

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We are currently discussing the doctrine of sanctification. Last week we finished looking at four steps for holy living, which is necessary for a truly happy life. These four steps were taken directly from Romans 6:1-13 as expounded by the Rev. P.G. Mathew.¹ How do you want to proceed today Dr. Spencer?

Dr. Spencer: By moving on to the next verse, Romans 6:14, which says, “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”² Now, we have to recognize that this verse starts with the word “for”, which means it is giving the reason for what had just been said, which was, to put it simply, that we should live holy lives. And the first part of the reason restates something Paul said earlier, but in a slightly different way. He says here that we should live holy lives because sin shall not be our master. Back in Verse 6 he had said that our old nature was crucified with Christ so that we should no longer be slaves to sin, which is saying basically the same thing. But now he goes to say that this is true because we are “not under law, but under grace.”

Marc Roby: Now, many modern Christians would say that because we are not under law but under grace, we do not have to keep God’s laws in order to be saved.

Dr. Spencer: That is a common view. And it can be right depending on what, exactly is meant by the phrase, “in order to be saved.” If you take that statement to mean that our obedience is not the ground, or the basis, for our salvation, then it is true. But if it is taken to mean, as it most often is, that we can be saved without keeping God’s law at all, then it is a dangerous heresy. We keep making this point over and over in slightly different ways because it is probably the most common foundational error in the modern church world and it is a very serious error that will send many people to hell. And Paul anticipated this misuse of the fact that we are no longer under law but under grace.

Marc Roby: I’m sure you’re referring to the next verse, Verse 15, where Paul asks, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?”

Dr. Spencer: That is exactly what I’m referring to. This is the second time in this chapter that he anticipates people misusing what has been said to justify a life of sin. In each case he uses a rhetorical question to express the anticipated error. Remember that in Verse 1 he started the chapter by asking, “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”

Marc Roby: And he answered that rhetorical question in no uncertain terms, “By no means!”

¹ P.G. Mathew, *Romans: The Gospel Freedom* (Volume 1), Grace and Glory Ministries, 2011, pp 348-358

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Dr. Spencer: And he answers this current question in exactly the same way, “By no means!” Or it could be translated, “May it never be!” It is a very strong rejection of the idea. We cannot go on sinning in order to increase the grace shown in forgiving us, nor can we go on sinning because we are saved by grace and not by our own works. In either case, the idea is preposterous. We are new creatures. We have been changed. We cannot and will not go on living the same old way. We used to be slaves to sin, but we were united to Christ in his death and resurrection and have, therefore, died to sin and been raised to a new life of holiness. Paul explains this again in a different way in Verse 16. He says, “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?”

Marc Roby: In other words, he is telling them that if they go on sinning, they are returning to being slaves to sin, which leads to eternal death, or we could say, to hell.

Dr. Spencer: And no one who has been born of God will do that. If a person continues to live as a slave to sin, he has not been born again. Our Lord himself made the same exact point. In John 8:31 we read that Christ said to some of the Jews, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.” Notice the conditional statement he begins with – *if* you hold to his teaching, then, and only then, are you truly his disciples. And he goes on in Verse 32 to say that if you are his disciples, “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Marc Roby: And these Jews took serious exception to Jesus implying that they needed to be set free. In Verse 33 we read that they responded by saying, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, the Jews who were speaking with Jesus were offended by this teaching, just as many people are today. They thought they would be saved by virtue of being a Jew. Just like many people today think they will be saved by virtue of having prayed a prayer, or been baptized as a Christian, or being a regular attendee or member of a church, or just being a nice person. But Christ disabused them of this idea. We read his reply in John 8:34-36, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Marc Roby: That reply doesn't leave any doubt, does it? And there's that nasty word slave again, the same word Paul insists on using.

Dr. Spencer: And Christ and Paul both make the same point. As we just read a moment ago, Paul said “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”? The idea here is very clear and makes the modern teaching about Christians not having to obey God's laws an obvious lie. Both Christ and Paul are telling us that if we have been born again, we *cannot* and *will not* go on living in sin. To do so would demonstrate that we are, in fact, still slaves to sin. But, as Christ said, “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Jesus Christ never fails to accomplish his purpose. And his purpose in saving his people is to make them holy and fit for heaven. That process takes our entire lifetime, but it has a definite beginning, which produces definite, immediate results.

Marc Roby: And it is important to point out what should be obvious. When Christ says that he sets us free, he means that he sets us free from the control of sin. In other words, we are free to *not* sin. It is the opposite of what some people think. He did *not* set us free from the law so that we would be free *to* sin.

Dr. Spencer: You're absolutely right about that. But it is consistent with sinful human nature to look for a so-called gospel that will allow us to continue to sin. And Satan makes good use of this lie. There is no one who is more solidly in Satan's grip than a person who thinks he is a Christian on his way to heaven when, in truth, he is still a slave to sin. The person thinks he is saved, so he doesn't listen to warnings about hell or calls to repentance and faith. He just nods his head thinking that others need to hear the message or the speaker is being legalistic.

Marc Roby: That is a very dangerous condition to be in.

Dr. Spencer: It is very dangerous whenever a Christian thinks that sin is not all that serious a problem. The fact that we have been forgiven should never, ever make us complacent toward sin. Rather, it should make us all the more appalled at our sin when we think of what it cost for God to forgive it. We must remember that as the supreme Judge of the universe, God, who is infinitely holy, *must* punish sin. He cannot simply wink at it. That is why Christ had to come and die. There was no other way for God to redeem a people for himself.

Marc Roby: As our Pastor likes to say, creation was, relatively speaking, an easy thing for God. He simply spoke and the universe sprang into existence. But redeeming his people meant that God's own eternal Son had to become incarnate and then suffer the wrath of God and die in our place.

Dr. Spencer: It is incredible whenever you consider what was involved in our redemption. And Christians *should* consider that often. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price."

Marc Roby: And Peter reminds of what that price was. In 1 Peter 1:18-19 we read, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

Dr. Spencer: Hallelujah! That is an amazing fact. And if we meditate on that fact we will recognize how awful sin is. *Every* sin, not just big ones like adultery and murder, but little ones too. Jesus is to be the Lord of *all* of our life. Even our thoughts and emotions need to be brought under the Spirit's control.

Marc Roby: Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:5 that "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Dr. Spencer: And we need to realize how serious that is. Every thought is to be obedient to Christ. I sin when I *think* something I shouldn't think! Now, I have to balance that statement by saying that Satan can put wicked thoughts into our minds, so just having a wicked thought pop

into your head is not sin. But you must consciously reject that thought. You must recognize it as an attack from an enemy, whether the thought comes from Satan, one of his demons, another human being or even your own sinful nature, you are to recognize it as sinful and cast it out. If you let yourself relish the thought for a while, you are sinning.

Marc Roby: That does speak to the comprehensive nature of Christ's lordship. Our thoughts, imaginations, feelings, they all need to be controlled.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they do. We are to be conformed to the likeness of Christ in every way. In Romans 12:2, Paul commanded us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." In the Greek, the first two verbs are present imperatives, meaning that this is a command and we are to do it continually. In other words, we are to continually fight to not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but instead to be continually transformed by the renewing of our minds. And the purpose is that we be able to test and approve God's will so that we will *do* what pleases God, just like Jesus himself did. As he said in John 8:29, "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."

Marc Roby: And we will also want to do what pleases God if we are truly part of God's family. One time when Christ was speaking to some people in what was evidently a crowded house, he was told that his mother and brothers were outside and wanted to speak to him. We read his response in Mark 3:33-35, "'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'"

Dr. Spencer: And everyone who has been born again has been adopted into God's family. It is unthinkable that such a person would happily go on living a life of sin. He cannot do so and be happy. As we have said before, holiness leads to happiness, but sin leads to misery in the life of a true Christian. And James Boice wrote that the process of sanctification, "describes two basic areas of growth. The first is separation to God and his purposes. For the root meaning of holiness suggests that which has been 'set apart' to God. The second is God-pleasing conduct or morality, becoming more like Jesus. ... This goal of holiness then has an outward standard of morality coupled with an internal conformity to the will and mind of God."³

Marc Roby: That quote fits perfectly with the verses we've been examining from the Scriptures. We are to be transformed in our *minds* and we are to *do* the will of God.

Dr. Spencer: And there is a great opportunity here for Christians to test themselves. An unbeliever can, and many often do, behave in ways that are consistent with God's standard. And even the best Christian sins, so no one's behavior conforms to God's standard all the time. But *only* a Christian will do what he does from a desire to please God. The motive is extremely important. A false Christian can look very good from the outside, that is the outward standard of

³ James Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Revised in One Volume, InterVarsity Press, 1986, pg. 449

morality about which Boice wrote. But a false Christian will *never* have that outward behavior coupled with, as Boice put it, an internal conformity to the will and mind of God. Therefore, we can test ourselves to watch out for hypocrisy. If you are doing things solely because you think they are the right thing to do and they will make your life better and make you look good to others, but you never really have the motive of consciously wanting to please and obey God, then you are *not* a Christian. You may be a very moral and upright unbeliever, but that will never save you.

Marc Roby: I remember that in a previous session we pointed out that the very same action can be sinful or not sinful depending on the motive behind the action.

Dr. Spencer: That's exactly the point. God examines both the outward actions and the heart motives behind them. So we also need to examine both in order to make our calling and election sure.

Marc Roby: And we should see in ourselves a real desire to know and to do the will of God.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we should. John Murray makes three good points with regard to sanctification. First, he notes that "All sin in the believer is the contradiction of God's holiness. Sin does not change its character as sin because the person in whom it dwells and by whom it is committed is a believer."⁴

Marc Roby: Yes, that's a great point. Believers don't get some kind of free pass as if our sins were OK because they have been paid for by Christ.

Dr. Spencer: Quite the contrary. Because we now have the power to say "No" to sin, our sins are worse than those of an unbeliever. The second point that Murray makes is that "The presence of sin in the believer involves conflict in his heart and life."⁵

Marc Roby: Yes, we have made this point before. One good test to see if we have been born again is whether or not we have this internal war going on. Our new nature is at war with our old sinful nature.

Dr. Spencer: That is a good test. And the third point that Murray makes is that "There must be a constant and increasing appreciation that though sin still remains it does not have the mastery. There is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin, the regenerate in conflict with sin and the unregenerate complacent to sin."⁶

Marc Roby: That again is important. If we ever find ourselves being complacent about our own sins, we are in very dangerous territory.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we are. We must be in conflict with our sin. We are at peace with God, but *not* at peace with our old sinful nature. I've heard professing Christians claim that God wants us to be happy and at peace with ourselves and that, therefore, it is somehow wrong for a Christian to

⁴ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955, pg. 144

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid, pg. 145

grieve over his own sin. But you will look in vain for that idea in the Bible, it simply isn't there. I do think you can make a case that, in general, God wants us to be happy. But that happiness is not because we aren't bothered by our sin anymore, it should be because we are sinning less and less and are grateful for God's having paid the penalty for us and having adopted us as his children.

Marc Roby: In Romans 14:17 Paul wrote that "For the kingdom of God is ... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit". You can't have the peace and joy without the personal righteousness.

Dr. Spencer: No, you can't. Real saving faith is always a penitent faith as we noted in Session 154. And we must remember what the Westminster Shorter Catechism says about true repentance, which it calls repentance unto life.

Marc Roby: Yes, let me read the answer to that question, number 87. It says, "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience."

Dr. Spencer: And there is the key. Real penitent faith, that is true saving faith, includes an inward determination and desire to walk in holiness. And we are enabled to do so because we are no longer under the law, meaning that we are no longer working in our own strength to try and earn our salvation, but we are now under grace, meaning that God supplies us with grace to enable us to obey him, which is done out of loving gratitude, not as a way to earn our salvation.

Marc Roby: That's a good way to put it, and a good place to end for today.

Dr. Spencer: And next time I want to look at what it means to be under grace.

Marc Roby: Very well, let me close by reminding our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We would enjoy hearing from you.