

Free from Sin

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 February 2011

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] Romans chapter 6 verse 15. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means.

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey, whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness.

But thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves, just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness.

So now offer them in slavery to righteousness, leading to holiness. When you are slaves to sin, you are free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?

[1 : 09] Those things result in death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thank you, Peter.

Well, please keep your Bibles open. If you haven't got a Bible, I encourage you to get one. There's one at the back. And you can follow along and make sure that everything that we're saying and talking about does come from God's Word.

That's most important. We don't want to be hearing my thoughts or ideas, but what God has to say. There's also a sheet.

There's one left if anybody wants it. Take notes. Feel free to come up and get it. I'll leave it here. It won't burn. Well, let's pray together.

[2 : 27] Our Father, thank you for your goodness to us. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for this book of Romans that we have been able to study and look at together.

We pray that what we read and think through now would be words from you that change us, words that bring life, words that shape how we live and how we should serve.

We pray that we would be encouraged through this morning, that you would challenge us where we need to be challenged, and that we would put right in our lives the areas that need to be put right.

But we want to do all of this under your grace. not our performance, but recognizing that all this is only possible because of what Jesus has done for us.

So please help us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I have a new rule for everyone.

[3 : 43] From now on, there's only going to be one rule. And here's the rule. You ready? There are no rules.

Do you like that? Because that's exactly what I said. From now on, we're not going to have any more rules. Do you remember that list Joy was talking about at the beginning?

About rotas for helping out and serving? Tear it up. No more rules. But you say, how can we do that?

If there were no more rules, we would descend into absolute chaos. People would do whatever they wanted. They would arrive whenever they wanted, which people do anyway.

We need rules to keep us right. We need to make sure that we do the right thing. No more rules.

That would be absolute madness.

[4 : 42] It would seem very strange, wouldn't it, for somebody to say, there are no more rules. But that's exactly what Paul seems to be saying to the church and to us.

Look at verse 14 of chapter 6. He says, sin shall not be your master because you are not under law but under grace.

It's very clear, isn't it? No more rules. We're not under law. We're under grace.

Verse 15. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? You could imagine them reading this and thinking to themselves, has Paul gone mad?

Has this gospel thing gone to his head? How can you say, we are not under law but under grace? If we're under grace, that means we can do whatever we like and God is going to forgive us.

[5 : 55] Look at the rest of verse 15. By no means. No, he says, that's not what I am saying. I do say, there are no more rules but that does not mean we can live however we want.

If you are a Christian, if you are somebody who trusts in Jesus, you live under the rule of grace and that radically changes your whole life and as we will see, it radically changes your whole attitude to serving.

You see, there were those in this church that are being written to who were concerned about right behaviour and I think we're all kinds of people who are concerned about right behaviour.

that things are done well. And in this church, there were two groups of people. You had the Jews who were from a religious background and they were concerned about the Gentiles.

They were people who were from a non-religious background and they were concerned that they would take this grace thing too far. In other words, a licence to sin. Those people, they'll just behave however they want.

[7 : 06] They'll say, God will forgive us. It doesn't matter what time we come. It doesn't matter what we do. God will forgive us. So the way in which to keep order in their church was to slap on lots of rules.

Let's have lots of rules and everybody will keep things right. But as he explained back in chapter 5 verse 20, have a look at 5 verse 20, he said the law, talking about the law of Moses, the first five books, was added so that the trespass might increase.

Now the principle was very clear. Rules or law only tell you what the right thing is. They can't make you do the right thing.

Laws and rules have no power. The only power they have is to punish you. They can't free you.

They can't make you do the right thing. No, he's saying, rules are no good.

We must live under grace. And by teaching them all about grace, he is bringing these two dividing groups together. He's getting the religious bunch on the one hand who want to control grace and say, let's not dish out too much grace here.

[8 : 27] And then he's wanting to bring the other group, the non-religious group who seem to be abusing grace and doing whatever they want. And he brings them together and he says, I want you to live under grace.

You will have a different kind of life under grace. You will no longer be serving self, your own needs and your own wants. Instead, in grateful response to God's amazing salvation, you will serve God and you will serve each other and you will serve your church well because of the grace you have received.

We could change what I said at the beginning a little bit. There's only one rule and it's the rule of grace. Because if we live under grace, we won't need rules, we won't need rotas, we won't need anything like that because our lives will be so radically changed, we will be serving in ways we never thought possible.

That, I think, is what Paul is going to be getting to at the rest of chapter 6. So let's unpack this a little bit more, this whole idea of grace enabling us to serve.

The first thing we want to notice is that everyone serves someone. Every one of us here serves someone. Look at verse 16. Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey.

[10 : 02] Whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or slaves to obedience, which leads to righteousness. You see, we all serve somebody.

And the way to find out who it is that we're serving is by asking, who do I obey? Because if we look closely at verse 16, it says, you are slaves to the one that you obey.

So that's a good question for us all to ask. Who do we obey? Well, it seems like we have two choices. In verse 16, we are either slaves to sin.

In other words, we obey self. We obey what I want. Or, we are slaves to obedience. That's slaves to Christ. In other words, we obey God.

What he wants. And because we're all here in church together this morning, and we've got our Bibles open, we'd all like to think we're in the second category, that we obey God.

[11 : 05] But look at verse 20. He says, when you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control or the restraint of righteousness.

Yes, he said, you did have a freedom, but it was only a freedom to obey self. You couldn't obey righteousness. Let me explain it.

It's a little bit like addictions. Addicts don't want to be addicts. They want to be able to break free from its control and break free from its hold in their lives.

And addicts are free to make that choice every single day. but they still obey their body's cravings. And in the same way, it's saying without Christ, we are addicts to obey what we want, not what God wants. We obey our cravings.

[12 : 09] We obey what our desires are, not God's desires. sinners. So back to verse 16, if we are given the choice, will you obey God or will you obey self?

Well, self wins every single time. In fact, the painful truth is, without Christ, we don't have a choice to do what is right.

We are natural born sinners. We can't help but do the wrong thing. That's who we are. That is our nature. And when we're talking about sin, let's not just think about breaking rules, things we don't do or things we should do.

It's a lifestyle. Sin is a lifestyle. It's our nature. It's a life that desperately tries to live outside of God. In other words, we are always living to serve our own needs and our own wants.

Rather than obey God who gives us everything that we need, we will obey anything and anyone that gives us what we want. So, if I wanted to have sex with someone else, I would have an affair.

[13 : 25] I would obey that hunger inside of me. If I want a job, I will tell lies in my CV and I'll write down anything I want to because I obey the desire that's in me.

If I want more control over somebody or over a situation, then I will begin to bully because I obey me. It's something that I want. It's something that I desire and I will do anything to get it.

So, sin is always living outside of God. That's the way it expresses itself. It's a life that serves me. It puts me at the center rather than God.

God. Or as one writer put it like this, we de-God God. We take away God's right and we give it to ourselves and say, you choose what you want to do.

But the seriousness of that problem is that we cannot help but serve me all of the time. So, we all serve someone and the truth is we serve ourselves.

[14 : 33] but thankfully we can be set free from that kind of lifestyle. We can be set free to serve God and it's grace that sets us free.

Look at verse 17. Thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

You have been set free from sin. Now that's good news because it's telling us that we've been changed from one kind of lifestyle to another kind of lifestyle.

From serving self to serving others and to serving God. Well, how does that change happen? Well, there's two ways this happens.

First, it's through obeying the gospel. Look at what it says there in verse 17. It says, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching.

[15 : 35] Now that's a funny way of putting that. The form of teaching is saying it's the gospel. That's what the form of teaching was that they had been taught.

And in particular, it is the good news that he has begun explaining all the way through Romans that Jesus has put us right with God. He's changed our life around.

The author John Stott explains it well. There's a quote up behind me. Just follow it as I read about the way in which God puts us right.

This is a summary of the gospel. Justification is a legal term borrowed from the law courts. It is the exact opposite of condemnation.

To condemn is to declare someone guilty. To justify is to declare him righteous or put right with God. In the Bible, it refers to God's act of unmerited favour, his grace, by which he puts the sinner right with himself, not only pardoning or acquitting him, but accepting him and treating him as

righteous.

[16:48] That is the form of teaching. That is the gospel. Jesus was treated as I deserve to be treated so that I can be treated as Jesus deserves to be treated.

And if we obey this gospel, if we put our faith and trust in this, we are saying, I can't help but be a sinner, and I need Jesus to change me.

And this is what sets us free. This is what changes us from being so self centred to being God centred. But there's a second part to how this change comes about, how this freedom comes.

Look at what it says there. It says this form of teaching to which you were entrusted. Now if you are entrusted to something, that means you are under its care or protection.

If you bring your child to a creche or to a school, you are placing your child or entrusting them to their care or protection. And that's exactly what it is for those who have obeyed the gospel.

[18:00] We are put under the care and under the supervision of the gospel. That means we can never be taken back by the rule of sin. Nobody can come in and take us away.

We have been set free and are now under the gospel's care, never to be condemned but always accepted and always treated as righteous no matter what we've done.

And maybe you're sitting here this morning and you're thinking what I did this week or what I've been thinking this morning is so outside of God. But yet if we are trusting in Jesus, we are entrusted under his care, under his protection, never to be condemned but always accepted and treated as righteous.

So we have been set free by grace to live a different way. Not to do like what we want to do but to live a different way, to live a life of service because grace sets us free to serve.

Look at the rest of verse 18. Well we'll read all of verse 18 into 19. You have been set free from sin, so that's the old way, and have now become slaves to righteousness.

[19:26] I put this in human terms or I use a human illustration because you're weak in your natural selves. He's being a little bit rude there isn't he?

He's saying you're a bit thick, you can't get it so I'm going to use a little illustration to help you. Now we probably struggle with this word here of slaves because nobody wants to be a slave.

Slavery was cruel, slavery was abolished many years ago. It breaks people and destroys people.

So why is he using it? Well he's using it here to help us to understand our new purpose in life.

And that's why he puts it in a strange way in verse 19. He says I use this in human terms because you're weak in your natural selves. I want to use this illustration of slavery to help you grasp our freedom.

It sounds a contradiction but I want you to grasp this. He says before you were under the control of sin. He was our master and we were his slaves.

[20:44] We just obeyed it. We had no way about it. But now he says you've been set free. You're under the control of grace. God is your master and now you're his slaves.

But these slaveries are completely opposite. The way in which we serve is completely different. these ways are contrasted in verse 19.

First, slavery to sin is a downward spiral into chaos. If you were to serve self, if that's your option, well, it's just going to end in chaos.

Look at verse 19. He says, just as you used to offer the parts of your body, your life in slavery to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness.

It's a downward spiral. When I was at school, we were always given a packed lunch, sandwiches, which I never really liked.

[21:49] And I had to eat them. That was the rule. Except for I came home one day with the sandwiches in my box and I didn't want to get into trouble so I threw them in the garden. And I was asked when I came in, as mum looked at the empty lunchbox, did you eat your sandwiches?

Yes. Sat down, had dinner that night and in came the dog. And he dropped a sandwich in the kitchen floor. Are these your sandwiches?

No. they are your sandwiches, aren't they? Yes, they are. Yes, yes. When did you put them there?

Oh, I can't remember. Ages ago.

Jonathan, they're still fresh. I'd been caught rotten, hadn't I? But that's the point here. That sin always leads to more sin.

Ever increasing wickedness. just a downward spiral. The little tiny mess of just throwing a little sandwich away ended up to being grounded and a big mess for me.

[22 : 58] But that's just a tiny little picture of the choices that we make in our lives. Tiny little sins, tiny little choices that people make, obeying self, wanting to please themselves, it destroys their lives and it begins to destroy others.

Ever increasing wickedness. Slavery to sin. It is slavery. It isn't a freedom. It's a downward spiral into chaos.

But grace saves us from all of that. It gives us a new way to serve. Slavery to God is a growing spiral into holiness.

Look at the rest of verse 19. He says, so now offer your body, offer yourselves in slavery to righteousness which leads to holiness.

As we give ourselves now to God because we're able to, we become more like Christ. His character becomes like our character.

[24 : 06] Slowly we begin to be transformed where we no longer want to serve self but we want to serve God. And this is the amazing transformation that the gospel brings into our lives.

Once we had no choice but now we have a brand new freedom to give ourselves completely to God. But let's not misunderstand this slavery to God. God is not a cruel dictator who orders us around as an exercise of his power just to show how strong he is.

He's not a tyrant who waves a big stick at us in temper. No he is the loving God you remember who came to serve us who gave his life for us who would die for us that is the kind of master he is he would lay down his life for us he gave us everything so that in grateful response we owe him everything that's what it is to be a slave we owe him everything because he gave us his everything so we have been given a brand new way to serve but let's face it we all know that this is extremely hard it's fine in theory it's fine written down on these pages and talking about it but we still struggle every single day to make the right choice and as we begin to put into practice this whole idea of serving on a Sunday morning and being here being early and going home late making that choice is going to be hard and difficult for us well the only way we're going to make the right choices is not more rules we could have 10,000 rules up on the board telling you what time you have to be here what time you have to go home at when to drink your tea when to sit down he can have all of these sorts of things but it's not going to make anybody do anything we need to be motivated by grace each day look at verse 21 to 22 they're written in contrast to each other in other words he's saying look at what the life of sin brings and look at what the life of grace brings look at the benefits and the results of each verse 21 this is what this is what a life of serving self brings verse 21 what benefit did you reap at the time from the things that you are now ashamed of so when you were serving self and it was just going down and down and down what were the benefits of that well absolutely nothing those things result in death complete separation from god and eternity from him is that the way you want to live he says well here's another way here's another way to be motivated verse 22 but now that you've been set free from sin and have become slaves to god the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life complete contrast if i want my son ethan to do his homework i can sit him down at the table i can shout at him and roar at him and tell him to hurry up i can give off to him when his sums are wrong i can tell him he's not doing good enough and he should do better well the outcome would be absolutely disastrous the work is never going to get done it's going to end in tears he's not going to like his homework and he's not going to like me either it'd be an absolute disaster but if i were to sit down with ethan and show him what to do to go through it with him and then to tell him look when we're finished whether you get it right or wrong we're going to go to the cinema now rather than fight homework he's going to want to do it isn't he now don't tell him i said that because i don't want to bring him to the cinema every day but there's an illustration there isn't it that in the same way when we look at the benefits and the results of grace when we look at what's to come the result is eternal life the new heaven and the new earth we will want to serve god more and more because of what's to come

we'll want to do it not as a way of earning these things but because they belong to us already look at verse 22 and look at how it's all past tense but now that you have been set free we're not working to set ourselves free it's past it's been done by jesus you have become slaves to god it's not something we have to try and earn or work towards it's been done and now the benefits today will be christ's likeness holiness it will be eternal life you see we need more grace not more rules if we're to serve god well we need to see everything that god has done for us all that is ours today all that is ours to come and it will change us to be people who serve so the question we all need to be clear on is this who are we going to serve who is going to be the boss of your life will it be self or will

it be christ the outcomes are very different verse 23 the wages of sin is death the payment if you live for self all the work of living for yourself sin is going to pay you and he will pay you with death but the gift of god if we live to serve christ the gift not because of what we've done but because of his generosity will be eternal life you see a community of believers such as us here this morning if we live under the rule of grace we will have the lord jesus as our boss and in response to this liberating grace we will want to serve him in our lives and in the world and in our church and it won't matter whether we're on a rota for this week or next week we'll just be serving all the time any time because it's really true what we said at the beginning we are not under grace or sorry we are under grace there are no more rules grace is the only rule and grace that changes us will turn lives that turn from self to serving god and serving those around us may god help us to be a community who live under his grace and his goodness let's pray together our father god we thank you that you are the great servant although you are creator and lord of this world you came to serve us by giving your life for us to set us free from one kind of life to bring us into another kind of life help us to live under your grace each and every day to be generous with your grace to one another forgiving one another supporting one another caring for one another help us not to abuse your grace or to misunderstand it as a license to do what we want but may it so transform us and change us that we are the kind of people that serve you so please help us as your people please help us as a church we thank you for everybody represented here we thank you for all of their gifts and abilities we thank you for all those who have served us today in setting up in tea and coffee in welcoming we thank you for everybody and for all that they do and we pray that we would encourage each other more and more to do this well in Jesus name Amen