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Hungering for Holiness, Part 9

Text- Romans 6:19-23

When I was in the third grade, I wondered aloud, to my teacher, Mrs. Edna McAveney (blessed memory), “If my birthday is November *16* and my grandfather’s birthday is November *17*, how is he older that I am? My birthday comes first.” Mrs. McAveney said, “Well, Richard, maybe he was born in a different *year* than you were.” As soon as she said that, all the pieces of understanding, regarding calendars and dates and how you compute those, came together. Mrs. McAveney had the opportunity to crush me or make me feel stupid. Instead, she put the truth in simple terms, so I could get it. Maybe that’s what Paul does here.

Paul speaks in human terms. It sounds like he has had to water down and simplify what he wants to say. This may not be as insulting as it appears.

NIV: *I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations.*

CEV: *I am using these everyday examples, because in some ways you are still weak*.

ESV**:** *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations*

MSG: *I’m using this freedom language because it’s easy to picture.*

What is the nature of this weakness, this limitation? Is it emotional? Physical? Intellectual? Spiritual? Perhaps Paul is not being condescending. Rather, he is framing what he wants to say, in language that is accessible for the Roman believers.

After framing his words in very deliberate, thought-out way, Paul rehearses the Romans’ past- “when you were slaves to sin...” I’m not a fan of people who feel the need to bring up my past to me. *I* know what I’ve done. *I* know what I’ve said. Paul seems to have no shame in reminding people of what they were (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 12:2; Ephesians 2:1-2).

**But now..**.. the two-word phrase of transition (3:21)- you have a different fruit. The fruit *to*/*of* holiness!

We often use 6:23 as a standalone verse when having holy conversations. See it now, in the context of this chapter. We who were slaves to sin are now slaves to righteousness. The Romans will *still* be slaves. Paul simply argues that these slaves must change *masters*. Once slaves to sin, now these become slaves of Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 7:22-23). Slavery to sin pays *wages*. Slavery to righteousness gives *gifts*. This is a liberating call *from* and *to*. These believers in Rome, and we, are called *from* slavery to sin *to* slavery to Christ. I hereby offer two pairs of terms that deserve our attention

1. **From** and **to**- from slavery to sin to slavery to righteousness
2. **Wages** (what you earn and deserve; Greek= *opsonion*) and **gifts** (what you could not earn and receive by grace; Greek=*charisma*). Sin leads to wages (1 Corinthians 4:4-5). Grace leads to the gifts of God (1 Corinthians 5:15-17).

The late John Stott says, in his commentary on the book of Romans, says there is a paradox here. Stott says that “each freedom is a kind of slavery” and “each slavery is also a kind of freedom” (Romans, p.185). Do you see it in the text? Note verse 20: When one is a slave to sin, one is free from righteousness. Conversely, when one is set free from sin (v. 22), that freedom is a kind of slavery for we bind ourselves to the redeeming, liberating God. We are freed *from* the control, the tyranny, the dominion of sin and freed *to be* holy!! Hallelujah!!

Amen