

Because of God's Grace, Believers Are Free

Romans 6:15-23

Romans 6:15-23 - *"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? ¹⁷ But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*

¹⁹ I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Background Notes

The Epistle to the Romans is Paul's masterpiece on the doctrine of salvation. In Romans we learn how a holy and righteous God can save unholy and unrighteous people. How is that possible? It's possible because the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world. Now God can save anyone and everyone who believes in Jesus. In Romans 1:16 Paul wrote, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes..."* So salvation is not attained by works, but by believing God. This is what saving faith is all about. It starts with believing God – what God has said and what God has done.

All this is covered in the first four chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. When we come to Romans 5, we move on to truth for the believer. In Romans 5-8, we have the great privileges of the justified believer. Look at Romans 5:1 *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."* Justified means to be declared righteous by God Himself!

In the first half of Romans 5 we learn about some of the great blessings and benefits of the package of salvation that God has given us. In the second half of the chapter we learn that Christ not only died as our substitute, but he died as our representative as well. As our substitute, Christ died for us. As our representative, we died in Christ. That is our spiritual position in Christ. In fact, in Romans 5 and 6 we learn that we're not only united with Christ at His death, but also in His

resurrection. This is the way that God sees us -- in Christ. We have died with Christ, we've been buried with Christ, and we've been raised with Christ. This is our spiritual position in Christ.

Doctrinal Points

1. The believer is no longer a slave of sin.

Because our salvation is a gift of God's grace (and we don't have to earn it by good works or by keeping the Law) there might be a tendency to say, "Well, we might as well go ahead and sin. After all, it's all covered by God's grace!" That is exactly the question that is raised in verse 15: *"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!"*

That question sounds very similar to the question back in Romans 6:1 - *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"* Notice the difference. In verse 1 the question is whether we should continue to practice sin so that God's grace may abound -- the more sin, the more grace. Look back at Romans 5:20 *"Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more..."* What is the answer here? The answer to this question (of course) is "Certainly NOT!" May it never be! Perish the thought! We're united with Christ in His death for sin, and we've been raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. How could we ever even think of such a thing as continue to practice sin so that grace may abound?!

In Romans 6:15 we don't have exactly the same question, even though it sounds quite similar. Here the question is not whether we should continue to sin, or practice sin, or if we should sin even just a little bit. After all, verse 14 says *"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."* That is, the power of sin in our lives as believers is broken. We are not under law, but we're under grace, and we are certainly not going to let sin reign in our lives!

So should we say, "What difference does it make if we commit a few sins here and there? Don't worry about it, God's grace covers it." What's the **biblical** answer? Certainly **not!** May it never be! What kind of thinking is that? If you take that attitude, before long you will become a slave to sin! Verse 16: *"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?"* In other words, sins snowballs and leads to death. Look also at verse 21: *"What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death."* And verse 23: *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Before we became Christians, that was all that could be expected. We were slaves to sin because we had a sinful nature. We were powerless to do anything but sin. Verse 20: *"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness."* But now it's different -- we have been set free from slavery to sin because we believed the gospel and were saved and given new life in Christ.

I love the way v17 puts it: *“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.”* Notice, *“you obeyed from the heart.”* That is more than ‘head’ belief -- that’s saving faith! And what was believed? The doctrine that Paul preached: salvation through faith in Christ alone.

Verse 18: *“And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”* “Free from sin” doesn’t mean sinless, and it doesn’t mean that we no longer have a sinful nature, but in Christ we are free from the **power** of sin. So the believer is no longer a slave of sin, but is now a slave of righteousness.

2. The believer is now a slave of righteousness.

The reason why Paul says, *“I speak in human terms”* is to emphasize that He is speaking in terms the Roman believers can understand. He’s speaking in terms that **we** can understand! As slaves of righteousness, you see, we’re not actually in bondage, but it’s a good contrasting parallel with slaves of sin.

Do you see the contrasting parallels here?

Two different masters: “Sin” on the one hand, righteousness on the other hand. Two different methods: “wages” on the one hand, “gift” on the other hand. Two different results or consequences: “death” on the one hand and “eternal life” on the other.

So verse 23 is a summary of these contrasting parallels: *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Normally we use Romans 6:23 as a “gospel text,” right? That is certainly a good and proper application, but in context Romans 6:23 is really is a summary of two contrasting ways of life. The unbeliever serves sins and continually reaps wages, which lead to death, but the believer serves God and already has the gift of eternal life in Christ that lasts forever. What a contrast!

At this point you might be saying, “Well, Dave, that sounds great, but it doesn’t work for me. I know that I’m a Christian but I still serve sin.” The point of this passage is that it **can** work. In Christ we are not only free from the **penalty** of sin, but from the **power** of sin as well. Let’s read verse 18 again: *“And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”* And verse 22: *“But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”* When we became Christians we were given new life in Christ. Now we have a new divine nature which is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, although we still sin, we are not **slaves** of sin. The believer is now a slave of righteousness.

Practical Application

We are not sinless, but we should sin less.

Before the fall, Adam was able not to sin as well as able to sin. He did have a choice. After the fall, Adam was **not** able **not** to sin because of indwelling sin, or the sinful nature, or the flesh.

When we become Christians we are given a new divine nature, even though we still have our old sinful natures.

Therefore, as Christians, on the one hand we are **not** able **not** to sin -- we will not become sinless in this life. In fact, 1 John 1:8 says, *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."*

But on the other hand, we **are** able **not** to sin because we have new divine life in Christ. 2 Peter 1:4: *"Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."* So in any given situation, we don't **have** to sin. In Christ's power we **can** do the right thing. We can **yield to righteousness**. That's the key to having victory over sin, and you can do it!

We look forward to heaven where, in our resurrected bodies, we will not be able to sin – a position even better than Adam and Eve before the Fall! Praise the Lord! Right now, however, we still sin -- but we don't have to! In Christ we have the ability not to sin. Remember, as Christians we are not sinless, but we should sin less.