

I. Introduction. Romans 6:15

A. Story: August 23, 1973, escaped convict Jan-Erik Olsson held up a bank in Stockholm, Sweden

1. Four employees taken hostage and kept in a bank vault, demanded money, a getaway car and the release and delivery to him of another convict. The Swedish police delivered all of this.
2. Olsson, while holding the hostages in this awful situation, extended small kindnesses and comforts to them: calls to family, wool jacket, souvenir (bullet).
3. The hostages began to form an odd bond with their captors, on a first-name basis and even began to fear the police more than the captors.
4. "After Olsson threatened to shoot [one of the hostages] in the leg to shake up the police, the hostage recounted to The New Yorker, "How kind I thought he was for saying it was just my leg he would shoot."
5. When the police finally used tear gas to force the convicts to surrender, it was reported that as they left the bank vault, "the convicts and hostages embraced, kissed and shook hands. As the police seized the gunmen, two female hostages cried, 'Don't hurt them—they didn't harm us.'" While one hostage was wheeled away in a stretcher, she shouted to one of the handcuffed captors, "Clark, I will see you again." Even more surprising, months later after the convicts returned to prison, some of the hostages went and visited them there.
6. The public and police were utterly confused by the attachment that these hostages had formed with their captors. Soon, psychiatrists labeled this phenomenon as "Stockholm Syndrome."

B. This is a striking picture of how those who follow Jesus so often struggle to see that sin is not their friend but rather a cruel captor.

1. We who have been saved by the grace of Jesus were once held captive as slaves to sin but we have been freed. Yet so often we struggle with going back.
 - a. Despite the pain, damage, and captivity sin has caused us, there is a certain attachment and comfort we find in it.
 - b. We get so used to life in slavery to sin that we don't quite know how to navigate life "on the outside."
2. In today's passage, Paul shines light on our own personal Stockholm Syndrome. He wants us to see sin for the villain it is and that life in Christ is about the slow but steady unlearning of our way of life with sin as our master and the learning of our way of life with Jesus as our master.

C. Last week, imagery of death, this week imagery of slavery: prevalent in Rome

1. Paul also knows that this imagery can only go so far in expressing our relationship with God. In fact in verse 19 he calls this out saying "I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations" aka, "I'm using this image because it will help you understand, but the metaphor has its limits."

2. The big idea of this whole passage is this: If you've been set free from a cruel and abusive master, why would you want to keep obeying his commands? Grace isn't there to let sin, your old master, keep bossing you around. It's there to free you from him completely.
- II. 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 of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Romans 6:15-23)
- A. The grace of God has emancipated you from slavery to sin. Why obey your old master's commands?
 1. Every human being is in slavery to sin but it's not purely against our will. Certainly there are habits and addictions that take hold of us even when we don't want them to, but every single one of us has "presented" ourselves to sin. We have been willing participants in our own captivity.
 2. So when Jesus frees us from that sin by His death and Resurrection, what sense does it make to keep following our former master's commands?
 - B. It only makes sense to keep pursuing our sin if sin, rather than Jesus, is still our master.
 1. Sin is not a "fun thing" we get to do because Jesus forgives us. Sin is a curse, a cruel master, and the leading cause of death (100%) for all human beings.
 2. When we present ourselves to God for salvation, we are freed to disobey the commands of our former master, sin.
- III. But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching [the Gospel!] to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:17-18)
1. Through the Gospel message, you have trusted Jesus, and a complete change of ownership has happened.
 - a. Make no mistake, you are owned by something. The whole nature of being a created being means that you are not your own.
 - b. You will either be in rebellion to your Maker and belong to sin, OR you will receive the grace of your Maker and belong to Him.
 2. When Paul thinks about the Roman believers, he gives praise to God that these people who were once owned by the cruelty of sin have been thoroughly and completely bought by another master through the Gospel of Jesus.
 - a. If you are saved, the deed to your life and everything in it now belong to God.
 - b. This causes a transformation FROM THE HEART. Not just actions but also our will and desires!
 3. Like I said before, Paul is aware that this metaphor of slavery can only be applied so far when we're talking about our Father in Heaven:
- IV. 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. (Romans 6 :19)

- A. Though the imagery of slavery is not a perfect metaphor when we apply it to our God Who is loving, sacrificial, and tender towards us, one idea that does apply is that of total allegiance.
 - 1. If you belong to sin, your allegiance and actions will follow suit, and sin will be how you navigate this life.
 - 2. But if you belong to GOD, so too will your allegiance and actions follow. Holiness will begin to be how you navigate this life.
- B. It is so important to see the sequence Paul lays out here:
 - 1. FIRST, by the grace of God through faith, God declares you righteous. Before you could even do anything in alignment with righteousness, through faith and because of His mercy, He gives you the STATUS of righteousness.
 - 2. But what starts with new ownership—new standing—“leads to” sanctification.
- C. It is your loyal faith in Jesus that changes your status to “righteous.” It is in the grace-filled environment of righteousness that your holiness can grow.
 - 1. Righteousness is a GIFT of God that we have no part in other than receiving it by faith.
 - 2. This new environment of grace—being loved freely and forgiven totally—begins to change us, make us holy—what Scripture calls “sanctification”
 - 3. Like Jean Valjean in *Les Mis...* the grace of Bishop Myriel changes Valjean from the heart: “Do not forget, never forget, that you have promised to use this money in becoming an honest man.” Jean Valjean, who had no recollection of ever having promised anything, remained speechless. The bishop had emphasized the words when he uttered them. He resumed with solemnity:—“Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I buy from you; I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God.” (Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*)
- V. *For when you were slaves of 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 have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. (Romans 6:20-22)*
 - A. Every human is owned, either by sin which leads to death or by God which leads to eternal life.
 - B. Two roads: Servant of sin = fruit of shame and death; or servant of God = fruit of sanctification and eternal life
 - C. Pastor and scholar John Stott said it this way: “There is a freedom which spells death, and a bondage which spells life.”
- VI. *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*
 - A. We EARN death by being united to sin as our master. We are GIVEN eternal life by being united to Jesus as our master.
 - B. I think the combination of words Paul uses here is very intentional.
 - 1. What do you get with sin as your master? You get WAGES. This is a payout that is EARNED. You work and you earn a wage for that work. What is the wage you earn from sin as your master? Death.

2. What do you get with GOD as your master? A wage? No, you get a GIFT. A gift is not a payout for work you've done. It is unearned and undeserved. What is the GIFT that you get with God as your master? Eternal life.
3. That doesn't mean the gift costs nothing. You receive the gift based on the sacrifice of "Christ Jesus our Lord"

VII. Conclusion: How do we let this truth actually change us, transform us, and make a real difference in our war with sin right now?

- A. Be aware of your mindset, asking God to show you truth about your motives.
 1. Do I look at God as someone Who must forgive me when I do the sins I want
 2. Do I look at God as someone Who will forgive me and FREE me from the sins I want to conquer? In other words, is my intention to use God as a "fixer" Who cleans up sin I that I have every intention of continuing? Or is He a "liberator" Who will both forgive my sin and free me from its grasp?
- B. Daily and specifically confess your sin to God (and others!) and ask Him to protect you from running back to it. Confess your sin to trusted friends.
- C. Daily pursue intimacy with Jesus through His Word and prayer.
 1. There is no life-hack around this.
 2. You will not have victory over sin long-term by way of self-discipline only. It is GREATER desires that beat sinful desires.
 3. The more intimate you are with Jesus, the more precious of a treasure He and His holiness will be to you. The more you treasure Jesus, the less you'll treasure or feel comfort in the slavery of sin.
- D. Rebel against and wage war on your sin.
 1. If you had been in actual physical slavery and had been freed from it, how hard would you fight if that old slave master came back to abduct you and take you back to be his slave again?
 2. Sin is the most cruel and murderous master there has ever been. It no longer owns you. When it comes back around to enslave you, rebel and fight!
 3. Fight pride and pursue humility.
 - a. Pride will blind you to your failings and even justify them.
 - b. Christlike humility is the doorway to true repentance and sanctification.
 4. To the best of your ability, remove yourself from its influence. Don't go to the places where temptation is sure to be.
 - a. Actual places or situations that have proven to be too tempting
 - b. Friends who aren't friends because they lead you into sin
 - c. Isolating and being in situations where you can do anything you want without anyone knowing
- E. Give yourself grace.
 1. The righteous status of being "in Christ" is immediate. The process of sanctification happens over time.
 2. *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. (Romans 6:22)*

Through faith in Jesus, you are IMMEDIATELY purchased by God and then PROGRESSIVELY learn to live as His servant rather than sin's servant.

3. Day to day and week to week it is REALLY hard to see change in ourselves.
 - a. But in the same way that we don't see physical growth in our kids because it is so incremental and we see them every day, at some point all of the sudden we look at them and realize "How did you get so big?"
 - b. You will likely not perceive the changes in yourself day to day, but a year, five years, 10 years from now you will look back and in God's grace be able to say "It's unbelievable how God has changed me, not just in how I behave but in what I desire!"
 - c. If you don't extend yourself this grace it will be very tempting to give up.
4. And family, let's extend this grace to each other! When we struggle and sin, let's be honest about it to each other. Not only for accountability but also encouragement. When I fail, I need you to help me repent and I also need you to lift my head.
5. Grace is what SAVED YOU and is also what will SUSTAIN YOU.

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