

## Salvation And Sin (Part 2)

Romans 6:15-23

Series: Book of Romans [#09]

Lyle L. Wahl

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Theme: **Grace Alone Leads To Holiness And Eternal Life.**

### Introduction.

Seventy-two years ago Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book *The Cost of Discipleship* was published. In the chapter "Grace and Discipleship", the first section was titled "Costly Grace", but the opening words were "Cheap Grace." What does he mean by *costly grace*, *cheap grace*? On the one hand, grace cannot be cheap for God because it involved God the Son humbling Himself to become one of us and dying on the cross, taking our sin on Himself. On the other hand, grace cannot be costly for us in terms of receiving it because, by definition, grace is a free gift.

Listen to a few descriptions he gives us.

- In cheap grace, he writes, "An intellectual assent ... is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins."<sup>1</sup>
- "Cheap grace means justification of sin without the justification of the sinner ... let the Christian live like the rest of the world."<sup>2</sup>
- On the other hand, costly grace "is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*."<sup>3</sup>
- "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."<sup>4</sup>

There are today various forms of cheap grace which need to be replaced with costly grace. The apostle Paul established the truth of salvation by God's grace through faith in the opening chapters. At the start of chapter 6 he begins dealing with what this means in practical terms, in particular the relationship of salvation and sin. In the first part of the chapter, which we looked at last week, he soundly routs the cheap grace notion that believers can continue sinning in order to receive more grace from God. He reminds us that salvation breaks sin's reign over us. We have died to sin's control. We are to live for God and grow in being like Christ, or holiness.

In the second part of the chapter he soundly routs the cheap grace notion that believers can continue sinning because we are under grace, not under the Old Testament Law with all of its commandments. His main thrust in this last part of the chapter is that *Grace alone leads to holiness and eternal life*.

## Isn't Grace Without Law Disastrous?

Paul kicks off this section with a question, as he did in the first section. Verse 15. "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Paul raises this question because he anticipates some questions and reactions to his statement on grace in verse 14, "sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

Some Jewish believers, having grown up and lived under the Law, might have difficulty in understanding now being "under grace" and not the Law. They might wonder if grace without the Law is disastrous. "Where are the *fences*," they ask. "Where are the positive and negative boundaries, definitions and measurements of holiness?" They might fear that without the Law some believers would not know how to, let alone actually live a holy life.

Then, some Gentile believers might think, "Since I am saved by grace and don't have to follow the 613 commandments of the Old Testament Law as the Jews had to, I can live any way I want." If not that, at least, "I shouldn't sin. But, since I am under God's grace, in the end my sin isn't that serious because I *am* going to be with Christ in heaven, and that is what really counts!"

That kind of cheap grace thinking is more prevalent than we might want to admit. One man said, "There is a subtle poison which insinuates itself into the heart of even the best Christian; it is the temptation to say: Let us sin, not *that* grace may abound, but *because* it abounds."<sup>5</sup> The list of excuses and rationalizations for living this way is quite lengthy:

- Everyone does it.
- No one is perfect.
- It's not hurting anyone.
- It's not really a *big* or *serious* sin.
- God understands.
- I just can't help it.

Paul's answer to this, as with the first question, is "May it never be!" "No! No! No! A thousand times no!" Any time you and I do not take temptation and sin seriously, we are allowing that *poison* to run freely and saturate our minds and hearts.

This is not living under grace. This thinking does not understand grace. Living under grace does not mean there are no certain and clear truths, no commands to follow. Look back to verse 11 where Paul gives several commands believers are to follow.

"Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." (11-13)

The truth is that *Grace alone leads to holiness as well as eternal life*. We see some of what that means in this section. This is a clear, sweeping, and forceful statement. Why was Paul so forceful about this? It was not because he was cantankerous, power hungry or intolerant. It was because He loved Christ, Christ's truth and Christ's people. He knew the stakes were high, and he did not want any believer to be sidetracked and spiritually stunted because of error and sin. He is writing in love and concern for those believers in Rome to know and live in the truth and purity of God. And so Paul *was* forceful. "No! Never think that because you are under God's grace you can continue to sin!" He is *setting some things straight* so believers will know and grow in the truth, will grow in purity, will grow in being like Christ.

### **Setting Things Straight.**

The first thing Paul sets straight is that every person serves someone or something. We are servants by nature. He tells us this right after the question and answer in verse 15. Go on to verse 16,

"Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?"

Verse 22 states it bluntly. "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God..."

That we are servants and, specifically, that we serve either sin or God and His righteousness, is not an easy truth for most people to accept. Many people see themselves as free—free from anything and anyone beyond themselves. Some people see God as wanting to restrict their freedom. They want to remain free to be themselves and do what they choose to do. The twentieth century sociologist C. Wright Mills expressed some of this when he wrote "Whatever else it may mean, freedom means that you have the power to do what you want to do, when you want to do it, and how you want to do it."<sup>6</sup>

The reality is that God created us to know *and* serve Him. We were created to be servants. That is part of who we are. There is no escaping or changing this reality. It is a reality that goes back to creation. God created Adam. God planted a garden in Eden. And "Then the LORD God took the man [Adam] and put him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Adam was to *serve* God in this way. God's command to Adam to rule "over every living thing that moves on the earth" was also part of his being a servant of God (Genesis 1:28). "Every person serves someone or something. We are servants by nature."

Going on, Paul straightens out some things about freedom. Specifically, that freedom in Christ is freedom from sin to obeying God. Look at verse 17.

"But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin,

you became slaves of righteousness.” (17-18)

Notice that even our salvation came as we “became *obedient from the heart*” to the gospel. God in His grace enabled us to have faith, enabled us, for the first time, to *obey God from the heart*. Thanks be to God *forever* that my slavery to sin, that your slavery to sin is over!

*Salvation breaks sin’s reign!*

*Believer’s have died to sin’s reign!*

Paul’s speaking to us as having been slaves to sin and now being slaves to God may make us a bit uncomfortable. In verse 19 he tells us he is using the image of slavery because it is a human term we know. The believer’s at Rome knew slavery all too well. It was a negative, degrading and repulsive reality. Why did Paul use this metaphor? He tells us he used it because of our weakness as human beings to understand spiritual truth, and this truth of our being servants of sin or of God is one we need to know, and know clearly.

Let’s go back to Adam. When Adam sinned things changed. He was still a servant by nature. But now, because of his choice, because of his sin, he and all his descendants—including you and me—are born as servants, as slaves of sin. It was only by God’s grace through faith that Adam could be restored to being a servant of God and His righteousness. It is only by God’s grace through faith in Christ that we can be released from slavery to sin to serve God and His righteousness.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of John’s gospel Jesus told some “Jews who had believed Him,”

“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:34-36)

Being freed from serving sin to serve God is true freedom, it is being *free indeed!*

We are either slaves to sin or free to serving God. When we were saved, we were freed from slavery to sin to serving God. That is an objective work of God’s grace. But the day to day battle goes on, as we all know, and often know all too well. Paul gives us this picture in Galatians 5, beginning at verse 17.

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” (17-18)

The first question in the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 is “What is thy only comfort in life and in death?” The answer, in part:

“That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and

redeemed me from all the power of the devil...”<sup>7</sup>

Listen carefully. When Christians fail to understand that God’s grace is not freedom to do whatever *we* want, but freedom to do what God wants, we face unneeded struggles, failures, discouragement and doubt, in addition to sin. “*Freedom in Christ is freedom from sin to obeying God.*” “*Grace Alone Leads To Holiness And Eternal Life.*”

We also see this in the last thing Paul straightens out here. It is the reality that a choice must be and, in fact, is made by each of us. He shows us this through the dramatic contrast of the results of the choice we make.

This section of Scripture makes it clear that there are only two options. There is no middle ground. There is no sitting on the fence. At this moment you and I, along with everyone else on earth, is living in one option or the other. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 6:24 when he talked about serving wealth.

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Let’s survey what Paul says about this, beginning with the first choice of remaining a slave of sin. Verse 16.

“Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death ...?”

We are slaves of whoever or whatever we serve. The result of remaining a slave to sin is death. Death, remember, has the idea of separation. Physical death separates us from our bodies. Spiritual death separates us from God. Paul is referring to both here, but primarily to spiritual death which is the result of sin. This is the option everyone follows until or unless they come to God through Jesus Christ.

Drop down to verse 19. “... For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness...” When we presented ourselves to impurity and lawlessness, which is the natural way of life, this led to even more lawlessness or sin. Yes, some non-Christian people are more moral and honest, more kind and loving than others. Yes, some non-Christian people improve their choices and way of life. But this does not change the fact that sin leads to more sin. It may not always be worse and worse sin, but it *is* always more and more sin.

Verse 20. “For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.” This does not mean that unsaved people don’t do good things. They do. It means that there is no bond, no motivation, no power to please God in those who are still in sin.

Verse 21. “Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.” The closing verse, verse 23, states it succinctly, “For the wages of sin is death...” Death is the payment sin earns and

deserves. We die physically because we are in a world that is fallen and sinful because of Adam's and Eve's sin. Everlasting separation from God and judgment is the wage that will be justly paid to everyone who lives and dies in this choice.

Now let's turn to the other option or choice, the choice of becoming a servant of God and His righteousness. Verses 16 and 17 tells us that obeying God and His gospel from the heart results in righteousness. Turn back to chapter 4, verse 5. "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." Look at the first verse in chapter 5.

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God." (1-2)

Jump ahead to 10:9.

"if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." (9-10)

Verse 18 reminds us that since we believed we "have been freed from sin, [and] became slaves of righteousness." Verse 19 states that when a believer presents himself as a slave to righteousness it leads to, it results in sanctification. Skipping down to verse 22,

"But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life."

*"Grace alone leads to holiness and eternal life."*

And, finally, Paul reminds us in verse 23 that this is not like the earned and deserved wage of sin, but it is the "grace gift," or "free gift ... of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." As he wrote to the church at Ephesus,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (2:8-10)

The dramatic contrast of the results of your choice make it clear that this is vitally, eternally important.

## Conclusion.

One question frequently asked when looking at this section is “Whose slave are you?” It is a question each of us should ask ourselves now. “Am I a slave of sin or of God and His righteousness?” Some of us may not yet have come to God through Jesus Christ and received His free gift of

- forgiveness of all our sin
- His everlasting life
- His peace, joy and strength
- His presence with us through all this life and our presence with Him for all eternity

Make that choice today. You can do this in the next quiet moments. If you do, talk with me, Pastor Tyler or someone else about this before you leave. Or, if you have questions and want to talk about it, we will be happy to do that.

Every believer, every child of God, should also ask and answer this question, “Whose slave am I?” Yes, your sins are forgiven and you are bound for heaven. You have eternal life by God’s grace. But right now, today, this last week, whose slave have you been in your thoughts, attitudes, priorities, choices, words and actions? What about your struggles and habits? Are you serving sin instead of God in some of them?

Two of the most practical, powerful and positive truths of God about growing to be like Christ are right here in Romans chapter 6. The first, as we saw last week, is that every believer has died to the control of sin. That took place when you received Christ. He breaks sin’s reign. “He breaks the power of cancelled sin. He sets the prisoner free!” If you are a believer serving sin, you are serving a usurper.

The second, as we saw today, is that God’s grace leads to holiness as well as eternal life. We already are slaves of God’s righteousness. That’s part of our new creation in Christ. So never buy Satan’s lie that your sin is not a big deal, or that it is too big a deal, is impossible to defeat. Choose to present yourself today, daily, moment by moment to God as a slave of His righteousness. God is *more than able* to be and do all that you need.

Think about these things, talk with God about them, listen to Him, and obey Him from the heart now in these few silent moments.

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost Of Discipleship*. Trans. R. H. Fuller, Irmgard Booth. New York: Collier Books, 1963, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Bonhoeffer 46.

<sup>3</sup> Bonhoeffer 47.

<sup>4</sup> Bonhoeffer 47.

<sup>5</sup> Cited by Frederic Louis Godet. *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. Trans. A. Cusin. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883, p. 253.

<sup>6</sup> C. Wright Mills. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2007, p. 162.

<sup>7</sup> Philip and David S. Schaff, eds. *the Creeds of Christendom With a History and Critical Notes, Sixth Edition, Vol. III*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007, pp.307-308.

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