

Should a Believer Sin?

Romans 6:15—19

In Romans chapter 6, Paul begins to give the believer the tools necessary to live a godly life. He has already told us how God justified the sinner when he reached out to God in faith, believing in the Person of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. Now, having been regenerated and made spiritually alive by the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are to live lives consistent with our new position in Christ.

Believers have been made free from sin because the old sinful nature has died with Christ. This is because we are closely identification with Jesus Christ. Since we have been baptized into Him, we are identified as having died, been buried and risen with Him. We are identified with His crucifixion (Galatians 2:20), with His body (we are the Body of Christ), with His inheritance (We are coheirs—Romans 8:17), and with His glorification (Romans 8:30). As Christ was given all things, we have been given all things (compare Ephesians 1:22 with Romans 8:37). We are also considered to be co-laborers with God (1 Corinthians 3:8—9). We have the seal of God within us that separates us from the world unto God (Ephesians 1:13—14). Separation is sanctification. This separation is a work of God upon the spirit of every believer. It is now our job to make sure that the old nature does not become active by pleasing the desires of the flesh. Paul is teaching us that there is absolutely no reason for us to follow the desires of the flesh. The flesh (old nature) had died when we were baptized into Christ, so that there is no room for sin a believer's life. The old nature no longer rules over us as it did before we were saved.

Chapter 5 was about being saved by God's grace, apart from any works on our part. Chapter 6 begins by deflating the argument, put forth by some, that embracing God's grace apart from the Law only encourages people to sin. This argument is used by those who don't understand that we are now controlled by the Holy Spirit through the new nature. The old nature has been put to death. Paul refuses to allow such an inane argument to be used to enable believers to sin all they want. The argument of sinning to increase God's grace comes from the old nature. A second objection Paul tackles is found in verse 15.

Shall we sin? (verse 15)

Is there ever any reason for a believer to sin? Paul removes all doubt by pulling the rug out from under the feet of those who are trying to find problems with being saved by grace without the constraints of the Law. These arguments come from those who think we need a list of dos and don'ts telling us how we should behave, such as is contained in the moral elements of the Mosaic Law. Many people today think we need to live by the Law in order to please God, and that God has given us the Law to teach us how He wants us to act. Often, these people are under the mistaken idea that the church has taken Israel position and therefore we are also under the constraints of the Law. Many also claim that the Mosaic Law is God's grace, even though Paul does not allow any room for that type of (il)logic. Paul says we are not under Law, we are under Grace (Romans 6:14). His argument through the last half of chapter 6 is that there is no room for us to be under the Mosaic Law, and there is no excuse for the believer to sin.

Servants (verse 16)

People are always desiring to be free and to be able to do what they want to do when they want to do it. They want to be free to do anything without being constrained by anything or anybody. However, Scripture teaches that we are all slaves. Unbelievers are slaves to sin, while believers are slaves to righteousness. We will serve one or the other. Unbelievers have no choice but to be slaves to sin because they are completely free from anything righteous. No matter how nice they act on the outside, their

hearts are evil, wicked and godless. They are unable to please God in any way because they are living only to please self. The Bible calls the unbeliever an enemy of God (Romans 5:10). The only thing the world has is self. This is why the world emphasizes self-acceptance, self-esteem, self-worth, self-forgiveness, self-confidence, self-love. Contrary to what we were taught as children, being self-centered is actually a good thing. Buddha sums up the world's view well when he said, "You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection."

Unfortunately, many churches have picked up on this lie and preach messages that appeal to the building up of self. They combine human logic with Scripture to come up with the idea that we are unable to truly love others until we love ourselves. This message can draw big crowds because it so appeals to the natural, sinful nature.

Paul makes it clear that being a slave to self is the same as being a slave to sin. Believers need to consider self to be dead so that we can be controlled by God (Romans 6:13). We are not to be ruled by sin and self because we are now under grace, not the Law. If we are servants of the Law, we are obeying the Law in our own power. Believers have died to the Law so that we would bear fruit for God (Romans 7:4). Following the Law is a hindrance to bearing fruit for God. The Law activates the old nature, even as we try to please God in doing so. The only way that the Law can be perfectly obeyed is when God the Holy Spirit causes a person to be able to follow it. This will happen to the Little Flock of believers as they go into the Millennial Kingdom (Jeremiah 31:33). Today, the Law can be used to convict sinners (1 Timothy 1:8—11), but we are never told to follow the ordinances of the Law. Grace is at work when we reckon the old nature dead and we live a life pleasing to God. This grace life is activated when we study Scripture, rightly divided, and allow the Holy Spirit to make His word come alive.

Obeying the doctrine (verse 17)

Instead of following the Law and remaining as servants of sin, these Roman believers obeyed the doctrine delivered to them preached by the Apostle Paul. This doctrine was the Gospel of Grace, not the Gospel of the Kingdom. When the Gospel of the Kingdom was being preached, the Mosaic Law was also in effect (Matthew 23:2), and was preached by Jesus (Matthew 4:23) who was a man born under the Law (Galatians 4:4). Paul now, in this Dispensation of Grace, leads us to understand that the Law only makes sin more sinful, bringing death and condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9). If we try to obey the Law to gain righteousness, we will fail because the Law was given to demonstrate that man was unable to follow the Law (Galatians 2:16; 3:10, 21, 24).

The doctrine Paul taught was unique and was to be protected. Time after time he emphasized that his doctrine was different from what was taught previously by the earthly Jesus and His Disciples. Paul is our masterbuilder by laying the foundation of Grace upon Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10). He called the Gospel of Grace his gospel so that it could not be confused with their gospel of the Kingdom (Romans 16:25; 2 Timothy 2:8). We are told to follow Paul as our example (1 Corinthians 4:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:9). His doctrine came directly from the risen and glorified Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:1, 11). No other doctrine should be taught that is outside of what Paul teaches in his 13 books (1 Timothy 1:3; Galatians 1:8—9). This doctrine is to be protected and disseminated through faithful men (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2).

Pauline doctrine leads us away from the Law and into God's grace. It is only in Paul's writings where we understand our position in Christ and how sin has been defeated. We have been made free from sin and servants of God, now we need to act out our position.

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