

## Slaves of Righteousness? Romans 6:12-23

When I was candidating for the ministry back in 1996/7, people seemed quite interested in my full-time employment at the time. I was a police constable in the West Midlands Police having transferred from Herts Constabulary when Michelle and I were married in 1988. The fact that I was aiming to leave the police service and join the Methodist ministry caused some consternation for my mum and some of my police colleagues. My mum had been worried when I wanted to join the police because she thought it was a dangerous job. When I told her I was thinking of leaving, she thought I was foolish for leaving such a secure career. You really can't argue against a mother's logic, can you? Some of my senior police colleagues thought I would soon be back with my tail between my legs. It's taken me 20 years to earn the same 'wage' that I was on when I was 30! Thankfully, I didn't join the ministry to be wealthy even though I have been *richly* blessed.

The people called Methodists seemed a bit alarmed that I wanted to be a minister. Wouldn't I be more effective staying in the police and being a Christian there? This was a question I was asked in the Selection Committee. During my district interview, someone, who obviously had a bee in his bonnet, dragged his chair across the room so as to invade my personal space. He said he'd moved nearer to make me more comfortable! He then proceeded to read me the police caution; "You do not have to say anything but anything you do say will be taken down and may be used in evidence." I think he thought he was being funny. One of the questions I was asked was 'what makes you angry?' I answered, "you mean besides people invading my personal space?" Despite that interview and some rather aggressive attitudes towards me at theological college because I had previously been a police officer, I made it through the interviews and training! I had made a journey which someone at the national interview had suggested was like moving from "Law to Grace." That sounds like a good title for an autobiography, perhaps one day.

The Apostle wrote: <sup>14</sup> *Sin must not be your master; for you do not live under law but under God's grace.*

This is true for us all. The Law was there to guide and instruct the people of God before Jesus had lived his 33 years on earth. Now we have his perfect example. We have his promises that God will never leave us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 3:16), that Jesus has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us. He has walked this way and he has left his Spirit to be our counsellor, comforter and guide. We are not alone. We are in this together.

The Apostle then uses an extended metaphor of slavery. He ends this section with the acclamation: <sup>22</sup> *But now you have been set free from sin and are the slaves of God. Your gain is a life fully dedicated to him, and the result is eternal life.*

How hard does the image of slavery jar with us in these days? Especially in these times when there have been protests under the Black Lives Matter (BLM) banner. Of course, *all* lives matter. However, the BLM movement is necessary in my mind because, so often, the individual lives of black, Asian and minority ethnic peoples have been disregarded and even

despised. The world will be a better place when there doesn't need to be BLM marches and protests all around the globe. For me, it's like the Pride marches and events that take place the world over, including in the Channel Islands. Some will say, 'why don't we have Straight Pride?' The answer is surely, because you don't get abused, beaten up, ridiculed or disowned by your family for being heterosexual. And, if you're white and a man, you probably don't realise just how privileged you are, most of the time. God promises us freedom, but for me we aren't truly free until all have an equal opportunity to prosper; irrespective of gender, sexuality, race, colour or creed. Or any other identifier, for that matter.

Have you ever found yourself saying; 'it isn't fair', or, 'what did I do to deserve this?' I know I have.

When things go horribly wrong, people often blame God and wonder where God was when this was happening. Even people who say they don't believe in God will still blame God when bad things seem to be happening to good people.

When I was studying through Cliff College when I was in my first couple of years of circuit ministry, I came upon a discovery that changed my mindset about God. Now, I don't blame God when things go wrong. Rather, I focus on thanking God when things go well, despite me being who I am. And this change came about when I read or heard something at Cliff about this passage and verse 23 in particular;

*<sup>23</sup> For sin pays its wage—death; but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.*

If there's one thing I know for sure, it is that I am (still) a sinner. I was one before I knew God. I hope I am a bit of a better person after knowing God and about God for the last 20+ years, but a sinner I still am. Therefore, if I get what I deserve, that would be - death. Read verse 23 again.

But no, I don't get death. That's not to say I won't physically die. Of course, I will. That's the other inescapable thing besides taxes (unless you can afford a very good lawyer, I suppose). I will die one day, but then I will live in that place that Jesus has prepared for me, in one of God's many dwelling places, in one of those mansions we heard about when we were younger. And the equally good news? Before we die, we will truly live. Abundant life now and eternal life, forever with Jesus and all the saints. Thanks be to God.