

63. The Book of Romans 6:17-23

Paul's Epistle to the Romans
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

(9-11-24)

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We are currently in the section of our Romans study that deals with **sanctification**—a section that covers Chapters 6 through 8.

Tonight, we find ourselves finishing up Chapter 6 where the theme is victory over sin—as in our 'fallen sin nature' that we inherited from Adam. In this chapter, Paul builds his teaching on overcoming sin in our lives as Christians around 4 foundational principles or instructions—which are the keys to our victory:

- **Know—verses 3-10**
- **Reckon—verses 11-12**
- **Present—verses 13-19**
- **Obey—verses 16-17**

We've already looked at the first 3, and tonight we're going to finish looking at the fourth instruction for victory—**Obey**.

IV. Obey—verses 16-17

Romans 6:16–17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? ¹⁷ But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.

As we said last time, you can present yourself to your commanding officer reporting for duty—but that doesn't mean you will obey the orders he gives to you. Likewise, you can present yourself to God by coming to church to hear God's Word proclaimed—and yet not obey what God has said. (Luke 6:46-49) That's why Paul doesn't leave it there, he finishes by admonishing us to obey the Lord in all He has ordered us to do.

Now to illustrate his point, Paul uses *slavery*—something they were very familiar with—and which, no doubt, got their attention. One thing everyone back then understood about slavery was that obedience to one's master was—absolute.

Some have wondered how so many Christians, who have been set free from certain behaviors and bad habits have, once again, become entangled in them?

Well, verse 16 tells us how:

Romans 6:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.

We'll call this *the principle of enslavement*—which says, 'Whatever master we present ourselves to obey, we become the slaves of that master.'

Paul said, "All things are lawful for me—but I won't do anything that robs me of my freedom and brings me under its control." (1 Corinthians 6:12)

"From the moment of my surrender, my new master decides who I am and what I do. I have lost all freedom and autonomy over my life—I have become the slave of another."

Once I make my *choice*—the result is no longer up to me. In other words, if I choose to place myself in front of a fire—I no longer have a choice as to whether or not I am going to be warm or cold.

We submit ourselves to the *influence*—and then the power of that influence takes over and produces its *effect* in our lives.

David Jeremiah said—"You can choose the kicks but you never get to choose the kick-backs."

Many people would say, "I'm my own person, I make my own choices." Well, yes and no—yes you make the initial choice as to what you will submit yourself to—but once you make that choice you've lost control of what the results or consequences will be.

- You can choose to stick your hand in the fire, but you can't choose whether or not you get burned.
- You can choose to jump off of a tall building, but you can't choose whether or not you hit the ground.
- You can choose to smoke cigarettes, but you can't choose whether or not you get lung cancer... (and on and on it goes)

In other words, you can choose the *kicks* but not the kickbacks—or as the Bible puts it, 'you will reap whatever you sow.'

Romans 6:16–17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? ¹⁷ But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.

Verse 16 is not an admonition to *practical* holiness (outward holy living, or sanctification) but a declaration of *positional* holiness (salvation) in Christ—which of course produces outward holiness (sanctification).

"But God be thanked..." (verse 17)

Who do we have to thank for our salvation?—God of course!

When was the last time you thanked the Lord for your salvation?

“...that though you were slaves of sin...” (verse 17)

That is a fact—you are no longer the *slaves of sin* but now are the *slaves of Jesus Christ*—reckon it to be true in your life and stop living like you’re still the slaves of the devil.

“...yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.” (verse 17)

Verse 17 gives the means by which you were delivered from your slavery to sin and were made slaves of Christ.

The word **doctrine** comes from the Greek word *didache* which means ‘teaching’—or in this context—the teaching of the gospel. Salvation takes place in the *heart* not in the head—

Romans 10:9 (NKJV)

⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Salvation comes from a heart-commitment—not from *head-knowledge* alone.

Once a person believes in Jesus from the heart—the Holy Spirit moves in and gives them a new nature (2 Peter 1:4) and the result is their attitude about sin begins to change—and their life follows suit:

1 John 1:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 3:6, 9 (NKJV)

⁶ Whoever abides in Him does not [habitually] sin. Whoever [habitually] sins has neither seen Him nor known Him... ⁹ Whoever has been born of God does not [habitually] sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot [habitually] sin, because he has been born of God.

As Spurgeon said: *"The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul. The changes may not come all at one time, and they may not come to each area of the life at the same time—but they will be there, and they will be real and they will be increasing as time goes on."*

A gospel of “*easy-believism*” or what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “*cheap grace*” won’t save a person.

I’ll paraphrase some of the things Bonhoeffer said on the subject:

“Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring conviction or confession of sin. Cheap grace is declaring someone a Christian who is not bringing forth fruits worthy of repentance (the evidence of a changed life). In short, cheap grace is grace without the cross and is the deadly enemy of the Church of Jesus Christ.”

If your faith hasn’t changed you, it hasn’t saved you—*“Faith without works is dead.”* (James 2:17)

Obedience neither produces nor maintains salvation—but it is an inevitable characteristic of those who are saved.

One author makes an important point—

“Only the Son of God could have paid the cost of *salvation*—but He calls His followers to pay the cost of discipleship. Jesus said, “*If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.*” (Matthew 16:24–25)

Romans 6:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ **But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.**

One pastor had this to say about the phrase Paul used here—“**That form of doctrine**”:

“*This phrase is part of a beautiful picture. The word **form** describes a mold used to shape molten metal. The idea is that God wants to shape us—first He melts us by the work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Then He pours us into His mold of Truth (Jesus Christ)—that shapes us into His image.*”

Romans 6:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ **But...you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.**

The idea from the Greek that Paul is expressing is not just that the Word of God delivered us—but that we were delivered into it.

One author explains—

“*It is true, of course, that, through its reading and preaching, God’s Word is delivered to believers. But Paul’s point here seems to be that the true believer is also delivered into God’s Word...The idea is that when God makes a new spiritual creation of a believer, He casts him into the mold of divine truth, and it has permanently shaped and formed his life.*”

J. B. Phillips rendering of Romans 12:1 uses the same figure: “*Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold but let God re-mold your minds from within.*” The Word of God becomes the mold that shapes our lives—and if that isn’t the case, then we need to question the legitimacy of our salvation.

Romans 6:18–19 (NKJV)

¹⁸ **And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.** ¹⁹ **I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves of righteousness for holiness.**

Verse 18 gives us the *positional* truth, whereas verse 19 gives us the *practical* exhortation.

“**Uncleanness**” and “**lawlessness**”—are two terms that refer, respectively, to *inward* and *outward* sin.

The unsaved person is both *internally* and *externally* sinful—and as he lives out his sinful, lawless life it results in “**more and more lawlessness.**”

One writer—

“Like a cancer that reproduces itself until the whole body is destroyed—sin reproduces itself until the whole person is destroyed.

Sinclair Lewis was the toast of the literary world and received the Nobel Prize in literature in 1930. To mock what he considered the hypocrisy of Christianity, he wrote Elmer Gantry, the fictitious story of a Bible-pounding evangelist who was secretly an alcoholic, a fornicator, and a thief. Few people know, however, that Lewis himself died an alcoholic in a third-rate clinic outside Rome, a devastated victim of his own sinful lifestyle.”

No one breaks God’s law with impunity—no one can be the servant of sin without suffering the consequences. The Bible says, *“The way of the transgressor is hard.”*

“Presenting yourself to sin will drag you down into the whirlpool of sin and eventually down the drain.” But verse 19 is telling us that it’s up to us to decide to *present* our bodies to God every day and obey all that He commands us to do with regard to living a holy, righteous life!

Victory in the Christian life comes—not in one major all-out battle, but in little everyday decisions to obey God that yield small victories which add up to a victorious life.

John 8:31–34 (NKJV)

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” ³³ They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* You say, ‘You will be made free?’” ³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.

Romans 6:20–22 (NKJV)

²⁰ **For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. ²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.**

There is an old proverb that says,

- Sow a *thought* reap an *action*
- Sow an *action* reap a *habit*
- Sow a *habit* reap a *character*
- Sow a *character* reap a *lifestyle*
- Sow a *lifestyle* reap a *destiny*

Galatians 6:7–8 (NKJV)

⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸ For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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