

# ARE WE “SLAVES OF SIN” OR “SERVANTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”?

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**NOTE:** - All Bible texts are taken from the King James Version; and the compiler has supplied the emphasis throughout this article.

## ▪ THE ISSUE AT QUESTION: -

Many professed Christians believe that obedience to the Law of Ten Commandments is bondage or slavery, from which Jesus Christ has set us free. Is this BELIEF true though? Is this the bondage or slavery which Jesus came to set people free from?

## ▪ OBJECTIVE: -

To establish clearly and simply from the New Testament Scriptures, that SIN is the bondage or slavery which Jesus came to set people free from; and that the person who commits sin is the truest slave to sin.

The apostle Paul has shown us in Romans, that those who have been justified by faith in Christ have been set free from continuing to be a slave to sin, and have now become slaves to righteousness. (This message of Paul also establishes the truth that SIN and RIGHTEOUSNESS are contrary and opposite to each other.)

The apostle James calls the Law of Ten Commandments the law of liberty. How can obedience to the law of liberty therefore be bondage or slavery? This is a **contradiction in terms**.

## THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE - JOHN 8:31 - 36 EXAMINED: -

Jesus taught those Jews who believed on him, that if they knew the truth, the truth would set them free.

John 8:31 & 32: - “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, [then] are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, **and the truth shall make you free**<sup>1</sup>.”

Jesus’ listeners questioned this statement, because they claimed to have never been in **bondage** or **slavery** to any person. Their question to Jesus clearly reveals that they understood that Jesus was referring to the truth setting them free from some form of slavery or bondage.

John 8:33: - “They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, **and were never in bondage**<sup>2</sup> **to any man**: how sayest thou, **Ye shall be made free?**”

Jesus’ answer to the Jews’ question teaches us what is the **slavery** that he was referring to, that the truth sets believers free from. It is the slavery of committing sin, because whoever commits sin is the **slave** of sin.

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek word that is translated in VS. 32 as “shall make free” is the word “eleutheroo” – Strong’s Concordance, Greek, No. 1659. This verb has been defined as “free, set free.” – A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, by Walter Bauer, pp. 250 & 251.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word that is translated in VS. 33 as “were in bondage” is the word “douleuo” – Strong’s Concordance, Greek, No. 1398. This verb has been defined as “be a slave, be subjected” - IBID., p. 205.

John 8:34 - 36: - "Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, **Whosoever committeth sin is the servant (slave) of sin.** And **the servant (slave)** abideth not in the house for ever: [but] the Son abideth ever. **If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.**"

**NOTE:** - The Greek word that is translated as "servant" in VS. 34 & 35 is the word "doulos" – Strong's Concordance; Greek, No. 1401. This noun is defined as "slave".<sup>3</sup> This word is used many times in the New Testament, and is translated in the KJV in the following ways: -

- Servant or servants;
- bond (in contrast with "free" see for example 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:28);
- bondman (in contrast with "free man" – Revelation 6:15).

In the context of this passage, clearly "servant" is not the best translation of this word. It is not strong enough in the meaning it needs to convey. Jesus is referring to people being in **bondage** or **slavery** to sin, from which the truth shall set them free. The translation of "doulos" as "slave" in VS. 34 & 35 harmonizes perfectly with the context of this passage. What Jesus is therefore actually saying in VS. 34 is: -

**Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin.**

In VS. 35 Jesus informs us that the slave of sin will not abide forever, but the Son of God will abide forever. In VS. 36 we find that if the Son of God makes a person free (free from being a slave of sin in the context of this passage), that person if truly free is free from being a slave to sin.

Is this not the purpose of Jesus' mission to this world as the Messiah – to set the captives free?

Isaiah 61:1 & 2: - "**The spirit of the Lord GOD [is] upon me;** because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, **to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to [them that are] bound.** To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn."

Luke 4:17 - 21: - "And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, **The Spirit of the Lord [is] upon me, because he hath anointed me** to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, **to preach deliverance to the captives,** and recovering of sight to the blind, **to set at liberty them that are bruised,** to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave [it] again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, **This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.**"

☞ **These passages therefore indicate that sin is slavery or bondage, and the person who commits sin is a slave to it, from which Jesus came to set us free.**

### ROMANS 6 EXAMINED: -

Paul informs us that the person who has been justified has been crucified by faith with Jesus, so that he should no longer be a slave to sin.

Romans 6:6 & 7: - "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with [him], that the body of sin might be destroyed, **that henceforth we should not serve<sup>4</sup> sin.** For he that is dead is \*freed from sin."

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<sup>3</sup> IBID., p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> The Greek word that is translated in Romans 6:6 as "should serve" (in respect of sin) is the word "douleuo" – Strong's Concordance, Greek, No. 1398. This verb has been defined as "be a slave, be subjected" - A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, by Walter Bauer, p. 205.

**NOTE:** - \* For the word “freed”, the margin has the word “justified”, which is based on the Greek word “dikaioo” – Strong’s Concordance; Greek, No. 1344. This Greek verb is defined as “justify, vindicate, treat as just”.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Paul summarizes the change that should have taken place in the believer, when they have experienced justification by faith: -

**The believer who is “dead to sin” – Romans 6:2, has been justified, and should no longer be a slave to sin.**

☞ Throughout the rest of this chapter, Paul contrasts being a slave to two different conditions: -

1. Being a slave to sin; - this is the experience **before** justification has taken place; or,
2. Being a slave of righteousness; - this is the experience **after** justification has taken place.

**(NOTE:** - “doulos” is the Greek word translated in the KJV as “servant/s” in Romans 6:16, 17, 20.)

The following verse clearly highlights these two contrasting conditions: -

Romans 6:16: - “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves **servants** to obey, his **servants** ye are to whom ye obey; **whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?**”

In the following two verses, Paul contrasts our condition **before** justification, when we were **slaves** to sin, with the experience **after** justification, having been set free from serving sin and we have become slaves of righteousness.

Romans 6:17 & 18: - “But God be thanked, **that ye were the servants of sin**, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. **Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.**”

Paul reinforces this message repeatedly in the following verses of this chapter. As we have yielded our members as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness, now we are to yield them as slaves unto righteousness and holiness.

Romans 6:19: - “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: **for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity<sup>6</sup> unto iniquity**; even so now yield your members **servants to righteousness unto holiness.**”

Before justification, we were slaves to sin, so that we could not do righteousness, and this unrighteous fruit ends in death. But having being justified and being set free from sin, we have become slaves of God, and our fruit is unto holiness, and the end of this experience is everlasting life.

Romans 6:20 - 22: - “For **when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness**. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? **for the end of those things [is] death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.**”

The blessed experience of justification by faith in Christ has set us free from serving the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:2: - “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus **hath made me free from the law of sin and death.**”

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<sup>5</sup> IBID., pp. 197 & 198.

<sup>6</sup> The Greek word that is translated as “iniquity” is the word “anomia”. Strong’s Concordance; Greek No. 458. It is defined as: - “Lawlessness”. – IBID., pp. 71 & 72.

## **THE LAW OF LIBERTY – JAMES' TESTIMONY: -**

The apostle James calls the Law that forbids committing adultery and killing (See Exodus 20:13 & 14), and which is found in the Scriptures, the “perfect law of liberty”. This of course is an unambiguous reference to the Ten Commandment Law. The person who continues in fulfilling this **perfect** law shall be blessed in his deeds.

James 1:25: - “But whoso looketh into **the perfect law of liberty, and continueth [therein]**, he being not a forgetful hearer, **but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.**”

James 2:8 - 12: - “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. **For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one [point], he is guilty of all.** For he that said, **Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.** Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged **by the law of liberty.**”

### **CONCLUSION: -**

- Obedience to the perfect law of liberty is **NOT** bondage or slavery. Sin (which is defined as the transgression of the law – See 1 John 3:4) is the slavery, which Jesus came to set us free from serving, in the experience of justification by faith. The person who continues to commit sin is a slave to sin. We are either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. The first leads to death; the second leads to eternal life. We do well to ponder these truths, and examine ourselves to see which path our feet are travelling in.