

A new master

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 6 on page 1136. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?

By no means. Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

But, thanks be to God, that you, who were once slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.

And having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. But I'm speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness, leading to sanctification.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruits were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now shamed?

[1 : 18] The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin, and have become slaves of God, the fruits you get lead to sanctification, and its end, eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Or do you not know, brothers, for I am speaking to those who know the law, that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives.

Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband, while he lives, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive.

But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law, through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work, and our members to bear fruit for death. But now, we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we may serve not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit.

[2 : 44] Thanks, David, for reading for us. Please do keep Romans open on page 1136, as we continue our series in these middle chapters of Romans.

We prayed already, so let me say that God's purpose for us this morning, as we look at these verses in Romans 6 and 7, is very clear, and it's there, I think, in verse 19, if you just have a look at verse 19 of Romans 6.

For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, leading to sanctification.

In other words, God wants each one of us tomorrow morning, and Tuesday morning, and Wednesday morning, and indeed every morning, to offer ourselves to him in his service.

To say, Lord, here I am, all that I am, all that I have, everything I am, I offer myself to you in your service today.

[3 : 59] But before we get there, I want to begin by asking a question, and it is this, how do people change? How do people change? In other words, how will you become the kind of person who is wanting to say, yes, Lord, I offer myself to your service?

Because the Christian life is a life of change. Just turn back to Romans 1, verse 5. I guess some of us may know this verse off by heart by now, but not all of us.

Romans 1, verse 5 speaks of the Lord Jesus, through whom we have received grace and apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations. It's one of the most important verses in the letter. True faith leads to obedience. True faith leads to a changed life. But how is that going to happen?

Well, going to any primary school, and I guess you'd get a very clear answer, wouldn't you? Change happens by rules and regulations, carrots and sticks.

[5 : 07] So whether it's a kind of traffic light system, and you're either on the green light or the amber light or the red light, or whether you have sticker charts or some other kind of system, it's rules and regulations, it's carrot and stick.

It's what we see, isn't it, in our culture as a whole. So if you live in Southwark, then you'll know that Southwark Council has a monthly prize draw to encourage people to recycle their rubbish and is threatening fines for those who don't.

Carrot and stick, rules and regulations. Well, for those at senior school and for those in the workplace, I guess, well, we'll be all too familiar, won't we, with the rules and regulations approach to changing people's behaviour.

Now, I have to say that before I became a Christian, I used to think the Christian life was like that. That Christian life is basically about rules and regulations at carrot and stick. Indeed, if you're here this morning and you have yet to put your faith in Jesus, that may well be what you think.

And in a sense, it's therefore not really surprising that you haven't yet put your faith in Jesus if that's what you think the Christian life is about. And it may be that there were some in the church in Rome who were saying something similar, that Christians need to keep the Old Testament law because that is the only way to change behaviour.

[6 : 29] That only by keeping the Old Testament law will that lead to the obedience of faith. Indeed, they look at the idea of justification by faith, the idea that it's at the heart of this letter, the idea that we are put right with God simply by trusting in Jesus' death in our place, not by what we do.

And they look at that idea of justification by faith and they think, well, surely that is a licence to live how you want to live, to live how you please.

Have a look at Romans 6, verse 15. What then? Are we to sin because we're not under law but under grace? That, it seems, is what some are thinking.

But according to Romans 6, the key to a changed life as a Christian is to understand who we are. Just take up the outline on the back of the service sheet there.

And I put the diagram right at the top that we looked at last week. And this is what we've seen, isn't it, over these last couple of weeks that the Christian is someone who has been united to Jesus, united to Christ, and brought from the rule of Adam and sin and death, and by being united to Christ has been brought from that to the rule of Christ and life with God both now and in the future.

[8 : 06] And we saw last week that as we grasped the implications of that, our thinking will change and as our thinking changes, why the whole of our lives will also change.

The Duke of Windsor who died in 1972 and who abdicated in 1936 before becoming crowned king was once asked about his upbringing as a young prince.

And he explained that his father, King George V, would often have to say to him as a boy, my dear boy, always remember who you are.

Always remember who you are. And if we, those who have put our trust in Jesus Christ, that is exactly what God is saying to us today if we are Christians.

And you'll see there on the outline three things. Remember you have a new master, remember you have a new freedom, remember you have a new life in the spirit. And we're just going to spend a few moments looking at each one.

[9 : 15] Okay, first of all, remember you have a new master or as we might say a new boss. Have a look at verse 16. Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.

Now, there's an important principle here and it is this, is that all of us serve something or someone. All of us serve something or someone.

You see, you and I don't just do things as human beings. We don't just do things, we serve things. As Paul says, you are slaves of the one you obey.

In other words, when you and I give in to sin, we're not just kind of doing a sin, we are serving sin as our master.

And clearly, if we are Christians, that is a total contradiction of our identity, of who we are. Because at that moment, we're saying with our lips, Jesus is Lord, but actually, by the way in which we live, we are serving sin as our Lord.

[10:36] Now, last Sunday afternoon, there was much rejoicing from one member of our family as Manchester United beat Chelsea in the Premier League. But imagine if Javier Hernandez, rather than scoring for his own team and kicking the ball into the Chelsea net, imagine if he had kicked the ball into the other net.

Well, perhaps you can imagine some of the words that Alex Ferguson might have said to him. I don't think this is probably the place to repeat them, but I imagine something along the lines of what do you think you are doing?

And Javier Hernandez, I suppose, might have replied, well, I just felt like scoring a goal. At which point, I guess Alex Ferguson would say, well, don't you understand? It's not just scoring a goal that counts, it's getting it in the right net.

This is not a game about simply scoring goals. No, you are paid to serve our team. If you're on our side, you score for us.

What you did is a total contradiction of who you are. But in the same way, you see, sin loves to present itself just as an isolated little opportunity, just this once.

[11:53] But there is no such thing as just doing sin. No, we serve sin. And notice here, there's no kind of third option of simply serving myself, doing what I want, because of course, that is the heart of sin, doing what I want, living for myself, pushing God out to the sidelines.

So that is the principle, but now have a look at verses 17 and 18. But thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.

And having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. You see, this is what now happens and is now true of everyone who has put their faith in Jesus Christ and his death for us.

You see, what happens when we hear the gospel and repent and believe in Jesus? Well, we're no longer slaves to sin, but slaves, as Paul says, to righteousness or to God, we might say.

Set free from sin and handed over to a new master. Now, there's more to the Christian life than being a slave to a new master, a slave to God.

[13:13] We'll see that in chapter 8 that we're also sons and heirs. But just now, come back to our verse, verse 19, where this principle is applied.

For just as once you presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, leading to sanctification.

It's that idea, isn't it, that we saw last week? Just as a soldier on the parade ground. He is there, isn't he, on the parade ground presenting himself to his commanding officer to serve him.

So if we have put our trust in Christ, that is how we are to see our lives, on the parade ground, presenting ourselves, all that we have, to God in his service.

Let me ask, is that how you will see yourself tomorrow morning? So, last Monday morning, because we had the same idea, last Sunday, last Monday morning, as soon as the alarm clock went off, Rachel asked me the question, which parts of your body in particular do you want to present to God today?

[14:28] It's a great question, isn't it, to be asked on a Monday morning. Notice really, the force of verse 19, it is that we are to be as wholehearted and committed to following Christ as we once were to following sin.

See, perhaps you're here and you became a Christian as a sort of late teenager or as an adult. Just think, up to that point in your life, what were some of the things that you kind of pursued and ran after?

Some of the things that kind of really controlled you? Perhaps a sport or pleasure or music or fashion or popularity or sexual pleasure or career or job.

Just think of the energy that you invested in those things. Well, what is the point? Now that you have a new master, serve God like that.

Well, perhaps you can't remember a time when actually you weren't following Jesus. Well, look at your colleagues. Look at your friends. look at the energy with which they invest themselves in serving their job, things apart from God, their career or pleasure or sport or relationships.

[15:57] Serve God like that. God Now, of course, there's also a warning, isn't there, in these verses? The warning that willing persistence in sin, the warning that a willing refusal to repent in a particular area of our lives, why it shows we're serving sin and not God.

because, of course, at the end of the day, regardless of what we say with our lips, the way to tell who your master is, is by looking at our lives, by looking at who we serve.

What does your life say about who you are serving as your master? That's the first thing.

Remember, you have a new master.

Secondly, remember you have a new freedom. Have a look at verse 23, which I think is a summary of verses 20 to 23. Verse 23, for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now, look, freedom is one of the great watchwords, isn't it, of our culture. And in verses 20 to 22, we have a contrast between the freedom that we thought we had before we put our trust in Christ, Christ, and the real freedom that we now do have in Christ.

[17:28] You see, there is a kind of freedom when you're not a Christian, but it's a very odd kind of freedom. It's the freedom that actually enslaves, and as Paul says here, which leads to shame and which leads to death.

It leads to shame. We may not have been ashamed then, verse 21, but we are now. We had some children around to our house to play a few months ago, and I noticed that over tea, the conversation of some of them turned to the times when they had seen their parents getting drunk.

Now, is that not shameful? I heard some time ago of a dinner party in Dulwich, a smart dinner party in Dulwich, where two of the guests were openly looking at pornography on their handheld devices. Now, is that not shameful? But of course, drunkenness, pornography, greed, ambition, selfishness, they're just seen as normal things, aren't they, in our culture?

It's normal. It's just what people do. But you see, once we put our faith in Jesus, we look back on that old life, actually, with shame.

[18:53] And ultimately, of course, it leads not only to shame, verse 21, but death, spiritual death, and to judgment. By contrast, the fruit of our new slavery to God is wonderfully attractive.

Can you see it? Verse 22, sanctification, growing in holiness and godliness and Christlikeness, and it leads not to death, but to eternal life.

The story is told of Abraham Lincoln during the years he was campaigning for the abolition of the slave trade in America. on one occasion he went to a slave market, and he saw a young girl being auctioned, and he started bidding for her, and he got her.

And as she was released and brought over to him, she spat in his face, so appalled was she at his double-mindedness, this campaigner against the slave trade, buying a slave.

at which point he told her, you are free, you may go wherever you choose, and he walked away.

[20:13] She caught up with him, so she said, if I am free, then I choose to serve you. You see, there is a world of difference between our old slavery to sin, and our new slavery to Christ.

The world says that true freedom is the freedom to serve yourself, to do what you want to do, when you want to do it. It's what all the adverts say, isn't it? You know, even kind of on an innocent Sainsbury's packet of food, be good to yourself.

All the adverts which say because you deserve it. It's a freedom of thought, but it's a terrible freedom. Jesus has released us from slavery to sin, not to be our own masters, but to serve God, to serve the God who has saved us, the gracious God who has saved us.

And that is a glorious, wonderful freedom that we have. Now let me suggest that our problem is that we don't believe it.

perhaps you're not a Christian, perhaps you look at the Christian life, and actually, frankly, you do think of it as a kind of slavery. I don't want Jesus telling me how to live my life. My life would be ruined.

[21:40] But the truth is that slavery to Christ is freedom. And the extent to which, even as a Christian, we can find ourselves thinking that surely real freedom is serving myself and doing what I want.

Why, that shows doesn't it how the world's thinking actually still affects the way in which we think about ourselves. Here, then, is a call to clear-sighted reality.

The command to give ourselves to God, I take it, in the light of these two freedoms, the command to give ourselves to God with all that we are and all that we have.

I take it it makes perfect sense, doesn't it? Let me ask those who have put our faith in Christ, do you ever envy unbelievers and the freedom that they seem to have?

Do you ever envy them? Perhaps you're brought up in a Christian home, you never really rebelled, but part of you wishes you had? Well, have a look again at verse 21.

[22 : 49] Is sin really that attractive? And look at verse 22. Christ's freedom is a glorious freedom. It doesn't lead us to become less human as perhaps we might fear.

Actually, it leads us to flourish. Perhaps for some of us, it's the temptation to go out with or marry an unbeliever or the temptation of a sexual relationship outside marriage.

After all, sin says that is the road to freedom. Or the temptation of the retirement brochures and the pension plans which promise the freedom to indulge ourselves in endless travel or gardening or golf with a bunch of other geriatrics if you want another G.

Indeed, some of us might already have fallen for sin's lie. Perhaps you're here this morning and in a sense you've all but kind of given up on the Christian life. Your life, your Christian life is just a kind of shell.

Well, remember what slavery to sin is really like and remember who you are. Why shouldn't you wake up tomorrow morning and say today, I am going to offer myself to God?

[24 : 07] Remember you have a new master. Remember you have a new freedom. Thirdly, remember you have a new life in the Spirit. Have a look at verse 1 of chapter 7.

Or do you not know, brothers, for I am speaking to those who know the law, that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives. Now, in this section, God is speaking in particular, I guess, to the kind of legalists amongst us.

In other words, those who, despite what we've seen so far, are still thinking, well, actually, I'm going to live my life by rules and regulations. I'm going to live my Christian life by rules and regulations.

Now, there's a lot here about the law.

We'll see more about the law next week. But for now, I just want to grasp the big idea, which is that the Christian has started a new life in the Spirit.

In verses 1 to 3, there's an illustration from marriage. The point is that a man or a woman is only bound to their husband or wife as long as they live, till death us do part.

[25 : 16] But once the spouse has died, they are free to marry another. That's the kind of picture, that's the illustration. But do you see how that principle is then applied in verse 4 to the law?

Have a look at verse 4. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

through the body of Christ, through the death of Jesus in our place, we've been released from the law. It can no longer condemn us that the penalty for breaking God's law has been paid by Jesus' death on the cross.

So we are no longer bound to the law. It no longer condemns us. And the point in verse 5, then, is that we mustn't then hold on to the law as a thing which will change us.

Verse 5. For while we are living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. God's Old Testament law is there to show us our sin.

[26 : 31] It is simply the diagnosis that says, this is your problem. And the mistake we then make is to think the law is not only shows us the problem, but also shows us the solution.

But no, God's law can do no such thing. God's Old Testament law, the Ten Commandments, can tell me what is right and wrong. It can show me what is right and wrong, but it is powerless to change me.

So what is the key to serving and to giving our lives to God? Have a look at verse six. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captives, so that we serve not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit.

The key to change is not the law, it is grasping that we have a new life in the Holy Spirit. And next week we'll see more of what that life looks like.

