

No longer slaves to sin

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[0 : 0 0] So, Romans chapter 6, beginning at verse 1.

Romans chapter 6 makes sense because Romans chapter 5 makes sense. We don't have time this morning to go over chapter 5 again, but hopefully from last week you'll remember, and therefore chapter 6 begins like this. Now hear God's word.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried, therefore, with him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him.

For the death he died, he died to sin once for all. But the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we're not under law but under grace? By no means. Do not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves to 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, having become slaves of righteousness, I am 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 to righteousness, leading to sanctification. When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[4 : 08] Well, may God bless his word to us this morning, and may he do that as we pray for it. Let's pray. Father God, we always consider you speaking to us as the most important thing and person that we should listen to, that you choose your words carefully and you expect us to learn them and to grow in them. We pray, Father God, that you would enlighten our mind with a view of changing our heart, not just so that we would think differently as a person, which is necessary, but that we would also live differently as people who follow Jesus. Father, it's difficult to follow your Son, our Savior and Lord, but Father, we know that by your Spirit you enable us to do it.

Father, we pray this morning that as we come to your word, that you will allow us to see both the reality of the gospel and also the demands of it as well. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we come to Romans 6 this morning, and I think the best possible way to explain Romans 6 is by getting rid of a misconception straight away. It's often said that Christ died so that you could live. Romans 6 clears that up almost immediately for us. Christ didn't die so that we could live.

Christ died so that we could die. All sinners must die. It's a non-negotiable. What Christ offers us is a way of dying with a prospect of resurrection. In other words, it's safe to die when you belong to Jesus. It's not safe to die when you don't belong to Jesus. Remember, there's only one division between two people in the world, either between Adam and Christ, whichever one you belong to.

And that's really important because Romans 6 makes it very, very clear that what Jesus Christ is offering or providing. Offering is a terrible word. If I could, I've said it now, it's out there, but that was a theological slip of the tongue that should be deleted. What Christ provides is a way for a person to die to their sin, to be separated from their sin, and to live in newness of life in Christ Jesus. Very important. So, let me say it again. Christ did not die so that you could live.

[6 : 47] Christ died so that you could die. You have to die to your old life, the old sin, so that you can be given a new one, because you can't live with two people. Yeah, the Bible's quite clear on that, on a moral ground. It's very clear on it, on a spiritual ground as well. We can only be married, or to one person at a time, one person forever. And that's the kind of union that's being expressed here in Romans 6. So, the grace of God triumphs over sin, which is good news. The question is, how does that lead to a person sinning less? I mean, that's how it opens. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? In other words, if God's grace can always triumph over sin, then won't that lead to a person just sinning more, seeing that God's grace will always cover the sin?

Now, logically, that makes a lot of sense. Biblically, it makes no sense at all. I think the question's being raised not because someone's looking for an excuse to sin, though Christians do look for an excuse to sin. You begin to notice it when they redefine sin as a mistake. It was just a mistake.

No, it was a sin. And once you have that redefinition happening, it's very easy then to not commit sins, but to just do your own thing. I don't think the person here is looking for an excuse to sin. I think what he's doing is he's raising the question that if God's grace always covers sin, then won't that lead to a believer just sinning all the time because he can get away with it? Makes sense, right? That if God's grace is always going to triumph over sin, then why not sin? Because God's grace will always triumph over it. In other words, isn't this giving a good reason to sin and get away with it?

Paul clears it up straight away. That's not what the grace of God is for. It's an incorrect interpretation, a misunderstanding to believe that God's grace will ever lead a person to sin.

In Titus, it says that the grace of God is its own teacher. And what that means is, is that a person who is saved, having received the grace of God, that that very grace within their life will teach them to say no to ungodliness. Go read Titus. Without any teacher or preacher or pastor or elder, just by the very grace of God alone in their life, that grace will teach them to say no to ungodliness. So grace doesn't lead a person to sin. It leads them away from sin. Grace doesn't promote sin. It leads a person away from sin. And whenever you hear a person saying, as they commit a sin, well, it's one of those gray areas, God is gracious. That's not what grace is for. Okay? How many times have we heard that? Well, God is gracious. He'll forgive it. Well, you're misunderstanding what grace is for. Grace is separating a person from their sin so that they don't continue in it, rather than constantly forgiving them of their sin because they continue in it. That's really important, that grace is what you receive upon your separation from an old master that just wants to ruin your life.

[10 : 39] Now, there are reasons why believers are tempted to sin, and we get to see that in the latter part of this chapter and, of course, into chapter 7. But think of this chapter as a chapter describing the way to godliness. Not so much a chapter on how to sin and get away with it, but rather a chapter on how to pursue godliness, how to battle with sin. Now, here's the point.

God, all true believers will not continue in sin, and all true believers can never be separated from Christ because of any sin that they commit. You know, as a pastor, I've had to deal with a few issues over the years. You know, parents where a member of their family has committed suicide, you know, does the last sin define you? No. Sin can damage you. Sin can cause you to do some terrible things.

But sin in a believer's life is a constant battle. But it can never separate you from Christ, if, of course, you are truly Christ's. And that's what Paul is trying to get to the heart of here. That the true believer battles with sin, he doesn't enjoy it. So here's point number one. Say no to sin. Sin, I describe sin to children in the Sunday school like this. Sin is saying no to God. I thought sin is effectively saying no to God. It's a lot more than that, but for a child in Sunday school, I think they can understand that. But you adults need to understand as well that every time you sin, you're effectively saying no to God. It's really quite that simple. But you can say no to sin now because God has saved you from that sin. He has separated you from the power of sin. In other words, sin no longer has dominion over your life. Sin can't make you do anything that you don't want to do. And so what that means is that when you sin now as a believer, you sin not because you have been made to by sin, but because you actually want to. And that's the challenge. You know, too often, you know, we want to take something that is true of our old life and adopt it into our new life. Was it the case that one day before I was saved that sin had total power over my life? That it caused me to do things that I didn't want to do and caused me to do many things that I actually wanted to do? Yeah, absolutely.

But for a person who is saved, sin has lost all power, all dominion, all rulership, all mastery over your life, which means this, that when you sin now, you have chosen to do so. And that's Paul's point that when Christ died to sin, you died in him to sin. The separation took place. The mastery is gone. And when Christ is risen from the dead, you too can look forward to the prospect of your resurrection because you have died to sin. Let me try and illustrate it a slightly different way.

Okay. We have a prison guard with us here this morning. I've never spent time in a prison behind the cells, but I've been in prisons, you know, visiting people. There's one thing that I've noticed, and that is that prisoners have very little freedom when you consider the type of freedom that you can have in the world. So imagine it like this, a prison guard telling a prisoner where he must go, where he must walk, what he must do. He tells him to get in his cell. He tells him to come out of his cell. Let's just say for a moment that the prisoner decided that he wanted to leave the prison.

[15 : 02] He's perfectly free to make the choice, but the choice doesn't come to anything because the prison guard is going to keep him exactly where he is because he is a prisoner, because he's under the master of the prison, the dominion of the prison. Now let's just imagine for a moment that that same man receives a pardon, and he's set free. And one day he's just walking through town, minding his own business, walking on the street. And the prison guard has a day off, and he happens to be walking along the same path in the opposite direction, and they meet. Can the prison guard ask the man to do anything that he likes? Absolutely. The prison guard can ask him to do anything, but here's the change.

Does the prisoner, who's now a free man, have to obey? Not for a moment, because he is free. That old connection of guard and prisoner is no longer there. That old connection of master and slave is no longer there. That old connection of dominion and rule and subjection is no longer there.

The man's free. And so if he does decide to do what the prison guard asks him to do, then he does so of his own free choice. What does that mean? It means very simply that as a Christian, you have been separated from your old master of sin. But when you get tempted, and when you feel that whatever it may be that causes you to sin in thought, word, and deed, you take that action of sinning by your own choice. And may not feel like your own choice, because you're palling up with an old friend that you have lived with for so long. But nevertheless, Paul makes it very clear. When a believer sins today, he does so because he is obeying the old master that he doesn't have to obey. He doesn't have to follow him. He doesn't have to do it.

But he does because he hasn't quite understood that he's a free man. He still wants to put himself back into that old relationship. And maybe he wants to put himself back in that old relationship as a means of saying, it's an excuse for what I do. You know, Paul is very sharp here on human behavior and how people think. So people are free. But here's the clause. They're free to obey Christ.

That's what the freedom is for. And so if a person doesn't obey Jesus, all that they're showing is that they still belong to the old master, is that they still belong to the old life.

[18 : 16] We're slaves to the one that we obey, says Paul, whether that be righteousness or ungodliness. We are slaves to the one that we obey. In other words, Paul is saying, you belong to the person that you listen to and follow. Some people listen to and follow, whether they know it or not, to the old man, the sinful self. And some people, because of salvation and justification, now listen to the new man, Christ Jesus, and have the strength to follow him because they have been set free from the old dominion that no longer has power over them. So shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

Not for a moment. Not for a moment, because that is not what grace is for. Let me try and change it a slightly different way. Who's the most godliest person in this room this morning?

No, not for a moment. Should be, the most godliest person in this room this morning is the person who sins the least. Who's the most ungodliest person in this room this morning?

It's the person who sins the most. Do you know what? When I was growing up, I used to get taken off to church and used to go off to Sunday school. I took a picture of my old Sunday school room once when I was down with my mum, staying with her for a bit. The building's dilapidated now. It used to be called the Rainbow Room. I have no idea because there's nothing really that colourful about it.

But, you know, we were taught things and those things stuck. You know, I used to think that godly people were those that had leather Bibles with gold edges. You know, they used to come in and used to and their Bibles were as big as a telephone book. And they used to sit there, you know.

[20 : 26] I also used to think that a godly person was the one who could quote scripture from almost any part of the Bible. Then I got a little bit older. And this man was doing it. I thought it was very impressive.

Until the point I asked him what it meant. Deafening silence. You know, we need to know what God's word means.

Holiness and godliness is not seen by having shiny shoes or a good haircut or a nice suit or a leather Bible with gold pages.

A godliness is seen in the person who sins less. A godliness is not seen in the person who has some kind of mystical aura around them.

That could be anything. A godliness is seen in the person who sins less. That's Paul's point. Who's the most godly person?

[21 : 33] The person who doesn't sin. Who's the least godly person? The one who sins all the time. Very simple. So here's the next thing that Paul gets to.

And that's the tension. Are we to sin because we're not under law but under grace? No, Paul says. Because we belong to Jesus.

Jesus doesn't sin. And you belong to Jesus. And therefore, you shouldn't sin. Because you belong to him. It seems to me that when a believer sins, they have to momentarily forget that they belong to Jesus.

Or they have to pretend, at least, that their relationship with Jesus is on hold. You know, this is why I've always been very confused at that question of, would you do that if Jesus was in the room?

As if Jesus is never in the room anyway. Isn't it the fact that Jesus is always present? But it does seem to me that when people sin, and we all sin, we do so because we forget our identity in Christ.

[22 : 48] We have to momentarily forget who we belong to. And we end up palling up with our old master. For good times or for bad times.

Here's the tension. That while it is true that you have a new nature in Christ, it is also true that you still have to live with the old nature. What a nightmare.

The old nature remains even though the new nature continues. And so the Christian life is a life full of tension. Full of freedom, but there is that tension between waking up in the morning and deciding whether or not you're going to live like Jesus Christ today.

How many of us have experienced that tension? You know, something's about to kick off, or it already has. Am I going to respond like Jesus, or am I going to respond like my old self?

You know, Roger Carswell used to say, you know what, you know what disagreement is in a relationship? He says, disagreement is nothing more than your old nature rubbing up against my old nature.

[24 : 03] Yeah, and I think he's, I think there's a point to that. We have to live with the old nature even though we have a new one, and that is a tension. That is something that the Christian has to fight with every day.

And so if godliness, or if grace, is saying no to ungodliness, then grace means that we have to say no to ungodliness every single day because of sin.

In other words, if we live with our old nature, even though we have a new nature, and we live with our old nature every day, then we have to say no to that nature every day.

The trouble is, as believers, we don't always say no every day. We say no on a few good days, and then suddenly the old nature gets us, and we just do what it says.

So Paul says, remember, you are slaves to the one that you obey, either slaves of righteousness or slaves of lawlessness. In other words, Paul's not saying, look, you're a new person with a new name.

- [25 : 15] It's not that, you know, you used to belong to him, and now you belong to Christ. No, he's saying you're a new person altogether. You're under no obligation to obey sin. You're under obligation to obey Christ because that's why you have been set free.

And the person who persists in sin, well, nothing good comes of that. It ruins your relationship. True believers can never be separated from Christ, but true believers can have their Christian life ruined by the sins that they commit.

Now, that's why Paul says in verse 17, but thanks be to God that you who are once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.

In other words, what he's saying is every time you sin, you do so because there is a disconnect between what you believe and what the Bible teaches.

It's as simple as that. The Bible teaches one thing, and you believe, and end up doing something quite different.

- [26 : 27] Again, sin in the Christian life cannot be defended because God is gracious. I mean, how many times have I heard that? Well, you know, it's one of those areas.

It's really not. It goes back to, you know, like Paul says in verse 17, become an obedient to the standard of teaching. It's not just obedience to the standard of teaching.

It's very clear what we're obedient to. Or ought to be. But how many times do people excuse the sin of others by accusing the person that's pointing out the sin as not being very gracious?

It's not very graceful. Not very gracious. Total misunderstanding of God's grace. God's grace teaches a person to say no to ungodliness.

So very important. So grace, Paul says, grace here never gives the believer a reason or an excuse to sin.

- [27 : 34] Rather, grace gives the believer the ability to say no to sin. Here's the exhortation. Number one, sin is always going to take us in the direction away from Jesus, and grace will always take us in the direction towards Jesus.

Number two, the aim of the Christian life is not to stop sinning. If it were, and you did manage to stop sinning, then what would you do?

The aim of the Christian life is not to stop sinning. Rather, the aim of the Christian life is to pursue godliness in which you will stop sinning. Sinning will come to an end as you pursue godliness and become like Christ.

And what that means is this, that Christians are not perfect, they never will be perfect until the day Christ returns. So the church is full of imperfect people, some more imperfect than others, but all imperfect.

You know, I love that line in George Orwell's Animal Farm. You know, we're all equal. Just some of us are more equal than others.

- [28 : 51] The reality is, is that we're all imperfect. Some of us are more imperfect than others, partly due to the fact that we spend more time sinning than we do trying to live by God's grace.

But this isn't a valuation count. This is really about how do we pursue godliness as a believer? How do we, in other words, sin less rather than sin more as we live our Christian life?

What that means also then is that you can say no to godliness every single day. And you will have to say no to ungodliness every single day as you live the Christian life.

Difficult? Extremely difficult. Difficult in some areas more than others? Yeah, absolutely. Here's the final thought. So, several years ago, I spent a long time reading Proverbs to understand why people make decisions.

I used to think it was very easy that decisions were based on knowledge. until I read Proverbs and realized that very little about decision making is based on knowledge.

[30 : 11] Decision making is based on what you fear the most and what you love the most. Every decision you make will be a reflection of what you love the most.

But what you love the most may not be what you think. Hence why you make decisions that lead you away from Christ. Because even though you proclaim you love Christ the most, your decisions and the resulting consequences say something quite different.

The other thing is fear. People make far more decisions out of fear than they realize. It normally turns up in loss aversion.

You know, we tend to think that greed is the biggest, dangerous sin. I don't think greed is positively. I think greed is negatively. In other words, we make the decisions we do in life out of fear of losing.

We don't want to lose. You take the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus. He has everything. Jesus tells him to give it all away, give it to the poor and to come and follow him. And it says because he had much, he didn't.

[31 : 23] Was he being greedy? No, he wasn't wanting any more than what he had. But his decision to not follow Jesus came out of the fear of losing what he had.

You think about it. How many decisions do you make out of fear and love? I think all of them. All of them.

But it all comes down at the end of the day to what you want to hold on to and love the most. Or rather, what you love the most. So, every decision you make will be in line with what you love the most.

But what you love the most may not be Jesus. It ought to be. And that's where your devotion to him comes in.

It's not about what you know to be right or what you know to be wrong. It really is about whether or not you are a slave to the one that you obey. Jesus, that is.

[32 : 28] Not lawlessness. And so, we know what love is. Romans 5. This is what love is. That Christ laid down his life for us.

Look at what he lost in order to gain you. Ask grace. that's grace.

The willing laying down of your very self for the desire of the other. That's what Jesus did.

Preach and every one of us here. That's grace. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.