



**“INSTRUMENTS”**  
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**ROMANS 6:12-23**

I shared with y’all last week a little bit about Paul, that Paul would never use twenty words to say something when he could use two hundred. It’s still true. But there’s another thing that you need to know about Paul, especially in his letter to the Romans, he is really fond of using juxtapositions. Something versus something else. Earlier in his writings he will talk about Adam as opposed to Jesus Christ. Later something totally different as opposed to sin, the love of God and the love of the world. Here he mentions three specific juxtapositions. And for Paul the first one comes down to that question: What do you do with the “S” word? (Not that “s” word, the other one – SIN.) What do you do with sin? How are we to cope with sin?

And you know part of our problem with reading Paul so deeply is that we’ve become accustomed to pigeon-hole things. We’ve got everything in its category, and everything in its place, and sin is no exception. We’ve gotten to the point where we don’t pay a whole lot of attention to sin anymore, because it’s not as brazen anymore. Our society, our culture has come to accept it. Sin is just, well, it’s just what some folks do.

We’ve gotten to the point now where we look at sin and we think, “Hmmm, well that’s just an individual thing, that somehow sin has been reduced to just what you do that you ought not be doing, and what you do that you ought to be doing. We call that sins of commission and omission. But Paul sees it a little bit different than that.

Now, granted, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we’ve become more aware of systemic sins, that is to say, sins of systems, where whole systems were convoluted in sin. We were talking about this in our Sunday School class this morning. We were talking about the whole criminal justice system and how that system isn’t really working. It needs overhauling really badly. That we still have recidivism in prisons from those who come out. And it’s not really restoring anyone to wholeness of life – victims, offenders, communities. Systems can fall prey to sin too.

Perhaps a more timely and appropriate example might be the accolades that San Antonio as a city received after the Spurs won their recent championship this past week. If you remember when Boston won the World Series last year, they tore the town apart in their celebrations. Or when the Detroit Pistons won last years NBA Championship, how the city went amok. Not just in sporting events. Systems infect large groups of people anywhere. Its called the Mob mentality. One has to only mention the name of the Rodney King verdict to remember the riots that swept L.A. Communities fall prey to sin too. But still, Paul is thinking bigger than that.

When Paul talks about sin, he isn’t talking about the specific acts of an individual or of a community, or a group of people. Paul is talking about the power of sin. He’s talking about the nature of sin. Paul is talking about the power that sin has over human beings. Whether you like it or not, we all fall prey to it. Paul is talking about the cosmic battle between good and evil, between sin and God, between that which is right and that which is wrong. For Paul, it’s not just an issue of the things that we might do or not do. For Paul it’s a state of being.

So, that first juxtaposition for Paul is of Sin versus God. Sin versus righteousness. And the second juxtaposition that Paul mentions is so closely tied to the first that you can’t really separate them. Paul uses that concept of slavery, and we’re not too comfortable with that – we still aren’t. It’s still too fresh in our minds. We’re still apologizing over it. Something we should have done a long time ago. Something we never should have gotten into in the first place.

But fall into that issue of slavery and for us to hear these words of Paul from the first century talking about an issue that's still so fresh in our hearts and minds and in our societies, we kind of almost take offense at that, and think that Paul is not using the right words. No, Paul is using the absolute right words. For Paul the issue of the first century slave was something that, . . . well, Greeks and Romans were his audience, mostly Romans, gentiles, converts . . . they understood what slavery is, much like we understand it. Paul used that term on purpose. He wanted to get our attention. Because, again for Paul, the issue is that we are all slaves to something.

Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, after a century of modern pop psychology, we want think that we are slaves to our addictions. How many smokers have tried to quit? Go ahead, raise your hands! Mark Twain said, "quitting smoking is easy – I've done it hundreds of times!" Those who are suffering from addiction really struggle with being enslaved to it. Some of us are enslaved to other things, not necessarily drugs or the results of drugs like alcohol, or nicotine, or even prescription or non-prescription drugs, even what they call recreational drugs. No, some folks are slaves to things like your calendar. "I'm sorry, I don't have time for you this week." I'll never forget the story of the little girl who approached her father and said, "Daddy, I'd like to make an appointment with you for Tuesday." "Honey, what are you talking about?" She said, "Daddy, I want to meet with you on Tuesday. Do you have any time available?" He says, "Honey, you don't need to make an appointment with me." She said, "Yes I do, because I don't feel like you listen to me unless I have your attention."

Some of us are slaves to calendars, and obligations, and lists, and other things that seem to consume our minds and our lives. We fall prey to it, and we are slaves to them, folks! Some of us are slaves to dieting, and some of us are slaves to sex. Some of us are slaves to the internet. For Paul, all of us are either a slave to sin or a slave to God.

And Paul puts up that second juxtaposition of slavery versus freedom. And there's no in-between, and there's no grey area. There's no mixture of the two. You are either a slave to sin, and freed from righteousness, or a slave to God, or righteousness and the gospel of Jesus Christ and freed from sin. There is no in-between. You can't have one foot in each camp. You are a slave to one and freed from the other, or a slave to the other, and freed from the first.

For Paul, to be a slave to sin leads to that third juxtaposition – wages. To be a slave to sin means that you earn that reward – or in this case the penalty. Death. Being under the slavery of sin means that the only outcome you are going to earn is death. Being a slave to God, to righteousness, being enslaved by Christ, being enslaved by the gospel that gives you life – its not an earned thing! Remember the Romans were still struggling with that whole notion of grace. It's still here, Paul's still talking about it. Remember the last verse I read, verse 23, said "The wages of sin is death; but" – he doesn't say wages! What does he say? He says, "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus."

For Paul, that's the whole difference. I've said this before Paul is extremely convoluted, and most folks would read Paul, and go "uh...uh...next!" Don't skip over this because Paul in his wonderful way and wonderful wordiness is very much expounding on everything that Jesus ever talked about in the gospels concerning the kingdom of God, and what it means to be a part of that kingdom. To live in the reign of God means that you are not an employee. You are a resident. You are in relationship. And that's the difference for Paul of being a Christian.

You've heard me say before that the benefit of being a Christian, for a lot of folks, - they sincerely believe this. I mean if they had it on a bumper sticker, they'd have it plastered all over their car – that the benefit of being a Christian is that you get to go to heaven! Even all of our hymns kind of point that way – "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be..." You remember those songs! You're looking at me like I'm funny! But you've sung them! We believe

that the wages of being a Christian is that you get to heaven. Folks, if you believe that you have been misled. The benefit of being a Christian is not what you have earned at the end of your life. The benefit of being a Christian is that you get to be a Christian. You get to be in relationship with the savior of the world – the one who died for our sins. You get to have a personal relationship with the God who created you, and who blessed you, and who called you into being by name, before you ever were. The benefit of being a Christian is that you get to be in relationship with God, the creator of the cosmos, the writer of the DNA, the counter of all the hairs on our heads! And I know that some of you guys are saying that “mine’s easier to count than some others!”

The difference between being under the power of sin and being under the power of God is life and death. Life comes from relationship. Death is the absence of it. For Paul, for the Christian faith, that’s who we are. It’s not something we earn. We’re not employees of the kingdom. We’re in relationship with the creator of the world. And when you’re in relationship, that’s a whole different mindset than an employee. Employees just punch in and punch out. They just do the minimum. I know there are some who like their job and do more. But by and large it’s a different relationship. To be in the kingdom and to be in a relationship with God means to live under the power of God.

Let me put it one more way, and we’ll close with this. How many of you truly love someone else? Mom, dad, husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, son, daughter, aunt, uncle... You are in relationship with that person, aren’t you? It’s a whole lot different if you were working for that person. That’s not a relationship. There is nothing that you wouldn’t do for that loved one. And if it’s a two-way relationship, there’s nothing that that loved one wouldn’t do for you. My dear friends, the one who loves you the most, gave everything for you, to be in relationship with you. And if you are in relationship with God, you want to be – you don’t have to, you want to – loved by God and in love with God. And when you’re in love with God, you can become an instrument, to be used, caressed, and cared for by God, for the benefit and the glory of God’s kingdom. Isn’t that better than just being an employee? You want to be there because it’s a love relationship.

That’s why God did what God did. That’s why God does what God does. And that’s why God’s promises will always be true. The gift that God gives to us is eternal life through Jesus Christ. What more could you ask for? What more could you want? In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.