

Romans 6:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

Analysis

Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness— eleutherōthentes de apo tēs hamartias edoulōthēte tē dikaiosynē (ἐλευθερωθέντες δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμαρτίας ἐδουλώθητε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ). Two aorist passives: eleutherōthentes (ἐλευθερωθέντες, having been freed) and edoulōthēte (ἐδουλώθητε, ye were enslaved). The passives indicate divine action—God freed them from sin and enslaved them to righteousness. This isn't self-liberation but salvation by grace.

The paradox is striking: freed from sin = enslaved to righteousness. True freedom isn't autonomy but serving the right master. Sin's 'freedom' is actually slavery leading to death; righteousness's 'slavery' is actually freedom leading to life. Paul uses slavery language because moral neutrality is impossible—everyone serves someone. Dikaiosynē (δικαιοσύνη, righteousness) is personified as the new master, parallel to sin. Positionally, believers have been transferred from sin's ownership to righteousness's ownership; practically, sanctification is learning to live consistently with this new reality by actively serving righteousness rather than sin. The verb doulōthēte (were enslaved) is passive—believers didn't emancipate themselves but were purchased and transferred by God.

Historical Context

Manumission (freeing slaves) was common in the Roman world, often through a fictional sale to a deity (the slave purchased freedom through savings, paid to the

temple, and was declared 'slave of the god' but functionally free). Paul may allude to this: believers were purchased (redeemed) by Christ's blood, declared 'slaves of God/righteousness,' and thus freed from sin's tyranny. The paradox—enslaved to be free—would be understood in this context. Ancient writers often discussed 'slavery to passions' vs. 'freedom through virtue,' but Paul's theology is unique: slavery transfer is God's gracious act, not human achievement.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How is being 'enslaved to righteousness' actually greater freedom than the 'freedom' sin promises?
2. What does it mean practically to serve righteousness as completely as you once served sin?
3. Where do you need to more fully embrace your identity as 'slave of righteousness' rather than clinging to autonomy?

Interlinear Text

ἐλευθερωθέντες δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμαρτίας ἐδουλώθητε τῇ

Being

G1659

then

G1161

from

G575

G3588

sin

G266

the servants

G1402

G3588

δικαιοσύνῃ

of righteousness

G1343

Additional Cross-References

Romans 6:22 (Creation): But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

Galatians 5:1 (Creation): Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

John 8:32 (Parallel theme): And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Romans 8:2 (Creation): For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Isaiah 54:17 (Righteousness): No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

Romans 6:14 (Sin): For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 6:7 (Sin): For he that is dead is freed from sin.

1 Peter 2:16 (Sin): As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of malice, but as the servants of God.

Isaiah 26:13 (Parallel theme): O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.

Psalms 119:32 (Parallel theme): I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.