

## Slavery

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Sin is more than the occasional mistake we make. It is a cruel taskmaster that drives us into bad habits that can destroy us. How can we escape its tyrannical grip?

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*“Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (Jn. 8:34).*

*“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage” (2 Pet. 2:19).*



According to a recent report by the International Labour Organization (2017), there are an estimated forty million people living in some form of slavery in the world today. This figure includes those in bondage for labor, sex trafficking, and forced marriages, with women and children disproportionately affected. These numbers are staggering, debunking the common belief that slavery is a relic of ancient times. Those of us who live in modern societies shaped by a Judeo-Christian worldview may not realize it, but throughout the rest of the world the barbaric practices of the past are still very much with us.

But as awful as these numbers may be, Jesus and Peter both point to *sin* as a far more pernicious form of bondage, inflicting much more misery on humanity.

How can that be? Slavery is the involuntary binding of someone to a role that is detrimental to their well-being. A slave has no freedom to make his or her own decisions about their future, and

no opportunity to leave that oppressive life. Sin, on the other hand, is the result of a conscious choice I make on my own. Can't I just choose to get out? So how is sin a form of slavery?

The tense of the Greek verb in Jesus' statement in John 8 carries a meaning that is lost in our English translations. To “commit sin” is not a single mistake or stumble, but a persistent pattern of behavior. It describes someone “who is constantly doing sin . . . who lives in sin” (Hendrickson). This is the language of *addiction*. While it's true that sin is a conscious decision we make, that single decision can become an entrenched habit, a way of life that overwhelms our cognitive reasoning and entraps us in behaviors that have a deleterious impact on us and others. Even when we *know* these behaviors are not healthy, we struggle to break away from them. That's slavery!

These addictive behaviors come in a wide variety of forms. In some cases, such as alcoholism or drug addiction, the bondage has a strong physiological component, requiring professional help to overcome. The more common variety, however, is simply bad habits that we have allowed to become embedded in our character: anger management issues, blame-shifting, holding grudges, laziness, favoritism, cursing and swearing, “white lies” that grow ominously darker, chronic negativity, gossip, ingratitude—the list could go on and on. Early in our life, ignorance, stubbornness, and peer influences lead us to get sloppy in all these areas, and over the years we become chained to a way of life that robs us of joy. We are in bondage to sin, and like every slave, we are miserable in our servitude. And we *know* it!

So, how can we escape this wretched life? Earlier in the same context, Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (v. 32). The grip that habitual sin has on our lives can be broken only by an intensive education in *the truth*—the truth about God's purpose for our lives, the truth about the faulty mindset that derails our fulfillment of that purpose, and the truth about the transformation that is possible by surrendering our hearts and lives to His control. This transformation is not instantaneous nor total. But once we embrace that truth and start to see the chains fall away, we will experience the joy and peace of mind that only a free person can know.

— David King