

## **Sermon for Sunday 28 June 2020**

### **by Geoff Oates**

**Romans 6 v17:** *'For at one time you were slaves to Sin. You were set free and became slaves to Righteousness'*

When I left my desk at UniCredit Bank for the very last time back in December, I had 28 years of service behind me. When I resumed my career very shortly afterwards with the Deutsche Zentralgenossenschaftsbank, you can possibly understand why, coming out of Moorgate Station, I often took the wrong turn, towards my old office, and had to double back. Or when I answer my phone, or introduce myself in a meeting, I confuse everyone by using the name of my old employer. And not just because Deutsche Zentralgenossenschaftsbank is a bit tricky to say. Someone will laugh politely and remind me that I now work for a new boss.

And that is what St Paul is telling us when he writes of us becoming 'slaves of Righteousness'. You've changed jobs. You've got a new boss. If he speaks of a slave being bought by a new master, it's because that was the common experience of about 33% of the population of the Roman Empire.

But in the words of our age, the challenge St Paul throws out to the young Christian community in Rome would go more like this: You used to work at Sin & Co, but you quit there, remember? You've signed on at Righteousness Inc. God's giving you an amazing career break. Why are you still behaving like you work at the old place? You owe your loyalty to a new boss.

There are many reasons to change jobs. Honestly, it's not always about more money. Most people are looking at least as much for a better working environment, and for a better corporate culture. Perhaps an atmosphere of team work, of shared objectives and shared rewards. A place where selfish ambition is discouraged, and

colleagues are not mere stepping stones on your own way up the ranks.

A place where you can behave honestly without fear of ridicule or reprisal. Where training will be provided to help everyone to achieve their potential. A place where management is about leadership and example, not about status and power. Where even the highest level of management is accessible, and listens to you.

If that's what you are looking for, then Righteousness Inc is the place for you. But don't turn up at the new office and start behaving like you did at the old place. If you want the benefits of the new culture, you will have to live by it.

Righteousness Inc is the kind of place that respects work-life balance. They won't ask you for more than you have to give. But they are looking for full-time, committed people. There are no part-time vacancies for a couple of hours a week on Sunday mornings.

But will you still probably be hoping for a better pay package than you got at the old place? How much are you on now at Sin and Co? As the old translation goes, 'The wages of sin is Death' – well that gives a whole new meaning to the idea of a cradle to **grave** employer, doesn't it! I think your new firm can offer you something much better than that.

I'm conscious I'm speaking as a prosperous professional. I have options and choices that many people do not share. People who cannot see a way out of exhausting, unsatisfying and unrewarding jobs, and fear losing even those.

In the same way, for so many of us, it really isn't easy to walk away from deeply ingrained habits and attitudes even though we recognise them, more or less clearly, as unhealthy and unworthy. Paul's image of slavery to sin can still speak to us.

But I don't want to be glib about real slavery, and the misery it has caused, and still causes, in our world. Or the tragedy that it took the followers of Jesus 1,800 years finally to agree that slavery really wasn't compatible with his teaching. This is probably the worst example of Christians collectively failing to recognise and live the new culture. The wounds of that legacy are wide open again.

Our present times do invite us to look less at personal issues, and instead at collective wrongs. We do wish the culture of our age was more caring, less prejudiced, more peaceful and more life affirming, but the levers of change always seem to be in someone else's hands, and it seems so risky and costly to go against the flow. It is easy to feel trapped in a web.

We would love to hand in our notice and move somewhere better, if we had the nerve.

It might seem hopeless, if it was all down to us. But there's another way to change your boss. In my 28 years at UniCredit I also lived through 3 corporate takeovers. Same workplace for me, but a new name, and a new boss. A new investor bringing new opportunity.

In Christ, God has made his big new investment in our world, in our lives. It's not about us moving to his place after all. He has brought Righteousness to our place. Not taking us out of our impaired world, but giving us the means to mend it. We are under new management, with all its opportunities for a fresh start, for developing a new corporate culture.

In the turmoil of Coronavirus, the turmoil of campaigns for racial justice, we know something is going to change. God is investing heavily in our world right now. He calls us to invest alongside Him. Calling us to put our faith in the new boss, to invest our lives in the new corporate culture that's fit for the Kingdom of God.



# Righteousness Inc **A PLACE FOR YOU**

- Where you can behave honestly without fear of ridicule or reprisal
- Where training is provided to help everyone achieve their potential
- Where management is accessible and listens to you

God brings  
Righteousness - put  
your faith in Him