

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made.

He said to Eve, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

Eve said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You won’t die,” the serpent said to Eve. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good *and* evil.”

When Eve saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it...

Half-truths

Did you catch the little half-truth in the Devil’s temptation there?

“You’re not going to die (at least not right away). God knows that if you eat it your eyes will be opened! You will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Their eyes were opened alright, that promise of the devil was true enough... they already knew good in the Garden of Eden and they sure did get to know evil after they ate from the fruit, the devil was right about that too. But they sure wouldn’t be like God anymore – at least not in the way that really mattered. They learned about the existence of evil, like God, sure enough, but unlike God that evil now resided in their very hearts. That evil wouldn’t be some kind of mere head-knowledge, evil became an immediate, intimate, and incessant companion for the rest of Adam and Eve’s miserable lives which did, in fact, end in death.

It’s easy to look at Adam and Eve and scratch our heads a little bit. How could they fall for it? But hind-sight is 20/20. From a distance we can easily see the half-truths in that crafty snake’s temptation, and I’m sure Adam and Eve had many opportunities to look back and kick themselves for not seeing the half-truths of the devil for what they were, but Adam and Eve found out in the Garden that when you are in the moment those half-truths don’t look quite so *half*-true.

This is the devil’s m.o., one of his go-to moves in the ongoing war for your soul – half-truths.

Romans 6 presents us with another theater of temptation in which the devil employs these half-truths with deadly efficiency. The theater of...

Slavery

Did God really say he wants you to consider yourself his slave? That’s what a loving God expects from you? Slavery? No, no, no. God knows that if you just ignore his wishes then you will be like he is, free – and it is your God-given right to be free!

And far more often it should, in the moment, the half-truth doesn’t look so *half*-true... because it does feel good to feel free to make your own choices in this world, doesn’t it?

You see, we never quite buck that little toddler throwing a fit over what he sees as his parents’ tyrannical rule over the house. Parents hand down a rule and the fists form, the feet start stomping, the look flashes in his eyes, “Haven’t you read the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights mom and dad? It is my God-given right to be *free* - free from your rules; free from your oppression; free from slavery on this plantation you call home.”

Ok, so maybe toddlers aren’t quoting our nation’s founding documents, but the sentiment is the same, isn’t it? From the moment they can move, walk, and talk our little kids make attempted declarations on freedom – independence to do what they want when they want to. And even though we grow up physically, we never lose that independence-loving streak. We just find more eloquent ways to demand freedom than a toddler temper tantrum – see the Declaration of Independence for a prime example of an adult temper-tantrum, a declaration of freedom from someone else’s rules that have been deemed unfair and unwanted.

And make no mistake about it; Americans are by no means the first people to harbor in their hearts a deep love of freedom. Americans aren’t the only people on this planet or in history who despise the idea of slavery in any kind.

We all desire to be free and the devil is really good at sweet-talking that desire with his half-truth promise of freedom from God’s rules and regulations.

The truth is, being the kind of people God expects us to be *does* feel like slavery. God freely admits that. Today in Romans he is perfectly clear with us when he encourages us to become his slaves. He could have said servants or disciples, but he chose the word *slaves* because when it comes to our relationship with God, slavery is as accurate a word as he could use. When it comes to the rules we have to follow on this earth, what is right and what is wrong, we do not live in a democracy. God’s wish is our command.

And so that crafty serpent comes and whispers his offer of freedom in our ears.

Call it the younger-brother half-truth tactic of that sly snake – you remember that younger brother in the parable Jesus told, the young man who was sick of living in the slave-like conditions of his father’s house, asked for his share of the money he would get when dear old dad was dead, and went off and spent that money on whatever his heart desired, enjoying freedom instead of slavery.

And all too often in the moment, it sounds true... it would feel freeing to indulge that good old God-given sex drive on a little porn... it would be such a relief to stop bottling up my problems with that co-worker and let them all spill out over a drink or two with a friend behind her back... it would feel tremendously liberating to ignore God’s slavish demand that I use everything I have (every penny I make, every thought I think, every step I take) to his glory and the good of his kingdom instead of for my own good and the good of my little kingdom.

Think about your last week. Think of the sins you committed. Think about why you did them. Can you see that half-truth peddling reptile at work? “God’s rules are a

burden. God's regulations are like slavery. It will feel good to ignore his rules because the you will be free, and freedom feels good," his forked tongue whispers.

And so we look at the sin, see that it is pleasing to the eye, good for the senses, and also a good way to feel a little bit of that cherished freedom and control in my own life and we take and eat it.

In the moment, that offer of freedom and control sound so true. But make no mistake about it, it is only *half*-true.

"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

Thinking of any given temptation as a choice between slavery to God and freedom to do what you want is always a *half*-truth. Yes, you will be free from God's rules, but you won't be free. Just ask the hopeless drug addicted woman, or the helpless alcohol addicted man – that drug was their free expression of choice, but having made that free choice, they are the furthest thing from free.

God says that all sins are like drug addiction. You may begin the habit as a declaration of freedom from all God's onerous rules, but in the end freedom is not what you get. You trade slavery to God for slavery to sin.

That is a hugely important truth friends, a truth that devil desperately wants you to forget – in this world of sin there is no such thing as freedom. As you are born, on your own, apart from God and all his rules, you are and always will be a slave to sin. And so your choice is not between slavery to God and freedom, your only choice is between slavery to God and slavery to sin – that is the *only* option when faced with temptation in this world. That's the whole truth, not the half-truth – it's slavery to God or slavery to sin.

That's the whole truth, and when you see it that way the choice ought to be clear, right? Today in the choices you make, the things you say, the thoughts you think, you will either be a slave to God or you will be a slave to sin and the devil, there is no third "free" option. The choice should be clear because the outcomes to those two choices are also perfectly clear. One slavery leads to death. The other slavery leads to eternal life truly free from sin.

The choice should be clear, and yet in the moment, all too often, like Adam and Eve, we trade the truth for the lie.

But there is another beautiful truth that serpent would love for you to forget: you have that choice in the first place.

If things were fair, if things were just, you wouldn't have a choice at all. You would be bound in slavery to sin from the moment you were conceived and have no way to escape that slavery – and the end result would be the same for all of us: **"slaves to sin, which leads to death."**

But in the face of those half-truth lies of the devil we have the beautiful whole truth about...

The gift of God

"You have been set free from sin... for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There is a good and God-pleasing way to find satisfaction for that innate desire you have for freedom, but it's not in all those ways the devil tries to convince you. There is a way to feel free that is so much better and longer-lasting than any of those small, temporary "freedoms" the devil offers with a wink and his fingers crossed behind his back... freedom that lasts not just for a moment, but freedom that lasts quite literally forever. Freedom found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus and the devil both offer you freedom, but only one of them can deliver in any real, lasting, and meaningful way... only one of them *has* delivered.

Because of Jesus, his life, his death, his resurrection, you have been set free from the shackles of sin – those shackles that have been rubbing your wrists raw from the moment you were conceived, those shackles that we leading you away to an eternity in hell, they are gone. You are no longer slaves to sin.

For us, for Christians, slavery to sin is a past tense thing – look at Romans, Paul says **"you used to be slaves to sin... you have been set free."** We are right now, already free from sin. Whether you always realize it or live like it is another issue. Every day we forget it and live like we are slaves to sin in so many and different ways but from God's perspective the chains are already gone. Let that sink in. You are already free!

Paul's encouragement for us today is to start living like it - to stop falling for the half-truth, never satisfying lies of the devil and find true, lasting, and eternal satisfaction in the gift that God has already given you in Christ - freedom.

Until we get to heaven our hearts are always going to have that penchant to bristle when we think of our relationship with God as one between a master and his slave, but today in Romans we are encouraged to remember not just the half-truth that slavery to God is a hard thing that asks a lot of us.

Remember the whole truth – you, your spouse ,your kids, your friends, you will all be slaves to something in this world - either to sin or to God. Only one of those has the ability to offer and has already earned real freedom for you. Doing our Christian duty, being slaves to God, that is the only choice that makes sense.

God grant us hearts convinced of that – hearts that see slavery to God as the gift that it is.

Amen.