

- Paul knew what it was like to be a literal “prisoner of the Lord,” and realized that many people – even so-called Christians – shunned him because of his chains. He was marked as a political prisoner, and any of his associates were also marked in the eyes of the Romans.
 - **Ephesians 3:1** *I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ*
 - **Ephesians 4:1** *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord*
 - **2 Timothy 1:8** *Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner*
 - **Ephesians 6:20** *For which I am an ambassador in bonds*
 - **2 Timothy 2:9** *Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound*
- In pleading with his friend Philemon not to punish the newly-converted runaway slave Onesimus, Paul refers to himself twice as a “prisoner” in a short letter of only 25 verses. He wants Philemon to know that Christians are all “slaves” to Jesus Christ – even those who are slave masters!
 - **Philemon 1** *Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ*
 - **Philemon 9** *Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ*
- However, the most insidious attitude Paul faced was not among Christians who rejected him because he was a **prisoner of ROME**, but among those who rejected his gospel because it made one a **prisoner of CHRIST!** The apostolic message of righteous living has always faced rejection from those who want “freedom in Christ” without “responsibility to Christ.”

Romans 6:15-23 ¹⁵ *What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. ¹⁶ Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? ¹⁷ But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. ¹⁸ Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. ¹⁹ I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. ²⁰ For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. ²¹ What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. ²² But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

- The whole point of being a Christian is not to be set free from ANY master, but rather to CHANGE masters! We exchange being a “servant of sin” for being a “servant of righteousness.” There are still responsibilities, but the WAGES are different!
- The loudest cry in modern society is the cry for freedom from restrictions of any kind. You can hear it echoed in the calls for feminist rights (“eliminate the differences between the sexes!”), in the shouts for abortion rights (“eliminate the consequences of casual sex!”), in the pleas for AIDS funding (“eliminate the consequences of homosexuality!”), and in the increasing calls to legalize drug use, nudity and prostitution (“eliminate all the barriers to my pleasure!”).
- And yet, feminists, abortionists, and homosexuals are not free! Psychological studies repeatedly show that they bear traumatic scars from their behavior, and that the radicals among them are fixated on their cause to the point where their life becomes consumed by it. The militants and activists for “freedom” are in fact the most incarcerated slaves in the world.
- What they are really looking for is not freedom, but a new master! **And we know Him!**

Secular Songwriter (Mariah Carey):

Here comes the night
No more living in the shadow of your love
This is my life
You always tried so hard to keep me down
But now I'll rise above those empty lies
You don't think that I'll be strong enough ...
I won't be a prisoner of your love ...
You can't do that
I'm not a doormat ...

Gospel Songwriter (Dottie Rambo):

I'm a prisoner of love, a slave to the Master
I willingly toil through the heat and the cold
I seek no reward in this life below
For payday will come when the pearly gates unfold.

When I came to Jesus I settled it all
I gave Him my life to control
Neither fear nor persuasion could draw me to Christ
But His love has captured my soul.

He holds me secure with His love strong and true
I'm happy His servant to be
In bondage to Jesus forever I'll stay
My soul doesn't want to be free.

- Due to his experience with the runaway slave Onesimus, Paul would certainly have identified with the plight of black slaves in North America in the last 250 years.
- These precious people were born free in humble villages across Africa, but captured by wicked slave traders, herded onto a ship and brought to North America. Packed in the hold like cargo, chained together so closely they could barely move, fed poorly and in despair because they had been stolen from their homes, many of these young men and women did not survive the six-week voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.
- For those who did survive, worse was to come in the new land. They were sold to plantation owners in the southern United States who used whips to force them to work from sunup to sundown. Some rebelled and ran off, but often starvation drove them back to the plantation. The brutal floggings they received as punishment were used to warn others against running away. Most slaves simply worked until they died under the lash or from disease or exhaustion. In the 250 years that slavery lasted in the United States, millions of people were sold into bondage so that plantation owners could grow rich selling the crops grown by their captive labourers.
- Before 1850, slaves were free once they reached a northern state that had outlawed slavery. But the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 forced all Americans, even those in free states, to help slave owners capture escaped slaves. As a result, fugitives had to travel farther north to Canada to find freedom. It was against the law to educate a slave, so they could not read maps, etc. They had only a whispered rumor that somewhere there was an underground railroad that would carry them to freedom. This network of people who worked in secret to pass slaves from one safe house to another got its unique name in 1831, when a plantation owner was chasing a fugitive slave named Tice Davids. He reported that he'd almost caught the runaway, but he seemed to disappear into thin air – "It was almost as though he'd disappeared onto an underground road." Later the name was changed to Underground Railroad because fugitives seemed to move as fast as the new steam trains that crisscrossed the country.
- The misery, fear and longing for home the slaves felt came out in the songs they sang and the stories they told. Later generations of slaves often used stories from the Bible to express their longing for freedom. Music was also used to send "coded messages" from plantation to plantation.

- Someone singing about “crossing the river” was passing on information about how to escape by crossing the Ohio River into a free state. “Canaan” and the “Promised Land” were often used as code words for Canada. A slave singing “Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus” was alerting other slaves that an escape attempt was coming up.
 - “No more auction block for me, no more, no more, no more auction block for me, many thousand gone.”
 - “Get on board, little children, get on board, little children, get on board, little children, there’s room for many a more.”
 - “Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land, tell old Pharaoh to “let my people go.”
- There were many code names on the underground railroad. The runaways were called “parcels” or “freight,” the person showing them the way was a “conductor,” and the safe houses were “stations.” But the most famous code name on the Underground Railroad was “Moses.” Just the whisper of this conductor’s name brought hope to the slaves, for “Moses” made 19 trips into the southern states and led more than 300 fugitives to freedom in Canada. Moses was never captured, in spite of a \$40,000 bounty.
- Few people at the time knew that this courageous freedom fighter was an escaped slave named Harriet Tubman. She was born in Maryland about 1820, and never considered running away until she heard that some of her ten brothers and sisters were to be sold. She decided, “I will have freedom or I will have death,” and set off northward. But she could not enjoy freedom alone! “Moses” made several trips back into the dangerous south, and led not only her family but many others to safety. But they had to be as tough as their leader! When a fugitive lost their nerve, they would find themselves facing Harriet’s pistol and her command to “Move or die!” She knew that the safety of the group was more important than the life of one individual. Late in her life, she would proudly say that “I never ran my train off its tracks.” Most of the conductors on the Underground Railroad were freed slaves like Harriet who decided to go back and rescue others.
- By 1863, when Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation freeing all slaves in the United States, as many as 60,000 fugitive slaves had found a new life in Canada. This new life was not easy; in fact, much of the new work they did was as hard as the work they had left behind, and they struggled to get an education. But it was worth it to leave behind their cruel taskmasters!

PREACH THE PARALLELS!