

ENSLAVED TO...?: OBEDIENCE IN LIGHT OF GOD'S GRACE (PT. 3)
ROMANS 6:15-19

One of the sad verses of the Bible is 2 Timothy 4:10 — “...Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica...” Like Lot who moved to Sodom and his wife who yearningly looked back at Sodom as it was being destroyed, and Judas, who loved money more than Christ, Demas was attracted by the allurements of what the world could offer. And though the text doesn't say there was a conversation between Paul and Demas, it sounds like there was. I can imagine something like this:

Demas: “Paul, I'm going to be leaving tomorrow — I'm going to Thessalonica.”

Paul: “Demas, what is your motive for leaving? We haven't talked about ministry needs in Thessalonica. And we've actually talked about the dangers of serving Christ there.”

D: “Well, actually, I'm not leaving for ministry; I've been offered a job and I have some old friends there that tell me what a good place Thessalonica is — really relaxing and lots of good times.”

P: “But Demas, you have been with me in Colossae; you've seen how the gospel transformed Philemon and Onesimus' relationship. We've shared the gospel with many together. How can you leave? And for Thessalonica? You know the ungodly influences that are in that place.”

D: “I'm just burned out and tired. I'm weary of working, and I'm sick of not ever having anything of my own and I'm tired of ungodly people succeeding and looking at believers always being persecuted and suffering. I'm just not sure that it's worth the cost to be a Christian, the way you describe it. The way I figure it, if we're forgiven, we can pretty much do what we want. In fact, I think that if we really want to know what grace is then we have to experience the world's way.”

P: “Demas, this is folly; you are about to exchange the eternal for the temporal. You're going the way of Judas; your soul is at stake with this decision.”

D: “Maybe. I don't know — it just seems to me that sin is pretty indefinable and not a big deal even if you can define it. God will always forgive, Paul. Don't you believe in magnanimous grace? I just know I'm leaving in the morning for Thessalonica...”

This is the mindset of those who will distort and pervert grace. But as Paul notes in Romans 6, if we are to claim Christ as our Master, then we must be willing to do what He does. Following Christ means being obedient to Christ. That is a truth that abounds in NT teaching, but it is particularly in the passage before us in Romans 6, where Paul teaches us that...

LIVING BY GRACE MEANS LIVING OBEDIENTLY TO GOD.

While some will assert that living by grace means being obedient to one's self and not to Christ, Paul clearly states that obedience is fundamental to being a Christian. What do we need to know about grace so that we can live obediently to the Lord? We've been considering four truths about grace that we must know and believe and live. In addition to the last of those, this morning I also want us to think about the objection that “I don't feel like I've been freed from sin by God's grace.”

1. **A QUESTION About Grace (v. 15a)**
2. **A MISUNDERSTANDING About Grace (v. 15b)**
3. **A CORRECTION About Grace (v. 16)**
4. **What Grace DOES in Us (vv. 17-19)**
 - ✓ Grace makes us OBEDIENT (v. 17a)
 - ✓ Grace TRANSFORMS our hearts (v. 17b)
 - ✓ Grace ENSLAVES us to righteousness (v. 18)
 - ✓ Grace FREED us from sin's downward spiral (v. 19a)
 - ✓ Grace PRODUCES sanctification's upward spiral (v. 19b)
5. **But I Don't Feel "Free"**
 - ✓ CONSIDER yourself to be dead to sin (v. 11)
 - ✓ CONSIDER your life in God and Christ (v. 11)

What do we need to know about grace so that we can live obediently to the Lord?

1. A QUESTION About Grace (v. 15a)

- Being **under grace** has never meant that a believer could purposefully engage in a lifestyle of sin. But some have misunderstood and misconstrued the gospel to mean that very thing. So Paul asks the question in v. 15 — **shall we sin because we are...under grace?**
- The question is about the appropriateness of the action — “ought we engage in sin?” or even, “are we ‘obligated’ to sin...?” The emphasis is, “let’s sin *because of* grace.” That is, grace becomes the reason and excuse for sin. It doesn’t matter if we sin because of the grace we have received from God. In other words, God “doesn’t care” about sin and our sin is irrelevant.
- That is a misunderstanding of the nature of grace, which is the second truth we must understand.

2. A MISUNDERSTANDING About Grace (v. 15b)

- To his proposed question Paul answers, **May it never be**. As we noted in v. 1, the phrase has to do with time — “may it never happen,” or “may it never come to pass.” It is a phrase of abhorrence.
- Such a condition should never exist because it is such an evil thought and idea.

3. A CORRECTION About Grace (v. 16)

- Here Paul gives us the general principle about the purpose of grace and our obedience: *whatever we obey is our master*. There are actually several aspects to this enslavement. Notice —
 - ✓ *Enslavement is self-inflicted*. The one enslaved **presents himself** (offers himself to serve).
 - ✓ *Enslavement is to one of two masters: sin or God*. And everyone is enslaved to one of those two masters. There are no other alternatives.
 - ✓ *It is impossible to be enslaved to both those masters at the same time*; either we are enslaved to sin or we are enslaved to God, but we cannot be enslaved to both. Note the emphasis on **either...or**.
 - ✓ *We know who our master is by what we do*. Who we obey is whose we are. If you want to know the identity of their master, just look at what they do. (Which is also what Jesus said: **Mt. 7:15-20**.)
 - ✓ *Enslavement to sin produces death* (e.g., **Rom. 5:21**).
 - ✓ *Enslavement to obedience produces righteousness*. Our life produces righteous works — our justification will be accompanied by obedience and righteous living (progressive sanctification).

- So many believers have misunderstood grace, not knowing that everyone is enslaved to one of two masters — sin or Christ. And grace has come, not to keep us *in* sin, but to *free us* from sin so that we can be enslaved to Christ. There is one more truth about what grace does and that is given in vv. 17-19.

4. What Grace **DOES** in Us (vv. 17-19)

- Grace makes us **OBEDIENT** (v. 17a)

- ✓ Paul notes that the Romans **were slaves of sin**. In fact, the sense is, “you were [perpetually] slaves of sin. While we all have a past that is stained with sin, that is no longer what identifies us; it *is* our past (and not our present, **Phil. 3:12-14**; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). If you are in Christ, your past sin is no longer your identifying attribute. You are Christ’s and His righteousness (alone) is now your identifying attribute.
- ✓ We are no longer slaves to sin because of a transformation that has taken place — which is what Paul means when he says **you become obedient...** This is a reference to when the Romans were justified by faith — when they were saved by God’s grace (**1:5**; 15:18; 16:26).
- ✓ A second thing that God’s grace does in us is...

- Grace **TRANSFORMS** our hearts (v. 17b)

- ✓ God’s grace produces a salvation that sanctifies; and that sanctification is more than just obedience. It is **obedience from the heart**. It is to say that one not only obeys, but he *wants* to obey; one might wrestle with doing what is right, but he *wants* to do what is right (1 Pt. 1:22).
- ✓ But Paul also means something even more than *heart-felt* obedience. An obedience that comes from the heart is only possible when that heart has been transformed through salvation and he has been given a heart of flesh and not a heart of stone (Ezk. 36:26; Lk. 22:20).
 - So the work of God’s grace is that He transforms us from the inside out. He changes our inward desires and gives us an ability to do things that please Him and are obedient to Him.
 - This is **Gal. 5:16-17** — a joyful submission to the Holy Spirit. Read through the list in vv. 19-21. Is there anything there that has ensnared you in the past? Surely. The transformation of God means that He changes those desires (not immediately, but progressively and persistently) so that even when you are tempted, you desire to resist and fight against it and to obey Christ.
- ✓ The heart obedience that God produces in us is **to that form of teaching to which you were committed**. The word **form** can mean, “imprint” — so there is an impression (imprint, type) left by the teaching that saves believers. So the gospel imprints our lives with transformation; our lives are transformed and molded by the gospel into Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29; 12:2).
- ✓ So this phrase, **you became obedient...**, means that God changes us. It is a reminder a fundamental part of our salvation is that God graciously transforms us from the ungodliness that we were to the godliness that we can be in Christ.

- **Grace ENSLAVES us to righteousness (v. 18)** — Paul indicates that two realities come about for believers when they are saved by grace.
 - ✓ First, they are ***freed from sin***. To be set free from sin indicates that there is a release & liberation from the domination of sin. Jesus' use of this word in **John 8:32** is helpful:
 - ... The hearers related it to physical slavery — “we’ve never been enslaved!” (**v. 33**) They had been enslaved to Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Alexander, the Ptolemies, and the Syrians. And now they were under the domain of Rome!
 - ... How deceptive and deluded the heart that rejects Christ is. “The power of self-deception is infinite.” In fact, their question at end of v. 33 is a challenge from men who were enslaved in every way — physical and spiritual.
 - ... The great tragedy is not that they were enslaved by Rome, but they were enslaved to sin and they — the experts in the Law — did not recognize the very truth the Law was given to reveal — that they were enslaved to sin and could do nothing about it (Gal. 3:19). This is for every man.
 - ... Those who live in a continual state of sin (***commits sin***, v. 34) are enslaved. People do not sin because it is fun and satisfying, but because they cannot stop. They are addicted to it and they cannot help themselves (which makes “self-help” books so utterly helpless!).
 - ... “The man who sins is a slave to sin, whether he realizes it or not.”
 - ... Changing the analogy, Jesus says that slaves don’t stay in the house forever; but the Son does (v. 35). He has a secure place in God’s house and family, and has an inheritance.
 - ... And the Son (v. 36) then can make a man free. Only Christ can move someone from slavery to sonship (Gal. 4:1-7; Rom. 8:12-15ff).
 - ... This is the work of Christ — to liberate us from sin (which is Paul’s point in Rom. 6).
 - ... He gives us freedom from doing that which we could not stop doing (sin) so we can do that which we could not do previously (righteousness)!
 - ... This is genuine (actual) freedom (***free indeed***, v. 36), as opposed to what only appears free.
 - Freedom from sin does not mean that we will never sin again (e.g., Rom. 7). But it does mean that the enslaving power that compels sin is removed. *We have a capacity not to sin.*
- ✓ Second, they ***became slaves of righteousness***.
 - The way Paul states this emphasizes that they were *caused* to become slaves; that is, someone else initiated the process of enslavement. It was a transfer of their lives to a new power and authority. The implication obviously is that God is the One who did this (cf. also **6:22**).
 - But this enslavement is a good enslavement — it is ***of righteousness***. The theme all through this passage is that the believer is saved so that he can now do acts of righteousness. His righteous acts don’t save him, but they are indicative of his salvation (vv. 13, 16, 18-20).
 - Note that when we are ***slaves of righteousness***, we are not slaves to moralism, attempting to do what we cannot do; we are slaves of Christ, doing what He has died to enable us to do. Clothed with His righteousness, now we can also live out what He is making us to be.

- Grace **FREED** us from sin's downward spiral (v. 19a)

- ✓ All this talk about slavery is difficult, because it goes against all our cultural sensibilities. And Paul acknowledges that when he says, *I am speaking in human terms...*
 - He means, I am using a term that is finite and limited and inadequate to communicate infinite truth. (And with that, Paul is clear that he is not endorsing or approving of slavery.)
 - However, despite its limitations, there are concepts in the slave/master relationship that are appropriate for our relationship with God; here are two inadequacies of "master" and "slave" —
 - ... The Master is a "despot" — an absolute authority, but He is a benevolent Master who always acts only with the best in mind for His slaves. In fact, the Master is also their Father — a Father who always and only gives good gifts (everything that comes from His hand is a good gift, **Mt. 7:7-11**).
 - ... The slave is required to be obedient, but that obedience is also for his protection and joy (**Jn. 15:11**). And when enslaved to Christ, we become His friends (**Jn. 15:15-16**). And even more, we become the Father's sons who receive the inheritance of Heaven (**Rom. 8:15-17**).
- ✓ And what has this inadequate term produced in us? It has pulled us out of a desperate situation.
 - Prior to being God's slaves we chose to be slaves to *impurity and lawlessness*.
 - The first word indicates moral corruption; it was often used in relation to sexual sins, though it could refer to any kind of vile immoral act. The second refers to living without respect to the law — it is a person who is out of control and rebellious. Though they have the law of God in their hearts (**2:14-15**), they willfully reject that law.
 - And as they presented themselves to that impurity (gave or offered themselves in service of it), it just produced *further lawlessness*. In other words, sin without repentance only leads to more sin. If one is willfully lawless (rebellious against God's law) that only will harden his heart and lead to further lawlessness. One cannot expect to live lawlessly and move towards Christlikeness. Rebellion against God only produces more rebellion against Him.
 - This is what Paul refers to in **Eph. 4:19** — the greediness of sin keeps asking for more because it will never satisfy (which is why one look at pornography won't satisfy lust and why one drink won't satisfy the alcoholic...).
 - So you might picture sin as a downward spiral — engaging in one sin will inevitably entice you to more sin and the more often you engage in that sin, additional related sins will be committed and the deeper one will plunge into despair. This is the mud that Christ pulled us out of.

- Grace **PRODUCES** sanctification's upward spiral (v. 19b)

- ✓ In contrast to the despair of sin's downward spiral, notice what God's grace of slavery did for us —
 - He has produced *sanctification* in us. This is the word "holiness." This is the one who is "set apart for God's service." He is dedicated to being used by God.
 - It's a parallel term to all Paul's use of righteousness in this passage (vv. 13, 16, 18-20).

- Listen to how Martyn Lloyd-Jones says it:

“As you go on living this righteous life, and practising it with all your might and energy, and all your time...you will find that the process that went on before, in which you went on 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 into the image of the Son of God.”

- This is the exact reversal of the downward spiral of sin; it is the upward spiral of progressive sanctification. Day-by-day, as we love Him and obey Him and submit to His good Word, we find ourselves being increasingly conformed to Him, looking increasingly like our Savior. This is what the grace of slavery does. (And if that’s what slavery does, then let us have more slavery.)
 - Too often we think of the hardship of obedience and the cost of discipleship; we must also consider the reward and benefit of obedience — and it is the freedom of a life that is more and more like Christ.
- ✓ Notice also that there is a responsibility for us — **present your members...** Just as he did in v. 12, Paul is making an application that is based on the reality of our position in Christ.
 - Because we are enslaved to Christ and under grace, there is an appropriate response: offer your lives (remember that we said **members**, v. 13, and **body**, v. 12 refer to the entire life of the believer) in service to God for Him to use as He pleases. In other words, your life should be one of willful obedience to God. (And notice that this is a willful choice, not accidental occurrence.)
 - And notice that he says **now**. For a period of time in your life (the years prior to salvation) you gave yourself entirely to sin; but **now** that has changed. **Now** is the time for a new way of living.

5. But I Don’t Feel “Free”

- Someone might say, “I know you say I’m free, but I don’t feel free. I wrestle with my sin and I feel trapped and stuck and hopeless. It feels like I am in a quagmire from which I can’t escape. The temptation is always around me and I keep falling. I’m stuck, not free.”
- ✓ We are liberated from the need to sin, not from the potential for sin — Scripture does not suggest that believers will never sin again (ch. 7 is a key example); the NT *does* indicate that the believer will not persist in a lifestyle of rebellion against God (v. 6b; 1 Jn. 3:4ff; 3:15-18).
- ✓ That we feel the pull of sin and that we are battling against sin is indicative that we *are* free; the unbeliever does not have the capacity to fight against sin (3:20; Mt. 5:48).
- ✓ It may be that we aren’t making progress because we aren’t availing ourselves of all the resources the Lord has given to us in our salvation.
- ✓ Or it may be that we aren’t making progress because we really aren’t trusting in Christ for our salvation (we aren’t living by faith, 3:21ff).

- If you read this passage and say, “I know nothing of this kind of life,” then you may not be united with Christ; you may not be saved from God’s wrath and you may not be a believer.
- That’s the bad news, but the good news is that you can repent and be forgiven. In fact, God calls and commands you to repent (“God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,” Acts 17:30). And if you repent and trust in Christ, God will not only forgive you of your sin, but in grace He will also liberate you from sin’s power. I urge you to repent today.
- ✓ Remember that genuine transformation is not a combination of will power and moralism —

John Owen...said, “Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world.” Unfortunately, that’s just the kind of moral advice given by many counselors both living and dead: a prescription of cognitive therapy, behavior modification, or religious practices that may result in superficial change, but essentially leave us to ourselves, with hearts untouched by the love of Christ and the grace of his Spirit. [Hedges, *Hit List: Taking Aim at the Seven Deadly Sins*, 19.]

- ✓ Instead, genuine transformation *is* a process of God’s grace working through your obedience (8:12-13).

- How to live the reality of who we are in Christ

- ✓ CONSIDER yourself to be dead to sin (v. 11)

- *Reckon what you should reckon* (v. 11). To **reckon** means “to consider, to account it.” It is to think and meditate on the truth. When we persist in sin, it is because we have persisted in untrue thinking — “stinkin’ thinkin’.” An ongoing lifestyle of sin reveals that we haven’t reckoned what we should reckon. When tempted, our thoughts and consideration should intentionally be, “I *don’t* have to do this; in fact, I have been freed from this!”
- *Don’t let sin reign in your life* (v. 12). Sin is *not* your master, if you are a believer; don’t live as if it is your master.
 - ... Avoid places and circumstances that tempt you to sin.
 - ... Prepare to say and practice saying “no” to temptation.
 - ... Then, say “no” to temptation. Consider Luther, “You can’t keep the bird from flying over your head, but you can keep him from building a nest in your hair.” And if you believe that you can’t say, “no,” ask yourself what you would do if your mother, wife, or husband was watching you do what you’re about to do (and then remember that while they are not present in the room, the God to whom all men will give account, is present).
 - ... Repent quickly from every form of sin. Confession and repentance indicates you are not letting sin reign in your life. Lack of confession will not produce righteousness in you. The more quickly and thoroughly you confess sin, the more quickly and completely you will become righteous in your living.

... Recognize that every instance of sin reveals a heart desire you had in that moment. Repent of those desires as well. There is a commercial for a candy bar that says, “You’re not you when you’re hungry.” Actually, your hunger is revealing exactly what you are wanting in that moment. Being “hangry” has exposed a tendency to be angry when you don’t receive the food you want when you want it. And we must replace those desires with a desire for Christ...

➤ *Remember the consequences of continuing in unrepentant sin:*

... If you continue in sin, yes, the Lord will forgive, but will you want to confess so that He will forgive? By nature, the more one continues in sin the harder we become to it (1 Tim. 4:2). (Give thanks for a tender conscience that regularly convicts you of sin, Rom. 2:14-15).

... Others — both believers and unbelievers — are watching. The Romans were examining Paul’s life to see if he was worthy to be supported in missionary endeavors by them (cf. also 1 Tim. 4:16; 1 Pt. 2:12). Our reputation is not ultimately about us; it is about Christ.

“God will forgive us of our sins if we are truly believers, but that does not erase or change the fact that our open sin has given the enemies of Jesus Christ an opportunity to say, ‘Is that all that Jesus Christ can do?’”
[Mack, *A Fight to the Death*, 90.]

✓ **CONSIDER your life in God and Christ (v. 11)**

➤ *Meditate on Christ (His person and work).* From this passage alone, we can learn...

... to meditate on His death and burial (v. 3, 4a)

... to meditate on His resurrection (v. 4b)

... to meditate on the new life He provides (v. 4c)

... to meditate on our unity with Him (vv. 5, 8; Jn. 17:22ff) — an infinite expression of love for us (how do we treat those whom we love?)

... to meditate on the life we have been saved to have with Him (on earth *now*, v. 8)

... to meditate on Christ’s mastery over sin (v. 9; Jn. 16:33)

... to meditate on His present life, living for the Father (and that we, too, are given new life to live for the Father, v. 10)

... to meditate on the life you have been granted in Christ (v. 11b; Gal. 2:20)

... And then consider the Gospels, the supreme revelation of Christ’s person and work.

... And then consider the OT prophecy of His coming (e.g., Is. 53) and the NT Epistles, which expound the fullness of His work.

... Why all this meditation on Christ? Because —

“Sin can’t breath in an atmosphere of fear and reverence before God. It suffocates. Can you imagine your lust cheery and prosperous when you are on your face before a holy God?” [Lundgaard, *Enemy Within*, 131.]

- *Learn what you should know* (vv. 3, 16). The fight against sin is first fought in the mind and the battle in the mind is based on knowledge. We read and study and meditate because to win the battle against sin we must know certain realities and truths. In this passage, we particularly should know and meditate on our union with Christ (3) and our enslavement to Christ (16).
 - *Be thankful* (v. 17). Sin flourishes when we are discontent with God. Sin withers when we are satisfied with God and thankful (e.g., Eph. 5:4 — the righteous replacement for sexual temptation is thanksgiving).
 - *Intentionally offer yourself to God as His slave* (vv. 16, 19). I will often ask something like, “Does this action/attitude indicate that I’m serving Christ, whom I love, or does it look like slavery to sin?” Or, “Can I do this as an act of worship to the Lord?”
 - *Do righteous replacements to your sinful temptations* (v. 19). Instead of giving yourself to sin, you give yourself to the Lord and His purposes and commands.
- ✓ In all these things what we are doing is cultivating a new desire for God that is greater than our desire for sin. It is what Thomas Chalmers called, “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.” By learning to delight in God and Christ and our salvation, the attraction of sin wanes. This is what the psalmist did with his own heart (**Ps. 27:8**). Consider J. I. Packer’s words:

“Being united to Christ in new birth through the regenerating work of the Spirit has so changed our nature that our heart’s deepest desire (the dominant passion that rules and drives us now) is a copy, faint but real, of the desire that drove our Lord Jesus. That was the desire to know, trust, love, obey, serve, delight, honor, glorify, and enjoy his heavenly Father — a multi-faceted, many-layered desire for God, and for more of him than has been enjoyed so far.” [Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*, 84.]

- ✓ When we are in Christ, sin is defeated, and we are enslaved to God and free to obey Him. And we will obey Him and win the sin battle as we consider and live in the unity we have with Him.
- ✓ Have you put off being obedient? *Now* is the time of salvation (v. 19). *Now* is the day for obedience. Do not delay.

CONCLUSION:

Killing sin isn't simply a matter of exercising greater will power. It's not less than that, of course, but it is far more. For the only effective way to mortify sin is to draw on the resources that are already ours through our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Then, with the confident security of God's grace beneath us, the solid hope of glory before us, and the power of his Spirit within us, we can enter the fray. No, we won't achieve perfection. But we don't have to, for Christ's obedience is already ours. The war is already won. "It is finished" (John 19:30). This means we can fight with confidence, knowing we're already accepted in Christ and someday we will be fully conformed to his glorious image once and for all. And this means real change is possible now, even as the battle continues. Therefore, my friend, "Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of your sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and you will die a conqueror; yea, you will, through the good providence of God, live to see your lust dead at your feet." [Hedges, 20-22.]

Killing sin and fighting against sin and being obedient *are* part of following after Christ and being a believer in Christ. The Scripture knows nothing of a genuine believer who is persistently rebellious against God. Does it reveal believers who struggle with sin and lose battles against sin (even for extended periods of time, occasionally)? Yes. But obedience *is* what the believer in Christ does.

But that obedience is not his own attempt at moralism. He obeys because he has been removed from the domination and mastery of sin and he has been enslaved to Christ. Christ is the master who demands obedience and at the same time empowers that obedience. That is what it means to be (joyfully) enslaved to Christ.

BENEDICTION: Romans 16:25-27