

The Gospel as it Really Is: Romans simply Explained
Sanctification (3) - A New Master!
Romans 6:15-23
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Some Latin

Simul iustus et peccator?

This short phrase coined by Martin Luther summarises both the great blessing of every believer and perhaps alongside the blessing, our greatest sorrow

- Simul—simultaneously
- Iustus—justified
- Et— and
- Peccator—a sinner

On the one hand we have been justified, declared righteous in God's eyes, unchangeably perfect forever because of what Christ has done for us, what a wonderful blessing! But on the other hand, at the very same time, while we remain in this world lamentably still finding that we have wrong thoughts, say wrong words and do wrong deeds.

As we make our way through Romans we've arrived at the part of the book where Paul deals with the "sin problem" in a believer's life. What should you and I do about the ongoing sin in our lives? That's the question Paul is answering in Romans 6,7 and 8. The answer is "sanctification" - we need to battle against our sin and put on righteousness.

Some people, were suggesting that it was OK for a believer to just keep on sinning, "*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*" (6:1)

If we keep on sinning then won't our sinning demonstrate just how amazing God's grace is? "What, God loves that person even though he keeps on offending God? God must be so gracious!" Paul's answer to that was "By no means!" "No way". No Christian should think like that!

Other people were saying much the same thing and this is today's Scripture, but in a slightly different way: "*Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?*" (6:15)

We don't live under the law anymore, striving to impress God with our obedience, we live under grace, we know we are forgiven no matter what mistakes we may have made. "Since we live under grace", some people were saying, "since our sin does not affect our salvation, why don't we keep on sinning?"

- We used to use foul language—it doesn't matter if we continue the habit!
- We used to hang out with the wrong crowd — there's no requirement to stop the practice!
- We used to slander people—no need to give up our old ways!

...because, since we live under grace, our sin does not affect our standing with God!

Again, what's Paul's answer, again, again, verse 15: *"By no means."* No way!

What Paul is doing in chapter 6 is dismantling the idea that a Christian can just go on sinning after their conversion; carelessly, indifferently, recklessly. He's teaching that believers must address the sin that remains in our lives. We must seek to live holy lives. We must be sanctified. We must live a new life! And the way he impresses sanctification on us is to introduce us to some new doctrines, to help us see why we can't keep on sinning.

"Don't you know?" he asked last week, verse 1, and again today, verse 16, again, "Don't you know."

The reason any Christian would think that they can continue in sin is because they lack these truths, they *"don't know"*. Once they grasp these truths, they'll change their minds. The truth last week was union with Christ. You were united to Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection, when he died for sin, you died to sin, you died to your old life: *"We died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?"* (v.2) And you have been raised with Christ to a new life of righteousness.

Someone who says "I can go on sinning" doesn't yet understand union with Christ. They must begin thinking, verse 11, "in the same way count yourself dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

And today Paul adds a second reason we cannot go on sinning:

We cannot go on sinning because we have a new Master

Paul takes us into the broken world of slavery for his next argument as to why a believer cannot go on sinning. He says, in verse 19, that this is a human argument, perhaps he's not happy to use slavery to illustrate a spiritual truth, but since his readers were weak, this easy-to-understand analogy is necessary. Across the Roman empire, don't forget, a large number of people were slaves, some say 10% some say a lot higher. Everyone reading this letter would have known the wretched practice of slavery; many would have been slaves themselves.

Just a note here: Whenever we think of slavery in the west, we tend to think of white on black slavery, new world colonial slavery. Slavery in Roman times was colour blind. People of all nationalities were enslaved by people of all nationalities. This did not make Roman slavery any less wicked, don't misunderstand me, but it removes a possible misconception. Roman slavery was much more like modern slavery. In the 21st century, right across the world there are estimated 50 million people in slavery, according to antislavery.org. with every colour enslaving every other colour. One person in

every 160 in the world today is a slave. That ought to keep 21st century people humble. Look, says Paul, here's a slave, let's work out who his master is.

Master A comes along and commands the slave, "pour me a drink." But the slave pays him no attention! The slave ignores him!

Then Master B comes along "pour me a drink" he commands, and immediately the slave obeys! We've worked it out, the slave's master is not A, but B.

Verse 16: "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness."

Why can't a Christian go on obeying sin? Because that would mean they were slaves to sin! But *you're not* slaves to sin:

Verse 17-18 "Thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

Sin isn't your master any longer! You have a new master, righteousness! When you came to faith and committed yourself to the truth of the Gospel you were set free from old master sin and became a slave to new master Righteousness!

So it's incongruous, it's out of place, it's incompatible, inappropriate, even bizarre that you should return to obeying your old master sin!

See what Paul is saying? Sin is out of place in a Christian's life because we have been set free from our old master sin and have a new master, righteousness.

And to reinforce his argument, Paul asks us to ponder for a few moments, the tragic harvest we reaped when we used to obey old master sin. Obeying him brought us shame and ruin and disaster. Why would you want to go back to him?

Verse 19 "What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death."

"Death" in the Bible means much more than physical death, it means separation from God, it refers to all the tragic marriage, bodily, family & community consequences that flow from disobedience. "Think of all the damage you did to your body, to your mind and to all your relationships when you obeyed Master Sin? Why would you want to continue obeying Master Sin, just based on the consequences?"

We should note from verse 19, that unbelievers go deeper and deeper into sin as time goes by: *"You used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity with ever-increasing wickedness.* Sin is progressive. Without the Holy Spirit, no-one grows old gracefully. The older you get the worse you get! Glastonbury has been on the news. The world honours old rockers. (I have no idea why, they can hardly sing any more and some of them can barely stand up!) You and I shouldn't honour old rockers because many of these men and women lived wicked lives at the heights of their careers, decades ago, and now in the winter of their lives, they are more wicked than they have ever been! We should pray for them but never honour them.

Why obey master Sin, considering all the harm he did to you when you obeyed him? And in the same way, think of all the *benefits* you have received since obeying Master Righteousness: *"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life."* (verse 22)

Just based on outcomes, positive ones obeying master Righteousness and negative ones obeying Master Sin, why would you want to go back to your old master sin? *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Summary of Paul's teaching in these verses

Pastor, I haven't followed everything today, Paul's logic, his slavery example, can you wrap up your sermon in simple language? God-helping me, I shall. Paul is teaching us three things,

(1) Christians need to hear that they cannot just go on sinning.

That's the basic point Paul is making throughout chapters 6,7 and 8. We must be sanctified. *"Shall we go on sinning?" By no means! (1-2) "Shall we sin?" By no means! (verse 15)*

(2) Christians need to realize that they have a new Master

It's possible for a believer to be unaware that the power of sin has been broken in their lives, that they do not need, any longer to obey the old Master. Have you seen those video clips of an animal being released to the wild? The cage door is opened but the animal doesn't run away! It's been caged so long it thinks that's the norm. Someone has to rattle the door, give it a poke! I am told that some farm animals, like a horse, mule, ox that for years has been tethered to a post and walked in weary circles to tread out the corn, when you cut the rope that tied them to the central stake, they don't take their freedom but continue to walk endlessly around the old beaten path. You've got to kind of prod the beast—"you're free now!" make him realise! Off you trot! Away to freedom!

Did you know, Christian friends, that God has supernaturally, powerfully, set you free from the power of sin? Three times in this chapter, verse 7, 18 & 23 Paul tells us that. Did you know that you no longer **have to** obey sin. You did in the past, you had to obey Master sin, righteousness had no control over you, verse 20, but no longer!

*O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace.*

Why? Charles Wesley? Why sing?

*He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;*

Maybe you did not know that, "Don't you know?" You thought when the old Master rocked up and whispered in your ear, you had no choice! And this morning you have learnt for the first time, that the power of sin has been broken in your life forever. You don't have two Masters, with equal authority! One day sin gets the upper hand and the next day Righteousness wins out. No, you have only one master.

(3) Christians need to run from the old master and obey the New one

And finally, with this in mind, if I can put it like this, Christians need to run from their old master and obey their new master. This is immensely practical. *"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."* I can't put it any better than Stuart Olyott:

"We must go through life avoiding the old master. If I find that a certain sort of book or TV programme (or website) stirs me up to sin, I must cut it out. Anything that unnecessarily leads me into confrontation with the old master is to be abandoned. He is much stronger than any of us think and will do everything in his power to get us to obey him. We need to avoid him like the plague, for plague he is."

That's the negative. The positive is this,

"We ought to see every day and hour as an opportunity to serve him and ought to seek to do everything for his glory. Our hands should be filled with his work, and our times disciplined to do as much for him as mortal life allows. When all our time is spent in joyfully seeking to please our new master, we will no longer be prey for the old one."

May the Lord help us to work these things out, may he empower us by the Holy Spirit to respond to his Word and live holy lives pleasing to him in every way.