

Flipping through old photo albums, or even Facebook photos, can be a very interesting thing. It is neat to see what you were compared to what you are now. It can be interesting to see how you used to look and dress compared to how you do currently. Sometimes it can make you say, “What was I thinking when I wore that, or did that fad?” It can also make you say, “Remember when that was cool?” It can be fascinating to see the old places that we lived at or had been to, and then to see how things have changed. It can be eye-opening to seeing how we have changed in terms of our hobbies, personalities, and how we handle situations. It is always interesting to see what we were compared to what we are now. This morning, Paul takes a stroll down memory lane in Romans 6. He tells what we were and what we are now. To do this, he uses nine different contrasts in just 11 verses. Let’s see what he tells us.

Paul says that you were a slave. Slavery is unfortunately still alive and well in our world. The story of a young girl named “Dodzi” is a common one in Ghana. Dodzi was orphaned at nine months and lived with her Grandmother, who served as her guardian. Her Grandmother had a lot on her plate as she was also taking care of eight other children by herself. At the age of 8, Dodzi was sold into slavery by her Grandmother. She was forced into the fishing slavery that was done on Lake Volta, which is the largest man-made reservoir in the world. She was forced to work on dangerous fishing boats, and did things like bailing out water, paddling the canoe, and to cast and pull in the fishing nets. Dodzi was also pressured into doing dangerous tasks, like untangling the nets while they were in the water. It would not be uncommon for children to die while doing this.

This poor girl was then forced to cook for her owners and to work non-stop around the clock. She even had a forced marriage with another slave against her will. But it gets worse for this poor girl. She had no way out, or no chance to escape. She was hopelessly stuck. Her masters were cruel and didn’t care for her one bit. Dodzi was under the threat of violence, and could be beaten and starved. She was a slave who lived according to her masters’ whims, will, and wishes.

The life of Dodzi is a reflection of our old spiritual life. Paul tells us that we were slaves to sin. As we learned last week, we inherited sin from our first parent, Adam, and we were born under its control. With sin as our master, we

“What you were vs what you are” Romans 6:19-23 Trinity 7 2026
obeyed and served it. Our bodies, and all of our members, our eyes, fingers, toes, mouths, and minds, were offered to its service. We offered them for acts of impurity and lawlessness. This led to more impurity and lawlessness. It horribly snowballed out of control! We acted against God’s Holy and good commandments. Like Dodzi, we served our master.

And just as any slave gets a wage for the work that is done, we got a wage all right. The payment and wage of these acts was death. We lived a life that bore no good fruit or good wage. We took what we what got.

Similar to Dodzi, we had no way out. We could not free ourselves from sin, nor pay for our release. The price was too great. We could never do it! Worse yet, we could not run away or escape. We couldn’t even think about rebelling, for we were not strong enough to break sin’s control.

This was a tough life too. Our master, sin, didn’t care about us. It didn’t care about the destruction that hate, lust, theft, lying, or coveting could create for us or others. It was not sorry for the devastation that it caused. Sin’s friends, death and the devil, didn’t care either. In fact, they were just as ruthless and bad. We were slaves to sin. Paul says you were this, and this was your lot and life.

Let’s go back to the story of Dodzi. After eight years of slavery, the young lady was released on September 9, 2016. She is currently living in freedom, and does normal household chores at her choosing. She has received psychological care, and is training to be a hairdresser. She is being taught to how to have financial security and ways to help resist, believe it or not, re-enslavement.

Paul says you are similar to Dodzi. You have been rescued and released from your former master. Through our baptism into Jesus, Paul writes in verses six to eight, “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.” Because of Jesus and our incorporation into His death and resurrection by baptism, sin has lost its control over us. It is no longer our master. It no longer calls the shots in our lives. We do not serve it, nor do we offer our members to it. We no longer receive its wage, death, but receive the free gift of God, grace, and eternal life.

For we are right with God, and our sin is not counted against us. The blood and life of Jesus has set us free and paid for our release. We have eternal life, and we belong to a God that cares about us, loves us, and watches over us. Sin's friends and co-workers, death and the devil, have no power or control over us. We sang in our hymn: “Though hordes of devils fill the land/All threat'ning to devour us, We tremble not, unmoved we stand; They cannot over pow'r us. Let this world's tyrant rage, In battle we'll engage. His might is doomed to fail; God's judgment must prevail! One little word subdues him.” We are no longer are sin's slave.

So, what are we are? Paul tells us in verses 17-18: “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.” Did you hear what you are? Paul says we are slaves of righteousness. We have gone from one slavery to another, but it ironically, it is in this new slavery that we have true freedom. This slavery to righteousness is a relationship that we receive from God, and it is a righteousness from Him that avails before Him. We live in His righteousness, and do deeds of righteousness, good works, in response to what He has done for us through Jesus.

For our members are offered to God and our neighbor as instruments for righteousness. We serve our Lord by gladly hearing His Word and learning it. We do it when we call upon His name to pray, praise, plead for help, and give thanks. We also serve Him by serving others. Whether that is by changing a diaper, cooking a meal for our family, giving someone a drink of water, or working hard at our job, these are all acts that serve God.

This life is a blessed servitude. It is not one of compulsion or force. We now live to serve God as He works in us through His Word, our baptism, and His Supper, to make us like His Son Jesus. You are a slave to righteousness.

It is interesting to reflect on what we were and what we are now. It is neat to see the changes that have taken place, and the growth that has happened. Paul enjoys seeing the change as well as he reminds us that we were slaves to sin, but now are slaves to righteousness, and that is a good thing. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.