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In Favor of Slavery

Text: Romans 6:15-23

My maternal great grandfather was a slave. He was a leather craftsman, a boot maker. His name was Sipio English. I asked my mother if she knew the name of the family that owned her grandfather. She said she had not ever heard a family name other than English. Perhaps the family who owned my great grandfather had the last name, English. This I know: If Sipio English had been sold by the family that owned him, the English family’s authority over him would have ended. He could only be owned by one master at any one time. Jesus said, rightly, “No one can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24).

Vs.15:

Don’t you know that when you give yourself to some*one* or some*thing,* that person or entity *owns* you????

“You were slaves of sin”, says Paul. I can hear some saying, “I might have been into sin, but I am nobody’s slave” Really? You did whatever sin told you to do. Obedience is part of bondage. When sin is our master, we do what sin says do. We think as sin would have us think.

* The alcoholic is slave to the alcohol.
* The morbidly obese food addict is slave to the food.
* The crackhead is slave to the crack.
* The habitual liar is slave to prevarication.
* The hothead easily ticked off person is a slave to anger.

However, even in our bondage, we hear voices from the freedom trail. “What would it be like *not* to be a slave to alcohol?”

“Could I ever *not* be addicted to food?”

Paul has a very warped-sounding reasoning here. Paul wants to say that it is our destiny to be enslaved. However, we must determine, to whom or what we will be enslaved.

In verse 18 the believer goes from one bondage to another. Having been set free...... you became slaves of righteousness. Being a Christian is a matter of self-surrender. We surrender ourselves to one Master! In fact, technically, it is not so much that we had teaching entrusted to *us*. No, *we* are entrusted to the teaching (vs. 17).

Every form of slavery has its perks, its benefits, its fruits, its wages, its end, its payoff, its payout.

Verses 20-21 address the results of the enslavement to sin model.

Verse 22-23 address the other side: the fruit of a holy life.

A Matthew 25 people are bondservants to this ideal of being Christ-like.

We represent the Christ to the broken. We live out a servanthood that is unapologetic. We are in favor of slavery. We Matthew 25 people favor bondage, but of a specific kind. We are not simply slaves. We are slaves of righteousness. We are slaves to God. We are bound to Christ!

The third stanza of Russell Kelso Carter’s 1886 hymn, *Standing on the Promises,* says

Standing on the promises of Christ, the Lord,

**Bound to him eternally by** love's strong cord,

Overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword,

Standing on the promises of God

That’s us. We are **bound to Christ eternally.** We are slaves.

But...

What a freeing slavery we enjoy. Emil Brunner says, “Freedom from the Law does not mean freedom *from* God but freedom, *for* God.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

James I. Packer[[2]](#footnote-3):

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| *When the New Testament speaks of ministering to the saints, it means not primarily preaching to them but devoting time, trouble, and substance to giving them all the practical help possible. The essence of Christian service is loyalty to the king expressing itself in care for his servants (Matt. 25: 31-46).* |

**Closing**

Physical slavery is a miserable reality.

**Illus.**

In Myanmar, systematic persecution has driven thousands of Rohingya Muslims from their homes, making them easy prey for traffickers who promise them safety, for a price, or jobs in Malaysia. Sometimes they are then kidnapped and sold into slavery or they are held for ransom until their families pay the kidnappers.[[3]](#footnote-4)

*Physical* slavery is horrific!

*Spiritual* slavery, on the other hand, is glorious. We are bound to Jesus, gladly. We live out Christ’s calling through holy conversations, acts of service, prayerful witness and radical love.

I’m not a fan of slavery’s whips... but I do favor slavery’s witness.

I’m no advocate for slavery’s chains...but I rejoice to be chained to Christ.

I am horrified by what I have read of cramped quarters in slaves ships and people being forced to live like animals on board those ships...but I rejoice to be onboard with Jesus, who guarantees us safe passage.

George Matheson, 19th century Scottish clergyman, penned the classic hymn, *O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go.* Another of his hymns is, *Make Me a Captive, Lord.*

1 Make me a captive, Lord,

And then I shall be free.

Force me to render up my sword

And I shall conqueror be.

I sink in life's alarms

When by myself I stand;

Imprison me within thine arms,

And strong shall be my hand.

2 My heart is weak and poor

Until it master find;

It has no spring of action sure,

It varies with the wind.

It cannot freely move

Till thou hast wrought its chain;

Enslave it with thy matchless love,

And deathless it shall reign.

3 My pow'r is faint and low

Till I have learned to serve;

It lacks the needed fire to glow,

It lacks the breeze to nerve.

It cannot drive the world

Until itself be driv'n;

Its flag can only be unfurled

When thou shalt breathe from heav'n.

4 My will is not my own

Till thou hast made it thine;

If it would reach a monarch's throne,

It must its crown resign.

It only stands unbent

Amid the clashing strife

When on thy bosom it has leant,

And found in thee its life.

I’m in favor of freedom, yes.

I’m also in favor of the right chains.

Amen

1. Quoted by Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 261 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. James Packer, Your Father Loves You, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The New York Times. *Horrors of Human Trafficking in South Asia,* The Editorial Board. May 29, 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)