

# Why Christians obey God

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Date: 12 June 2022

Preacher: James Barnett

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everyone. My name is James. Good to see you on this chilly morning this morning. When I was 18, my parents moved out.

We were living in Wollongong, and I was in my second year of university, and my parents with my younger sister moved to the Hills District of Sydney. And I lived with my brother for a year in Wollongong, and then lived on my own for a year.

And it forced me to become an adult. It was really wonderful because I learned how to do things like make pavlova. And I remember vividly one time getting stiff peaks in the egg whites without a whisk, but just with a fork.

And so I made that pavlova, and then, like any good 18-year-old, ate the entire pavlova. And it forced me to become an adult. I cooked my own meals. I cleaned my clothes.

I worked to pay rent while I was at uni. But then when I finished university, started looking for a job. And so I moved back in with my parents. And they were still in the Hills District, so I moved into the Hills.

[ 1 : 09 ] And there were positives and negatives. Living with them meant that I could, you know, find a job, you know, when I was still looking. But it meant that I was also living with my parents who treated me like a child.

And it was frustrating. I was 21 at this point, and I'd been used to cleaning my clothes. And my mum's cleaning my clothes, and I'm like, mum, I'm not a child. What are you doing?

And there was tension because my status had changed. I had been a child. I became an adult. And then they were treating me like a child again.

There's often a tension when a person doesn't act like who they are. The married person who acts like they're single. The parent who lives like they don't have children.

The new worker who is still acting like a uni student and sleeping in all morning. The adult who behaves like a child. There's tension when a person doesn't act like who they are.

[ 2 : 14 ] For those who follow Jesus, their status in life has changed. They've gone from death to life. From the power of sin to the power of God being set free by him.

And yet, I wonder if we forget our status as God's children. And often run back to following our old ways.

Do we forget who we are? We are in the book of Romans. And over the last few weeks, we've seen our desperate need for God to save us.

And he does this through his wonderful grace to us. He chooses to forgive. He chooses to justify us because of his great love for us. It's called justification by faith.

And we saw that last week. We've gone from having our head, Adam, to our new head, Jesus, as the one who represents us. And we have all the benefits through our new head, Jesus.

[ 3 : 17 ] And today, Paul shows us that we're not just saved. Our entire status has changed. And so it's not right for us to go back to our old way of doing things, our old status.

But instead, to be who we are because of Jesus. And so today, we're going to be challenged and encouraged to be who we are. Two points this morning.

The first status change is from dead to alive. And the second status is of slaves to sin to slaves to God. Let me pray for us as we begin.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for Romans chapter 6. We thank you for your word to us. And we ask that we would understand who we are as your children. And that we would continue to grow like Jesus.

Amen. Paul has set out this wonderful picture that there is free grace. There is justification. You no longer need to work.

[ 4 : 20 ] You no longer need to follow a set of rules to be saved. In fact, that doesn't actually work to get saved. Instead, there is free grace. And now Paul answers a question on many people's minds.

Well, if I'm saved, does it really matter what I do? Can I just do anything I like? Can I just go on sinning and God's going to forgive me? So have a look.

Romans chapter 6, verse 1. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? If what I do has nothing to do with my salvation, then does it really matter what I do? Actually, if anything, the more I sin, the more God gets to show his grace to me so I can have more and more grace from God. Isn't that a good thing? I remember working through this thinking when I was younger and I've spoken to many people who've asked this question.

Maybe you're asking this question today. Does it really matter what I'm doing if God is going to forgive me anyway? Paul responds. And he responds pretty strongly in verse 2.

[ 5 : 31 ] By no means. We are those who have died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? It's kind of hard to picture how strongly Paul would have written this.

But, you know, I can imagine if he was writing this in text or writing it on a comment online, it would all be in caps. By no means. Don't do this. We have died to sin.

Sin and the Christian do not go together. Now, this doesn't mean that Christians do not sin. Some will suggest that Christians just no longer sin and that's not what Paul's saying.

And he's not just saying that sin has no influence over us because sin continues to influence us. And it doesn't even just mean that sin is inappropriate for the Christian.

And it's not even saying that the Christian is slowly moving away from sin. Paul says that we are dead to sin. The moment a person becomes a Christian, they have a new master.

[ 6 : 33 ] They're under a new power. The Christian has gone from being ruled by sin to being ruled by God. Previously, we were completely under the power of sin.

We could not resist it. But now, sin cannot dominate the Christian. The Christian, under God's power, is able to resist and to rebel against the pull of sin.

Paul says in Colossians chapter 1, that there's a new power at work in our lives. He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

Now, one way to understand this would be if there was a country that was under complete control by a wicked government. Okay? Go with me. So there's a country under complete control by a wicked government and a good army invades, throwing out the wicked force and giving back control of government and communication to the people.

But the out-of-power soldiers, the wicked soldiers, they're still there, but they've become a guerrilla force. So they're not in control of the military anymore, but they are still hiding in the bushes.

[ 7 : 45 ] And this guerrilla force can create havoc for the rightful government. It can never take control again, but it can make things difficult.

Being dead to sin means we don't have to obey it, even if sin remains. And Paul explains this as being dead to sin and alive to Jesus in verse 3.

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Paul uses this word baptism. In the original language, it means being immersed in and you stay there. It's this picture of conversion. When the Christian is made aware of Jesus' lordship and they follow him, at that moment, just in like chapter 5, Jesus becomes our head.

And he died his death on his behalf for us. And his resurrection is our resurrection too. And so in verse 8, Paul can say, if we died with Christ, we believe we will live with him.

[ 9 : 06 ] All that is true of Jesus is true of the Christian. He died to sin. He was raised to life. And so the Christian right now is dead to sin and has a new life.

It's a status change. The Christian's position in life has changed. The wicked government has been kicked out and there is a new power in control.

If you are following Jesus, your old way of life is dead. It's dead. You've had two lives. There's your before following Jesus' life and there's the after following Jesus' life.

And so even when we sin, it doesn't change our status. We don't go back to being unforgiven, sinful before God.

We continue as alive in God. But this is a wonderful reality that we can ignore, we can forget, we can lose sight of.

[10:07] And so Paul calls us to do what God does in verse 11. Paul says, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Earlier we saw in Romans that God counted us righteous in Jesus. John used the illustration of doing a park run and the fastest runner, their time was given to the slowest runner. There is a swap that is done where God counts Jesus' perfect life for us. And so what Paul is calling us to do is to see ourselves as God sees us.

God counts his righteousness for us and we're called to see that God does that for us. Count yourselves dead to sin. Paul is calling us to see ourselves as God sees us.

That our status has changed. That we are no longer sinful, fallen, but that we are dead to that and we are alive in Jesus.

[11:19] We are not under sin. It's a legal right. Our legal position before God has changed. But we actually need to take advantage of it. There's no point having \$14 million if you don't take advantage of having \$14 million.

If you're living on the street, cold at night, you're not living in the reality of what is in the bank. We need to live with the reality of how God sees us.

Before we can speak of how this should change our hearts and how it should change our actions, it has to enter our minds. We have to see us and to see each other as God sees us.

I read a story recently of those who were set free from slavery in the United States after the Civil War. Slavery had been abolished and all slaves, young and free, had been given their freedom. But there were many people who had endured long years of slavery and they found it very difficult to understand their new status. And so they heard that they were free.

[12:33] But they struggled to understand it. They struggled to realize it. And when they saw their old master coming to them, they began to quake and fear. So Martin Lloyd-Jones, the preacher, says, we can experience being a slave experientially.

We can experience that in our lives, even when we are no longer a slave. Whatever you feel, whatever your experience may be, God tells us here, through his word, that we are no longer under the reign and rule of sin.

And if I fall into sin, as I do, it is simply because I do not realize who I am. Verse 14, for sin shall no longer be your master because you are not under the law but under grace.

And yet how often are we fearful of it? Stuck in it. Not looking to our master who has set us free.

And so brothers and sisters, there is a wonderful assurance for us here.

We are called to think of ourselves as God sees us, dead to sin and alive in Jesus. We can be fearful of our sin, not realizing who we are.

[13:51] Or we can see ourselves and see each other as God's children with a new status. I will sin. You will sin.

You will rebel against God today, tomorrow. But that is not who we are. We are saved. If you follow Jesus, you are one of his children, part of his family.

The slave to sin is who I was. But now we have a new master, a new status. And so this means our life should look different.

Second point today is that our status has changed. We've gone from being a slave to sin to a slave to God. And so because of this, life should look different.

Paul in verse 14 asks the same question as verse 1 in a slightly different way. He says, What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace?

[14:52] And he repeats that, by no means. I love that. I appreciate it when Gary read it before. By no means. And so Paul is again coming back to this question.

What does it actually look like to live for the Christian? What is our life to look like? It is not to continue to go off sinning how we used to live.

Our life is to look different. Are we under any obligations? Do I need to follow the Ten Commandments? Do I have to love my neighbor? I was really encouraged with what Leland was saying before about seeking to read his Bible regularly.

But do I have to do that? It's encouraging hearing him seek to be reading his Bible regularly four or more times. But do I have to do that? Paul answers this again by talking about our status.

This time about slavery. And the old singer Bob Dylan wrote a song that Paul is talking about here when he sang, you're going to have to serve somebody. And so verse 17 and 18.

[ 15 : 53 ] Though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

No one is free. Every single person is a slave. They're either a slave to sin or a slave to God. We all have a master.

And when our master is sin, verse 23 tells us that what we earn, we earn death. Our wage is death. But when our master is God, we don't earn anything.

Because we can't earn anything. Instead, verse 23 tells us, do I have it there? I don't have it there. What verse 23 tells us is that instead we are given a gift. A gift of eternal life.

The point of Romans 6 is that we're all serving somebody. We're all a slave to something. Some bottom line, something is driving us.

[ 16 : 57 ] Something has mastered us and we are all slaves. What are you offering yourself to? If you're following Jesus, don't go back and become a slave to sin.

Are you a slave of people's opinions or God's opinion? Are you a slave to the bottom line of your bank balance instead of seeing the riches freely offered through God's grace?

Are you a slave to obeying your family in the hope that they might be proud of you when you have a God who longs to be close with you? Are you mastered by a desire to be with someone so that your behaviors shape your desire to get affection instead of seeing the affection and love you already have in Jesus?

We're all controlled by something and when it's anything other than God, it leads to death. But there is a kind and generous master and we've become slaves to righteousness that Christian doesn't have to obey God to be saved.

But we do obey to have a life filled with the fullness of God, to have a joyful, flourishing life. Tim Keller has an illustration about birds and fish.

[ 18 : 19 ] It's not birds and bees, it's birds and fish. The fish in the water is stuck in his situation of the water and he sees the bird and longs to be free like the bird.

He sees the bird and thinks, I want to be like that. And so the fish flops out of the water and goes on the ground and dies. Because the fish is made for water.

That's where the fish finds its freedom. In our current world, we hear being a slave to anything and we can think, I don't want to be a slave to anyone.

But we're all slaves to something. We want to search for freedom, but we find freedom when we live in the way God has made us to be. The fish finds its freedom when it lives in the water.

And whilst it looks like it's bound to slavery, that is the best place for it. I wonder if we are swimming and we are seeing people leap out of the water, chasing sin, and we say, oh, look at them.

[ 19 : 25 ] They're leaping out of the water. That looks so great. I want to be just like them. And then we don't notice that they're just chasing after something that is going to be the end of them.

Instead of seeing that, obeying God, both shows that we love God. But also it's the best way to life. It's the way to human flourishing.

So what do we do? We saw in the first point that we need to change our minds. We need to see ourselves as God sees us, as having a new status.

And then in verse 13 and 19, Paul calls us to action. He says, do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God.

Verse 19, just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness, leading to holiness.

[ 20 : 28 ] Paul is saying, be who you are. Be controlled in your behavior. Offer your whole body, your whole members, your heart, your actions, your soul.

Offer them to righteousness. Offer your whole self to purity, to love, to generosity, to kindness, to patience, to gentleness, to self-control.

Obey God, but not based on your feelings or your situation, but on the reality of the gospel.

Because God has considered you righteousness, considered you righteous.

And so be the status change. We are no longer under the power of sin, but we are God's. Sin doesn't reign even when we struggle with it.

Viewing yourself as righteous in Jesus is a great assurance, and it motivates us to obey God, to live the new status, not to earn it, because it is who we already are.

[ 21 : 32 ] If you are still thinking about what it means to follow Jesus, to offer yourselves to righteousness, to what this status would look like. Everything we are yearning for and searching for in life is found in this status as a child of God.

Are we searching for meaning and for purpose? Are we looking for recognition and joy for a person who will love us? That is only found in God.

And the status as a child of God is higher than any other status. For the brother or sister who is a Christian, who is struggling with being who they are, let me get really practical with what it means to offer ourselves to righteousness and to think of ourselves as a new status.

When we come to a daily situation to sin, we have an option. Am I going to offer myself to God as a slave to righteousness, or am I going to offer myself to sin?

My old way of life, who I was before I was saved. And so there's a cycle that happens. There's stages you can go through, which you can see on the screen.

[ 22 : 50 ] There's a cycle that happens. There's an event. There's a situation. There's a problem. There's a desire to sin. There's a thought. There's a feeling that wells up inside, and then there is a response.

And so if someone says something that I think will make me feel, make me look bad, if someone puts me down in a social setting, that's the event. And I have this opportunity.

Am I going to offer myself as a slave to sin or a slave to God? Am I going to revert back to who I was, or am I going to be who I am?

If I let my desire to look good and defend myself, be my master, I'm going to, my thought, the second thing that happened, is going to be quick.

You need to put this person down. They've said something bad about you. They've rebuked you, and you need to get back at them. You need to defend yourself. Maybe you need to put this person down and joke about them so everybody turns on them instead.

[ 23 : 57 ] I must pay them back for hurting me. That's the thought that will run through my mind. And the feeling that comes up is anger and bitterness and rage.

And then the response can be that I lash out with words. I'm not sure if you can see yourself in that, but this is a cycle we all go through.

But what would it look like to remember who I am? What would it look like to remember who I am, that my status has changed? To remember, to see myself as God sees me, as his child.

Set free from sin. Set free from that situation. And so in that same situation, the event could be somebody says something critical of me, they put me down, and my thought, instead of immediately leaping to defense, could be, do you know what?

That person has pointed out some difficult truths about me. I really don't like that, but I need to be aware of it. Maybe they've done that to hurt me, and that's okay, but God is my judge.

[ 25 : 07 ] This person is not my judge. And he has already accepted me. And do you know what? I can now have a feeling of thanks to God, because my God has forgiven me far more than this person will ever know.

And instead, I can respond with acceptance and love to this person, instead of abuse. this cycle happens every day, with every situation that we're placed into.

And we have that option, who is going to be my master? Am I going to revert back to my old status, to who I was before? Or am I going to be who I am, following Jesus?

Will I count myself as God's slave to righteousness, and respond by offering my thoughts, my feelings, and my actions to God? Or will I respond seeking to protect myself, being a slave?

Brothers and sisters, let me encourage you to take a step in faith, seeing yourself as God sees you, and ask God to help your whole self serve him.

[ 26 : 18 ] Our status has changed. Let's not go back to how we were, but let us live how God has called us to live. Let me pray for us. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the truth and the challenge of chapter 6.

God, help us to be who you have made us to be, your children. help us to see our old status as slaves to sin, as not something that we would desire.

Lord, we ask for much wisdom, that when we are confronted by sin, either external or in our own hearts, that you would help us to choose to offer ourselves to you, Lord, because we love you and we want to be like you, Lord.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.