



# ROMANS<sup>Part 4</sup>

Chapter 1:1

Romans 1:1—“Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus.”



It will be difficult grasping how an ex-Pharisee could call himself, at the beginning of this epistle, “A slave of Christ Jesus.” Aren’t Pharisees proud? How could they ever be slaves? Precisely. This is the shock of Paul’s story—and ours as well. We most immediately relate slavery to African Americans of the Civil War South. The title “slave” rubs us wrong

until considering it in reference to a benign, loving Savior.

I wish to introduce you to the concept of peaceful, purposeful slavery to the kindest Master ever.

There are different kinds of slaves. Some people are slaves to others. Others are slaves to themselves. Some blindly serve and are subsequently destroyed by systems. The only slavery Paul had ever known before Damascus was slavery to the law and to his own ambitions. These cruelly preoccupied the man, oppressing him, threatening both his life and sanity.

Henry David Thoreau once said, “Men everywhere lead lives of quiet desperation.” I think he meant women as well. Thoreau was not a contemporary of Saul of Tarsus, but here is a universal truth applying to those slaving for anything or anyone except the Benevolent Lord of Everything.

## KICKING AGAINST GOADS

When Jesus called Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus, one of the first things He said to him was: “Hard is it for you to be kicking against the goads!” (Acts 26:14). The Greek word translated “goad” in the Concordant Version is “*kentron*,” whose English element is “puncturer.” A goad is a sharpened stick used to prod animals. *Kentron* is like a pin driven into the flesh; it is translated “sting” in the “Concordant” Version in 1 Corinthians 15:55, as in, “Where, O Death, is your *sting*?” What was stinging the Pharisee, Saul? His pursuit of perfection. The sting was the law, or should I say, Paul’s desire to do it perfectly. The law was Paul’s own personal, cruel taskmaster. The sting was his own obsessive/compulsive disorder making him want to excel at it. The man suffered from OCD, I am quite sure. Anyone reading a few pages of Paul—yes, even the changed apostle—will detect it. He struggled with perfection as a Pharisee, and tended that way as an apostle. Christ Jesus rescued him from the worst of it, rounding

off the edges and putting his compulsiveness to good use.

When Paul is detailing his trials in 2 Corinthians 23-28, he speaks of beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, and lousy accommodations in a swamp. The last thing he mentions may have been the hardest for him: "... the solicitude for all the ecclesias." Paul cared about people and wanted everything to go right for everyone. He took care of body members as he took care of himself. He resisted *hyper*-analyzing his own walk, but goaded himself daily, keeping on top of his body and mind to be running to the finish line. He played by the rules to the end. In both his pre and post Pharisaic life, this man dotted i's and crossed t's, having little tolerance for those lesser than he. But as I said, the love of Christ sanded off the rough stuff.

All of this is still slavery. There is bad slavery—to ourselves, or to outside systems; there is good slavery—to Christ and to what He wants for our lives. Common between the good and the bad is a willingness and desire to follow one's owner everywhere, whether it is the law of Moses and one's own compulsions, unto death, or Christ Jesus, Who is many times smarter and more benevolent than we—unto life.

### SWEATING TOO MANY DETAILS

Life is miserable when you've no room to move, to breathe, to make mistakes. Imagine a self-made world where the walls are covered in sharp nails. The walls are so close to your skin (the walls and nails represent perfection), that whenever you move, you must move with the



utmost care to avoid puncture. Consistent avoidance of injury is impossible. The "goats" Paul kicked against were the hemmed in, nail-sheathed walls of his own standards.

Let's linger here a moment. The law contained 613

things one had to consistently accomplish to please God. The Pharisees, dissatisfied with only 613 laws, invented many more. Their deepest need (and sharpest goad) was to out-perform others. By this, they hoped to impress God. Once one embarks upon such a walk, it is impossible *not* to look down on other, less-accomplished individuals. Self-righteousness was the predictable flip-side of Paul's obsessions.

### COMMON LOT

We all suffer from some degree of this. I am not OCD, but neither am I quick to cut myself slack. When running 9 miles a day years ago in pursuit of a sub 3-hour marathon (my best time was 3:05), I never cut corners. Literally. If there was a lightpost on a sidewalk corner I was turning at, I would circle outside of the post, never inside it. If suffering was the order of the day, I would leave no groan un-uttered.

This trait serves me well in the evangel because I sweat the details. Formerly a slave of running and other exercise, I am now a slave of Christ Jesus. My book covers must be aesthetically balanced, my sentences properly punctuated. I want my testimony and teaching to look good. God has rounded the edges so I can rest with imperfection, thank God. I shoot for perfection, but settle for excellence. Now that I'm writing this, I think this needs adjustment. I should shoot for excellence, and settle for "pretty good."

It's a fine line, true. Some people say I'm trying too hard. People always tell me, "Cut yourself slack." I'm starting to take their advice, but only because a pleasant facet of slavery to Christ Jesus is slavery to His command to rest. For slaves, it is easy to work, especially when the pricks constantly punish sad performance. It is a paradox to say, "Obey and rest." God is commanding us to rest and accept His love. We have a hard time equating this to slavery. But it is; it is right of the Master to ask this—to ask us to let Him wash *our* feet. This was the struggle of Peter. It is our struggle as well.

It is hard to accept grace.

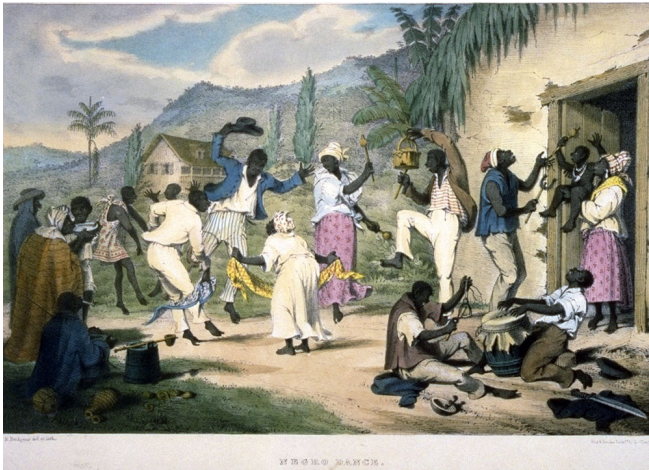
### SIMPLICITY OF SLAVERY

Now that Paul has become a believer, he is a slave of Christ Jesus. The word "slave" is the same. The definition does not change. Slave—*douleuo*—in the Greek, means to serve as the property of another. This can be demeaning, or it can be relaxing because there is Another ordering your steps.



The slave hears only his master's voice. This is the key to the enjoyment of slavery. Enjoyment in bondage comes only by knowing that one's Owner is Christ Jesus. "Owner" is from the Greek *kurios*, whose English element is "sanctioner." The Concordant Dictionary defines this as "one who has authority over others, the opposite of a slave." This definition goes on: "As a title of Christ it refers to His authority, and relates to service."

With physical taskmasters in the days of American slavery, slaves used to bow their heads and obey every command. It was only relaxing in one respect: slaves were delivered from tending to their own sustenance. Masters provided all basic needs. When the slaves finished working for the day, they didn't have to rush to the grocery store, to the local DIY, or to the haberdashery. Slaves paid no bills. I'm not saying slavery was near ideal, I'm simply considering the positives. This is why those in bond could sing spirituals in their cabins at night, and dance the night away. Again: no bills; no burning midnight oil worrying about the kids' college fund. The slaves' leisure—what



little there was of it—was free. Dancing and singing saved their souls to attend another day.

Yes, the slaves' day was most often hell—horrific working conditions, brutal overseers—but not because of the work itself. Theirs was an uncomplicated life. "Pick cotton!" Yes, the quotas required of them were cruel, and the hours long, but solely consider the work. Picking cotton is easy compared to figuring out the Adobe In-Design word processing program, or filling out your income tax form. When picking cotton, all one needs to know is how to separate the boll from the husk. Watch how easy it is on this video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW4dBODmN9o>.

Now watch a video about how to create In-Design paragraph styles: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVMvvNRe6lw>



Yes, cotton is hard on the back. But In-Design is hard on the brain. I sometimes think we of this "modern era" are worse off than many ancient societies.

### MECHANICS OF SLAVERY

Paul wrote the following to real slaves, but this also applies to slaves of Christ Jesus:

Slaves, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-slavery, as human-pleasers, but with singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. All, whatsoever you may be doing, work from the soul, as to the Lord and not to humans, being aware that from the Lord you will be getting the compensation of the enjoyment of an allotment: for the Lord Christ are you slaving. For he who is injuring shall be required for that which he injures, and there is no partiality.

—Colossians 3:22-25

Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:3,4—

Suffer evil with me, as an ideal soldier of Christ Jesus. No one who is warring is involved in the business of a livelihood, that he should be pleasing the one who enlists him.

Let's put these two verses together. Slaves, obey in *all* things, your masters according to flesh. Pretty simple. No choosing what to do here; no relying on oneself. Thank God Paul didn't say "some things," because then we'd be convening meetings and writing contracts; everyone's opinion would differ. Secondly, how freeing to look past the human holders into the eyes of Christ Jesus, the ultimate Owner. We are not the arrangers of our own lives. None of us asked to be where we are.

Then, "work from the soul." That is, give whatever you do the best you have. Make sure to act as unto the

Lord, not to humans, as you will not often be compensated by flesh and blood. If you have been injured, bear it. Life is unfair. I never knew how unfair until adulthood. The person who injures you will answer for it. With God, there is no partiality. Even if the injurer is a Body of Christ member, God will address and redress the wrong. The injury's instigator will answer. This is the "vengeance is mine" promise (Romans 12:19). God is good for it. Give place to His indignation; it is more insightful and effective



**“Your enemies will realize their mistakes, and so will you.”**

than yours.

The problem is that these injuries add up and redress is delayed—either until the dais of Christ for believers, or the great white throne for

those of no belief. Don't worry. You will live to see your enemies confront their mistakes. They could have had a V-8, but drank battery acid instead. You will also confront your many failings. There is no partiality. With Christ, however, all is done correctly and finally.

As with vengeance upon your enemies, thus also with compensation. You work and work and see little for it. Don't worry: God keeps track of everything. I wish it were a “pay as you go” program, but it's not. It's one big lump sum on “that day,” the day we appear at the dais of Christ. (Romans 14:10-13; 2 Corinthians 5:10). In the meantime, God doles out juicy tidbits to sometimes barely keep us walking through this living nightmare.

In the war analogy of 2 Timothy 2:3-4, Paul speaks of Christ as an Enlister. Here is one of my favorite passages. The soldier hears but one voice, that of the one ultimately in charge of him. For us, that is Christ. The problem is: He's not here, physically. We are left with our minds. We've got to do some serious thinking, people. To use Paul's phrase, we must come to realizations. This involves nothing but thinking. It is a matter of rehearsing and repeating things mentally. Don't be tricked into thinking this activity is not spiritual. It's spiritual as can be.

## NEW IDENTITY

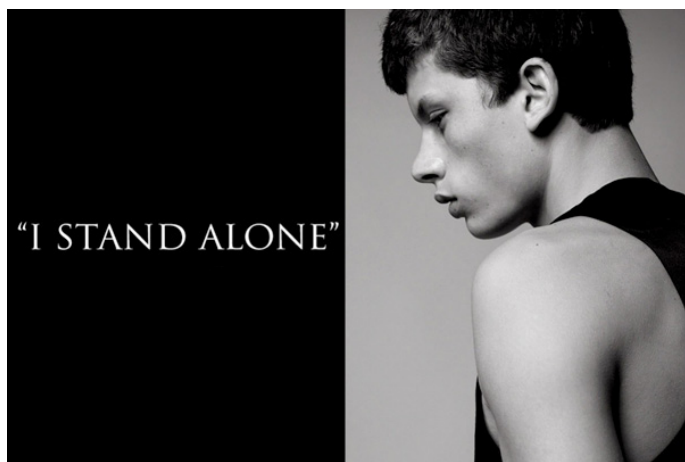
In light of my own teaching, here is what I've been doing lately: Any time something goes wrong, or an irritant comes along, I will say out loud: “I am a slave of Christ Jesus.” This instantly calms me. I may have to say it three times every minute, but so far, it works every time. It calms me because, first of all, this is a statement of fact, not theory. Christ Jesus' physical absence does not preclude His running of my life and its circumstances. He is alive and dictating my life, my battle-plan, my actions. He also dictates my problems and trials. He dictates where I bump my head, and where and when I step in a mud puddle. He dictates the times I cannot find a parking spot at Wal-Mart. Since I am His slave, I cannot complain. I can, but it's kicking against good goads. I'm a slave. Slaves have no say. This is why I must say it out loud: “I am a slave of Christ Jesus.” A slave has no choice. It is helpful information. It is practical beyond belief. If these are your circumstances, try it and see:

- ▶ My spouse does not understand me.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ My job sometimes discourages me unto death.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ I am underpaid at work.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ My boss doesn't like me.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ My kids don't understand my faith.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ My body is turning on me.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ I am tired of always eating the right foods.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ When I wake up, I'm still tired.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ The details of life sometimes bury me.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ I have not had a vacation in five years.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ There is so much evil in the world  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ Every year I live, I get older.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”
- ▶ People I love keep dying.  
“I am a slave of Christ Jesus.”

I find this is working. Try it. Just say it. Say it out loud. Treat it like a mantra, but don't repeat it mindlessly. As you say it, think hard on the words "slave" and "Christ." Remember: you are not a slave of Jesus Christ, but of Christ Jesus. Jesus Christ, Himself, was a slave, or should I say He took the form of a slave (Philippians 2:7) on earth. "Jesus Christ" was the name of His humiliation. You are not the slave of the humiliated One. Rather, you are the slave of the exalted, almighty Christ, who is running the universe by God's authority, for all authority was granted to him. Both titles are used in Scripture, but Paul exclusively uses, "Christ Jesus."

### A RARE PRIVILEGE

Not everyone is a slave of Christ Jesus. Hardly anyone is. Christians are not; they don't even know Christ Jesus. At best, they know only Jesus Christ. They want to work miracles and get a bunch of people following them. They sure aren't slaves, because Joel Osteen and others are trying to tell them how blessed they should be, and if they aren't, they don't have enough faith. This is not you. You are suffering and being persecuted by even your own friends. Your life is ridiculous. You have straightjackets



others aren't constrained by. Even your Christian friends gallivant around like they've got no Owner. Well, they haven't. God is their God, but not their Owner. God is not yet the Father of all, and Christ Jesus is not yet the Owner of all.

Slavery to Christ Jesus is rare, rare, rare. You *must* walk in a realization of the rarity of it. When you say, "I am a slave of Christ Jesus," please understand how few can truly say this. Just wait until the day of your com-

pensation. The horror of everything wrong now will be righted and de-horrified in a single day. That day is coming. It is not now. You will look like a genius then for being the slave of a Man Who was crucified, but then got raised from the dead by His Father. All your eggs are going into the next basket—not this one—and the actions of your enemies are being remembered and will be addressed. There will be regret, some pain, and even salvation through fire. Some of your enemies will go to the lake of fire, to be vivified at the consummation. God is not a respecter of persons in this regard; with Him, there is no partiality. Some may be in the body of Christ, but they are the heel and not the head. So be it. There are many places.

You are a slave of Christ Jesus, then, not Jesus Christ. This is why you can be a slave with your head held even—not down, not up, just even. You're still not going to turn cartwheels, but this information may keep you from becoming so despondent you want to end your life. Don't do it.

I want to end my own life, but can't.  
"I am a slave of Christ Jesus."

### NEW CREDENTIALS

Try to see how relaxing and uncomplicated the slave-life can be. You don't have to compose your own agenda or write your own script. (You wouldn't have written into the script anything that has happened to you anyway, including but not exclusive of divorce, bumping your head, living where you do, wishing your body or your mind were different, or watching your former friends, loved ones and family members abandon you.)

When people thought Paul was crazy, he shrugged. Paul did not care. He looked to his Lord, His Owner. His Owner was pleased with him, and that was good enough for Paul. This is why, at the beginning of this epistle, Paul calls himself, "Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus." This is a heck of a way to begin an epic writing you hope will impress people. But that's just the thing: Paul didn't care, ultimately, who liked it and who didn't. He knew it was awesome. The holy spirit dictated Romans to Paul, and knew what it was doing. Paul spoke the words out loud while his scribe Tertius tried to keep up. Paul only had to get it out; that's all he cared about. He figured the truth would trump everything, including presentation. And it has. Paul only had to please his Owner and Enlistee, not his readers. This, he did.

No author I know of begins his credentials this way,

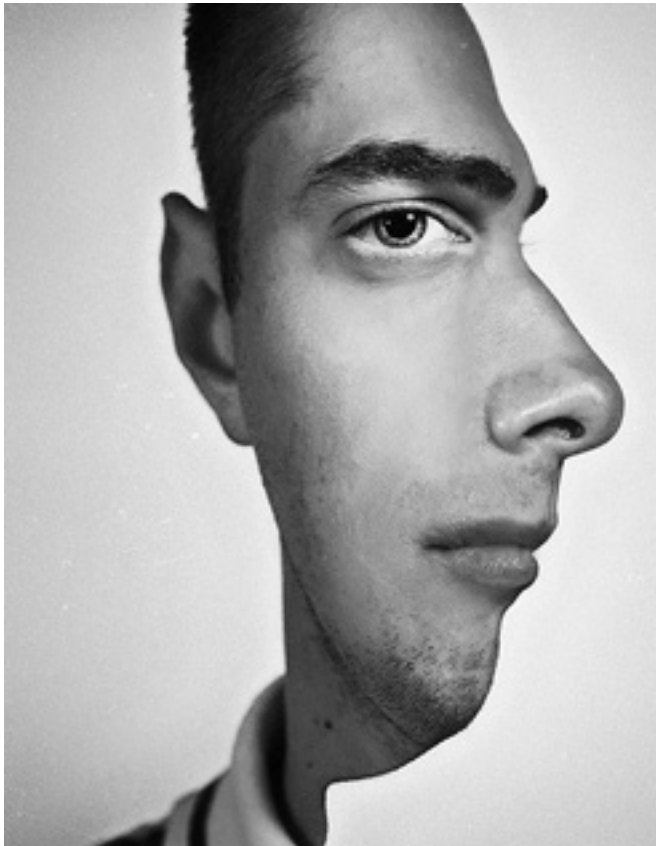


“I am a slave.” In fact, I am typesetting the paperback version of *How to Quit Church Without Quitting God* right now (I am halfway through), and on the very first two pages, I share quotes about how great the book is, and how great a writer I am. (The first page is media reviews, the second is reader reviews.) This is more like how normal humans do it. I want people to be impressed with me and my book right off the bat. Is this vain? Of course it is. Am I kicking against some goads, some pricks? Possibly so. Certainly so. Maybe I’m doing the wrong thing. This kind of thing may be making my life harder, that is, wanting people to think well of me. See, then, how relaxing it is to give up on such a thing before chapter one:

“Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus.”

Maybe this is why most believers forsook Paul in his lifetime. Someone would say Paul needed a PR agent. Paul wasn’t very good at presenting himself. Or had he possibly worn himself out presenting himself during his Pharisee days? Absolutely, he had already exhausted himself trying

“Paul was not  
very good at  
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himself.”



his whole young life to burnish his image. To Paul, this call of Christ was practically a vacation. It’s true, but only when compared with his former life. I need to start looking at things this way, and will start today (November 1, 2013). It was a relief to Paul to be done with his former life, which he realized had been killing him. This is why Jesus said, straight off, “It’s hard for you to kick against the goads.” It *was* hard. (This is also why Jesus said, on earth, “My burden is light.” He said this to people being persecuted for their faith.) So now, life was going to be easier. Yes, Paul was going to suffer, but even that felt like a Tahitian cruise when held against his former life.

#### DELIVERED FROM SELF

How do you think men of God such as Paul, John and Peter were able to rejoice after beatings? It’s because getting beaten was actually easier than their former lives. They set their eyes upon Christ, Who was doing everything through them. He was filling out their taxes for them, and learning Adobe In-design for them, then transferring the knowledge to them directly in the simplest terms. This is what the Upper Room was all about. What were the apostles doing before the Upper Room experience? Nothing. They were tarrying. Tarrying is a lot easier than fishing and trying to collect taxes (in the case of Matthew) from people who hate you.

What were the apostles doing after the spirit of God descended upon them? They were running out of the building. Peter delivered a speech that was nowhere near being a dandy of self-design. He spoke only the words of Christ. He did not labor for six hours on the speech, write it on a napkin, scratch out words, practice before a mirror—none of that. God gave him the words, and he delivered them. Later, the priesthood became enraged and hauled Peter and John into Sanhedrin Central. How hard is that? It’s not hard at all. It’s easy. You just go wherever they lead you. Even if they tie your hands with rope, you just go. In fact, having your hands bound makes things easier still. You don’t have a choice.

#### DELIVERED FROM CHOICE

When you’re filling out your taxes, on the other hand, you have many choices, moral and otherwise. When you’re learning Adobe In-Design, you have an appalling number of choices that more often than not paralyzes you and make you want to cry and/or smash your computer monitor with a fist and/or a hammer. When you’re dragged



before the Sanhedrin by a rope, none of this comes into play. How can it? This is why men and women are so calm in the face of such things. It seems supernatural, but it is really quite natural. Same when you're getting beaten. Yes, it hurts like hell, but it wasn't your decision, it was the decision of your Master/Owner/Enlister, Who gave you the words that led to the beating. Now you just stand there—you have no choice—and get whipped. What else can you do? There are no choices.

#### FOLLOWING ANOTHER

This is why the Garden of Gethsemane brought the most horror to Christ. He still had what felt to Him like a choice. He could slough off the cross; that is how it felt to Him. He asked *His* Owner to remove the cup. His Owner said He had to walk through it. Once that decision came down from the ultimate Enlister, it was all just blind obedience on the part of Christ. Once that crisis of decision came, it was follow the Leader—that's all. Very simple. Not easy to endure, no. But again, you have no choice. The decision is made. This provides much relief.

For Paul, the decision was made. It was made by someone finally superior to him, the Lord Jesus Christ. What a relief to Paul to realize he was not the be-all, end-all of wisdom, drive, and intelligence. The biggest relief to Paul was discovering someone greater than he. All was easy after that, including laying his head on the chopping block, anticipating the next time he'd open his wide, blue eyes.

"Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus."

Ahh! And amen. ■



*Remaining your  
servant in Christ,  
as always,*

*—Martin*