

## ARE YOU FREE AS A BIRD?

Romans 6:14-23

Bob Bonner

December 2, 2018

Freedom is something we all want. Each of us has something inside us that yearns to be able to call our own shots. In describing this yearning, some say, “I want to be or I am as free as a bird.” But are birds even really free?

A. W. Tozer, a wonderful man of God in days past, somewhat answered that question for us when he said this:

The naturalist knows that the supposedly free bird actually lives its entire life in a cage made of fears, hungers, and instincts; it is limited by weather conditions, varying air pressures, the local food supply, predatory beasts, and that strangest of all bonds, the irresistible compulsion to stay within the small plot of land and air assigned it by the birdland committee. The freest bird is, along with every other created thing, held in constant check by a net of necessity. Only God is free. (A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, publishers, 1961), pp. 115-116.)

Only God exists without rival and only God possesses the right and authority to do whatever He wishes. Only God is fully wise and knows everything such that He would never do anything which could entrap Him. Only God is truly sovereign and can do absolutely whatever He pleases.

God does offer the Christian freedom, but it is a different type of freedom. It is not the freedom to choose to do just whatever you want, but the freedom to choose to do what you know is right and to receive His power and the ability

to pull it off. For instance, let's say you are hooked on gambling; it has become an addiction. You know it's wrong to be risking what little income you may have on a bet, but when someone challenges you with a \$100 wager as to who will win a game, you just can't help yourself. You make the bet, maybe lose, and then feel guilty because you knew better. Freedom is the ability to stop betting, because you know it is wrong, and you are addicted.

Freedom is the ability to live responsibly, while every other voice in your world cries out that you need to live selfishly and look out for number one. When Jesus Christ enters our life and changes our nature, He gives us His very life, His very power and enablement to refrain from doing those things we know are harmful but are impossible to resist. We don't ever have to allow sin to control our lives again. And that is the very point of what the Spirit of God teaches us in Paul's letter to the **Romans, chapters 5-8**. And in particular, that has been the subject matter of what we have been looking at for the past three weeks in **Romans 6:1-13**.

Beginning in **Romans 6:14**, the apostle Paul states a premise as true for the follower of Christ. He says that we no longer have to be ruled or controlled or enslaved by any sin. Writing to Christians, Paul states, "**For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.**"

In the first half of this verse, Paul announces the change in sovereign rulers in our lives. He says that sin shall not be master over you. Sin once ruled over us, before Christ rescued us from its mastery. But now you no longer have to submit to every sinful temptation that confronts you. Someone else is master now, and that someone is Jesus.

Whereas sin was your master, ruling on the basis of hate and a desire to destroy you, Jesus set you free from Satan's control and has become your Master. Different than Satan who desires to destroy you, Christ rules on the basis of love and wants what is best for you. If you choose to serve Him, He will enable you to resist temptation, and Satan will flee from you. He will enable you to live in joy and hope, regardless of the horrible circumstances you may find yourself in.

The second "**for**" in the second half of **verse 14** announces the resulting change in our condition since we became a Christian with a new master. The

second half of the verse has been misunderstood by some that as we are no longer “**under the Law,**” we are free to live lawlessly and can do whatever we please, even evil. Far from it. What not being under the law but grace means is that we no longer need to fear the tyranny of a bunch of rules and orders and perform in such a way to be granted enjoyment of God’s acceptance, approval, and love. Instead, we are now living under the grace of a loving relationship with God, based on how Jesus performed on the cross on our behalf. Only because of His work on behalf of those who put their confidence in Him are we forever to be forgiven and accepted by God. We can add nothing to better our standing before God than what Christ has already done. Once we seriously consider what Christ has done for us, the only logical response is that we will want to honor His work on our behalf and live holy lives. When we know and consider it as true that our identity changed after we became Christians, then our view of the law and how we approach living moral lives will change as well.

Let me illustrate. Let’s say that a man is left a widower with two children. He hires a housekeeper to be his employee. He tells her that the conditions of her employment are that she is to cook good meals and follow some specific rules as to how he wants the house kept clean. In addition, he gives her instructions as to how and how not to dress the children. From time to time, this housekeeper’s employer goes about the home to check up on her to see that all is in order and if she is obeying all of his instructions. He watches her management of the children and corrects her in a manner suited to the relationship of an employer and employee.

After a year, he realizes that his children have fallen in love with this woman. Furthermore, he too has grown fond of her. He asks her to marry him, and she accepts. Now that they are married, the relationship not only changes between them, but so does her identity. She is no longer his employee; she is his wife. He no longer follows her around the house to oversee her work, nor does he tell her what to cook for dinner. Because their relationship is built on love, she knows what he likes and delights in doing what pleases him. If she is not sure what will please him, she asks. She is no longer under law, but grace.

In the same way, we obey Jesus because we know He loves us, and we in turn choose to love and obey Him. The more we understand or know what he has done for us, and the more that we consider it as true, the more we will

naturally want to honor and worship him by presenting ourselves to Him as holy vessels, weapons of righteousness for His use in an evil world. We no longer live under law, but by grace.

It is at this point that Paul asks a question that most Christians will ask at some time or another, as a result of finally discovering that they live under grace, and they don't have to sin.

Let me paint a common situation for us all. You may not face this particular temptation, but you have or will face a similar one. Let's say that you have lived with a new insensitive neighbor for two years. You have done everything you could to build a reciprocal relationship. But in return, he freely lets his dog run all over your yard dropping poop bombs wherever he pleases, parks his boat and trailers in front of your house for weeks at a time, and continues to play his music so loud that from your home you can feel the base massaging your chest. The thought comes into your mind that you want to tell him off or do something that would finally let him know you have had it. You may even fantasize about puncturing the tires on his boat trailer parked in front of your house, or scoop up all of the poop, put it in a brown bag, drop it at his front door, light it on fire, ring the door bell and walk away!

Now, being a Christian, you know that is wrong and wouldn't be very loving. "But man," you think, "that would really feel goooooood!" Deep down, in the midst of losing control of your anger, you want to sin, even though you know it's wrong. Wanting the satisfaction, you find yourself asking, "Can't I sin just this once?"

That's exactly the question Paul addresses in the remainder of **Romans 6**, beginning with **verse 15**. He asks, "**What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?**" He is asking, "Can't I sin just this one time? I mean, what's the harm?"

Paul answers this question, beginning with **verse 15b**. He says, "**May it never be!**" Or, "No, you don't really want to do that."

Then, beginning with **verse 16** he explains why this is not a good idea. He warns us of the danger of choosing the fleeting pleasure of sin. He points to a

logical principle that each of us probably experientially know already. He writes:

**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 [that is obeying the call to sin] resulting in death, or of obedience [the call to do what comes naturally to a saint, a holy one, an ambassador of Christ, a very child of God] resulting in righteousness?**

The key word upon which Paul's argument rests is the word "slave." It is used eight times in these six verses. Paul's point is that as human beings, we were created by God to be a slave to someone. We were created to be mastered by someone. We cannot avoid it. You were not created to do whatever you want; you were created to serve somebody.

This was probably more obvious to Paul's readers in his day, whether Greeks, Romans or Jews, than it is obvious to many of us today. For hundreds of years before Christ, societies were built upon the foundation that everyone answered to someone else. Typically, it was to a king, pharaoh, caesar, or mythological gods. But in the 1940s, a new definition of freedom was birthed in this country that was pretty much foreign to the rest of the world. The new, flesh-based definition of freedom was that you could do whatever you want, no holds barred. That's what it meant to be an American.

About twenty years after the birth of this definition, and having lived in the wake of that deception of freedom, Bob Dylan, the song writer and modern day philosopher, having been raised on the free love and drug culture, came to his senses and wrote these words to a song that was on an album called, *Slow Train Coming*. It was entitled, "You've Got to Serve Somebody." Here are the lyrics:

You may be an ambassador to England or an ambassador to France,  
You might like to gamble; you might like to dance.  
You might be the heavyweight champion of the world.

You might be a socialite with a long string of pearls.  
But, you've got to serve somebody.

You may be a preacher preaching spiritual pride,  
Might be a city councilman taking bribes on the side.  
You may be working in a barber shop; you may know how to cut hair.  
You may be somebody's mistress; you may be somebody's heir.  
But, you've got to serve somebody.

Might like to wear cotton, might like to wear silk.  
Might like to drink whiskey, might like to drink milk.  
Might like to eat caviar, might like to eat bread.  
You might be sleeping on the floor or sleeping in a king-size bed.  
But, you're going to have to serve somebody.  
Yes, indeed, you're going to have to serve somebody.

It may be the devil or it may be the Lord.  
You're going to have to serve somebody.

That's exactly what Paul is driving at in this passage. In the verses that follow, he more fully explains that you are either going to serve the Lord over all creation, or you are going to serve the devil and sin. No one ever has been a totally free agent. We have been moved and controlled by forces beyond our power. And up until Christ saved us, we had no choice but to serve the devil. But in Christ, being a new creation, I have the freedom to choose whom I will serve. Before I came to Christ, I did not have a choice; now I do. That is what Paul is leading up to in **verses 17-23**.

Ultimately, every Christian has two options to consider as to whom we will serve. We can know these two options, and we can moment by moment choose which one we want to live by. Paul explains the dangers and benefits we will encounter, depending upon which option we choose. In **verses 17-21**, he shows us the dangers are of choosing to serve sin at any time. He tells us:

**But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin** [It is the past tense, designating who you were before you came to Christ. But thanks

be to God, because He is the one who has changed our lives through Jesus Christ], **you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed** [meaning the basics about knowing and living for Jesus Christ], **and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms** [meaning his reference to slavery] **because of the weakness of your flesh.**

Paul says that we humans have a weakness of moral fiber called the “**flesh**.” This is the first time Paul uses the expression of the “**flesh**” this way in the book of **Romans**. He will explain what he means by the flesh in **chapter 7**.

He continues, “**For just as you presented** [past tense = before you committed your life to Christ] **your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness.**”

Paul is giving us here a very important principle to remember. It’s what I call the “I bet you can’t eat just one” principle. Many years ago there was a potato chip commercial that dared you to just try to eat only one of their potato chips, without having to have one more. And pretty soon, the person can’t eat just one or two; he has to finish the whole bag!

Paul is saying here that if you choose to sin one time, it won’t stop there. You will become a slave to that sin. That sin will carry you farther down the road than you had planned to travel. You just can’t eat one piece of pumpkin pie during the day. You have to have another! And pretty soon, you are way beyond your diet.

This is true of all sin. It’s pleasurable for the moment, but then it’s got you! Whether it is your bitterness and refusal to forgive someone, the enslavement of sexual immorality, or looking for a way to bend the hunting ordinances, your sin begins to control you.

Pretty soon, the results of enslavement to sin will begin to reveal itself in different ways in your life. Your physical countenance or appearance will begin to change. When people see you, they will notice that that bright cheerful look you had about you when you first came to Christ has faded. Instead, you will present a poopy-faced attitude to those with whom you work and live. Understand, you don't want your countenance to change or the day to appear darker to you, but sin has already taken you further downhill than you wanted to go.

Jesus didn't mince words when he said this in **John 8:34**, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.**" And that includes everyone, Christian and non-Christian.

Some of you have experienced or are experiencing this right now, and you may be wondering, "If I deliberately choose to sin as a Christian, does that mean I am hopelessly forever doomed to be enslaved to that sin?" No, not if you are a Christian. As a child of God, you have been provided with a simple way of escape. **1 John 1:9** tells us that all we need to do is confess that sin or agree with God that it is wrong and not part of our new identity in Christ, turn away from that sin, and we will immediately be put back onto the path of freedom in righteousness. However, there will be some consequences of that sin. There always is, as God said there would be. In **Galatians 6:7-8** Paul is writing to Christians and explains, "**Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.**"

That corruption could be an ongoing weakness in our life to that particular sinful habit. It could mean the loss of money, because maybe you have disobeyed God's principles of finance. It could mean an unplanned child or the destruction of a home, if the sin was that of immorality. You can be forgiven, but there will be consequences to sinning. Sin is a cruel master.

That's why Paul exhorts us to do something different with our "**members**" or our bodies or our lives. He says, "**So now present** [or more literally, keep on presenting every day] **your members as slaves of righteousness, resulting in sanctification.**"

The same is true of sin. All you have to do to experience freedom from sin is to let go of it through confession and choose to grab hold of the Lord and serve Him and righteousness.

In **verse 20**, Paul sets us up for the next two consequences for the Christian who chooses to obey the voice of sin. Paul states, “**For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.**” In other words, before you were saved, you were free to do wrong and you wouldn’t really know what you were missing. You would receive temporary satisfaction along with the negative consequences of reaping what you sowed, except you did not necessarily recognize the correlation between what you had done wrong and the negative consequences of your sin.

But that is no longer true, now that you have committed your life to Christ and been given a new identity. Paul says, “**Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.**”

Next to becoming a slave to sin when we choose to obey its temptation, Paul says that we will feel a sense of deep shame. What is shame? It is the awareness or painful feeling of embarrassment over unworthy actions. When we misbehave and do things that we know don’t go along with who we are in Christ, we are embarrassed. When the Christian sins, there’s the thought, “What in the world am I doing this for? This isn’t why I was saved. I know better than this. I know I have the power to do what is right, but I chose to ignore that power. And now, I am ashamed that after all that Jesus has done for me, I have treated Him this way.”

This is why Paul asks us the haunting question, “What benefit did you reap from that sin?” The answer is “None!”

But God loves us so much, that if the feeling of shame doesn’t awaken us to stop what we are doing, He has another painful discipline He will apply to our lives to bring us back to Himself. Paul calls it “**death.**” And by that, we are not talking about spiritual death in the sense that one loses salvation or the spirit once again dies and is separated from God. “**Death**” here refers to what

is happening in the soul of the individual rebellious believer. We will come back to explain this type of death more fully in a moment

Instead, let's move to **verse 22** and look at the second option of choosing to serve obedience and what benefits it results in. Paul writes, "**But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.**" Paul highlights two big benefits for refusing to obey the voice of sin and instead following the call of righteousness.

The first is sanctification. By that, Paul means ongoing spiritual growth or maturity. Changes we have wished would take place in our lives start taking place. Old habits begin to disappear almost as if by magic. Those self-centered tendencies you have had all of your life, idiosyncrasies that have driven your kids, parents, spouses, and friends away from you, begin to change. And as a result, you begin to find friends like you have never had before.

The second benefit is that we get to experience eternal life right now. We get to know God better. Our intimacy and realization of Him grows deeper. Because we stand in confidence before Him, we are more confident about life. We find peace amidst the storm of our circumstances as well as joy, forgiveness, victory, hope, and a sense of purpose and direction. When we read His Word, it comes alive to us. Now when we pray, we know God hears our prayers. And we sense He is using our lives to effect salvation in others. That's life, right now! Christians have the greatest potential to get the most out of this life than any other people alive.

But notice, I said potential. So many Christians are not realizing much of that potential. In spiritual contrast, they are experiencing a death of sorts. God feels to be a distant stranger. There is no sense of God's hand of blessing on life. Some Christians are trapped in their fears, anxieties, and bitterness. They are living in defeat, despair, and depression. Rather than experiencing the abundant life, they exist day to day, feeling trapped by the mundane. God's Word is no longer exciting and fun to read. It has become stale. They experience no confidence in prayer, so why pray? Long ago, they quit trying to share Christ with others, because they know their life is a mess. Whereas previously they looked forward to church, now they avoid church.

There is no one more miserable on the face of this earth, not even the lost individual without Christ, than the Christian who is deliberately living in sin. Because the Christian knows what he is missing, and the lost person does not. The prodigal son who was eating pig slop due to his sinful rebellion realized he could have been eating well at the table of his father.

Paul, in **Galatians 5:1**, pleads with the believer, **“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”** It is your choice, Christian.

Paul summarizes this section in **verse 23**. He explains, **“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** Although this verse is often quoted in evangelism, it was not written with the lost in mind. Remember, Paul has been speaking to the lives of the Christian since **Romans 5:1**. Nowhere since then has he addressed the unsaved. Likewise, **Romans 8:5-6** was written with the believer in mind. There Paul states:

**For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.**

Back in **Romans 6:23**, Paul uses a very interesting term, **“wages.”** This word is a special term used of the daily food ration given to a Roman soldier for his service. In other words, this death is not some large payment that comes at the end of life, but rather something that is measured out and experienced to the person on a daily basis.

The wages of sin, then, is daily death. It is the opposite of really living. It would be characterized by hostility, anger, frustration, emptiness, barrenness, worthlessness, hatred, self-hatred, and boredom.

As I said earlier, it is only when we confess our sin and foolishness and turn away from sin that “**life**” returns to us. But in the meantime, what we get is “**death**.” What’s really sad is that it is all so unnecessary for the believer. Three times in our passage, Paul stresses that the believer has been “**set free**” from sin. We don’t have to return to sin. So, with these negative consequences, why should we continue to do so?

This morning, if you are feeling like you are being drawn down into the pit of death, as a Christian, why go any further? Especially on communion Sunday, why not choose to stop living like someone you are not, and commit to remembering who you are as a follower of Jesus? You are a deeply beloved saint. Ask God to forgive you, and return to the road of life.

Let’s pray. Our Father, we pray that there may be among us today, young and old alike, men and women who will dare to respond to the challenge of your Word, to be what we are capable of being in Christ. May they choose to serve you, our Savior, and live as saints, rather than go back to serving sin as our task master. And if there are any here today who are tired of living with the consequences of having ignored you or of having kept you at arm’s length, may they bow their knees before you in humility, seeking your forgiveness and taking your free gift of Jesus to come into their lives and be their loving Lord and Savior. Father, if there are any here today who are just now asking Jesus to become their Savior and Lord, move them to share that great decision with a friend before today is out. In Jesus name, amen.

LIFE	DEATH
Know God better	God is a stranger
Deeper intimacy with God	Loss of closeness to God
Confidence	No sense of God’s blessing
Peace	Fear
Joy	Anxiety
Forgiveness	Bitterness
Victory	Defeat
Hope	Despair/ Depression
Purpose/direction	Existence/mundaneness
God’s Word is alive	God’s Word is stale
Know God hears our prayers	No confidence in prayer
Impactful Christian witness	No Christian witness

Look forward to Worship/Fellowship
------------------------------------

Avoid going to church
-----------------------