

## **Romans 6:15-19 Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?**

### **Part 1**

Following the perhaps surprising point in v13 that to be under sin is to be under the dominion of sin, Paul clarifies himself by posing the question, *Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?* and answering it with an emphatic, *Certainly not!* That is, shall we continue to be lawless because we are not under law but under grace? Then we get the short answer (in the form of a question!)

Romans 6:16 *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?*

Jewish people would have known very well the choice God gives us between life and death, though perhaps not Paul's gentile readers. They knew this because the choice goes all the way back to the garden. There were two trees, one associated with life, and the other with death. No sane person would in their right mind eat from the tree that led to death, except that there was an evil whispering serpent in the garden. In one sense we are all in the garden, and we all face the choice between life and death: that's quite a choice. This is a theme throughout the Bible.

Deuteronomy 30:15-16 *See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.*

The choice is not if we are going to obey, but who we are going to obey. Are we going to obey sin leading to death, or obedience leading to righteousness and life? Will we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength? Or will we turn and love other gods? This may be a shrine in our front room, but in the materialistic West is it more likely to be money, or success, or hedonism (pleasure), or the biggest one of all, ourselves.

For example, if we give ourselves to alcohol we become drunk, and drunkenness can lead to alcoholism, which is a life destroying addiction. Pornography, gambling, drugs or lying can be equally destructive. Even things which aren't bad in themselves can become addictive: shopping, eating or internet gaming. But even without any of these more serious vices, there is in each one of us a principle at work which Paul calls the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2.) Now believers in Jesus have been freed from sin, how can we do anything but give ourselves to obedience leading to righteousness?

We are slaves to the one we obey. If we obey God we become slaves to God. That doesn't sound very nice. Can God really be trusted? Aren't there verses in the Bible that approve of slavery? Maybe the God of the Bible is a nasty enslaving God after all. There are some verses that have to be interpreted carefully and in context, but really nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible has two big stories, which overlap. The first is the story of the Exodus, which is about God setting people free from slavery. The second is the story of Jesus dying and rising again to set people free from the slavery of sin. God's heart is to set people free from everything that oppresses them. But he does it on His terms and not ours. If we can trust ourselves to Him in obedience leading to righteousness we invite His blessing into our lives.

Romans 6:17-18 *But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

For the believers in Rome this gospel wasn't just theory; they knew the reality and the power of the gospel in their lives. Sometimes for us, the truth of the gospel needs to drop 12 inches down from our heads to our hearts. When we only give mental assent to the gospel our behaviour remains unchanged. A spirit of unbelief, or an unbelieving attitude, gets between us and God like an invisible wall. This wall needs tearing down (2Corinthians 10:5). For the believers in Rome, this wall had come tumbling down. But Paul attributes this reality in their lives to *the form of teaching to which they were committed*. Whatever exactly this teaching was, we can safely assume that is contained teaching from the Scriptures, the gospel, and possible stories and teaching of Jesus. Spiritual transformation doesn't just happen, or take place in a vacuum. Jesus taught,

John 8:32 *You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.*

To be free we need to allow the truth of the word of God to impact our lives. This can only happen as we listen to the word preached, and read it in our personal devotions. The power for spiritual transformation is in the word. But it's not just words on the page: God is the Word who became flesh in the person of Jesus. It is Jesus who brings about this inner change. This is the choice God places before us,

Romans 6:19 *I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.*

The process of spiritual transformation is obedience, which leads to righteousness, which leads to holiness. It is called sanctification. We will continue with this in the next session, but I want to finish today with a parable, from C.S. Lewis' book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. It is about spiritual transformation.

Take some time to think through the spiritual meaning Lewis has placed in this story.

*In **The Voyage of the Dawn Treader**, Lewis tells of how a young boy named Eustace becomes a dragon—a very unhappy dragon at that. Eustace steals a gold armband and puts it on, only to find that his greed turns him into a dragon. And the armband is excruciatingly tight on his dragon foot.*

*One night, in the midst of his pain and frustration, Eustace encounters a huge lion who tells the boy to follow it to a high mountain well. Eustace longs to bathe his aching foot in the cool water, but the lion tells him he must undress first. It seems silly to Eustace because dragons don't wear clothes, but then he remembers that dragons, like snakes, cast their skins.*

*So Eustace scratches his skin, and the scales begin falling off—and soon his whole skin peels away. But when he puts his foot in the water, he sees that it is just as rough and scaly as before. He continues scratching at the second dragon skin and realizes there is yet another underneath.*

*Finally the lion says, "You will have to let me undress you."*

*Eustace is afraid of the lion's claws but desperate to get in the water. The first tear is painfully deep as the lion begins to peel away the skin. Surely death will follow, Eustace believes. With the gnarled mess of dragon skin now cut away, the lion holds Eustace and throws him into the water.*

*Initially, the water stings, but soon it is perfectly delicious. Eustace swims without pain, for he's a boy again.*