

An Exegesis of Romans 6:15-23

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Introductory Thought

When I was a good way through preparing this paper, my mind flashed back to a recent Sir Arthur Conan Doyle short story that I had read: *The Adventure of the Three Students*. What does Sherlock Holmes have to do with the method that you and I undertake in doing an exegesis? From looking at the height of the exterior window of the crime scene, Sherlock Holmes discovered not the means of entry that the culprit used to gain access to the examination. Rather, Holmes narrowed down the list of suspects from three to one by deducing that only a man of at least six feet high could see in the window to notice what papers were on the table. From two little pyramids of black putty-like stuff, Sherlock Holmes discovered the evidence linking his lead suspect to the scene of the crime. The man guilty was one who was a long-distance jumper on the track and field team, the black clay being the substance used in the jumping pit. From the minutest details he gathered important clues, a piece here and a piece there to better understand the big picture of what happened. The opportunity to do a thorough exegesis of this Greek text from Romans reminded me how as students of the Greek we are in much the same role as our dear Sherlock. We want to pick up on all the minutest details, which can give us important insight into revealing the big meaning. It is my hope that your skills will be refreshed through this study of Romans 6:15-23. What great detail the Greek language provides for us to bring out all the wealth of meaning that God's Word holds for ourselves and for the people God has placed under our care.

The Greek Text

15 Τί οὖν; ἀμαρτήσωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐσμὲν ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν; μὴ γένοιτο.

16 οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ὃ παριστάνετε ἑαυτοὺς δούλους εἰς ὑπακοήν, δούλοι ἐστε ὃ ὑπακούετε, ἤτοι ἀμαρτίας εἰς θάνατον ἢ ὑπακοῆς εἰς δικαιοσύνην;

17 χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ ὅτι ἦτε δούλοι τῆς ἀμαρτίας ὑπηκούσατε δὲ ἐκ καρδίας εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τύπον διδασκαλίας,

18 ἐλευθερωθέντες δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμαρτίας ἐδουλώθητε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ.

19 ἀνθρώπινον λέγω διὰ τὴν ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν. ὥσπερ γὰρ παρεστήσατε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν δοῦλα τῇ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ καὶ τῇ ἀνομίᾳ εἰς τὴν ἀνομίαν, οὕτως νῦν παραστήσατε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν δοῦλα τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ εἰς ἁγιασμόν.

20 ὅτε γὰρ δούλοι ἦτε τῆς ἀμαρτίας, ἐλεύθεροι ἦτε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ.

21 τίνα οὖν καρπὸν εἶχετε τότε; ἐφ' οἷς νῦν ἐπαισχύνεσθε, τὸ γὰρ τέλος ἐκείνων θάνατος.

22 νυνὶ δὲ ἐλευθερωθέντες ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμαρτίας δουλωθέντες δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἔχετε τὸν καρπὸν ὑμῶν εἰς ἁγιασμόν, τὸ δὲ τέλος ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

23 τὰ γὰρ ὀψώνια τῆς ἀμαρτίας θάνατος, τὸ δὲ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ ζωὴ αἰώνιος ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.

Preceding context

In chapters 1-5 Paul's dominating topic to the Romans is JUSTIFICATION!!! Having thoroughly refreshed the Roman believers in all the amazing things God had done for them, in chapters 6-8, Paul moves on to speak of the believer's sanctified life brought about by God's good news. Topic = SANCTIFICATION! Something to note as you look at how the apostle Paul handles these two fundamental teachings: as he talks about justification, sanctification isn't far from his lips, and as he moves on to discuss sanctification, he hasn't

for a moment let justification slip from his mind. For example, look at what 3:31 says, and don't overlook where it is placed - right in the heart of Paul's discussion of justification. "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." These are Paul's words shortly after drilling home the truth that: "... we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." Like a writer giving a glimmer of the excitement coming, we might view Paul's words in vs. 31 as a foreshadowing. He gives a glimpse ahead to the topic he will cover more fully in a moment, namely Sanctification. But then, in ch.4-5 he returns back to pound home justification so that this truth is never forgotten. In ch.6, from which our verses for consideration today come, Paul returns to his thought in 3:31 and explains more fully the believer's sanctified life. Yet, even at the end of ch.6 note how Paul proclaims a strong declaration of justification, for justification always serves as the basis for the believer's sanctified life.

Verse 15

15 Τί οὖν; ἀμαρτήσωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐσμὲν ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν; μὴ γένοιτο.

Translation: *What therefore (possibly supply ἐροῦμεν, "shall we say" – cf. 6:1)? Should we sin because we are not under law, however (we are) under grace? May it never be!*

οὖν – Particle used to draw the reader to a logical conclusion which is based on something previously said. Here, in a question, it is used by Paul to draw out the logical question that people would ask in response to the statement of grace given in vs.14.

ἀμαρτήσωμεν – Aorist, active, subjunctive, 1st person plural of ἀμαρτάνω (to sin; to miss the mark). Here, it is a deliberative subjunctive, which has the idea of turning the question over in one's mind, mulling it over.

ὅτι – Conjunction, causal (Lenski – consecutive, not causal [R.1001], "seeing that")

οὐκ ἐσμὲν – Present, active, indicative, 1st person plural of εἰμί. The indicative is used because this is a fact. Present is used because this is our present and ongoing condition, being under grace and not under law (cf. Romans 5:1-2).

ὑπὸ νόμον – We are not "under the control of the law," "under the control of" in the sense of the thing that compels a person to act. Illustration: a father putting his hand down on a son's shoulder, tightly grasping and applying pressure as needed so that the son follows where he leads and does what he wishes. The son is under the pressure of that hand. We are not under the law in that way, having the law pushing its heavy hand on us to compel us to acts of righteousness. νόμον has no article, stressing the quality that the law makes DEMANDS – "DO WHAT I SAY! OR ELSE!"

ἀλλὰ -- Conjunction, expressing a strong contrast between what precedes and what follows.

ὑπὸ χάριν – We are "under the control of grace." The fact that there is no article with χάριν is stressing the quality of "undeserved," a free gift. Grace is what compels us to act in the way that we do as believers. But grace controlling us is completely different than the way the law formerly controlled us. Remember the illustration of the father forcing the son with a heavy hand to go and do things, things that the son was reluctant to do. Grace doesn't need to force us to do things, as with a heavy weighted hand. We want to do God's will now. Like a person receiving the most precious gift imaginable will desire to show thanks to the giver, we desire to show our thanks to God for the gift of eternal life. The difference in meaning here isn't seen in the preposition, obviously right, because the preposition is the same in both cases - ὑπὸ νόμον and ὑπὸ χάριν. The difference in meaning is seen in the objects. νόμον demands service! χάριν instills willing service!

μη γένοιτο – Aorist, middle, optative, 3rd person singular of γίνομαι - “to be, become.” The optative here expresses a strong negative wish. Paul is wishing that the Romans will **never** think this way.

Comments and Application

Notice the similarities to 6:1. Paul raises the question again, to shoot it down again. This is a common tactic employed by teachers. Is it not? You pose the difficult question for the students to consider, so that you can guide the students to the correct answer. In this way the students aren't left to answer the tough questions on their own later. As in 6:1, Paul attempts with this question to nip in the bud any faulty logic, like someone claiming that through his grace God gives license to sin. Paul leads into a discussion that once again counters the abuse of God's grace. In fact, he immediately, very emphatically answers his own question – “May it never be!” He makes sure that there is no misunderstanding, and then he goes on to explain his answer in the following verses. Professor Panning in his *People's Bible* commentary states: having grace compel us to follow willingly is a concept that defies conventional wisdom. Usually people think that rules and regulations are a necessity to keep people in line. Think about that! What's the difference maker? Why is it that believers don't need to be law driven? What's the conventional wisdom smasher? Grace! Paul isn't speaking to unregenerate worldlings. He is speaking to Christians.

Why have some fallen into the trap of being legalists? The great inclination is to think that rules and laws stop disobedience. The natural fear is that unless we have at least some laws we will not be kept from sinning. Can grace alone be sufficient for the purpose, up to the snuff for keeping sin in check in the repentant believer? God's answer to the repentant child of God is: “You are under grace!”

How does this concept affect our use of the Law in our preaching? What do we always need to be on guard against? Legalism! And yet, at the same time we do need to strongly and boldly preach sanctification, sanctification which has as its foundation the proper motivation.

Verse 16

16 οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ᾧ παριστάνετε ἑαυτοὺς δούλους εἰς ὑπακοήν, δοῦλοί ἐστε ᾧ ὑπακούετε, ἥτοι ἀμαρτίας εἰς θάνατον ἢ ὑπακοῆς εἰς δικαιοσύνην;

Translation: *Do you not know that to whom you are offering yourselves as slaves, slaves you are to the one whom you obey, whether (slaves) of sin toward death or (slaves) of obedience toward righteousness?*

Οὐκ οἴδατε – Perfect, active, indicative, 2nd person plural of οἶδα (really the perfect of the stem εἶδ-, but used as a present; “to know”). Lenski expresses that this is litotes for: “You must certainly know!” In other words, change the question mark at the end of the NIV translation into an exclamation mark. I certainly think that captures the flavor of Paul's thought in the Greek original.

ὅτι – Conjunction, here giving the content of what the Romans should know.

ᾧ -- Relative pronoun. Note the repeating of this same relative later in the verse, creating emphasis.

παριστάνετε ἑαυτοὺς – Present, active, indicative, 2nd person plural of παρίστημι (“to present yourselves, to offer yourselves”). Literally παρά -- “beside, along side,” ἵστημι -- “to place, to set.” When you place something at someone's side, by the person's hand, you are placing the item at the person's disposal for him to make use of it. (The same verb is used in vs.13 of this chapter, speaking of not placing the parts of our body at sin's side to be used by sin.) The present tense of the verb indicates that this is an ongoing activity.

δούλους – Appositive to ἑαυτοὺς. No article.

εἰς ὑπακοήν – εἰς “toward, resulting in” ὑπακοήν “obedience” In the root you can see ἀκούω, meaning “to listen” to someone.

δοῦλοί ἐστε – δοῦλοι positioned before ἐστε for emphasis. ἐστε is a present, active, indicative, 2nd person plural of εἰμί. Present indicates that this is your ongoing, continuous state of existence: “slaves you are, and slaves you continue to be to the one whom you listen to.”

ὧ ὑπακούετε – Present, active, indicative, 2nd person plural of ὑπακούω (“to obey”). Again, in the root you can see ἀκούω, which means “to listen” to someone.

ἤτοι... ἢ – “Whether...or.” Robertson (1154) says that the ἢ with the τοι seems to have the notion of restriction, there being only two alternatives. Either this is the case, or that is the case, but there is no third option available. If there are no other options, the point is: no one is without a master, and no one can serve two masters.

ἀμαρτίας εἰς θάνατον – Genitive modifying δοῦλοί, subjective genitive. Personification of sin as the master, as the one listened to and obeyed. εἰς θάνατον “toward, leads to, results in death.” The point: this is where you end up if you offer yourself to be a slave of sin.

ὑπακοῆς εἰς δικαιοσύνην – Genitive modifying δοῦλοι, subjective genitive. Personification of obedience to God as the controlling influence over the person’s life. This scenario leads toward/results in righteousness. (Righteousness here is not referring to God declaring our status as right in his eyes. Righteousness here is referring to the later effects that God’s declaration of righteousness brings about, namely right acts of thanks and service to God.)

Comments and Application

If a person keeps presenting himself to someone or something even, then the person is slave to that master by his own choice and volition. Take a whimsical illustration for example. The person who says, “I’m a slave to my ice cream!”, in reality means “by my own choice, each night, I get out the ice cream. I scoop it into the bowl. I repeatedly raise the spoon to my mouth, and I eat every last bite of the ice cream.” Does the ice cream hold the power to physically force you to eat it? No. By your own choice you are a slave to it. [Note: I hesitated to even use this illustration. But, I think it picks up well on the “presenting oneself as a slave to something” from the verse. The hesitation comes from a desire to always be 100% clear that this truth of presenting oneself does not, nor could it ever, enter into the field of the doctrine of conversion. Conversion is completely the work of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:1-9).] With that being clear, the illustration vividly brings out the truth that unbelievers do present themselves, of their own choice, as willing slaves to sin. Also, we must keep in mind that, having been converted, believers do have the new creation inside that does desire to willingly serve God.

Jesus in Matthew 6:24 – “No one can serve two masters.” Paul here too says, “No one can serve two masters.” It is one or the other. Even more, no one is without a master. Either offer yourself to sin or offer yourself to God. You can only desire to offer to one. The Christian desires to always offer himself to God. Yes, the believer might slip into sin, but he never desires to serve sin. There is a difference between voluntarily and continually offering oneself as a slave to sin and the involuntary sins of weakness that a believer falls into (compare Hebrews 10:26-27 and 1 John 2:1-6, or check out Romans 7:14-25).

Something else to consider as we look ahead to vs.17: it’s either one or the other – serve sin or serve God. But, by the grace of God a person can be changed over from one master to the other. Keep in view that in vs.16 Paul begins a comparison that will continue up through vs.22. Here’s all the ramifications and results of being slaves of sin versus all the ramifications and results of being slaves of obedience. The climax of the comparison is vs.23 – the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Verse 17

17 χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ ὅτι ἦτε δοῦλοι τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὑπηκούσατε δὲ ἐκ καρδίας εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τύπον διδαχῆς,

Translation: *And now thanks be to God, that (though) you were slaves of the sin, but now you have obeyed from the heart the form of teaching to which you were given over.*

δε – Coordinating conjunction, in this case it seems to be advancing the thought. “And now...” It’s as if Paul is saying, “You remember what I just said (vs.16). You can only serve one master. Ok. Now, here’s the gracious twist brought about by God.”

Χάρις – “Thanks, gratitude (goodwill);” τῷ θεῷ -- “To God” dative, the person to whom all our thanks goes. The credit goes to God that the following change described in vs.17 has taken place.

ὅτι – Conjunction, here giving the content of Paul’s thanks, what Paul is thankful for and what the Romans should be undyingly thankful for

ἦτε δοῦλοι τῆς ἁμαρτίας – Imperfect, active, indicative of εἰμί, 2nd person plural. Imperfect states that this was your ongoing, continuous situation in the past. You were δοῦλοι τῆς ἁμαρτίας “slaves of the sin.” The article with “sin” is an article of previous reference, namely of the two alternatives mentioned in vs.16 you were slaves of the sin. You listened to what it said. That was where you were before God called you to faith.

δὲ -- “Coordinating conjunction, presenting a contrast. You were slaves of sin, “but” now you obey God’s will from the heart. There are a number of important contrasts presented between the two clauses on either side of the δε. Hold on to that thought as we look at the rest of the words.

ὑπηκούσατε ἐκ καρδίας – Aorist, active, indicative, 2nd person plural of ὑπακούω (“to obey”). This happened – aorist; this is a statement of fact about the Roman believers. This event happened when the Roman believers were brought to faith by the Lord. Note where the obedience now comes from – “from the heart.” With no article, the stress may be on the quality of willingness. The fact is that this is not an outside force compelling service anymore, like the period before a person was brought to faith when they were “under” the compelling force of the law. The law is no longer a heavy hand upon the shoulder that needs to force obedience. Now, there is a motivation placed inside the believer. This motivation to obey God is the response to all that God has done for us. We are now “under grace.”

τύπον διδαχῆς – “Mold/form of teaching.” The accusative object telling what the Roman believers obeyed when they were brought to faith. διδαχῆς is a genitive of description. This is speaking of the whole gospel message.

εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε – Aorist, passive, indicative, 2nd person plural of παραδίδωμι (“to hand over; to entrust”). The NIV translates: “the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.” Literally – “the mold of teaching into which you were handed over” or with τύπον “into which you were poured” (Romans class notes – NT 371). With either translation, note especially the passive voice of παρεδόθητε. The agent here of course is God. He changes us. By the gospel message that he brings to us he both changes us, reshapes us, and he reshapes and changes our actions. Pay attention for the passive verbs in vs.18 and 22 as well. Bringing a believer to faith and to the sanctified life of faith that flows from faith is completely God’s doing.

Comments and Applications

Paul's line of thought: You can only serve sin or God. We all know that we all started out serving sin. What awesome thanks we owe to God that he allowed for a way of switching sides, of switching masters. What awesome thanks we owe to God because he is the one who switches us over from the sinning side to the winning side. He is completely responsible for bringing us to faith and bringing all the blessings that come from Christ through faith.

Two important parts to the contrast presented in vs.17 are: #1 – You now obey a different master. But don't miss the all-important second point of comparison. #2 – You now obey with a different motivation. Maybe an example from the Old Testament will help to illustrate the second aspect of this change, a change where now the new service is willing.

Deuteronomy 15:12-17 – “If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally... But if your servant says to you, ‘I do not want to leave you,’ because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant.” (also see Exodus 21:2-6)

Hebrew servants whose time of service was done had an option presented to them. They could be free and go on their way. Or, they could stay on with their former master, staying as willing servants to the master who had faithfully provided and cared for them. To show that they willingly decided to stay and serve and be a servant for life, God gave them this ear piercing ritual. While it doesn't fit in every nuance, the illustration does bring out the key idea of a change, the change from demanded service to willing service. In such a case there must have been feelings of gratitude on the part of the now willing servant. He must have seen that the master was good to him and that is why he wanted to stay and serve him. Romans 7:6 states: “But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that *we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*” We serve from the heart, not from the iron fist.

Verse 18

18 ἐλευθερωθέντες δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ἐδουλώθητε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ.

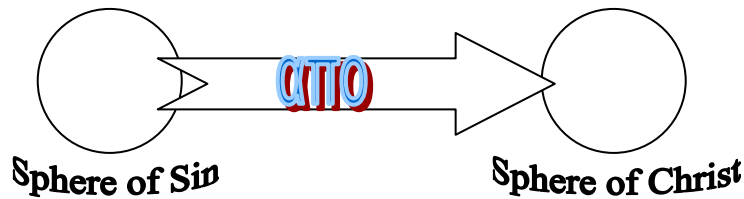
Translation: *And now that you have been set free from the sin, you have become slaves to the righteousness.*

δὲ -- Coordinating conjunction, “and.” Continuing the thought of vs.17, and adding another fact to the comparison begun back in vs.16.

ἐλευθερωθέντες – Aorist, passive, participle of ἐλευθερώω (“to set free”), adverbial/circumstantial – preliminary: “now that you have been set free from sin.” There could also be a causal flavor to the circumstantial participle “since you have been set free from sin, you have now...” Remember the line of argument that Paul began back in vs.16. It is either one or the other, and it has to be one or the other. So, if you have been freed from sin, the result must be that you are now serving God as your master. That believers have been set free is a fact. That the Romans have been set free from sin is something that has happened – aorist. The passive voice of the verb again points us to the fact that someone besides ourselves has done this for us. The agent of this work of setting us free is of course God.

ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας – ἀπὸ “from, away from,” entirely outside the sphere of something. The article with sin is again previous reference. Believers have been set free from sin, and are now entirely outside the sphere of sin's control as master. That's not saying the believer doesn't at times fall victim to temptations, but the believer does not in any way willingly serve sin as master. We are now inside the sphere of Christ's protection and the

subsequent service to him that follows on our part. Contrast the ἀπὸ found here with all the “ἐν”s (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) in verses 1-14:



ἐδουλώθητε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ – Aorist, passive, indicative, 2nd person plural of δουλόω (“to make *someone* a slave”). The verb is passive, again turning all attention away from ourselves and pointing us to God as the one who has brought us to the beautiful spot in which we now find ourselves – free to serve God. When you hear the vocable meaning of the verb, “to be enslaved, become slaves,” remember this is now willing service (service from the heart, vs.17). Aorist – this is again a fact, something that has happened for the Roman believers, something that happens for each believer at the moment they are brought to faith. τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ is a dative of reference with the verb – “You have become slaves to the righteousness.” The article, as with the article accompanying “sin,” is an article of previous reference, referring back to vs.16. As there, “righteousness” here is not referring to God declaring our status as right in his eyes. “Righteousness” here is referring to the later effects that God’s declaration of righteousness brings about, namely right acts of thanks and service to God.

Comments and Applications

We are now free to fulfill the original purpose for which God created humankind. God never intended us to belong to sin in the first place, to have sin as our master. God created us to serve him. Now that God has freed us from sin, we can fulfill the purpose of our existence. We are free to serve God.

This is a willing service. That word “freed” is important to keep in focus. As when a bird is freed from captivity and is free to use its wings and fly, it doesn’t appear that the bird considers flying a forced thing that it must now do. It’s now able to fly free as it was originally created to do. So, as believers who have been freed from the cages of sin, we are now free to do what we were originally created to do. Do we consider it a forced thing to serve God? Certainly not! We bask in the freedom to do the things for which God created us. We have been given license to live, freedom to live the way that God originally intended.

Verse 19

19 ἀνθρώπινον λέγω διὰ τὴν ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν. ὥσπερ γὰρ παρεστήσατε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν δοῦλα τῇ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ καὶ τῇ ἀνομίᾳ εἰς τὴν ἀνομίαν, οὕτως νῦν παραστήσατε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν δοῦλα τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ εἰς ἁγιασμόν.

Translation: *I speak in a human way on account of the weakness of your flesh. Indeed, just as you presented the members of you in slavery to the impurity and to the lawlessness toward the lawlessness, so now present the members of you in slavery to the righteousness toward holiness.*

ἀνθρώπινον λέγω – Present, active, indicative, 1st person singular of λέγω (“to say, speak”). ἀνθρώπινον, literally an adjective meaning “human,” is used here as an adverbial accusative: “I speak in a human way.” Two alternatives: Prof. Kuske – Paul is repeating his thought once again because that is the way that a human being often needs to be spoken to. “Paul apologizes for reminding them (many of the same words used in vs.13) again to commit themselves, but the weak commitment, which is because of the sinful flesh, leads him once again to urge them to commit all the parts of their body to do God’s will so they act as people consecrated to God.” Or, a second alternative, given in Prof. Panning’s People’s Bible on Romans – Paul is putting this in human terms in the sense that he is using an illustration from everyday life so that the people could have an image to which to

attach the scriptural concept that Paul is speaking of. Thus, Paul uses the illustration of slavery, for slavery was an every day aspect of life in the Greco-Roman world of that time. Paul has been using this picture of “slavery,” and here he explains why he is using this picture: it’s a familiar picture and it has many points of parallel from which to teach about the spiritual truths at hand.

διὰ - With the accusative = “because of, on account of”

τὴν ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν – “The weakness (associated with sickness or disease);” “the flesh,” here referring to the human, sinful nature of humankind

γὰρ – Explanatory use of γὰρ, namely further explaining the familiar illustration that Paul is using (fits with Panning’s explanation of 19a), or explaining the thought that is being repeated because as explained at the beginning of vs.19 we often need this repeated (fits with Kuske’s explanation of 19a)

ὡςπερ...οὕτως νῦν – Protasis “just as,” apodosis “so now.” The νῦν especially brings out the contrast between the facts recorded in the protasis being in the past, as opposed to the encouragement in the apodosis being for the present.

παρεστήσατε – Aorist, active, indicative, 2nd person plural of παρίστημι (“to present, offer”). Literally: “to place beside” (the idea of at the person’s disposal for use). Recall the explanation already given in vs.16. The same verb is also used in vs.13. The aorist tense confirms that this is the way that it was in the past.

τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν – The same wording as in vs.13. The “parts of you” instead of just saying “your body” (σῶμα) emphasizes the activity of sin. A person uses the individual parts of the body in order to carry out specific sins. ὑμῶν is a genitive of possession.

δοῦλα – Adjective modifying τὰ μέλη; literally: “slavish (subject, servile).” Here it almost serves as an appositive: “...the parts of you as slaves...”

τῇ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ καὶ τῇ ἀνομίᾳ -- “The impurity” and “the lawlessness.” In both cases the article is what we would call a generic article, emphasizing that “uncleanness” and “lawlessness” of every kind is included in the meaning here. (For an example of a listing of some of the things included you could look at Romans 1:24, 29.) “Impurity” has attached to its meaning the idea of something that stinks or reeks. “Lawlessness” in its meaning includes the concept of rebellion.

εἰς τὴν ἀνομίαν – “Into, toward; resulting in” The picture is of a person sinking deeper and deeper into the realm of lawlessness. As a person willingly presents themselves to lawlessness and willing rebellion, they place themselves on a “slippery slope” where the likelihood of slipping down into more and more rebellion is very great. Things that a person might have drawn back from at first, they soon find themselves doing because they have been drawn further and further into the realm of lawlessness and rebellion.

οὕτως νῦν παραστήσατε – Aorist, active, imperative, 2nd person plural of παρίστημι. Earlier in the verse, in the protasis, the same verb was used as an aorist indicative; now it is used as an aorist imperative. The line of thought: that *was* the case *before*, but *now do this*, namely act in the exact opposite extreme. With the same verb being used as in the protasis, the same vocable meaning applies. The fact that the verb is the same simply serves to make the difference in whom you are presenting the parts of your body to all the more dramatic of a contrast. The aorist tense for the imperative (sharper than the present imperative) expresses: “Do this *right now!*”

τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν δοῦλα – Not only is the verb the same from the protasis to the apodosis, but the things being offered are exactly the same too. Once again this serves to only make all the more dramatic the difference in what you are offering the parts of your body for.

τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ -- “The righteousness”; as with “lawlessness” and “uncleanness” in the protasis, here the article too is generic: “Present yourselves as slaves to the righteousness, namely righteousness of every kind.”

εἰς ἁγιασμόν – “Toward; resulting in” The vocable meaning of ἁγιασμόν is: something set apart for God. The μόν ending emphasizes the action: *doing* what is holy.

Comments

It seems fitting that εἰς ἁγιασμόν is at the very end of the sentence. I think that refreshes in our mind’s eye the very truth that Paul has been teaching about the relationship of justification to sanctification. The result of carrying out holy actions is only found after God takes us from the state of being willing slaves to sin and after he takes us to being willing servants to him and to his will. The change is brought about by the gospel message. Now we offer ourselves to, we lay our selves at the disposal of, righteousness. The soggy wallet illustration shows the relationship. If you fall out of your fishing boat, and someone from shore sees and swims out and pulls you safely to shore, saving you from drowning, you might pull out your soggy wallet, from your soggy pants in order to offer the person a now water-logged token of thanks. Was the person who saved you motivated by your offer of thanks? No. The act of saving you was long complete before your offer of a reward of thanks was ever placed on the table. Were you attempting to pay back, repay the man an amount of money equivalent to what you life is worth? No. I’m sure you wouldn’t have enough money in your wallet, nor could you find an adequate amount of money by scrounging through your car to supplement your offer with the loose change under the seat cushions, in the ash tray, and nigh to hopelessly wedged in the defrost vents. God simply saves us, solely motivated out of his grace and love. It is his gift. He does it with no view ahead to some sort of payment he might receive for his efforts. We could never pay God back for saving us eternally. When we pull out the “soggy wallet” of our lives and offer God our acts of thanks and obedience, they are simply that: our heartfelt thanks in recognition of the undeserved and unfathomable love of a God who loved us simply because he wanted to love and save us.

Verse 20

20 ὅτε γὰρ δοῦλοι ἦτε τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ἐλεύθεροι ἦτε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ.

Translation: *In fact, when you were slaves to the sin, you were free in respect to the righteousness.*

γὰρ – Explanatory; Paul is looking at the same thought that he has been discussing, only now he looks at it in a new way, from a slightly different angle

ὅτε – Temporal conjunction, definite temporal clause

ἦτε – Imperfect, active, indicative of εἰμί, 2nd person plural. The imperfect expresses that this was the Romans ongoing situation in the past. (See vs.17 for the same type of thought being expressed.)

δοῦλοι τῆς ἁμαρτίας – The article is again one of previous reference. This is a concept that Paul has been discussing at great length, only now the new twist is coming in the second half of the sentence.

ἦτε – Imperfect, active, indicative of εἰμί, 2nd person plural. This too was their ongoing situation in the past.

ἐλεύθεροι – “Free,” namely no commitment or no concern (see explanation immediately below).

τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ – Dative of reference or respect, telling what the Romans were free in respect to when they were slaves to sin. When they were slaves to sin they had no concern for obeying the will of God; they had no commitment toward carrying out righteous acts of thanks to God.

Verse 21

21 τίνα οὖν καρπὸν εἶχετε τότε; ἐφ’ οἷς νῦν ἐπαισχύνεσθε, τὸ γὰρ τέλος ἐκείνων θάνατος.

Translation: *Therefore, what kind of fruit did you have then? On the basis of those things now you are ashamed, for the end of those (is) death.*

οὖν – In a question οὖν is used to ask the reader to draw the conclusion, the answer to the question from what precedes.

τίνα – “what kind of, what sort of” Interrogative pronoun.

εἶχετε – Imperfect, active, indicative, 2nd person plural of ἔχω (“to have, to hold”; *with fruit*: “what kind of fruit did you produce/harvest”). Keep in mind that Paul has already given the answer to this question back in vs.19, the answer being lawlessness. This was the ongoing fruit that they had in the past. Panning in the People’s Bible on Romans comments that the force of the Greek verb here is: “What were you able to keep from that lifestyle? What *lasting* benefit did you get?”

τότε – “Then” notice the strong contrast between the νῦν in vs.19 and the τότε here.

ἐφ’ οἷς – Relative pronoun, referring back to καρπὸν. The fact that both are masculine agrees. The fact that οἷς is plural and καρπὸν singular is accounted for in the fact that καρπὸν has a collective idea. Blass/DeBrunner accounts for such instances where “a collective is construed as if the subject were plural” (reference 134, page 74). It’s just like we would say in English: “The fruit from that tree this year was five bushels.” What we mean is that all the pieces of fruit (plural) from that tree equaled that amount.

νῦν ἐπαισχύνεσθε – Present, middle/passive, indicative, 2nd person plural of ἐπαισχύνομαι (“to be ashamed of something”). νῦν goes along with the present to draw the contrast between their past acts (εἶχετε... τότε) and the way that they feel about those past acts in the present.

γὰρ – Conjunction, giving the reason why the preceding statement is true, namely why now the Romans are ashamed of the previous fruit they harvested when they were slaves to sin.

τὸ τέλος ἐκείνων – “The end; the result”; “of those (actions)” The demonstrative pronoun very pointedly directs the reader’s attention to the fact that this punishment/result comes from *those* acts. The demonstrative pronoun is like a finger pointing right at something so everyone sees what is being talked about. ἐκείνων, along with οἷς, refers back to καρπὸν.

θάνατος – “Death” no article, stressing the quality of death – the finality of death, the quality of death in contrast to life. The fact that there is no εἰμί seems to make the ending word “death” all the more emphatic.

Verse 22

22 νυνὶ δὲ ἐλευθερωθέντες ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας δουλωθέντες δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἔχετε τὸν καρπὸν ὑμῶν εἰς ἁγιασμόν, τὸ δὲ τέλος ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

Translation: *But now, since you have been freed from the sin and have become slaves to God, you have your fruit toward holiness, and the end (is) eternal life.*

δὲ -- Conjunction, used here to contrast the past when the Romans were slaves to sin and the present now when they are servants of God

νυνὶ -- “Now,” contrast to the τότε in the previous verse.

ἐλευθερωθέντες – Aorist, passive, participle of ἐλευθερώω (“to set free”), adverbial/circumstantial, with either a preliminary and/or causal flavor (same as back in vs.18, in fact the same wording is used back in vs.18). The fact that it is passive again emphasizes that the agent for producing this freedom is not found in the Romans, the agent of course being God.

ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας – See notes on vs.18

δὲ -- Conjunction, continuative

δουλωθέντες – Aorist passive, participle of δουλόω (“to make *someone* a slave”), adverbial/circumstantial, with either a preliminary or causal flavor (see ἐλευθερωθέντες above). The passive brings out the same point as ἐλευθερωθέντες as well, just from a different shading. God is the one who frees us from sin, and he is also the one who brings us into service to him.

τῷ θεῷ -- Dative of reference or respect. Believers have become slaves/servants of God.

ἔχετε – Present, active, indicative, 2nd person plural of ἔχω (“to have, hold”; *with fruit*: “to produce, harvest”). The present tense makes it clear that an ongoing activity of believers is being discussed. In essence the present tense is expressing the familiar thought of James 2:26: “...faith without deeds is dead.”

τὸν καρπὸν ὑμῶν – The object of ἔχετε, accompanied by the genitive personal pronoun ὑμῶν. ὑμῶν is a subjective genitive, expressing that “you” are the doers of the action inherent in the word καρπὸν.

εἰς ἁγιασμόν – “toward; resulting in holiness” (see notes on vs.19, which has the exact same phrase)

δε – Conjunction, continuative

τὸ τέλος – “The end, the result” (see notes on vs.21)

ζωὴν αἰώνιον – “Life eternal.” Here’s the big difference between vs.21 and vs.22. It all boils down to a complete contrast between the final word in vs.21 θάνατος and the final two words ζωὴν αἰώνιον in this verse. That’s a big difference in the τὸ τέλος!

Comments

Note how there is no personal or demonstrative pronoun as in vs.21 with the acts that lead to death. The result of our sinful acts is eternal death, emphasis on the fact that these sinful acts of ours are the cause. But, eternal life is not the result of our acts (no demonstrative pronoun pointing to our acts). Instead, the passive verbs in verse 22 point to someone else’s acts to bring us eternal life, namely God’s acts.

Also, always keep this statement in vs.22 in the context of vs.23 and the rest of Scripture. When we do that, no work-righteous ideas will raise their ugly head.

Verse 23

23 τὰ γὰρ ὀψώνια τῆς ἀμαρτίας θάνατος, τὸ δὲ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ ζωὴ αἰώνιος ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.

Translation: *For the wages of the sin (is) death, but the gift of God (is) eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

γὰρ – Explains vs.21 and 22, brings the two thoughts together

τὰ ὀψώνια – “The wages” – the payment given for services rendered (the ration, provision, wages of soldiers). It is like our modern day pay check – death is the just and deserved payment for sin, it is precious what has been earned

τῆς ἀμαρτίας – Subjective genitive; a vivid picture of this is seen if we view sin being personified here. Sin dishes out the wages, like a boss tearing off the paychecks and handing them to the laborers as they walk past. Sin tears off the paycheck that reads “eternal death.”

θάνατος – “Death” The fact that there is no article stresses the quality of death versus life. No εἰμί seems to emphasize the sharpness of the verdict all the more: “Death!” You might envision it as the sharpness similar to the harsh sound of the Judge’s gavel slamming down in sync with the word: “Guilty!” No other words of explanation are needed. The word says it all: “θάνατος!”

δε – Conjunction, contrasting the two halves of the verse

τὸ χάρισμα – “The gift.” Compare the vocable meaning of τὰ ὀψώνια and τὸ χάρισμα. Wages are earned/deserved! A gift is something freely given! To bring out the vocable meaning of gift, think of the last time when you received a gift with a price tag attached from the giver saying: “You owe me \$20! Cash would be preferred, but I will also accept a check.” You say you’ve never had that happen. Exactly! That wouldn’t be a “gift.” Nor would it be a gift if the card attached read: “You can pay off this gift by working x-number of hours for my septic tank repair business.” A true “gift” is freely given.

τοῦ θεοῦ – “Of God” subjective genitive, namely the subject of the action inherent in the word “gift”. God is the doer of the act of giving eternal life. He is the one handing out the gift to all who believe. Note that there is only one subjective genitive found here. It isn’t τοῦ θεοῦ δὲ τοῦ ... Just God!

ζωὴ αἰώνιος – “Life eternal”

ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν – In this sphere alone, refocuses the readers mind on all the “ἐν”s in vs.1-14 of ch.6. Eternal life is found only in Jesus.

Closing Comments

Romans 6:15-23 presents us a very practical section to help us as we strive to avoid two opposing pitfalls. The two pitfalls to avoid: legalism and license to sin. As preachers of God’s Word we might feel a struggle at times to preach sanctification as strongly and pointedly as it rightly should be proclaimed. The struggle is present because we certainly don’t want to convey even the slightest tone of legalism to our people. But, neither do we want to convey any hint toward the other extreme, namely license to sin. So, what do we do

to avoid the opposing pitfalls, either in our own personal lives or in our preaching? We need to make sure we clearly keep in view all four components of God's Law and Gospel: I. The Law – convicts; II. The Gospel – pardons & frees; III. The Law – guides; IV. The Gospel – motivates & empowers. Soak in how Paul weaves all four of these components of Law and Gospel throughout his words in ch.6 of his letter to the Romans and throughout the rest of the book. *Both* Law and Gospel need to be taught in order to convey the full message of justification. *Both* Law and Gospel need to be taught in order to convey the full message of sanctification. And the Law and the Gospel need to remain properly distinct from one another, while remaining inseparably paired. That's the challenge. Looking at Paul's words here in Romans ch.6 gives us practical instruction in how to apply all the wealth of God's Words, first in preaching to ourselves and also in preaching to our people.

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