

Worship 11_21_2021

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00:03

Thank you for that offertory a moment ago, we are going to take some time now to get into God's word a little more deeply. So as I invite you to do each week, I hope that you have a copy of scripture out and open in front of you. If that's a personal Bible or Bible app that you have, I invite you to have that out if you need something, there are read Bibles available in all the pews. And we will again this morning be in the book of Romans, which is in the New Testament. After you go past the four gospels in the book of Acts, then you will find Romans and we'll be in the end of chapter six. Looking at the first little bit of chapter seven here, together. Everything that we do, really is ultimately offered up in service to something our actions or attitudes, it can be directed towards our own self good towards the pursuit of our unchecked desires, or our actions or attitudes that can be directed towards something higher, something better, we can offer ourselves up in service to that which leads to death, or we can offer ourselves up in service to the source of life. This fall, we've been studying the book of Romans here together, and we come to another section in this letter where Paul is presenting a set of mutually exclusive options. Another time where this is a zero sum game, he is saying it is either one or the other. Either, we offer ourselves up in service to sin, or we offer ourselves up in service to God. And maybe that sounds a little too blunt to you, maybe it doesn't seem nuanced enough, it seems like a rather simplistic or unsophisticated take on things. But I want to try to see what scripture has to say about that. With you here this morning. Before we do that, I'd like to invite you once more, to pray with me. Great and gracious God, we thank you for this time that we have to be here together today. Lord quiet are distracted minds, calm are distraught hearts. Let us hear what it is that you have to say. And let us respond then in ways that demonstrate our love for you, and our love for others. And Father, I do pray that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts would be acceptable in Your sight. We pray this in the matchless name of Jesus, the Christ, amen. If you've been here, throughout Psalm, or most of this time, you're probably getting a little tired of hearing the recap, but I want to offer it to you just because this is a letter that has a very sustained flow of thought. And so if you're new or you've missed a couple, it's not as if we are just jumping in right to the middle of things here, with no context whatsoever. This is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in the ancient city of Rome. And it was a pretty diverse group of Christians there are many of them had come out of an ethnically and culturally and religiously Jewish background, and many, from an ethnically and culturally and religiously Gentile backgrounds. So they had questions about how does all this stuff relate to us? Does God work the same way with both groups? And what about the times we don't agree with one another, and Paul begins right at the onset of the letter to say, I've got good news for you. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone, everyone who believes that he switches gears pretty hard, though, and says, now there's bad news. And that is that every single one of you has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, every one of us, there's not a single person who's righteous. So you need this good news. It's not about what you perform. It's about what God has promised. And he gives a bunch of examples of that highlighting all around this idea that this is a free gift that comes to us in Jesus Christ, we are made righteous, made right with God, not through our own efforts, but through what God has done for us through what He has given us, in Jesus. And he's been presenting that for a while. And he moves on into this section where he

addresses some of the questions that typically come up. Paul had been planting churches he'd been preaching he'd been teaching for years at this point, and he knew the kinds of questions that people would have, when you are presenting a message like that when you're saying it's not about what you do. It's about what Jesus has done for you. He knows that there are questions that often come up in this part of the letter. Then he goes through a series of these three rhetorical questions. We looked at the first one last week today, we're going to look at the question he raises and the way that he responds to this second to kind of a rhetorical question, but I want to give you a little disclaimer on the front here, especially to look at the beginning part of this passage, he uses an illustration that may not sit comfortably with everybody, I understand that. So I'm going to definitely say a word about that. Try to address what he's getting out with that particular illustration, and then see what it is that God is trying to show us through that. So first, here's the passage. This is Romans chapter six, I'm going to read verses 15 and down through 23. And I invite you once more to listen to the word of the Lord.

04:47

What then, are we to sin because we are not under law, but under grace? By no means? Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves? One whom you obey either of sin which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness. But thanks be to God that you who were one slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness. 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. For when you were slaves to sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 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. But now that you have been set free from sin, and become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification, and it's an eternal life, For the wages of sin is death. But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. I'd like to consider with you here this morning verse, this imagery, this illustration that Paul is using, I do want to acknowledge that and look at that. And then we'll look at the second of these three rhetorical questions that he asks, in this middle part of the letter. This is the second one that comes up where he says, What then and poses a question. And then finally, we'll see the point he is making here that we have been set free, so that we can serve in a new way. We have been set free, so that we can serve in a new way. I want to take a moment, though, as I said at the beginning, just to understand Paul's illustration here, you may read this section, you may hear this section look at and say, Why? Why use the metaphor, the language, the imagery of slavery, why pick that one is something that you're using? Certainly we are aware of just the abject wickedness of that practice in our own historical context, and also the horrific ways that it's still being practiced around the world. So you say, why is that the one that you're using their principle of good communication, just in general is using using imagery using illustrations that your audience understands is going to resonate with them. I've had an opportunity to preach in a number of different international settings. And I can tell you, one of the biggest challenges there is to find an illustration that's going to work across some of those differences across some of those contexts. I can remember one time a few years ago, preaching with our team when we were down in Guatemala, and it was using an interpreter and I decided to you try to use this illustration about when the Greenfield bridge had been recently demolished, I'd used it here and it seemed to be effective down there, it was not, not at all. You got to find an illustration that's going to connect with people that they're gonna understand. And so at the time, Paul wrote this, at the time, Paul wrote this, some historians estimate that as many as much as a third of the population of the entire Roman Empire were enslaved peoples. And there could have been as many as four times as many people who were or had been enslaved as those who were free Roman citizens. Now, the system there, I mean, it differed significantly from the kind of chattel slavery that we see in a lot of Modern History Settings. For example, many people entered into it voluntarily for a short period of time as a way to pay off their debts. So it's a little different, but it's still not a good thing. There's no it's not a good thing. So why use that again? There's a New Testament scholar and commentator named Richard Longenecker, who I think put it well he was he said this in his outreach to pagan Gentiles, Paul evidently came to realize the impact of the analogy in the language of slavery

had in conveying the Christian message dramatically to those particular hearers. Yet, he seems also to have felt that criticism, that slave analogy and slave language are not only unworthy, but also demeaning when speaking about one's relationship with God. And that seems to be why in verse 19, Paul says this in verse 19, he said, I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. He acknowledges that. So I mean, as smart as we all like to think that we are we have no understanding of spiritual truths on our own. Sometimes we need analogies, illustrations, even if they're not perfect to communicate the kinds of things that we need to know. So I just want to acknowledge that because Paul uses an illustration here, that would have immediately landed with great power total impact upon that congregation upon the group of people who were there, even though he himself acknowledged some of the limitations of that. But lest we miss the main point of what he's getting at here, the main point I think, is pretty clear. He's saying either we are offering ourselves up in service to one thing, or to the other. There's two options. This is another place in the letter we says either one thing or the other. So I want to look at the second rhetorical question now that he has in this particular section in the letter is in verse 15, right at the beginning.

09:48

This is the second time that Paul asked a rhetorical question there. He says, What then are we to sin? Because we are not under the law, but under grace? And this is a variation of the question indeed asked earlier, if you remember last week in the beginning of chapter one is where he said, Are we to continue sinning? So the grace might abound? It's a slightly different question. But it's a variation on that same theme people are hearing. It's not about what you do. It's about what God has done. So the question is, well, if it's all about God's free grace, then does it matter how we live? If it's all about grace, it doesn't matter at all. How we live? The first question was a little bit different that one was, well, if the more I send, the more grace I get, I should get more grace by sending more impulses. That's not the way that it works. It's not the way that it works. At all here he is saying he's answering this question and people saying, well, if we're not under the law, because that's the point he built up to, he said, you're no longer under the law. So he knows the follow up question as well from not under the law. Meaning if I'm not compelled to relentlessly strive after self righteousness through perfect behavior, that's no longer the case. And I can do what I want, right? I can just go and decide what I think is best and follow that they're looking for a loophole, once again, it's the same motivation looking for a loophole that you can take advantage of. Just down the road is the Carnegie Library, I think most of you know that in like, every library everywhere, when you check out a resource, you're given a return date. And if you're late on returning that you incur a fee, except that they have established three locations that are fine free return sites, from there, and they're just trying to encourage people to use their resources. They want people to do that. And they're taking away barriers that might prevent them from doing so. But are there people who take advantage of that? who keep the resources for far, far longer than they should before returning them at one of the fine free locations? Of course there are? Have I personally benefited from one of those locations? Because I found a book under the couch that was embarrassingly late. Maybe. Paul's saying here, no, that's not the way it works. You're not under the law. That's not that doesn't have dominion over you, that's not controlling you. That doesn't mean you just get to do whatever. He knows the kind of questions that come up. He knows the objections. He's heard them all before. That's why he addresses them. And these are all about a misunderstanding of the gospel. He's addressing these misunderstandings. He's saying, yes, God's grace of bounds. It doesn't matter how much you say, in God's grace of bounds. That doesn't mean you sin more to try to get more grace. And here, he says, You're not under the law. That's not what you're under. But that doesn't mean that you're not under anything. He says, by no means here, I pointed it out to you last week, there's a particular grammatical construction that he uses in the Greek it's the strongest possible way that you can state a negative in the Greek language. He's saying no, absolutely, not. unequivocally, no, this is not how it works. We're made right with God through what Jesus Christ has done for us. But he says, that does not mean you get to just presume upon God's grace, you try to take advantage of His mercy. You get to do whatever you want, with no regard to what God has said before you no longer get to offer yourself up in service to sin. But your allegiance does get directed somewhere. That's what

he's getting at here. It does get offered somewhere we have been set free from sin, we've been set free so that we can serve in a new way. That's the purpose. That's the point. That's what he's getting at here. We've been set free so that we can serve in a new way.

13:16

Now on our own, we are in captivity to sin, not just here, but elsewhere. Scripture uses very strong language to talk about this relationship. Paul's slavery metaphor is just one of them. The way that sin has control in our life, the relationship that we have to Scripture speaks of in the strongest possible terms. That's because sin is so much more than just some bad habit that you can't shake, or some personal idiosyncrasy that other people just have to deal with, or some lamentable flaw that you just have to learn to live with. If you think that your sin is just an inconvenient imperfection, that's like thinking that an atomic bomb is nothing more than a backyard firework. Thing is bigger than this, we need to speak of it in the strongest possible ways. And in Scripture, our individual relationship with sin is often speaking of sin in these terms of captivity, and it was a way to intentionally echo the experience of the ancient nation of Israel when they were in bondage in Egypt. They were there. They were enslaved by the Pharaoh they were unable to deliver themselves on their own. That's yet another reason why this language is often used is meant to bring to mind that experience that God's people had. It's meant to show the totality of the tyranny of sin. It's in John 8:34, that Jesus himself Jesus Himself said, Anyone who sins is a slave to sin. So Scripture does speak of it in very, very strong language. But the major difference of our experience with sin, for example, and the experience of the ancient nation of Israel in Egypt, is that while we are held in captivity to sin, we also participate in it willingly and with great delight. Our very desires are very wills that have been corrupted, we indulge in all these idolatry. So although we cannot do otherwise, we also do so willingly. And that's the great difference there. That in fact that highlights just how thorough just how pervasive our captivity, the sin is, we present ourselves. Paul says Here we present ourselves as those enslaved to impurity, and lawlessness which leads to more lawlessness. And because of this, he has said many times here that God's just judgment does stand against us verse at the end of verse 21, is where he says, the end of those things, that is the goal, the result of those things, is death. That's where it's heading. The end of those things, he says, is death. And very famously, one of the more famous expressions, even in this letter is the beginning of verse 23, where it says the wages of sin is death. In other words, the only paycheck that sin ever earned you as it were, is a sentence of condemnation from the judge. He says, You're holding captivity to these things, you have to understand how strong that is, how thorough that is. And in Jesus Christ, we've been set free from these things we've been set free from that and given a gift of eternal life once more here we're reminded that this comes by grace alone. The second half of that verse, For the wages of sin is death is this, but the free gift of God? is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Do you see there's another strong contrast here? Do you see that one of those things we earn? One of them we do earn says you've earned death, through sin one of those things as a free gift. He's again presenting a very stark contrast, one of those is something you earn one of the something you don't earn, you don't earn eternal life. You haven't done anything to merit that you haven't achieved that that's a gift. What do you have achieved, he says, Nothing you should be boasting about, that he said, the fruit of those things is things we can look back on and be ashamed about. This is very strong language, it makes us uncomfortable. But it shows the highlight serves to highlight just how significant is good news is, because there's nothing we can do to rid ourselves of this to break free from this bondage. We can't come up with some brilliant escape plan to tunnel our way out of this prison. We've got to be rescued by someone from the outside. And that's true for us as individuals. It's also true for us as a people that you heard that great verse a little bit ago from First Peter, where it says that he has called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light so that you can proclaim His excellencies. And it's not just individuals, he said, once you are not God's people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy, we've been set free and this new life that we receive then is offered up in service to God.

He'd already introduced this idea just a little bit ago, back in verse four, this chapter was where he said that we are identified with Jesus Christ through His death. And just as he was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we might walk in a newness of life. He's already brought up that idea. That's the purpose that's the point. So that we can walk in a newness of life. Now here because he's using that particular illustration, imagery, he speaks about being slaves of righteousness and slaves of God. And again, that's forceful language, I understand. But the point is this your allegiance, your service, your labor, your life, your love. Those can only be offered up to one. Jesus again himself in Matthew 624 says, You cannot serve two masters. Because offered up in one direction and one only, and on our own in our sin, we are captive to those things, but having been set free from them, having been given the free gift of eternal life in Christ, Jesus, our Lord, we can offer ourselves up in a new way to God. That's why in verse 17, he speaks of becoming obedient from the heart. becoming obedient from the heart, we can turn away from those things that he says we look back on and now ashamed of, and we can pursue those things that lead to a greater intimacy with God. Another New Testament scholar, a guy named Douglas Moo said this in his commentary. He thus makes clear that Christians should serve righteousness with all the single minded dedication that characterize their pre Christian service of such idols as self, money, lost pleasure, power, is saying all the energy, everything that you directed towards pursuing those before, direct that to God, now. That's the change that's happened. And he uses another, perhaps unexpected illustration to make this point. There's another little passage we're going to look at here. Now I wanted to lead up to it though this is another illustration that would have landed differently, perhaps with his original audience than it does with us, but I want you to listen to it. This is the first few verses of chapter seven. It's the same train of thought. He's making the same point. He goes on to say this, or do you not know brothers, for I am speaking to those who know the law so that this particular part may have landed a little bit more forcefully with his with the Jewish Christian audience. That's what he's getting out here they may have, they may have connected with this a little bit better or more readily. He says, I'm speaking to those who know the law that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives for a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulterous 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 adulterous. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another team who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law, we're at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which hold us captive so that we serve in the new way of the spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. We serve in the new way of the Spirit. This section This illustration is talking a little bit more about our relationship to the law, that's been a major theme in this letter, a question that comes up. How does God's law function in the life of a believer and Paul has gone to great lengths to say that's not your ladder, by which you climb to God, that's not what it is. In fact, the first thing it does is it shows you how you're not there, it exposes your sin. It shows us the righteous standard that we don't live up to. On our own, you can't use that to solve the problem. He said, it has got to come from somewhere else, pointing back again to the righteousness received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. So here in this section, he's using a different illustration. And once again, don't don't press the details of it. Some of the details are a little hard to maybe line up, for example, Paul has been saying all to this point that we die to the law. But this illustration makes it seem like the law is the one that dies. So again, don't press the details too far. But the main point is clearly saying something has died. And that changes the status of things. Because something has died. He said, it's different now. You in Christ have been you increase that in Christ, you have died with him and his death, you've been raised with him in his life. So there's a different relationship here. Now, he said that law that had exposed your sin, it no longer stands in judgment against you because that sin has been dealt with. Something has changed. And it all builds up to that statement, right at the end is the last thing I just want to focus on with you here. It all builds up to that statement in verse six, where he says this has all happened so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, all of this that he's getting. And he says all of this happened, we have been set free so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit.

22:50

Now, having said free, though, that freedom is not it's not unchecked autonomy, it's not limitless permission. It's a freedom that actually trains us to walk in new ways to freedom that trains us to walk and live in new ways. I shared this with you two months ago, we got a puppy. And I used him as an illustration right when we got him and I've tried not to overuse this. And you guys can all get tired of hearing about that. But I'm doing once more this week, right? Because one of the things we're working on is showing him how to walk on a leash. He just wants to run around with reckless abandon, just go wherever you want as fast as he wants. But we live out in the East End. And there's some pretty busy city streets right there. He thinks that it's miserable, that we try to put this leash on him. But this is a way to keep him safe. It's not to punish him. We've been set free says so that we can serve in new ways. So there's a new way that you learn to live. He talks about walking in a newness of life. That's the intent here. We've been released from the crushing burden of the law, we've been released from the impossible task of trying to self manufacture our righteousness. But that doesn't mean we just get to run off into city traffic. We've been set free, he said, in order to serve in the new ways of the spirit of what What's this new way of the Spirit look like? The new way the Spirit? What's that look like? That's the only time that that particular phrase shows up in Scripture, the new way of the Spirit that that phrase, it's the only time that particular phrase shows up there. And unfortunately, there's not a footnote that gives us a clear, simple definition of this. However, back in verse 22, and throughout that first part of chapter seven, Paul is talking about fruit that comes out of our life. He's talking about bearing fruit fruit that leads to sanctification fruit that leads to eternal life. And all throughout the New Testament fruit refers not only to specific actions, but also to just the general character that we develop. It does refer to specific actions, but fruit refers to also just the general character we have that is meant to reflect more and more the image of Jesus. So the new way of the Spirit is a way of bearing the fruit of the Spirit. And the fruit of the Spirit. We're told in the book of Galatians is love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. His gentleness, self control. Those are the things that are supposed to characterize the lives of us once we have been brought out of death and into life in Jesus the new way, the spirit is marked by those things characterized by those things in all that we do. And that can happen only, only when we draw near to Jesus in faith, when that Spirit works in us and through us to bring about this change, because something has changed. In recent months, you may have seen that a lot of economists a lot of sociologists have been writing about what they call the Great resignation, which generally refers to the vast number of people who have left their jobs during this time of COVID 19 pandemic, usually, because they're hoping to find something better and it's happening. It's happening at extraordinary levels, not only in the United States, but also around the world. And I've spoken with many of you who have gone through something like that, or perhaps are thinking about something like that. And in a way, in a way, Paul is talking about the great spiritual resignation that takes place when we call upon Jesus Christ in faith, though it's far more significant than a voluntary vocational change. He says you can no longer offer yourself up in service and devotion to those things that had held you captive. Instead, you offer yourself up in service and devotion to the one who has set you free in the first place. You live. You love you labor in new ways, and you bear fruit that bears witness to the fact that we who were dead in our sin, have now been made alive together with Jesus Christ. And if you've been made alive, then you need to live. And that's what we're called to do. As we serve in these new ways, in the spirit. Let's pray together. Majestic and merciful God, we thank you for calling us out of death and into life. enable us by your Spirit to live in the new ways that you have set before us. Help us to turn from sin and to rest in our Savior. For it's in his name, we pray amen.