul tells the Romans that this teaching was committed to them, but then adds that they are committed to it. The verb he uses is a very particular Greek word which refers to passing on a tradition. The Romans had come to obey the apostolic teaching from the heart ... and now the teaching also has mastery over them.

Next time, we will see the last two stages of Christian experience with respect to Paul's analogy of two slaveries.