

Romans 6: 15 – 7:6 Slave or free?

1. Reflect on your life before you became a Christian and compare it to who you are today. Were there things that you placed a much higher value and importance on before, that have changed since becoming a Christian?
2. In Bob Dylan's song from the 1970s, "You Gotta Serve Somebody" the refrain is:

*You're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed,
You're gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody*

The song allows no room for neutral ground, clearly conveying the idea that everyone is indeed serving someone, without exception. See Romans 6: 16 below, which conveys a similar message. Paul starts out with the phrase "do you not know" which implies that for Paul, this is a fundamental truth that everyone should know. How do you respond to this passage? Does it ring true to you? Explain.

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?

3. Note Romans 6:19-23.

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 greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. ²⁰ When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- a) Paul compares what it was like before when we were slaves to sin and after we became slaves to righteousness. Does this comparison raise any particular insights for you on the new life in Christ?
- b) What do you think verse 20 means i.e. in what sense were we "free in regard to righteousness" before we became Christians?

c) How do you understand the irony implicit in verse 22, which talks of being “freed from sin” but “enslaved to God.” How is it possible for Christians to be both free and slave?

d) The passage speaks of both righteousness and sanctification. Are they the same thing? If not how are they different? (*Hint: Sanctification is “the act of making a thing pure and holy.”*)

4. Read Romans 7:1-6.

a) Consider the first 3 verses from this text. How is Paul using the illustration of marriage in this passage?

¹ Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during that person’s lifetime? ²Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. ³Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

b) Note Romans 7:6 below. How can you nurture the new life of the spirit?

But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.