

## Romans 6:15-23

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[ 0 : 00 ] The 30th president of the United States was a man called John Calvin Coolidge.! He was president from 1923 to 1929.! He came from New England, and supposedly people from New England don't have a lot to say.

I don't know if that's true. He was noted for being a man of very few words. And President Coolidge was a man like that. He came home from church one Lord's Day, and his wife had not been able to go to church that morning.

There was no YouTube to catch up. She said, what was the minister preaching about? And Coolidge said, sin. One word. Sin.

His wife tried to keep the conversation going a little bit. She said, well, what was he saying about sin? And Coolidge said, he's against it. That's a caricature, isn't it, of preachers.

Lots of people think that's what we're about, preachers. They're against sin. Often, we hear people say there's too much talk about sin.

[ 1 : 01 ] You make too much of it. Too much stress, too much emphasis on sin. After all, God is a God of love, isn't he? He's a loving Father. In Jesus Christ, there's forgiveness for every sin.

They're not defending kind of what they would call serious sin or continual sin. But does it really matter if you sin occasionally?

Now and then. Is it such a big deal? And that's the question in verse 15 of Romans chapter 6. It's a slightly different issue than the question in verse 1.

Do you remember that? The question in verse 1 was, should we carry on sinning? Are we to keep going in sin? To go on sinning and sinning and sinning. So that God, who's a God of grace and a God of forgiveness, will he look even better, wouldn't he, if we keep on sinning?

But now Paul is facing a different question. And the question is, can we sin occasionally? Does a sin now and then make a big difference?

[ 2 : 06 ] If God is a God of grace, which means he's a God of undeserved kindness, and we are living under God's grace, not under God's law, well, surely we can be a little bit less uptight.

Not care too much about the occasional sin. It's no big deal. And once again, Paul recoils in horror, doesn't he?

Look what he says. He says, by no means, certainly not, no way. He's saying to you and I, if we think sin is no big deal, you've not understood.

It would be a wrong conclusion. It's a false deduction from my argument. It matters enormously, and you and I can never take it lightly.

And so he approaches this question from a slightly different angle than he did two weeks ago at the start of Romans 6. So at the start of Romans 6, he talks about what a Christian is, conversion, somebody kind of becoming a Christian and living as a Christian.

[ 3 : 15 ] He talks about it from God's side and God's perspective. He talks about, if you remember, that we're united to his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we cannot carry on in sin because we've been taken out of Adam and our sins. We've been taken out of the sphere of sin. And as a Christian, we now live in a new sphere, into a new person that we're united with, the Lord Jesus.

And so for somebody who proclaims to be a Christian, they live in the most intimate, permanent way in union with Jesus Christ. They are joined him.

That's what God has done. And so we must remember that on the basis of that, on the basis of what God has done, we can't carry on in sin. But I think in Romans 6, the second half, he turns to a slightly different argument.

And he talks really about our side, the human side, of what has happened to you if you've become a Christian. That there's a commitment that you have made.

[ 4 : 21 ] And his argument is going to be that we can't carry on in sin. Sin matters, not only because of what God has done for us, but we can't sin because what we have done and the commitment that we've made.

And his main thought is that being a Christian, conversion, if I can put it that way, is commitment to God. It is a commitment to God.

It is adjoining ourselves to God, to obey God and to serve God. And that is the point that he wants to bring us back to again and again. Every day that we live.

Conversion is a commitment to God. And that being the case, sin does really matter. And it's inconsistent with that commitment.

And it matters very much every day because we are to present ourselves wholly, wholeheartedly to God. And that makes sin something that doesn't fit.

[ 5 : 22 ] It makes something that is against our nature. It's anomalous. It's anomalous. It makes sin something that we shrink back from.

And he's going to give you two reasons why we should present ourselves to God as the people of God. So, first of all this, when we commit ourselves to God, the first reason is found in verses 16 to 18.

And that is, there are only two possible masters. There are only two possible masters. And Jesus is saying, shockingly, that no human being on earth is independent.

No human being is autonomous. Everyone serves a master. There's no getting away from that.

It is inevitable of being human. In Victor's poem, he says, I am the master of my faith, the captain of my ship.

[ 6 : 22 ] No one is like that. And Paul refers in verse 16. It seems strange to us, but it happened quite a bit in the first century. Look at verse 16. He says, Now, he takes us to the slave market.

It's a bit uncomfortable for us. And he says, you present yourself to someone as their slave. And we think, well, why would anyone do that?

Why would you go up to someone and say, I want to be your slave? No normal person today would ever think of doing such a thing. But it happened actually quite a lot in the first century. Remember, there were no pensions.

There's no unemployment benefit. No social security. No social care tax. No free hospitals in those days.

If you were poor, you could literally starve to death. No social security net of any kind. And so it's quite likely, quite happened quite often, that people who were desperately poor would go and offer themselves to someone and say, I will be your slave.

[ 7 : 41 ] And then at least you'd have a roof over your head. You'd have a bed to sleep in. You'd have three square meals for yourself and your family. Your master had to look after you.

It was a common thing for people to offer themselves to say, I will be your slave. I will serve you and I will obey you. Now, Paul uses this as an illustration of our position as human beings.

That in fact, this is what every human being does. We offer ourselves to someone or something to meet our needs. We trust someone or something to meet our needs.

And then that someone or something governs us and directs us and rules us. And Paul's point is this. There are only two masters.

There are only two masters. So look at verse 16. He says there, you can either be a slave of sin or a slave of obedience. A little bit later, he tweaks that a little bit.

[ 8 : 44 ] And in verse 18, he talks about slaves of righteousness. And then in verse 22, he speaks about being slaves of God. And two options. You can either serve sin or we can serve God.

There's no third master. There's no neutral position. There's no kind of Switzerland. In the Second World War, you had Germany and her allies and you had Britain and their allies.

But Switzerland was neutral, wasn't it? And they didn't take part. Switzerland was on nobody's side. They weren't invaded. They were a neutral country. But there's nowhere like that in the spiritual sphere.

Everyone in this world, everyone in this room is either a slave to sin or a slave to God. And everyone in this building this morning, slave to sin or a slave to God.

And if you are a slave to sin, as difficult as this is to hear, you are ruled, governed, and motivated by sin. And likewise, if you are a slave to God, you are governed and controlled and motivated by God. [9:56] So which master does a Christian serve? And the answer is really obvious, isn't it? What really happens when somebody becomes a Christian, from our point of view, is them saying to God, I want to be your servant.

I want you, God, as my master. I am treating you, God, to meet my needs. And I am giving myself to you. Paul put it this way in verse 17.

He says something has happened. They once were slaves to sin, but something has happened. They are committed to the teaching and gladly obey.

And they do it willingly and enthusiastically. And the result is in verse 18. Can you see the result? And so in verse 18, having been set free from sin, they become slaves of righteousness.

And so the person who has become a Christian, they have a new master. And we freely choose a new master, God, and we give ourselves to him.

[11:04] And we come under his authority. And we promise that we will obey him. And we commit ourselves to being shaped by his word. That's the identity of the Christian.

He or she is a servant of righteousness. So it's really obvious, isn't it? You can't complacently say, well, the occasional sin doesn't matter. It's no big deal.

That is a denial of what has happened to you. It's a denial. It's a contradiction of who you are because you are in Christ. You are united to him. You have offered yourself freely to him.

You are a slave of righteousness. And so the thought that a Christian could just sin occasionally and not be bothered by it, Paul says that's impossible. Sin is something that causes acute sorrow. And so that we're ashamed. And we repent. And we repent. And we say to ourselves, I should not have done that. And we recognize it's totally incongruous.

[12:11] It doesn't fit. It's something that shouldn't happen because there's only two masters. And so let me pause for a moment. Let me introduce an objector. All right? Paul does that often in Romans.

He doesn't actually do that here, but I'm going to. So some of you say, wait a minute, Paul. I don't accept what you're saying. I don't accept the basic premise of your argument.

I want to insist to you that I don't have any master. I want to admit to you I'm not committed to God in the way that you describe. But I am certainly not a slave of sin.

That is offensive. It's a very negative thing. It's a very insulting way to talk about me. I'm actually quite a decent person. I might not be as religious as you are, but I'm not wicked either.

I try to be decent, moral, upright. I try to love my fellow human beings. I'm a free human being. And so what you're talking about sets up a false dichotomy, a false tension.

[13:14] You are saying you either have to be a slave of God or a slave of wickedness. And I don't accept that. I'm not a slave of God, but I'm not a slave of wickedness. And Paul knows that.

And I find it really encouraging as a preacher that Paul knows that his illustration isn't perfect. So look at verse 19. The picture of slavery is not a perfect picture. He's really apologizing there.

He's saying, I'm speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. You're so dumb, I've got to use this illustration. That's what he's saying. I know it's not ideal, but I've got to try and make it plain, the apostle tells us.

But yet it's basically true. You see, we're not free. Nobody is free. You're not free from yourself. You're not free from your own nature.

You're not free from your own heart. So listen to the great philosopher Bob Dylan. You may be an ambassador to England or France.

[14:18] You may like to gamble. You might like to dance. You may be the heavyweight champion of the world. You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls, but you're going to have to serve somebody. 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 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 some high degree thief. They may call you doctor or they may call you chief. You may be a stage trooper. You might be a young Turk. You may be the head of some big TV network.

You may be rich or poor. You may be blind or lame. You may be living in another country under another name, but you're going to have to serve somebody. Yes, you are. You're going to have to serve somebody.

It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but if you're going to have to serve somebody, you may be a construction worker working on a home. You may be living in a mansion. You might be living in a dome. You might own guns and you might even own tanks.

[15:16] You might be somebody's landlord. You might even own banks. You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride. You may be a city councilman taking bribes on the side. You may be working in a barbershop.

You may know how to cut hair. You may be somebody's mistress. Maybe somebody's heir. You might like to wear cotton. Might like to wear silk. Might like to drink whiskey. Might like to drink milk. You might like to eat caviar. You might like to eat bread. You may be sleeping on the floor, sleeping in a king-size bed. You may call me Terry. You might call me Timmy.

You may call me Bobby. You may call me Zimmy. You might call me RJ. You might call me Ray. You may call me anything, but no matter what you say, you're going to have to serve somebody. 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. Lots of you have got dogs.

[16:16] Much to my distress. So here's a dog illustration. Let's say you bring your dog to my house. Don't do that, but bring it.

Or I come to your house. And there's two bowls. There's a bowl of smelly, meaty, dry meal. The dog loves it.

You can't wait for it. There's another bowl. And you put in front of the dog a nice, crisp lettuce with a few tomatoes.

Maybe a boiled egg. Give the dog a choice. What's the dog going to choose? Now, doggy, which one do you want? You're completely free.

You can either have the bowl of meaty meal or you can have the lettuce. Now, you know, don't you, that 100 times out of 100, the dog will always go for the same choice.

[17:17] The dog is completely free. Totally free. But he would never, ever have eaten the lettuce. I hope not, otherwise this illustration doesn't work. Did you compel the dog to make the choice of the meaty meal?

No, you didn't. The dog was perfectly free, isn't it? He had the total choice. But it's in his nature. It's his nature. He will choose according to his nature.

It's a free choice. There's nothing compelling him. You don't take his head and push the dog's head into the bowl of meal. It's a free choice, but it's not free in that he's not free to be other than he is. Do you get that? He is not free to be other than he is. He's not free to be other than a dog who loves meat and meal.

So he acts in accordance with his own self, his own nature. And so we, the decisions we make, they're not just governed by our reason.

[18:20] Our minds, our acts come from deep underlying direction of your personality. We do what we want to do.

We do what is in our nature to do. And the free decisions that we make, thousands of decisions that we make in a week, they show our fundamental nature.

Paul puts it in this way. Look at verse 16. He says, Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone that's obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.

And so people say, I have no master. I am free. But then somebody calls. And they jump, and they run, and they obey. And we say, well, that is his master.

And you and I have personalities which are either directed towards God, or they are directed away from God.

[19:27] That's our master. And so, you and I can act occasionally contrary to our will. You and I can act contrary occasionally to our nature.

But normally, normally you and I act at the dictates of who we are. And we're either motivated by sin, or motivated by God.

There's no third personality type. Sin or God is our governing force. And Paul is saying, if your life is characterized by sin, or you obey sin, or you take it lightly, what does that tell you about who your

master is?

It tells you that your master is sin. And despite what your lips might proclaim, you're not a Christian at all. You might claim to be, but who do you obey?

Who do I obey? Who do I call master? Not who I call master, but who do I obey? And to live in sin, and to flirt with sin, and to play fast and loose with sin, how can such a person claim to be a Christian?

[ 20 : 51 ] There are only two masters. But then Paul has got another compelling reason why we present ourselves willingly to God, and it's this. There are only two possible lifestyles. Two masters, two lifestyles.

That's verses 19 and 23. Each master makes demands consistent with his own nature. So, sin and Satan, they will not demand that you read God's word.

They will not command you to devote yourself to prayer and dependence on God. They will not desire you to keep God's law. They will make commands consistent with their own nature.

And so if your master is evil, if your employer is evil and dishonest, he will make demands consistent with his own nature. If your master, if your employer is an upright man or an upright woman, honest and true, they will make demands consistent with their nature.

And so you've got to choose your master carefully. And so it is in the spiritual life. If you obey sin, you need to realize today what is sin going to ask you to do?

[ 22 : 05 ] Where will sin lead you? What direction will sin take you? And so think back to the time before you became a Christian. Look at the second half of verse 19.

For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness. I don't think I need to specify each of us has memories, don't they, that are embarrassing.

Each of us has memories and skeletons in our cupboard that are unpleasant and are not good. And Paul asks you, take a peek in that cupboard.

He asks you, what was the fruit? What did you get at that time from those things of which you're not ashamed? Was it great?

Was it wonderful that you look back and say, oh, it was much better before I became a Christian. Life was so much better. Do you look back and say about those things, I was delightful.

[ 23 : 17 ] I love the things that I did before I was a Christian. And the things I did, it was just so great. I wish I had a photograph of it all. I wish I'd kept the album. No, he says, doesn't he, he says, you were ashamed.

And you don't like thinking about it. And you think of the people that you hurt. And you feel your cheeks get hot when you remember it. And you're embarrassed.

And you remember the emptiness and the dirtiness and the feelings of dissatisfaction and guilt and fear. And you remember the situations that you ended up in which you never planned to be in.

And you remember the lives that have been damaged. And so what fruit were you getting? And he says, do you want to go back to that lifestyle? That's what happens if you choose sin.

But your new master is different. Look at verse 19. So now, present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

[ 24 : 23 ] That means leading to being changed, to be more like God. And then verse 22. So the second half says the fruit that you get leads to sanctification and in the end eternal life.

What is God like as a master? He's a kind master. He's a good master. Jesus says, my yoke is easy and my burden is light. And you never regret serving him.

And there's no shame in serving him. And there's no bitter memories. And so how do you spend your time? What do you now delight to do?

What sort of friends do you have? True friends, real friends that will stand by you. They'll give you the shirt off their backs. And so, Christine, as you understand the gospel, how do you feel?

How does it affect your affections that you are ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven? Forgiven. And when you think about your future now, you see that actually it's brighter and brighter and brighter and there will be a heaven and there will be a new creation.

[ 25 : 37 ] It's a better life in every way. And so Paul says, the apostle, how can you think of going back to the old life? Two different lifestyles, which is better?

And something else Paul says, and it's solemn and it's wonderful, that don't forget that in neither lifestyle can you stand still. In neither lifestyle do you stand still.

It's a conveyor belt. You know those airports where they're long, you just stand there and you're kind of taking those long conveyor belts? And so there's a terrible phrase in there in verse 19, I don't know whether you picked it up, where it says, leading to more and more lawlessness or ever increasing wickedness.

It's a grim process of moral deterioration. And Satan will make you worse and worse and worse and you'll think it won't happen. You think I'll dabble in sin just a little bit.

I'm a decent person. I've got certain standards. I'm only involved to this certain extent. This far and no further. Luke 15 is the great example of that, isn't it?

[ 26 : 42 ] Do you remember when the prodigal son, we know that story, the prodigal son goes to his father and he says, can you give me the inheritance? It's sinful. I wish you were dead. Can you give me the inheritance? I want to go to the far country and I want to live as I want.

If he'd have asked him that day, are you going to end up in a pigsty, utterly broken, he'd have laughed at you, wouldn't he?

He'd have said, don't be ridiculous. I'll never end up in a place like that. I'm going to lead a wonderful life. And yet that's where he's ended up. It brings me no joy at all this morning to say that the devil's goal is to make you a devil in hell.

And if you will not become a Christian, what is the devil's aim? It's to make you into a horrible, ugly, disgusting, utterly evil devil in hell forever and ever. And that is where sin leads.

What a thought. God's plan, on the other hand, is to make you better and better and better and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. To live a more perfect, a more pure, a more attractive, a more beautiful day until Jesus Christ will come again.

[ 27 : 57 ] And you'll stand in front of him and when you see him you shall be like him. Perfect, sinless, and glorious. And so which master will you follow? Which master is the better lifestyle?

And when we play with sin, do you realize what you're doing? You're damaging yourself and you're ruining yourself. And Paul takes that argument even further and he takes us to the very end of that moving walkway and he takes us to the final destination.

The end of all things, look at verse 23, for the wages of sin is death. You have the road to hell and then you have the road to heaven. And there are only two possible destinations for human beings. In heaven, by God's mercy and faith in Christ and in hell, every other way that humans have ever lived. And sin leads to death.

When I was a teenager there was an anti-smoking campaign and you know the message they put on cigarettes and I don't know if they still do it. But one of the messages on the cigarette packet was, I'm now going to kill myself a little bit.

[ 29 : 14 ] I'm now going to kill myself a little bit. That's what we do with sin. And conversely, the opposite side of that is to obey God and to resist sin is to live more intensely, more beautifully, more satisfyingly.

It is to take another step on that conveyor belt towards heaven, to that wonderful new existence.

Not because we deserve it. We deserve the wages of sin, but the gift of God is eternal life.

the free gift that God gives in his grace to his servants. So the choice is before you, choose this day who you will serve. Which master will you serve, sin or God?

Which destiny, death or eternal life? Which way of receiving it, by wages, work your own way, or by the free gift of God?

That president of America's minister was against sin and so is God. He is against sin. And that is because he wants you to live and not die.

[ 30 : 27 ] And so, this morning, don't cheat yourself. Don't destroy yourself. Don't give yourself to the wrong master. Don't take sin's wages.

Receive God's free gift. As Paul will say later, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercy of God to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Amen. Let's pray together.