

Who are You Serving?

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Date: 26 May 2019

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thanks, Stuart and Hannah. Folks, let me invite you to have that passage in Romans chapter 6 open in front of you. We're going to be dipping in and out of it this morning, and I've thoroughly enjoyed my time there this week, and I really hope and I trust that the Lord has something to teach us this morning as we turn to his word.

So with Romans chapter 6 open in front of you, let's just begin this morning. I've been in theological circles now for over seven years, theological training circles, and I've spent time in different places. I've discovered that there's a phrase that people continually use wherever I go, and it's a phrase that I've come to understand is absolutely true, and it goes like this, and see if you maybe agree with this, it's that everyone's a theologian. Everyone's a theologian.

So if we're describing, defining rather, theology as the study of God, then any time anybody engages in thoughts about who God is, really grapples with that, wrestles with that, and from that they think about the world in which we live, why is it the way that it is, and then they think about human beings, why is it that we are the way that we are, why is it that I am the way that I am. On some kind of level they're engaging in theology, right?

Thoughts about who God is, and that means that your neighbor has thoughts about God, they're a theologian, and it means that your classmates and your colleagues, they have thoughts about God, they're theologians, and it means that your friends and your family have thoughts about God.

The first minister has thoughts about God. Teresa May, as we've been thinking, has thoughts about God. The Hollywood actor has thoughts about God. The premiership footballer has thoughts about God. Everyone's a theologian. Everybody has thoughts about God.

[1 : 4 4] God. I've been thinking about that this week. I've been reminded of one of my favourite theologians, kind of on that theme, and he goes by the name of Bob, and his second name is Dylan.

Anybody like Bob Dylan? What a voice. That is a unique voice, isn't it? Bob Dylan's voice. But he's one of my favourite theologians. I have no idea whether Bob Dylan was a Christian or not, is a Christian or not. I have no idea, but I do know that he's a theologian just like the rest of us.

And you see that kind of come through in his songs, as he just observes the world and the things that are going on in the world, and he comments on it. You see it through his songs. And let me just show you some of the lyrics from a song that he wrote as he watched the way in which human beings live their lives.

And it goes like this. You may be a construction worker working on a home. You may be living in a mansion or you might live in a dome. You might own guns and you might even own tanks.

You might be someone's landlord. You might even own banks. But you're going to have to serve somebody. You're going to have to serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody.

[2 : 5 4] You see, what Dylan was observing is he's watching humanity and he's watching human beings and the way that they live their lives, the way that they spend their time, the way that they spend their energy, the way that they spend their money.

What he's observing is that everything that we do as human beings is driven by something. The truth is we all serve somebody. Now, I wonder what you think about that.

As Bob Dylan chucks it out there this morning, what do you think about that? It's very thought-provoking, is it not? We love to think in our world that we're free. We do what we want. Bob Dylan is saying we're all serving somebody.

And it might surprise you to hear me say that the God of the Bible, the God who's made everything, the God who's made us in his image, the God who in his word he tells us what he's like, the God

who in his word tells us what we are like, he would heartily agree with Bob Dylan.

And we know that because of this passage this morning. And that's really its message, if you want to think about it like that, that everyone's following somebody. Everyone's following somebody.

[3 : 58] That's its message. The only question is, who is that somebody? And you see, if you've got the text there, Paul's opening question, verse 15, is very similar to that of verse 1 of chapter 6.

For this is a continuation of the theme that we thought about last week. As we thought about the freedom that we have as Christians in Jesus Christ. That was a big theme of last week. Jesus Christ, who as it were, if you want to think about it like this, he's walked into the marketplace where we were there, chained to our wrists, responding to the orders being given by sin, our master.

Just picture it like this. Sin was shouting orders at us, and our response was, yes sir, yes sir, three bags full sir. That was our response to sin as it shouted, because we were slaves of sin.

And what happened is, Jesus in that marketplace walked up to our old master. He walked up to sin, and he said, see her, see him, I'll buy them. I'll buy them.

And I won't give you three magic beans, I won't give you 30 pieces of eight. What I'll give you for them, is that I'll give you me. I'll give you my life. Because I'll pay with something far greater than money.

[5 : 08] I'll pay with my blood, I'll pay with my life. And he bought us, that's what Jesus did. He bought us. He bought us as he died for us on the cross. He paid with his blood to make us his own.

And we are his. And we have newness of life in him. And we've been set free, and this is where, if you've made the link, this is why we read from the Exodus passage earlier, we've been set free, not to live for ourselves.

God has rescued us. Why? To go wandering? No. To worship him. This is why we've been set free. Set free from something, set free for something. Set free to worship God, and to live for Jesus every day of our lives.

And really, this passage this morning, Paul continues that thought. And what we see him say to the Christians in Rome, and what we see him say to the Christians of every day, which includes us, is that make your every day, make your every day, your every thought, your every motive, your every act, make it about obeying and glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ, who has bought you for himself.

And so that's the pulse of this passage. And what we'll see is we'll see Paul make two statements as he tries to unpack this for his readers. Here's the first one, beginning at verse 15, and it's this.

[6 : 21] It's that everyone's serving someone. Everyone's serving somebody. Every human being who's ever existed, every human being who does exist, every human being who will exist, is serving someone.

Now just think about that for a minute. Think about your life. What do you dream about? What do you dream about? What's the next goal on your radar? What's the next thing that's coming up? How are you thinking about that? What's going on? What in your mind, as you think about your life, what would need to happen in order for you to call it a success? Friends, if you start engaging with those kind of thoughts, if you start wrestling with those kind of questions, you'll begin to see who it is that you really serve.

Because as far as God is concerned, that there's only two choices really. I mean, hear this text tell you that when it comes to who you serve, who you live for, the choice is not like a dual X color chart, okay?

It's not like that. You're not looking at this thinking that I'm going to be duck egg blue today, I'm going to be magnolia tomorrow, and I might even be petal pink next week. This is who I serve. I've got the choice.

[7 : 26] No, no, no. God says if you want to play the game of thinking about it, who you serve, like a dual X color chart, think of it with a dual X color chart with only two colors on it. And it's black or it's white.

That's it. Either, and this is true for all of us, we're serving ourselves, pursuing our own agenda and our own advancement, and therefore we're serving sin, or we're serving Jesus.

And what we need to understand is that to serve self and to serve sin is what we do by default.

Now, if you don't believe me, let me challenge you to try and go a week without sinning.

Okay? Try and go a week without making a self-centered decision, without making a judgmental thought about somebody, without using self-defensive words.

Try going a week without doing that and see how far you get. Because I think for all of us, we wouldn't even make it till lunchtime on day one, would we? Because we're slaves to sin.

[8 : 31] This is what we do. This is the way that we go. And that was true of the Christian pre-Jesus. Do you see what Paul says, verse 17? Do you see how we get those words?

And look at it with me, because these are glorious words. But thanks be to God. This is what he says. Do you see it? But thanks be to God. Want to shorten it? But God.

Now, I love it. I would love to write a series called But God and trace all the but gods throughout the Bible because there's tons of them. But this is the Bible's way of saying, here is the game changer. Something is about to change in regard to what it's telling us, what God is telling us.

And what the but, thanks to God, says here is that you were running one way like we were singing in our last song and Christ got involved. Right? He got involved. He graciously intervened.

He mercifully got involved. And he's transformed our fortunes if our trust is in him. And what did he do? Well, he changed us. And where did that change occur?

[9 : 34] Do you see it there? It changed in their hearts. This is the testimony of every Christian.

There's been a heart change. God has performed heart surgery on us. Now, do you know why that is good news?

Because this is where the problem is. This is where the problem is. This is what we find Jesus saying in the Gospels. It's not what goes into the body which makes it sinful and defiles it. It's what comes out of the heart.

The problem is inward. Right? The problem is inward. So, Jesus, he's not just a surface level saviour. What this passage tells us is that he's not just into simplistic behaviour modification.

What he's into is holistic life transformation. If you think about it, this is why it's so important that we know our Old Testaments, that Jesus isn't just this random bloke who's turned up onto the public scene in 30 AD and started doing stuff.

This is a line of promise. Because this is what God said he would do. This was his covenant promise to his people, the one that we see him make through the prophets Jeremiah, and we see him make through the prophet Ezekiel.

[10 : 37] That he would move to do what his people could not do. And he would move to change their hearts. And how he would do that is that he would write his law right into their hearts.

He would write it. It's there. It becomes his people's pulse. This is what they do. And God made this promise in the Old Testament. And he brings it to pass in the new.

As he rescues his people through Jesus. And he empowers them to live for him through the work of his indwelling Holy Spirit.

This is mind-blowing that God lives in us. His followers. He lives in us. He hasn't just set us free to go and do our own thing, to try and have a go on our own strength. He's given us the power to live for him.

Gone is that heart of stone. And brought is that heart of flesh that beats for him. And you see what God has done here. He has written his word. He has written his life-giving word where?

[11 : 39] On our hearts. And that is, if you've got the text there, that is the pattern of teaching that Paul is talking about here. Do you see it? And what does that mean?

It means that our lives as Christians should look increasingly word-shaped. Because this word, this living word has got under our skin. Right?

Think Frank Sinatra. I love song lyrics. There's another one, right? I've got you where? Under the skin. This is where this word has worked. It's one, it's power. It's shown in our lives. And it's working away, renewing us day after day after day.

Renewing our hearts and our minds. And what has it done? God's word has what? Claimed our allegiance. Love that phrase. It has claimed our allegiance. Or as Hannah read there, we have been entrusted to this pattern of teaching.

I think if you've got an ESV there or a KJV, I'm sure as well, I think that translation probably captures it better because it talks there about being handed over to this pattern of teaching.

[12 : 42] And that verb there, handed over, is a passive verb. Nothing to do with us. Everything that's been done to us, that's what it means. In other words, we've been handed over to God.

Now if you think about it, have you ever had the experience where you've moved into a new flat? Maybe a student, you've had that experience or you've bought your first house, you've moved into a house or whatever. You've moved somewhere different and you've signed the contract and you've

had a word with the solicitor, the agent's happy, he's got his feet.

And that day comes when you get the keys. Right? Think about that day. What do we call it? When you're handed the keys, what's that day called? Handover day. Never say that human beings aren't creative, right?

How on earth did we come up with that one? It's handover day. And what Paul is saying here is that if you're a Christian, you picture yourself in that scenario. You're not the landlord, you're not the tenant, you're the set of keys.

Right? You have been handed over to God. This is what he's saying. You have been handed over to God. He owns you now. He's in possession.

[13 : 45] And he's going to be the one that's choosing the furniture. He's going to be the one that's choosing the colours. And the blueprint for that is his word. As he moves into our lives, this is what it's going to look like.

And as he transforms us, as he transforms us from the inside out, friends, there's going to be a noticeable difference. We'll come to love his word. We'll come to love worshipping him because he's transformed us from the inside out.

Let me just say one of the greatest thrills for me in this job, and I wonder if you've had this experience before, is seeing people come to be Christians for the first time. Right? And you know what happens?

You walk up to people and you say, listen to me, I love you. Do you want to read the Bible together? And they look at you like you're out of your mind. Why would I be interested in that? But they've got sympathy for you, so they entertain you and say, yeah, I'll do that.

But as you get into that conversation, you realise, spiritually speaking, that the lights are not on. Right? And then something happens. Something happens. And sometime later, you go up to that person and say, would you like to read the Bible together?

[14 : 46] Would you like to read Romans together? And they say, do you know what? I've read it eight times already. Why have you done that? Well, I don't know, because one day Jesus wasn't all that big a deal to me and then all of a sudden my eyes were opened and I can't get enough of him.

And you say, what has gone on there? What has happened? And do you know what's happened, friends? Is that God's got involved. And the truths of Romans 5, 6 have become true for that person. Romans 5, 5, if you want to turn it back there, what does it say that God has done? He has poured his love into the hearts of his people through the Holy Spirit. He has poured that love into the hearts of his people.

That's what's happened. And also, this has happened. Through the Holy Spirit, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

This is what's gone on. I didn't see it for years, but this is what's gone on. God has been so kind and gracious. And he's poured out his love into our hearts. And now we see the words of George Whitefield.

[15 : 56] When you have once tasted of his love and felt the power of his grace upon your heart, you will then love to talk and walk with Jesus. That's it, isn't it?

Friends, everyone's serving someone. Paul says to the Christian, God's calling your life. God's calling your life. And she changes you is to live as slaves to righteousness. And here's the second thing that he says from verse 19 is that everyone's going somewhere.

From verse 19, again, he urges them to remember the... And do you see how he describes this? He describes it as the downward spiral of sin, if you like. That was their lives. That was what they were all about.

Friends, that was maybe the path that some of you are on today without Jesus Christ. appeal to you through this verse to come to him in no life. But Paul is saying, pre-Jesus, we were on this downward spiral of sin.

We were held captive and we were moving in the direction of, do you see it? Greater and greater lawlessness. We were drifting away from the God who made us. Let me just, as a wee sidebar here, let me just try and maybe tell you about something that was on my heart and as I cried as I was thinking about it this week and it surrounds this whole area of abortion.

[17 : 16] And as I've listened to people voice their opinions on social media and on the news and as I've read articles, it struck me that as a society, we've massively drifted from a time of rejecting it to questioning it to accepting it.

and now as you watch what's going on, people are celebrating it. And it moves me to tears and let me just say that as a church, we don't want to be known as people who shout our nose unsympathetically from the sidelines.

We want to take our God-given convictions about the beauty of life, every life that God has made in His image and we want to take those convictions as we walk alongside people in love and we say, let me love you, let me help you, let me step into your pain and your questions and your fears and together, let us help you find a better way.

You know, I met up this week with the counsellor for Brunnsfield and Morningside, just picking our brains on what are some of the ways that we can serve this community better as a church and she said the number one need that she perceives in our area is social isolation.

people just don't know where to go, they've nowhere to turn, they've got no friends. Friends, maybe this morning you want to think about ways that we as a people, God's people here, can begin to speak into those situations and help.

[18:45] But back on track, Paul mentions what was going on before Christ got involved, that we were downward spiralling away from God in our sin. This is what was going on.

Paul reminds them that this is what they used to be all about and the fruit of that old life was producing bad fruit. It was bad fruit. Bad fruit that went to show that they didn't know God.

This was their previous life before Jesus got involved. You know, I got an email a few months ago from a teacher at my old school and she asked me to, because she found out I was a minister, she, I'm probably desperate as well to get people, she asked me if I'd be willing to come and speak at my school assembly.

Now, see if I'd have thought about that, at 16 years old, sitting in that school I thought would have terrified me in front of 900 people. But sadly, I wasn't able to make it as I checked the dates. But thinking about my school, my old school, do you know what it did?

It unlocked a whole host of memories in my mind that I think I'd forgotten. And as well as some really cherished ones about my time at school and my whole life around that age group, what it unlocked was a whole host of memories I thought, what on earth was I doing?

[19:55] And as I thought about the things that I used to do and as I thought about the way that I used to treat people and the things that I used to say, do you know, I was utterly ashamed. And presumably, that is what Paul is talking about here when he says, but by the grace of God, this is where your lives were heading.

Do you see him say it there, verse 21? He says, as you think about your old life and the fruit that you were producing, are you not ashamed of it? I've never had those kind of moments when you think, goodness, but by the grace of God, where would I be?

What would I be about? Where would I be running? And friends, we need to remember the previous chapter that's just come here in Romans, that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone and Christ alone.

We need to remember that Jesus has dealt with that old us on the cross. It doesn't have power over us anymore because he's taken it for us and praise him. That stuff doesn't hold us anymore. That's not what we're about.

We are a new creation in Christ. Christ. And now, verse 22, because of the truth that we are Jesus's and the truth that the Spirit of God is working in us and he is pointing us day after day to Christ, that's his job, as we abide in Christ, we'll begin to see good fruit in our lives.

[21:08] See the other side of the coin here when Jesus got involved. Good fruit. And I think that's what Paul means at the end of verse 19 and verse 22 when he's talking about this new life path that God has his people on, the path that is marked holiness.

This is what we're on. Some of your translations might say there's sanctification. This is the path that God has put us on. This is what he wants to see from the lives of his people. You know, we often talk as Christians, don't we, about knowing God's will for our lives.

Ever ask that question? What is God's will for my life? And we normally use it, don't we, when we're thinking about big life decisions that we need to make. We've had a crossroads and we don't know what to do. You know, what job do I take?

Where do I move? What place do I live? Who should I marry? What should I do? And in those moments we get frustrated, don't we? As we try and do it our own way and try and do things our own strength and saying, God, why are you not answering?

What's going on? And we get frustrated and we remember to ourselves that we watched The Wizard of Oz when we were younger and we think about Dorothy and we thought, do you know what? I'll give this one a shot. God, would you show me the yellow brick road?

[22 : 18] Would you show me the yellow brick road and would you put people in my path who will be able to sing over me, here is the yellow brick road, here is the yellow brick road. There's times in life where we say, God, what is your will for my life?

Well, friends, let me just say, not putting that aside, there are big things that we need to do but God has given the means by which we can make those decisions but God's primary will for our lives is caught up in this word, sanctification.

Caught up in this word, sanctification, this lifelong, loving, transformational process that God has us on as his people through which he makes us day after day after day after day through every life experience more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

That's why the Spirit lives in us. Pointing us to him. That's God's primary will for our lives and it's amazing I find this in life when I'm at that crossroads and God just says, have you tried praying? I'm going, no, I haven't tried praying. What does God teach me all along? Was it patience? Yeah. Friends, the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, love, joy, peace, patience, godliness, fruitfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[23 : 35] What lovely words have you ever met a person in your life who just oozes those things? Oozes those things? I can think of people in my life who I've met over the years who've just modelled that to me.

Do you know what? I love being around those people. Could be around the people all day. Keep on talking. Talk about the football. Talk about what you... Just keep talking because I just love to be around people like this.

Friends, I just say, if you're younger here in this church, can I encourage you to get to know an older generation? Get to know the older generation. Just full of life experience. And do you know where they've got it from?

They've got it from years and years and years of sitting at the feet of Jesus. Day after day after day sitting at his feet. I tell you, there was someone in this congregation I visited recently.

I went to visit them, but do you know what? I left feeling like I'd be visited. Because we see the fruit of the Spirit. Friends, you know what I think has occurred to me this morning that the ultimate example of these things is Jesus.

[24 : 37] It's Him. It's Him that we seek. It's Him that we're being transformed more into the likeness of. Let me ask you just in some small way this morning. Do you see the fruit of the Spirit growing in your life?

Do you see that? Do you want to see more of that? I do. As God uses these everyday circumstances to mould us more into His likeness, to teach us about our inadequacy and to teach us about His adequacy, His all-sufficiency.

Friends, what fruit are you seeing in your life? Because Paul would say here that that fruit, what you're seeing, is going to tell you a lot about the person that you're serving.

Do you see it? At the end here at verse 23, he talks about the fact that we're all serving one of these two very different masters.

And he mentions the fact that these two different masters are going to pay out at the end of the day in two very different ways. Do you see it? I was thinking this week about my first job that I had when I was 16, before when I was still at school, working at the local restaurant, driving around in my family Ford car with the green P on the side, thought it was the B's knees.

[25 : 54] Do you know what I was earning? I was earning £4.10 an hour. Right, now remember this was 2002, so don't go calling the authorities after that one, okay? But £4.10 an hour, this is what I was earning.

Loved it. But as I look back on that, I think to myself, what terrible pay for the amount of effort that I put into that job. But do you see what Paul says here? If you've served sin, if you've given yourself to sin all your life, see when it comes to payday at the end of your life, see when you total up all those hours that you spent investing there, sin your master won't give you a gold watch to mark your retirement, right?

It's going to pay out in eternal death. This is what it's saying. You know, we hear Jesus, I was reading it this week, Jesus in Matthew 25, talk about the sheep and the goats.

This is what's going to happen when he comes back. Separate the world into the sheep and the goats. One group, he will take his people to be with him in everlasting joy and the other group will go to everlasting torment.

The place that he talks about as the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth doesn't sound great to me. I don't know how it works, but it doesn't sound like a place I want me to be or want any of you to be or God wants you to be.

[27 : 06] Friends, words coming from the most loving human being who has ever walked this earth. Whereas God, the one who made us originally in his image and made us his own in Christ, his payday, do you see it?

It won't be a wage, it will be a gift. One that we haven't earned and it will be a gift called eternal life. Heaven, with him, worshipping fully, no more pain, no more sickness, just all out worship of our glorious three in one God forever.

See, these two masters are paying out in two very different ways. Friends, let me just, as we draw this to a close this morning, let me just ask you to prayerfully consider today who are you serving? What's your life all about?

What are you living for? Because, do you know what? You're going to have to serve somebody.

You're going to have to serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody.

You know, just as we close, what we've got into the habit of doing as a family, every night when we sit around the table for dinner together as we just ask this question, what was your best bit about today?

[28 : 23] Right? So I say to the girls, what is your best bit about today? And they normally say, I met this. They don't say, I met this. They're not supposed to get it. They say, my friend Hannah, that's the only one that comes up. Or we say, go into the park, that was my best bit about today.

But you know what? As I've been thinking about this passage this week, it's urged me to ask myself a different question every day. But not at the end of the day, but at the start of the day.

A similar but different question. Not what was the best bit about my day, but to ask myself, who will it be about today? Who will I serve today? Paul says in the second half of Romans chapter 6, to the Christians in Rome and to us this morning as God speaks to us through his word.

Make your every day about obeying and glorifying the saviour Jesus Christ who's rescued you and bought him for himself. So friends, I realise we've touched on a lot of areas there, so I just want to give us a minute just to be quiet.

And I urge you to just pour out your soul before our all-knowing and all-loving God today and then I'll close. But don't waste this opportunity before the madness and the noise kicks off.

[29 : 33] Just use this moment of silence just to reflect your own heart with God this morning. Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus.

Just from sin and self to cease. Just from Jesus simply taking life and rest and joy and peace. I'm so glad I learned to trust him.

Precious Jesus, saviour friend. And I know that he is with me. He'll be with me to the end. Father, what an awesome God you are.

And Lord, I just pray for us this week, whoever we are, Lord, you would teach us wonderful things about who you are. Lord, help us not to be about chasing the things of this world, but help us by your grace to be those people who are all out in pursuit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Father, we commit our hearts to you this morning, realising that there's many of us here from different experiences and backgrounds. And I pray, Father, that you would, by your spirit, continue to be at work in our lives.

[30 : 49] Father, thank you that you love us. And so we pray all these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.