

Whom Do You Serve?

Biblical scholars teach us that sometime around the year 57 A.D., the apostle Paul wrote a letter to certain Christians in Rome (Romans 1:7). In that letter Paul declares that Christians "...have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God." Next Paul gives a succinct definition of slavery. You are slaves "to the one whom you obey, either of sin which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to righteousness." Professor John Murray, in his commentary on the book of Romans, writes these helpful words: "The emphasis upon obedience shows that obedience to God is the criterion of our devotion to him and that the principle of righteousness is to present ourselves to God as servants unto obedience."

Although Paul's teaching gives us much to consider, it's important that we understand what he's not saying. The slavery which he speaks of is not the absence of freedom, but rather, slavery to God, in Jesus Christ, is the only true freedom that exists. The picture of Christians as "slaves" is very appropriate because it helps us to see that our commitment to Christ, our Master, must be complete. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Paul writes these provocative words: "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." The clear teaching here is that Christians have been purchased from the slave market of sin. We now have a new Master whom we're bound to serve and obey completely.

This introduction to slavery will help us as we look at the next portion of our text in Matthew's gospel. We've been looking at Matthew 6:19-34 and I've been noting from that text that the cause of our unhealthy fear and anxiety is misplaced trust. We looked first at contrasting treasures and then at contrasting vision. Today we pick up the final contrast in Jesus' teaching in this passage—contrasting masters. Listen to Jesus' words from Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." Jesus is saying in effect that, "No one is able to serve as a slave to two masters." This verse is intimately connected to the first two contrasts. At the heart of whether or not we store up "earthly or heavenly treasures" or whether we have "healthy or diseased vision" is directly connected to whom we serve.

Notice now the last phrase of verse 24: "You cannot serve God and money." Greek language lexicons inform us that the word translated "money" comes from an Aramaic word that's usually translated "mammon" which can mean either money or possessions. It actually came to mean, "...that in which one trusts." So, then, money, possessions, job, spouse, children or anything that we place our ultimate trust in is set over against God, our Master.

Going back to this idea of a slave to his master, we may not often think in terms of slavery, for example, in our vocation. If we're working for two earthly employers we can faithfully split our time between them. Technically, in the working world, it's possible to have two jobs and be faithful to both of them. But this is not possible in the world of a slave. As a slave, there's no sense in which a slave would ever have the latitude to do anything other than what his master requires from him. A slave is totally subject to his master at all times, 24 hours a day. What, then, does the teaching of Jesus mean for us? God has given us many things to enjoy for which we may find honest pleasure in without guilt. But the minute that we place our trust in

the gift rather than God, the giver of the gift; the minute that we place ourselves on the throne in the place of our Master by wanting what we want rather than what he wants for us, we've made a master out of the gifts/possessions we've been given. I once heard that, "...sin is what you do when you're not satisfied with God." If we're not fully trusting in our Master, Jesus Christ, we'll place our trust in other things for our happiness, security, and fulfillment. Jesus has given his people everything that we need so that we can rest completely satisfied in him which will free us from ongoing bouts of unhealthy fear and anxiety. He has loved us with an everlasting love. The hymn writer, Isaac Watts, once wrote, "Love so amazing so divine demands my soul, my life, my all."

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