

God's Grace and the Choices We Make

Thomas Robinson, *Gospel of God's Grace for All of Us 17*, April 26, 2015

Romans 6:12-23 (ESV adapted)

6:¹² Therefore (all of you), **do not let sin be king** in your **body** subject to death, to make you **listen to its desires**.¹³ Do not **present the parts of yourselves** to sin as **instruments of injustice**, but **present yourselves to God** as **people brought from death to life**, and **the parts of yourselves** to God as **instruments for faithful righteousness**.¹⁴ For **sin will not be your master**, for **you are not under law but under grace**.

¹⁵ What then? **Shall we sin** because we are not under **law** but under **grace**? By no means!¹⁶ Do you not know that if you **present yourselves** to anyone as **servants** to **listen to** their commands, **you are servants of the one to whom you listen**, either to **sin** leading to **death**, or to real **listening** (to God), which leads to **being in the right**?

¹⁷ But thanks/grace to God, that you who were once **servants of sin listened from the heart to the pattern of teaching** to which you were **handed over**,¹⁸ and, having been **set free from sin**, you were made **servants** of God's faithful **righteousness**.¹⁹ I am **using a human illustration**, because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you once **presented the parts of yourselves as servants to impurity** and to **injustice** leading to more injustice, so now **present the parts of yourselves as servants to faithful righteousness** leading to being made **holy**.

²⁰ For when you were **servants of sin**, you were free from any claim by God's righteousness.²¹ But **what fruit** were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For **the end** of those things is **death**.²² But now that **you have been set free from sin** and have been made **servants of God**, the fruit you get leads to being made **holy** (by God's Holy Spirit), and its **end** is **eternal life**.²³ For **the wages of sin is death**, but **God's gift of grace is eternal life in Messiah Jesus our Lord**.

Galatians 3:1-2

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ² Let me ask you only this: Did you **receive the Spirit** by works of the law or **by hearing with faith**?

Romans 1:1

¹ Paul, a servant/slave of Messiah Jesus, called to be one sent out (an apostle), set apart for God's good news...

Romans 10:13-17

¹³ For *"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* [Joel 2:32] ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to **believe** in him of whom they have never **heard**? And how are they to **hear** without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"* [Isa 52:7] ¹⁶ But they have not all **listened to/obeyed** the **good news**. For Isaiah says, *"Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?"* [Isa 53:1] ¹⁷ So **faith** comes from what is **heard**, and what is **heard** through the **report of the Messiah**.

Romans 8:14-16

¹⁴ For all who are led by the **Spirit of God** are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the **spirit of slavery** to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as children, by whom we cry, *"Abba! Father!"* ¹⁶ The **Spirit himself bears witness** with our spirit that we are children of God.

You're Alive and Free! – Act that way!

Paul, a Roman citizen raised in a Greek city with a strong identity as a Jew, called as an emissary by Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, but both crucified and the embodiment of God. He watched the Good News of what God has done in Jesus do astonishing things in the lives of both Jews and pagans, but he knows that the transformation is a real challenge. It means new identity, new creation, death and resurrection. Not easy! The change is personal and communal. Easy to ignore, dilute with other beliefs, turn into religion.

We have our own difficulties, living 2000 years later. We live in a flood of information and ideas that we normally let it flow over us like a cloud – no change, we're barely moist. Paul says this is an event that reveals the world you live in is different than you thought. It's far better, with possibilities you never dreamed. Don't stay in the dark, deluded.

A second problem is the language from the Roman empire. Slaves and obedience. Paul uses it not as a great injustice, but as everyday reality. It's every person's relationship to the emperor/king. He uses it as voluntary choice. It also has OT echoes of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the "servant of the Lord" in Isaiah. The word usually translated "obey" (*hyp-akouein*) emphasizes the idea of listening to someone, taking their words and commands seriously to direct life and action. Not thoughtless obedience, but learning/understanding the new reality, living out of the message that reveals you in that reality. Once you know you have been "*brought from death to life*," how then do you act?

Law and the Power and Vulnerability of Sin

Paul speaks powerfully of "sin" not just a mistakes we make, faulty judgments. Rather it's like the emperor, king and lord. Sin is the deep brokenness of human beings: selfishness, fear, delusion, pride, injustice, using violence and death to control people, etc. Without God's intervention it was the only regime, the universal enslaving power: "*sin reigned in death*."

Breaking its power took two-steps. First the law defined the universal brokenness against a standard that marked it as transgression. In some ways sin becomes more powerful and tempting. But second, the law diagnosed sin's power and made it vulnerable. God moved beyond law in Jesus' gift of grace to take on himself our sin and death, create new life of resurrection and heal our lives now by his Spirit. You're "*not under law but under grace*."

But we're used to our brokenness. It's hard to learn not to make sin king, not to present parts of ourselves to its rule by our fears, addictions, pride, racism, sexual desires, envy, etc. Paul speaks of being *handed over to a pattern of teaching*, really listening from the heart and being set free. That teaching is Jesus, all that he did and taught and is. God's holy Spirit enters that listening/obedient heart to make us holy, healed, unbroken, alive. Jesus' story becomes ours in all its beauty, love, and power. We're plunged into his eternal life.

Death and the Gift of God's Grace

Death is always hard to deal with. On one level it is simply the end of a body's ability to function, natural, a transition. Even then it's not pretty. It's also the great sign of fear, avoidance, meaninglessness, nihilism, war, violence, destruction, powerlessness, loss, pain. All our sin creates the horror of death, its wages. We choose, present ourselves, enslave ourselves to our own destruction. God's 'wrath' is simply letting our choices go.

But God's whole being calls us back. His love makes it possible for us not to destroy ourselves. He gives himself in Jesus to draw us into his life. In Jesus even we can really choose life.

Romans 6:12-23 – God’s Grace and the Choices We Make

6: ¹² Μὴ οὖν βασιλευέτω ἡ ἁμαρτία
ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ὑμῶν σώματι
εἰς τὸ ὑπακούειν
ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτοῦ,

¹³ μηδὲ παριστάνετε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν
ὄπλα ἀδικίας τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ,
ἀλλὰ παραστήσατε ἑαυτοὺς
τῷ θεῷ
ὥσεὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ζῶντας

καὶ τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν
ὄπλα δικαιοσύνης τῷ θεῷ.

¹⁴ ἁμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει·
οὐ γὰρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον
ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν.

¹⁵ Τί οὖν; ἁμαρτήσωμεν,
ὅτι οὐκ ἐσμέν ὑπὸ νόμον
ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν;

μὴ γένοιτο.

¹⁶ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι
ᾧ παριστάνετε ἑαυτοὺς δούλους
εἰς ὑπακοήν,
δοῦλοί ἐστε ᾧ ὑπακούετε,
ἥτοι ἁμαρτίας εἰς θάνατον
ἢ ὑπακοῆς εἰς δικαιοσύνην;

¹⁷ χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ
ὅτι ἦτε δοῦλοι τῆς ἁμαρτίας
ὑπηκούσατε δὲ ἐκ καρδίας
εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε
τύπον διδαχῆς,

¹⁸ ἐλευθερωθέντες δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας
ἐδουλώθητε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ.

¹⁹ Ἀνθρώπινον λέγω

διὰ τὴν ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν.

ὥσπερ γὰρ παρεστήσατε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν
δοῦλα τῇ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ
καὶ τῇ ἀνομίᾳ εἰς τὴν ἀνομίαν,

οὕτως νῦν παραστήσατε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν
δοῦλα τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ εἰς ἁγιασμόν.

²⁰ ὅτε γὰρ δοῦλοι ἦτε τῆς ἁμαρτίας,
ἐλεύθεροι ἦτε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ.

²¹ τίνα οὖν καρπὸν εἶχετε τότε;
ἐφ' οἷς νῦν ἐπαισχύνεσθε,
τὸ γὰρ τέλος ἐκείνων θάνατος.

²² νυνὶ δὲ ἐλευθερωθέντες ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας
δουλωθέντες δὲ τῷ θεῷ
ἔχετε τὸν καρπὸν ὑμῶν εἰς ἁγιασμόν,
τὸ δὲ τέλος ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

²³ τὰ γὰρ ὀψώνια τῆς ἁμαρτίας θάνατος,
τὸ δὲ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ
ζωὴ αἰώνιος
ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν.

Galatians 3:1 ὦ ἀνόητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν, οἷς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἐσταυρωμένος; ² τοῦτο μόνον θέλω μαθεῖν ἀφ' ὑμῶν· ἐξ ἔργων νόμου τὸ πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως; ³ οὕτως ἀνόητοί ἐστε, ἐναρξάμενοι πνεύματι νῦν σαρκὶ ἐπιτελείσθε;

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:1** O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Romans 1:1 Παῦλος δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος ἀφωρισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ,

^{ESV} **Romans 1:1** Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

Romans 10:17 ἄρα ἡ πίστις ἐξ ἀκοῆς, ἡ δὲ ἀκοὴ διὰ ῥήματος Χριστοῦ.

^{ESV} **Romans 10:17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 10:12 οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολὴ Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ἑλλήνου, ὁ γὰρ αὐτὸς κύριος πάντων, πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν. ¹³ πᾶς γὰρ ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται. ¹⁴ Πῶς οὖν ἐπικαλέσονται εἰς ὃν οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν; πῶς δὲ πιστεύσωσιν οὐ οὐκ ἤκουσαν; πῶς δὲ ἀκούσωσιν χωρὶς κηρύσσοντος; ¹⁵ πῶς δὲ κηρύξωσιν ἐὰν μὴ ἀποσταλῶσιν; καθὼς γέγραπται· ὡς ὠραῖοι οἱ πόδες τῶν εὐαγγελιζομένων [τὰ] ἀγαθὰ. ¹⁶ Ἄλλ' οὐ πάντες ὑπήκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ. Ἡσαΐας γὰρ λέγει· κύριε, τίς ἐπίστευσεν τῇ ἀκοῇ ἡμῶν; ¹⁷ ἄρα ἡ πίστις ἐξ ἀκοῆς, ἡ δὲ ἀκοὴ διὰ ῥήματος Χριστοῦ.

^{ESV} **Romans 10:12** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 8:14 ὅσοι γὰρ πνεύματι θεοῦ ἄγονται, οὗτοι υἱοὶ θεοῦ εἰσιν. ¹⁵ οὐ γὰρ ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα δουλείας πάλιν εἰς φόβον ἀλλὰ ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα υἰοθεσίας ἐν ᾧ κρᾶζομεν· ἀββα ὁ πατήρ. ¹⁶ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν ὅτι ἐσμὲν τέκνα θεοῦ.

^{ESV} **Romans 8:14** For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,