

I. Introduction

A. Romans 6:15-23 . . . What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! [16] Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? [17] But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. [19] I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. [20] For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. [21] Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. [22] But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. [23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

B. Prayer

II. What shall we say? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? No, never!

A. Romans 6:15-16 . . . What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! [16] Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

1. The primary message of these two verses is this: Continuing to willfully, repeatedly, and unrepentantly sin means we are serving sin, not God. And if we are serving sin, regardless of how saved or how religious we believe we are, we are not under the grace of God but under death. For just as death and life are mutually exclusive conditions, so serving sin – which results in death, and serving God

- which means you are under His grace, are mutually exclusive conditions.
- 2. This message from Paul is not unique to him, Jesus states it on several occasions and in several ways.
  - a. In Matthew 7:23, Jesus tells us that at the final judgment there will be those who are convinced they have been sufficiently religious to be justified and guaranteed eternal life. Yet because they also served sin, Jesus says He will say to them, “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”
  - b. In Luke 13:24-27, Jesus says, “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. [25] Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' [26] Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; [27] and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.'"
  - c. And in Matthew 25:41-43, we hear Jesus saying to those on His left, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; [42] for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; [43] I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.”
  - d. The point here is that serving sin puts you in the devil's camp. Now the devil shows no mercy, and the resulting death from serving sin is unforgiving. In other words, you cannot, simultaneously, serve sin and live under God's grace. To live under God's grace, that is, to be justified, and empowered for godly living, and given the gift of eternal life, you must serve God and His righteousness.
- 3. There is a second truth I want to point out from vs 16. Paul says we are either slaves of sin or slaves of obedience – which from the context means slaves of God. The point here is that in this life there are only two possible masters, and we serve one or the other.
  - a. In other words, to rebel against God's rule is to submit to Satan's rule. To reject Satan's rule is to accept God's rule. To stop serving righteousness is to start serving sin, and to stop serving sin is to start serving righteousness. There is no third option.

- b. And though we speak of self-rule – which is a good way to describe rebellion against authority of any kind – in reality we are willful slaves giving allegiance to someone – and that someone is either the devil or God, sin or righteousness.
- B. Romans 6:17-18 . . . But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed (*delivered, handed over*), [18] and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.
  - 1. The one thing I want to point out about these two verses is Paul's definition or explanation of Christian conversion.
    - a. Paul speaks of these Roman Christian's conversion in two ways:
      - (1) as going from slaves of sin to becoming obedient from the heart to the gospel teaching they were taught,
      - (2) and as being freed from sin and becoming slaves of righteousness.
    - b. In contrast to Paul's words, Christians today often speak of conversion as going from an unbeliever to being born again, or from rejecting Christ to accepting Christ as Savior. What these more modern statements lack is any reference to the master/slave relationship and resulting obedience to God and His word.
    - c. Now without making too much of this contrast, I want to say that Paul's conversion description is consistent with the whole of Romans.
      - (1) For example, in Romans 1:5, Paul speaks of having received grace and apostleship from Jesus Christ for the purpose of bringing about the obedience of faith (*a reference to conversion and living the Christian life*) among all the Gentiles for Jesus' name's sake.
      - (2) In Romans 10:9-10, Paul says that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord (*not as Savior, but as Lord*), and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; [10] for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness (*obedient from the heart*), and with the mouth he confesses (*that he is a slave of Christ*), resulting in salvation.
      - (3) And Paul closes Romans by reminding his readers that the gospel he is teaching is the same as what Christ taught, and the prophets taught, and the commandments taught, and which has been taught to all the nations – with the result

that it has lead to the obedience of faith (*referring to conversion and living the Christian life*) (Romans 16:25-27).

2. The reason for pointing out this contrast between Paul's explanation of conversion and the more modern and popular explanation is to remind us of the nature of conversion. By nature, Christian conversion is life-changing, direction-changing, and master exchanging. It takes us from the domain of darkness and brings us into the kingdom of God's beloved Son. It takes us from serving sin to serving God and His righteousness. And it takes us from death to life. This is not a change of religions, or a change of denominations, or a change of what we do on Sundays, this is a change of heart that produces a change of behavior – and it is that change of heart and behavior that demonstrates we new creations in Christ Jesus.
- C. Romans 6:19 . . . I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.
1. The human terms Paul is referring to is his use of the master/slave relationship to demonstrate the relationship between the devil and his followers, God and His children, and Christ and the church.
    - a. Now without question, these Christians understood the master/slave relationship. Therefore, they could easily apply it to the practical, earthly side of the relationship between sin and the sinner, and righteousness and the Christian.
    - b. However, there is a spiritual dimension to that relationship which the master/slave model does not illustrate or explain. And Paul says these Christians were not spiritually mature enough and Biblically knowledgeable enough to comprehend the spiritual dimension, so he uses this earthly model to talk about their past relationship to sin and the new relationship to God.
  2. We also are reminded in vs 19, that both sin and righteousness grow. Sin grows from bad to worse, while righteousness grows from good to better. The reality is, neither sin nor righteousness can be contained at their present levels. There is not such thing as hitting a plateau and staying there in relation to sin or righteousness.
    - a. We are either slipping down the slope of rebellion against God and therefore becoming more and more sinful, or we are ascending the hill of obedient submission to God and therefore growing in

righteousness. This is an important truth, for it shows us the need to remain vigilant against the encroachment of sin and to remain purposeful in the continued pursuit of godliness.

- b. The challenging part of this truth is that the more you entangle yourself in it, the less you realize you are getting worse and the easier it is to think you have plateaued (*reached a state of little or no change*). And the more you grow in godliness, the more you see the power of one sin to pull you downward and the less you see yourself as being the righteous person God saved you to be.

D. Romans 6:20-21 . . . For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness (*That is, because you were a slave of sin, you owed allegiance to your master – sin. And because sin was your master, you owed no allegiance to righteousness, because it was not your master.*). [21] Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.

1. Vs 21 contains a profound statement which raises a question that we all are wise to seriously consider.
  - a. Are you ashamed of the way you lived when serving sin? Do you look back at your life as an unbeliever with sadness and shame for having lived that way? Are you ashamed of specific sinful actions and activities you participated in when you served sin?
  - b. I am not asking if you now know they are wrong. Nor am I asking if you wish you had not done some of those things. I am asking if you are ashamed of the way you lived while serving sin? Are you ashamed of your rebellion against the all-wise, perfectly loving, impartially just, yet merciful and forgiving God? Are you ashamed of how poorly you treated God and your fellow man in those days?
  - c. Paul's assumption is that we are ashamed of how we lived as servants of the devil and slaves of sin. I know this kind of thinking has been a challenge for me, and possibly it is a challenge for you. May we rise to meet this challenge by continuing to grow in the kind of thinking and valuing whereby we love all righteousness and hate all lawlessness, and see life as God sees it.
2. The last thing I want to say about vs 20-21 is a reminder of what you already know: No matter what benefits come from sin, there are no praise worthy, love worthy, God-pleasing, eternal benefits of sin, for sin's only design is to damage, destroy and ultimately kill.

E. Romans 6:22-23 . . . But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. [23] For the wages of sin is death, but the (*free*) gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. In vs 16 - 22, Paul uses an interesting mix of words to talk about our slavery to God. As I review them, listen to the changes in wording.
  - a. Vs 16 – slaves of obedience, resulting in righteousness,
  - b. Vs 19 – slaves of righteousness, resulting in sanctification,
  - c. Vs 22 – slaves of God, resulting in sanctification and an outcome of eternal life.
2. In each statement, Paul presents a state of being that appears both absolute and progressively changing. For example, the fact that we are slaves is absolute. And yet, Paul presents us as being slaves, first of obedience, then of righteousness, and finally of God. These changes appear to represent some form of progression. And Paul points to a result that comes out of this slavery, and the stated result infers a progressive state of being.
3. So why is this important? Let me give you three reasons.
  - a. First, seeing the Christian life as a progressive journey built on absolutes helps us make sense of the tension between certain parts of God's word and our experience. Scripture says we are dead to sin and alive to God, and it says it in an absolute way. Human experience says we still struggle with sin, and are still dying to sin – even as we draw near to God and pursue godliness in all our behavior. If we hold only the absolute as true (*dead to sin, alive to God*), we will soon grow discouraged and possibly give up on the Christian life altogether. If we hold only the progressive part as true, we will likely believe that continuing in sin is normal, and as a result, accept the practice of sin as normal. The mentally and spiritually healthy solution is to hold both the absolute truth and the progressive truth as one single truth, so that we anchor our mindset and intentions to the absolute truth while persevering in dealing with the ups and downs of practical, day-by-day growth in godliness.
  - b. Second, knowing that growth in godliness takes time frees us to work through one or two sinful patterns, practices, or habits at a time – until we have made sufficient progress in those one or two areas to move on to another one or two areas that need conforming to the likeness of Christ. The reality is, we will not – and indeed cannot – change everything at once. So God speaks

to us about being dead to sin – expecting us to think of ourselves as being dead to sin. Yet at the same time, God sends us on a journey of progressively dying to sin, day-after-day and sin after sin, and progressively putting on Christ-likeness in place of those sins to which we’ve died.

- c. Third, this merging of the absolute and the progressive is important because it shows us where we are headed in spite of where we are along the way. We especially see this progression of where we are headed in the “to what or to whom we are enslaved” part of Paul’s three statements. As new believers, we begin by committing ourselves to obey, that is, obeying the truth we know about God and how we are to live. We progress to valuing righteousness so much that it is no longer only obedience to God that we serve, but righteousness. We end by treasuring God, His will, His honor, His happiness, and our relationship with Him so much that we move into zealously serving God as His slave, for that is what brings us into intimate fellowship with Him. Do you see the progression?

### III. Conclusion

- A. In closing, I want to press one more truth home about Romans 6:22-23.
  1. Without the presence of an ongoing transformation from salvation through sanctification unto eternal life, there is no salvation. As we have seen before, salvation, sanctification, and justification are inseparable. You cannot have one without the others.
    - a. Yet in spite of the inseparable bond between salvation, sanctification, and eternal life,
    - b. and in spite of the fact that the scripture says it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law who will be justified,
    - c. in spite of these truths, eternal salvation remains a gracious gift that is only given by God and received by faith.
  2. For the wages of sin is death, but the (*free*) gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.