

Romans 6:15-7:6

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 0 0] If you ever find yourself stuck having to organise a stag night or a hen night or you're struggling! for ideas what to do on a stag weekend let me give you a solution there's a company online! that'll do it for you and their tagline runs as follows make the most of your last night of freedom with hen nights stag nights and stag weekends in the uk it's a company called freedom limited is it revealing that people commonly refer to stag nights and hen nights as their last night of freedom and the implication is that freedom is all about being single footloose and fancy free because then you can do what you want when you want with whom you want sleep around you can get drunk and the rest of it because marriage marks the end of freedom marriage contains nasty words doesn't it like obligation and commitment and responsibility so what is freedom? is it a life without responsibility or commitment or obligation is that freedom?

it's a widespread assumption isn't it? the first year student at uni I'm free at last no more parents breathing down my neck no more friends or brother and sister tut-tutting over my shoulder now I can live as I want I can sleep around I can get hammered at the student bar I can party all night I can sleep all day I'm free at last and that sort of assumption persists freedom is being answerable to no one according to our culture no one's got the right to tell me how to behave or what to believe I'm a free person what is true freedom?

well this passage is all about that look at chapter 6 and verse 15 what then are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? it's very similar to the question at the start of chapter 6 in Romans basically now we are under grace we live under God's favour if we're christians does it mean that sin just doesn't matter anymore because we're forgiven you see what Paul says by no means perish the thought well in what sense are christians free? firstly the christian enjoys freedom from sin and we've been set free from sin to belong to God and that is chapter 6 in verses 15 to 23 verse 16 do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves you are slaves of the one whom you obey either of sin which leads to death or to obedience which leads to righteousness so that verse tells you about two types of slavery there's slavery to sin and slavery to obedience and it's referred to in verse 18 as slavery to righteousness and then in verse 22 slavery to God there's two masters one master is called sin the other master is called God and over the past two weeks we've seen in this little bit of Romans how sin is pictured as a power as a ruler and now we learn that there are just two options there is slavery to sin or to God and everyone serves one of those two masters each of us in this room in this borough in this city in this country in this world is either a slave to sin or a slave to God and that means that people like to think of themselves as independent don't they we belong to no one we're answerable to no one but the bible says that is a myth that is self-perception

I don't know if you know the final lines of the poem Invictus by William Ernest Henley and he expresses the view of many doesn't he he says I am the master of my fate I am the captain of my soul but the bible says that's never never last it says do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves you are slaves of the one you obey verse 16 either of sin which leads to death or obedience which leads to righteousness it's saying you are not the master you are not a captain you are the servants the slaves of a higher power that we all live under authority and our master is either sin or God now by nature we are all slaves to sin that is made explicit here but other passages in the bible tell us that Jesus in John 8 says everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin in Peter's perhaps 2 verses 1-3 the apostle describes our natural state as human beings that we are spiritually dead enslaved condemned by nature children of wrath we're not born free even if we are very religious people it's very offensive isn't it to the religious the Jews in John 8 they were outraged when Jesus told them that they were slaves to sin they said we are the offspring of Abraham we've now been slaves of anyone but the bible says we are not born free we are born slaves to sin our

world and our culture loves to talk of freedom Roosevelt in 1941 in his famous speech talked about four freedoms freedom of speech freedom of religion freedom from want freedom from fear and they are all important freedoms but they are not the ultimate freedom the most important freedom of all is freedom from sin and that is something that no politician can deliver you can be born into a country where you enjoy all those four freedoms but you're still born a slave a slave to sin how do we escape this slavery look at verse 17 thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed and have been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness the pattern of teaching that's referring to the gospel about the Lord Jesus how we live that out in our lives it's saying that when a person becomes a Christian when a person believes that pattern of teaching the gospel at that very moment they are set free from slavery to sin to slavery to God and the gospel is what sets is what God uses to set people free that's very encouraging isn't it when we teach people the gospel that has the power to set people who are in slavery to sin free you don't need to be a great speaker all you have to be able to do is be faithful in explaining the truth and that should encourage us shouldn't it to share this powerful liberating message about Jesus just imagine God gives you an opportunity to speak about the gospel with a friend or a colleague or a family member and if we can write down what you said if we made a transcript it may not seem very impressive would it if we compared it to Martin Luther King's I am a dream speech the rhetoric may seem a little bit limp might not a bit patchy in comparison but your very simple stuttering words have got the potential to bring even greater change than Martin Luther King brought the potential to free a person from slavery to sin look at how verse 18 goes on and having been set free from sin having become slaves of righteousness that is slaves of God according to verse 22 so I mean set free from sin as your master you are now you're not a free spirit beholden to know when you become a slave of God so there's a change of ownership the christian is somebody who belongs to God you are not your own the apostle Paul says God is now their master and I wonder for those of us who are christians is that how we see ourselves the apostle Paul began his letter to the Romans with these words Paul a servant or a slave of Christ Jesus is that how you think about yourself you now belong to God another way of expressing the truth is to say that when you became a christian you accepted Jesus Christ as your savior and your lord you accept him as your rescuer and your ruler the two go together you cannot have Jesus as your rescuer without him being your ruler the christian life is not just about believing in Jesus it is about belonging to Jesus it is about a change of ownership now being a slave of God that is not the complete description of a christian is it verse 19 the apostle Paul acknowledges the limitations of this language he says I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations so a christian is not just a slave he is also son of God a child of God if you only relate to God as your master then something is wrong no he is our heavenly father through Jesus Christ but with that said the challenge of this passage still stands who is your master is it sin or is it God what difference will it make if our master is now God that needs to change the way that we live so that new belonging should lead to new living in verse 19 in the second half for just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification before we gave our members we gave our bodies in the service of selfish desires but now we have to present our bodies in all its various parts to God if you were here last week you see exactly the same thought in chapter 6 verse 13 why is Paul repeating himself well presumably because he knows you and I don't get things the first time around present your members as slaves to righteousness christian leader john stott tells the story in his biography about his routine in the morning is when he gets up he leans over the side of the bed and puts his legs over and he goes through his body and he says lord take my feet and use them for your glory take my legs and use them to go to places that will honor you take my hands take my lips take my ears take my mouth well why would you bother living this way why would you bother living that way where you want all of you deserve all of christ why would you do that well there's two different outcomes one is in the present and one is in eternity first time 20 says you were slaves of sin and you were free in regards to righteousness as well of righteousness not very easy to understand but what fruit were you getting at the time from the things of which you're now ashamed and the end of those sins can you see it is death but now that you've been set free from sin and become slaves to god the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end eternal life there's a contrast what is the fruit that the two living for the two masters produces but if your master is sin you are free in a sense from righteousness

[11 : 44] but what's the benefit in that when you do things of which you are so ashamed that if we put them up on a screen here this morning for us all to see you'd be ashamed of them and as you get older you spiral down following sin into godliness can you see that in verse 19 lawlessness leading to more lawlessness it's the picture of a half a skelter and your conscience becoming progressively hardened your character becoming increasingly corroded and decayed and it's a very ugly picture but by contrast if your master is god and you serve him verse 22 says the fruit you get leads to sanctification that is to say holiness of life rather than a downward spiral of ungodliness instead there is an upward spiral of you becoming more and more like god and his new character of growth in Christ-likeness and it's a beautiful picture

I don't know if you've had the experience of meeting with an older Christian who's walked with the lord for 40 or 50 years and to see the fruit in their character how they've changed is a beautiful thing isn't it I remember when I was in a youth group I was about 12 or 13 and one of the leaders said memorably if you think sin is exciting try holiness I can remember very little from that youth group apart from that well if this present fruit isn't enough of an incentive look at the future destiny verse 23 sums it up the wages of sin is death but the free gift of god is eternal life in Christ Jesus our lord that is saying sin is not a good master to have when you look in your wage packet at the end of your life you find eternal death the wages of sin is death that means being under the judgment of god forever by contrast the free gift of god is eternal life in Christ Jesus our lord so this eternal life is not a wage you've earned that you've earned for serving god it is a free gift from your new master do you ever find yourself if you're a Christian tempted to envy those who don't belong to god their lives don't they in some way they seem more attractive more appealing and at times we need to remember the fruit of such a lifestyle the wages which sin will pay those who serve him in the end and if at the moment you're not a Christian perhaps you've held back from following Jesus because you think I don't want to give up my freedom well this is saying this freedom that you think you have is terrible terrible slavery slavery to a terrible master and serving him what does it produce? moral and spiritual decay now eternal death and the life to come or wouldn't it be a good day to change owners? secondly more briefly Christ not only enjoys the Christian not only enjoys freedom from sin but also freedom from the law that is to say if we've been set free from the punishment of the law to serve Christ do you notice that word appears in each of the six verses at the start of chapter 7 it's the word law we're going to continue looking at it next week but by law we're not talking about the law of the land but the law of Moses which is focused on the ten commandments we're told in chapter 6 in verse 14 and 15 we are not under the law anymore but we are under grace chapter 7 verse 6 picks up the same theme it says the Christian is now released from the law so you're not under the law you're released from the law what does that mean?

it sounds doesn't it like a recipe for total anarchy a world of lawlessness but it's actually nothing of the sort you'll see on the outline we find this theme again of a new belonging let's pick it up in chapter 7 and verse 6 but now we are released from the law having died to that which held us captive having died to that which held us captive so that we serve in a new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code what that's saying is this if sin is your master you are under the law you are held captive by the law now what does that mean?

picture it this way the law is working alongside sin as its henchman the law is working alongside sin as its associate and we are saying aren't we?

[16 : 26] sin is a terrible master sin keeps us locked up in this dungeon cellar but who does sin leave on guard to make sure we don't escape the cellar?

it's the law the law if you like is the jailer he is the guard the law has the key to our prison the law is the one who is holding us captive now if you've got that picture in your mind that we are behind bars in this dungeon if we go to the doors of this jail and we say through the bars to the jailer the law who is standing outside guarding us with the keys we say come on I've had enough of this I want to get out of jail he says of course he says you can go free you can go free on one condition you've got to keep all the commandments that's all you've got to do God what are the commandments? well God's law is love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and love your neighbour as yourself do that and you're out of here but of course we can't we fail and so we remain captive under the law that's the sort of idea and lots of people try to bargain with the jailer let's develop the analogy a little bit many people say ok jailer I've not kept these commands you mentioned I've not loved God I've not loved my neighbour but I've kept these instead these are the other commands that I've kept won't this do?

well that's the essence of religion isn't it? what religion does is it comes up with its own set of commands in an effort to persuade the jailer the Lord to release us the idea is I may not have loved God and I may not have loved my neighbour but look this is what I've done I went to church every week I've been baptised I've read my Bible won't that do?

I go to mass and confession regularly I've lived my life under Sharia won't that do? and the more desperate people are to get out the more harm they actually do to themselves it's a bit like the jailer throwing himself against the bar of the jail to get himself free and all he does is injure himself the more people struggle to get themselves free the more the chains dig in and the bloodier the whole thing gets now this may be saying to you you might be somebody who for many years has worked really hard at being religious or being moral but it's saying to you you will never find true freedom that way to do so is to live under the law in captivity so how can anyone get free?

[19:06] well verse 6 says but now we are released from the law having died to that which held us captive now we are released having died to that which held us captive there are only two ways out of the dungeon the one way is to keep the commandments which we've seen we can't do the other way is to die so look at verse 1 of chapter 7 do you not know brothers if I am speaking to those who know the law that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives this is saying to you once you are dead you have paid the ultimate penalty that the law demands now let's go back to the picture if you die in your cell your body is going to be carried out and thrown outside so the law has done its worst the law cannot touch you anymore once you have died you will be out there you will be free but in verse 4 like with my brothers you also have died to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit to God do you remember we saw last week that we've died with Christ that's what's happened with the Christian we've been united with Christ in his death that our death penalty has been paid the eternal death penalty that we deserve has been paid for by Christ and so we've been set free from the law we are no longer captive now you may be thinking if you're following me there's not much chance to enjoy your freedom if you're dead is there the corpse that's been thrown out of the dungeon what sort of freedom is that but remember last week we have been united with Christ and Christ died and three days after he died he rose again from the dead and so no sooner has the corpse been thrown out of the cell than God raises us with Christ new life now notice again what our freedom looks like look at verse 4 likewise my brothers you also have died to the law through the body of Christ so that you belong to another to him who has been raised from the dead

I belong to Jesus the language of belonging is actually the language of marriage in verse 22 and 3 use marriage as an illustration and it makes the very obvious point that if you're married you are bound to your spouse until death and if one of you dies then legally you are free to remarry it's using that analogy and it's saying believers have died we've been set free from the terrible marriage that we had to the law but now we can belong to Christ forever we've died to the law and so we're free to remarry and we're now in the best relationship that there is with Jesus Christ and so new belonging means new living verse 4 we've died to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit to God now let's say you're a moral person here this lunch time you may even be a religious person and you might be thinking what difference would it make if I belonged to Jesus it's chocolate cheese the old way of life is about serving the old written code verse 6 what the law does is the law just presents you with commands that you cannot keep the law is powerless the law is completely powerless it can't produce holiness in your life in fact the law provokes sin in our lives verse 5 speaks about sinful passions so try this exercise when you go past the park bench that says wet paint do not touch what do you long to do?

you long to touch it you see the sign do not tread on the grass what do you want to do? tread on the grass you didn't even think about going on the grass you didn't even think about touching the bench until you saw the sign that's what the law does it arouses our simple passions and life under the law is miserable it leaves us powerless and so that means just to tell people be good do better well at least people utterly demoralised because they can't do good they can't do better but this chapter tells us that when a person swaps owner when a person belongs to Christ they serve in a new spirit what does that mean?

that means that they serve in the life of the spirit does that mean that you can you can get rid of the written teachings you can get rid of the bible well no of course not we're going to see that over the next couple of weeks but what we're told here is that God's spirit is in us he gives us the desire to

live for God he enables us to grow in true holiness of life so if we're Christians God's spirit is at work in us and so we bear fruit the fruit of Christ like character the law changes the law was once our enemy but it's now our friend think about it you're playing rugby and you see Jonah Loma if he's still alive you see him on the other pitch and he's just a monster he kind of runs at you and every time you go near him he flattens you and steamrollers over you but what happens when you become a Christian is that giant changes side and suddenly the law becomes on your side and so you can say with David how I love your law the law who was once your enemy now becomes your friend he helps you to see how you can serve God better so as we close there's been a whistle stop tour this lunchtime we have wonderful freedoms in the gospel we are freed from sin and freed from the law and we now belong to God and he is our new master and he is our new husband and he calls us to serve him to live for him but if you're not yet a Christian

Bob Dylan says this you've got to serve somebody you might be a rock and roll addict prancing on the stage you might have drugs at your command women in a cage you may be a businessman or a high degree thief they may call you doctor they may call you chief 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 but you're going to have to serve somebody you've got one life who are you going to serve which master will it be will it be sin or is it going to be God and you may be somebody who is here this lunchtime and you've been serving sin for many years now and all the time you thought you were free well why not switch owners to the one who has loved you and the one to serve whom is perfect perfect freedom let's pray