

The Truth About Autonomy

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[0:00] Good morning. Can you hear me okay? Alright, we got some of you here. As been our habit this month, please turn with me to Romans chapter 6. Romans chapter 6. If you're visiting with us this morning, welcome. My name is BK. I have the pleasure of serving as one of the pastors here. For some of you who have been away for a while, welcome back.

I'm excited about getting into this text today. So excuse me if it's a little bit long. I'm going to try to talk really fast then. Alright, if you've been with us for the last few sermons, you know how important this passage is to explaining what actually changes when someone becomes a Christian.

A lot of people would admit that they're going to heaven. They're forgiven. They have a new status before God. But when temptation starts to come into the world and starts to overcome them, they start to get discouraged and start asking the question, am I really saved?

And to counter that, we tend to work harder. Try to be more disciplined. Try more in whatever spiritual habit we prefer.

But Paul teaches us there's another strategy. And that strategy begins with our thinking. It's understanding that we are or we have a new identity with Christ.

[1:41] And we have the assurance to know that we are saved. Paul teaches us that the Christian life begins in the mind. Which means understanding truth about the way things are. The cross-centered life begins with interpreting our lives through Jesus Christ and not through our feelings.

How often we fall into that trap, right? We feel something. We feel something, whether it's shame. We feel uncertainty. We feel agitation. Sometimes we begin to think that must mean I'm not right with God.

And rightly so. They kind of get jumbled up because we still struggle with sin. But Paul simply argues you are not dead because you resisted sin. You resist sin because you're dead to it. Amen? So we resist sin by standing firm in the understanding that we are planted in Jesus Christ. In this morning's text, Paul is dealing with an issue that seems similar to what we saw in verses 1 to 14. But there's a difference. Notice Paul kind of begins with this question. The first objection.

[3:33] You see, this is a different issue. The first question is about abusing grace. The second question is about removing restraint.

So let me read today's text before we go any further. And we're only going to look at two verses. Because it's jam-packed. What then, Paul asks?

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?

So I'm going to make a statement. And the statement I'm going to make runs counterculture to what this world tells us. You ready for this?

You are not free. You are not free. Not only that, you never were free. And you're never going to be free in the very way you've been told.

[4:54] The reality is we live in an age of autonomy. Autonomy means self-law, self-rule, self-definition, self-direction. I'm the master of my universe and I make the rules.

What it means is there is no authority over me. There is no master above me. And there's no rule outside of me. Let's be honest.

This is the air we breathe. From childhood, we are taught this belief. Follow your heart. Be true to yourself.

Live your truth. And don't let anyone tell you what to do. Right? And if anyone challenges this idea, the modern response is immediate.

BK, that's oppressive. That's controlling. That's outdated thinking. The fact is autonomy is the sacred idol of this generation.

[5:57] Now, I know some of you are nodding along and you're like saying, preach it, BK. Preach it. You got it. You're nailing it. But here's the shocking part. Many Christians have absorbed this thinking without even realizing it.

Well, they believe the gospel means I am forgiven. I'm going to heaven. I'm under grace. Therefore, I can live however I want. And this is exactly the objection Paul anticipates in this morning's text of Romans 6.15.

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? In other words, if we're not under the law anymore, what's stopping us?

What are the boundaries? Because without boundaries, there's anarchy. So this morning, I want to answer this question. This is the primary question that I want to answer this morning.

If God forgives all my sin, past, present, and future, why does obedience matter? Why does obedience matter?

[7:06] This is the primary question. But in order to understand or to get to the answer to this, we've got to come to some understanding. We need to understand.

This is where I'm going to take you this morning. What do the words law and grace mean? How does Paul define sin? How does Paul define slavery? And I'm going to talk about why we misunderstand obedience.

But before I do any of these things, I have to deal with the first issue. And that issue is the myth of autonomy.

So this is my first point of this morning. The objection of autonomy. Let's start Romans 6.15. It says, What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?

By no means. As I said, this is the second time in this chapter Paul raises the what then question.

[8:08] Verse 1, Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? And verse 15, Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Like I said, they're similar questions.

But they're not identical questions. Like I said before, the first objection was theological. The second objection is practical.

The first question is about abusing grace. The second question is about removing restraint. Now notice Paul's answer, By no means.

This phrase is the strongest negative in the Greek language. It means absolutely not. Perish the thought. The idea is morally unthinkable. And what he says is, Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?

And the heart of it is found in this phrase. Not under law but under grace. Verse 15, Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?

[9:19] What does that term under the law means? What Paul is talking about is known as the moral law. It's not the ceremonial or civil law.

But he's getting into the moral law. He means that we are no longer under the law in the sense that our salvation depends upon our keeping and observing the law.

You with me on that? We're no longer under that rule. Now, it's important to point out what Paul's not saying.

Paul doesn't say that the moral law no longer reflects God's character. Paul doesn't say that the Ten Commandments are irrelevant. And Paul doesn't say that God no longer cares about obedience.

He's not saying anything of these things. What he's saying is that your acceptance with God does not depend on your obedience. There is no do this and you shall live.

[10:28] You see, when you're under the law, the law does expose your skin, sin. But the law demands perfection.

The law condemns failure. And the law provides no power to obey. Yes, the law is holy. The law is good.

The law is righteous. But here's the thing. The law cannot save. And we've heard Paul echo this truth, right?

If you remember way back in Romans 3.20, it says the law reveals sin. In verses in chapter 4.15, it said the law brings wrath. In 5.20, it says the law increases trespass.

One author puts it very simply. To be under the law is to wake up every day standing in a courtroom where the verdict is always guilty.

[11:28] That's what the law means. Now what does Paul mean when he says under grace?

You see, to be under grace is not to live without authority. It's to live under a different covenant. It means your standing before God rests on Christ's obedience and not on yours.

It means you are justified. You are declared righteous. You are accepted. Not because you performed, but because Christ did. Amen? And here's the fear that creeps in.

Grace does not lower the standard. Grace fulfills the standard in Jesus Christ. You see, grace removes condemnation.

It is grace that unites you to Jesus. It's grace that gives you a new heart. But ultimately, we've talked about this several times.

[12:35] Grace is what changes you from the realm of death to the realm of life. Amen? That's where it begins. So you are no longer in the realm of law condemnation.

You are in the realm of grace reconciliation. That is what Paul means here. You with me on that? Now we kind of understand the law and grace.

Let me explain where people go wrong. People will say, if I am no longer under the law, if I'm no longer condemned by law, if my obedience does not determine my justification, then what stops me from sinning?

That's the objection. And that objection reveals something. And it's no shame to answer that question. It's a logical question. But it's based on a misunderstanding of the law.

It's based on the thinking that the law was only meant to restrain sin. That's not what the law was created to do. It assumes that the only reason people obey God is fear of punishment.

[13:43] They fear if you remove the punishment, you remove obedience. If you remove the law, you remove morality.

If you remove consequences, you remove restraint. And this is why it's so hard for people to get out from under the law.

You with me on this? This is important. This is why so many people are wrapped up in the law. This is how the world thinks. And tragically, it's how many Christians think.

They assume holiness is sustained by threat. But Paul is going to argue something different. Like he says, law never estranged sin at the heart level.

It only exposes it. Grace does something deeper. Grace does not create autonomy. Grace creates transfer from death to life.

[14:47] What he means by this is you're not freed from one authority to become self-governing. Right? You weren't rescued out of the realm of death so you could live however you wanted.

The fact is you are being freed from one master to belong to another master. And this is what verse 16 will say. But before we move there, we need to expose something even different.

Because the objection in verse 15 doesn't just misunderstands grace, it misunderstands sin. The reason you misunderstand sin is because you believe it is an act.

And most people fall into this trap. They believe that sin is an act. But Paul is about to show us that sin is a master.

It is a master. And that brings me to my second point, which I've called the principle of slavery. The principle of slavery. Let's just read verse 16 again.

[15:57] 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, here Paul is dismantling this idea of autonomy. Notice how he begins. Do you not know? That phrase means this is something obvious.

This is something foundational. This is basic reality. He's not introducing advanced theology. He's stating something that is self-evident.

And it is this. Whoever you obey, reveal who owns you. Whoever you obey, you reveal who owns you.

Let's break this phrase down. Phrase by phrase. Sorry, let's break this verse down. Notice, if you present yourselves.

[17:01] That word present means to offer yourself. To place at someone's disposal. To yield to them. You with me on that? What that means is it's the language of availability.

It means you step forward. You offer yourself. You put yourself under someone's direction. And notice, this is an active. It's active. And here's the point Paul's making.

No one dragged you there. No one dragged you to sin. You placed yourself before sin. The fact is, you present yourself every day.

Every decision, every thought, every desire. You are constantly placing yourself at someone's disposal. This is unavoidable. Now, notice what Paul does not say.

He does not say, if you occasionally stumble. He says, if you present yourselves. Now, what's important about this, this is about direction.

[18:02] This is about pattern. This is about trajectory. Who do you yield to? Who controls your yes and your no and who directs your obedience?

It does not fall. It does not mean to fall occasionally. He's talking about a pattern. Now, notice the next phrase. You are slaves of the one whom you obey.

This is the self-evident truth. That word slave, *doulos*, means own property. You are not hired help. You were not a consultant.

You were not a volunteer. To be a slave is to be owned. And with that, it means total allegiance, total authority, and total claim.

Now, Paul is saying something shocking here. He says, your obedience is not random behavior.

Your obedience is evidence of ownership. You with me on this? That your obedience is not random behavior.

[19:11] It is evidence of ownership. You don't obey occasionally and remain neutral. The fact is, obedience creates bondage.

The one you repeatedly obey becomes your master. Why is this so important? Because this destroys the myth of casual sin.

We often think it's just a habit. It's just a weakness. It's a struggle. Paul is saying, no, no, no, no, no. It's none of those things. It's a master. It's a master. And here's the truth. Masters don't negotiate with slaves.

And this brings us to our reality of life. There's only two masters. Verse 16, you're either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.

[20:15] Notice there was no third category. Notice there's no religious but autonomous, spiritual but independent, saved but self-ruled.

There's none of that stuff there. There's only two. Sin and obedience. Now notice something important. It took me a while to figure this one out.

Paul here is not contrasting sin with the law. That's not the comparison he's making. Paul is contrasting sin with obedience.

He's contrasting sin with obedience because why? Because obedience is not legalism. Obedience is allegiance. Obedience is surrender.

Obedience is recognition of rightful authority. And here is what we must define carefully. Sin is not just wrongdoing.

[21:21] Sin is a ruling power. I know. I get it. Sin is marketed as freedom. Amen? It's what's out there.

Sin is presented as liberation. Sin is framed as self-expression. But the truth of the matter is it's none of these things.

Earlier in Romans Paul described sin as reigning. Sin entered through Adam. Sin spread. Sin reigns in death.

What Paul is communicating here very obviously is sin is not merely an action. Sin is dominion. And if you obey it you are placing yourself under it.

This is the exact same thing that Jesus himself spoke in John 8.34. He says, everyone who commits sin is the slave to sin.

[22:29] Sin. Notice he didn't say everyone who commits sin might become a slave of sin.

He says, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. And just to correct it, that word commits means an ongoing action. It's placing yourself under that authority.

So slavery is not the end result of extreme sin. Slavery is the built-in structure of sin.

That's how sin works. The crucial question we need to ask ourselves is sin leads somewhere.

Just as he says obedience leads somewhere. What this tells us there is movement. Trajectory. Like sin moving to death.

[23:28] Obedience leading to righteousness. And what Paul is saying is not abstract. The fact of the matter is sin always produces decay. It may begin with pleasure.

It may begin with freedom. But its very end is destruction. Many of us know this only too well from destroyed relationships, destroyed conscience, destroyed identity.

And ultimately it's eternal separation from God. Because this is the lie sin wants you to think.

You're in control. But the only thing sin does is it produces capacity. obedience.

Now let's talk about obedience. The text says obedience leads to righteousness. Not self-righteousness, not performance-based acceptance, but conformity to God's character.

[24:35] You see, obedience produces alignment. It produces wholeness. It produces moral clarity. It produces increasing freedom from sin's tyranny.

You with me on that? That's great news. As we heard last week, sin wants tyranny. He wants to attack. He wants you to bow to it.

Now here's the irony of it all. The world believes, will tell you, that obedience is bondage. But Paul simply says obedience is liberation.

Because the fact is you're going to be mastered by something and the only question is what master destroys you and the other restores you. I'm going to repeat this again because it bears repeating. there's only two roads. There's no middle road. There is no spiritual Switzerland. You cannot say I don't serve sin, but I also don't like the language of slavery to Christ.

[25:45] Can I be myself? Scripture doesn't give us this option. You see, refusal to bow to Christ is not neutrality. It's submission to self.

And self, apart from grace, is already ruled by sin. Autonomy is not freedom.

Autonomy is just sin wearing independence as a disguise. When someone says, I don't want anyone telling me what to do, they think it's freedom, but it's not.

What it is, it is evidence of mastery. It's evidence of who they really serve. Because here's the truth. There is only one being in the universe who is self-existent and self-governing. There's no such thing as absolute freedom for a human being.

[26:46] Only God is autonomous. Only God is self-governing. Only God, and he is not conditioned by anything outside himself. What that means is, God doesn't do what is right, what God does is right.

You with me on that one? It's like God's got a decision to make. Well, I like this ethic, that's a higher ethic, I have to follow that. No, no, no, what God does is the ethic.

Guess what? We're not him. We don't get that choice. So, tell me this passage doesn't leave us ripe for asking questions about ourselves.

Tell me this does not expose us. The obvious question is, who are you presenting yourself to? I'm not talking about what you profess.

I'm not talking about what you feel. I'm not talking about what you intend to do. But I'm asking, who do you obey?

[28:06] Because obedience reveals ownership, and ownership determines destiny. this brings me to my third point.

And I want to contrast the tyranny of sin versus the freedom of righteousness. Paul has told us something. We almost resist instinctively, right?

You are a slave of the one you obey. Now he sharpens it, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.

And here's the thing. We need to slow down, examine both masters, because here's the truth. Sin never advertises itself honestly. It's like watching the liberal news.

You're never going to get the truth. Because sin does not advertise itself honestly. See, here's the thing about sin. Sin never presents itself as bondage.

[29:11] It never does. It presents itself as empowerment. empowerment. Right? You can do it. It whispers, you deserve this.

You need this. You're missing out. Don't you feel a little restricted? You see, what happens is sin doesn't begin with change.

It begins with an appetite. It begins with desire. It begins with choice. If we pay attention to the structure that Paul exposes here, there's choice.

We make a choice to sin. We then start to repeat that choice. Then that choice becomes a pattern and then it owns you.

You with me on this? no matter the sin, it follows the same road every time. It's going to act. There's going to be a choice there. You'll make that choice and you're going to make it on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday.

[30:19] Now all of a sudden you've got a pattern going. A mold, so to speak. It's what shapes you. And then before you know it, the chain is set.

Anybody who's ever been enslaved to addiction knows exactly what I'm talking about. You see, this is why sin must be understood not as a behavior but as a power.

The fact is, scripture describes sin as reigning, enslaving, deceiving, warring, blinding. And it's never described as being passive.

It's described as being active. And it's not weakness alone. It's dominion. And this is where our thinking must be corrected. We tend to treat sin lightly because we measure to ourselves.

I'm not as bad as those guys. I'm not bad as those girls. We always compare ourselves. We minimize our sin. We excuse it. We rename it. But here's the thing.

[31:32] Sin was never meant to be measured horizontally. Sin is always measured vertically. And when you see sin in that light, you realize something sobering.

You're not playing with something harmless. You're submitting to something that is deadly. Notice Paul's easy words.

Sin leads to death. Not might, not possibly, not eventually, if extreme, leads.

But here's the hard truth. Death isn't merely physical. It's spiritual decay. It is alienation from God. It is the corrosion of our soul. It's the hardening of our conscience. It's the shrinking or the removal of our joy. It is the loss of clarity. And ultimately, if unredeemed, it leads to eternal separation from God.

[32:46] The fact is, sin always takes you further than you plan to go. It always keeps you longer than you intended to stay.

And it always costs more than you thought you would pay. this is the testimony of Scripture and history.

Let me address one more issue before I get into the paradox of true freedom. This is the illusion of autonomy. See, the myth of autonomy says, I am in control.

But the reality is, the person who insists on autonomy is already enslaved.

The man who says, no one tells me what to do, is ruled by pride. The woman who says, I follow my heart, is ruled by desire. And the addict who says, I can quit any time, is ruled by appetite.

[33:57] The religious moralist who says, I don't need grace, is ruled by self-righteousness. You see, autonomy is not absence of mastery.

It is simply choosing a different master. And often that master is self. And self apart from Christ is never neutral.

It is self-governed by sin. You are either under the dominion of sin or under the dominion of righteousness.

Now, this is where Christianity sounds backwards. And if you're new, just kind of checking out Christianity, I'm going to tell you this is some of the problems here. Notice that Paul says, slavery to obedience leads to righteousness.

And later in the chapter, he will say, slavery to God leads to sanctification in eternal life. And the world hears that word slavery and thinks oppression. And we get it.

[35:01] But the Bible uses the word slavery and points to liberation, not oppression. Why? Because freedom is not absence of authority. Freedom is alignment with our design.

Amen? That's what true freedom is, is living in the alignment of how God has created us. One author just says, a train is not free when it leaves the tracks.

It's wrecked. You are not free when you leave God's authority. You are slowly starting to decay. Freedom is not self-rule.

Freedom is functioning as you were created to function. And how were we created to function? We were created to worship God.

we were created to honor God with how we live, how we speak, how we conduct ourselves. You were created to obey.

[36:06] You were created to live under the loving authority of your creator. The world is going to tell you this is demeaning, but this is dignifying.

Why? Because the master matters. Amen? The master matters. Now, don't get me wrong here. Paul's not talking about if you occasionally struggle.

He's simply asking the question, what direction defines you? What masters your trajectory?

Because the truth is, and I was thinking about this all last night, I barely slept, it's that idea because every life is moving somewhere.

And I ask that question, where is my life moving? Is every decision I am making being captivated by this idea? Sin leads to death, obedience leads to righteousness, righteousness leads to sanctification, and sanctification leads to life.

this isn't about perfection, it is about lordship. The question is, do you ever fail? The question is, who do you belong to?

[37:36] Because the fact is, you will increasingly resemble the one you obey. If sin governs you, death will mark you.

If Christ governs you, righteousness will grow in you. And here's the thing, it's not optional, it's inevitable.

You see, that question reveals your master. Let's just take a look at this last principle. You are a slave of the one you obey.

we have to let that truth search us. Because it is possible to profess grace and still misunderstand mastery.

It is possible to claim Christ but yet still live autonomously. It is possible to say, I'm under grace while presenting yourself daily to sin.

[38:44] Make no mistake, Paul is not teaching sinless perfection. He's not saying you will never struggle. He's not saying Christians never fail.

What he's saying is you cannot belong to Christ and live comfortably mastered by sin. And this goes back earlier, right?

You know you object to sin is a sign that sin isn't ruling you. It means you're free to God. You live under grace. You resist sin. You hate sin.

You don't want it to be a part of a sin. That's a great thing. It tells you who really owns you. So let me just answer this last one.

What does it mean to obey? Obedience is not emotional enthusiasm. It's not religious activity or church attendance. And it's certainly not vocabulary.

[39:41] Obedience is yielded authority. Obedience is yielded authority. It is saying you are Lord and thus us acting our lives as if we mean it.

To put it more simple, when Christ speak, I submit. When scripture confronts me, I bend. When conviction comes, I respond.

It doesn't mean instant maturity. It means directional allegiance. You may stumble, but you will not settle. You will fail, but you will not defend sin.

You may grieve, but you do not excuse your rebellion. And that is the difference. You see, one who's a slave of sin excuses it. The slave of righteousness hates it.

the one who is a slave to sin tries to hide it. The slave of righteousness fights it. The slave of sin is comfortable in their sin.

[40:44] The slave of righteousness is convicted by it. The issue is not perfection. The issue is ownership.

See, one of the things that lies that we are told is if I am under grace, I am unaccountable. But like we said, grace does not create independent people.

Grace never says you answer to no one. Grace says you now belong to Christ. The fact is, you are either presenting yourself to sin or presenting yourself to obedience.

And here is the obvious question. What patterns rule your life? What do you obey? Where do you consistently yield?

What truly has functional authority in your decisions? One author says, your habits preach your master.

[42:03] Your reactions reveal your ruler. And your private life exposes your allegiance. actions. Let's be honest, this is uncomfortable.

But it's clarifying. And the thing about clarity is clarity is mercy. Because the worst thing could happen to you is to assume you are free when you're enslaved.

Let me conclude with this thought. If sin governs you without resistance, if there is no fight, there is no conviction, there is no growing hatred of unrighteousness, then the issue is not that you are under grace, the issue is that you still may be under sin.

See, he gets back to the original choice, or the original fact. Grace has to do something. It doesn't bring about perfect obedience, but it will bring real and true obedience.

And it is obedience that flows from new ownership. Next week, we're going to look at the miracle of transfer, where Paul says, but thanks be to God.

[43:29] But this week, we sit with the principle, you are not autonomous, you are mastered, and your obedience reveals your master.

Amen. Amen. Let me pray to give the music team a little bit time to get up here. Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, we just thank you for this corrective word in our lives.

It is such a simple principle, people, but yet we never really ask it of ourselves. Who am I a slave to? What do my actions say about who I am?

I'm not talking about the presentation of how I present myself here at church, but when I'm alone and no one's watching, what do I give my mind over, my eyes over, my will over to?

For some of us, it's the whole idea of unforgiveness. So many people lie trapped in the power of sin because they cannot forgive.

[44:42] So many people are caught in shame, still thinking that God still wants them to be accountable to the life they lived before Jesus Christ.

And these are all the ways that Satan uses to disarm us so that our lives have no power. It's like a gun with no bullets.

Father, thank you for your goodness to us. I thank you for this word. I thank you for the moral clarity you give in just using Paul's words to really let us to understand that our sins aren't actions.

Our sins are sin is a power that means to overthrow your rule and our obedience to that rule.

Father, I pray if there's anyone here whose conscience is trapped by sin and that they want out, I pray that they would make themselves available for prayer to me or one of the elders.

[45:53] We have a prayer room that we can use right after the service. We're blessed with Pastor Dave as a counselor to walk with us by examining and teaching us how to submit our lives to the gospel.

So, Father, I pray that even in this sermon, which feels more point form than anything else, would be a truth that leads to new life.

And I pray it would lead to repentance for those who've been bought by you but are playing with the world. May it warn us in every way.

In your name we pray. Amen.