



This Sunday we continued with our new topical series at Magdalen Road, looking at the counter-cultural 'shape' of the Christian life – especially that 'the way down is the way up'. Why is it that God says we must be weak to be strong, foolish to be wise, go through suffering to enjoy glory, be slaves to enjoy true freedom? We will, each week, be seeking to challenge our 'natural' thinking processes, asking God to help us to think more and more as he does – and trust him that what he says is best.

This week we were in Romans, joining Paul mid-way through his argument about the outworking of God's grace and our relationship with sin. He was using the language of slavery, and though particularly that we think we're free, without Christ – the reality is we're enslaved to our sinful desires. Paul was seeking to persuade us that real freedom means slavery to Christ.

#### **v15-16: Our slavery is universal**

Paul says that everyone is a slave to something. There is no neutrality or grey area. Either a slave to Christ (righteousness) or to sin. The reality of that slavery is seen all around us, all the time as people seek to find 'life' in all kinds of places.

#### **v17-18: Our slavery is transferable**

The good news though from this passage is that our slavery can change – we're able (under God) to change allegiance to the one whom we serve. Paul's description of this is unusual in that he says they 'obey from the heart a pattern of teaching' – note this is not in opposition to grace (v15) but rather fuels our obedience.

#### **v19: Our slavery grows a harvest**

Paul's next point about slavery is that it is not static, but rather grows fruit that is seen in how people live. If you're slave to righteousness, so you will grow fruit of holiness. If you're a slave to sin though, that will snowball and escalate into ever increasing wickedness as we continually lust for the next experience.

#### **v20-22: Our slavery to God is freedom**

The paradox in these verses though is that Paul says – in opposition to the world – we are free when we are slaves to Christ. Freedom is not seen in being able to do what we want to do, when we want to do it – because that is what enslaves us. Freedom is seen in being

able to be the person who we were made to be, loving and serving our Lord Jesus who's yoke is easy and who's burden is light.

Here are just a few questions that might get things going, please feel very free to ignore / adapt for your group:

How in v15 does Paul describe the state of the Christian? Why does he put it like this? What does this mean?

How do you see universal slavery in those around you? At the individual level? At the corporate level?

What hope is there for those caught into a cycle of slavery? What do you make of Paul's emphasis on obedience here? Is it in opposition to grace?

In what ways does slavery grow a harvest do you think? Where have you seen this in your own life? What about the lives of others?

What did you make of Josh Harris' quote regarding holiness being a harvest?

"What you see in your spiritual life today is the direct result of what you've put in the soil of your life in days past. The difference between the person who grows in holiness and the one who doesn't is not a matter of personality, upbringing, or gifting; the difference is what each has planted into the soil of his or her heart and soul. So holiness isn't a mysterious spiritual state that only an elite few can reach. It's more than an emotion, or a resolution, or an event. Holiness is a harvest."

What do you think it means that true freedom is found in slavery to Christ? Where / when do we struggle to believe this? Why?