

Free from Sin, Part 1

Introduction

A. The Slavery of Sin

Jesus said, *"Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin"* (John 8:34, NASB). Everyone who enters the world comes under sin's tyranny. Sin controls man's thoughts, words, and actions. The apostle Paul said the believers in Rome "were the servants [Gk., δουλοσ, "bondslaves"] of sin" (Rom. 6:17, 20). Paul went on to say that the ultimate result of being a slave to sin is death (vv. 21- 23).

To be a slave to sin is a horrifying thing. Dr. Donald Guthrie has been quoted as saying that sin "is a debt, a burden, a thief, a sickness, a leprosy, a plague, a poison, a serpent, a sting: everything that man hates it is; a load of curses, and calamities beneath whose crushing, most intolerable pressure, the whole creation groaneth.... Who is the hoary sexton that digs man a grave? Who is the painted temptress that steals his virtue? Who is the murderess that destroys his life? Who is this sorceress that first deceives, and then damns his soul?--Sin. Who with icy breath, blights the fair blossoms of youth? Who breaks the hearts of parents? Who brings old men's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave?--Sin.

"Who, by a more hideous metamorphosis than Ovid even fancied, changes gentle children into vipers, tender mothers into monsters, and their fathers into worse than Herods, the murderers of their own innocents?--Sin. Who casts the apple of discord on household hearts? Who lights the torch of war, and bears it blazing over trembling lands? Who by division in the church, rends Christ's seamless robe?--Sin. Who is this Delilah that sings the Nazarite asleep, and delivers up the strength of God into the hands of the uncircumcised? Who, winning smiles on her face, honeyed flattery on her tongue, stands in the door to offer the sacred rites of hospitality, and when suspicion sleeps, treacherously pierces our temples with a nail? What fair Siren is this, who, seated on a rock by the deadly pool, smiles to deceive, sings to lure, kisses to betray, and flings her arms around our neck, to leap with us into perdition?--Sin. Who turns the soft and gentlest heart to stone? Who hurls reason from her lofty throne, and impels sinners, mad as Gadarene swine, down the precipice, into a lake of fire?-- Sin" (cited in Elan Foster's *New Encyclopedia of Prose Illustrations* [N.Y.: T.Y. Crowell, 1877], p. 696).

Sin is a life-wrecking, soul-damning reality that clings to man like incurable cancer to the human breast. Men struggle to be free from sin, but they cannot. They try to flee from guilt, but no one can find relief.

B. The Solution to Sin

The greatest gift God could ever give to man is freedom from sin and right standing with Him. What a joy to fulfill all that man was intended for when God originally created him.

Romans 6:15-23 describes how to gain freedom from sin. This portion of Scripture provides tremendous comfort and is a great cause for rejoicing. We place our faith in the

finished work of Jesus Christ, we are "made free from sin" (vv. 18, 22). Deliverance is available to all who are haunted by their sin.

Lesson

In the book of Romans, Paul discusses the great doctrines of justification (chaps. 3-5) and sanctification (chaps. 6-8). In Romans 6:1-14 Paul unfolds the reality that believers are made holy, and in Romans 6:15-23, he describes their freedom from sin. He is approaching the same doctrine in both a positive way (holiness), and a negative way (freedom from sin). They are simply two sides of the same coin. Paul is looking at the doctrine of sanctification from two different perspectives. In verses 15-23 Paul explains that believers are sanctified because they have become slaves to God. Therefore they can no longer be slaves to sin. Paul's point in both sections of Romans 6 is to show that a regenerated person cannot continue in the same pattern of unrighteousness that characterized his life before he was saved.

I. THE ANTAGONIST (v. 15a)

"What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?"

I have essentially used the same major outline points as in the first section of Romans 6 (see pp. xx-xx) because Paul's argument in the second half follows the same pattern of thought as the first.

A. The Question

The first question of the antagonist was, *"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"* (v. 1). The second question is much like the first: *"Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?"* (v. 15). The idea in the two questions is virtually the same. Does the doctrine of salvation by grace give license to unrestrained sin? The legalist of Paul's day could not imagine that salvation is by grace through faith alone, apart from any works of the law.

B. The Quarrel

When the apostle Paul explained the doctrine of salvation by grace to the Jewish people, they rejected it because they believed for centuries that a person had to earn his way into heaven by good works. In their thinking, Paul's teaching provided liberty to sin. There have always been those who criticize the doctrine of grace because they say it leads to lawlessness. But simply because it attracts such criticism doesn't mean it should be altered to accommodate the fallen thinking of man.

1. Legalists from the past

When Paul preached the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in the territory known as Galatia, he encountered much objection. The Jewish leaders said you must be circumcised and keep all the laws of Moses before coming to Christ. But Paul responded, *"A man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified"* (Gal. 2:16, NASB). He also said to the Galatians, *"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another; but there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be*

accursed" (Gal. 1:6-8). Salvation by grace is the true gospel. Salvation by works is an accursed gospel.

2. Libertines from the present

Many today have taken the doctrine of grace and have instead made it a doctrine of antinomianism--an attitude of lawlessness. They believe God's grace allows them to sin without consequence. I have had conversations with persons who claim to have received "super grace," thinking they don't have to confess their sin. They assume God doesn't care what they do because grace is free, and that allows them to live anyway they desire. Many sins go under the name of grace. However a person's constant state of sinfulness proves he was never under God's grace, because the grace of God inevitably transforms a life.

So, the antagonist in Romans 6:15 was asking, "*Shall we deliberately, persistently, habitually sin because we are not under the law, but under grace?*" That betrays a complete misunderstanding of what the apostle Paul was saying. He did not mean that believers were no longer responsible to obey God's Word; his point was that we aren't under a system of law, needing to produce our own righteousness. We're to accept the free gift of God's grace. Paul's hypothetical questioner asks this: "*Does grace free us to sin at will?*"

II. THE ANSWER (v. 15b)

"God forbid."

Paul's answer to the antagonist is the same as in verse 1: *μη γένοιτο*, the strongest possible negative response in the Greek language. Although the King James Version translates Paul's response as "God forbid," it would better be translated, "Impossible!" "Ridiculous!" or "Absolutely not!" To the apostle Paul, the antagonist's question was an utterly unacceptable thought. To even ask a question like that would cast serious doubt on the questioner's search for truth.

III. THE AXIOM (v. 16)

A. The Assumption (v. 16a)

"Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey"

An axiom is a general truth that is self-evident. It doesn't need proof because it is an obvious fact. The phrase "know ye not" tells us verse 16 is an axiom. Paul is saying that if you sign up to serve a certain master, you are bound to obey that master. That is what slavery is.

B. The Application (v. 16b)

"Whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"

Paul here personifies two masters: sin (disobedience) and obedience. Whom do men ultimately obey or disobey? God. Some people yield themselves as servants of disobedience against God and some yield themselves as servants of obedience to God. If you are the slave of sin, that leads to death, but if you are the slave of obedience, that leads to righteousness. Theologian Charles Hodge said that men

hurry on "from one degrading service to another, until it wrecks their ruin" (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.], p. 206).

As Paul said earlier in the book of Romans, men are either in Adam or in Christ (Rom. 5:12-20). They are either under the reign of sin or the reign of grace (Rom. 5:21). In Romans 6:16 Paul is saying you serve either sin or obedience. There is no middle ground.

1. The believer's true service

Another axiomatic principle is this: you cannot serve two masters. Jesus said, "*No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other*" (Matt. 6:24). It is the nature of slavery that you cannot have two masters barking orders. Once you've chosen your master, you are bound to obey him.

2. The believer's true submission

Paul uses the analogy of slavery in Romans 6:15-23. He is saying that when a person becomes a Christian, he submits himself to God through Christ. There is no salvation apart from conscious submission to Christ on the part of the believer.

Before you come to Christ, you are a slave to sin, but when you receive Christ, you become a slave to the Lord. The person who comes to God through Jesus Christ is not only ethically bound to obey, but made to obey as well. Believers are "*created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (Eph. 2:10).

Many people have misunderstood Romans 6 because they don't realize that God brings to pass practically what He declares about believers positionally. Salvation begins with the creative act of God in totally remaking the believer's nature, and then moves to an ethical responsibility on the part of the believer.

3. The believer's true sanctification

The apostle Paul was not giving a command in Romans 6, but the actual state of being of believers. When someone is saved, he is transformed and then is progressively sanctified. In Romans 6:1-14 Paul describes the believer's transformation through the analogy of Christ's death and resurrection, and in verses 15- 23 he uses the analogy of slavery to describe the same reality.

Even though we as believers are limited by our earthly bodies and can therefore experience only imperfect holiness, we will nonetheless obey because we are new creatures in Christ. Obedience is a certainty in the life of a person who is truly justified. That is not to say believers won't ever sin or that at times sin won't appear to dominate, but obedience will be manifest even if obscured at some points. Should a Christian sin, his new nature will hate that sin, and yearn for righteousness, like the apostle Paul did in Romans 7:15-25.

In Colossians 1:21 Paul says, "*You, that were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight.*"

Commentator Matthew Henry said, "All the children of men are either the servants of God, or the servants of sin; these are the two families. Now, if we would know to

which of these two families we belong, we must inquire to which of these two masters we yield our obedience" (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, vol. 6 [Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.], p. 405).

4. The believer's true salvation

The person who continues in continual and habitual sin in the same manner before he claimed to have received Christ is not a Christian. Redemption will manifest itself in a righteous life-style. This is what the apostle John had to say about that:

- a. 1 John 1:6--*"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."*
- b. 1 John 2:4--*"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."*
- c. 1 John 3:9-10--*"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil. Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."*

According to Romans 6 a believer will not continue in sin for two reasons: (1) He is united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and has therefore died to the power of sin, and (2) He is the slave of God and will therefore obey Him.

IV. THE ARGUMENT (vv. 17-22)

A. The Position (vv. 17-18)

In verse 17 Paul explains the axiom of verse 16. He then applies it to the believer's life in verses 17-22. He does so by drawing an extended contrast between slavery to sin and slavery to righteousness.

1. The source of salvation (v. 17a)
"God be thanked"

We owe thanks to God whenever discussing the topic of salvation because He is the source of the Gift of salvation. People don't come to Christ because they are so intelligent. They think their way into heaven. No one comes to Christ just because they are intellectually convinced of its validity. God may appeal to the intellect in the process, but no one comes to faith in Christ for any reason other than God's sovereign will drawing him to salvation. In John 6:44 Jesus says, *"No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him."* Paul said, *"I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world"* (Rom. 1:8). God is always to be thanked because He is the author of salvation. As you study the New Testament, you will find it emphasizes that God is the author of salvation. The transformation from death to life--from sin to God--is one that God Himself works. He alone is to be thanked for His most precious gift!

2. The servant of sin (v. 17b)
"Ye were the servants of sin."

The Greek tense in this phrase is imperfect, which implies the Roman believers were continually in a state of slavery to sin. Although many do not want to admit it, that is the condition of every man before salvation. Sin's dominance began with Adam and Eve, and continues to this day. Every man and woman is born in slavery to sin. Paul said, *"There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes"* (Rom. 3:10-18).

Unregenerate men think they are free. When confronted with the gospel of Jesus Christ, many are afraid it will restrict their liberty. But the truth is, unregenerate men don't have any liberty! There is no such thing as real freedom for an unregenerate person. All unbelievers are slaves to sin.

3. The standard of subjection (v. 17c)
"Ye have obeyed"

Paul has used the Greek word *ὑπακούετε* (obeyed) or a form of that word for the fifth time in this portion of Scripture (cf. also vv. 12, 16, and 17). Paul is speaking about the obedience of faith. A Christian believes in Jesus Christ as an initial act of obedience and then follows through with a life of obedience. We are always to be submitting to the Master. Obedience is the expression of that faith. All who are truly justified are obedient to God, and the longer you live with Christ, the more obedient you will become.

- a. Titus 2:11-14--Paul said, *"The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people of his own, zealous of good works."*
- b. 1 Peter 1:22--Peter said, *"Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth."* When a person comes to Jesus Christ, it purifies his soul. He becomes a new creation, resulting in a life of obedience.

4. The sincerity of submission (v. 17d)
"From the heart."

Salvation is both an external and an internal reality. It isn't something God declares on the outside without any resultant change on the inside. True salvation does not come from water baptism, church membership, religious activity, or taking a spiritual pilgrimage. Salvation comes only by faith in Christ, which results in obedience from the heart. Faith is an inward reality that produces outward obedience.

Even though salvation is the work of God, that doesn't mean a person is passively transported from slavery to sin to slavery to God. If a person becomes saved, he will know it! Some theologians say a person can be redeemed and not know it because it happened forensically and God simply hadn't announced it yet. But in Scripture we see that salvation never occurs apart from a commitment to Christ. In Paul's words, it is obedience from the heart. Being once a slave to sin, a person who obeys Christ's call to salvation eagerly makes God his new Master.

5. The shape of service (v. 17e)

"That form of doctrine which was delivered you."

When someone obeys the gospel, it is not some nebulous and vague belief, but a belief in the doctrine of God's good news-- the body of saving truth. The way Paul framed his thinking in this verse is rich in meaning and the King James Version missed his point. The last part of verse 17 should read, "That form of doctrine into which you were delivered," not "which was delivered you."

The Greek word for "form" in verse 17 is $\tau\upsilon\pi\omicron\omega$, which has many different uses in the New Testament. $\tau\upsilon\pi\omicron\omega$ *Tupos* and its various forms are used sixteen times in the New Testament. Here it refers to a casting mold, a cast or frame into which molten material is poured to take its shape. The mold in this case is in the shape of a servant of righteousness.

When a person is born, he is poured into a mold in the shape of sin. But those who are obedient to the gospel become conformed to Christ, who is the pattern for the mold of righteousness. When God saw man as a slave to sin He melted him down in His great grace poured him into a new form or mold. Paul said to Timothy, *"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Tim. 1:13).

Believers have been melted down by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and poured into a new mold. When the metal has cooled, we are lifted out and the new shape is that of a slave of Christ. The mold into which believers have been poured is the form of doctrine--the saving truth of the gospel of Christ. That is what Paul meant when he said, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity" (Rom. 12:2, Phillips). The gospel teaching you submit to when you become a Christian stamps you with its image.

*** The Stairway of Hopelessness**

Christians are commanded to obey the gospel (2 Thess. 1:6-9). They must conform to the doctrine set forth in the Word of God. You cannot become a Christian by simply believing whatever you choose.

I once spoke at a luncheon for the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International on issues within the Charismatic Movement. Afterwards a man said to me, "I've been in this group for a long time and I'll tell you how I think you can get

to God. You see, there are many steps and at the top there is a door and behind it is this guy named Jesus. What you really want to do is try to make it up the stairs and get through the door and then hope this guy Jesus lets you in. As you're on your way up the stairs, you've got all these preachers and movements yelling at you, but you just continue going up the stairs. I call it the 'stairway of hope.' That's what I think the gospel is." I said to him, "Sir, bless your heart, you are not a Christian, and your stairway is hopeless. You need to depend on Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. You have no idea what it means to be saved."

If you expect to see Jesus some day, you cannot try to invent your own mold. There is a sound form of doctrine, the teaching of the gospel, which says you must confess your sins, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and affirm His death and resurrection. You must affirm His lordship, His right to rule over you. That's the true gospel. If you are to come out in the image of a servant of God, you must be poured into His mold and not your own?

6. The servant of the Savior (v. 18)

"Being, then, made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."

The apostle Paul was not saying that Christians are free from sinning or the temptation of sin. He was saying that those who are truly saved are free from the tyranny of sin. We are for the first time in our lives, slaves of righteousness. Before a person comes to Christ, he can do nothing but sin. Even an unbeliever's good deeds fall into the category of sin because they're not done for the glory of God. When men do good deeds just because they want to be good men, that's tantamount to pride. Sinful men don't even know they are slaves to sin.

Believers, however, have been made free from sin, and have become the servants of righteousness. Only those who believe in Jesus Christ are truly free from sin, for only Christians can choose whether to sin or not. We are free to do right for the first time in our lives. That's the essence of Christian liberty. Those who contend Christian liberty gives us the freedom to sin don't understand true Christian liberty. The servant of sin has no choice but to sin, while the servant of righteousness is the only human being who has the freedom to do right for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Focusing on the Facts

1. Everyone who enters the world comes under sin's _____.
2. What is the ultimate result of being a slave to sin?
3. True or False: The greatest gift God could ever give a human being is to be happy and successful.
4. In what way does the apostle Paul approach the doctrine of sanctification?
5. What is Paul's point in both sections of Romans 6?
6. Why does Paul begin verses 1 and 15 with an accusation against the doctrine of salvation by grace?
7. The Jewish people as a whole rejected the doctrine of salvation by grace because they believed for centuries that a person had to _____ his way into heaven by _____.

8. What charge is the doctrine of God's grace always liable to?
9. What problems did Paul encounter with the doctrine of grace in the territory of Galatia?
10. What is meant by the term "super grace"? What can we conclude about the salvation behind this type of thinking?
11. What is Paul's answer to the antagonist's question in Romans 6:15?
12. What axiomatic principle does Paul give in verse 16?
13. True or False: We serve either sin or obedience. There is no middle ground.
14. There is no salvation apart from _____ to Christ on the part of the believer.
15. Is obedience to God an option for the believer? Explain.
16. What can we assume is the spiritual status of one who professes faith in Christ, yet continues in habitual sin? Support your answer with Scripture.
17. Who is the source of our salvation? How should we respond (Rom. 6:17)?
18. True or False: All unregenerate people are slaves to sin and therefore have no real freedom.
19. A Christian believes in Jesus Christ as an initial act of _____ and then follows through with a life of _____.
20. What does faith produce?
21. What will occur when someone obeys Christ's call to salvation?
22. Explain how the Greek word $\tau\upsilon\pi\omega\sigma$ is used in Romans 6:17 and describe its significance for the believer.
23. True or False: You can become a Christian by believing whatever you choose.
24. What is the content of the gospel?
25. What is Christian liberty?

Pondering the Principles

1. Romans 6:16 says we will obey either sin or righteousness. Whose slave are you? Study the following texts and ask God to make you a servant of the Master, Jesus Christ: Joshua 24:14-27, Matthew 4:8-11, and 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9.
2. Even though believers have been made righteous by God, we are not perfect. Nevertheless we are commanded to obey God on a daily basis. Are you obedient to God on a daily basis? Is the pattern of your life one of righteousness? Memorize the following verses and ask God to conform you more to the image of Christ: Matthew 5:6, 1 Timothy 6:10-12, and Hebrews 12:14.
3. Believers have been melted down by God and poured into a new mold. We have been reshaped by the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. Over the course of the next week, spend time with God and ask for a fresh start. List on a piece of paper things you do that continually displease the Lord. When you are finished, look up 1 John 1:9 and write it across the page. Tear up the paper to symbolically show your break with sin. After you have destroyed the paper, study the following verses and ask God to mold you into what He desires: Isaiah 64:6-8, 45:9; and Jeremiah 18:1-6.