

Who's Your Master?

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Unshakeable: Romans / Romans 6:15-23

Something that most people don't know about me is that I used to smoke cigarettes. I started when I was young, about 13 years old (Yeah, I know). I thought it was cool and all the guys I looked up to in the neighbourhood smoked and so I started smoking.

I quit smoking around the time I was 24 or 25 years old, right around the time we had our oldest child, I just didn't want to have that hanging over my head as a new father.

But here's what I hated about smoking the most, is that I was such a slave to that cigarette, like it ruled so much of my life. I hated smoking, I really did, but I couldn't stop. It was the first thing I thought about when I woke up, it was the last thing I did before I went to bed. I sacrificed time with family, it strained relationships and I spent so much money on cigarettes, I couldn't believe it. Every so often I would say, that's it, I quit, only to be right back smoking a few days, sometimes the next day. I finally had to get medical help to quit.

I was a slave to that cigarette and I hated it.

But here's what Paul says to us in our passage this morning. We are all slaves to something. The question isn't if you serve something, but who you serve. Like maybe it isn't cigarettes for you, maybe you're a slave to your career, or money. Maybe you're a slave to your reputation or self image, maybe you're a slave to lust or pornography. Maybe you're a slave to your own selfish desires, or anger.

The question isn't if you are a slave to something, but who you are a slave to. And really Paul tells us that it all comes down to two choices. Either you are a slave to sin or to righteousness, in essence either you are a slave to sin or to God.

And he sums up where it all leads to the wages of sin is death, but gift of God is eternal life.

Our passage this morning will force us to ask ourselves Who is my master? Who do I serve?

I'm not going to answer that question for you, but from our passage this morning there are three questions for us to wrestle with and how we answer them will speak volumes.

Who is your master? Who are you serving today?

Look with me at our passage this morning.

In Romans chapter 6 Paul has been dealing with the issue of sin in the life of the believer. And, at this point it was needed. Because up to chapter 5 everything was about grace. We are saved by grace, sustained by grace, grace is the air we breathe. He's reminded us over and over again, you cannot earn your salvation, you cannot maintain your salvation by your own effort, grace, grace, grace.

So much about grace that someone would ask, Paul if we cannot out sin God's grace, if the more I sin, the more grace abounds to me, does that mean I have a blank cheque, that I can just presume upon God's grace and forgiveness with reckless abandonment?

And Paul comes to chapter 6:2 and says by no means! Absolutely not! How could you even suggest such a thing?

And in the first half of chapter 6, Paul delves into the power we have in the resurrected life of Christ. That you and I struggle with sin because we don't realize that sin no longer has power over us, sin is a defeated emperor.

That when you place your faith in Jesus, spiritually you are united with Him in His death, that old person who was ruled by sin has died, they don't exist any longer, how can you still live in something you have died to?

But not only are we united to Jesus in His death, but in His resurrection! We have died, but we have been given new life in Christ and in this new life we are no longer bound to sin, but we live for God.

The key to overcoming sin, Paul said, is in recognizing the power of our union with Jesus, united in His death and His resurrection.

But, here's the thing — you and I still have a choice. Sin is no longer your master, you as a believer can choose to serve sin or to not serve sin.

If you don't know Jesus, if you don't have a relationship with Him, sin is your master. You may not realize it, but you do what sin tells you to do, when sin tells you to do it. You follow your desires and passions and give no thought to the desires of Christ.

But child of God, you have a choice. Sin is no longer your master — but do you still choose to serve sin?

See Paul comes to the second half of chapter 6 and he's still dealing with the same question, but this time it's a slightly different framework. In verse 14, Paul leaves off with the statement — sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law, but under grace.

And the Jewish readers especially would pick up on that and say — wait a minute Paul, are you saying we don't have to obey the Law?

The Law here is specifically the Old Testament Law that God gave to Israel, that showed them exactly what it looked like to walk in faithful relationship with God.

But Paul, you are saying we are no longer under the authority of that law, but under the authority of grace — so does that mean we don't have to obey God?

That's the question he once again is anticipating in verse 15.

[Romans 6:15](#) — What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

It's a subtle difference from the issue before. The issue in verse 1 was — can we just sin recklessly because grace abounds? But here he's saying — do we have to walk in obedience if we aren't under the law?

Are you saying Paul, we don't have to obey God?

And again, his response is so strong, so sincere — by no means! Absolutely not.

Someone put it this way — freedom from the Law doesn't mean freedom from God, it means freedom *for* God.

Like, let me just put this simply — if you refuse to obey Jesus, you are not a follower of Jesus. It's that simple. You cannot separate the two. You cannot decide that you want everything Jesus offers but not obey Jesus. To make a decision to follow Jesus is to make a decision to obey Jesus, to obey His Word, to live a life that is pleasing and honouring to Him. You cannot follow Jesus and live by your own rules — that's not following Jesus, that's following yourself.

So how do I know? How do I know who I truly serve?

Well, here's the first question to ask yourself...

Who Are You Choosing to Obey?

Look what Paul says in verse 16.

Romans 6:16 ESV

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 of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

This may sound strange to us, because it's speaking to a culture we aren't a part of, but this is imagery Paul's audience would immediately understand, because slavery made up almost 80% of the Romans workforce some historians say.

And we've said this before, but it doesn't make it right, that slavery in Romans time was not like in more modern history, the slave trade that is the black eye on American history.

Some of the most respected people in society were slaves, you could be a doctor, a teacher, an accountant, you could manage a whole household. And slavery wasn't racially based, it really showed no prejudice, people entered slavery for all kinds of different reasons, you could earn an honest living as a slave, but some people went into slavery to pay off debts, others to avoid prison.

And that's why this imagery may sound strange to us, but makes sense to the original audience, when Paul says that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves... we would think, like why would anyone present themselves to be a slave, why would anyone choose to be a slave, but people regularly did, the image here is of a person showing up at someone's doorstep and saying can I serve you, can you be my master?

And that may make sense if you knew that your master is a kind, gentle, fair person, that makes sense if you knew there was something to gain from submitting as a servant, but not if the person you're submitting to is a harsh master.

See this is Paul's whole point, think about what he's getting at. He is saying who you choose to obey is your master, that every time you go back to that sin, you are all over again presenting yourself as a slave to sin, you are making sin your master.

"The master we obey shows whose slaves we are."

Like every time I put that cigarette in my mouth and lit up, I was submitting to that cigarette as my master, I was doing what the addiction told me to do and Paul is making this case for every sin we give into.

Every time you give into that anger you're making yourself a slave to that anger. Every time you click on that pornographic website, you are making yourself a

slave to that image. Every time you go back and manipulate that situation to protect your reputation, you're making yourself a slave to what people think of you. Every time you chase that next purchase, that next raise, that next deal because it's never quite enough — you're making yourself a slave to money.

Every time you choose to obey sin, you are presenting yourself as a slave to sin and what we often forget is that sin is a harsh, harsh, master who shows no mercy.

See, if we're wrestling with who is our master, ask yourself who do you obey?

This is a very practical question, and we're talking about overall trajectory.

Like, I get it we all struggle with sin, there are times that each of us fall, but if you are looking over your daily routine, your daily schedule, the choices that you make each day, ask yourself who am I regularly submitting myself to?

See, the thing about masters is that you can't have two of them, you can't serve two masters. Because what each master demands of you is going to conflict with the other.

Jesus said this... in the Sermon on the Mount. He told us you cannot serve two masters, you cannot serve God and the World, you will either end up hating the one or loving the other.

You have to choose, we all serve someone, we all serve something, the question is does what you serve lead to life?

See, sin is harsh, hard and merciless. Sin leads to death. We forget that sometimes, don't we? We wonder why we're still stuck, why we look around and there doesn't seem to be life, only chaos and pain. Ask yourself who do you choose to obey?

See the key word that is implied is choice... that **if** you present yourselves, if means there is a choice. It's this truth that carries over from the first half of

chapter 6 where Paul says in verse 13, do not present your members to sin, don't let sin reign and make you obey its passions.

The whole idea is that now, by faith in Jesus Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit that lives within us, we can choose. We didn't have that choice before — sin was our master and we obeyed it. But now we can choose.

But here's what I want you to see — that choice doesn't start with your willpower. It starts somewhere deeper than that. It starts in your heart.

Which brings us to the second question — where does your heart lean?

Which Way Do Our Hearts Lean?

Where does your heart lean?

Look with me at verses 17-18.

Romans 6:17-18 ESV

17 But 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, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Notice that Paul is praising God because there has been a difference in the life of these believers, you were once slaves of sin, and now become obedient... but notice who he is praising.

He's not praising the believers for their efforts, no.

But thanks be to God, why? Because God is the one who has done the work in their hearts. Oh sure it's playing out in their actions, but they are working out what God is working in them.

This is what grace does in the life of the believer. It doesn't just give us forgiveness, the grace of Christ does a work in our hearts. That's what's going on, they are able to be obedient, because God has done a work in their heart.

You who were once slaves to sin have become obedient from the heart...

We've said this so many times, sin is so much more than our actions and our behaviours. Sin finds its root in our hearts, long before we sin by action, it starts with a desire in our hearts. This is why Jesus said, out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

God says in Jeremiah that our hearts are desperately wicked.

We need more than just forgiveness of sin, we need a heart transplant and when we place our faith in Jesus, grace does more than just grant us forgiveness, grace gives us a heart transplant.

The question to ask yourself, is like, if you're wondering who's your master, or who is it that you serve...ask yourself, which way does my heart lean?

See, if God has done a work on your heart, you begin to grow in the desires of God. Now, some of this you'll notice right away, I love to tell the story about when I first gave my life to the Lord that I went home and dumped out all my alcohol and all my gangster rap CDs and that was the start.

What I didn't realize is that my issue of sin ran far deeper than that, that the closer I grew to Jesus the more I became aware of sin that I didn't even know was in my life. Watching God do a work on my heart over the years, slow, sometimes painful, work of removing my love for sin in my life.

This process of changing my heart, growing me in righteousness and Christlike character is what's called sanctification, you see that word used in verse 19.

See what Paul says.

Romans 6:19 ESV

¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. 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.

That key word there sanctification, is the word that is used to describe our ongoing growth in Christ.

Each of us are at different phases and stages of growth, but there are signs in our lives of growth, that I am not who I want to be, but I am not who I used to be, that as I look over my life I can see how far Christ has brought me. There is growth in holiness and desires for things that lead to life instead of death.

This is the work that God does in us, it's this empowering work of grace that enables us to say no to sin and yes to righteousness, but notice the chief tool, go back to verse 17. Notice the chief tool that God uses in this change.

Romans 6:17 ESV

17 But 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.

Do you see that phrase, the standard of teaching to which you were committed? What's Paul getting at here, what's that standard of teaching? Well, he's talking about his teaching, about the teaching of the Apostles, and what they were teaching was none other than the words and commands of Christ.

This is the great commission, isn't it? That Jesus gave to His disciples. To go and make disciples, yes baptizing, but He says teaching them to obey all the things I have commanded you, that's what Paul is talking about.

This Word, God's Word is the standard of teaching, and what Paul is saying is that the obedience that God is producing in their heart is a direct result of their submission to the authority of God's Word over their life.

This speaks volumes to why so many Christians are stunted in their growth, because growth in holiness, growth in sanctification, and heart posture is directly tied to our understanding and submission to God Word.

You cannot grow in holiness if you are not growing in God's Word. You cannot grow in sanctification if you are not submitting to God's Word, that's the key.

Notice the standard of teaching that you were committed to... you and I are committed to the truth of this Word, this standard of teaching. That word, committed, carries the idea of submission, you don't just hear God's Word, we submit to it.

And until I commit to understanding the truth of it, and submitting to the authority of it, there can be no true and lasting growth in sanctification.

How do I know who my master is, how do I know who I serve?

Which way does your heart lean this morning?

Does your heart lean towards the things of God? Is your heart, your life, your centre of being, is it being shaped by the truth of God's Word. Do you submit to it, are you committed to it? Does your heart lean towards the things of God... are you growing in holiness?

This is the key indicator isn't it? That even though you struggle with sin, you hate that you struggle with it. That when you do fall you hate that you've given in because your heart so longs for and desire to grow in holiness, to please the Lord.

The evidence of who your master is isn't that you never sin, it's that your heart longs for holiness, your heart desires to do the things of His Word, that even if you do fall, you come to Him in repentance, knowing that your master has better things for you.

God is doing a work in you...

But notice, we aren't passive in this sanctification, this growth. Notice the contrast, these two realities; side by side in these verses. In verse 17, Paul is talking about the work of obedience that God is doing in our hearts through His Word, but in that same breath he says in verse 19, that just as you once present your members as slaves to impurity, now present your members as slaves to righteousness.

It's not this passive sit idly by and allow God to do a work in your heart, no, no, God is doing the work, but you and I have to live it out, in everyday choices...

One doesn't fall into sin and say, oh well, I think God is working out something in me – no, you say, I've fallen but tomorrow I'm going to get up and fight all over again. Instead of presenting my members to unrighteousness, I'm going to make the choice to live for righteousness.

God has placed this ability in you and I, but we still have to live it out.

Like the musician who has been gifted with an incredible gift of music, but never plays a note, or a singer who has an amazing voice, but never opens their mouth, like a runner who has the gift of supernatural speed, but never runs a race...

We have been gifted with the Holy Spirit, the truth of God's Word, the grace that empowers us to overcome sin, but it is only as useful as we choose to live it out.

So, we've talked about who you obey and where your heart leans — but here's the thing, eventually what's on the inside shows up on the outside. Your life will tell the truth about who your master is. Which brings us to the third question — what is your life producing?

What Is Your Life Producing?

If you're wondering who it is that you serve, answer the question what is your life producing?

We look at Paul's words there in verse 20-23.

Romans 6:20–23 ESV

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads

to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul wants us to think back to when sin reigned in our life, and he's honest, you didn't have this burden of striving for righteousness, of striving for holiness, you were free from that, but he says to remember what fruit you were getting from that life.

We seem to forget sometimes the fruit that came with living for our flesh and our sin, we kind of romanticize it don't we? I find myself even doing that, like my kids love to hear stories about Dad from the past. In fact, whenever we spend time with friends or relatives that knew me before I followed Jesus, they want to hear about Dad before he was a pastor, and sometimes as we're sharing those stories, there's laughter about how foolish I was or how crazy a night was, there is this kind of romanticizing of the past.

You know what we leave out of the stories? The shame I felt the morning after those crazy nights, the issues of my own self esteem. We leave out the pain that I caused, the broken relationships, the heartaches. We leave out the emptiness, the longing for meaning and purpose, the realization that all the places I was trying to find my identity and purpose were dead ends and left me feeling just as lost, just as empty as when I started.

We leave out the death.

There might have been a freedom in those days, but it was grim freedom, it was freedom that lead nowhere.

See, sometimes when we think about sin, we forget about the death. The enemy, he baits his temptation much like a fisherman baits a hook. When you put that fishing rod in the water, you don't want the fish to see the sharp hook, they'll never bite it, so you wrap it up nice and neat around that which is enticing.

And maybe you're here this morning and you know what – you praise God you don't have a past – maybe you grew up in a Christian home, maybe you've been following Jesus since as long as you can remember, and praise God for that. Praise God that He has spared you the pain, the memories, the shame of a past, don't ever look down on that.

And yet, you still feel that pull, that pull, whether you have a past or not, giving into sinful desires is tempting, freeing, but it leads to death.

What fruit Paul says, what fruit were you getting from those things that you are now ashamed?

For the end of those things is death.

We compare that with what Paul says in verse 22.

Romans 6:22 ESV

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Compare the fruit, it's what it leads to isn't it? When you give your life over to God, when He is your master, when you serve Him, the promise isn't that life will be easier, the promise is the reward is greater, it will lead to sanctification, this progressive growth in holiness and in the end, eternal life.

Not just life after this life, but life, real life here and now. Jesus said I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly, abundant life, life as it was meant to be lived in relationship with the one who created you for Himself, a life with meaning, and purpose, and direction, and fulfillment.

A life that serves and heals and pours out into others.

This is life.

Ask yourself this morning what is your life producing, what fruit?

See the fruit of your life will reveal who you're serving.

There is no such thing as a fruitless Christian, there is fruit in your life, but the question is what kind of fruit?

Is it fruit that leads to life, or fruit that is producing death?

Paul sums it all up in that last verse doesn't he?

Romans 6:23 ESV

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What is your life producing?

Notice the wording there, the wages of sin, wages is something you earn, something you work for, wages come through burden and trial don't they?

If sin is your master, the burden your earning is death, but notice what comes from God, not wages, but a gift, submitting your life to God results in a gift, His gift is eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ.

Life – because Jesus laid down His life for you. Life, because Jesus was resurrected for you. Life, because He has defeated sin and death and the penalty – the wages – the burden, the shame and the destruction that comes from it.

You know what's interesting, is that today, if I smell a freshly lit cigarette, my mind still goes back to oh man, that smells good. That addictive place in my brain lights up and says remember, remember that first cigarette with that coffee in the morning, oh, wasn't it the best?

And when I first quit smoking, it was the hardest, but here we are 17, 18 years later and you realize, man I've come so far, there is no way I could go back. Why, why would I ever place myself back under the bondage of nicotine, knowing what a harsh master it is.

I don't say this to condemn anyone who smokes, folks I'm just sharing my story.

I do think, it speaks volumes to what Paul is trying to communicate to us in this passage.

We all serve something or someone.

You've asked yourself three questions.

Who do I choose to obey, which way does my heart lean, what is my life producing?

Those are diagnostic questions that reveal truth to our lives.

And maybe, you're here and you recognize, no, no I'm not perfect, but I strive after serving the Lord with all that I have, I serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and I might fall, but my heart is for Him.

Then praise God for that, praise God for the work He has done in your life, producing obedience from your heart.

But maybe you're here and you realize, you know what? I say I love Jesus, but I find myself submitting to sin more often, or my heart still leans towards the things of this world or maybe you're looking around and you're seeing a lot of death, destruction and defeat because of some past choices.

This message isn't to condemn, but to hold out those choices one more time and today you can make the choice for the first time or all over again.

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, and my prayer for you this morning is that you would choose life.

Life that comes only by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You can today submit your life to Jesus for the first time or all over again.

Let's pray.