

## Free from Sin, Part 2

### Introduction

Sin is the most devastating, debilitating, and degenerating power that ever entered into the human race. Except by the intervening grace of God, it would send everyone to an eternal hell. God instructed the children of Israel to rid themselves of sin by calling it the "accursed thing" (Josh. 7:13). Sin is compared to the venom of snakes (Deut. 32:33) and the stench of death (Ps. 5:9). It is defined as a transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). Scripture characterizes sin in many ways.

### A. Sin is Defiling

Sin is a pollution of the soul. It is to the soul what scars are to a beautiful face, what a stain is to silk, and what smog is to an azure sky. Sin makes the soul black with guilt. It is described as a bloody menstrual cloth (Isa. 30:22), a plague (1 Kgs. 8:38), and filthy garments (Zech. 3:3-4). God Himself loathes false teachers who lead others to sin (Zech. 11:8). The apostle Paul calls sin "*all filthiness of the flesh and spirit*" (2 Cor. 7:1).

### B. Sin is Rebellious

Sin tramples God's holy Word. It rebels against God's law and is God's would-be murderer. If sin had its way, it would eliminate God or at least try to un-god God.

### C. Sin is Ungrateful

Paul said that although all know about God, "*they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful*" (Rom. 1:21). Sin is like King David's son Absalom, who kissed his father yet plotted treason against him (2 Sam. 14:33; 15:6). Having been the recipient of his father's goodness, treasures, and blessings, he then turned away and became a traitor. Likewise the sinner indulges in God's goodness, treasures, and blessings in the world around him; yet he too betrays God by serving Satan, who is God's archenemy. The sinner abuses God's good gifts.

### D. Sin is Incurable

Jeremiah said, "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil*" (Jer. 13:23). A sinner has no more chance of changing his nature than a leopard has changing his spots or a black man his skin. Paul said, "*Unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled*" (Titus 1:15). Puritan John Flavel said, "All the tears of a penitent sinner, should be shed as many as there have fallen drops of rain since the creation cannot wash away sin! The everlasting burnings in hell cannot purify the flaming conscience from the least sin." Sin is so utterly devastating that even an eternity in hell cannot purge the least of it.

### E. Sin is Abominable

God said of sin, "*Do not this abominable thing that I hate*" (Jer. 44:4).

### F. Sin is Overpowering

Sin is so overpowering that it characterizes the sinner like blackness characterizes night. Sin dominates the mind, will, and affections (Jer. 44:15-17, John 3:19-21).

### **G. Sin is Satanic**

Paul said that sinners walk *"according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air"* (Eph. 2:2). Unregenerate man is a child of disobedience. Jesus said to the Jewish religious leaders, *"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do"* (John 8:44).

### **H. Sin is Miserable**

Job said, *"Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward"* (Job 5:7). Paul said that *"creation was made subject to vanity,"* which is emptiness or uselessness (Rom. 8:20). Sin takes away man's honor and peace. It ultimately takes away meaning from life.

### **I. Sin is Damning**

The apostle John said, *"I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hades delivered up the dead that were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire"* (Rev. 20:12-15).

## **Review**

- I. THE ANTAGONIST** (v. 15a)
- II. THE ANSWER** (v. 15b)
- III. THE AXIOM** (v. 16)
- IV. THE ARGUMENT** (vv. 17-22)
  - A. The Position** (vv. 17-18)

## **Lesson**

### **B. The Practice** (v. 19)

Paul has moved from speaking about the believer's position in Christ to the believer's practice in Christ. He previously stated in verse 18 that believers have become the servants of righteousness. Now in verse 19 he says we are to live righteously.

#### 1. The Accommodation (v. 19a)

*"I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh"*

##### a. The form

The apostle Paul wanted his readers to realize he was using the analogy of masters and slaves to accommodate their humanness. He was attempting to communicate the eternal truths of God to the finite minds of men. In any human analogy, the logic breaks down at some points. We are to take an analogy only as far as Scripture takes it.

##### b. The flesh

The word "flesh" in verse 19 parallels the term "mortal body" in verse 12. They along with "body of sin" and "members" describe man's mortality, where sin

finds its base of operation. It is not the new you--the new creation in Christ--that gives way to sin, but the sin that dwells in your flesh. The flesh is that part of man that is influenced by sin. As long as we are encased in fallen, fleshly bodies, we will struggle with sin.

2. The alienation (v. 19b)  
*"Ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity, and to iniquity"*

a. The pollution of sin

All unbelievers are in a state of sin and have no choice but to sin. Yielding to sin comes naturally to them. The Greek word translated "uncleanness" means, "inward pollution," and "iniquity" means "outward lawlessness." Paul was saying that unbelievers are in the family of sin, polluted on the inside and evil on the outside. They continually yield themselves to sin both internally and externally.

b. The progression of sin

There is a progression in verse 19: first yielding the body as a servant to sin, then to uncleanness, and then to iniquity. Sin inevitably leads to more sin; it is like a cancer reproducing itself. Sin is a cruel master. Nineteenth century British author Oscar Wilde was secretly involved in homosexual relationships along with other deviant behavior. When he was found out, he said, "I forgot that what a man is in secret, he will some day shout aloud from the housetop."

Sinclair Lewis was the toast of the literary world. His novel *Elmer Gantry* made mockery of Christian preachers and evangelism, the title character being a Bible-thumping, Jesus-preaching alcoholic, fornicator, and thief. However few people know that Sinclair Lewis died as an alcoholic in a third-rate clinic outside the city of Rome. He had been totally devastated by sin. No one gets away with sin. It will reproduce itself until it casts a person into hell. The apostle Paul was saying that's the way the Roman believers used to be when they were under the bondage of sin.

3. The affirmation (v. 19c)

*"Yield your members servants to righteousness, unto holiness."*

In verse 19 Paul is not talking about the believer's nature. A person is either by nature a servant of sin or a servant of God (vv. 17-18). He is emphasizing that a believer's life-style must match his new nature. Since believers don't have to sin, don't sin! As we were once 100 percent yielded to sin, so we should now be 100 percent yielded to righteousness. Since we are freed to do right, Paul urges us to take advantage of that privilege:

a. Romans 12:1--*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."* Paul didn't tell believers to present their souls, but their bodies--the unredeemed part of man. He doesn't say to present your inner man because that has been transformed. The believer is to present his body because that is where the potential battleground is for sin.

- b. 1 Corinthians 9:27--"*I buffet [beat] my body and make it my slave*" (NASB). A believer must keep his sinful body under control.
- c. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5--"*This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication; that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of sensuality, even as the Gentiles who know not God.*" The body has a tendency to drag believers into evil.  
Being a Christian doesn't make you perfect, but you actually do have the capacity not to sin. Sometimes our fallen nature tempts us to sin and we give in, but we don't have to. Not only is there a progression of evil in verse 19, but also a progression of righteousness. As iniquity leads to more iniquity, so righteousness leads to spiritual maturity. And the more righteous you become, the more you will gain victory over sin.

\* **Serving a New Master**

Commentator Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "As you go on living the righteous life and practicing it with all your might, energy, and time, you will find that the process that went on before in which you went from bad to worse and became viler and viler is entirely reversed. You will become cleaner and cleaner and purer and purer and holier and holier and more and more conformed to the image of the Son of God." That is exactly the difference Paul describes in Romans 6:15-23 in being mastered by either the Lord or sin. Believers progress to greater and greater levels of holiness while sinners regress lower and lower to the depths of depravity. No one stands still. Christians who allow themselves to sin under a deficient understanding of grace or simply give in to the flesh will find a universal principle working with believers and unbelievers alike: sin leads to more sin.

When Israel was in Egypt, God gave Pharaoh a command: "*Let my people go*" (Ex. 7:16). But most people don't quote the rest of the verse, which says, "*Let my people go, **that they may serve me***" (emphasis added). People do not correctly understand God's Word if they don't understand obedience. God didn't say to Pharaoh, "Let My people go so they can roam around and do whatever they want the rest of their lives." God delivered the children of Israel from the bondage of their cruel masters in Egypt to become committed to a new Master. Unfortunately, it took a whole generation to learn that. We haven't been freed from sin to do only what we want, but what He wants.

**C. The Promise** (vv. 20-22)

1. Slavery to sin

a. Delusion (v. 20)

*"When ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness."*

By saying that unbelievers are "free from righteousness" Paul meant that unbelievers cannot respond in righteousness to God because they do not feel

the need to do so. Righteousness makes no demands on unbelievers because they have no capacity to respond righteously. That's why it does no good to tell unregenerate people to abide by God's laws.

1) People are sinful

Unregenerate people need to recognize they are utterly incapable of keeping the law of God. That is a key point in evangelism for only then can a person throw himself upon the mercy of Jesus Christ for salvation. There are so many who don't know Christ, yet think they are good people. However the truth is they are slaves to sin. They assume that if they do good things, God will be satisfied, but He is pleased only when we obey Him.

2) People are self-righteous

The apostle Paul says this about the folly of self-righteousness: *"What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse [dung], that I may win Christ"* (Phil. 3:7-8). A person is either a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness. There is no middle ground.

b. Deceit (v. 21a)

*"What fruit had ye then in those things of which ye are now ashamed?"*

Paul was asking the believer, "What fruit did you have in your unregenerate state?" The answer is none. Many without Christ boast about their unrighteous exploits, but when they come to Christ, the past is simply cause for shame.

I have noted a sense of shame in the testimonies of those with sordid backgrounds. They may want to share how the Lord delivered them from drugs or crime, but they don't relish in their sin anymore. So Paul's question in Romans 6:15 now becomes more clear. Why would someone want to come to Christ and then continue sinning when the only fruit of that sin is something to be utterly ashamed of? John Calvin said, "As soon as the godly begin to be enlightened by the Spirit of Christ and the preaching of the gospel, they freely acknowledge that their whole past life which they lived without Christ is worthy of condemnation. So far from trying to excuse themselves, they are in fact ashamed of themselves. Indeed, they go farther, and continually bear their disgrace in mind, so that the shame of it may make them more truly and willingly humble before God."

Sin does nothing but bring shame. A true believer looks back on his life before Jesus Christ and sees a lot to be ashamed of. However people who don't know Christ tend to glory in the things believers are ashamed of.

c. Death (v. 21b)

*"The end of those things is death."*

Why would a Christian, who is justified by grace through faith, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and given the choice to do right, ever choose to sin? Why would someone choose to sin when sin only begets more sin, then shame, and finally

death? The devil tries to get us to sin, but that leads to spiritual death. Certainly sin many times leads to physical death, but Paul here is specifically referring to the second death, which is the death of the soul.

## 2. Slavery to God

### a. Freedom (v. 22a)

*"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God"*

It is a marvelous thing that God doesn't hold the penalty of sin against the believer. Believers are doubly blessed because God also frees us from the tyranny of sin. Just knowing that a believer doesn't have to sin is a great reality. Paul said, "As David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness apart from works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom. 4:6-8). Being free from sin doesn't mean you are sinless; it simply means you don't have to sin if you choose not to. Sin's capacity to control a believer is forever severed because of Christ's finished work on the cross. Believers are now slaves (Gk., δουλοσ, "bondslave") of God.

### b. Fruit (v. 22b)

*"Ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."*

As opposed to the fruit of shame and death in verse 21, Paul now talks about the believer's fruit of holiness. He is being very matter-of-fact here: if a person is truly saved, holiness will result. There's no such thing as a fruitless Christian. You might have to look awhile to discover the fruit of righteousness in some believers, but some measure of fruit will be evident in every true believer. Paul defines a believer's fruit as "fruit unto holiness."

Holiness is an important word because it is God's most glorious attribute. Isaiah said, "I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:1-3). Holiness is the only attribute of God that is repeated three times in a row. Although believers cannot become God, we can be like Him when we walk in holiness.

### c. Fullness (v. 22c)

*"The end everlasting life."*

The fruit of unrighteousness is eternal death, but the fruit of righteousness is everlasting life. By "everlasting life" Paul wasn't just speaking about the quantity of life, but also a quality of life. Living forever means nothing unless life is worth living forever. Jesus said He came that we might have abundant life (John 10:10).

## V. THE ABSOLUTE (v. 23)

## A. The Law of Sin (v. 23a)

*"The wages of sin is death."*

### a. The inexorable law

There is a reason the sin principle in an unbeliever's life dominates him and leads him to vile behavior and ultimately to eternal death. There is also a reason that righteousness leads the believer to be holy and ultimately ushers him into the fullness of everlasting life. It's because there exists an absolute law that works without fail: "the wages of sin is death." God's inexorable law demands that the penalty for sin is eternal death. Just as the law of gravity demands that what goes up must come down, so sin must bring death. Since God made inexorable laws in the physical dimension, we should not be surprised that there are inexorable laws in the spiritual dimension. Those who continue in sin earn the wages of sin, which is eternal, spiritual death.

### b. The inevitable wages

The Greek word translated "wages" was commonly used of rations that were given to soldiers in military service in return for their duty. It was simply compensation for services rendered. Just as someone today would receive wages from an employer, so sinners must receive the wages of their sin--death. When God pronounces eternal hell on the unbelieving, it is because they have earned that sentence. It is just and fair because it is the proper compensation for sin. Justice demands payment. If you earn death by your sin, you will certainly receive it. Those who hope for pardon and deliverance apart from Christ are actually hoping that God will be unjust, but they are hoping for the impossible.

## B. The Gift of God (v. 23b)

*"The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord."*

This is the other side to the absolute law of God. If God gives the sinner his just due, then a believer receives something he does not deserve--eternal life. Eternal life is not a wage, but a gift. You cannot earn eternal life because it is a free gift. It can't be earned by good works, church attendance, philanthropy, or religious rituals. Paul said, *"By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God--not of works, lest any man should boast"* (Eph. 2:8-9). If you want what you deserve--death--God will give it to you, but if you want what you do not deserve--eternal life--God will give that to you as well. How? Verse 23 tells us: *"through Jesus Christ, our Lord."* This is Paul's great climax to the sixth chapter of Romans. There is no salvation apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Acts 4:12--Peter said, *"Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."*
2. John 10:7-9--Jesus said, *"I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."*
3. John 14:6--Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comeeth unto the Father, but by me."* That is the most narrow-minded statement ever made, but it also happens to be true!

There is nothing else to say to the world other than to offer them the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. To be made free from sin and guilt and to inherit eternal life, that is true freedom. Instead of having things to be ashamed of, a saved person is filled with thanksgiving to God. Instead of anticipating eternal death, a believer anticipates eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### \* **The Result of Grace**

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that cheap grace "amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.... [Costly grace] is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.... When [Martin Luther] spoke of grace, [he] always implied as a corollary that it cost him his own life, the life which was now subjected to the absolute obedience of Christ.... Happy

are they who, knowing that grace, can live in the world without being of it, who by following Jesus Christ, are so assured of their heavenly citizenship that they are truly free to live their lives in this world" (The Cost of Discipleship [N.Y.: Macmillan, 1959], pp. 47, 53, 60).

### **Conclusion**

Romans 6:1-14 teaches us that we are one with Christ because we have shared in His death, burial, and resurrection, and that we are to walk in newness of life. In Romans 6:15-23 we learn we have a new master. Salvation doesn't free you to sin: it frees you to do right for the first time in your life. Salvation takes unholy men and makes them holy. It is a call from sin to holiness. Any other kind of evangelism is incomplete. God is not looking for people who want to add Jesus to their sinful life-styles. Salvation is not addition; it is transformation. Jesus calls men to die to self and rise again to walk in newness of life. He is calling men who say no to their present master and yes to a new Master. God's grace covers any sin, but it never condones it. What does it mean to be a Christian? Romans 5 says it means to be secure; chapter 6 says it means to be free from sin.

### **Focusing on the Facts**

1. Describe what sin is and explain its effect.
2. What is the position of every Christian, and how is he to live?
3. What do the terms "flesh," "mortal body," "body of sin," and "members" refer to?
4. True or False: All unbelievers are in a state of sin and have no choice but to sin.
5. What progression does Paul pose in Romans 6:19?
6. As we were once \_\_\_\_\_ yielded to sin, so we should now be \_\_\_\_\_ yielded to righteousness.
7. What are the two kinds of slaveries Paul speaks of in verses 20-22?
8. \_\_\_\_\_ people need to recognize they are utterly incapable of keeping the law of God.
9. True or False: It's not accurate to say a person is either a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness. There is a middle ground.

10. What is the fruit of sin? Explain.
11. True or False: Sin's capacity to control a believer is forever severed because of Christ's finished work on the cross.
12. Can a person be truly saved and exhibit no fruit throughout his life? Explain.
13. What did the apostle Paul mean by the term "everlasting life" in verse 22?
14. What is the inexorable law that Paul gives in verse 23?
15. What is the penalty for sin? Is it fair? Explain.
16. True or False: Eternal life is not a gift, but a wage.
17. There is nothing else to say to the world other than to offer them the gift of \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_.
18. What do you need to clarify about salvation to keep from making your gospel presentation incomplete?

## **Pondering the Principles**

1. Sin is a devastating reality. If you fail to deal with it, it will destroy your life and send you to an eternal hell. Sin separates you from a potential relationship with God. Read the following verses and confess your sinfulness to God if you haven't already and ask Him to give you new life in Christ: Romans 3:23, 6:23, and 10:9-10.
2. In Romans 6:21 Paul said we are all ashamed of things we did before knowing Christ. But things are different now that we are Christians. Verse 22 says we're to reproduce fruit leading to holiness. Are you producing righteous fruit for God? Study the following passages, which speak of fruit-bearing, and ask God to produce His good work through you: Proverbs 11:30, Romans 7:4, Ephesians 2:8-10, Colossians 1:10, and James 3:13-18.