

Set Free to Become a Slave

Romans 6:14-23

The Christian is someone who has been set free in order to become a slave. That is the good news of the Gospel that may not sound very good to many ears.

Our country loves the idea of freedom. Liberals value freedom from oppression and suffering. Conservatives value freedom from government control. But in one way or another, Americans love freedom.

Telling an American that slavery is good news is not an easy sell. Given the options:

Autonomy? (The freedom to rule yourself)

Or Slavery? (Servitude to the rule of another)

Which do you want?

Most would choose autonomy. But autonomy, spiritually speaking, is an illusion. We are all slaves. The only question is, "To which Master?"

Read Romans 6:14-23.

Righteousness... what is it? It is the submission of your will to the will of God. What is sin? Choosing your will over the will of God. (Being autonomous – ruling yourself) Sin is the submission of your will to your passions and desires.

25 years ago Coca Cola came out with an ad campaign to promote the sale of Sprite: Obey your thirst. This is actually a good description of sin: Obedience to desire. So, both righteousness and sin involve submission – only to different masters.

When a person places their faith in Jesus Christ, they change masters. As a Christian, you have been set free... from sin. And having been set free you have now become a slave... to righteousness.

V. 23

For sin will have no dominion over you,
since you are not under law but under grace.

"For sin shall not rule over you..." (That's the freedom we enjoy – it is freedom from our slavery to our sinful desires.)

Sin is a cruel master that rules over each one of us before we come to know Jesus Christ. One of the greatest lies Satan gives to us is to tell us that the path of sin is really a path of freedom. When we choose to sin, we think we are simply doing what we want to do. The truth is that we are becoming the slave of our desires. At first, this may really feel like freedom. But those desires, if left unchecked, increasingly enslave us. We become a slave to them.

When we trust in Jesus Christ, he promises to free us from our slavery to sin. We shall no longer be ruled by our selfish desires. We often ask the question as Christians, "Can we change?" Can we really be different?

Our answer must always be a resounding "Yes!"

I say this knowing that no Christian achieves perfection in this life.

I say this knowing that some habitual sins seem like they will never be conquered.

I say this knowing that true Christians sometimes fall into terrible sin.

I say this knowing that the road to righteousness is slow and arduous and filled with many detours.

But none of these change the truth of the Word of God: If you receive and rest on Jesus Christ, sin shall not rule over you.

"It is not a hopeless struggle in which the believer is engaged, but one in which victory is certain." Hodge

In verse 14, Paul introduces another contrast that he will not really develop until chapter 7. He says that the believer is free from sin because he is no longer "under law" but is rather "under grace." What does it mean to be "under law" or "under grace"? To be under something means to be subject to its authority. Whatever it is that you are under has jurisdiction over you.

Jurisdiction is the key. If you live within the city limits of Morganton, you are under the Jurisdiction of the Laws of Morganton. If you live outside of those city limits, you are not under the jurisdiction of those laws. Unless you choose to go inside the city limits for one reason or another.

We live outside of the city limits and within the county limits. So, when I built the Pool House, I had to have a County Building Permit. From what I am told, the building codes within the city limits are much more strict. I was glad that I was not under their jurisdiction.

Paul says that the believer is no longer under the jurisdiction of the law, but is now under the jurisdiction of grace. It is important to see that both Law and Grace are in the position of authority to rule over. We are not brought out from under the jurisdiction of the Law so as to now live in a place where there is no rule

whatsoever. Grace is not something that just lets you live any way that you might choose. Grace rules over you.

But to what law is Paul referring?

This is a huge question deserving of much discussion – but not today.

1. The Mosaic Law – 10 Commandments.
2. The Adamic Law – Creation.

The Mosaic Law was specifically given to the Jews. So, technically speaking, only Jews were under its jurisdiction.

But the Mosaic Law was also an expression of the Law that was written on the hearts of Adam and Eve at creation. So, every child of Adam is “under the law.” This makes sense to me because Paul has just explained the difference between having Adam as covenant head or Jesus as covenant head.

To be under the law is essentially what it means to be under Adam and the mastery of sin. And to be under grace is what it means to be under Jesus Christ and his mastery to righteousness. To be under grace is to be under Jesus Christ as your new master. Many people misunderstand being “under grace” as being under a more relaxed standard, but this is not Paul’s intent.

Similar to my being grateful that I am not a resident of Morganton city limits. I like having “less strict” laws and lower taxes of a resident of the county. They believe that Jesus has come to relax the standard of righteousness.

One has only to read the Sermon on the Mount to understand that Jesus did not come to “relax the standard.” Remember he is the one that makes perfectly clear that the Mosaic Command “You shall not murder” actually includes “inner feelings of hatred towards another person.” That does not sound like a relaxing of the standard. No longer being under the law does not mean a reducing of the standard.

Being “under grace” means that you are under the jurisdiction of grace as a force moving you towards righteousness.

God is using his power to set you free from the rule of sin over you.

Every person only has two options:

1. Be ruled by sin.
2. Be ruled by Jesus.

There is no third option: Rule yourself. To be ruled by Jesus is to be ruled by righteousness. Remember: righteousness is the submission of your will to the will of God.

Is this what you thought it meant to be a Christian? Or did you have some other picture in mind? God is very patient with us. He does not root out all of our sin all at once. He is very kind with his children. But if you think that God simply overlooks sin, or turns his eyes the other way, or somehow thinks our sins do not matter, you are sadly mistaken.

If you think that you can have your sin and your God, you have believed in something other than the biblical gospel.

It is easy to confuse God's commitment to holiness with the false idea that he still wants to punish us for our past sins. We must always remind ourselves that "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

At the same time, sin, by its very nature, is destructive. And we must never make friends with sin. We must never think that our sins do not matter. God can use our past sins for his glory to be sure. But having Christ as our Master brings us to deal with our sin, to repent and confess our sin, and to strive to live in accordance with God's righteous standard. Being "under grace" means to be under the jurisdiction and authority and influence of righteousness.

How often have we heard from people who have little or no desire for the biblical standard of holiness, "Oh, I am Christian... I just don't think I have to..."

Being "under grace" does not mean that we are free to sin.

15 What then?
 Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?
 By no means!

Grace frees us from the condemnation of sin.
But it does not free us to do what we want.
Grace brings us into submission to a new Master.

16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves,
 you are slaves of the one whom you obey,
 either of sin,

which leads to death,
or of obedience,
which leads to righteousness?

Trusting in Jesus Christ does not make you immediately righteous. All of your struggles are not magically fixed in a moment. But trusting in Jesus Christ does put you on a different path. You are taken off of the old path and placed onto the new path. The old path was a path of increasing slavery to sin. And this path leads to death. But the new path is a path of increasing obedience to Your New Master. And this path leads to righteousness.

Our responsibility is to present ourselves to our New Master. I now belong to Jesus. He has freed me from the clutches of sin so that I might be brought to more and more perfectly obey him.

Trusting in Jesus is like getting off of the down escalator and getting onto the up escalator. Going from the down escalator to the up escalator includes our repentance and faith, but it not something that we do for ourselves. Only God can free us from the one and move us to the other.

17 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,

Becoming a Christian includes our heartfelt decision to commit ourselves to the path of righteousness.

Jesus is declared in the Gospel as Master or Lord.

Jesus is declared as the Ruler of the Righteous Kingdom of God.

If you are trusting in Jesus, you are trusting him to make you 'fit' for the kingdom of righteousness. You are committing yourself to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. The Christian does not free himself from sin.

In the actual act of being taken off the down escalator the Christian is passive.

18 and, having been set free from sin,
have become slaves of righteousness.

And when Jesus takes us off of the down escalator, he always places us on the up escalator.

19 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.

The lifelong posture of the Christian is to recognize Jesus' position as Master. You are my Master. You have bought me with your own blood for yourself. You have the right to rule over me. I present myself to you as your slave.

I am no longer under the jurisdiction of my own desires and wishes. I am under the jurisdiction of righteousness. What desires am I currently experiencing that need to be brought into submission to your will?

Sanctification is not immediate. Notice that presenting ourselves to Jesus leads to sanctification. Sanctification is a process. Just like lawlessness can lead to more lawlessness, so one act of obedience leads to another act of obedience.

I remember reading when I was in college a booklet entitled:

My Heart Christ's Home – Robert Munger 1954

In this booklet the Christian's heart is portrayed as a house with different rooms. In becoming a Christian, ownership of the entire house is given to Jesus. And as own, Jesus goes through the different rooms and in his time, deals with the sins of each of those rooms. It is very helpful. Jesus may not deal with all of the sin all at once. But he owns the whole house and will be Master over every room.

The Christian cannot ever tell God that he does not really have a right to this room or that room. He owns it all.

20 When you were slaves of sin,
 you were free in regard to righteousness.

Before Jesus was your master, you were not considering obedience to his will. You were consumed with doing what you wanted. You were consumed with seeking your own path to fulfillment.

How can I change my circumstances to satisfy my desires? The issue of righteousness. The issue of submitting your heart to your new Master was not even on the radar. For some people being “free in regard to righteousness may sound good.”

But Paul asks this question:

21 But what fruit were you getting at that time
 from the things of which you are now ashamed?
 The end of those things is death.

I have been thinking lately about “unintended consequences.”

For instance, when the government increased unemployment benefits due to Covid, it was intended to help people get through the Pandemic. One unintended consequence that is now occurring is that many businesses are finding it very difficult to draw employees back to work. Many restaurants are functioning much the same as during the lock-downs, but not because of the virus. They just cannot get enough waiters and cooks. Unintended consequences.

Well, people don’t usually choose sin with the intention of wanting to die. Death is an unintended consequence of choosing sin. But it is most definitely the outcome of continuing down the road of sin. “The end of those things is death.”

Paul wants us to think rightly about sin. Shortly after God created Adam, He came to him in the Garden. And he explained to him the rules of life living in his world.

“You may enjoy my world. You may even improve and develop this world through meaningful and fruitful work. But one thing that you cannot do is to eat of this one tree. For if you do, you shall surely die.”

Choosing to sin leads to the end of death. Adam and Eve are deceived by the Serpent, and they have to learn the hard way. But so often, because death is not immediate, we too can be deceived. We can even use the Gospel in a distorted way to make us think that sin no longer leads to death.

We think that we can have our cake and eat it too. We can have life in Jesus while continuing to pursue a life of sin. All sin leads to death. It is right to think, “Either Jesus is in me conquering sin, or sin is conquering me.”

Every Christian must come to accept that they are not yet all who they want to be, or who God will make them to be. But this does not mean that the Christian can ever have the mindset that sin can have a permanent residence in the heart. The Christian life is one of continual repenting of sin and looking to Jesus for increased grace to put that sin to death. The Christian, because he knows the end of sin, is in an irreconcilable war with his sin.

There are some days that you may want to give up fighting against sin. You have blown it again, and you think to yourself, “What is the use?” “I cannot defeat this sin!” You are tired. You want life to be easier. You look around at people who do not seem to be struggling with sin like you and you envy your image of them. And you begin to think that the problem is not sin, but rather the doctrine that “the end of sin is death.”

And you begin to believe the same old lie, “I am a Christian. But I am also one who remains in my sin. My sin no longer leads to death.”

Once you begin to think like this, you will begin to excuse sin. You will begin to make friends with sin.

James 4:4 ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

1 John 2:15-17 ¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions - is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the

world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Those passages are strong. But they are true. My old self continues to love sin. And so, it is prone to making friends with this world. But I have to continually tell myself that this old self has been crucified with Christ on the cross. And no matter how strong its desires may be in the moment, they are passing away. This world, with all of its sin, is dying. Only that new heart within me, that heart that does love righteousness is permanent. This new heart is bound to Jesus. And being bound to Jesus, it is a slave to righteousness. Obedience to the will of God is my destiny, by grace alone. And so, I will continue to fight to put my sin to death.

22 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.

As Christians, we must keep our eyes fixed on the end game. If we simply focus on the moment, the desires within us gain power. But if we fix our attention on the outcome of a life of submission, eternal life, our desires lose power.

The victory begins in the mind.

I am no longer a slave to sin. Jesus has set me free from the rule of sin. Sin is no longer my Master. Any continued servitude to sin is temporary and coming to an end. I am now a new creation in Christ Jesus. I am a slave of God. He is my Master. I may not yet serve him perfectly, but I recognize that He owns me and has the right to do with me whatever he sees fit. I believe that my freedom and my happiness is now found in surrendering my heart to my Heavenly Master. I want him to conquer me. I want him to bring my will into submission to his. I no longer see my struggle with sin the same way. I no longer try to make God into a being who is OK with my sin. I now see God as the only One powerful enough to truly rescue me from my sin. I don't want God to relax his standard. I want him to free me from every ounce of sin still residing in my old self.

I don't want him to ever quit until he has removed it all.

Sin is a cancer.

When Robin was in her battle against cancer, we realized that the cancer cells are incredibly small. They can be in the system even before they can really be detected. And so, the chemo and the radiation and the surgery had to be awful in an attempt to get out all of the cancer. The doctors are good. But they are not perfect. And so, we believe that the cancer has been destroyed. Or at least to such a degree that Robin's ongoing immune system can fight against any remaining cells. I am so thankful for everything that the doctors did for us. They made Robin feel more miserable than the cancer. But they were not the enemy. They were on our side.

The same is true of God. He is our friend. His righteousness is not something we should wish away. His righteousness is our greatest friend. He sees every cancer cell of sin. And in his kindness and mercy, He is working to kill it all. He is destroying it. And we are surrendering to his treatment.

It is the working of his powerful grace upon which we depend.

23 For the wages of sin is death,
but
the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eternal life is a free gift. But it does not mean that it comes to us without pain, or without the removal of sin.

"Just leave some of those cancer cells in there doc. Is it really necessary to get them all out?"

The destruction of sin is a tremendous gift. You cannot destroy your sin on your own.

There is no way that Robin could have destroyed her cancer on her own. Without the work of the doctors and nurses she would not have won that battle.

The same is true in our battle against sin. God comes to us and says, "I have a gift for you. And this gift is absolutely free. The gift is Jesus. Trust in him. And he will set you free from your sin. And he will put you on the road to righteousness. And the end of righteousness will be eternal life.

Eternal life is a place where there is no more cancer of sin. Eternal life is a world where all of God's children perfectly and perpetually surrender to his will.

The battle is in the mind.

We must every day strive to recalibrate our thinking.

We must expect that our thinking will get twisted. Our old self wants it to be twisted.

But we must continually come back to the truth of God's Word.

Jesus has set me free – not to rule myself – to live autonomously.

Jesus has set me free – to make me his slave – a slave of righteousness.

And to all who truly belong to him, this is good news!