

**Writeup for Website****Series: The Roman Road****Title: Getting Pierced**

*Paul's been harping on sin & salvation. It's good for the constant reminder, and driving it home, but the Christian life is not just about avoiding sin & the pursuit of purity & holiness. It is about extending ourselves, investing in others, and furthering the interests of our Master - since as Christians we've willingly given ourselves to Christ as slaves of righteousness - join us in exploring these ideas in Romans 7:1-6 this week.*

**Color Changes in text indicate slide changes**

Before my little excursion into the wilderness of the High Sierra's we left off at the end of Romans 6 where Paul discussed the difference of being a slave to sin, as opposed to a slave to righteousness; probably recalling a familiar Old Testament image from Exodus 21 (vv2/5-6) where it outlines...

*"When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person, without debt... 5But if the slave declares, "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out a free person," 6then his master shall bring him before God. He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost; and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him for life."*

We see here slavery was a limited thing lasting 6 years, then a slave was set free. But if a slave chose to remain in the service of his master, it's for life. This may well be what Paul had in mind when he said in v16 of chapter 6, 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?"*

Therefore, with the offer of rescue from slavery by Christ's death on the cross, having been set free to obey God, we have a choice - to return to the slavery of sin, or become slaves of righteousness. Like the OT slave, we have a choice to decide that if we love our new master, Jesus, we'll submit to his authority over us, and become slaves, not of sin, but of righteousness which leads to righteousness/holiness/sanctification; a topic which we will come back to in a little while.

Therefore, due to Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross, there's a choice for how we'll live from now on. But neither gives us personal freedom as we would define it - which is to do whatever we want, which isn't true freedom at all. Since to do whatever we want is to resubmit ourselves to the slavery of sin - it's to go out into the world without the covering of the master who takes care of those under his charge. Because in the rejection of Christ comes a renewed bondage to sin, as opposed to the acceptance of Jesus as master comes freedom through obedience to him. Today, we want to explore this further

in 7:1-6. But before we get into that, let's define an important term in this passage. The Law.

The Law was considered the embodiment of the Hebrew Scriptures teaching on life & conduct as given by God through the prophets. In other words God gave us clarity on how to live, which brings true freedom. It included the 10 commandments found in Exodus 20, and was comprehensive, detailed & exhaustive. Yet, the Law was never put in place to save us - it was not meant to be the moral ladder to attaining God's favor. As a matter of fact, it only tended to reveal sin in us, or how far we are from God's holy standard. Paul said of the Law in chapter 5, *<sup>20</sup> Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...*<sup>1</sup>

Scripture teaches that the Law, or God's standard for life, convicts us of our trespass, or sin. In other words, due to the Fall, we are unable to live up to God's standard, and the Law convicts us of our need for salvation or a savior. It continually reveals to us how far we are from God. And Paul's speaking to well versed people in these subjects, whereas, sad to say, many of our modern readers are biblically illiterate - for instance as I sat around campfires on our backpacking trip, I found I had to define terms left & right in order to share the gospel with my listeners.

I imagine you may have seen the movie *Sleeping with the Enemy* starring Julia Roberts. A movie about a woman who meets a man, he seems nice, they marry. But afterwards she finds that he's extremely demanding & she can't live up to his standards. Before he comes home each day she has to make sure the house is absolutely in order, all the labels on the cans have to be facing out in the cupboards & perfectly aligned. Everything must be folded & cleaned just right. If not, he beats her. It was futile trying to please him. She couldn't & with every effort she made, she found there were a thousand new things to which she could not measure up.

Imagine living with a husband like that, never pleased, capricious, violent one minute, sweet the next. It would make you crazy, skittish, your stress levels would always be high, you couldn't relax, and you'd begin to think horribly of yourself. She eventually breaks away from him, faking her own death, and goes off to start a new life where she meets a man who treats her with love & respect. She figuratively had to die to be set free. She was bound to a man who sought only to hurt & destroy her - and his law, or his standards were unreachable. We could label him as the sin within us.

In chapter 7, in reference to the Law & the sin which it reveals in us, Paul uses an illustration similar to this scenario, but with a twist... *"Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?"*

In other words, while you are alive under God's moral/civic law, you are bound to that law, but if you die, you're freed from it. Like Julia Roberts character, who figuratively

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Ro 5:20.

died, she'd then been set free from the tyrannical law of her husband. Simple enough, but then he continues with an example which doesn't quite fit...

*2 For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as **he** is alive, **but if her husband dies**, she is released from the law that binds her to him. 3 So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man."*

Let's stop there a moment, since Paul's been using the language of death of a person in being released from the power & effect of sin & the Law. This makes total sense, if your husband dies, you're no longer married & free to remarry. Logical. However, Paul's addressing the whole moral law which we're unable to live up to, so marriage isn't really the issue, it's sin within us & our inability to live up to God's standard in a myriad of ways. To truly be free the woman would have to die & be reborn to be freed from the effects of the law in totality. It struck me that the illustration he uses here isn't of a woman who dies & is reborn - but of her husband dying which releases her from the law. I asked myself, why did he choose to use that illustration?

We need to keep focused on what Paul's speaking about, the sin which is within all of us & how the law brings that to light. So, we must replace the husband in this illustration with her sinful nature. She's legally married under the Law, married to that life. Bound to her sinful nature & its effects upon her while she's still under the legal connection to it. She's released when that power over her dies off. She now has the opportunity to choose a new spouse. And we remember, Christians are referred to as the Bride of Christ when we die to sin, and are reborn in him. It's a new covenant, a new situation in which the effects of the law & sin are broken, where instead of being bound unwillingly, we willingly enter into this new spousal relationship with a good husband who brings freedom & life. **Which is what he says following this in verse 4...**

*4 So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law **through the body of Christ**, that you might belong to another, **to him who was raised from the dead**, in order that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. 6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."*

You also died to the law through the body of Christ - that says the same as John 3:16-18 (let's read this together), <sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Jn 3:16-18.

In the movie, *Sleeping with the Enemy*, Julia's character faked her death. And if you remember, the husband figured it out & found her. She would have to truly die to be free from him. We can't get round our sin, it will find us. Something had to die for it to be satisfied, and God loved us so much that he sent his Son. The term Son in the Scriptures means Jesus originated from, and was God. God sacrificed himself to satisfy the old spouse, and rises from the dead to become our new husband. Knowing we could not live up to the standard of the Law, God made preparations for us, for our salvation, to bring us back into relationship with him. To bring us close to him.

So, salvation isn't only moving from slavery to sin, to slavery to righteousness, it's also a change of spouse or master. Sin wouldn't let go, it wouldn't die, but God gave himself as a sacrifice to satisfy the laws demand. He died in our place, and we're now reborn to remarry a good loving caring husband who wants only what's best for us. Sin no longer has any legal power over us. It's as if Jesus walked into Julia's house & said to her husband, "You're dead set on slowly killing this woman, so I'll die in her place." And in doing so, he killed the power that husband had over her.

And in seeing the lengths to which our new husband will go to win our favor, we willingly go to the doorpost, and now request that Jesus pierce our ear as a symbol of our lifelong devotion to this new relationship in which we find ourselves. We've been brought far from sin, and close to God in Jesus. Paul refers to it as being made holy, or to being sanctified in chapter 6, *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.*<sup>3</sup> Translations use the words holiness & sanctification interchangeably - in other words we are being made into the likeness of Jesus by way of being close to him.

Holiness has the idea of being set apart from what's unclean or defiled & being dedicated or connected to God. For example, when Moses came near the burning bush, he was told to remove his shoes because the ground he was walking on was holy. It was special because God was there. Anything brought into the presence of God is purified & made holy. Things placed in the Temple were holy, because they'd been set apart for use in worshipping God. There was nothing special about them apart from that. It was just they were close to God. So it is with us as we choose to become slaves of righteousness, God comes & dwells within us through his Holy Spirit, and that indwelling of his Spirit gives us a connection to God that makes us different - holy.

We're set apart, made holy, by the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, but at the same time we continue to be sanctified as we live lives of righteousness empowered by the Holy Spirit within us. In fact if you look at 7:6, that's how Paul ends this section. **He says:** *"But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."*

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<sup>3</sup> *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ro 6:19–20.

Our sanctification, our growth in holiness develops through the new life brought about by the Holy Spirit living within us - by being brought close to God in Christ. Notice at the end of our passage we're not keeping track of our progress with a written code of law, but rather through the vibrant organic life of the Spirit within us. Our sanctification is guaranteed by Jesus' death & resurrection, yet in the meantime our growth in holiness is an ongoing struggle. We need to present ourselves to God each day as willing slaves. That'll mean giving up our rights where they conflict with his interests. It'll mean being committed to his purposes, to his people, to his programs, not just our own. In becoming his bride, and his slave, we now no longer ask what is it that I want in life, but what is it that my master wants of my life? Because Paul says in this passage that our purpose is *'in order that we might bear fruit for God.'*

Do you extend yourself? One obvious sign you can watch for in your life is our tendency to just hang out with friends. The temptation is, especially when life gets busy, is to only surround ourselves with those people we know & like. We get a false sense of security in this. But God calls us to reach out constantly to new people as well as old. It's not that we have to be best friends with everyone, but when you walk in this room do you only greet those you know, or do you naturally look for the wall flowers & new people? Do you seek out people who're hungry for Christ & seek to feed them? It's a kingdom decision. Even with our enemies, are we loving them, extending ourselves to others all the time. Do we pull our friends into this lifestyle as well, discipling them along the way, or do we just cycle through the nice restaurants over & over again with the same folks? Since sin can come in the form of selfishness, indifference & sloth.

It reminds us of the men who were given talents/money while their master was away in Mt 25. To one he gave five talents, another 2, and still another one. The first two invested the money reaping financial reward for the master, presenting it all upon his return. The third just buried the money returning only the one talent when the master returned. The Master was happy with the first two, upset with the third, and took what that man had & gave it to the first.

We could view our Christian life as just accepting Jesus, burying ourselves in, avoiding sin, being good, and surrounding ourselves with a false sense of comfort. But that's not what Jesus calls us to. He not only calls us to purity & holiness, but calls us to further his kingdom, to make interest on what he's entrusted to us. The gospel is good news in which we carry out to others. So the Christian life isn't just about the avoidance of sin, as important as that is, it calls us out to invest in others. To build on what Christ has done in us by giving it away constantly. We don't just avoid sin, we ask ourselves about every decision we make, "Does this further the interests of my master?"

We could be really good people our whole lives, but we could be burying our talent in the process. We may look like good Christians, act the part, but only be really furthering our own goals & personal security. *If you were going to run a marathon, you'd pare your attire down to very thin running shorts, light running shoes, and a tank top. You wouldn't go to the starting line in jeans, work boots, and a winter coat. The question is,*

what's going to make you run best. Some things we choose in life don't help us to run the race Jesus has marked out for us - they may seem innocuous, but they weigh us down.

Many of us are ambitious to further our careers, to build our retirement plans, but do we ever stop to ask, is this adding to the interests of Jesus? Do these seemingly inconsequential mundane decisions grow the interest of Christ? Or, when I stand at the doorpost & the awl goes through my ear, do I realize that everything I am is His now, and every decision is to be weighed in that light? Maybe Jesus doesn't want me to start that business, or stay in this career which eats up all my time & leaves no room for His calling? Am I concerned about others around me, rich, poor, black, white, or what have you? Am I prayerful for all people groups of the world to know Christ as I am called to all throughout Scripture. Do I care about my neighbor though I don't share his views?

Jesus death on our behalf has freed us from the bondage of sin & his risen life gives us the freedom to follow him, to do what he calls us to do. But we still have to choose to do it. We still have to fight the battle in the power of the Spirit, and the power of the enemy is broken, the constraint of our sinful nature has been castrated. We're free again to follow Christ & his purposes in the world. And that freedom can't be separated from the constraints of holiness & righteousness as we model him to others.

There's a paradox here. We're free, yet at the same time we're slaves. It reflects Exodus 21, where the slave decides, service to his master is far better than freedom to do whatever he wants - because he has seen & learned that freedom of self interest is false freedom. Freedom in service to our master Jesus brings deep satisfying life since it builds on the interest of the kingdom. It brings true riches of building into others, and seeing the world know Jesus & the power of salvation.

When Kim and I began hiking the John Muir Trail, we knew that when we entered the wilderness there was no returning until we reached the end. The heights of Mt Whitney was our final goal 240 miles away. We had to trust the trail would lead us there. Every time we looked up a mountain we saw no inkling of a path to follow. It was until we took the next step that the trail would continually reveal itself. And only from the top of very high passes could we look back & see where the path had led. Eventually it led us over 11 passes in total, past beautiful rocks, streams, and lakes & on to the top of the highest peak in the lower 48 states, 14,500 feet up Mt Whitney. We saw things we never would've seen without trusting that trail & the others who'd gone before us. We prepared & planned, but the path led the way into a beautiful, but precarious wilderness.

That's what Paul's speaking about in Romans. We're to trust Jesus, the Path, the Way, to lead us through life discovering things we never would've seen otherwise. We can stay at home, bury ourselves in everyday life, or we can get out & live the adventure with Him. Paul's saying that in coming to Christ we're committed. Once we crossed that threshold of the bridegroom there's no turning back. We can't put our hand to the plowshare & do a good job while looking back at what we've left behind. We go forward, not antsy when we can't see the path, but trusting He's leading us. Not just camping in one spot, but following along, living the adventure of faith with every step.

Have you willingly been pierced? Or, if having already done so, have you buried your talent? Are you in service to your master, and has that made a difference in how you live & the decisions you make in every situation large & small?

I challenged you to memorize this verse 5 weeks ago. Now I challenge you to meditate on it this week... *Romans 6:18 - You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.* What does it mean? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you exactly where you're not following, or have buried your talent. To what does righteousness call you? What are your Master's desires? In backpacking we were told we'd see beautiful things, but we had yet to see them. Jesus tells us He's great plans for us, but we may be foregoing that joy as we warm ourselves by the campfires of safety in our homes.