



Romans 6:15-23 (ESV)

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 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? 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. 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.

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.

Romans 6:15-23 (HCSB)

¹⁵ What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Absolutely not! ¹⁶ Don't you know that if you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of that one you obey—either of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching you were transferred to, ¹⁸ and having been liberated from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness. ¹⁹ I am using a human analogy because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you offered the parts of yourselves as slaves to moral impurity, and to greater and greater lawlessness, so now offer them as slaves to righteousness, which results in sanctification.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from allegiance to righteousness. ²¹ So what fruit was produced then from the things you are now ashamed of? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now, since you have been liberated from sin and have become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification—and the end is eternal life! ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

English Standard Version Bible - *Study Bible*¹

Romans 6:15-23

6:15-23 The question posed in [v. 1](#) is now explored from another angle, that is, shall a Christian continue to sin because sin's power over him is broken ([v. 11](#)) and thus there is little danger in sinning?

6:15 Paul emphatically rejects the idea that freedom from the old covenant era of being **under law** implies freedom to sin.

6:16 Moral decisions still matter for Christians. Giving in to sin results in people increasingly becoming **obedient slaves** to sin. (For a brief description of ancient slavery, see note on [1 Cor. 7:21](#).) This kind of activity eventually **leads to death**, not implying that genuine believers can actually lose their salvation but that sinning leads them in that direction, away from full enjoyment of life with Christ (cf. note on [Gal. 5:4](#)). Those who give themselves utterly to sin will die (face eternal punishment).

6:17-18 True Christians, however, will never live as slaves to sin, for God has transformed their hearts at conversion, so that they will now grow in their love of righteousness and in living according to God's Word.

6:19 Although Paul acknowledges that the illustration from slavery is imperfect, it nonetheless stresses the importance of giving oneself wholly to God rather than to sin.

6:20-21 When the readers were unbelievers, they were totally captivated by sin, and the end result of such sin is death (physical and spiritual death are probably both in view here). Sin always brings destructive results in people's lives.

6:22 Christians have a new status and a new destiny.

6:23 Those who give themselves to sin will die both physically and eternally, whereas Christians are assured of eternal life. **Wages** implies that the punishment for sin is what one has earned and what one deserves. **Free gift** is the opposite of something one deserves, which fits Paul's earlier emphasis on justification by grace alone (God's unmerited favor; see note on [4:16](#)), through faith alone (trusting in Christ for justification; see [1:17](#); [3:21-4:25](#)).

1. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 6".

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible²

Romans 6:15-23

6:15-23 These verses are another of Paul's extended analogies. People have a choice about which master they will serve.

6:16 Paul used the figure of **slaves**. Whoever you **obey**, you come under his power. Obedience to **sin** brings **death**. Sin pays a wage to his subjects, and it is death (cp. [v. 23](#)). Obedience to God brings **righteousness** and the gift of eternal life.

6:17 Paul thanked God for the work of salvation that came to the Roman Christians.

6:18-19 Slavery and redemption are common biblical metaphors for spiritual death and salvation. The Hebrews were once in bondage (literal and spiritual) in Egypt. God broke the bondage so they could come out from Egypt and worship Him ([Ex 7:16](#); [12:29-42](#)). Similarly, the Roman Christians were once in spiritual bondage to false gods, but God liberated them so they could be **slaves to righteousness**.

6:20-23 As **slaves** of God, believers produce **fruit** (see [Jn 15:1-8](#)). This is the work of **sanctification** or holiness in their lives, and the final product is eternal life. Lest the figure be misunderstood as a payment for merits earned, **eternal life** is a **gift of God** through Christ. One master (sin) pays an earned wage of death; the other master (God) pays in unearned grace, resulting in eternal life ([Jn 17:3](#)).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Romans 6:15-23

What Has God Done About Sin?		
He has given us	Principle	Importance
New life	6:2,3 Sin's power is broken.	We can be certain that sin's power is broken.
	6:4 Sin-loving nature is buried.	
	6:6 You are no longer under sin's control.	
New nature	6:5 Now you share his new life.	We can see ourselves as unresponsive to the old power and alive to the new.
	6:11 Look upon your old self as dead; instead, be alive to God.	
New freedom	6:12 Do not let sin control you.	We can commit ourselves to obey Christ in perfect freedom.
	6:13 Give yourselves completely to God.	
	6:14 You are free.	
	6:16 You can choose your own master.	

2. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., HCSB Study Bible, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 6".

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1904-1905.

6:16-18 All people have a master and pattern themselves after him. Without Jesus, we would have no choice; we would be enslaved to sin, and the results would be guilt, suffering, and separation from God. Thanks to Jesus, however, we can now choose God as our Master. Following him, we can enjoy new life and learn how to work for him. Are you still serving your first master, sin? Or have you chosen God?

6:17 To "wholeheartedly obey" means to give yourself fully to God, to love him "with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind" ([Matthew 22:37](#)). And yet so often our efforts to know and obey God's commands can best be described as "halfhearted." How do you rate your heart's obedience? God wants to give you the power to obey him with all your heart.

6:17 The "teaching" they were to obey refers to the Good News that Jesus died for their sins and was raised to give them new life. Many believe that this refers to the early church's statement of faith found in [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#).

6:19-22 It is impossible to be neutral. Every person has a master—either God or sin. A Christian is not someone who cannot sin but someone who is no longer a slave to sin. He or she belongs to God.

6:23 You are free to choose between two masters, but you are not free to adjust the consequences of your choice. Each of the two masters pays with his own kind of currency. The currency of sin is eternal death. That is all you can expect or hope for in life without God. Christ's currency is eternal life—new life with God that begins on earth and continues forever with God. What choice have you made?

6:23 Eternal life is a gift from God. If it is a gift, then it is not something that we earn, nor something that must be paid back. Consider the foolishness of someone who receives a gift given out of love and then offers to pay for it. A gift cannot be purchased by the recipient. A more appropriate response to a loved one who offers a gift is graceful acceptance with gratitude. Our salvation is a gift of God, not something of our own doing ([Ephesians 2:8, 9](#)). He saved us because of his mercy, not because of any good things that we have done ([Titus 3:5](#)). How much more we should accept with thanksgiving the gift that God has freely given to us.

Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary⁴

Romans 6:15-23

Freedom to Obey God / [6:15-23](#)

Paul begins this section in almost the same way as the last one. He wants to make sure there is no misunderstanding of the nature of grace. It is not the chance to do anything we want. Rather, it is the opportunity to live the way God wants us to live. Ultimately, there are only two masters: sin and the Lord Jesus Christ. The choice is clear and required. The only rightful master is our Creator!

6:15 Paul's wording in [verse 14](#)—that seems to set the **law** against **grace**—probably surprised his readers. It would look as though Paul was replacing the law with grace, thus giving people no law and, therefore, freedom to sin. This almost repeats the question in [verse 1](#), and Paul's response is the same: **Of course not!** As the argument develops, however, there is clearly a different matter at stake. In [verse 1](#), Paul was challenging the crude assumption that sinning will give God the opportunity to exercise more grace. Here, Paul is guarding against the assumption that because sin is no longer our master, we can indulge in sin without fear of being controlled by it. Being under grace and under the mastery of Christ allows us the freedom not to sin. Any attitude that welcomes, rationalizes, or excuses sin is not grace, but slavery to sin itself.

6:16 All human beings are enslaved. While this idea clashes with our goal of independence, the fact is that we were created for interdependence. Paul is using an "illustration" ([6:19](#)) to make an important spiritual point: You are a slave to whomever or whatever you commit yourself to obey. This means that friendships, goals, employment, citizenship, membership, education, career, debt, and marriage all include aspects of slavery. We should choose our slavery wisely. When **sin** is our **master**, we have no power except to do what it bids us, with the end being **death**. But when we **choose to obey God**, the one who created us, we become slaves to obedience and will **receive** God's **approval**.

There are only two choices and no middle ground. This is as Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters" ([Matthew 6:24](#)). To refuse to allow God to be master over your life is to choose slavery to sin. While service to sin leaves us powerless and leads to death, service to God leads to righteousness and eternal life.

6:17 Before accepting the salvation offered through Christ, all believers **were slaves of sin**. But now they have a new master because they **have obeyed** the **new teaching** from God, referring to the Good News of salvation (see [1 Corinthians 11:2](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:15](#); [3:6](#)). This message abolished the slavery to sin that they had lived under, and it outlined a new way of living—under grace.

6:18 It is impossible to be neutral. Every person has a **master**—either **righteousness** or **sin**. A Christian is still able to sin, but he or she is no longer a slave to sin. This person belongs to God. Believers are set free from the control of their evil desires and their selfish habits, free to become enslaved to righteous living. We serve the righteous God who is in the process of transforming us to become more like him so that we can one day share in glorious resurrection to eternal life. That's not a bad master to have!

4. Barton B. Bruce et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 601-602.

[6:19](#) Paul emphasizes that he is using an **illustration** in case any of his readers fail to understand his meaning. Anyone living in Rome knew about **slaves and masters**. There were more slaves than citizens in the empire. When people are **slaves of impurity and lawlessness**, they are held in bondage to a master who seeks their destruction. But to **choose to be slaves of righteousness** is very different. God does not keep us in his service against our will—rather, we desire to please him in everything we do. Then we are becoming **holy**, referring to the progressive goal of salvation, our growth into persons who exhibit more and more of the character of Christ in the way we live.

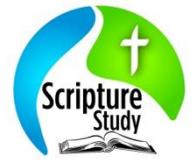
[6:20-21](#) The freedom that people experience when they are **slaves of sin** is the antithesis of genuine freedom. It is such a distortion of the meaning of liberty that it causes people to be glad that they are not **concerned with doing what is right**. That is ultimately the worst kind of slavery. And the **result** is that people end up **shamed of the things they used to do**. Paul was teaching the Roman Christians that it was appropriate for them to feel ashamed of their pre-Christian actions, and Paul was encouraging them to seek the benefits of high moral living now that they served Christ.

[6:22](#) The benefits are immeasurable for those who are **slaves of God** and set **free from the power of sin**. Faith makes us righteous in God's eyes and challenges us to realize that righteousness in practical living—doing **those things that lead to holiness and eternal life**. Holiness is gained as a process over our entire life wherein we become more Christlike and set apart for his service; eternal life begins at conversion and, despite the physical death we will inevitably face, continues beyond the grave.

[6:23](#) This result of **sin** is not just physical **death**—everyone dies physically, believers and nonbelievers alike. This refers to eternal separation from God in hell. This is the wage that a person receives for his or her rebellion against God. Those in hell will find no comfort in the truth that they have been paid exactly what they earned.

But instead of wages, those who believe receive a **free gift** from God—**eternal life**. Eternal life does not mean endless life on earth, but resurrection from death to eternal glory with God. Because eternal life is a gift, we cannot earn or purchase it. It would be foolish for someone to offer to pay for a gift given out of love. To be a gift, it must be given and received freely. A more appropriate response to a loved one who offers a gift is grateful acceptance. Our salvation is a gift of God, not something of our own doing ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). He saved us because of his mercy, not because of any righteous acts on our part ([Titus 3:5](#)). How much more we should accept with thanksgiving the gift that God has freely given to us.

Study and Discussion Questions



Slaves to Righteousness - [Romans 6:15-23](#)

Topics: [Change](#), [Consequences](#), [Eternal Life](#), [Life-style](#), [New Life](#), [Righteousness](#), [Sin](#), [Slavery](#)

Open It

1. *What bad habits can control and damage a person's life?
2. If you had to forfeit your personal freedom to become a slave, whom would you want to be your master?

Explore It

3. Why shouldn't a Christian continue to sin willingly? ([6:15-18](#))
4. Who or what determines the things that dominate or control a person? ([6:16](#))
5. *How does sin dominate a person's life? ([6:16-18](#))
6. *What results follow from being a slave to obedience to God? ([6:16](#), [19](#), [22](#))
7. *What is the result of being a slave to sin? ([6:16](#), [21](#), [23](#))
8. With what attitude do believers obey their new master, righteousness? ([6:17](#))
9. What change has happened to people who have put their trust in Christ? ([6:17-18](#))
10. What is the result of being a slave to righteousness? ([6:19](#), [22](#))
11. What are the wages of sin? ([6:23](#))
12. What is the gift of God? ([6:23](#))

Get It

13. What attitude should a Christian have toward sin?
14. What causes a person to be a slave to sin?
15. *What benefits and pleasures do people think they gain from sinful, selfish living?
16. Before knowing Christ, when did you feel regret for the selfish things you had done?

17. How does sin destroy a person's life?
18. *What are the benefits and pleasures of righteous living?
19. Why can't a person be his or her own master, enslaved to neither God nor sin?
20. In what ways is our relationship to God not like slavery?
21. To what degree is each person responsible for his or her sinful or righteous living?

Apply It

22. *How can you show your wholehearted obedience to God this week?
23. In what areas of your life do you need God's help to loosen the grip of certain sins?