

Writeup for Website**Series: The Roman Road****Title: Gotta Serve Somebody**

Who we obey is who we serve. Some may obedience to Christ is restrictive. However, faith is restrictive in the same way a good diet or exercise program is restrictive. Would LeBron James say, "I hate basketball, it's so restrictive. I have to exercise, eat right, I'm so in bondage to basketball!" NO, he willingly submits himself to healthy practices which make him a great player. A life of faith is not burdensome when we willing submit to Jesus who brings life, the alternative is slow or even quick death in the service to sin. Paul calls us to make a choice, just as Moses & Joshua did for the Israelites earlier.

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

You may be an ambassador to England or France
 You may like to gamble, you might like to dance
 You may be the heavyweight champion of the world
 You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls.

Might be a rock'n' roll addict prancing on the stage
 Might have money & drugs, women in a cage
 You may be a business man or some high degree thief
 They may call you Doctor or they may call you Chief.

You may be a state trooper, you might be a young turk
 You may be the head of some big TV network
 You may be rich or poor, you may be blind or lame
 You may be living in another country under another name.

You may be a construction worker working on a home
 You may be living in a mansion or you might live in a dome
 You might own guns and you might even own tanks
 You might be somebody's landlord you might even own banks.

You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride
 You may be a city councilman taking bribes on the side
 You may be working in a barbershop, you may know how to cut hair
 You may be somebody's mistress, may be somebody's heir.

Might like to wear cotton, might like to wear silk
 Might like to drink whiskey, might like to drink milk
 You might like to eat caviar, you might like to eat bread
 You may be sleeping on the floor, sleeping in a king-sized bed.

But no matter what you say.

You're gonna have to serve somebody,
 It may be the devil or it may be the Lord
 But you're gonna have to serve somebody. (Bob Dylan, *Gotta Serve Somebody*)

Bob Dylan's conversion experience to Christ back in the 70's prompted a Gospel album, *Slow Train Coming*. It's possible he was reading Romans 6 when he wrote these lyrics. Let's listen to what Paul says in vv15-23 as we round out this chapter...

*15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! 16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, **you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.** 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

We said last week humankind was created to serve. We will serve. The question is who, Self or Christ? Because either Jesus or Sin will reign in our lives. Paul's the master of the rhetorical question, can we take advantage of God's grace, by no means. Since to take advantage of grace is automatically to switch allegiance to something other than God.

If you're accepted to a university, you're a student. You're given a class schedule, syllabi, books, and all expectations are laid out. Maybe you go for your first week, and hear all the work which is expected of you. On the second week, you hear there's a football game, your new university's playing their rival - but it's an away game, and would mean you'd miss a few classes. But you do it anyway. Then the following week there's some hazing requirements for your new fraternity. You miss a few more classes. Then you ran into that girl on the way to your economics class... she may be the one! You skip another. And this pattern continues until the end of the semester. You haven't done any of the required work, or very little. All you've done is enjoyed the fun parts of the college experience - the things you like.

Grades come in. Yours don't even register. Your professors don't even remember your face. You never showed up, and have failed every class. You lose all your scholarships, financial aide & grants. And they're not extending another semester to you - and that girl wants nothing to do with a deadbeat. Could you go in to the Registrar, complain & argue about how many games you went to, or how well you participated in your fraternity, or how much school spirit you have - and by the way the girl I want to marry goes here!?! Would the university listen? Would they consider you a student? No, you're not a student, you haven't acted like one. You've not devoted yourself to student life, but only what you want. Your not a member of the student body, you've got no right saying your a part of their school, since they call the shots.

That's what Paul's saying. If you want to be a student then the university's your master. Paul uses the idea of slave since it makes sense to these folks, but we can easily use another illustration. Like never showing up to work means you can't argue your boss,

who fires you, that you still consider yourself part of the company. No matter how much you want to think you can abuse God's grace, you can't. It's a clear sign your not a part of the team, maybe never really were. It's what CS Lewis said to us 2 weeks ago again, maybe your faith's imaginary.

But if you'd gone to class, done the work, as well as all the fun stuff. If you've assimilated the teaching, shown you understand it, taken it in, written your papers, learned, and even helped others in the process maybe as a teachers aide, you've got the right to wear the university moniker with pride. You're a student. And maybe that girl is still interested! You submit yourself to the universities rules, code of conduct, professors directions, etc., It's not restrictive, it's good for you. It's developing you & preparing you for the future - it's forming & shaping your life. You don't regard them as having control over you, because you've willingly submitted to their control - which we do in many situations.

Paul says, **you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.** Like a university, which has a pattern of teaching, claims your allegiance when you apply. You've believed what's been proclaimed to you in Jesus. And like we've been saying for the last few weeks, that means involving yourself in the worship service, community group, community partnership activities, having a quiet time, memorizing scripture, prayer, etc., You go to class, because it's forming you - it's not restrictive, or holding you back. It's preparing you for life. You've assimilated, even to the point of teaching & discipling others along the same path of righteousness. You're a teachers aide for Jesus, so to speak - a disciple.

You realize, that in the past you followed another line of teaching, you studied it, practiced it. Think about how much time we put into research just to buy a car, get a job, or play World of Warcraft (God forbid!). Some of you guys may've known more about microbrews, or professional athletes, than you did about the Scriptures before you came to Jesus (& still might)! But you've changed allegiance now, and you're obedient to Christ & his principles outlined in those Scriptures. And just like you couldn't tell your professor he or she is wrong, you don't tell Jesus he's wrong, even when it's hard to accept what He's teaching you. If you say you don't trust something he says, you'll be obedient to this part but not that part, you'll go to the parties but not class, then you're not really a student of Jesus. We want no longer to be a slave to sin, but a slave to righteousness - to reflect our allegiance in lifestyle & choices. To willingly submit to the control of Christ in life. Paul continues...

19 I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.

20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal

life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul doesn't claim freedom as if to mean that once we find Jesus we can live as we want. As a matter of fact he says that's the opposite - it's bondage - it's slavery to sin. You're gonna be a slave to one or the other, sin or righteousness. Think about it clearly. Every social order has a mantra, ideals, values, or what have you, which govern their community. Even small groups of friends have a social order, when broken upsets the ship. We're never truly free to do as we want, we always serve someone or something within the confines of some social order.

The young woman who works on my dreadlocks is going to *Burning Man* this year. She's very excited. As she knitted away at my hair, I took opportunity to read the 10 principles which govern *Burning Man*. If you don't know what it is, it's a once a year festival of creativity & self-expression which pops up in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada. They call it a temporary city since 70k people attend - and at the end of 9 days they burn a giant statue; *The Burning Man*. The principles which govern it are, Radical Inclusion, Gifting, De-commodification, Radical Self-reliance, Radical Self-expression, Communal Effort, Civic Responsibility, Leaving No Trace (you'd better clean up!), Participation, and Immediacy. I don't have the time to read through & explain all of them, but they, in many ways, sound idyllic. Utopian.

Burning Man has no food stalls, no beer stands, no trash cans, sells no water to it's participants, money isn't used, cell phones don't work, and there's only internet for absolute emergency, etc.. Everything is de-commodified, basic needs are met without cost to anyone & everyone is to be radically self-reliant. It's considered by its founders & followers to be, not just as an event, but a way of life - a culture. They're trying to change the world through these 10 principles, which work to some degree. There's been a lot of good things which have been born from it. Yet, I imagine their principles work only because 70,000 people are governed by them for one week a year, any longer & self-centeredness & sin would eat away at the foundations of what is otherwise an ocean of water offering a drink to a thirsty man.

Burning Man's a quest for freedom. Freedom's the question. What is it? How is it attained - is it anarchy, where everyone gets to do as they please? Or, is there more to it? There is...even *Burning Man* has it's principles which guide it. Yet, in the biblical world view, true freedom is freedom to follow that which is healthy & good, that which we were created to follow & be in Christ. Freedom to sin is like the guy several years ago who robbed a convenience store. He gave the clerk a \$10.00 bill to get her to open the cash register. It worked. She opened it & gave him the contents - without looking he ran off. He got what he wanted...a grand total of \$4.34, but he'd left the \$10.00! He lost \$5.66 in the process. Sin promises so much, but it always short changes us. There's no freedom in it, and leaves you poorer than when you started.

Some things sound so good. So promising. Some ways of life, or subcultures, sound so utopian. Especially when they only last a week & we only see everyone on their high.

Give it a month of sleeplessness, and dust, and heat, and see what happens. When we convince ourselves we can live how we want, we're like the man on a life raft in the middle of the ocean. Fresh water runs dry, and we're left with only ocean water. Seawater contains 7 times more salt than the body can safely take in. Ironically a person dehydrates because the kidneys demand more water to flush out the additional salt - but with every gulp you add 7 times more salt. The more you drink the thirstier you get. Drink to your own death. Sin's promises run dry, leaving us drinking more & more, thirstier all the time for more of what we think will satisfy, but is killing us all the same.

Remember last week we asked, do we always feel like we're dead to sin? No - we'll battle with our sin nature until Jesus returns, or we're dead, whichever comes first. Whether or not we 'feel like' we're dead to sin doesn't matter. It doesn't change the fact any more than a married person who doesn't feel the romance of their marriage at any point in time - it doesn't mean they're no longer married during those times. The marriage license, witnesses, and a ring on their finger all testify they are! Our 'Thinker' has to override our 'Feeler'. Scripture dictates we take every thought & desire captive to Christ since he's the professor telling us what's best for us - and what we find is that His is a well which never runs dry, filled with water which is always satisfying.

But often times the lie is whispered in our ears on the battle field of life that Christ, this Jesus/faith thing's too limiting. Too restrictive. Burning Man operates on radical inclusion, but go share Jesus out there who demands allegiance in moral ways contrary to their lifestyle & I imagine you'll find different. Jesus seems to have something to say about money, our sexuality, drug & alcohol use, or how I treat my neighbor who constantly let's his dog crap on my lawn, etc. Jesus doesn't seem to afford me the freedom I sometimes want. If Jesus wasn't Lord of my life, I'd have the freedom to punch my neighbors lights out & send his dog packing. I can't just do as I want - as a matter of fact I have to love him in Christ! Everything else looks so fulfilling & promising - like an ocean full of water to a thirsty shipwrecked sailor. But we must look at it differently.

Faith is restrictive in the same way a good diet or exercise program is restrictive. Would LeBron James say, "I hate basketball, it's so restrictive. I have to exercise, eat right, I'm so in bondage to basketball!" Would Peyton Manning ever say, "I hate having to throw a football - there's so many other things I could be doing. I'm a slave to football!" NO, they never say that. They may be tired, they may want to skip a practice, but overall they're devoted to the game & all that entails making them great players. They show up. Participate. Exercise. Eat right. Stretch. Run plays, whatever it takes to make them sharp on the field. Because they know that self-restraint & self-control, and healthy practices make them great. If not, they wouldn't be great athletes, and definitely not members of the teams for which they play.

Who we obey, is who we serve. So, will people see Jesus on us? Will they smell his righteousness as they get close to us like an expensive cologne? ...On a wall near the main entrance to the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, is a portrait with the following inscription: "James Butler Bonham. No picture of him exists. This portrait is of his

nephew, Major James Bonham, deceased, who greatly resembled his uncle. It is placed here by the family that people may know the appearance of the man who died for freedom." No literal portrait of Jesus exists, but the likeness of Christ, who makes us free, can be seen in the lives of true followers.

So, Paul's simply calling us to allegiance & all it entails. And allegiance to Christ brings freedom, health, and goodness into our lives. He's urging us to make the necessary choice of allegiance, like Moses, who upon his death assembled all of Israel together giving the people a choice. He said, ¹⁹ *This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰ and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*¹

We choose between life & death, blessings & curses when we're faced with temptation - who'll we serve, and what'll it bring. It may seem good for a week to choose not to be obedient to Jesus in some way, but prolonged drinking of the water, and your kidneys can't flush out the toxicity of salt.

In a drastic example, a friend of mine, in a weak moment chose to sleep with someone outside of marriage, and now is saddled with a child. That child is an innocent blessing, but my friend was a father at 15! Imagine what that does to the rest of your life, how it changes all your opportunities. And now, the biological mother, who's a drug addict, is making his life a living hell, demanding money, threatening litigation, throwing all responsibility on my friend, abusing his child, etc. - it's a living death.

Joshua at the age of 95 after leading the next generation, again gave Israel the same choice... ¹⁴ *Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."*²

Choose this day whom you'll serve. Make a clean break from the old gods which governed your life. Most of us aren't out there committing major sin. Our sins lie more in the category of self-interest & indifference. Our gods promise better lives, bigger houses, reputations & prestige. They demand our time & tongue. They tempt us to leisure & rest. Paul says, stop playing both sides, it doesn't work - you're fooling yourself. I imagine each one of us, if we're honest & truly introspective would see we have one foot in both worlds. Some subtly, some outrightly. There's a choice &

¹ *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Dt 30:19–20

² *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jos 24:14–15.

prolonged dancing around the issue brings up the question, is our faith imaginary? Since we remember Jeremiah said, the heart is deceitful above all else, who can trust it?

We don't tend to like definitive challenges. Although we're Americans, we don't value the vibrato & confidence of leaders such as Moses & Joshua in spiritual matters who say, as for me and my house we will serve the Lord. We're intellectuals priding ourselves on breaking down all statements, but in the end it's our escape pod from what we see as a limiting life when we've not even given Jesus a chance to prove his promises to us. But theirs is great leadership. Leadership which I hope I can emulate to you as pastor/leader here.

Sin is anything which would lead me away from Jesus, and that comes disguised as good things. So again, take stock. I had a great conversation with Tim this week, a young man, sincerely taking stock of life, desiring to make great choices to build his faith & life overall - commendable. Let's continue today with our hope to fill our minds with the 'pattern of teaching that has now claimed our allegiance'. Last week I challenged you to memorize Romans 6:10-11 & 1 Corinthians 10:13. This week I challenge you to memorize:

Romans 6:6-7 - For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin ⁷because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Romans 6:14 - For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Romans 6:18 - You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.