

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

LESSON **XIV**: SANCTIFICATION: CAN WE SIN BECAUSE OF GRACE? — CHAP 6 VERSES 15-23

“STEERING A COURSE BETWEEN LEGALISM AND LICENTIOUSNESS” — “In 6:1-14, Paul responds to an objection that the very abundance of God’s grace in Christ encourages sin by arguing that Christ, in fact, sets believers free from sin. In 6:15-23, Paul responds to a similar objection by emphasizing the ‘flip side’ of this freedom from sin: slavery to God and to righteousness. Slave imagery dominates this paragraph. Paul also uses the language of freedom but less often. Thus, *it is not ‘freedom’ that is the topic of this paragraph but ‘slavery.’* (Paul uses δούλος [doulos, ‘slave’] and δουλόω [douloō, ‘enslave’] eight times and in every verse except 15, 21 and 23; and the related words ὑπακοή [hupakoē, ‘obedience’] and ὑπακούω [hupakouō, ‘obey’] occur three times. ἐλεύθερος [eleutheros, ‘free’] and ἐλευθερώω [eleutheroō, ‘set free’] occur, together, only three times; and two of these refer back to the teaching of 6:1-14.) *This emphasis on the Christian’s slavery — which Paul admits is not the whole picture; cf. v. 19a — is necessary in order to show that the freedom of the Christian ‘from sin’ is not a freedom ‘to sin.’ Between the dangers of legalism and licentiousness Paul steers a careful course. He makes it clear that Christians are free from the binding power of the Mosaic law while at the same time stressing that Christians are ‘under obligation’ to obey their new ‘master’ — God, or righteousness. Against those who would insist on the necessity of the law as a force to curb and restrain sin, Paul proclaims the release of Christians from the power of the law as a necessary step in over-throwing the reign of sin (v. 14; cf. 7:1-6). And against those who would pervert this new freedom into an excuse for sinning, Paul insists that even ‘under grace’ there are obligations of obedience that must be taken seriously. For, as Paul makes clear, there is no such thing as human ‘autonomy,’ a freedom from all outside powers and influences. Either people are under the power of sin, or they are under the power of God. The question is not, then, whether one will have a master, but which master one will serve. Serving sin, Paul shows, leads to death; serving God, to life.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 396f]

“The new principle had just been laid down. The apostle had found it in the object of justifying faith. But could a principle so spiritual, apart from every external and positive rule, take hold of the will with power enough to rule it thoroughly? To this natural objection, formulated in ver. 15, St. Paul answers as follows: by the acceptance of grace a new master has been substituted for the former, sin (vv. 16-19); and the believer feels himself obliged to serve this new master with the more fidelity because he rewards his servants by communicating life to them, whereas the former master pays his by giving them death (vv. 20-23). Thus it is proved that the new principle is clothed with sufficient, though purely internal authority, to control the believer’s life.” [Godet, *Romans*, pg 253]

TODAY’S LESSON IN A NUTSHELL

“The passage begins, as does 6:1-14, with a rhetorical question that picks up the substance of something Paul has just said (v. 15). Paul’s initial response (v. 16) is a reminder that our actions have serious consequences, in that those actions serve to bind us to different powers — ‘sin’ and ‘obedience’ — and lead to very different results — ‘death’ or ‘righteousness.’ In vv. 17-18 and 20-23, Paul uses his customary ‘once ... but now’ device to contrast his readers’ pre-Christian existence with their Christian experience. ‘Once’ they were slaves of sin, doing shameful things that led to death; ‘now’ they are slaves to God and of righteousness, and do things that lead to holiness and life. This ‘indicative’ frames the ‘imperative’ of v. 19: ‘just as’ we once gave ourselves over to those powers to which we were formerly enslaved, ‘so now’ we are to give ourselves over to those powers to which we are now enslaved.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 397]

What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. 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? 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. 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 unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were

What then? shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? let it not be! have ye not known that to whom ye present yourselves servants for obedience, servants ye are to him to whom ye obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? and thanks to God, that ye were servants of the sin, and — were obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which ye were delivered up; and having been freed from the sin, ye became servants to the righteousness. In the manner of men I speak, because of the weakness of your flesh, for even as ye did present your members servants to the uncleanness and to the lawlessness — to the lawlessness, so now present your members servants to the righteousness — to sanctification, for when ye were servants of the sin, ye were free from 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. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 6:15-23 KJV)

free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 6:15-23 NIV)

righteousness, what fruit, therefore, were ye having then, in the things of which ye are now ashamed? for the end of those [is] death. And now, having been freed from the sin, and having become servants to God, ye have your fruit — to sanctification, and the end life age-during; for the wages of the sin [is] death, and the gift of God [is] life age-during in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 6:15-23 Young's Literal Translation)

v 15 — “Paul opens this paragraph exactly as he did the previous one:

brief interjection: ‘*What then?*’;

rhetorical question: ‘*Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?*’

strong negation of the question: ‘*May it never be!*’;

lengthy explanation (vv. 16-23).

“Even the content of the rhetorical questions is similar. In both vv. 1 and 15 Paul asks whether the grace of God should lead to sin. However, *in 6:1 it is a question of sinning in order to gain more grace, while in 6:15 it is a question of sinning because of grace.* The reference in 6:15 is obviously to 6:14b, where Paul proclaims that the believer is not ‘under the law’ but ‘under grace.’ Those who are joined to Christ by faith live in the new age where grace, not the law of Moses, reigns. This being the case, *believers’ conduct is not directly regulated by the law. Under Jewish premises, such a ‘law-less’ situation would be assumed to foster sin. Christians would be no better than ‘Gentile sinners’ (cf. Gal 2:15). But Paul sees in God’s grace not only a liberating power but a constraining one as well: the constraint of a willing obedience that comes from a renewed heart and mind and, ultimately (cf. Gal 5:17-24; Rom 8:4-9), the impulse and leading of God’s Spirit.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 397f] “*There is a subtle poison which insinuates itself into the heart even of the best Christian; it is the temptation to say: Let us sin, not that grace may abound, but because it abounds.*” [Godet, *Romans*, pg 253]

RAILING AGAINST THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE — “*Because works are not the ground of our justification; because we are justified freely by his grace, are we at liberty to sin without fear and without restraint? Does the doctrine of gratuitous salvation give a license to the unrestrained indulgence of all evil? Such has been the objection to the doctrines of grace in all ages. And the fact that this objection was made to Paul’s teachings, proves that his doctrine is the same with that against which the same objection is still urged.*” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 206]

LEGALISM CANNOT LEAD TO TRUE HOLINESS — “The leading doctrine of this section, and of the whole gospel, in reference to sanctification, is, that grace, instead of leading to the indulgence of sin, is essential to the exercise of holiness. So long as we are under the influence of a self-righteous or legal spirit, the motive and aim of all good works, are wrong or defective. The motive is fear, or some merely natural affection, and the aim, to merit the bestowment of good. But when we accept of the gracious offers of the gospel, and feel that our sins are gratuitously pardoned, a sense of the divine love, shed abroad in the heart of the Holy Spirit, awakens all holy affections. The motive to obedience is now love, and its aim the glory of God.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 211f]

v 16 — “‘Do you not know’ introduces, as is customary in Paul, a fact that he assumes is known to his readers. In this case, the fact is one with which his readers would have been familiar even before their conversion: habitually ‘presenting’ oneself to something or someone makes one a slave of that something or someone. For people in the ancient world would often sell themselves into slavery as a way of avoiding financial disaster.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 398]

THE BINDING POWER OF OUR ACTIONS — “Christians, who have been set free from sin by their union with Christ, must recognize that, were they constantly to yield to the voice of temptation, they would effectively become slaves of sin again. The Lord Jesus made the same point: ‘*Every person who is committing sin is a slave to sin*’ (John 8:34). Without taking anything away from the reality of the transfer from one master to another, then, *Paul wants to make clear that ‘slavery’ is ultimately not just a ‘legal’ status but a living experience. Christians, who are no longer slaves of sin, must no longer live as slaves of sin.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 398] “‘Know ye not that those who obey sin are its slaves; hurried on from one degrading service to another, until it works their ruin; but those who serve holiness are constrained, though sweetly, to constancy and fidelity, until the glorious consummation of their course?’ As a servant or slave is under an influence which secures the continuance of his obedience, and he who serves holiness is under an influence which effectually secures the constancy of his service.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 206]

SUBJECTION TO THE MASTER IS NOT OPTIONAL — “The last part of the verse has the purpose of convincing Christians of the seriousness of this practical obedience by making it clear that there are two, and only two, options open to every person and that these options carry serious consequences. *Either one is a slave of sin or a slave of ‘obedience.’ Paul makes it clear in this ‘either ... or’ that there is no ‘possibility of neutrality.’ One is never ‘free’ from a master, and those non-Christians who think that they are ‘free’ are under an illusion created and sustained by Satan. The choice with which people*

are faced is not ‘Should I retain my freedom or give it up and submit to God?’ but ‘Should I serve sin or should I serve God?’ But Paul is writing to Christians, and we, too, must not forget that to sin is to submit ourselves as slaves to sin.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 398f] This speaks to those worldly believers who are rightfully said to be “the most miserable people on earth”: they cannot enjoy sin any longer due to the Spirit of Christ dwelling within, yet they are in rebellion to their new Master and therefore have not the joy of their salvation. **“Obedience (personified) is the master to whom he is now subject. He is not only bound to obey, but he is made to obey in despite of the resistance of his still imperfectly sanctified nature. He cannot but obey. The point of analogy to which reference is here made, is the certainty of the effect, and the constraining influence by which that effect is secured. In the case both of sin and of holiness, obedience is certain; and it is rendered certain by a power superior to the will of man. The great difference is, that in the one case this subjection is abnormal and destructive, in the other it is normal and beneficent.”** [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 207] **“This it is that a superficial Pelagianism understands moral liberty. After the doing of each act, it can return to the state in which it was before, exactly as if nothing had passed. But a more serious study of human life proves, on the contrary, that every act of will, whether in the direction of good or of evil, as it passes into reality, creates or strengthens a tendency which drags man with increasing force, till it becomes altogether irresistible. Every free act, then, to a certain degree determines the future.”** [Godet, *Romans*, pg 254]

THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH — “In this contrast, it is surprising to find sin and obedience rather than sin and God (cf. v. 22) or sin and righteousness (cf. vv. 18, 20) as the competing ‘masters.’ ... **Paul is out to emphasize the significance of obedience in the Christian life, in a context where such an emphasis is necessary to counter a false libertinism. The freedom of the Christian is not freedom to do what one wants, but freedom to obey God — willingly, joyfully, naturally. ‘Obedience,’ says Calvin, ‘is the mother of true knowledge of God.’**” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 399] “We have already seen, 1:5, that the apostle calls faith an obedience. It is the same 15:18, where he designates the faith of the Gentiles by the name of obedience. Faith is always an act of docility to a divine manifestation, and so an obedience.... **Every time the gospel is preached to the sinner, he is challenged to decide between the obedience (of faith) or the carnal independence of sin.**” [Godet, *Romans*, pg 255] “It enters into the idea of slavery, that the subjection is absolute and continued. The slave does not obey his own will, but his master’s. He is subject not for a time, but for life. He is under an influence which secures obedience. This is as true in spiritual as in external relations. He who serves sin is the slave of sin. He is under its power. He cannot free himself from its dominion. He may hate his bondage; his reason and conscience may protest against it; his will may resist it; but he is still constrained to obedience.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 207]

WE CHOOSE THE PATHS OF OUR LIVES — “In order to underscore further the seriousness of the choice between these masters, Paul specifies the consequences of the respective ‘slaveries’: death and righteousness. ‘Death’ may include reference to physical death and present spiritual death, but in this context it means mainly ‘eternal’ death: the final and eternal exclusion from God’s presence that is the ultimate result of sin. Since it is contrasted with death, ‘righteousness’ could refer to ‘final’ justification: that ultimate acquittal from sins and introduction to eternal life that come to the believer in the last day.... But, in light of vv. 13, 17-20, the best option is to understand righteousness to refer to ‘moral’ righteousness, conduct pleasing to God. The objection that this does not make a natural contrast with ‘death’ is not a telling one, since the contrast ‘sin’ and ‘obedience’ has already disrupted a precise antithesis.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 399f] **“[A]bsolute liberty cannot be the condition of man. We are made, not to create our guiding principle, but simply to adhere to one or other of the higher moral powers which solicit us.** Every concession freely made to either is a precedent which binds us to it, and of which it will avail itself to exact more. Thus there is gradually and freely established the condition of dependence spoken of by the apostle, and which issues, on the one side, in the absolute incapacity of doing evil (1 John 3:9), the state of true liberty: on the other, in the total incapacity either to will or to do good (Matt 12:32), the state of final perdition.” [Godet, *Romans*, pg 254f] **“The death intended is spiritual and eternal. It is the absolute loss of the life of the soul, which consists in the favor and fellowship of God, and conformity to his image.”** [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 207]

v 17 — “Paul now dispels any idea that Christians stand in a situation of neutrality with respect to the master they are to serve. This verse and the following one reveal Paul’s conviction that they have already made the decision to follow a new master. For Paul gives ‘thanks to God’ for the transfer of spiritual allegiance that they have manifested. Once, Paul says, ‘you were slaves of sin’; but now ‘you have obeyed that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over.’ **‘You have obeyed’ points to the time of conversion, when the Roman Christians first bowed the knee to Jesus the Lord. The word therefore includes reference to faith but must not be confined to it. As we have argued in commenting on ‘the obedience of faith’ in 1:5, Paul views faith in Christ and commitment to him as Lord as inseparable and mutually interpreting. Here, then, the focus is on the initial commitment of the Roman Christians to Christ as Lord, including both their ‘faith’ in him and their submission to him. Paul uses ‘obey’ because he wants to underscore the aspect of submission to Christ as Lord of life that is part of becoming a Christian.**” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 400f]

obeyed from the heart — voluntary and sincere. “Christian obedience is obedience from the heart, in opposition to an obedience which is by constraint. Any attempt at obedience by an unconverted man, is an obedience produced by some motive of fear, self-interest, or constraint, and not from the heart. Nothing can be more convincing evidence of the truth of the Gospel than the change which, in this respect, it produces on the mind of the believer. Nothing but almighty power could at once transform a man from the love of sin to the love of holiness.” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 261]

form of teaching — Why does Paul say “*pattern, type, form*” of teaching rather than just “*teaching?*” Some teach this refers to a

baptismal confession of faith, possibly referred to by Peter in 1 Peter 3:21: “*the answer of a good conscience toward God.*” (KJV) Douglas Moo differs: “But a more likely contrast is that between the ‘form’ of Christian teaching and the ‘form’ of Jewish teaching. Paul would then imply that Christians, while no longer ‘under the [Mosaic] law,’ are nevertheless bound by an authoritative code of teaching. And Paul may have an additional reason for using *typos*. Most of the Pauline occurrences of this word refer to believers as ‘examples’ to other believers. In these verses, *typos* includes the active connotation of a pattern that ‘molds’ others. Similarly, in this verse, it is likely that *typos* includes the idea that Christian teaching ‘molds’ and ‘forms’ those who have been handed over to it.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 402] “[H]ere Christianity is represented under the notion of a mould, or die, into which they were cast, and from which they took the impression of its excellence. The figure upon this die is the image of God, righteousness and true holiness, which was stamped on their souls in believing the Gospel and receiving the Holy Ghost. The words εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τυπον [eis ὃν paredothete tupon, ‘a form ... to which you were delivered’] refer to the melting of metal; which, when it is liquified, is cast into the mould, that it may receive the impression that is sunk or cut in the mould; and therefore the words may be literally translated, into which mould of doctrine ye have been cast. They were melted down under the preaching of the word, and then were capable of receiving the stamp of its purity.” [Adam Clarke, *Romans*]

delivered up, handed over — “The verb ‘hand over’ might connote the transfer of a slave from one master to another — an image appropriate to this paragraph. But perhaps more relevant in conjunction with a word like ‘teaching’ are those places where, in probable dependence on Jewish concepts, Paul uses ‘hand over’ to refer to the transmission of the early Christian teaching or tradition (cf. 1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:3). In this verse, however, it is not the teaching that is handed down to believers but the believers who are handed over to the teaching. ***This unusual way of putting the matter is intentional; Paul wants to make clear that becoming a Christian means being placed under the authority of Christian ‘teaching,’ that expression of God’s will for NT believers. The new convert’s ‘obedience’ to this teaching is the outgrowth of God’s action [the verb is passive] in ‘handing us over’ to that teaching when we were converted.***” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 401] This emphasis is brought out especially in Young’s Literal translation: “*and thanks to God, that ye were servants of the sin, and — were obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which ye were delivered up*” (Rom 6:17 YLT) “***The intimation is, that faith in the gospel is the gift of God, and obedience is our consequent act. ‘The passive’ says Philippi, ‘indicates the passive relation of man to work of regeneration of which his activity is the consequence.’***” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 208]

v 18 — “This brief verse recapitulates the ‘indicative’ of the believer’s transfer from the old realm to the new that was the central teaching of 6:1-14 and that was hinted at in v. 17a. For the first time, however, Paul uses the language of ‘freedom’ to describe the believer’s new status with respect to sin. In a world in which ‘freedom’ has taken on all kinds of historical and social baggage, we must remember that ***Paul’s concept of freedom is not that of autonomous self-direction but of deliverance from those enslaving powers that would prevent the human being from becoming what God intended. It is only by doing God’s will and thus knowing his truth that we can be ‘free indeed’ (John 8:31-36). This is why, without paradox, Christian freedom is at the same time a kind of ‘slavery.’ Being bound to God and his will enables the person to become ‘free’ — to be what God wants that person to be.***” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 402] “ελευθερωθεντες [eleutherothentes, ‘having been set free’] is a term that refers to the manumission of a slave. They were redeemed from the slavery of sin, and became the servants of righteousness. Here is another prosopopoeia: both sin and righteousness are personified: sin can enjoin no good and profitable work; righteousness can require none that is unjust or injurious.” [Adam Clarke, *Romans*]

you became slaves of righteousness — note the verb is again passive (cf. vv. 17, 22) drawing attention to the initiative of God. “***It was not license, but a change of masters, that they had experienced. This being the case, it is impossible they should serve sin; they have now another master. A manumitted slave does not continue subject to his former master.***” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 208]

v 19 — **I put this in human terms** — the sentence is parenthetical, explaining why Paul is using slavery imagery to depict the Christian. “Paul’s point would appear to be that human nature produces a weakness in understanding that can be overcome in this life only by the use of (imperfect) analogies. However, Paul is not withdrawing or ‘apologizing’ for his slavery imagery. Indeed, he goes right ahead and uses it twice more in this passage with the same application (vv. 19, 22). It is just that ***Paul recognizes that his language could be interpreted to mean that Christian experience bears the same marks of degradation, fear, and confinement that were typical of secular slavery. But, while shorn of these characteristics, life in the new realm of righteousness and life does mean that a person is given over to a master who requires absolute and unquestioned obedience; and to make this point, the image of slavery is quite appropriate.***” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 404] “[W]hat is human, i.e. common among men.... The apostle means to say, that he uses an illustration drawn from the common relations of men, to set forth the relation of the believer to God.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 209] “This phrase is often used by the Greek writers to signify what was easy to be comprehended; what was ‘level with common understandings,’ delivered in a popular style; what was different from the high flights of the poets, and the studied sublime obscurity of the philosophers.” [Adam Clarke, *Romans*]

yielded unto sin — “The old master is denoted by the two terms ἀκαθαρσία [akatharsia], uncleanness, and ἀνομία [anomia], lawlessness, life going beyond all rule, licentiousness. The first of these terms characterizes sin as personal degradation, the second as contempt of the standard of right written in the law on every man’s conscience (2:14, 15).” [Godet, *Romans*, pg 259]

unto lawlessness — signifies, “to do all one’s pleasure without being arrested in the least by the line of demarcation which

separates good from evil.” [Godet, *Romans*, pg 259]

AS YOU SERVED SIN, NOW SERVE RIGHTEOUSNESS — “The last part of v. 19 is very similar to v. 13. Both use the verb ‘give oneself as a servant,’ both use ‘members’ to emphasize the need for Christians to obey God with all their capacities, and both contrast the pre-Christian with the Christian master that is to be served. But, whereas v. 13 made this contrast with a double imperative — ‘do not present ... present’ — Paul in this verse employs a comparison: ‘just as you presented ... so now present.’ *He thus makes clear that Christians should serve righteousness with all the single-minded dedication that characterized their pre-Christian service of such ‘idols’ as self, money, lust, pleasure, and power. Would that we would pursue holiness with the zeal that so many of us pursued these other, incomparably less worthy goals!*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 404]

yield your members in slavery to righteousness unto holiness — ‘holiness, sanctification’ could refer to the end-product of our living or it could refer to the active changes, the process of “*becoming holy.*” “*Committing ourselves as slaves to doing what is right before God (‘righteousness’) results in living that is increasingly God-centered and world-renouncing.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 405] “*Ye were eager to yield your members to sin to commit evil, be ye now as eager to yield them to righteousness to realize holiness. Do not inflict on this second master the shame of serving him less faithfully than the first.*” [Godet, *Romans*, pg 259]

v 20 — “*The imperative ‘present yourselves as slaves to righteousness’ in v. 19b is the center of the paragraph. But this command does not, and cannot, stand in isolation. We can, and must, serve righteousness because God has freed us from sin and made us slaves to righteousness. The ‘imperative’ grows out of, and reflects, the ‘indicative.’* In order to maintain this careful balance, Paul ‘frames’ the command in v. 19b with reminders of our new status in Christ (vv. 17-18, 20-23). Therefore the ‘for’ in this verse introduces vv. 20-23 as the ground of the command in v. 19b.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 405]

THE IMPLICATION OF OUR PAST SLAVERY — “As in v. 18, Paul reminds his Christian readers that they were formerly slaves of sin. But instead of immediately completing the temporal sequence with a description of their present Christian status, he pauses to remind them of an implication of their past lives. *Non-Christians often pride themselves on possessing a ‘freedom’ appropriate to autonomous human beings and deride Christians for giving that up — becoming ‘subhuman’ — in obedience to a ‘god.’ And Paul admits that those apart from Christ have a certain ‘freedom.’ But it is a freedom ‘with respect to’ one thing only: ‘righteousness.’ ... As ‘slaves to sin,’ people are ‘free’ from the power and influence of the conduct that pleases God; they are deaf to God’s righteous demands and incapable of responding to them even were they to hear and respect them. For Paul makes it clear that those outside Christ, to varying degrees, can recognize right and wrong (cf. Rom 1:18-32; 2:14-15); but the power to do the right and turn from the wrong is not present. ‘All are under sin’ (3:9) and therefore incapable of doing God’s will.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 405f]

v 21, 22 — “This verse continues Paul’s characterization of the pre-Christian situation of his readers: ‘then’ matches the ‘when’ in v. 20.... There is the clear parallelism between vv. 21 and 22 that is created if v. 21 is punctuated with a question mark after ‘then’:

	<i>Status</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
v. 21	<i>‘then’ — slaves of sin, free from righteousness</i>	<i>‘fruit’ bringing shame</i>	<i>death</i>
v. 22	<i>‘now’ — free from sin, slaves of God</i>	<i>‘fruit’ bringing sanctification</i>	<i>eternal life</i>

[Moo, *Romans*, pg 406f]

the fruit of sin — “Paul highlights the negative nature of the ‘freedom’ enjoyed by Christians in their past by showing that the ‘fruit’ of which they are now ashamed resulted from that freedom. ‘Fruit’ is used in the NT to describe both concrete actions and general character traits. Both are in view here. This attitude of shame on the part of believers toward the ‘products’ of their pre-Christian lives is, as Calvin suggests, positive: ‘He only then is imbued with the principles of Christian philosophy, who has well learnt to be really displeased with himself, and to be confounded with shame for his own wretchedness.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 407] “*It is a remarkable fact that men in a state of alienation from God will commit sin not only without shame, but will glory in many things of which they are ashamed the moment they are changed by the Gospel. They now see their conduct in another light. They see that it was not only sinful but shameful.*” [Haldane, *Romans*, pg 264] “*By saying that they have this fruit, he wishes to express not only the idea that they produce it, but that they possess and keep it in themselves, that they drag it with them as forming part of their own moral life. ‘Their works follow them,’ as is said.*” [Godet, *Romans*, pg 260]

things that result in death — this reference to death must be “eternal death” — that eternal separation from God in hell that begins after physical death. The reasons for this is (1) it cannot be mere death because it is the fruit of sinful living, yet even Christians die physically; and (2) the contrast in v. 22 is eternal life.

“when ... but now” — the “but now” answers to the “when” in v. 20. The first part of the contrast was our lives prior to being saved: as unsaved we were “slaves of sin” and “free from righteousness;” now Paul concludes the contrast with Christians presently being “slaves to God” and “set free from sin.”

PAUL'S FOCUS OF v. 22 — “But Paul’s focus in this verse, expressed in its main clause, is on the results of that past ‘transfer’ for his readers’ present experience: ‘you have your fruit leading to sanctification.’ *The ‘fruit’ of which they are now ashamed has been replaced with fruit that ‘yields a harvest’ of sanctification. And the final outcome of this ‘fruit leading to sanctification’ is ‘eternal life.’ ‘Life,’ while it begins for the believer at the moment of conversion (cf. 6:4 and 8:6), is not granted in its full and final form until ‘that which is mortal is swallowed up by life’ (2 Cor 5:4).*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 407f]

v 23 — “This verse not only explains the contrasting ‘outcomes’ of death and life specified in vv. 22-23 but also brings the entire chapter to a fitting climax. As in v. 22, ‘sin’ and God are contrasted as the rival ‘powers’ that determine the destinies of each individual. Paul fittingly describes the (eternal) ‘death’ that those under the power of sin experience with the word ‘wages.’ He thereby implies that the penalty sin exacts is merited, in contrast to the ‘eternal life’ from God, which is a ‘free gift.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 408]

wages — ὀψώνια [opsōnia] has the general meaning of ‘provisions’ but refers usually to money paid for services rendered. It may be used in almost any sphere of life (one manuscript has been found which uses this word in reference to a child’s allowance) but is particularly used in reference to a soldier’s pay. “In light of this, *it is probable that the word here would convey military associations: Paul pictures ‘sin’ as a commanding general paying a wage to its ‘soldiers.’*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 408] “Wages — ὀψώνια [opsōnia]. From ὄψον [opson] *cooked meat*, and later, generally, *provisions*. At Athens especially *fish*. Hence ὀψώνιον [opsōnion] is primarily *provision-money*, and is used of supplies for an army, see 1 Corinthians 9:7. The figure of ver. 13 is carried out: Sin, as a Lord to whom they tender weapons and who pays wages.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*, vol 3 pg 73]

HELL DESERVED, HEAVEN UNDESERVED — “*A man may MERIT hell, but he cannot MERIT heaven. The apostle does not say that the wages of righteousness is eternal life: no, but that this eternal life, even to the righteous, is THE gracious GIFT of GOD. And even this gracious gift comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. He alone has procured it; and it is given to all those who find redemption in his blood. A sinner goes to hell because he deserves it; a righteous man goes to heaven because Christ has died for him, and communicated that grace by which his sin is pardoned and his soul made holy.*” [Adam Clarke, *Romans*]

in Christ Jesus our Lord — “It is therefore very appropriate that this verse, and this chapter, should end with the note of christological inclusion: ‘in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ It is not clear whether this modifies only ‘eternal life’ — ‘eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’ — or the entire clause — it is ‘in Christ Jesus our Lord’ that God gives the gift of eternal life. *But in light of the all-embracing importance of this being ‘in Christ,’ the latter is preferable. We may summarize the verse by noting, with Lloyd-Jones, its three contrasts: the master that is served — sin versus God; the outcome of that service — death versus eternal life; and the means by which this outcome is attained — a ‘wage’ earned versus a gift received.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 408]