

The central theme in Romans chapter six verses fifteen through eighteen, where I would like to focus my attention, is that believers in Christ Jesus have been set free from sin and have become a slave to righteousness. Paul emphasizes his point by stating that we are under grace and not under the law. He also shows in this passage what it means to be a slave. The law of God is important to Paul. He upholds the law but exclaims that in Christ we are no longer bound to the law. Sin leads to death, but thanks be to God that through Jesus Christ's life and death the chains of sin that leads to death have been broken to set us free.

Before explaining Romans chapter six verses fifteen through eighteen I would like to show what Paul had been saying prior in his letter to the believers in Rome. Romans chapter one through chapter three Paul focuses on the problem of sin and how all human beings are bound to sin which leads to death. In these three chapters sin, the wrath of God and His judgment are the central theme.

Sin is any deliberate transgression or violation of God's law. Jesus taught that the central demand of God's law is to love the Lord your God with all your heart. Thus, the essence of all sin is the failure to love God. The most common explanation in the New Testament of sin means to deviate or to miss the mark. In the first three chapters of Romans the definition of sin focuses on the deliberate rejection of God and his lordship over our lives. In Romans 1:21 it states, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him. In Thomas Schreiner's book on Paul, *Apostle of God's Glory In Christ*, he writes of verse twenty one in chapter one of Romans, "The root of sin is not lack of knowledge, for human beings know God is God... The heart of sin is the refusal to worship God and give Him the supreme place in our lives" (Schreiner, p. 105). We also see that in these first three chapters of Romans a concentration on humanity's state of sin as it is referred to in Romans chapter three verse twenty-three, "for all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God..." In Moo's commentary on Romans he states, "We must consider 1:18-3:20 as a preparation for, rather than as part of, Paul's exposition of the

gospel of God's righteousness" (Moo, page 92). It is the revelation of God's wrath on sin and the coming judgment of God to come that leads to the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Romans chapter four through five generally states that through faith in the work of Christ Jesus we are justified by God, declared righteous, and therefore have peace with God. Paul also explains that through the first man, Adam, sin entered the world and therefore death through sin. However, Romans chapter five verse eighteen says, "...just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." This one man's, Jesus Christ's, obedient life brings a way we can be made right with God. Another point Paul emphasizes in Romans chapter four through five is that faith that justifies is faith alone, apart from works. This can be picked up in Romans chapter four verses four through five and chapter five verse one. This peace with God that is attained through being justified by God is reconciliation with God. In verse ten of Romans chapter five it shows that we were enemies to God before faith in Christ but through faith in Christ we have been "reconciled to him through the death of His Son..." Through belief in Christ Jesus and His work on the cross we are brought into right standing before God. By placing our faith in Jesus Christ we allow him to take our place in dying our death so we can stand before a holy God and be forgiven and made righteous. Paul explains in Romans chapter five verses twelve through the end of the chapter that there are two spiritual places the heart of a person can be. Either the heart is stuck on the inheritance established by Adam which results in sin and death or the heart is founded by Christ and results in a life filled with righteousness.

In Romans chapter six, Paul begins with a rhetorical question asking, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (Romans 6:1), which is similar to the question in Romans chapter six verse fifteen, "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" (Romans 6:15) In verse one of chapter 6 it is a question of, sinning so that God's grace may increase in order to give Him more glory. In verse fifteen it is a question of sinning because we know that God's grace is there by the forgiveness that is found in Christ. In James Coffman *Commentary of*

*Romans*, he contrast these two verses, verse one and verse fifteen as stating, “[verse 1] There it was a question of deliberate continuation in a state of rebellion, and here [verse 15] it is a question of the occasional sinful act.” Both acts of sin are detestable to a holy God as Paul alludes to in how he answers both questions by saying, “By no means!” The whole chapter of Romans six is about Christ’s death on our behalf that frees us not only from the consequences of sin but also from the power of sin. Moo stated in his commentary “subduing the power of sin is the topic of Romans six” (Moo, page 350). It is realizing that the believer in Christ Jesus is no longer under the grip of sin but has been released from sin and has been made righteous by God through Christ. Also a major topic or theme of Romans chapter six is a call to righteousness and holy living as well as subduing the power of sin.

I would like to focus on the image of slavery mentioned in this chapter. Paul uses this image of slavery to show the mastery of both sin and those who have been set free from sin and then bound to Christ’s lordship. In addition to this, Paul explains that the believer has been brought out from being under the power of the law to being under the power of grace. It is this grace of God in which the believer now stands, stated in Romans chapter five verse two, which is the power to overcome sin.

In verse fifteen of Romans chapter six Paul referenced what he wrote earlier in verse fourteen, “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law but under grace.” In verse fifteen he wrote, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” Believers in Christ are potentially masters over death and sin, because they are “not under law, but under grace.” This is the power of God shown in these who believe in Jesus Christ’s life and work on the cross. However, to understand Paul’s thought on how the believer in Christ is no longer under the law but under grace we must look at the background of the law of God and Paul’s own experiences with the law. The history of the law of God from the Old Testament will give insight into what Paul was trying to explain when he wrote that the believer is “not under law but under grace.”

When Paul mentions the law he is referring to the law given to Moses. The law that was established by God to the Israelites and can be found in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Many times Old Testament religion is associated with legalistic behavior. One might conclude that the law in the Old Testament was a set of rules and regulations that only led to doing things for God. However, the law of God that is recorded in the Old Testament should not be characterized as rules that led people to legalism. On the contrary, the law of God was means to the covenant with God. The law was given by God as means of binding Israel to their God. The law provided Israel with a standard for obedience to God in order to keep the covenant relationship with God. George Eldon Ladd wrote in his book, *A Theology of The New Testament*, "...the object of the law is to settle the relationship of the covenant-nation and of the individual to the God of the covenant and to the members of the nation who belong to the same covenant. The reward for obedience to the law was preservation of the positive relationship to Yahweh" (Ladd, page 540). This is shown in Leviticus chapter eighteen verse five where it states, "The man who obeys the law shall live." God desires people who are committed to him in covenant love in keeping His commands. In Deuteronomy chapter seven verse nine Moses wrote that God is desiring a covenant with his people who follow His commands. "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands" (Deuteronomy 7:9). We also see in Deuteronomy chapter seven verse nine that obedience to the law could not satisfy God alone for God desires true love and devotion to Himself from His people. For the law itself exclaimed, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5). Obedience to the law of God was an expression of trust in God. Another example of this is shown in Deuteronomy chapter ten verse sixteen where Moses exclaimed, "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer." The physical circumcision alone did not make a person right with God it was also the circumcision of the heart. God wants the hearts of people and not just their obedience to the law. However, during the "intertestamental period," as Ladd stated (Ladd, page 541), the people of Israel only wanted to

recognize the obedience aspect and not give the Lord their God their whole heart. Ladd later noted in his book about how the Israelites focused on the doing of the law rather than keeping the law in love and devotion to God. Ladd stated, "The importance of the Law overshadows the concept of the covenant and becomes the condition of membership in God's people" (Ladd, page 541) Ladd also stated, "The Torah [the law of God] becomes the one and only mediator between God and humanity; all other relationships between God and humanity, Israel, or the world are subordinated to the Torah" (Ladd, page 541). During this time there was a shift of focus from keeping the covenant with God by love and devotion to the creator onto just simple obedience to the law. This is shown throughout the Old Testament scriptures where people needed to be reminded to "Love the Lord your God and keep His requirements, His decrees, His laws, and His commands always" (Deuteronomy 11:1). Moses reminded the people to love God and keep his laws. It is out of love that one keeps the commands of God not out of sheer obedience. In the New Testament we see how the effects of this thought permeated the teachers of the law. Mathew 9:14-17, Matthew 12:1-12, Matthew 23:34-39 and other Gospel passages show this type of thinking controlled the minds of the Pharisees when they interacted with Jesus in trying to accuse Him of not being from God; because from their view point He was breaking the law. In Matthew chapter five verse twenty, Jesus taught that life with God is going beyond keeping the law to living by the principles behind the law.

Paul's understanding of the law came first as a Jew and upholder of the law as a Pharisee. We read of Paul's credentials in Philipians chapter three verses five and six where he states that he was a Pharisee and met many requirements of the law but his very devotion to the law also led him astray in his own pride. Paul recognized that his very zeal for the law had blinded him to where true righteousness could be found which is in Christ Jesus (Philipians 3:7). What Paul as a Pharisee thought was righteousness, he now as a follower of Christ realizes to be the very essence of sin. Through this understanding Paul's thought about the law and how he dealt with it in the past will bring insight on Romans chapter 6 verses fifteen through eighteen.

Paul asked the rhetorical question, "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" in verse fifteen of Romans chapter six and then answers it with a firm, "By no means!" to first capture the reader's attention and then help the reader to see that one should not separate the law and God's grace. Again, God is focused on the heart and not the simple obedience to God. Paul really wants the Christian to get back to heart condition of one's life and not the outward condition. When the law was mentioned in the time Paul was writing this letter to the Roman Christians it was thought of as rules that one had to follow but not something to be viewed as a way to show love and devotion to God. So Paul stated that the believer is no longer under the law; all the rules and regulations that would bring a right standing before God, but "under grace" that results from Christ life and death on the cross.

This statement, "under grace," is not just some liberating power that God gives to the believer but it is a new nature that a believer has and from this new nature a desire to obey God's commands. It is the motivation of God's love and grace in the believer's life that brings obedience. In Christ, where we gain this power for the new nature, we can now live out the call to holiness. In the *Baker's Commentary On The Bible* it states that not being "under the law but under grace" shows that "we do not have to work from a fallen nature" (Baker, page 937). It is in this birth of a new nature in Christ that we can live out our relationship with God. Thomas Schreiner in his book, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory In Christ*, mentions that the phrase "not under law but under grace" is not about believers being "liberated from all ethical norms" (Schreiner, page 132). This is not a free ticket to just go against the law of God and sin because one is "under grace." This is a charge to live holy lives because God's grace has been shown through His Son, Jesus Christ. Thomas Schreiner also stated that Paul "does not want the readers to think that the law is sinful" but "to prove that law itself provides no power to overcome sin" (Schreiner, page 132).

The word grace in verse fifteen is a powerful word for the believer in Christ Jesus. The idea of grace involves forgiveness, salvation, regeneration and the love of God. This word is defined from the greek word, *xa/riv*, as good will, loving-kindness, or favour from the *New Testament*

*Greek Lexicon*, based on Thayer's and Smith's Bible Dictionary. This grace that is stated in Romans chapter 6 verse fifteen is referred to as this great favor and love from God on human beings to forgive them all of their sins. It was stated earlier in Romans that people are sinful and thus alienated from God, but God in his grace or loving-kindness treats those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, as if they had never sinned because Christ died their death for their sins. This same word, *xa/riv*, is used in Romans 3:24, Romans 5:2, Romans 5:20 and other verses that speak of God's loving-kindness and favor that abounds even when we were died in our sins. Being "under grace" as Paul stated is being under the favor and loving-kindness of God. This state of being "under grace" is a gift from God and it should not be abused. This explains why Paul emphasizes that we don't have the liberty to even think that we can sin because we are "under grace" as he answers, "By no means!" How can we even think to take advantage of God's grace in our lives when we don't even deserve it?

In verse sixteen Paul asks another rhetorical question to the Roman believer, "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?" The word slave that is mentioned in this verse refers to the greek word, *dou=lov*, which is translated as bondservant or man of servile condition as defined by the *New Testament Greek Lexicon Bible Dictionary*. This is complete submission and servant hood to the master one is enslaved to. Slavery is obedience to the master. The master can be someone or something. This language of slave or bondservant is used in the Old Testament in Exodus 6:6 and in Leviticus 26:13 where it stated how God freed the Israelites from the bondage of slavery to the Egyptians. The slavery that was happening in that time was a complete obedience to the Egyptians. There was no question that the Israelites were bound in slavery. This same picture is being painted when Paul talks about slavery in verse sixteen. Paul points out in this verse that what you obey you are therefore a slave to. In Moo's commentary on Romans he states, "Paul wants to make clear that slavery is ultimately not just a legal status but a living experience" (Moo, page 398). Jesus said, "Every person who is committing sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). Sin is

a lifestyle and daily practice of obedience to the sin. To think of sin as an individual thing that happens once in a while is not viewing it as Jesus taught or as Paul taught. Slavery is the act of obedience to a master at all times not just sometimes. This word slavery that Paul uses is a person who is bound as a servant to another. As stated in Adam Clark's *Commentary on Romans*, "...a slave among the Greeks and Romans was considered as his master's property." This is not a person who comes and goes as he pleases. This type of slavery is those who give themselves up to another's will, whose service is used for their bidding. Paul also states in this verse that it is an "either...or" obedience. He assumes that everyone is a slave through personal commitment, "whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness" (Romans 6:16). There is no room for neutral thinking. One should not think, "Either I keep my freedom or I give it up and submit to God." No, the only choices are to serve God or serve sin there is no freedom language ever spoken here by Paul. In addition, both types of slavery have results. Slavery to sin is death which is, *qa/natov*, in the Greek and translated as a spiritual death arising from sin, as well physical death as the loss of a life consecrated by God and to be followed by eternal damnation in hell. And slavery to obedience results in righteousness, which in the Greek is, *dikaiousu/nh*, and translated as a "way in which man may attain a state approved of God" (*New Testament Greek Lexicon Bible Dictionary*).

In verse seventeen of Romans chapter six Paul thanks God for the work that has been done through Christ Jesus setting the believer free from the slavery of sin and embracing their new master, Jesus Christ, in obedience to His teaching. "But 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" (Romans 6:17). Paul is stating that the one he is writing to has already made the decision to follow the new master. It is interesting how Paul chooses to write in this verse the object of the believer's obedience is to the "form of teaching." Paul continues to use the whole obedience and slavery language to show that those who break free from the slavery of sin will transfer into submitting to new teaching; which is Jesus Christ died for their sins and was raised to give them new life. This new teaching also requires that the believer must submit to God their whole life

and follow Him. Coffman states that the “form of teaching,” “...makes it a certainty that Paul here had reference to baptism.” I would agree that “form of teaching” is the teaching of Jesus Christ but I would not go as far as to say that it is a direct relation to baptism. However, Coffman believes that the words baptism and gospel are synonymous. If the “form of teaching” is the gospel then baptism is “precisely ‘that form of teaching’ Paul spoke of here,” as stated by Coffman. I do not see the “form of teaching” is related in any way to baptism. Again, I believe Paul wants to move away from external purists of God, not that baptism is wrong, by no means. Paul is only focusing on the message of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins and the obedient life with Christ that leads to righteousness. Moo pointed out, “Paul wants to make clear that becoming a Christian means being place under authority of Christian teaching” (Moo, page 401). Again, the slavery image is shown as one’s authority is switched to another’s authority. This is the switch of one’s authority under sin and now one’s life is under the authority of the teaching of Christ. In Adam Clark’s Commentary on Romans he wrote that the teaching in which the believer now obeys is Christianity being “...represented under the notion of a mold, or die, into which they were cast, and from which they took the impression of its excellence.” This is an interesting image and can relate to how one is transferred from one master’s mold to another.

Now in verse eighteen Paul hits hard his main point that he has been building up to in the previous verses. “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Romans 6:18). This sums up Paul’s teaching that a believer in Christ goes from one master to another master. Once one has been freed from the master of sin through faith in Christ then they get a new master. I believe this is Paul’s main focus in these verses for the believer that we can be set free from sin and gain righteousness by God. Sin no longer holds the believer captive. This freedom language is throughout the New Testament in such passages as, John 8:31-36, Romans 8:21, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 5:1, and others. However, the Christian freedom brings enslavement to another master, Jesus Christ, who said, “...my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).

We must not think Paul said that the believer is totally removed from all contact or influence of sin. Paul states that it is being free from the power of sin, which is death, and not from ever sinning again. In The Baker's Commentary it says, "...Paul recognizes that the old nature, though in principle put to death on the cross, lingers on in the life of the believer and can be overcome" (Baker, page 937). Moo states, "While belonging to a new realm, the believer brings with him into it many of the impulses, habits, and tendencies of the old life, a constant threat to putting into actual practice the realities of our new realm status" (Moo, page 352). Since placing faith in Christ the Christian is bound to Christ and the believer must choose to live according to their new nature and not the old nature which has no control over him. Sin in the believer's eyes has no mastery over him. Clark stated, "sin can enjoin no good and profitable work..." For the believer sin has no place in their life because he is enslaved to righteousness, which has nothing to do with sin. The life of the believer is dying to the old life, self, and putting on the new life, which is found in Christ Jesus. This new life can only be found under God's grace that leads to enslavement to God and therefore produces righteousness in one's life.