

ROMANS

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSTITUTION

STUDY FIFTEEN

Whose Slave Are You?

Romans 6:15–23

An eternal life is not what starts when we die; it's what starts when we trust in Christ. Isn't that a great thought? When I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and I put my faith and trust in Him, at that moment, my eternal kind of life began. A life Jesus described as "more abundant," and the master changes within me. I no longer serve the enemy of my life, but the redeemer of my life, my Savior.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PEOPLE in the Greco-Roman world could become slaves in different ways. Some were born into slavery because their parents were slaves. Others were taken as spoils of war—captured as an enemy's prize after winning a battle. In his commentary, *Insights on Romans*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains another way people became slaves.

An older, more common type of slavery was “voluntary indenture.” Impoverished people could offer themselves as slaves to someone in order to have food to eat and a place to live. In other words, people willingly accepted slavery in order to meet their basic needs.¹

As a Jew and a Roman citizen ([Acts 22:3, 25–28](#)), Paul used the practice of voluntary slavery to illustrate the spiritual reality that everyone serves someone or something. The question isn't, “Are you a slave?” but, “Whose slave are you?”

Some people enslave themselves to their occupation. Some choose money and possessions as their masters. Some attach themselves to other people. Others worship themselves, serving their passions and desires. Everyone serves sin when they give in to temptation, and all this self-surrender leads to one thing—bondage.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study we examine the difference between the life that chooses sin as master and the life that is voluntarily surrendered to God—which, paradoxically, is the only free way to live.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Lay it down—*your life*—at the Lord’s feet. Think about the lyrics of this song by Larnelle Harris.

I give all my service to You,
I give all my service to You;
No matter the cost or what others do,
I give all my service to You.²

Take time to express your surrender to the Lord as you explore these liberating truths in Romans.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the first half of Romans 6, Paul taught that grace, through Christ, frees us from sin to serve God. “Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. . . . Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace” (Romans 6:6, 14).

The good news about God’s grace is that it covers all our sins. We can’t out-sin grace, because the more we sin, the more grace God gives. As Paul said, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (5:20 NASB). How does this truth give you hope when you feel stuck in sin?

Some people, however, misunderstood Paul’s teaching. They reasoned that because they are under grace and not the law, they could do whatever they pleased. They shamelessly cheated on their spouses, covered up their shady dealings, bullied people, took what wasn’t theirs, and on and on, racing through life utterly ignorant of what the green flag of grace means.

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Reckless freedom, however, inevitably leads to a wrecked life. God's grace frees us *from* sin, not *to* sin, and for liberty to serve God, not license to serve ourselves. What do you think is the problem with taking grace to mean license (versus liberty)?

Liberty is not the same as license. Let's see how Paul explained this principle about grace in the latter half of Romans 6.



Observation: Voluntary Slavery and Consequences

The first step of our *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, observation, helps us to determine what Scripture says, so we can better understand what it means.³

Question and Answer—Romans 6:15

What question in [Romans 6:15](#) did Paul use as a springboard for his teaching? What motive might prompt a person to ask this question? Why do you think Paul reacted like he did?

General Principle—Romans 6:16

Like a good teacher, Paul stated his central thesis up front in [Romans 6:16](#). What was Paul's main point?

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Previous Condition, Present Choice—Romans 6:17–23

Paul broke out into thanksgiving to God in [Romans 6:17–18](#). What about the implications of the gospel caused Paul’s spontaneous praise?

Observe the contrasts and comparisons in Paul’s illustration of slavery in [6:19–22](#). What are the consequences of giving ourselves to sin? What are the benefits of presenting ourselves to God?

Look carefully at [6:23](#) in the NET, J. B. Phillips, and in various translations. What wage does sin pay its servants? What does God give to those who serve Him?

Believers’ lives depend on whose slave they are. Those who obey God live a life of righteousness, and those who let sin enslave them experience death.



Interpretation: Obedience to God Versus Obedience to Sin

The second step, interpretation, further clarifies the meaning of our passage. In [Romans 6:15–16](#), Paul emphasized that while obedience to God results in righteousness, obedience to the old master, sin, leads to death. The “wages of sin is death,” Paul stated plainly (Romans 6:23). What did he mean by using the word *death*? How would you describe Paul’s point?

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It's not a physical death. It's a death-like existence. You enter into a realm of darkness and sometimes despair. You stay there long enough, and divine discipline kicks in to the point where the Lord has to decide whether to leave you on the earth or take you. If His children choose to disobey over a long period of time, there are serious consequences. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Paul praises God in [Romans 6:17–18](#) for spiritual freedom in Christ. What is the meaning and significance of spiritual freedom? Don't forget to consult your Bible-study resources like [Constable's Notes](#).

*Because you believe the gospel that Christ paid the complete penalty for your sins, thanks be to God, you're freed from the enslavement that was once yours in experience. Now, you have a choice; before, you had none.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

In [6:19–22](#), Paul used the illustration of slavery to underscore two outcomes depending on whose slave believers are—enslavement to sin resulting in lawlessness, enslavement to righteousness resulting in sanctification. Explore the term [sanctification](#) in a Bible dictionary like the *Holman Bible Dictionary* at [studylight.org](#). How does lawlessness—freedom to follow our desires—lead to death? How does sanctification—freedom to follow Christ—lead to life?

*Sanctification means, “consecration to God, set apart for God’s purposes.”
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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Paul told the Roman believers that the wages will be different depending on the master. Reread [Romans 6:23](#) in the NET, the J. B. Phillips, and other translations. What is the context of this passage and its significance to believers?

We've used it all our lives for evangelistic purposes, but it's in a context written to the believer. This is really a verse for the believer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The master we choose dictates the kind of life we live!



Correlation: Two Masters, Two Kinds of Lives!

Spiritual slavery and freedom permeate the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Compare [Matthew 6:24](#); [John 8:31–36](#); and [Romans 6:15–23](#). What truth did Jesus teach which Paul developed about obedience and freedom?

Compare [Proverbs 5:21–22](#); [13:6](#); [Romans 6:20–21](#); [Galatians 5:19–21](#); and [James 1:13–15](#). Think about the death-like existence when we give sin the steering wheel. What caught your attention the most about the life of the person who is held captive by his or her own sins?

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Compare *John 10:10*; *Romans 6:23*; *Galatians 5:22–23*; *Ephesians 2:8–10*; *Colossians 3:12–17*; and *2 Timothy 2:20–21*. How would you describe the eternal kind of life God gives when He is our master?

Eternal kind of life causes you at the office to encourage the person who can't find his or her way out. It keeps you from judging. But if you're enslaved, you're not living that kind of life. Got it? Grace says, "You're free to choose." God says, "Choose Me." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Whose Slave Are You? Choose Every Day!

Every day, you will face choices that will reveal whose slave you are. How could you memorialize these truths so you can remember that only in God's hands will you breathe the air of freedom? Also think about an area in your life that should be handed over to your Master. What area might that be?

It's possible to be free and yet choose slavery. I know Christians who have done that. A dear pastor I know in another state fell, and tragically his response was, "Well, you know, God understands. God is a God of grace." And I said, "Stop. You made a choice. You made a bad series of choices. Face it. Address it. Trust God to lift you through it." As long as he keeps telling himself that his version of grace is the right one, he's enslaved to a lie. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Think of those who do not know the Lord Jesus and yet claim they are free. Why not take some time to pray for members of your family or coworkers who are lost?

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As you conclude your study of Romans 6, take a moment to renew your personal commitment to live by grace. In prayer, thank the Lord for the gift of freedom under the authority of your new Master, Jesus Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father God, I am so thankful for Your freedom and grateful that I am Yours. Use my life to touch people. Let my life be Your vehicle of glory. Lift me high in the air on the wings of freedom in Christ for all to see Your masterpiece. In the name of Jesus, who has freed me, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Romans*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 151.
2. Larnelle Harris, "I Give All to You," in *The Celebration Hymnal: Songs and Hymns for Worship* (n.p.: Word Music / Integrity Music, 1997), hymn 595.
3. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2007, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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