THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

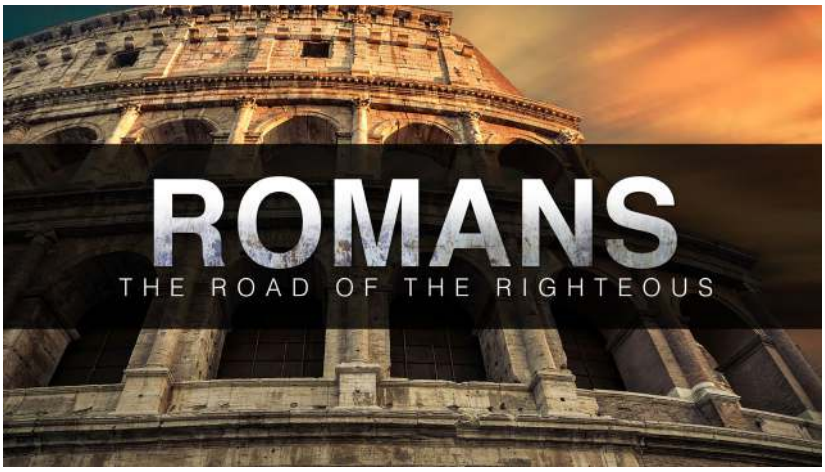
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 6:15-23

Written By

©Pastor Marty Baker

October 7, 2018



His name was Frank. Tattoos covered his arms, and you could see them spilling out over the top of his collar, so, I'm sure they covered his back as well. His massive, muscular forearms went well with his neck which would have made a wrestler proud. And his chest was, well, simply just thick. How did this mid-forty-year-old wind up looking like this? The answer is simple: He spent half of his life in the California penal system, so he had plenty of time to pump weights as the leader of a ruthless Hispanic gang.

I'll never forget some of the things he told me as came to Christ and the local church.

> "Pastor, when I was inside the prison, I still have a lot of power. I could have a person killed with just a word."

How do you respond to a statement like that?

On another occasion, the stoic, thousand-yard stare ex-con came up to me after a Sunday School class I taught and he said matter-of-factly,

> "Pastor, I just want to let you know that you are one of the few people I allow to look at me when we are talking."

I took that as an extreme complement. Yikes! (That's Greek for "Oh, my!")

As Frank grew in the faith, he traded friends, landed a great job as a foreman at a local plant, got away from drugs, stopped his career as a meth dealer, and attended church faithfully. Then, one day I received word he had been arrested. It was his third strike, which meant he was

going in for life. I rushed to the county jail situated next to the Sherriff's facility where I was the chaplain so see what happened and how he was doing.

The officer on duty put me in a small room with a black phone on my side of the bulletproof, unbreakable glass. Frank was on the other side with his phone. The conversation when something like this.

I asked, "Frank, man, what happened? You were doing so well. You had really put your life together as a Christian man."

He sadly replied, "Pastor, a rival gang planted drugs on my property and then called the police to check things out. Because of my record they assumed I was guilty so they arrested me on the spot, and now I'm facing a third strike."

Looking behind him, I could see all of the young inmates, half his age, walking freely behind him in the family life area of the jail. Knowing the prison can be a dangerous place, especially for a man like him, I said, "Say, Frank, weren't you afraid to come in here with all these young gang bangers and drug dealers?"

"No, Pastor. The inmates announced my coming and basically had a party mindset when I arrived," he replied.

"What do you mean," I queried.

"Well," Frank said, "In the state of California the prison system gives you a number to identify you. The inmates do this as well based upon how bad and evil you are. In the State I am number six, so the young inmates celebrated my coming because I'm something akin to a celebrity because of my life of crime."

I think I swallowed hard at the moment.

We talked some more and I then asked him, "If you could tell the young men in your family one thing, what would you say now?"

His answer was direct, "I would tell them to not do the things I did, nor have the kind of friends I had. I'd tell them to get a good job and work hard." Of course, his faith also figured into the equation for his faith in Christ is what radically changed him and his outlook on life. Outwardly, he still looked like Frank the mean meth dealer, but inside he couldn't have been more different.

I eventually prayed for Him, asking for the Lord to be merciful to him and get him out of this mess. After a short amount of time behind bars and further investigation by the police, Frank was freed to enjoy his life and continue to grow up in Christ, but it was a daily struggle between his old master, Sin and Satan, and his new master, Jesus.

Frank's life, was, in many respects, a picture of my life and yours as well, if you are believer. The Lord saved you, but your old master seeks to imprison you so you don't live a free, victorious spiritual life. The Lord, on the other hand, wants you to make real progress in conforming your life to His holy life. How do you go about doing that when the pull of sin can be so great? It's a question Paul addresses in Romans 6:15-23. To aid us in isolating this coveted answer, I propose we analyze Pau's contextual answers to the following practical question:

How Can You Live A Life Victorious Over Sin?

To review, Paul's emphasis upon the eternal security of the believer in chapter five, coupled with the fact he explicitly said believers are not under law but grace, led to opponents (who were probably predominately Jewish) accusing him on supporting moral anarchy with his antinomianism. In the first fourteen verses of chapter 6, Paul skillfully demonstrates, through sound doctrine (vv. 1-11) and sound commands (vv. 12-14), how his teaching supports holy living

because the saint is now freed from the domination of his old master, Sin. The points he makes to support this conclusion are as powerful as they are convincing and highly motivational. They also naturally lead to a logical conclusion: Why would you want to live a godless life when you are free, for the first time in your life, to live, by God's power, a godly life?

With verses 15 through 23, Paul turns and further develops his argument that believers are not saved to sin freely, but are saved to be free from the domination of sin by means of being obedient to Christ and His teachings. As you consider how he validates this premise, you will readily see how he also demonstrates the believer can move from spiritual loss to spiritual gain. If you are a saint and you feel like a proverbial sinful monkey is on your back and you just can't seem to sake it, then I hope you listen closely to Paul's words here.

Four concepts derived from Paul's teaching in this portion of Romans not only demonstrate that Christians should live like Christ, but how they should go about doing this. Watch how the master teacher, Paul, develops his line of reasoning:

Understand A Key Principle (Rom. 6:15-16)

Paul begins each section of this chapter with a question. Section one: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace my abound?" (Rom. 6:1). His answer was a definitive "No" based upon our relationship to the person and work of Jesus. His victory has become our victory.. His defeat of sin and death has become our gain. Hence, we do not want to sin so grace abounds because of who we are. Rather, we desire to walk worthy as sons and daughters of God

In section two, viz., verses 15-23, Paul poses another question:

> 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?

This question is slightly different than the first. Here he wants to know if his teaching allows saints to sin freely because they are not bound by the law but are free by grace. His answer in Greek is as definitive as it was with his opening question of the passage:

> May it never be!

Trust me. If you chose to become a shepherd of sheep, you will always have a small percentage of well-meaning folks who will mis-interpret and mis-apply your teaching. Welcome to Leadership 101. Paul knew it well. What did he do when some sheep took him wrong? He addressed their statements head-on with precision and compassion. With a short statement like this in Greek, Paul underscored the fact his teaching about law and grace would never support the notion believers are free to live lawlessly, ever. You will note he employs the first person plural "we" to include himself in the query posed by detractors within the church at Rome. The inference is clear, "Would I engage in sin because I am now free from the constraints and condemnation of the Mosaic Law? No way!" is his definitive answer.

He offers a metaphor the Romans would know well in order to drive home he just made and to introduce a key life principle. Follow his words carefully:

> 16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

Of course the Roman believers understood slavery because slaves made up 30% of just Italy alone.[1] The *Ancient History Encyclopedia* gives us insight into the life of a Roman slave when it states,

> Slaves were the lowest class of society and even freed criminals had more rights. Slaves had no rights at all in fact and certainly no legal status or individuality. They could not create relations or families, nor could they own property. To all intents and purposes they were merely the property of a particular owner, just like any other piece of property - a building, a chair or a vase - the only difference was that they could speak.[2]

Being property of someone else was firmly engrained in the Roman mindset. Everyone knew what this sad situation meant: *A slave is obliged to do whatever his owner/master said without question or argumentation. Slavery called for absolute, unflinching, inexorable obedience.* That was the principle everyone understood all too well and that is why Paul applied it to the spiritual realm. Jesus had talked about this principle years earlier when he remarked,

> 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8).

Your practical life shows you are either a slave to sin and evil, or a slave to Jesus and righteousness. There is no middle ground, no straddling the fence. All of this forces us to ask a personal question: Does the way I live my life show sin is my master, or Christ? As a slave of Christ you should be constantly asking yourself questions like, "Lord, what do you want me to do in this situation? Lord, what do you want me to say when our family gets together to discuss some tough, thorny issues. Lord, what is your will regarding where you want me to go to college? Lord, do you want me to be on this dating sight, or not?" So on and so forth. A slave doesn't live for what they desire, but for what their Master desires. How much thought do you give Jesus in your life, or is your life all about you? Righteousness floods into your life and soul when you start listening to and obeying God more often than not, which is what you should be doing as a slave of Christ.

Further, the theological import of this verses, really, should not be missed. As a saint, you are now free to choose to live as if you are a slave to Christ doing His bidding, not yours. That, my friend, is the path to a victorious Christian life. It all starts with understanding this simple principle.

A second concept logically flows from this first concept and principle. Believers don't believe they are free to sin and they find freedom from sinful living when they . . .

Understand A Key Position (Rom. 6:17-18)

Following his metaphor further, Paul asserts an exciting, breath-taking insight into the Christian life:

---

[1]Mark Cartwright, "Slavery in the Roman World," *Ancient History Encyclopedia* (November 2013), accessed October 4, 2018, https://www.ancient.eu/article/629/slavery-in-the-roman-world.

[2]Ibid.,

> [17] But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

What is Paul getting at here? First, note the two key verbs here, viz., *having been freed* (ἐλευθερωθέντες) and *became slaves* (ἐδουλώθητε) are both passive, meaning the subject, the saint, is being acted upon . . . here by God. Ostensibly, this means, at the moment of conversion He did for you what you couldn't do yourself. He freed you from the domination of sin, and He, who is full of grace and love, made you His eternal slave. What a magnificent reality.

Second, note Paul says "you were slaves to sin." The past tense denotes who you used to be. Frank understood the past tense better than most. He knew, firsthand, the spiritual slavery the Lord had saved him from. Do you? Let your new position in Christ sink in. *The old you is old news.* Paul talks about this concept all the time in his writings because it so moved his soul:

> [13] even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; [14] and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus. [15] It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all.* [16] Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life (1 Tim. 1).

> [3] For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. [4] But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, [5] He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, [6] whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life (Titus 3).

I'm sure he smiled as he thought about who he used to be and who he was now as a saint. The change of spiritual ownership changed everything. Like the Romans, he had been obedient to the doctrinal teaching he received from God and from God's leaders, and this resulted in becoming a truly free man.

All of this moves me to ask another question, "Does your personal life demonstrate you understand and live out your new position in Christ?" Does what you do on a date reflect the new you? Does how you treat the less gifted around you speak of your new position? Does how you reach out to the less fortunate illustrate you have a new righteous position as Christ's slave? Does how you work demonstrate to others you are fulfilling God's mandate to do everything to His glory and not yours?

When you struggle with the old man, as Frank did at times, victory can come back to you as you reflect on your unique position as a saint. You are God's son, His daughter. What a privilege, so go and live like it. As you might expect, this applicational emphasis is exactly where Paul heads in verses 19 through 20 where he challenges us, in so many words, to . . .

Understand A Key Proposition (Rom. 6:19-20)

Listen to Paul's heart here:

> 19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in *further* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Here Paul apologizes for using such an emotionally charged illustration, but he knew it would effectively communicate what Jesus did, and does, for saints at the moment of salvation.

He starts out by stating the obvious. Permit me to paraphrase his words, "Remember what it was like when you didn't know God? Living a holy, moral life basically didn't cross your mind. Why? All you did is move from one sin to the next one. Yeah, back then you were on the downward spiral of sin. You naturally moved from impurity to lawlessness, and then on to further lawlessness."

"Impurity" is an interesting word in Greek. *Akatharsia* (ἀκαθαρσία), according to the Friberg Analytical Greek Lexicon literally means "*worthless material, waste*; of graves *decayed flesh*."[3] In the New Testament it is linked to idol worship (Rom. 1:24), but can denote illicit sexual activity, be what it may (2 Cor. 12:21), or any kind of just absolutely vile and vicious activity. I'd dare say our culture has got the corner on this brand of sin. I don't think I've ever witnessed this much vile, vicious activity wedded to immoral sexual activity, real or otherwise. Many are either engaged overtly or covertly in immoral sexual activity, or they denigrate those who are not and who choose to live disciplined, godly, righteous lives. As Paul argues, "Show me someone engaged in impure behavior and I'll show you someone who next moves to lawless behavior. And once they start down that rebellious road, there is no end to it. They readily and willingly, like slaves, move from one lawless act to the next. And they are so enslaved and blinded to their sin, they can't see their sad, tragic, disgusting predicament. No wonder God uses the same word to describe the Anti-Christ in 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 3. He will be "<u>the</u> man of lawlessness," *anomia* (ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας).

What does a impure and lawless person sound like?

- Who are you to tell me what I can or cannot do with my body?
- We should be able to do what we want so long as it doesn't hurt anyone.
- We are progressive, not digressive. Such is not the case (2 Pet. 2:19).
- We need to replace old laws with new, more loving and compassionate laws. Right.
- I am my own man and I can do what I want.
- What I am doing and how I am living is, really, not that bad.
- I live to resist things I feel are wrong even though they are current laws.

And so on and so forth. Such is how we, as believers, used to be when they were unbelievers. Remember the day? Remember the times when you lived to shake your fist at your parents, at police officers, at teachers? Remember when you had a smart, cocky mouth? Remember when you

[3] Timothy and Barbara Friberg, *Friberg Analytical Greek Lexi*con (Bloominton: Trafford Publishing, 2005)..

thought you were wiser than you old man? Remember when you didn't think twice about binge drinking to be accepted by your sorority or team? Remember how you graduated from drinking, to pot, to cocaine? Remember how one glance at a forbidden magazine dropped you down a deep, dark, bottomless pit of pornographic evil? Remember back when sin dominated your life. You weren't happy, were you? How could you be, you were a slave.

Now, Paul says, things are different because of your new position in Jesus. Sin is not your master anymore, Jesus is. Now, you are God's slave which means your life should naturally result in righteousness and what Paul calls sanctification. In Greek, the last part of verse 19 is a result clause introduced by the preposition, *eis* (εἰς). This is how the NASB translates it:

> . . . resulting in sanctification.

Sanctification is derived from the Greek *hagismon* (ἁγιασμόν), which is built on the root word for holy, which means "to be set apart." Biblically, there are two facets to a saints sanctification. A the moment of faith/salvation they are given *positional sanctification*, or holiness, because of their new relationship with Jesus, who is holy (1 Cor. 1:30). A second facet of sanctification is called *process sanctification*, and it denotes the saints daily life. This is, as Paul talks about in Colossians 3:8-13, the putting off the old man and putting on the new man. As a saint does this, holiness floods into his/her life. Yes, as they learn to yield to God and His teaching and promptings, they leave the old master of sin behind and embrace the new Master, Jesus, and in so doing they become holier. Paul's statement here is Romans 6, verse 19 references this second aspect of sanctification. We know this because he employs the use of the imperative to introduce it:

> so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

The aorist active imperative is found in the word "present," *parastasate* (παραστήσατε), and it readily applies to a believer willfully and thoughtfully presenting various aspects of their lives to God so holiness can be achieved.

So, how do you move from living more like a slave of Christ than a slave of sin? Understand a key principle, understand your unique position in Christ, and readily and daily apply the proposition to go out and live a holy life for God in all you do.

As before, this leads us to posit some personal questions:

- God, is my thought-life holy?
- God, is how I treat others becoming more holy?
- God, am I engaged in any kind of activity which is hampering my growth in holiness?
- God, what sinful habits do I, like Frank, need to set aside so I can have victory?
- God, what parts of my life are not set apart unto you? Is my money your money? Is my mind your mind? Are my dreams and desires subservient to yours? Is my child-rearing your version of child-rearing? Is my dating life really set apart unto you, or am I controlling it?

Sanctification. It's a natural by-product of one who knows Jesus, but it's a daily, moment-by-moment commitment to become more holy today than yesterday. This type of victory is what Jesus has put before us. Seize it to His glory.

Lastly, to secure a victorious Christian life consider this fourth concept:

Understand A Key Promise (Rom. 6:21-23)

Paul's words here drip with wisdom and insight:

> 21 Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. 22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He pauses for a moment and reflect back to his old life without Christ. What was it like? Unsatisfying to the core. Nothing he did brought purpose and meaning to life, and everything he poured his life into had the stench of sin and death about it, and he knew it . . . he just didn't know what to do about it. Truly, as he says, the lifestyle of slavery to sin gave him no ultimate, lasting, meaningful benefits. You remember those days, don't you?

- One party led to another party.
- One girl led to another girl.
- One promotion led to another promotion.
- One demonstration full of anger and passion led to another demonstration.
- One major purchase led to another purchase.
- One degree led to another degree.

But in the end you, like ol' Solomon, felt like you were just trying to catch the wind in the palm of your hand (Ecc. 1).

Now, however, things are quite different. Now, that you are a slave to Christ, you have magnificent promises from God, promises like being "freed from sin," being a slave of God, becoming holy for a change, being pumped up about the hope of eternal life to come. Promises like this put wind in the sails of life, don't they? So, too, does Paul's last statement:

> 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When you're born under the first Adam, the wages of your status are physical and spiritual death. But, when you, by faith, take the free gift of salvation from God, He cleanses your soul for all time and gives you eternal, not temporal life. This all leads to a simple question: How could someone who has this forgiveness and this life not want to live a victorious life for Him? Frank did. I know you can too.