



EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

Tim Stafford relays a story from the *The Democratic Union Newspaper* (Lawrenceburg, TN) that touched my heart. In the small village of Plelo in 1944, the German army lined up a group of young French teens before a firing squad. They were to be killed for helping a French unit of underground freedom fighters. However, just before the teens were executed, Bob Hamsley led a small unit from Patton's 3rd Army to halt the firing squad and free the teens. Years later, one of those teens was the mayor of Plelo and honored Bob Hamsley's rescue. His reason for the ceremony was profound: "It is hard to forget your savior." ... Have we forgotten our Savior? May we daily honor the One who "gave himself for our sins to deliver us" (Gal. 1:4).



Before Gordon became a seminary student, he already had a master's degree in education and had been a principal in the public school system for 12 years. God used both Gordon and Diane (and their two children) as divine lights in our public education system. When they sensed that God wanted them in full-time ministry, Gordon enrolled in VBTS and graduated with his *M.B.S.* in 2001. About this time, the Lord directed them through a Mission Conference to plant Beacon Baptist Church near the oceanfront. For nearly two decades Gordon has been the lead pastor of this vibrant, growing church, which now has its own property, building, staff, community outreach, and energetic mission program reaching around the world. Gordon and Diane model grace and have a deep passion for discipling new believers in Jesus Christ. Thank you Gordon and Diane for your faithfulness in ministry!





Truth in the Agora: *The Christian Slave* (Romans 6:19)

Are there two words in the English language more contradictory than “Christian” and “slavery”? Whereas the term “Christian” connotes a harmonious relationship of peace with God and our neighbors, the term “slavery” is rife with cruelty and oppression. It is hard to imagine two words more distinct from each other in our vocabulary. Yet in Romans 6:19, Paul calls on all believers of Rome to “offer your bodily members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.” In effect, he calls on every Christian to be a “slave.” Let’s look deeper into what Paul means when he talks about slavery in the context of the Christian life.

First, Paul begins 6:19 with an apology for his analogy: “Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand” (NLT). Slavery was part of the Roman culture in Paul’s day. By most estimates one-third of the city’s population of Rome was either slave or freedmen (freed slaves). James Dunn observed (*Romans*, 1:341) that of the 40,000 to 50,000 Jews in the city of Rome, most of them fit this category. In other words, Paul’s analogy was clear to these believers. Yet Paul was uncomfortable with it because of its social incongruities, and therefore offers his apology for this human comparison.

Second, if slave language is socially reprehensible, why did Paul use it? This is a fair question and may be approached from two perspectives. First, Paul used it because of the image it suggests. One author fittingly described slavery as “total belongingness, total obligation, and total accountability,” and this suits Paul’s point “which no other image seems able to equal” (Cranfield, 1:321). This image was Paul’s own description of himself as seen in the beginning of his letter, “Paul a slave of Jesus Christ” (1:1a). Secondly, the type of slavery Paul references does not seem to be the result of being sold as a captive of war or by parents for financial gain; rather, it is the familiar Roman practice of *offering one’s self* to a wealthy citizen for the purpose of having a place to live and food to eat. In Stott’s words (*Romans*, 183), it was a willful “self-surrender” to another, and the end result was the loss of personal liberties.

Third, the language of willful self-surrender supports Paul’s objective. Paul reminds his readers through this familiar cultural practice that there are only two masters one may submit to, with the result being either “impurity” or “righteousness.” On the one hand, impurity “dishonors the body” (1:24) and calls for one “to live a lie” (1:25). Also, Paul explains in 6:19, “impurity . . . leads to more lawlessness.” For Paul, impurity is never stagnant, and left unchecked by grace will consequently breed deeper sin, or “ever-increasing wickedness,” as the NIV translates it. On the other hand, surrendering to the gospel results in one becoming a “slave to righteousness,” which means living a radically transformed life. In this verse Paul gives an imperative with apostolic force: “offer your bodily members as slaves to righteousness [*right purposes and actions*].” Paul is calling for a wise choice and a radical lifestyle.

Finally, living as a Christian slave has a definite result. The noun “sanctification” may mean either *the position* in which one stands because of justification, or *the process* one pursues in his or her daily life through submission to the indwelling Holy Spirit. In 6:19 it is the latter, and living as a genuine Christian slave, writes Douglas Moo (*Romans*, 405), “results in living that is increasingly God-centered and world-renouncing.” Therefore, let’s live today for Jesus as did Paul—as *Christian slaves*!