

“Slaves of Christ”

Romans, chapter 1, verse 1, reads: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." Notice, Paul begins this letter to the Romans: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ...". This is a radical statement! The word "servant" in the Greek is *doulos* – which means "slave". It refers to a person in the service of a master, one under obligation to obey and work for the benefit of a master. In fact, this word in the Greek of the New Testament describes one so completely subservient to someone else that he or she has no freedom but to obey!

Notice whom Paul is enslaved to: "Paul, a servant of *Jesus Christ*...". Paul regarded himself as a slave of Christ: completely owned by Christ, totally in service to Jesus, his Master!

Now this is not some goofball idea that only the Apostle Paul had! Believers in the New Testament caught on to this imagery of being "slaves" to Christ! *James* begins his letter: "James, a servant (slave) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1). Simon Peter thought the same. He begins his second letter: "Simon Peter, a servant (slave) and apostle of Jesus Christ..." (2 Peter 1:1). *Jude*'s brief letter begins: "Jude, a servant (slave) of Jesus Christ..." (Jude 1).

Now the idea of slavery is repugnant to us. One of the ugliest marks on American history was when slavery was a social institution. A Civil War was fought over it. Slavery was, and is, a horrible sin and dehumanizing evil. No good word can be said about slavery.

When I was kid, there were times when I guess I expected my mom to do things for me, and she'd say, "Who was your slave last year?" No normal person wants to be another person's slave. *But in our relationship with God and with Jesus, that's what Christians are: slaves!*

One of the things this means is that ***we have no claim on God.*** We are not equal partners in our relationship with God! We in the U.S. are used to living in a democracy. Many of the decisions we make are by majority rule or popular vote. But God's kingdom is not a democracy! It's a *king-dom* with a *King* (God!) God has absolute authority. This is brought out in the Scripture found in Luke 17:7-10: "Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, 'Come here at once and take your place at the table'? Would you not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink'? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'" Slaves do what slaves are supposed to do – they serve their Master!

Saying we are slaves of Christ ties in with the New Testament witness that Jesus is Lord. The Bible says that Jesus is absolute Lord and Master! He is Lord and we are not! As Lord, He has undisputed possession of our life! Get the picture?

Now maybe you're thinking, all this sounds like "preacher-talk" – "bound in absolute obedience to His will...undisputed possession of my life". Or maybe you are thinking, "This is pretty depressing! I don't want to be a slave!"

What does this really mean in for me, and way I live - in practical terms? ***One thing it means is*** understood that. He said, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20). If I commit myself to Christ, it’s not *my* will that’s important, it’s *Christ’s will*. Jesus said, “I don’t seek my own will, but the will of the one who sent me” (John 5:30). That’s the model for Jesus people: Not what I want, but what Christ wants.

In fact, Christian baptism symbolizes this. Romans 6:3-4, talking of baptism, says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into his death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Baptism symbolizes, in part, *death*. Death to our old life of sinning. Death to living our life centered in me, and my own will. Then rising to a new life centered in Christ. Mike Slaughter, pastor of the United Methodist church in Ginghamburg, Ohio, tells of the woman in their congregation who complained that she didn’t like the music in worship. Mike's response to her was, “Were you baptized? If so, you died and got out of the way.” Life was no longer just about herself and what she liked and wanted! Are we going to follow Jesus? If so, we have to give up ownership of our life!

Now to give up control of my life can be a scary thing. This is especially true for some of us who may have control issues – maybe we had a mom or dad who tried to control us, or we have a controlling spouse. So we get panicky when we think about having someone else controlling our life – even if it's Jesus! But this can be scary for any of us! What can happen if I relinquish control of my life to Christ? Whatever Jesus says I do, I do. Wherever Jesus says I go, I go! But it's important to remember this: *Jesus is absolutely trustworthy. We are safer in His will than doing what we want!*

To confess Christ as Lord, and recognize we are a slave of Christ, means we try to give up control of *every part of our life* to Christ! I remember an elderly couple in a church I served. The lady was a shut-in, and her husband did not attend church. I was talking with her once and the subject of her husband came up. Her comment about him, was, "He'll just do what he wants to do anyway!" I suppose there’s a part of that in each of us – we want to do what we want to do!

Can I allow Christ to have control of what I say and do when I'm at work? What I do with my time? How I spend my money? What I do when I'm with friends at school, or on date? How I conduct myself when I'm away on a business trip? Mike Slaughter, in his book *Spiritual Entrepreneurs*, observes, “We often say that Jesus is first in our lives, but in reality, he comes after careers, relationships, clubs, golf outings, band practice, football, baseball, soccer, and even yard work. That is why I am convinced that most people in the church today are following a Jesus of their imagination, not the risen Lord of the universe.” Of course, to let Jesus control every part of our life is not easy. It's a lifelong process!

A little boy was praying at bedtime. In great detail, he informed God of the next day’s plans and what God could to do make it a good day for him. Finally, the dad – who was listening in on his

son's prayers, made this suggestion "Don't bother giving God instructions. Just report in tomorrow morning for duty!" This little story makes me think of something I read in a book where the author says he begins his morning prayer: "Just checking in, Lord, to see what You want me to do today!"

We're thinking of this powerful imagery that Christians are "slaves" of Christ, and what that might mean in practical terms. This also reminds me that ***when I become a Christian, I not only confess Christ as my Savior, but also as my Lord.*** In most rituals for joining the church, in some fashion the person joining the church will confess Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior. When I confess Christ as my ***Savior*** I am acknowledging that what He did on the cross pays the penalty for my sin, and that I am trusting Christ to save me. As Savior, He forgives my sins and gives me eternal life. This is great! How nice a gift! But when I confess Christ as ***Lord*** it goes beyond just believing in Him to save me. It means that I want Him to have control of my life. I yield to His plans, His purposes.

Here's something else to consider if we really believe we are servants, slaves, of Christ: ***We don't need volunteers in the church!*** Churches talk about their volunteers, and ask for volunteers. But there is a difference between being a "volunteer" and being a "servant" or "slave". "Volunteers" give of their time, their abilities, as they see fit in their schedule. If they choose to do that. They are in control and call the shots. But "servants" or "slaves" of Christ serve in the church on the basis of *His will*. What does *Christ, my Master*, want me to do? How does *God* want me to use my time and talents and money? The word "volunteer" is the language of the club. The word "servant" or "slave" is the language of the Bible and the church. We don't need volunteers here at Community Church, but we sure do need servants!

The Apostle Paul begins his letter to the Roman Christians, "Paul, a servant (slave) of Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:1). Slaves of Christ!

Now one might think nobody would be attracted to follow Jesus if we have to become His slaves. ***But the strange twist here is that people who are slaves to Christ do it out of a joyful willingness!*** I remember seeing movies depicting slave traders, rounding up Africans to put them on a boat and ship them to England or the colonies. There are these white men with their guns, capturing, chaining these poor Africans, a look of shame and defeat and fear on faces of these soon-to-be-slaves. They are *forced* into slavery! That's not the way it works when we are slaves of Christ!

Our willingness to surrender control of our life to Christ is motivated by all He's done for us! Jesus left the glory of heaven and came to earth so I could be forgiven and live a new life, and be part of God's family forever. I can never repay Him for what He's done for me! I can only offer my life and will as a way of saying "thank you"! I first gave my life to Christ as a teenager when I began to see what Christ *did for me* in the cross. It was then that I began to ask *what I could do for Him* in response!

In the Bible, being a servant or slave of God is not a drag, but a high privilege. In the Old

Testament, there were only a few select individuals called “servants of God” – Moses, Joshua, some of great prophets. What a privilege to be able to be a servant of the Lord of all creation – the Lord Jesus Christ! When I was young, I played accordion in a band. At one point we were invited to play for an event where Eleanor Roosevelt was the guest of honor. You know, I didn’t ask whether we would get paid. I didn’t fuss about it taking an evening out of my schedule. To me, it was an honor to play for a person who was known and famous throughout the world. Well, there is no one more famous and known throughout the world than the Lord Jesus Christ. I just count it a privilege to let my life “play for Him” as His servant each and every day!

One more thought about our being slaves of Christ: ***The alternative to being a slave of Christ is to be a slave of sin.*** Let's look at a reading from the Gospel according to John, chapter 8: "Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?” Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:31-36). This section of Scripture is in the middle of a long dialogue with some Jews. Jesus says continuing in His word and following Him as a disciple leads to freedom. The Jews were insulted. They were never slaves to anyone! (If you know anything about the history of the Jews in the Bible, this wasn't exactly true! Many times they were conquered and occupied by other countries. Jesus then says *we all* are enslaved to *sin*, unless He sets us free.

We may be offended if we hear that: “I’m really not that bad of a person!” But we are slaves to sin! It may be destructive habits or addictions. Or our slavery might be to certain hurtful attitudes, like a bitter, critical spirit, or cynicism, or anxiety, or fear. All of us tend to be slaves to self-interest: we put self at the center of life. It's only when we choose to surrender all we have to Christ and be in bondage to Him that we really experience the true freedom Jesus talks about. If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

So here’s the choice: Slave to sin. Or slave to Christ. The first leads to death. The second leads to life! The hymn writer captured the irony of being free only when yielded to Christ: “Make me a captive Lord, and then I shall be free. Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.”

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