

WHAT A LIFE!

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What do you want to be when you grow up?

Jesus said:

John 21:18 "I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go."

Americans don't like the idea of becoming slaves!

Although our nation harbored a slave trade during its first century, it fought its bloodiest war, within its own borders, to end slavery in America.

Well, truth be told, no person, anywhere in the world, likes the idea of becoming a slave. Each of us has enough pride and independence to push that idea aside—even when it comes from God.

In the text I just read to you, the resurrected Jesus was speaking with Peter. On the night that Jesus was arrested, Peter had sworn three times that he did not even know the man, Jesus—to Peter's great shame and humiliation. Then, after Jesus had risen from the dead and shown Himself alive to His disciples, He took Peter aside and asked him, "Peter, do you love me?" Three times Jesus asked him, and three times Peter declared that he loved the Lord—once for each of his denials.

Then, Jesus spoke of Peter's past—when he did just as he pleased—and of his future—when he would be required to do what he did not want to do.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Probably, "a slave" was never on your list!

John 21:18 "I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go." ¹⁹ Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, "Follow me."

Probably the guy who tells you, “Stick with me, and you will die an unpleasant death,” is not the one you would ordinarily choose to follow.

But when you choose to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, you put your life—and your death—into His great hands. You effectively surrender *your right* to choose your own way anymore.

The path, the timing, the encounters, the trials, and, yes, the ending of your life become the prerogative of Jesus Christ. He doesn’t have to ask you what you want or what you prefer; He simply says, “Follow me.”

What Jesus does guarantee, however, is that if you follow Him, your path will glorify God. Your life, and your death, will bring honor to the Almighty.

You’re Gonna Serve Somebody

On Tuesday nights, we have just completed studying the sixth chapter of Paul’s Letter to the Church in Rome. In that chapter, Paul adopts the concept of slavery as an illustration of life—both outside of faith in Christ, and in the faith of Christ.

Outside of Christ, all people were slaves to sin under the law—whether Jews (to the Law of Moses) or Gentiles (to the law of their own conscience). The law—any law—is a hard task master.

To be “under law” means to be *under command* (the law tells you what to do), to be *under restriction* (the law tells you what not to do), and *under accountability* (the law brings consequences). “Do this,” and “don’t do that,” “or else.” That’s what it means to be “under.”

The Law was not given to Moses to deliver God’s people from sin. It is not possible for the law, any law, to do that, for the law only highlights sin, and shows its utter sinfulness.

As soon as the law says, “Do this,” our minds begin to look for ways to NOT do it. And when the law says, “Don’t do that,” our minds begin to seek ways to get away with it. That is why the Bible refers to us as “enemies in our minds” toward God (Colossians 1:21). We frequently look for loopholes and excuses for bad behavior, sometimes rationalizing that we had no choice (“The devil made me do it!”).

Then, Jesus Christ confronted us with the Good News (the Gospel), and we surrendered our lives to Him. We identified with Christ, as He had identified with us. He identified with our sins, so that we could identify with His righteousness.

Romans 6:4 Therefore we have been buried with Him (Jesus) through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life.

God forgave us our sins, and our sinfulness, because Jesus paid our debt. The Holy Spirit gave us life in Jesus Christ (for we had been dead toward God in our spirits, even though alive in our bodies), and we were born again (raised to a new way of living). From that point forward, we are to consider ourselves “*dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 6:11).

And now, as Paul wrote (Romans 6:14), we are no longer “*under law, but under grace.*”

Now, there’s that word “under” again. And we know now what “under” means with respect to the law: under command, under restriction, and under accountability.

Well, I have news for you today! “Under” means the same thing, with respect to the law AND with respect to grace. “Under grace” also means under *command*, under *restriction*, and under *accountability*.

The New Living Translation (which is an excellent translation for general use) renders verse 14 like this: “*You no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.*”

Technically, that is accurate, but it could be misleading. Many church people think that salvation by grace means they are no longer under ANY law. They think that Jesus Christ closed the book of the law and put it away. They imagine that behavioral requirements came from the law, and that grace is free of any requirements regarding behavior, or resulting consequences.

Paul would strongly disagree. We never escape slavery in this lifetime; we only exchange masters. Once we were under law and, therefore, under sin. Now we are under grace and, therefore, under righteousness. “Under” describes the condition of a slave—under command, under restriction, and under accountability—whether referring to law or grace, to sin or righteousness.

Christians are slaves to Christ. Our primary relationship to Him is as slaves, although our *fellowship* with Him is as friends. We are under His command, under His restriction, and we will each give account to Him personally.

The magnificent distinction is not the nature of our accountability, but the *source* of our motivation.

As followers of Jesus, we are not guided by laws—rules, rituals, and regulations—but by the promptings and leadings of the Holy Spirit. Laws, and those who enforce them, may put the

fear of God into you, but grace, and the Holy Spirit who inspires it, puts the love of God into you.

The law is a device wielded by *fear*; grace is the instrument of *love*.

“Under grace” we still have responsibilities to do what is right and avoid what is wrong, and we are still accountable for what we do, but we are motivated by the love that comes from God and the love we have for God.

We ask NOT, “What does the law demand?” but instead, “What would love do?”

The law’s insistent requirements stimulated the sin that lives in each of us, and it moved us to do what was wrong in God’s eyes, and our guilt grew to an overwhelming burden.

But grace puts sin to sleep, and God’s love moves us to do what pleases Him (and, coincidentally, pleases most people, too!).

Romans 6:22 *But now, freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your benefit leading to sanctification, and the end is eternal life.*

“Freed from sin and enslaved to God” (Romans 6:22). “Dead to sin but alive to God” (Romans 6:11).

This is the kind of slavery that leads to fullness of life! The only alternative is a way of emptiness and death.

What have you chosen? What path do you follow today?

Romans 6:23 *For the payoff of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Sin does not pay its wages on a daily basis. You may skate for years before the payoff comes. But the payoff will come, and you will be held accountable.

The gift of God, on the other hand, pays all the time (for it is eternal, not time-bound)—it pays life, in ever-increasing fullness—every day, all the time, abundantly, and forever.

Oh, what a life this is!