

A crucial implication of these truths is that the principles of law and grace are *mutually exclusive* while yet *still continuing to operate simultaneously* in the present era. In this way law and grace follow the pattern of the two ages of salvation history associated with Adam and Christ: the new age in Christ has supplanted the former Adamic age, and yet men still continue to live as sons of Adam; in their unbelief and estrangement they continue to inhabit the age associated with him. It is only through their union with Christ that they enter into the new age He inaugurated. So it is with law and grace:

- *Law* continues to be the determining principle of righteousness for those still under sin's mastery. In their self-enslavement they are constrained to seek their righteousness by self-effort through "law-works."
- But those who have appropriated the righteousness that is according to *grace* have escaped the tyranny of sin that expresses itself in self-determination and the insistence upon self-righteousness through works of law.

Thus, though the Old Covenant has found its fulfillment in the New Covenant and has passed away, Paul could still insist to the Corinthians that unbelieving Jews continue under the principle of law (2 Corinthians 3:1-18). It is in Christ that the "veil is lifted" with the result that the individual person moves from the Adamic age and the governing principle of law to the principle of grace which defines the age of the last Adam.

As the Law of Moses served the increase of the Adamic transgression in the sons of men, so grace has triumphed to break sin's reign (5:20-21). But since law was intended to serve the purpose of making sin "exceedingly sinful" by drawing it out and intensifying it (7:7-13; cf. also 1 Corinthians 15:56), *the conquest of sin must be accompanied by the abolition of the governance of law*. This is precisely Paul's point as he transitions from 6:14 into verses 15-23. For 6:1-13 established the fact that sin's mastery over the believer has been vanquished by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection and his participation in them; the believer has died to sin and been made alive to God. But given that sin has been conquered, so also it follows that the believer is no longer under the governance or authority of law; grace now governs him.

10. But if it is true that the believer is not "under law" but "under grace," can it not be further argued that the believer is now "free" to sin? This is the contention Paul raises in 6:15, and it proceeds out of a flawed, but yet extremely common understanding of law. *This flawed premise is that law serves to effectively restrain sin*. Therefore, when law's restraint is removed, sin is certain to flourish. But Paul nowhere presents law as acting to *restrain* sin; rather, it inevitably serves to *strengthen* and *promote* sin. This is the heart of his thesis in chapter seven.

One may observe that, in fact, law - together with the penalties it imposes - does in some sense act to curb sinful conduct. This is the reason God ordained civil government. But Paul recognized that sin is not bad conduct, but self-enslavement expressed in self-determination, self-preoccupation, and self-righteousness. Against these things law has no restraining capacity; directives and commandments cannot change a person's nature and orientation. Quite the opposite, law only serves self-enslavement.

It is grace alone that restrains sin, and it does so not by *containing* it, but by *conquering* it. Grace overcomes sin by transforming the man; law can only attempt to put a corral around his conduct, while at the same time serving to nurture his self-idolatry. Law does not effect a change of masters - the man under law does not escape sin's lordship, for he does not escape his enslavement to himself. Grace alone brings this deliverance, and with it, a new master for the believer:

*“Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! 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? 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.”* (6:15-18)

- a. The first thing to observe about this passage and its relation to verse 6:14 is that it follows the same basic structure as in 5:20-6:10. After making a sweeping affirmation, Paul then raises a logical implication in the form of a rhetorical question, which in turn he responds to with the exclamation, “*May it never be!*” From there he proceeds to explain why it is that the implication he himself raised is both absurd and impossible to be realized in the life of the believer. Moreover, he does so, not by appealing to his own insight or apostolic authority, but by appealing to what every Christian knows to be true.
- b. Here the question he raised to his readers regards the believer's “freedom” to sin because of having been released from the constraints of law (6:15). In effect, this question reproduces the previous one in verse 6:1, for both address the issue of sin in relation to the triumph of grace that has come in Christ. In the latter question that triumph is simply presented in terms of grace supplanting law.

Having declared the absurdity of such a possibility, Paul then justified his declaration by appealing to an obvious practical principle of slavery with which the Romans were well aware (6:16a). That principle - understood by Christian and non-Christian alike - is that a person's giving of himself to the devoted service of someone or something effectively renders him the slave of that person or thing. While some have interpreted Paul's statement in terms of devoted service being the *evidence* of one's enslavement, the context better supports the conclusion that Paul was indicating that such devotion *effectively insures* slavery. When a person gives himself to serve another with committed devotion, he cannot help but be rendered the slave of the one he serves.

And so Paul's answer to the contention that freedom from law opens the door for the believer's continuance in sin is that the person who gives himself to sin will find himself being rendered sin's slave. And the Christian is not to let sin have any reign in his mortal body or present his members to it as instruments of unrighteousness (6:12-13). Rather, he is to recognize and “live out” the truth that, by his participation in Christ's death, he is no longer a slave to sin (6:5-7).

Because the believer has been delivered from his former enslavement to sin, he is not to yield himself to it. For by doing so he will find himself again becoming bound to its service - not in the absolute sense, for sin can no longer gain its former mastery over him - but in a way that debilitates him and argues against his new allegiance to a new master. The believer's deliverance from sin and new "enslavement" to God are not simply theological concepts or spiritual goals to be pursued; *they constitute a new and living reality that define and determine the Christian's existence*. Douglas Moo observes: "...slavery is ultimately not just a 'legal' status but a living experience."

Accordingly, the believer is obligated to live out the defining reality of his new life in Christ and deny all other forms or arenas of servitude (ref. 1 Corinthians 6:1-20; Galatians 4:1-11, 5:1-26; etc.). Freedom from law does not bring autonomy or libertinism, but deliverance from an old master for the purpose of being joined forever to a new one. No man can actually serve two masters; if he is to serve a new master he must be set free from the former one so as to no longer have any attachment or allegiance to him. To the extent that he continues to serve the old master he denies his service to the new one.

- c. When it is considered that, in the ultimate sense, there are only two possible objects for a person's devotion, the implication of Paul's stated principle is huge. In the end, every human being either gives himself to the service of *sin* (self) or *obedience* (God) (6:16b). In turn, the service of each "master" yields its own result: slavery to the former yields *death*, whereas the latter yields *righteousness*. Paul's point is unequivocal: whatever a person may believe about his "freedom," he *does* live as a slave. The only question to be answered is which of the two possible masters does he serve? He is enslaved either to the one or the other; he is no more free from the mastery of both than he is able to serve both.

In this regard it is noteworthy that Paul identified these two masters as *sin* and *obedience*. The fact that he previously spoke of slavery to sin versus slavery to *God* (6:11-13), and ends this context in the same way (6:22), gives insight into how the master "obedience" is to be understood. He did not mean to convey that the principle of obedience *itself* constitutes this master, for the person who serves sin also is obedient (6:16). Here Paul was specifically associating the idea of obedience with the life of faith manifested in devoted service to God. In this way, the one who is a slave of *obedience* is also a slave of *God*.

Furthermore, he identified the "product" resulting from a person's slavery as being either *death* or *righteousness*. It is obvious that the result or "fruit" of slavery to sin is death, but how does slavery to obedience result in righteousness? At face value this would seem to be a prime proof-text for the "works righteousness" doctrine of pseudo-Christian traditions. Clearly, Paul could not have meant that commitment to obedience in any way effects or even contributes to a person's righteousness; such a claim would unravel all that he has said to this point in the epistle. Various solutions have been proposed:

- 1) Some, recognizing that “death” here refers to the judgment of eternal death, have regarded this “righteousness” as referring in parallel fashion to the *final perfection* to come with the renewal of all things at the last day.
- 2) Others have understood it in terms of the *justifying righteousness* that results from the “obedience of faith.”
- 3) Still others view this righteousness as expressive of the *practical conduct* that marks the children of God and that is pleasing to Him.

The third view seems to be the best when considered in the overall context, but certain considerations show it to be, if not incorrect, at least incomplete.

- First of all, it has an important weakness in that it fails to capture the parallelism established in this passage between *death* and *righteousness*. In whatever way sin’s mastery implicates death, slavery to obedience implicates righteousness.
- A second thing to note is that insight into the nature of this parallelism is provided by his identical grammar in the two phrases. Paul has sin moving toward and terminating in death, and in a parallel way obedience moving toward and terminating in righteousness.

The “end result” idea conveyed in both phrases - together with the parallelism of death and righteousness and the overall emphasis of the context - suggests that *Paul was thinking in terms of the believer’s faithful obedience resulting in the final vindication of his righteousness in Christ.*

This particular understanding is exemplified in his words to Timothy as he spoke of the “crown of righteousness” being laid up for him and every Christian who “has loved Christ’s appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8; cf. Galatians 5:5). It is also consistent with the larger contextual emphasis upon the believer’s practical sanctity. For, far from arguing against the Christian’s present, *practical* righteousness, this *eschatological* righteousness implies and presupposes it.

For in Paul’s conception of the gospel, a life of practical righteousness attests to the reality of the believer’s possession of Christ’s righteousness. The most obvious proof of this is that justifying righteousness brings with it the gift of the Holy Spirit, and His role is to produce in the justified person full conformity to Christ. Therefore, the presence of this transforming work is evidence that a person has been justified and stands in Christ’s righteousness. In the day of judgment, the practical fruit of righteousness in believers’ lives - wrought entirely by the power of the Spirit - will testify that the God who determined to redeem and recover men back to their true humanity has indeed accomplished His goal. His own divine righteousness, reckoned to them through faith, has also been realized *within* them in their transformation into the likeness of the divine Son and God-Man.

- d. Paul has insisted that there are only two possible masters, and every person necessarily serves one or the other. At the same time, he testified to the Romans that the one master is *innate*, while the other must be *embraced* (6:17). Without exception everyone enters into this life as a slave of sin, and all would continue in that servitude were it not for the effectual intervention of a deliverer. This intervention has occurred only in the case of Christians, and the object of Paul's expression of gratitude indicates to whom he attributed the believer's deliverance from his former lord. As he considered the Romans' former slavery to sin and their deliverance from it, his response was, "*Thanks be to God.*"

Moreover, he shows that this deliverance has come through the means of a sincere, inward obedience to the word of the gospel: "...*you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed.*" This "form of teaching" is the apostolic gospel, and because it is "the power of God for salvation," Paul rightly regarded it as both the object of the Christian's obedience and that to which he is "handed over" and entrusted. It is the gospel upon which the believer, having heard and received it, has taken his stand, and through which he will be saved if he continues in it (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

- e. By this deliverance they were "*freed from sin*" so as to become "*slaves of righteousness*" (6:18). Previously Paul spoke of death to sin (6:6, 11) and a righteous deliverance from sin (6:7), but here for the first time he referred directly to the believer's *freedom* from sin. Again, Paul should not be construed as saying that the believer has been set free from every operation of sin in his life. Rather, Paul's point is that God has broken sin's dominating power so that men can now serve Him and fulfill their own created purpose. Thus the Christian's freedom is not unto himself; he has been set free from sin in order to become *enslaved to righteousness*. Paul's use of the passive voice shows that this enslavement is the result of divine initiative and power, with the result that the one who once served only his own lusts now serves a new master according to a new principle.

*"In a world in which 'freedom' has taken on all kinds of historical and social baggage, we must remember that Paul's concept of freedom is not that of autonomous self-direction but of deliverance from those enslaving powers that would prevent the human being from becoming what God intended. It is only by doing God's will and thus knowing His truth that we can be 'free indeed' (John 8:31-36). This is why, without paradox, Christian freedom is at the same time a kind of 'slavery.' Being bound to God and his will enables the person to become 'free' - to be what God wants that person to be."* (Douglas Moo)

*"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king." (1 Peter 2:13-17)*