

EXPLANATION OF 45TH BIBLEBOOK

ROMANS 6:15-23 (April A.D. 67)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an example of the good order how to build up Christians:

- Romans 6:1-10 is a doctrinal exposition 'what to believe' – sound faith.
- Romans 6:11-16 is an exhortation 'how to live' – consistent application.
- Romans 6:17-23 is an encouragement with regard to 'the progress already made' – encouragement to persevere.

OUTLINE

Romans 6:14 ended with the statement: “Sin shall not be your lord!”

The question then is: “Who is your Lord?”

(II) 6:15-23. Who is your Lord: God or sin?

- a. Every human being has a lord and is a slave (6:15-16).
- b. Transferring from one lord to another (6:17-18).
- c. Practically promoting righteousness and holiness (6:19).
- d. The slavery to sin and the slavery to righteousness exclude one another (6:20-23).
- e. The absolute necessity for Christians to live a holy life!

EXPLANATION

(II) 6:15-23. Who is your Lord: God or sin?

Paul exhorts Christians that they have the responsibility to live the righteous and holy life.

a. Every human being has a lord and is a slave (6:15-16).

6:15. What then? Shall we sin (vsaa) because we are (vipa) not under law but under grace? May (this) not be (voad) (i.e. By no means)!

6:16. Don't you know (by relationship, reflection, intuition)¹ (vira) that to whom you put yourselves at the disposal (vipa) as slaves to² obey, you are (vipa) slaves to the one whom you obey (vipa) – whether³ of sin (leading) to⁴ death, or⁵ of obedience (leading) to⁶ righteousness?

People under the law and people under grace.

People under law (for example the religious Jews)⁷ try to be justified (saved) in God's eyes and please God by doing the works of the law and by doing this in their own power. Such people do not have the legal state of righteousness (justification) and also do not have the moral condition of holiness. They are *not able* to live the new, righteous and holy life, because in their human natures they are still slaves to sin (6:16) and because their goal and motivation is to be justified before God by keeping the law⁸. People 'under law' remain slaves of the law and slaves of sin. They used to offer the members of their bodies in slavery to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness (6:13,19). They are under the control of wickedness (6:20) and do shameful things (6:21).

But people under grace (Christians) have been justified (saved) by God's grace through faith. Such people have the legal state of righteousness (justification) and the moral condition of holiness! They are *not able* to continue to live in sin, because in their human natures they have become slaves to God (6:22), slaves to righteousness (6:18) and slaves to obedience (6:16). They offer the members of their bodies in slavery (service) to God's righteousness leading to holiness (6:19). They are under the control of righteousness (6:20). The benefit they reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life (6:22). Romans 6:14 said, “You (Christians) are not under law, but under grace.”

But if Christians are no longer under law, does this mean that they are at liberty to sin (as the Antinomians taught)? Paul says, “By no means!” (6:15). Paul continues to address the issue of sin and not the issue of the law. He speaks against people who continue to live in sin.

Christians must no longer be slaves of sin, that is, they should no longer be slaves of their sinful natures and do the sinful deeds that belong to the sinful nature. Instead Christians must be slaves of obedience to God (Christ), slaves of righteousness. Obedient Christians are committed to live out of their righteous and holy state and do righteous and holy deeds. John 15:15 and Galatians 5:1 teach that only submission to Christ leads to true freedom.

¹ G: oida

² G: eis

³ G: eis

⁴ G: eis

⁵ G: é

⁶ G: eis

⁷ and religious Muslims

⁸ Galatians 3:10-11

In this context Paul illustrates the true state or condition of non-Christians or unbelievers with the picture of slaves serving their master 'sin'. And he illustrates the true state and condition of believers in Christ with the picture of slaves serving their master 'righteousness'.

Living under the master 'sin' or under the master 'righteousness'.

Before their conversion, people offered themselves to be slaves of their old master called 'sin'. They put themselves at the disposal of their sinful nature together with all its manifestations of disobedience. 'Sin' was such a powerful master, that people did not have the ability to do any good (in God's eyes), but only to obey evil. The consequence of living under the dominion of sin is 'death', that is, spiritual death now, physical death at the end of life on earth and eternal death in hell thereafter.

After their conversion, Christians offered themselves to be slaves of their new master called 'righteousness'. They put themselves at the disposal of their regenerated nature together with its manifestations of obedience. 'Righteousness' here refers to righteousness in all its aspects and virtually means the same as salvation in all its aspects (i.e. justification and sanctification)(cf. 5:17). 'Righteousness' is such a powerful master, that Christians have the ability to do what is good in God's eyes and actually obey everything that is good. The consequence of living under the dominion of righteousness is 'life', that is, new, spiritual and holy life now, physical resurrection after death and continuance of eternal life thereafter.

The consequences of service to the master 'sin' or the master 'righteousness'. Thus, Paul teaches that no human being can live without a master or a lord! No one in the world is really 'free' or 'independent', in the sense that he has no master over him. Everyone in the world has a master, under whose lordship he has put himself, and that master is either 'sin' or 'righteousness'.

The master 'sin' obligates people to put the members of their body as instruments of unrighteousness at the disposal of sin and this leads to 'death', that is, a condition of unrighteousness and unholiness. They are unable to resist sin and unable to obey God. But the master 'righteousness' obligates Christians to put the members of their body as instruments of righteousness at the disposal of Christ and this leads to a condition of holiness. They are able to resist sin and able to obey God. When a Christian knows that these are the consequences of service to sin and service to righteousness, he will tend to devote himself to continued faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

b. Transferring from one lord to another (6:17-18).

6:17. But thanks be to God that, though you were (viia) slaves of sin, you obeyed (viaa) wholeheartedly the pattern (form) of teaching⁹ to which you were delivered¹⁰ (by God)(viap).

6:18. and having been set free (vpap) from sin, you have become slaves (viap) to righteousness (i.e. you have entered the service of righteousness).

Before their conversion, Christians were slaves to sin (6:6,16); sin reigned as lord and master in their mortal bodies (6:12); they offered the members of their body to serve 'sin' (6:13,19) and obeyed the irresistible power of their sinful nature (6:16).

But after their conversion, Christians became slaves to God (6:22) and slaves to God's righteousness (6:18) and wholeheartedly obeyed the form (pattern) of teaching to which they were entrusted (6:17).

The pattern (form) of teaching. *The form of teaching' is the pattern or standard of Christian teaching, which was used by all the apostles and was recorded in the New Testament. It is the correct and fixed pattern of teaching the Christian doctrines¹¹. It is especially illustrated in the book of Romans and according to 2 Peter 3:12,14-16 was also well known by the apostle Peter. This correct and fixed pattern of teaching the Christian doctrines regulated the thinking, beliefs (convictions) and practices of Christians. It taught the only true method or way to a state of justification and holiness (namely, by faith) and the only true way to a life-style of sanctification (namely, by obedience). It is God's whole rule of faith and practice, that is, the doctrines that all Christians should believe and the practices that all Christians should obey within the Kingdom of God.*

In Acts 20:17-35, the apostle Paul says that his task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace included the unhesitating proclamation of "the whole will of God." The correct and fixed pattern of teaching the Christian doctrines contains the whole will of God. It teaches clearly the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and the relationship between God's Old Testament people, Israel, and God's New Testament people, the Church. It teaches all the important Christians doctrines and Christian ethics. It teaches the creation and the fall. It teaches the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It teaches the need to repent and have faith in Jesus Christ. It teaches all the important aspects of the Kingdom of God (the kingship or sovereign reign of God), which Jesus Christ taught in all his parables. It teaches what Christians must believe about sin and salvation and why Jesus Christ is the only Way to God and eternal salvation. It teaches what the Church and Church leadership are. It teaches the importance of the Bible as the

⁹ G: tupos didachés

¹⁰ G: paradidómi

¹¹ cf. 2 Timothy 1:13

only Word of God, of prayer, of obedience and of living a holy and victorious life. It teaches what Christian fellowship is and how Christians must be witnesses in the world. It teaches the biblical requirements and biblical tasks of elders. It teaches how Christians must respond to the false prophets of other religions and the false teachers that come to distort the truth of the Bible. It teaches God's answer to man's questions about 'where do I come from', 'who am I', 'why am I here', 'where am I going', and 'how do I have a significant life'. It teaches what Christians must know about relationships: friendship relationship, boy-girl relationship, marriage relationship, parent-child relationship (how to raise children) and yoke-relationships (relationships that God forbids). It teaches clearly about sex only within marriage and clearly that God hates all forms of sexual immorality. It teaches the Christian life-style and especially everything about how he must manage money. Etc.

Likewise in the book of the Romans, Paul taught about sin and judgement, about the only true method of justification and sanctification, and about glorification and practical Christianity. Christians today cannot and may not ignore 'the Christian form of teaching'! Whoever ignores the Christian form of teaching, that is, whoever ignores the whole will of God and the culture of the Kingdom of God, ignores God and will fall into liberalism and false teaching.

Christians are handed over (transferred) to this form of teaching. The text says, "You once-for-all wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you once-for-all were entrusted." The verb 'entrusted' means 'handed over into the custody of some authority (e.g. the police and the courts) and in this case 'handed over to the authority is God himself and especially to his whole will as revealed and formulated in the Bible.

Paul does NOT say that this correct and fixed form of teaching in the Bible was handed over into the custody of Christians or the Church, so that Christians may interpret and obey it as they please. Instead, he SAYS that all Christians were handed over into the custody of this correct and fixed form of teaching in the Bible, so that this revelation of God in the Bible may transform and determine the beliefs (convictions) and commitments of Christians!

God in his sovereignty has handed all Christians over into the custody of his whole rule of faith and practice. God has very clearly revealed to Christians what he wants all Christians to believe and to do. God's revelation of this "message of the Kingdom"¹², this "whole will of God"¹³, this "form of teaching" (6:17) is completely objective. It is the whole objective truth¹⁴. It is not subjective and not dependent on people's own interpretation or choice to obey or to disobey. Man did not invent it, but God did reveal it¹⁵. The matter of Christian doctrine and practice is decided by the sovereign God and not by any church denomination, not by any theologian, and also not by any famous church leader. God commanded Christians what to believe as Christians and how to live as Christians. Christians may not select certain things from the Bible to believe or to practice and ignore the rest. Christians are subjected to "the message of the Kingdom of God, that is, to the culture of the Kingdom of God"¹⁶, to "the whole will of God"¹⁷ and to "the form (pattern) of Christian teaching" (6:17)!

Christians wholeheartedly obey this pattern (form) of teaching. Christians were not passively transferred from one master to another. According to Romans 6:16-17, after God broke 'the power of sin' in them, they voluntarily, sincerely and gladly renounced their 'slavery to sin' and offered themselves to God and to obedience of God! This implies that the person that receives Jesus Christ as Saviour receives him as Lord! The person that comes to Jesus Christ for justification through faith also comes to Jesus Christ for sanctification through obedience! Obedience to the call to put our trust in Christ as our righteousness implies the call to put into practice the message about the culture of the Kingdom of God¹⁸, that is, to obey God's whole revealed will¹⁹! And God's revealed will comes to us in a correct and fixed form of teaching of doctrine and practice!

In order to grasp this correct and fixed form of Christian doctrine, Christians must do more Bible study and study whole Bible books within the contexts of the Bible books instead of only studying certain Bible verses that are scattered throughout the Bible.

c. Practically promoting righteousness and holiness (6:19).

6:19. I am speaking (vipa) in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh (natural selves)²⁰. For just as you used to put the members (of your body) at the disposal (viaa) of slavery to impurity and lawlessness leading to (i.e. for the promotion of) lawlessness, so now you must put (vmaa) your members at the disposal of slavery to righteousness leading to (i.e. for the promotion of) holiness. (i.e. enlist your bodily members in the service of ...)

How can Christians devote the members of their physical body to the service of righteousness?

¹² Matthew 13:19

¹³ Acts 20:27

¹⁴ John 17:17

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:9-10; cf. Deuteronomy 29:29

¹⁶ Matthew 13:19

¹⁷ Acts 20:27

¹⁸ Matthew 6:33; 13:19

¹⁹ Acts 20:27

²⁰ G: sarx

The Old and New Testaments emphasise the importance of the bodily members and other faculties of Christians in the struggle against sin.

Devoting the members of your body to righteousness and holiness.

- Guard *your heart* above all else (Proverbs 4:23).
- Use *your feet* to take only ways that are firm and not swerving (Proverbs 4:26-27).
- Control *your hands*, especially with regard to the opposite sex (Proverbs 5:15-21).
- Use *your tongue* to give gentle answers that turn away anger, appropriate replies and timely words (Proverbs 15:1,23).
- Use *your face* to express a cheerful look that brings joy to people (Proverbs 15:30).
- Use *your ears* to listen to advice and accept instruction (Proverbs 19:20).
- When you fall seven times, use *your feet* to always rise again (Proverbs 24:16).
- Use *your hands* to finish your higher priorities first (Proverbs 24:27).
- Use *our eyes* to observe and learn lessons (Proverbs 24:32).
- Use *your mouths* to speak patiently and gently, which is very persuasive (Proverbs 25:15).
- Make a covenant with *your eyes* not to look lustfully at a girl (Job 31:1).
- Use *your mind* to think about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8).
- Offer *your body* as a living, holy and pleasing sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1).
- Be transformed by the renewing of *your mind* in order to test and approve what is God's perfect will (Romans 12:2).

d. The slavery to sin and slavery to righteousness exclude one another (6:20-23).

6:20. For when you were (viaa) slaves of sin, you were (viia) free from righteousness (i.e. free from the control of righteousness or free from doing righteousness).

6:21. What fruit (i.e. benefit) then did you have (viia) at that time from the things you are now ashamed of (vipn)? Their end (is) death!

6:22. But now, freed (vpap) from sin and made (vpap) servants of God, the fruit (benefit) you have (vipa) (leads) to²¹ holiness. And the end (outcome)(is) eternal life.

6:23. For the wages (compensation) paid by sin (is) death, but the gracious gift of God (is) eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Slavery to sin. The meaning of these words is very clear: to be slaves of sin means to be enemies of righteousness. James says, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? *Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*²². It is impossible to be devoted to sin and to righteousness at the same time! Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon (an idol, money)²³."

The things Christians are now ashamed of are their former evil thoughts, leading to evil words, issuing in evil deeds, resulting in evil habits (cf. 1:18-32). The apostle Peter says, "You have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery (unbridled and unrestrained living, doing what the sinful nature demands), lust (wrong sexual desires and practices), habitual drunkenness, orgies (drunken parties, singing and swaying through the streets), carousing (drinking parties) and detestable idolatry (religious, philosophical and scientific idolatry)"²⁴.

The outcome of slavery to sin is death in the sense of spiritual death in the present²⁵, physical death at the end of life on earth²⁶ and eternal death in hell at the final judgement²⁷.

Slavery to God does not have the negative connotation of 'slaves to men' or 'slaves to sinful habits (i.e. completely controlled by men and sin). 'Slaves to God' describes the relationship of men to God in the sense that God *owns* them body and soul (cf. 1:1). Although Christians are slaves to God in that sense (i.e. owned by God), they are not called slaves and are not treated like slaves on earth and also should not have the attitude of slaves on earth. While in other religions the followers are called and behave like slaves on earth, Christians are called 'friends' of Jesus Christ instead, because everything, which Jesus Christ learned from God the Father, he made known to his disciples²⁸. They are called 'sons and daughters of God', because God chose them before the creation of the world and adopted them as his own

²¹ G: eis

²² James 4:4

²³ Matthew 6:24

²⁴ 1 Peter 4:3

²⁵ Ephesians 2:1

²⁶ Hebrews 9:27

²⁷ Revelation 21:8

²⁸ John 15:15

children²⁹. And they are called ‘brothers’, because Christians now belong to the same family (the family of God) as Jesus Christ³⁰.

Sin always has bad consequences: its compensation consists of spiritual, physical and eternal death. However God bestows the free and gracious gift which consists of eternal life! The gift is completely free for believers in Jesus Christ, but has been paid for by the precious blood (death) of Christ³¹.

The outcome of slavery to God, that is, of a life dedicated to God as one’s Lord, to his ‘form of teaching’ and to his service, is eternal life: that is, having assurance of eternal life and experiencing eternal life. Eternal life is above all an intimate and personal knowledge of God in Christ³², a personal relationship with him that never ends!

e. The absolute necessity for Christians to live a holy life!

What is holiness? Holiness is putting off the old man that lived before regeneration and putting of the new man that lives after regeneration. Our ‘old man’ or ‘old self’ was crucified with Christ (6:6). The tense of this verb indicates a *once-for-all decisive* putting to death of our unregenerate nature in its entirety. *Our ‘old man’ is our inward state and outward condition before our regeneration.* The old man is not regarded as being slowly put to death in a process over a period of time.

‘Holiness’ refers to *our ‘new man’, our inner state and outward condition after regeneration.* In Romans 6:19 and 22, the word ‘holiness’ does not refer to the process of being made more and more holy (sanctification), but rather to *the state of being made holy*³³. It is the God-given ability to resist sin and to obey him wholeheartedly by living the new life. In Romans chapter 6 *the emphasis is not on the process of sanctification, but on the state of sanctification, called holiness.* The emphasis is on the once-for-all-decisive break with sin and its power, and an ability and commitment to righteousness.

What is the purpose of holiness? The purpose of the once-for-all decisive crucifixion of our old man or old self was “to do away with the body of sin” and “to stop the slavery to sin”. *The ‘body of sin’ is our physical body as conditioned, controlled and used as an instrument by our sinful nature, that is, by the sinful tendencies that still dwell in the Christian.* The crucifixion of our old self was to render our body of sin powerless, ineffective, or even stronger, to wipe it out. The body of sin has already been sentenced to destruction and the sentence is now being carried out through living the new and holy life in the power of the Holy Spirit (8:13). When a person becomes a Christian, his physical body should no longer be conditioned and controlled by his sinful nature, but according to Romans 6:16, it should be conditioned and controlled by his regenerated state, that is, by righteousness that manifests itself in holiness or that manifests a resistance to sin and an obedience to God (6:18-19)³⁴.

What is the evidence of holiness in our life? The evidence of holiness in our life (being a new man) is death to the power of sin (6:2,7,11,14), that is, we show that we are no longer a slave to our sinful nature (6:6). The evidence of holiness is when we live the new life (6:4) and when we live ‘to God’, that is, live under the control of God, in obedience to God and in dedication to God. Obedience means obedience to the teachings and practice of the Bible (6:11,17). The evidence of holiness is when we offer the physical members of our body to God as instruments of righteousness (6:13,19) and when we wholeheartedly obey ‘the form of teaching’ to which we were subjected (6:17).

What is the motive of holiness? The most important doctrine in Romans chapter 6 is that, not the law, but grace is essential for the exercise of holiness, that is, for living the life of the new man (6:14). People who are ‘under law’ have a self-righteous or legal spirit and try to be justified by doing the works of the law. Their motive to obey the law is *fear of punishment* by God and their aim to obey the law is *to merit their justification (salvation) and to receive rewards* from God.

However, when people are ‘under grace’, they are deeply aware that they are already justified by God’s sovereign and free grace, which they have received through faith. Their awareness of God’s love for them awakens in them a holy desire and will to obey God. Their motive to obey God is *love for God*³⁵, and their aim to obey God is *to glorify God*.

What is the certainty of holiness? The certainty of our holiness (of being a new man, of having the state of holiness) is grounded in the *literal* death and resurrection of Christ two thousand years ago on the one hand and our *spiritual* death and resurrection in solidarity with Christ on the other hand (our baptism with the Spirit or our regeneration through the Spirit). Just as the certain consequence of Christ’s death was his resurrection, likewise the certain consequence of the Christian’s dying to the power of sin is a new, righteous and holy life! The death and resurrection of Christ renders the righteousness (justification) and holiness (sanctification) of Christians certain! Christians share in Christ’s death in

²⁹ Ephesians 1:5

³⁰ Hebrews 2:11

³¹ 1 Peter 1:18-19

³² John 17:3

³³ 1 Corinthians 1:30

³⁴ Galatians 5:16-26

³⁵ 1 John 4:18

order that they may share in Christ's life. Because of their once-for-all decisive spiritual death and resurrection in solidarity with Christ, Christians can and want to and will live the new resurrected life to God" (6:8-11)!

Therefore, Christians *not only should, but want to, can and will* offer themselves to God as his slaves (6:13) and to obedience of God's will (6:16)! Christians are not only *bound to obey*, but they are *made to obey* in spite of the resistance of their still imperfectly sanctified nature. They cannot but obey, because according to Philippians 2:12-13, "God works in them to will and to act according to his good purpose" (cf. 8:30)³⁶. Therefore we have the assurance that the power of our sinful nature shall never have absolute dominion or control over us anymore - not now and also not at any future time! God's grace, given to us in our spiritual death and resurrection in solidarity with Christ, ensures that we can and will realise what we should do! Victory is certain (8:31,37).

The struggle against sin is not hopeless, because the power of the sinful nature has been effectually (sufficiently) broken. The triumph of holiness has been effectually secured by the completed salvation work of Christ. This is really good news! This is the 'gospel'!

³⁶ Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 1:1-2