

## ROMANS 5:15-6:14

### FREEDOM

“The free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”<sup>1</sup>

**T**his particular day has been designated “Freedom Sunday” in a many churches and denominations throughout North America. It is a tragic truth that slavery has never been abolished in our world. Throughout the world, multiplied millions of people live in slavery—people actually chained and held as chattel or condemned to serfdom through impoverishment. Again, people—especially women—are condemned to sexual slavery to serve the degraded desires of wicked men. Though slavery is a terrible sin, this summation cannot begin to address the slavery to sin that binds many in this world. It is impossible, given the constraints of time imposed on our worship this day, to address the spectrum of servitude.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Undoubtedly, some of the churches participating in this Freedom Sunday will prove incapable of rising above a focus on the sociological issues. Let's acknowledge that to the individual who is held in thralldom—whatever the form the individual's slavery assumes—slavery ensures a horrible existence. Christians should be focused on seeking liberty for any who are so enslaved.

It is surprising to learn that slavery in Mauritania was criminalised only in August 2007. Moreover, estimates indicate that up to 600,000 men, women and children—twenty percent of the population—are enslaved in that nation to this date.<sup>2</sup> The enslavement especially of Dinka tribesmen continues in Sudan to this day with as many as 200,000 black south Sudanese children and women living in slavery. It is instructive to note that it was only in 1962 that President John F. Kennedy stood firm in demanding that Saudi Arabia cease the practise of slavery. Unfortunately, there are multiple recent news reports exposing forced servitude perpetuated by Saudi royalty living in the United States and in Great Britain. All these indicators suggest that the practise of slavery has never actually ceased in Muslim lands. Christian Solidarity and Christian Freedom International are two groups that have focused world attention on the issue, exposing the enslavement of Christian and animist tribesmen in Sudan in particular.

Undoubtedly, Christians should inveigh against sexual slavery that ensnares so many of our youth; we should expose the wickedness of those who would take advantage of their naiveté. I recall the horror I felt as I witnessed children prostituting themselves in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, just as I remember the deep emotional pain of a young girl of sixteen who was undergoing drug rehabilitation in New Westminster as she told of being lured into the sex trade. Then, to ease the pain of a life spiralling out of control, she began to use drugs. At sixteen, she looked like an old woman. No Christian should ever be guilty of ignoring such slavery; and certainly, no Christian should ever be guilty of participating in such sexual slavery whether by using prostitutes or through purchasing or viewing pornography.

And while I might speak of slavery to alcohol or drugs, ultimately I will be compelled to turn my attention to the source of all such slavery. Ultimately, sin lies at the root of those who enslave others and at the slavery itself. Tragically, even Christians can permit themselves to be enslaved, and the degrading slide can be surprisingly rapid. We who stand before the congregations of Christ the Lord, declaring the mind of the True and Living God are responsible to expose sin, naming it by name, and we are charged to call the people of God to holy lives. All of us are responsible to encourage one another to stand firm in this most holy Faith.

**THE FREE GIFT** — God offers to any individual willing to receive it, a gift. The gift is priceless, yet it is free to anyone willing to receive it. We speak of this gift as the gift of eternal life, which it is; however, it is so much more than merely life as we might imagine it. The life that God offers may be best described as an unending living relationship with God Himself. The relationship is one that ensures peace and joy—peace with God and peace with oneself, and joy that is so incredibly intense that it cannot be described other than saying that it is inexpressible [see **1 PETER 1:8**]. The peace and joy conferred when one receives God's incredible gift flows out of freedom—freedom from guilt, freedom from fear, freedom from the power of sin.

The gift, eternal life, costs the one receiving it nothing. Were it to cost us anything, it could not be a gift. However, throughout the Word of God we are told that this is a gift. Paul testifies, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift through redemption that is in Christ Jesus" [**ROMANS 3:23, 24**].

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<sup>2</sup> "History of Slavery," Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/?title=History\\_of\\_slavery](http://en.wikipedia.org/?title=History_of_slavery)) accessed March 12, 2011

Again, looking back to Abraham and his faith in God, the Apostle has written, “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered;  
blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin” [ROMANS 4:1-8].

Were this not somehow sufficient to convince any of us that God is offering a gift which is given without cost or condition, the Apostle finally states, “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” [ROMANS 6:23].

When I hear this powerful testimony from the Apostle, my mind turns again to the words Isaiah wrote so many centuries before Paul was moved by the Spirit to state these truths. Isaiah wrote:

“Come, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and he who has no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.  
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.  
Incline your ear, and come to me;  
hear, that your soul may live;  
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David.”

[ISAIAH 55:1-3]

The Word of God teaches, “You were bought with a price.” Based upon this truth, each of us is urged to “glorify God in your body” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:20], and we are enjoined to avoid becoming “slaves of men” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:23]. We are to stay focused on the Master who redeemed us, living without fear of what others may think of us. The price with which we were purchased is precious. In fact, we have been “ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [our forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” [1 PETER 1:18, 19]. I doubt that any of us can truly understand the significance of this truth, but each of us has experienced what it means when we received Him as Master over our lives.

An unknown author has written of the Master's sacrifice, "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" [HEBREWS 2:14, 15]. He became like us that we might become like Him.

That is such a powerful description that is provided in the Letter to Philippian Christians. There, we read, "You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had,

who though he existed in the form of God  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be grasped,  
but emptied himself  
by taking on the form of a slave,  
by looking like other men,  
and by sharing in human nature.  
He humbled himself,  
by becoming obedient to the point of death  
– even death on a cross!"

[PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8, NET BIBLE]

No mere mortal can fathom what it meant for the Son of God to empty Himself. When we read that the Lord of Glory took upon Himself the form of a slave and shared in human nature, humility demands that we cover our mouths and marvel at this grace. Though we can never explain what happened, each of us is able to testify that He has conquered sin and that in Him we now live. Indeed, this is "the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" [GALATIANS 2:20].

Life, knowledge of the True and Living God, are offered freely to all in Christ Jesus. The Word of God makes a distinction between what we once were and what we have now become in Christ the Lord. Writing to Titus, Paul states a truth that describes each redeemed saint, "We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another" [TITUS 3:3].

So often, we Christians say the right words, and live as though they were meaningless. Salvation, eternal life, is given through the grace of God. We learn this truth early in our walk with the Father when we cite the words recorded in EPHESIANS 2:8, 9: "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Establish in your mind that the gift of God is "not a result of works," rather it is by grace. When speaking of grace in another place, Paul clarifies what is meant when he speaks of grace. He writes, "If [God's choice] is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace" [ROMANS 11:6]. You who believe, you are chosen. What you have received from God was given by grace, and not because of your abilities, or your character.

Let me set your mind at liberty by reminding you of a saying of the Master which has been recorded for our benefit. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" [JOHN 15:16a]. This is the reason Peter speaks of those to whom he writes as "elect exiles ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ" [1 PETER 1:1, 2].

Before moving on, permit me to point you to a passage that you know very well. The passage speaks of God's love poured out on those whom He has chosen, and this includes you, because you believed in the Son of God. "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” [**ROMANS 8:31-39**].

Each of us struggles against sin; we grow discouraged because it seems as if we fight the same battles over and over again. We know that we are saved; we are confident that God has chosen us. However, we discover that we are weak and seemingly powerless against evil. Did you notice what the Apostle said in the passage we just read? He said that in the struggles we are called to endure and in the multiplied trials we face, “we are more than conquerors through [Christ] who loved us.”

This is but an iteration of the words of the Master who warned His disciples, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” [**JOHN 16:33**]. And, this is an anticipation of the promise given through the Apostle of Love, who would later write, “Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” [**1 JOHN 5:4, 5**]? Because of the free gift the Saviour has given to each of us as His redeemed saints, with the Apostle we are able to exult, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” [**1 CORINTHIANS 15:57**].

**FREEDOM TO BE** — It is Freedom Sunday; I cannot imagine a greater freedom than the freedom to know God and to enjoy Him forever. Surely, there is not a more delightful freedom than this. Similarly, I cannot imagine a more degrading bondage than to be enslaved by sin—having no hope and without God in the world [**see EPHESIANS 2:12**].

This does not mean that we no longer struggle against sin. Even the Apostle who gave us such great missives revealing the character of the Father struggled, not always with success. Remember His words recorded in the Letter to Roman Christians. “I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” That is indeed a dark moment in his life. However, his anguished cry is quickly answered with a joyous exultation: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” [**ROMANS 7:21-25**].

The author of the Hebrew Letter encourages believers, urging them to keep on keeping on. “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” [HEBREWS 12:1, 2].

The genesis of our struggle is that we live in two worlds—we are redeemed people and before God we are now declared perfect; however, we still live in this fallen world, and we are therefore responsible to live as redeemed people. Before the Father, we are now pure and holy. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” [EPHESIANS 1:3-14].

For a moment, focus on the work that God has performed in your life if you are one who is saved. When you accepted baptism as one who is redeemed, you confessed freedom in Christ. “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” [ROMANS 6:6]. You confessed that though you were once enslaved to sin, you had now been freed through faith in Christ the Lord.

Now, from your position as one who is free in Christ, you are able to rejoice with the Apostle, who says, “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, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness” [ROMANS 6:17, 18].

Because the Spirit of Christ is at work in your life, you want to honour Him by living a life that is marked by righteousness and goodness. The Apostle testifies, “You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” [ROMANS 8:15]!

I wish I could tell you that you will never again sin against the Master, but you will sin. In saying this, I am not making concession for sin; I am merely acknowledging our frailty. I am not excusing sinful behaviour; I am facing our broken condition. Though we are weak, we need to know that our Master is strong. For this reason that the Word of God instructs each Christian, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” [ROMANS 6:12-14].

**FREEDOM TO SERVE** — Can there be any greater privilege than that of serving the True and Living God? That is the powerful message delivered through the Apostle in **GALATIANS 5:13**: “You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Because we were called to freedom, we must use the freedom we have received to love one another, and the evidence that we love is our service.

Contemporary culture does not value the concept of serving another—perhaps it never did; however, it is nevertheless true that each individual is serving someone. John Lennon’s bitter atheistic reactionary life view led him to sing that you must serve yourself, but the fact remained that Robert Zimmerman—Bob Dylan—got it right when he intoned,

You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride  
You may be a city councilman taking bribes on the side  
You may be workin’ in a barbershop; you may know how to cut hair  
You may be somebody’s mistress, may be somebody’s heir

But you’re gonna’ have to serve somebody, yes indeed  
You’re gonna’ have to serve somebody  
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you’re gonna’ have to serve somebody<sup>3</sup>

Jesus confronted this very issue in one particularly pointed exchange with the religious leaders of His day. Addressing people who had believed in Him, Jesus said, “‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ They answered him, ‘We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, “You will become free”?’”

“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’” [**JOHN 8:31-36**].

These men insisted that they were free; but in fact, they were slaves to their own desires. They wanted to be recognised as important men. They sought adulation and deference from other, lesser men. The Master exposed them as men whose service came at a price—men who served only to be seen, men who loved receiving honour from other men and men who delighted in being shown deference [see **MATTHEW 23:1-7**]. The tragedy is that human nature wants to be served rather than serving; and we Christians are not immune to this same dreadful malady.

The religious leaders whom Jesus exposed as religious frauds would be described later by Peter, when he identifies them as false teachers who are kin of the false prophets. Of these wicked people, Peter writes, “They promise [people] freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved” [**2 PETER 2:19**]. Here is the warning that must not be neglected: “Whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.”

The effort to subjugate those who sought to follow the Master did not cease with His death. Paul would write of the spiritual descendants of the Pharisees and scribes, “False brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery” [**GALATIANS 2:4**].

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<sup>3</sup> Bob Dylan, “Gotta’ Serve Somebody,” ©1979 by Special Rider Music, <http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/gotta-serve-somebody>, accessed March 12, 2011

Later still, Jude is found combatting this continuing effort to bring the people of God into thralldom when he wrote, “Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” [JUDE 3, 4].

The message is directed toward Christians, though I pray that outsiders hear what is said, and that hearing, God’s Spirit will work powerfully to convict them, drawing them to life in the Son of God. Nevertheless, for each Christian there was a time when he or she was a slave to sin. Each of us was at one time ruled by our passions and desires. We imagined that we were capable of ruling our own lives; but we were deceived. God revealed our bondage and led us into His glorious light. It is good to remember our former condition, so that we will have compassion on those who are outside of the grace of God. In one of his letters, the Apostle exposes our past even as he cautions against attempting a return to what we once were.

“The heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

“Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more” [GALATIANS 4:1-9]?

He reminds us of a truth that Jesus first declared. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned, “No one can be a slave of two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot be slaves of God and of money” [MATTHEW 6:24, HOLMAN CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE]. If your personal desires drive your decisions, you are deceiving yourself. If you use your religion to mask imposing your own will on others, you are deceiving yourself. If your service consists of seeking accolades and the praise of man, you are deceiving yourself. If serving Christ is a duty and a drudgery, you need to ask why that should be the case. And if your service to Christ excludes service His people, you have cause to worry. The Master taught us, “Whoever would be first among you must be your slave” [MATTHEW 20:27].

Christian, understand who you are and what you have received in Christ the Lord. The Apostle has testified, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” [GALATIANS 5:1]. This is a call to eschew every effort to permit oneself to be enslaved by religious effort. It is likewise a call for each believer to refuse to be mastered by anything other than love for Christ Jesus and His holy people.

Only a Christian has the prospect of being truly free. Free in Christ—free of guilt, free of fear of judgement, without condemnation—the believer has received the promise of divine power to overcome the world. As followers of the Lamb, we who believe need but appropriate what has already been given us—His power and freedom to live a righteous life. We have power to live godly lives, the Spirit of God living within us to urge us toward righteousness, and freedom from condemnation so that we need not live in fear.



Of course, if you are not a believer, though you may be religious, without knowing the redeeming power of the Son of God, you are a slave to sin. All who are outside of Christ are in slavery. Yours is an appalling bondage because you know of God's power without knowing God's salvation. Though you may seek to coerce the love of God through your religious efforts, in your heart you know that you cannot succeed. What you need is God's great salvation.

The Son of God gave His life as a sacrifice because of your sin. He gave His life as a sacrifice so that you need not face the penalty of your sin. The good news is that Jesus did not stay dead—the grave could not hold Him. He rose from the dead and ascended into the glory where He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Therefore, the call of God is extended to you. At this moment, the call of the Master is, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Master over your life, believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in freedom [see **ROMANS 10:9, 10**]. The promise of God is that “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [**ROMANS 10:13**]. Amen.