

Who's Pulling Your Strings?

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[0:00] Welcome to this week's message from Faith Bible Church of Lake Charles.! We're excited to share a practical Bible-based teaching that we hope will encourage you! and strengthen your faith. Thanks for listening. Now, here's today's message.

Have you ever felt like you were free, but didn't feel like you were in control? Maybe it started with a subscription, and it was a free trial, and then later you found out your card was charged for three years because you forgot to cancel it. Not really in control, right? Or maybe you downloaded a free app on your phone to stay connected, but now you spend three hours of a day on it. It tells you what to think, what to do, and what to buy, rather than you being in control of it. You know, I think we have a little bit today of a misunderstanding of what freedom is.

We tend to think that freedom is not having a boss, not having someone to tell us what to do. We hear of young people leaving home because they don't like their parents' control over their lives. They feel like they're stifled, and the reason they give is they want freedom. They don't want someone having a boss over them. We think freedom often is the ability to do whatever we want, whenever we want, with whomever we want. You know, we think freedom is like a blank check, but if you've lived long enough, you realize that doing whatever you want often leads you to be stuck in a place you never wanted to go.

And that's the illusion of freedom, and that's where it can lead us. And that's exactly what Paul is talking about in the end of Romans chapter 6, where we are today. We've been in Romans chapter 6 for about three weeks. The Apostle Paul has already told us that we have died to sin. We died with Jesus Christ positionally when He was on the cross, and He used the analogy of baptism. We died with Him, we were buried with Him in baptism, and we rose again just like Jesus did in His resurrection, and we were raised to walk in newness of life. But now he deals with the freedom objection. Someone in the back of the room, you know, Paul always was very good at expecting people's objections, and he countered those objections very often before people actually verbalized them. And so someone in the back of the room may be thinking, since I'm under grace, and not under the law, it really doesn't matter what

I do, right? Because I'm free. And Paul's response to them, and I believe Paul's response to us, is a reality check. He wants us to see that everyone is serving someone, or everyone is serving something.

[3:15] We're not totally free. There's no such thing as being without a master. The only question is, which master are you picking in your life? And here's what I want us all to understand today. If we leave here today without remembering anything else, I want us to remember this, that freedom isn't found in doing whatever you want. It's found in serving the right master. Freedom isn't found in doing whatever you want. Freedom is found in serving the right master. Let's look at our text together this morning.

Romans chapter number 6, starting with verse number 15. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? We'll read all the way to the end of chapter 6. Verse 16. Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms, because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now

present your members. We talked about that last week, the parts of our body, our eyes, our mouth, our mind, our feet. Those are instruments. Those are weapons that we use, whether as members, as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, verse 20, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have in them in the things of which you are now ashamed?

For the end of those things is death, but now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. So what Paul is doing is he's circling back to a question that he asked at the beginning of the chapter, but he's doing so at the end with a little bit of a different focus. In verse 1, he asked if we should persist in sin. Since we were dead with respect to sin, just like a dead person is no longer tempted by physical things because they're dead, he says since you were dead to sin, why should we persist in sin? Here in verse number 15, he asks if we should commit an act of sin. He says, you know, since the law isn't hanging around my head with a magnifying glass anymore, some might say, does it really matter if I sin on purpose? You know, I'm not stuck under the law anymore, and because we're under grace, does it really matter if I sin, maybe because I want to?

And what is Paul's response we see in verse number 15? He says, certainly not. God forbid, *meganoto*, probably the strongest negative that Paul could have used in the Greek language. He says, no, certainly not, is his way of saying that grace isn't a license to be reckless. Grace isn't a license to sin. He spent the first half of his chapter talking about our identity, who we were in Christ. Now Paul's going to spend his time talking about our industry. Who are we working for? Who are we serving? He focuses on the image of a first century slave market, a concept that all of his readers would have been familiar with. They would have walked through town, and they would have seen a bunch of people on a platform, and they were being auctioned off to people to buy slaves. That was a very common concept all throughout Asia during this time. People would go, and they would go to another country, and they would conquer maybe a city, and they would take slaves, and sometimes even an army. They would conquer an army, and they would take the soldiers, and they would bring them back, and they would sell them as slaves. So this was a concept his readers knew all too well to explain our actions, that our actions actually reveal our allegiance. So what we do will pretty much show the rest of the world who we're serving. Let's go back to verses 16 through 18. Start with verse 16. He said,

[8:20] Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves to, slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness?

So what's Paul telling us? Realize that your habits reveal your master. The things that you do, your habits, the things when you get up in the morning, and the things that you do throughout the day, for someone on the outside looking in, they can pretty well tell, who are you serving? Who is your master? Someone may say, you know what, I'm a Christian, I follow Jesus, but people at work know you differently. Very often, that's what happens. I've heard it said, well, you know what, they claim to go to church, they claim to be a Christian, but yeah, I know what they do.

What are they saying? Well, you know, they're a hypocrite, because they claim to be a Christian, but yet they act like everyone else. They don't act like they're following Jesus. They don't act like what people think a Christian should act like. And so what Paul is saying is, realize that your habits reveal who you're serving, who your master is. Paul asked, do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey? And the key word is, present or yield. We do this ourselves. Last week, we talked about giving the keys of our life back to sin. Like when someone borrows your car, you give them the keys. Well, they're in control. They're the ones that decide where it goes, how fast it goes, and whether it ends up in a ditch or not. You're not in control once you hand the keys over. And the same thing with our lives. If we serve a particular master, in effect, they're pulling our strings. They tell us when to jump and what to do.

And so Paul is saying, just be careful. Your life, your habits are going to show who you're serving. It means to yield or to present yourself, means to offer oneself to stand or to be at one's beck and call.

[10:33] You present yourself to serve them. It's the same word the Apostle Paul used in the previous section. But here, he links it to

obedience, links it to obey. Literally, that word obey means to hear under.

It would be, it carries the idea of positioning yourself under it to carry it out, to do whatever that master says to do. So what the point I believe Paul's making is, direction, not intention, determines your destination.

Direction, not intention, determines your destination. You know, we can intend all we want, but it's what we do that makes a difference. It's our direction. The way that we're going determines our destination. You might intend to follow Jesus, but if you present your time, if you present your money, if you present your body to the boss of greed or lust, what you are is you're actually a slave to greed and lust. You're a slave to sin. You're a slave to whatever it is that you serve.

There are some people who are workaholics. I mean, they are taking every extra shift. They are working overtime all they can to get as much money as they can, which is not in and of itself a bad thing.

But if they are, as the Bible says, worshiping money, then they are a slave to money. And we know that the love of money, the Bible says, not money, but the love of money is the root of all evil.

[12:12] And so what he's saying is, if you present your time, and if you present all of your attention on making money so that you can, whatever, use it upon your own desires, he says what you really are is you're a slave to that thing.

You can't claim one master while clocking in for another. So as the Lord Jesus said, you cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money at the same time.

And Paul also pointed out that being a slave to sin leads to death. We see that in verse 21. We see that in verse 23 as well.

And this death is not only a physical death and not only a spiritual death, but it's death in general as the natural consequence and the inevitable collateral of sin.

So when the Bible speaks about death, we said it speaks of separation. So when we die physically, we're separated from our body. When we died spiritually because of what Adam chose to do in the Garden of Eden, we were separated from God.

[13:30] And death also in our life today, sometimes we have, you ever heard of the death of a dream? Or sometimes the death of a relationship? And very often it's because of our own actions.

And so death sometimes is a consequence, not always physical death, but the death of a certain object. On the other hand, being a slave to obedience or to God and His gospel leads to righteousness.

Death is the normal consequence of sin. Disobedience, which is disobeying God, and righteousness is the normal consequence of obeying God and living for Him.

So what Paul is saying is, your habits determine who you're serving. Let's look at verses 17 and 18. But, God be thanked, He says that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered, and having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

He says once, we were once slaves of sin, but something changed. What did He say? We obeyed from the heart. And they trusted Christ as their Savior.

[14:45] They began following Jesus. So to whom is Paul speaking in Romans chapter 6? To whom is Paul talking to? Hmm?

The church of believers. So Paul is talking to believers. That will make a difference later on in the chapter if we want to rightly interpret God's Word as we move on.

And so he talks about, quite often, about you once were, but now you are. You once were, but now you are. So he's talking to believers here in this chapter. And in verse 17, But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine.

That word form refers to a mold. Like when a master artist pouring metal or pouring something into a mold, God's truth has a specific mold.

When we follow God's truth, we're going to live a certain way. We're going to live according to a mold. We're going to be like Jesus Christ, or act like Jesus, if you will. When we trusted Christ, we were poured into the mold of the gospel.

[15:57] We were delivered unto it. So one of the things that you and I can do this week, remember we talked about the habits that we have determined to our master. What we could do is audit your presenting, or audit your yielding.

Who are you yielding to this week? Look at your calendar. Look at your bank account. Ask yourself, if someone else looked at my calendar, if someone else looked at my bank account, if someone else looked at my habits and what I did when no one else was looking around, who would they say my master is?

So very often you want to know something about you, ask somebody else, and they'll tell you. Well, you know, most of the time you are whatever.

Well, I didn't realize that. They go, well, yeah, you are. You go around with a frown on your face.

Well, I didn't realize that. Or you go around, all you do is complain. Well, no, not really.

Well, yeah. And so ask someone else. So if someone else looked at your life this week, so do an audit. Where are you giving your time? Or to whom are you giving your allegiance? Who are you turning over the keys of your life to?

[17:09] Who are you allowing to pull your strings? You know what? We don't want to be slaves of righteousness by accident. We want to willingly every morning when we get up, present ourselves to Him.

Stop giving the keys back to sin. It will drive you where you never wanted to be. All right, let's move on. Verse 19. Verse 19, he says, I speak in human terms.

Paul has said that a few times in his writings in different letters. Because of the weakness of your flesh, for just as you presented your members as slaves of unrighteousness and of lawlessness, what does it do?

It leads to more lawlessness. So now present or yield your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. In other words, and we're going to flesh this out in a bit, trade your handcuffs for a towel. Now, those of you who know what Jesus did with His disciples before He was arrested, He took a towel, bent down, took a bowl, and washed His disciples' feet.

[18:16] So to take up the towel means to be a servant and to serve others. So in verse 19, Paul apologizes for something. He apologizes for speaking in human terms.

I think what he's doing is he's apologizing for using the slave and master analogy. He says, I'm having to bring this to the modern world today.

He said, I'm having to use this as an analogy because of the weakness of your flesh. I'm trying to prove a point here. So he says, he's speaking in human terms because sometimes we're a little slow to catch on.

And he says, just as you used to offer your body to uncleanness or impurity and lawlessness, he says, you now need to offer your body to holiness.

That word holiness or sanctification means to be set apart for a special purpose. Think of fine china. Like the fine china that you see in your grandmother's hutch or your parents.

[19:23] Well, you don't use your fine china to feed the dog, do you? Most of the time, we don't even use fine china to feed our kids. The point is, we keep it for special occasions. We keep it for, we reserve it for special guests.

So in other words, it's set apart. It would be fair to say that your fine china is sanctified. It's set apart. And that's another meaning of the term holy.

Just simply set apart. Paul is saying that your life has been set apart for God's use, not for sin's use. Once you trusted Christ as your Savior, you became a new creation, you have a new nature, you belong to a new master, and you have a new identity.

You are a citizen of a new nation. So he says, stop yielding the members of yourself to sin to do wicked deeds, unrighteousness, lawlessness.

Now he points out a paradox in verse number 20. He says, for when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

[20:33] He says, when you were free from righteousness, what he's saying is, you didn't care about God's standards. You were a slave to sin. You

were free from God's standards because you were not part of God's family. You weren't really free. You were just off the leash in a graveyard. You know, it's like someone being able to walk around in prison as a prisoner.

You're free to walk around, but you're free to walk around within the razor wire of the perimeter. And that's kind of like what people say, well, you know what, I'm free. Yeah, you're off the leash, but you're still walking in a graveyard.

You're still walking in the graveyard of sin. So Paul says, when you were slaves of sin, you were free of God's right, you were free in regard to God's righteousness because you became, but now, having been set free from sin, you have become slaves of God.

Look at verse 21. What fruit did you have? So Paul is continuing with this same argument. We're free, but we're not free to sin, and we need to understand what freedom is and what we're going to get depending upon which master we serve.

[21:54] What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? So there were many believers who look back at their life and were ashamed of their lifestyle or were ashamed of their actions before they came to Christ.

There are many people today that are walking around who are redeemed, who are part of God's family, but they look at their past and there were things that they were ashamed of because some of those fruits of sin are something that they're still suffering with.

And so he says, what fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. So if you serve a master, you expect to receive wages, right?

Sin pays wages. Death. God also pays wages, holiness, and everlasting life. In the old life, we produced fruit of which we are now ashamed, Paul says.

In the new life in Christ, we produce fruit that glorifies God and it produces joy in our lives. Now look at verse 22. But now, having been set free from sin, remember, Paul is speaking to believers.

[23:08] He says, when you trusted Christ as your Savior, you died with respect to sin and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness. And the end, or the ultimate fulfillment of it, is everlasting life.

Slaves of God? Well, that doesn't sound like freedom to our 21st century ears. I mean, when we think slave, we don't think freedom. But here's the secret. The only way to be free from the things that destroy you is to be bound to the one who created you.

The only way to be free from the things that destroy you is to be bound to the one who created you. Because he's the one who knows how to live in order to have a joy-filled life, in order to have freedom to enjoy life, and also to be fulfilled.

And that's what people are looking for today, isn't it not? Fulfillment. Some people look for fulfillment in the wrong places. They think it fulfills. It might feel like fulfillment for a little while, but it doesn't really last.

You know, it's like eating a, it's like you're hungry and you eat a candy bar. One of those little bite-sized candy bars. You know what? You have this sugar rush and then you get this, you get this, this drop and all of a sudden you're hungrier than, than you were.

[24:39] It's satisfied for a moment, but it's not like eating a full, healthy meal. So that's what he's saying. He says, now we have the fruit to holiness and the end, everlasting life.

Think about it this way. The boundness. A fish is only free when it's bound to water. A train is only free to move when it's bound to its tracks.

And someone would say, well that, that fish is not free really because, you know, that, that fish is stuck to the water. Hello? That's its life-giving source.

It's free to move wherever it wants. A fish in the ocean can swim wherever it wants. But the moment it gets out of the ocean, it's a fish out of water, what are we?

The moment we give the keys back to sin and we sin wantonly, we're, we're, a follower of Christ out of our element.

[25:52] We're a follower of Christ out of our element. The moment that train, now, you look at the track, look at a train track. It goes wherever whoever built the track goes.

What if the train says, you know what, I don't want to go that way, I want to go this way. And it gets off the tracks, what happens? It's called a derailment. And it's a problem. It's not going to go where it wanted to go.

That's the problem with sin. We think, oh, we'll go over that, we'll, we'll, we'll go after that shiny new fulfillment. And guess what?

We get stuck. And it doesn't lead us where we want to go. As a matter of fact, it takes us in the opposite direction of where we really want it to go. But as long as that, as long as that train stays bound to the tracks where the people who said, you know what, this is the best route to take from point A to point B, that will get you there safely.

As long as that train is bound to those tracks, it's going to move along and it will get to its destination from point A to point B. Same with the Christian life. So do we get it?

[27:04] We're only truly free when we allow ourselves to be bound to God's design for our life. When we're serving Him as our master. So here's the second thing we can do this week.

Accept your boundness and stop, and stop trying to be totally independent. You realize that total independence is an illusion? We're not totally independent. We need God.

We need God for the air we breathe. We need God for the strength to be able to produce income. We need God for our health. Actually, we need God so we don't just blow apart in Him or through Him, by Him.

All things consist or are held together. Instead, every morning, choose to tie yourself to God. Say, God, I'm your servant today. I'm not my own boss.

I'm your servant today. Tell me where you want me to go. Tell me what you want me to do. Just bind ourselves to God every morning and say, God, I'm yours. I'm not my own boss.

[28:03] I surrender my life to you. When you trade the handcuffs of sin for the towel of serving God, you'll find the life you're actually looking for.

And that is the only way to really be free. Now, let's close with this. Let's look at the Bible, probably one of the Bible's most famous verses next to John 3, 16 and it's verse 23.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, to fully understand verse 23, we need to remember who Paul's readers were.

Who were Paul's readers? Christians, followers of Christ, the church. So, he was writing to believers who were already part of God's family who were already following Jesus Christ.

So, do you remember how many times he said, you once were, but now you are? Paul's obviously writing to Christians. They were followers of Christ and throughout the book he talks about how you once were, but how you should live now.

[29:14] this entire section that we've been studying has been about living under grace, not going back under the law and serving sin. That's Paul's entire focus.

We're under grace now. Don't go back and try to live under the law and follow rules and regulations or give yourself back over to sin.

That's his whole point here. So, I mean, just look back at verse 22. He says, but now having been set free from sin and having become slaves of God, he's actually talking to believers.

Now, this puts verse 23 in perspective. Paul is making the argument that the believer not go back and give control of their life to their sin nature, but to yield themselves to God.

So, he continues the same argument in verse number 23. Remember, he was talking about the fruit. He's talking about what fruit did sin produce. You're ashamed of it. What fruit does giving yourself to God, yielding yourself, presenting the members of your body to God, it yields righteousness.

[30:23] Ultimately, it will yield eternal life. So, in other words, were we talking about slave master? Check the retirement plan.

That's what Paul's saying. Check the retirement plan. Look at verse 23. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So, Paul's closing this section with probably, as we said, one of the most famous passages in the Bible, but we often miss the context. We have the word wages.

In the Roman world, this referred to a soldier's pay or to a slave's rations. You work for it, you earn it. It's the paycheck for your work.

Paul is saying that if you work for sin, sin's a very faithful employer. Sin won't miss a direct deposit, but the currency that sin pays in is death.

[31:26] This isn't just simply physical death. It can be the slow rot of relationships. It can be loss of the death of peace in our life because we're serving sin and we have the death of peace.

Ultimately, it could be, for those who choose not to trust Christ, it could be eternal separation from God. But look at the contrast. God doesn't say, God doesn't give wages.

What does God give? What does God give? I gave it away. God gives gifts. God doesn't give wages because what do wages imply? We earn something.

The wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. This eternal life, that's not just long life, that's quality of life.

It's a quality of life that begins the moment we trust Christ as our Savior. So we don't have to wait for eternal life. We have it the moment that we trust Christ. And it's the moment it takes place the moment we trust Christ as our Savior.

[32:38] The moment we allow the strings of our life to be pulled by our old master, it's now our master.

But Paul is saying, give the strings of your life to God. Let Him pull the strings. Because culture says, what? Work for yourself and you'll get all you want. Work for yourself.

Paul's saying, work for yourself and you'll get exactly what you deserve. And you won't like the paycheck. So for the follower of Jesus, if we give back the keys to sin, we'll probably soon see the death of our joy, and possibly the death of relationships, or maybe the loss of our health, or maybe the loss of our physical life.

So if you're a follower of Jesus, you may be secure in God, but we'll pay the consequences of sin in this life. Now we usually apply Romans 6.23 to the lost.

And for sure it does apply to the lost. You can still use Romans 6.23 when you're sharing the gospel with someone. Don't say, pastor said it only applies to Christians, primarily applies to Christians, but don't say, pastor said don't use Romans 6.23 when you're sharing the gospel, because it still applies, because the wages of sin is death, all the way and leading up to separation from God, eternal separation from God.

[34:09] But it was primarily a warning to the saved, just like Paul's been giving that warning over and over again to the believers in Romans 6. There is a sin unto death, 1 John 5.17, also 1 Corinthians 11.30, for this reason there are many among you who are weak and sick and a number who are already asleep.

In other words, they died. What was the problem in the Corinthian church? There was sin problems, there was all kinds of sin issues. And according to Paul, there are some that were chastised to the point where God said, you're done on earth and your life is over.

They may have been a believer, but he said, your life is over. Take, for instance, Samson. He wouldn't yield himself to God, but preferred to yield to the lust of the flesh.

And the result, Judges 16, was physical death. So if the believer, if the one who follows Jesus Christ refuses to surrender our body to the Lord, but uses the parts of our body, our eyes, our hands, our feet, our mind, then we're in danger of being disciplined by God the Father, and this could ultimately lead to death.

A side note would be Hebrews 12 verses 5 through 11, and the end of verse 9 in particular. So we see the same thing in Corinthians that ultimately it could, serving sin could ultimately lead to our physical death.

[35:51] We have three instructions in chapter 6. We mentioned them about three weeks ago. Know, reckon, and yield. There are some things that we need to know. We need to know that we're dead with respect to sin.

Paul says we need to count it as being true. Reckon it to be true, and then yield the members of your body to God. And so we have to know that we've been crucified with Christ, and we're dead to sin.

