

Romans 6:20-7:6 Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Part 2

Romans 6:15 *What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!*

Last week we began to look at Paul's answer to this question and today we will finish it. Paul summarises his answer to his question in Romans 6:16, explaining that it is not a matter of if we obey, or not, but who we obey, either sin which leads to death, or obedience that leads to righteousness. But note Paul isn't simply laying down the law for these Roman Christians. Rather he is appealing to their sanctified common sense: *Do you not know ...* he exclaims ... that you are slaves to the one you obey.

Paul makes this same kind of appeal in Romans 6:20-23, stirring up memories of the fruit, or rather lack of it, when they lived in ways they are now ashamed of. This is rather like the appeal this week in the media to lose weight because of the link between obesity and cancer. Some things just aren't good for us! (Though changing our behaviour is easier said than done.) Paul is pointing out that those *things of which you are now ashamed* were not good for them, and in fact lead to death (ultimately eternal separation from God.) He probably has in mind the kind of sins described in Romans 1, which many of his gentile readers had been converted out of. Paul gives another helpful list of the kind of things he's thinking about in Galatians 5:19-21. These are all moral issues, and they can all be linked to prohibitions in the law (Torah.) For Paul such things are part of God's moral law of the Universe, which are applicable to all of us, and are obvious. God is in the business of picking up the pieces of broken lives and putting them back together again. It's called redemption: so, now we are under this abundant grace of God, how can we continue in these sinful and destructive ways?

The gospel is about the changed life: *But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life* (Romans 6:22). There was no real and lasting benefit in our lives without God. But Christ brings genuine fruit into our lives that will last. Paul tells us about this fruit in Galatians 5:22-23. Against these things there is no law. These fruits of the Spirit benefit us in family, work and ministry, and lead to eternal life.

Paul sums up this section (20-23): *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:23). The wages of sin ... wages are what you deserve ... is death. But the free gift of God ... what you don't deserve ... is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. That's grace!

Yet justification by faith leading to the changed life is very different from an easy-believism. My brother has told me that he objects to Christianity because he can't see how or why believing certain things gets you to heaven. I agree, because this isn't justification by faith. For example, we may say and even agree with the Apostle's Creed, but that isn't a ticket to heaven. Listen to James on the nature of faith.

James 2:19-24 *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” – and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

Do we wonder why we say salvation is *by faith alone*, when the Bible says *not by faith alone*? This is a good question. The reason is Luther and the Reformation. The historical backdrop to the Reformation was corruption in the Catholic Church, especially indulgences. Indulgences were granted by the church for doing a good deed of some sort, to (supposedly) reduce punishment in purgatory. Luther came along and said salvation is not by indulgences, but by faith alone. And he was right. But James, who was 1500 years earlier, hadn't even heard of indulgences. He was thinking about the nature of faith. He was saying that in effect you can, like the devil, believe all the right things, but real Biblical faith has to be put into practice. In my view James and Paul are

singing from the same hymn sheet. It's like the blind man who was healed: if Jesus comes into your life you probably won't have the faintest idea about any creed. All that you know is that, *once I was blind, but now I see* (John 9:25). To the Pharisees who had all their theology worked out Jesus said, *Now that you say, "We see", your guilt remains* (John 9:41).

The obedience of faith in Romans 6 is the living out of our faith - faithfulness. To further convince his readers, Paul illustrates his point with an illustration from the law (Romans 7:1-6). Paul specifically addresses *those who know the law*. We know there were different kinds of people in the Roman church: 1) Jewish believers in Jesus who knew the law more or less from birth; 2) Gentiles who converted to Judaism prior to faith in Jesus, and knew the law fairly well; 3) Gentiles who had come to faith in Jesus who had learned some of the Law since then; 4) Gentiles who had come to faith in Jesus who knew practically nothing of the Law, and/or may have viewed it as misguided or unimportant. Paul was addressing the people in categories 1 & 2. Paul's illustration is complex for us to understand because most of us are in categories 3 & 4! Nevertheless, hopefully we can grasp the basics.

The illustration goes like this: a woman is married, but if she goes with another man she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage and it's okay to get married to another man.

Paul has made the point in Romans 7:1, *the law hath dominion over a man as long as he lives?* (KJV) In Romans 6:14 uses the same word, *dominion*, to describe the role of sin in our lives before we belong to Christ. So in Paul's terminology sin and law have dominion when a person is *under law* (under the heel of the law.)

The main point of the illustration, which relates by to Paul's question in Romans 6:15, is this: if the woman's husband dies she is free to marry, if she wishes, without incurring the penalty / condemnation of the law. Likewise, when we died to sin we were released from the condemnation of the law and are free to marry another. So,

Romans 7:4 *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the [condemnation of the] law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another who has been raised from the dead, in order that you may bear fruit for God.*

I think dying to the law, or condemnation of the law, is more or less the same as dying to sin, because when we die to one we die to the other. If we are no longer under one, we are no longer under the other. When a thief is caught red-handed he is under law and sin has dominion in his life. If he is forgiven he is freed from the law's penalty.

Likewise we died to the law through the body of Christ in baptism, because Christ took the penalty for us. As with the woman, the penalty is not applicable and we are free to belong to another, Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead, in order to bear fruit for God. Before belonging to Christ, sinful passions were at work in us bearing fruit for death (Romans 7:5). But now we have been released from the condemnation/penalty of the law, having died to sin, we serve God not in the old way of trying to earn acceptance with God, but in the new way of the Spirit (Romans 7:6). This is the changed, or changing, life.

This interpretation avoids equating the husband with the law, concluding that the law is abolished. Instead the law provides the framework for the whole illustration. Paul, it seems, is aware of this potential misunderstanding, which is perhaps why he moves on quickly with his next question, *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!* (Romans 7:7). When we start to think Paul nullified the law, something he specifically says he does not do (Romans 3:31), I think we make Paul's challenging material even more complex.

If we have trusted Christ for salvation; if we have been baptised into His death so that we may share in His life, then the only proper response is the obedience of faith, and expression of our love for the Lord, that we may bear fruit for God.