

The Reality of a Change of Realms for the Pursuit of Holiness—Part 2**Review:**

Last week we focused upon the fact that in our union with Christ, we have experienced the overthrow of our previous ruler. In Christ we have died to sin. Its power over us has been brought to nothing. We therefore can refuse its overtures. We are now alive to God. Therefore, we can and we must stand up to the allure of sin against God. Instead we should present ourselves and every part of us to God. This is reason to not sin. Tonight we turn to Romans 6:15-23 and find here INCENTIVE not to sin.

You can have incentive but no ability. In that case incentive means nothing. You can be told that drinking contaminated water will make you sick and thus you would want to avoid drinking it. But if nothing but unclean water is available, you can only drink unclean water, and any idea of incentive is meaningless. However, if pure water is available to you, the incentive is meaningful. Now you can make an enthusiastic choice for the pure water.

Before a person is united with Christ, sin reigns over them in power and they can do nothing other than sin. However, after a person is joined to Christ by faith, the power of sin is removed and they can choose to obey Christ. They are free! In this freed condition, incentive means a lot. Previously we were given reason not to sin. We do not have to because its power has been removed from us. Now we are given incentive, motivation, and stimulus not to sin but to submit in obedience to God.

Exploring Romans 6:15-23 — Set free from Sin, Slaves of Righteousness

We are focusing on the change of realm or dominion. In the prior section, Paul sets the context in terms of realms of power. In this section the context is the sphere of servitude in which the motif is master and slave.

In Romans 6:1-14 Paul answered the question, "should we sin so that grace may abound?" "No," he said, "we died to it and we live with Christ to God; so we can't live in sin." Now Paul asks, "Should we sin, then, because we are not under law but grace? (It cannot be counted against us?)" Again he says, "No." This section is about "Why not?"

1. It should be obvious. When Paul says, in verse 16, "Do you not know?", he is highlighting the fact that the reason we are not to sin should be self-evident. There were those who argued that if they believed Paul's gospel of grace, they would have every

reason to continue living in sin. Paul resoundingly rejects that notion. And he goes further. He declares that the ground for rejecting the notion is quite basic. A mere elementary understanding is all that is needed in order to answer with a resounding, "no!"

2. He proceeds with that basic understanding. When you do what anyone tells you to do, you are enslaving yourself to that one as master. (v. 16) Psalm 1 explains who is blessed. "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers." When a person lives in the counsel of the wicked, that person is not blessed. They are parched. Their leaf withers. They do not produce fruit. Why? They are enslaved to sin.

3. Paul then points to the outcome of enslavement to sin. What happens if you are enslaved to sin? YOU DIE! Sin leads to death!

This is exactly what Psalm 1 teaches. The wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. The way of the wicked will perish.

4. Slavery to sin leads to death, but slavery to obedience leads to righteousness. Accordingly, Psalm 1 says that the blessed man refuses to walk in the counsel of sinners but walks in the counsel of the Lord. His DELIGHT is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is alive! He is like a tree by streams of water. His leaf does not wither and he produces fruit in season. And in everything he does he prospers. He does righteousness.

5. Slaves to sin is what we all once were. But if you are in union with Christ, you became obedient from the heart to the teaching of the gospel. At that moment your slavery to sin ended; you were set free from sin's mastery. You became slaves of righteousness. Righteousness is now your master.

6. (v. 19) You used to commit sin upon sin resulting in a progressive accumulation of sin. Now you incentivized to do the opposite. Present your members (the parts of your being) to righteousness more and more, leading to sanctification (the process of becoming progressively holy).

7. (vv. 20-23) The choice is the fruit which is death or the fruit which is life. That is a pretty strong incentive. Work for what kills you or accept the gift that gives you sanctification and eternal life. And demonstrate it is yours by obeying Christ.

9. To sum it up. A quote from Tom Schreiner
(*Romans* from the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 341)

The thrust of Paul's argument in verses 16-23 is that being under grace does not encourage believers to sin. For if their lives evidence slavery to sin, then the consequence will be eternal destruction. The power of grace must lead to a transformed life, for holiness of life is necessary for life eternal. . . . Those who are slaves of righteousness have been liberated from sin by the grace of God. If they practice righteousness, it is an evidence of his grace in their lives. But the imperative cannot be ruled out either. Those who have been freed from the power of sin must be holy in order to experience eternal life. They cannot rely on the indicative of God's grace and shuck off the need for concrete obedience in the particulars of life.

Conclusion

So I say as these verses relate to the pursuit of holiness, they complement what we saw in Romans 6:1-14. There Paul provides reason to obey—we have been freed in order to do so. Here Paul provides incentive to obey—if you continue to be enslaved to sin you will not inherit eternal life because the pursuit of righteousness is evidence of the transformation one receives when one receives the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Whoever you serve is your master. And if sin is your master, death is your destiny. But if righteousness is your master, eternal life is proven to have been God's gift to you.

How should this teaching affect my everyday life?

1. Every temptation should be met with the resolve to submit myself not to sin and death but to righteousness and life. I need to realize with every temptation what is at stake: righteousness or sin and life or death.

2. Every act of sin leads in the direction of more sin, while acts of righteousness promote further acts of righteousness. Thus, the hour of temptation as well as the frame of mind with which I meet every new day are occasions for me to call to mind what is at stake and commit afresh to the path of life. In other words, I must acknowledge that sin wages war against my soul. So I determine to battle for righteousness and life every day.

As these truths fill my mind I am incentivized to obey and seek holiness.