

“That I may be His own” Rom 6:12-23

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I think that today I will address you as ‘slaves in Christ’! As my dear fellow slaves in Christ! This is how Paul speaks about us in his letter to Christians in Rome. This is how he calls all Christians. And what a slavery it is! We’ll discuss it in a minute.

Today we will talk about several things; about how Christians misunderstand what God’s grace and forgiveness means. We will talk about how challenging it is to be a Christian. We will talk about two ways, the way of death and the way of life, and what they are like. And, finally, about how to live God pleasing life.

First, about this misunderstanding. It is a terrible one, it destroys individual Christians and it is destroying the Church. It is a serious, serious problem that we all need to be concerned with.

What is it, you may wonder? I’ll try to summarize it. You know that our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is gracious and forgiving God, right? Of course.

You also know that He forgives us all our sins. Every one of them because of what Jesus has done for us all. Is this correct? Sure, it is. And now, if this God is so forgiving and so loving, and He will forgive me all my sins...

... it means that I can go and ... how should we end this sentence? Many Christians think that they can end this sentence with words ‘I can go and do what I want, because God forgives everything, and I can do what pleases me.’

I can ignore this God. I can be indifferent to Him. I can ignore His invitations. I can ignore His commands and commandments. Especially the first three. I don’t need to love the true God more than anything. I can love other things more.

I don't need to pray, praise and give thanks to Him for everything, and most definitely I don't need to come where He Himself invites me every Sunday. I can ignore His Church. I can ignore all my promises which I gave to Him.

See, this's hard to understand; we don't usually ignore our promises, right? Especially if we consider ourselves to be good people. Unless these are promises given to our loving God. Then we can forget about them, and get even offended if someone reminds about them.

But can we conclude that sentence this way? I don't know what you think, but the apostle Paul says very strong words. "Me genoito!" It is the strongest way to say 'no' in Greek. It means something like 'categorically NO! By no means! May this never happen!' May you never think about ignoring your God!

Think about any organization in this world. If you want to belong to it, then you need to commit to it, right? Even when it comes to our hobbies. If you are a member of a netball club, or a basketball club, you commit to do your part, right?

But not when it comes to being a Christian, a member of Christ's Church. Not when it comes to following Jesus. Not when it comes to learning everything that Jesus commanded, living accordingly and sharing the Gospel with all people in your lives.

How would you look at someone who claims to be a member of your sport's team, but doesn't train, doesn't attend practices, doesn't come to games? Can you even imagine that? Doesn't make any sense.

But when it comes to being a member of Jesus' Church, such attitude suddenly seems fine... can you help me to understand it? Such attitude is embarrassing. It brings shame to our Father, it brings shame to the body of Christ.

Would you want to belong to a team, that has such low expectations to its members? I think we need to repent for we tolerated such attitude, fearing to offend people more, than we fear to offend our Lord and Saviour.

Now we'll talk about how challenging it is to be a Christian. We need to understand how these spiritual things work. We all are born dead in our sins. We are incapable to love our God. That's a situation of all human beings.

But then our loving God sends His Holy Spirit to create new hearts in us, to give us new life, new will, new emotions, new thoughts. And once this happens, our Christian life begins. Or we can say our Christian challenges begin.

See, before you had received the Holy Spirit, you were slave to sin and death. That's it. No battle there. You were obedient to sin. Now, when you have received the Holy Spirit, there is this battle between your old sinful self, and your new self.

Now you have this ability to choose, either you will allow sin to rule your lives, or the Holy Spirit. And you would know this from your own experience, that there are two voices fighting in you, one, the old Adam, dragging you back into the world, and the other, the Holy Spirit, gently calling you closer to Jesus.

I have bad news for you. This battle will continue till the end of your life. This is, why it is so challenging to be a Christian. We need to battle against our own old self every day. Again, and again.

It is not easy. So many lose in this battle. But if this inner battle seems familiar to you, then rejoice. Sometimes Christians are concerned that they still have this battle going on. Don't be discouraged. This is what it means to be a Christian. That the Spirit of God is active in you.

We have new hearts, but we still have our old sinful nature, that fights against God. But with every time when we win each of these micro battles, we grow stronger and stronger, and we can rejoice in our daily victories.

As you can see, to follow Christ is not a walk in park, it is a challenging task, not everyone has what it takes to be Jesus' disciple, but those who endure till the end, they will be saved and they will receive eternal life in Paradise.

Now, a little more about these two ways. Many people don't get it, but there are only two ways. The Bible speaks from the beginning till the end about two ways. One is the way of death, and the other is the way of life.

There is no middle ground. There is not neutral territory, as so many misunderstand it. In the letter to Romans Paul speaks about these two ways as about two different slaveries; slavery to sin, or slavery to God.

Or we can call them two freedoms, if you wish, – freedom from God and freedom from sin. We can choose to have this freedom from God, sure. He doesn't impose His love and His blessings. We can choose to ignore Him, to reject Him and do whatever we want.

But remember this! This freedom comes with a price. And the price tag is usually hidden. All the lords and powers of this world, anything that we'll choose to love and trust more than Jesus, they will promise you a lot, but they will never be able to deliver us what we truly need.

Whatever you believe can give you more than being with true God will fail you. Always. And at the end you will pay the price. The price for this freedom from God is – death. Or as Paul the apostle put it in his letter, – the wages of sin are death. That's one way to go.

Or the other way, the way of life. We can be slaves of God. And free from sin, devil and death. And what a beautiful slavery this one is. And what a beautiful slave master, what a beautiful Lord we have. Like no one else.

You know what slave masters do. They exploit us. But this one, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, He has redeemed you, lost and condemned creature, He has purchased and won you from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. And He has done it paying with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death.

And this is the most beautiful statement. He has done it, **so that I may be His own**. You can say it, – so that I may be His own. So that I may belong to Jesus

Christ, all-powerful, gracious and self-sacrificial God, who loves us more than His own life.

Why would He want us to be His own? So that we may live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

How sweet the words! Jesus is the Lord different from all others. Others think how to exploit us, Jesus thinks how to serve us. Others think what they can get from us, Jesus thinks what can He give us. Others think how to benefit from us, Jesus thinks how to bless us.

We could say that Jesus has come in the power of the Almighty God and has confiscated you for Himself, that you may be His one. Now you are His own. He is your Lord. And if you persevere in your daily Christian struggle and endure till the end, you will rejoice in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. And this is most certainly true.

Our last question was, – how should we lead our daily lives as Christians, as slaves of Christ? Luther explains it well in the Small Catechism. We should strive to lead our new lives where ...

... “the old Adam in us should, by daily repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

This is, why our morning prayer contains these words: “Keep me this day from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please You.” This is a simple, rich and joyful life, when we begin every day entrusting ourselves to our Lord, praying Him to guide us and enlighten us with His Word and His Spirit.

When we daily present ourselves in Jesus’ service, “for into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the Wicked One may have no power over me.”

This is what our new life in Christ and in His Church is supposed to be like. Life of faithful and dedicated commitment to our wonderful Lord. We need to remember, that this new life is God’s undeserved gift to us. Therefore, we need to fear the most to lose this most wonderful gift.

I pray that by the grace of God, and empowered by His Holy Spirit, we all can lead new lives as slaves to Christ, so that we can live as His own, being truly the light to the world and with our words and actions bringing honour to our Father who is in heaven. Amen.

And the peace of God that surpasses all our understanding, may keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.