

Slaves to Grace

Studies in Romans

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Bible Text: Romans 6:15-23

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Will you turn this evening to Romans chapter six? We are reading the portion starting at verse 15 through to the end of the chapter.

What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.¹

Amen. The Lord will add his own blessing to this passage from his own precious Word for his name's sake.

Romans six falls into two distinct parts. Verses one through 13 or 14—there is a little discussion as to whether the second part should start at verse 14 or 15—but I take it the first 14 verses are the first part and then verse 15 through to the end of the chapter is the second part of this epistle.

It is very interesting that Paul commences the second part precisely as he did the first. You remember the verse one says:

¹ Romans 6:15-23.

“What shall we say then?”²

Verse 15 says:

“What then...?”³

Verse one says:

“Shall we continue in sin?”⁴

Verse 15 says, again:

“...shall we sin?”⁵

Verse one the reason is:

“...that grace may abound?”⁶

Verse 15:

“...because we are not under the law, but under grace?”⁷

There is obviously an intended repetition. Verse 15 very closely resembles verse one and it substantially repeats the question and the answer of that verse. In other words, in this latter part of the section the apostle Paul, while moving on to some new ground, is nonetheless still refuting the slander that by his doctrine of grace he is giving to believers a license to sin. But though the argument generally is the same, the terms are certainly markedly different.

In verse one the apostle is picking up the idea of chapter five verse 20 and 21.

Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?⁸

Because wherever there is sin there is super abounding grace. Shall we continue in sin to allow God to continue to show his super abounding grace? In other words, this is an objection raised to Paul and his doctrine of grace saying, really, what you are teaching is

² Romans 6:1.

³ Romans 6:15.

⁴ Romans 6:1.

⁵ Romans 6:15.

⁶ Romans 6:1.

⁷ Romans 6:15.

⁸ Romans 5:20—6:1.

Antinomianism or carelessness about personal life and personal standards. We can continue to sin.

Now, in verse 15 he is picking up the language of verse 14. Verse 14 says:

“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin...”⁹

The idea is, again, shall we continue to sin? Shall we live on in sin, because we are not under law, but we are under grace? In the first case, obviously, Paul is answering the objection that because grace is always magnified in super abounding over sin, we should let God manifest his glory by sinning. He is answering that objection. In verse 15 he is dealing with the objection that because we have been justified and secured in our standing with God for all eternity without any reference at all to any good works of our own, then it doesn't really matter whether we do good or ill. So, let's continue in sin.

Now, remember, this is the charge that is being made against the apostle's doctrine. His answer is both plain and pungent. Immediately he says, “God forbid.” And while the Greek of that text simply translates, may it not be, it is a whole lot stronger than that conveys in English. And I think our translators of the Authorized Version—and I gave reasons for this. You will have to go away back to earlier studies—but I think the Authorized Version understood that Paul, in saying this was picking up a Hebrew idea. And they have got something of the force of the apostle's heart when they say, “God forbid that this should be.” That is his answer.

And in the process of working out his detailed reply, he makes it clear what he means by not being under the law. He is not referring specifically or solely or to the law of Moses. He is speaking of not being under law, any law. We are not under law. Now, obviously he does not mean that believers are free from having to obey any kind of law. I don't want to be facetious here, but you try stepping out of the 14th story and saying, “I am not under law and I am not called to obey the laws of gravity,” and we will be picking up the wee bits at the bottom, whether you like it or whether you don't.

Nor is he saying that we are not called upon as citizens to obey the laws of the nation, because later in this epistle he actually goes down that subject and says how we are to obey the laws of our rulers. Nor is he saying that we don't have to obey the law of God, because later in this epistle and, indeed, right throughout this passage he is calling for a life that is truly lawful and obedient to the commands of the Lord. But here he shows what he means when he says, “You are not under law.”

The great American commentator and theologian Charles Hodge said, “To be under law is to be under obligation to fulfill the law of God as a rule of duty and as a condition of salvation.” That is the key to Paul's thinking here. It is to be under the law as an obligation that I have to fulfill in order to be saved.

⁹ Romans 6:14-15.

Hodge goes on very wisely to say, "That as no man is free from sin, as no man can perfectly keep the commandments of God, every man who rests on his personal conformity to the law as the ground of his acceptance with God must be condemned." We are not under law in this sense, but under grace. That is, under a system of gratuitous justification.

You remember studying chapter three I emphasized that word. There are two great words that we should attach to this doctrine of justification. One is gracious and the other is gratuitous. Romans three says we are justified freely, gratuitously by his grace. This free justification, what Paul later calls this gift of justifying righteousness, granted to us by the grace of God without any referenced to any work or merit of our own, we are now under grace, that is, under a system of gratuitous justification. We are justified by grace without works. We are not under a legal dispensation requiring personal conformity to the law and entire freedom from sin, past and present as a condition of the... of our acceptance. But we are under a gracious dispensation according to which God dispenses pardon freely. And he accepts... I want you to listen to this, for when I read it I had a second take to make sure it wasn't a typo or a printer's error. It wasn't. And here is great theology and here is great wisdom. We are under a gracious dispensation according to which God dispenses pardon freely and accepts the sinner as a sinner. There is the heart of the gospel. Accepts a sinner as a sinner for Christ's sake without works or merit of his own.

The devil's lie is that God accepts you as a saint. Therefore become saintly and when you have become sufficiently saintly, when you have repudiated sin sufficiently, when you have overcome sin sufficiently, when you have repented sufficiently, when you have wept sufficiently, when you have done enough, then God will accept you as a saint. That is not the gospel. The gospel is when you come as a sinner to Jesus he accepts you as you are. He doesn't look for a clean up job before he takes you on. He loves the most unlovely. He treats with the most wicked and he saves the most unworthy. He accepts you where he finds you in your sin, but thank God he doesn't leave you there. He saves you and for Jesus' sake and through the merits of his righteousness and shed blood. He pardons your sin freely. He divests you of the rags of your own wickedness and self righteousness and he clothes you with the righteousness of Christ, the garments of salvation, as Isaiah calls them. And all without any input of any work or prayer or merit or any good thing at all that you have ever done. You come as you are, a poor, hell deserving sinner and you come to a holy God, a righteous God who could be expected to throw you immediately into hell to rid such an unclean thing from his presence. But as you come to the holy God he says, "I forgive you, because you come to me on the merits of Jesus Christ. He lived the life. He died the death. He paid the penalty. He put away your sin. I forgive you. And not only will I forgive you, but I accept you. Not I am going to accept you when you have progressed sufficiently to be worthy of acceptance. No, no. I accept you fully, finally, irrevocably, eternally just now. I accept you. And when you are in heaven a million years, I will not be accepting you any more than I am accepting you right now as you come to me in Jesus Christ."

We are under a system of pure grace. That is a glorious truth. I have to stop myself, stand back, take a breath, because I will go on all night in that. That is a glorious truth. You can never hear enough of justifying grace. I am sick of preachers running through the Bible to try to find something new, lifting a text out of context, perverting a word or a phrase in order to find something to tickle the fancy of people who are going out to eternity and all the time what those people need to hear is the central theme of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation justifying grace in Jesus Christ. That is the gospel and you can never hear enough of it.

But, you know, if you ever want to see the wickedness and the depravity of the human heart and mind, then just watch the normal human reaction to such a truth, because from this truth the carnal mind draws the conclusion: Since or because we are under grace, justified and accepted forever without reference to anything we have done or are doing or will do, then it doesn't really matter how we live. We can just continue in sin.

You know, throughout history that has been the constant criticism raised against the doctrine of a free justification. As we have seen, it was raised in Paul's day. He deals with it in these two sections of Romans chapter six. Having expounded the whole doctrine of justification in Romans three and four and in the great fifth chapter and got into the depths of this wonderful truth of being accepted in union with Christ by grace through faith, he immediately has to come down to earth with the bulk, as it were, and say, "Here is the objection. What you are saying, Paul, is: It doesn't matter what we do. We can live any way we like."

So that was the objection raised in Paul's day. It was used in the fifth century by a group called the Pelagians as they sought to fight against the doctrine of grace, sin in Adam and salvation in Christ. It was used and raised again in the days of the Protestant Reformation by the council of Trent, the Roman Catholic council. It was raised to answer the Lutheran and Calvinistic doctrine of justification by faith which was really the New Testament doctrine of justification by faith. And this was the position of the men of Trent. This overthrows all morality. This means you can do what you like. This is not the gospel. This objection is still being employed to this day by Romanists and by Arminians who believe in what is called synergism, that the salvation of your soul is the result of a united effort between God and you. Sadly, that has found its way into many an evangelical and fundamental pulpit. Many of you may well have heard a preacher say, "God has done his part. Now it is up to you to do your part. He has done it all. All you have to do is this. And if he has done his part and you do your part, then together you will get it all right." Well, I am here to tell you it is all of God and it is all of grace and it is all free.

You see, all these objections hold that holiness is the product of law keeping. And therefore this free justification is an invitation to sin. If you are secure in Christ without reference to your works, the carnal mind says there, look, that is an invitation to live wickedly because holiness has to be done by law keeping, by putting you under the law.

Wrong, says Paul. As I have pointed out many times in these studies, holiness will keep the law of God. I preached a whole series on the law of God here in which I took great time to emphasize that holiness will honor the holy, moral law of God. But holiness is not by the law. It is by the gospel. So Paul says this is all wrong. The fact that we are justified, verse 14, means that the dominion of sin is broken. Now most preachers take that to be dealing with some superior level of Christian living and they take it to be referring to some subjective experience of victory in the life. And I have news for you. It is not. Now it will lead to that—and you will see that as we go on. It will lead to the experience of victory in the life, but in Romans six and 14 where he says, “We are not under law, but we are under grace,” he is saying we are justified. We have been lifted out and I will just repeat a little of what we have been doing in the last weeks. We have been lifted out of the realm of sin. We have been lifted out from under the reigning power of sin. And we have been put under grace. We have been justified freely. We are no longer in Adam, but we are now in Christ. This is what Paul is now emphasizing.

But the—and forgive me. I will pronounce this word properly. You Americans all butcher it—the corollary... you will call it the corollary. The last time I looked at it in English there were two Ls in the middle and that is corollary. So I have to teach you English as well. But you know what I am talking about. For those of you that have got Irish blood in your veins and find it hard to follow, I will say it your way. The corollary of this truth is inescapable. And this is what now Paul is perusing. If we are not under sin, we are not under law, if sin is no longer the monarch that is reigning over our souls, but grace is, then—and this is what 15 through 23 is all about—we are no longer slaves to sin, but slaves to grace. Not slaves to sin, but slaves to grace.

Now let me make some very simple remarks that I hope will tie this passage together. Number one, all men are slaves to the one or to the other, either to sin or to grace. We are all slaves. I want you to get this in you mind. There is an awful lot of rubbish talked about man and his free will and free this and free that. Every man, in a sense, has a free will, in the sense that every man has the ability to choose according—that is his volitions—according to the prevailing disposition of his will. But the prevailing disposition of the will is either sin or grace, one or the other. So we are now getting beyond volitions down to the very heart of the human soul.

Every man is a slave. Martin Luther when he wrote his great work *On the Bondage of the Will* he congratulated Erasmus who replied to it on behalf of the pope *On the Freedom of the Will*. He congratulated Erasmus that he had understood the key element in the whole gospel that Luther was preaching. This is the thing. Understand it. Every man and woman is a slave. We are either slaves to sin or we are slaves to grace. And when you read this passage that we have read tonight it is clear that Paul the apostle summarizes or comprehends all men under one of these two reigning monarchs. Every one of us lives under the reigning principle of sin or under the reigning principle of submission to God by faith in the merits of Jesus Christ. To use the language of the apostle here in Romans chapter six, either we are serving sin unto death or we are serving and obeying righteousness, verse 16. Or as 19 puts it, either we are slaves of lust and uncleanness, of

lawlessness producing more lawlessness or we are slaves of righteousness that produces holiness or sanctification, one or the other.

Put it another way. Either we are under law, trying to work our way to heaven, under law, trying by our personal conformity to the law of God to satisfy God and gain his acceptance and open the doors of glory. Or convicted of our sin we have put away trust in ourselves. We have put away trust in our law keeping and we have thrown ourselves upon the mercy of God and the merits of Jesus Christ and we have cried, “God, be merciful to me a sinner. Save my soul for the sake and on the merits of Jesus Christ alone.”

We are either under law trying to work our way to heaven or we are under grace receiving the free gift of justifying righteousness by the application of the merits of Christ received through faith.

Either we are in Adam... remember what chapter five verse 12 had to say about that.

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”¹⁰

Where did they sin? They sinned in Adam. They were condemned in Adam. By nature we were born into this world. We are born in Adam. Every man, woman and child here is either in Adam or by grace now in Christ. Therefore every man is either condemned or justified. So all men are slaves, either to sin or to grace.

Now remember the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6:24? No man can serve two masters. You cannot be both a slave of sin and the slave of grace. In other words, you can't be condemned and justified. You can't be saved and lost. You can't be a child of God and a child of the devil. No man can serve two masters. It is one or the other. And I want you to listen carefully tonight and I want you to take this very much to heart. This goes beyond church and church affiliation and church experience. It goes beyond education at Christian school. It goes beyond profession of faith and this gets right down to the heart of things, where you stand with God. You are a slave. Whose slave? That is the question.

It leads to the second thing I want to say. Each man shows whether he is a slave to sin or a slave to grace by presenting himself as the willing slave of one or the other. Look at verses 16 and 17.

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.¹¹

¹⁰ Romans 5:12.

¹¹ Romans 6:16-17.

Verse 16 gives us a general principle, a self evident truth. It shouldn't take any proving of this. If you hand yourself over as a slave to any master, you are his slave. No great feat of logic or logical power in understanding that. If you present... the word present or yield means to give yourself up to the power or the disposal of another. It means to place yourself deliberately into the hands of another. And Paul is saying if you deliberately place yourself under the power and at the disposal of any master then you are a slave to that master. Understand what he is saying. He is not just saying a servant, not even an indentured servant. He is talking about a slave, a slave—and this was especially true in Roman times. You must understand this was written to the church in the city of Rome. It was written at a time when the world was ruled by Rome and Roman law. And you must understand that a slave under Roman law had hardly the standing of a dog. A slave was and in Paul's thinking here is under his master's power absolutely. And he is bound for life. His servitude does not end.

Furthermore, he doesn't do his own will. He does his master's will. Now there are times when he may enjoy what his master's will is, but whether he likes it or lumps it, a slave's job is to do his master's will.

Now bring this in to Paul's argument. He is saying we are all slaves of sin by nature. We are all under the bondage of sin by nature. But here is the worst thing of all. We are slaves of sin, but we are willing slaves of sin. we love to be slaves of sin. Sinners are not sinners against their will. They are sinners because sin rules in their will and thereby Paul is able to say that you are yielding yourself. You are handing yourself over. You are giving yourself into the owner and the dominion to be at the disposal of sin.

There are times, of course, because the image of God in man, though severely defaced has not been eradicated. There are times when conscience will arouse you. There are times when you will feel guilty for your sin. There are times when you will hate certain aspects of your bondage. We all know what this is about. Men hate the results of their sin. They hate the sadness. They hate the broken hearts, the broken minds, the broken homes, the broken families. They hate the awful scourge that sin brings without hating the master who reigns in the heart. There are times when you may feel guilty and hate aspects of your bondage, but still be driven to serve and obey the master sin.

And, you know, the result is always fatal. Notice three times in this passage that we have read, verse 16, obeying sin unto death; verse 21, the last line, the end of those things is death; verse 23, the wages of sin is death. The result for the slaves of sin is death, eternal death, the second death, death and hell forever. Sin is fatal every time.

The only alternative to sin unto death is obedience unto righteousness or justification. But, you know, that is impossible. I come to a sinner and he is sinning unto death and sin reigns in his heart and the result is death and hell forever. And I come and I say, "Here, what you need to do is start producing obedience so that you will be justified." That is to mock him in his sin for one overpowering reason. Fallen man has neither the will nor the power to escape the reign of sin or to originate righteousness toward God.

Remember what the Lord Jesus said as he spoke to the Jews who said that they were not slaves? “We are not in bondage to any man.”

“Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”¹²

You see, there is no recuperative power in fallen man. Ephesians 2:2 tells of how the fallen man walks:

“...according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”¹³

What is wrong with America today? What is wrong with the world today? What is wrong with society today? Why has education not worked? Why has culture not worked? Why has the greatest prosperity any nation has ever known in history not led to a betterment in the moral standards and climate of the nation? Why have none of these things worked? For the very simple reason that without saving grace, men are walking according to the course of the world. They are walking according to the prince of the power of air, the devil of self. And he is the one who is energizing in the children of disobedience.

We look at the drunk and the drug addict and the street walker and all the people who are on the fringes of society because they are down and almost out and we say we can see Satan working there. Well, you can, but don't ever think that is the only place he is working. You go to the homes of the rich and the famous and the high and the mighty and he is working there just as truly and just as powerfully and for the people involved just as fatally.

So here we are, a slave. And you show to whom you are a slave by presenting yourself, handing yourself over to the control and power and dominion and disposal either of sin and Satan or grace and God, one or the other.

There is hope for getting out of the one into the other, because the gospel has given evidence of this in the experience of believers. Notice carefully the third thing here, that believers started out in the same position as the rest of men, slaves of sin, but they have undergone a great change and they are now slaves of grace. Notice carefully the language of verses 17 and 18.

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.¹⁴

¹² John 8:34.

¹³ Ephesians 2:2.

¹⁴ Romans 6:17-18.

Now I want you to watch the language here very carefully. First thing, notice you obeyed from the heart. This obedience—and you have got to understand this, because Paul is not contradicting himself saying you are saved by faith and now you are saved by obeying. What he means he refers to in chapter one verse five the obedience to the faith or, as the marginal reference puts it, obedience of faith. He repeats that at the very end of the epistle in chapter 16 verse 26 where he say that the gospel:

“...now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”¹⁵

What is this obedience? It is the obedience of faith. Now, as Dr. Barrett will tell you as a Greek scholar, that little word all leads to dozens of pages of discussions on technical books of Greek grammar. The word all is so small but it is so often so important. In this connection it means either the obedience that belongs to faith or the obedience that springs from faith or, as I believe, better still, the obedience that is faith. What he is talking about is a faith that is inside and that is manifested by obedience. It is a faith obedience. That seems to be his idea. It was certainly the idea of his master, the Lord Jesus Christ. For in John chapter six verses 28 and 29 they said unto him.

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.¹⁶

So this obeying from the heart, this obedience is faith that obeys the command of the gospel.

I want you to notice that this faith obedience is from the heart. In other words, it is the submission of the whole mind and will to the truth and terms of the gospel. Notice what I said. It is submitting the whole mind and will to the truth and terms of the gospel.

People that think that faith is a matter just of the head. It is not. Romans chapter 10, remember verse nine.

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth...”¹⁷

You know, when people refuse to believe to the gospel they sometimes try to cloak their problem by presenting it as an intellectual problem.

“I have intellectual problems with the gospel.”

¹⁵ Romans 16:26.

¹⁶ John 6:28-29.

¹⁷ Romans 10:9-10.

Man, don't fool yourself. What you have is a heart problem, a will that is governed by sin, rebellion, lawlessness, wickedness that rejects God and his Christ. It is a heart problem. It is with the heart that man believes unto righteousness. Therefore, Paul is saying here this obedience is from the heart.

I have often quoted the words of the old Scottish theologian Thomas Halliburton. To me this was such a simple statement and yet such a profound statement. And certainly it is what Paul's statement here in Romans six is. Faith is a hearty acceptance of God's way of saving sinners. Faith is throwing out all the rubbish of our own self righteousness, all the dependence on what we have ever been, thought, done or said. And we come to God and recognize his way of saving sinners as set forth in the gospel and say, "This is the way. I want no other way. And there is the submission of the mind to the truth of the gospel that Christ died for our sins, that he rose again the third day according to the Scripture and there is this submission to the terms of the gospel. Repent and believe the gospel. That is how man is saved. Disobedience is from the heart.

Notice the third thing, that it embraces that form of doctrine which was delivered you. The word form of doctrine here should not be misunderstood. If I tell you that we follow that form of faith that is expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, you would say, "Well, we are following that variety, that emphasis, that exposition of the Christian faith." We are not saying that there is no salvation outside of those who follow the doctrinal system of the Westminster Confession, but we are saying that is the form that we follow. And so when you come to this passage and Paul says that you have believed and you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine you might think that is what he means, but it is not what he means. Far, far from what he means. He is not talking about some shade of truth. He is talking about the central, fundamental, inescapable truth apart from which a man or a woman cannot be saved.

The word form is translated in various ways in the New Testament. When in John 20:25 we read of Thomas wanting to see the print of the nails in Jesus' hands, this is the word that is used. In Acts seven and 43 you have Stephen speaking of idols that men made to worship and he calls them figures made to be worshipped. This is the word that he used. And Claudius Lysias wrote to Felix a letter about Paul the apostle he said he wrote in a certain manner or a certain form. That is the word that is used. You remember we made much of the fact in Romans five verse 14 that Adam is a figure of Christ, a type of Christ. That is the word that is used.

Just in passing, let me just throw out something for sometimes, well, always a little knowledge is dangerous. You hear sometimes some criticism of the Authorized Version of the Scriptures because it will translate the same word in 10 different ways. Well, I have just given you a variety of texts in which the same word, the word that gives us the English word type is used. But you would never say when Thomas wanted to see the mark of the nails in Jesus' hand that he was looking for a type. No, no. He was looking for the print of the nails. It is a good translation. There is good reason, often times for the variety of the English as it translates the same word in Greek. This word, actually, is most commonly translated as an example, having the idea of a pattern.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:11:

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition.”¹⁸

In Philippians 3:17 he said:

“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.”¹⁹

We are the pattern. I think you know this is getting to the heart of this word that we have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine. The word form means something that is normative. It creates the norm. It is formative. It is the guiding principle. It is the rule of that doctrine.

Now Paul is saying you have obeyed from the heart the guiding principle or the rule of that doctrine. What doctrine is he talking about? What rule is he talking about? Well, he is talking about the doctrine he has been expounding throughout Romans, the doctrine of grace, the doctrine of free justification, the doctrine that God condemned us in Adam, but by grace he receives us in Christ and he imputes to us the merits of the righteousness of Christ, putting away our sin by his grace through Christ’s merit without any input of our works. That is the great doctrine.

And he is saying, “You have obeyed from the heart that rule, that norm of all Christian doctrine.”

This is a great text, you know. This is the norm. This is how you judge all preaching. This is how you judge all doctrine. This is how you judge whether churches are standing or falling, being faithful or unfaithful. This is the normative and formative doctrine of the Christian religion. And Paul says you have obeyed this from your heart.

Now here is an amazing thing and I think our translators didn’t quite get why Paul wrote what he wrote, because their translation is done to make it read good in English.

“...ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”²⁰

Doesn’t that make good sense? You have this delivered to you. You obeyed it. You believed it. That makes good sense. And it is true, but it is not what Paul said. What he said was, “You have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. You have obeyed that form of doctrine unto which you were handed over.

Now what does that mean? Remember, that this whole passage has to do with slaves and

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:11.

¹⁹ Philippians 3:17.

²⁰ Romans 6:17.

slavery. He is saying God took you out of the thralldom of sin, delivered you from that evil master and he handed you over to grace. You once were a slave of sin. He took you and he handed—and that is the idea in the Word delivered. He handed you over to grace. Thus, we read, verse 18:

“Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”²¹

I think I prefer a stronger rendering. Ye were made the slaves of righteousness, literally ye were enslaved to righteousness. That is the glorious change that God makes. And this is why I love the gospel. You can go anywhere with the gospel. You can meet any kind of people with the gospel. You can go to the up and out or the down and out. You can go to the rich or the poor. You can go to any part of the world. It is the same gospel. And what does it say? It says as Colossians 1:13 puts it that the Father:

“...hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.”²²

He has taken us out of the thralldom of sin and he has handed us over to grace. Now that is a beautiful picture. Righteousness is now the ruling force in us. We are slaves of righteousness, slaves of justification. That is justification, meaning pardon and acceptance with God, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is now the governing principle, the master of our minds, the master of our will which now commands our obedience.

And that leads me to the last thing I have got to say. And it is this, verse 19 through 23. As slaves, we live according to the rule of our master.

Notice what Paul says in verse 19.

“I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh.”²³

What he means is, given the weakness of our understanding—and I have to confess that as I have studied Romans I understand what he means about the weakness of our understanding. I spent hours and hours and hours and hours going through, pondering, reading, reading what together people think, trying to come to grips with the massive thought of the greatest theologian. I know he is inspired and therefore his word is inerrant, but even in human terms, the greatest theologian, the greatest mind the world has ever seen. And coming to grips with the depths of what he is saying here.

I have understood how weak my understanding is. And I have no doubt that as you have listened to me, you said, “I wish we had a preacher who could make it clear to us, because we feel how weak our understanding is.”

²¹ Romans 6:18.

²² Colossians 1:13.

²³ Romans 6:19.

Well Paul took us into consideration. He says:

“I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh.”²⁴

He says almost apologetically, “What I am doing here I am using the imagery from the slave market just to try and take these great, great theological truths and bring them down to a level that you can relate to and you can understand. A slave can be a slave only to one master at a time.”

In this case, verse 19, we were slaves to the idea of impurity, uncleanness. We were also slaves to lawlessness. You see, here are two things. Lusting after uncleanness. Those are the lusts of the flesh. And repudiating every restraint that God’s law would place upon us. And you will notice how it multiplies. Impurity. Lawlessness leading to more lawlessness which would lead to more impurity, which would lead to more lawlessness. It is a downward spiral to the very dark depths of hell. That is sin reigning.

I wonder are you there tonight. I wonder as you sit in God’s house tonight is that where you are where sin is the dominating force, it is the ruling, reigning principle, the monarch of your mind and of your will. You have been handed over. You have handed yourself over into his hands.

But now notice this concerning believers he has said that God has set us free. He has set us free. The word free is an important word. It was a Greek word that Christ used in Romans eight. It is a word that Paul uses in his epistles. No writer in the New Testament pays such attention to the idea of Christian freedom, Christian liberty. Man, it makes me sick when I think of people of the reformed persuasion—and I am one of the reformed persuasion—who have brought this idea of Christian liberty down to such a sick level that it is simply a license for them to go out and drink booze. It is their liberty to take alcohol. Paul was talking of something all together more glorious when he is talking about freedom. It is freedom from condemnation. It is freedom from the bondage of having to establish our own righteousness before God by our own works. It is freedom from the thralldom and dominion and the reign and the mastery of sin. He has set us free and he has placed us in the hands of a new master.

Grace personified as the master is really a word for Christ our justifier, Christ our righteousness. That is what he has done for us. Therefore, he says, verse 19, yield yourselves, hand yourselves over to this new master. And let me point out to you—and I really should take an extra week on this alone. Of course, I have dealt with a hundred things tonight I should take an extra week on. But I don’t have those weeks. Christians wonder: How can I really be holy? How can I really get victory? How can I really live the life that I ought to live?

I want you to notice this, that it is righteousness that produces holiness. It is justification

²⁴ Ibid.

that produces sanctification. It is understanding what your position is in Christ and reckoning on it and acting on it. That is what gives you actual holiness of life.

There is no dichotomy in the Bible. There is no great severance in the Bible between justification and sanctification and this notion that holiness is to be attained by me giving you a list of rules, regulations and principles and saying, do this, cut your hair a certain way, wear a certain color of shoes, have a certain kind of suit on and all the rest and do, do, do and you will be holy. You keep on doing those things—and many of them are good things to do—and you will still be as unholy inside as ever you were before. You need to be justified in order to be sanctified. You need the grace of God taking you out of the mastery of sin and putting you into the hands of Christ, your justifier in order to be holy.

And the beautiful thing, verse 20 through 22 makes it clear that the old tyrant sin can no longer enslave you. When you were a slave of sin, you were free of righteousness. And we all remember that. you have no power to do anything that would please God or merit his grace in salvation. You were free from righteousness.

You sees, slaves of sin can't produce righteousness. They can't save their souls. They can't gain acceptance. And they have no motive power to produce holiness. And I want to notice that if you re not saved, I am going to take a minute to emphasize this in verse 21:

“What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?”²⁵

The idea of fruit is what benefit. Some of you may not be saved and as the Lord speaks to your heart, the devil kicks up and he brings many arguments and he tells you what you will... and this is a favorite argument of the old liar the devil. What ... what you are going to lose, what you have got to give up to be a Christian. What you have got to give up? That is like saying to man dying of cancer, “To be healed you have got to give up your cancer.” I mean, that is rubbish. It is a lie. Here Paul says, “What fruit, what benefit did you have in those things?”

And I ask any sinner. What benefit do you have? Anything that keeps you from Christ there will come a day when you will be thoroughly ashamed of that thing. And what a day when you stand before God and say, “Lord, I give up Christ. I give up the call of the gospel. I give up my soul. Because of the supposed benefit the gain of sin.

I want to tell you, my friend, sin is a terrible task master and tyrant and sin is 100 percent loss. Slaves of sin gain no benefit for the end result, the end of those things is death. However, slaves of God, verse 22, have fruit unto holiness. You see, if you are justified you want to live holy. The carnal mind says, “Hey, you are justified. You can live whatever way you like.”

²⁵ Romans 6:21.

The Christian's answer is, "Yeah. I wish I could always do what I like, because I like to please God. I like to please my master. I like to do what the great master of my mind and will now commands. I like to have my life as a reflection of the grace that saved me."

But no Christian ever says, "I am saved by grace without works, therefore it doesn't matter how I work. I can live like the devil and go to heaven." These people who say, "Oh, I am saved, you know. I am saved. I walked the aisle and I signed the card and I joined the church and I got baptized and I have done this and I have done that and I am saved and I can do anything but go to hell." And they do it. Well, they go to hell at the end of it. They will go to hell at the end of it. For no man that has ever been justified—understand what I am saying—no man that has ever been justified makes justification an excuse or a license to sin. It is the devil's lie. Justification is unto holiness, sanctification. And the end result is everlasting life. But that end result, you know, it is not the result of our holiness. That is the thing. Verse 23, it is the gift of God.

Notice the significant change of terms in Romans 6:23.

"For the wages of sin is death."²⁶

The end of sin is the earned wages of one who has fought in the cause of sin and that end result is death.

The word wages is a word that has in it the idea of a soldier getting his wages. Remember earlier I pointed out Paul uses the word for the members of your body being used for sin and he is using the word that normally means weapons. You make your hands, your feet, your eyes, your ears, your tongue, you make them weapons of sin. You are a soldier in the army of sin. And what he is saying is, "Pay day is coming." As a great American preacher titled one of the most famous sermons preached in modern times in America, "Pay day some day."

For the wages of sin, the end of a Christ rejecter's life is something that he has earned. But the end of bearing fruit for Christ is eternal life. It is not wages, but it is the gift of God. It is the crowning benefit of grace. It is the full enjoyment of the gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ our Lord.

As we close tonight we come full circle. Paul has maintained the truth of justification through grace by faith alone without works. He has talked about this sole merit and mediation of Jesus Christ. He has talked about the security of the believer in Jesus Christ without any works of his own entering into the picture. And he has made it clear that this truth is not a license to sin, but it is a platform to live in holiness.

We are all slaves.

A great English preacher was going along in a train one day and he gave his testimony to a fellow traveler and invited him to Christ. And the man said, "You are a fool." The

²⁶ Romans 6:23.

preacher said, "I am Christ's fool. Whose fool are you? I am a slave. But I am Christ's slave. Whose slave are you?"

And if you are here tonight as a slave of the tyrant sin, I am here to tell you that the power that took this guilty, hell deserving sinner out of the realm and reign of sin and handed me over to grace, I want you to get that picture in your mind and never, never forget it. I see God reaching down into the slave market of sin seeing me, this vile, willing servant and slave sin and I see the almighty hand of the living Christ. I see those nail pierced, blood sprinkled hands and I see them reach down and lift me out of that realm of sin and hand me over to grace. That is the picture I want you to get. And that is what the Lord does. And you come and by faith as a sinner to Christ

Whose slave are you?

Let's bow our heads in prayer.

In a moment the meeting will be over. I cannot lift you out of sin into grace. But the hand of the almighty living Christ can. You are justified by grace but it is through faith and faith is simply a sinner believing on the Lord Jesus. I would love to see you come to Christ. Come without delay. Dr. Barrett and I, indeed, all the elders and workers in the church are here as your servants for Christ's sake. Come. Let us open the book of God tonight to help you to grasp this great gospel and yield to it the obedience of faith.

Father in heaven, bless thy Word to every heart now we pray and, God, grant that this night in this place and wherever this message is seen and heard, thou wilt bless it to bring sinners out of the thralldom of sin and into the kingdom of thy dear Son and to bring thy people into the liberty and the victory that rightly belongs to the justified people of God. Answer prayer abundantly and give grace to souls to close with Christ as he is freely offered to them in the gospel. Part us now with thy blessing. Keep us in thy fear. Give fruit for the preaching of the Word. We pray giving thee our thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the merits of his precious atoning blood. Amen.