

Rebuilding the Foundations - Romans
Part 12
“Growth in Holiness”
Romans 6:15-23
Pastor Charles Price

Romans 6:15-23, we looked at the first half of this chapter last week, as we are going through this letter of Paul to the Romans and he continues the same theme and he asks in Romans 6:15,

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 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? 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. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves, just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I imagine in our society we value choice as one of the very important values that we have. A lot of people, especially coming to this part of the world, comment on the incredible range of choice available everywhere. 25 years ago, apparently, the typical supermarket in Canada carried about 9,000 products on its shelves. Today, they carry more than 30,000 in a typical supermarket. In the produce section there used to be 65 items, generally. Someone recently counted them, there are 285 items; that’s fruit, vegetables and the like. 25 years ago, the average home could pick up six television stations. Today, the average home has more than 30 stations connected, and many of you have tripled that, I’m sure, because there’s lots more available.

Just a couple of generations ago, a couple got married and babies happened. Now you choose: how many are you going to have? When are you going to have them? 20 years ago, there were 560 mutual funds available. Today, there are 3,500. Once you are either Catholic or Protestant, if you professed any form of Christendom. In the year 2000, there were 32,908 registered Protestant denominations, and 291 Catholic groupings, and there is a new Christian denomination coming into being every single week. So, if you don't like this one, pick that one; if you get fed up with that one get up, and go to another one.

Choice: it's everywhere, and we pride ourselves on that. But I want to suggest to you this morning that basically, we have only one fundamental choice to make in life, and every other choice that we consider to be an expression of that freedom is actually going to be an expression of that one choice that we have made, and the choice is this, according to Romans 6: Who or what is going to be my master?

Who or What is going to be my master?

Paul limits the options, not from dozens and dozens. He limits the options down to two, as we're going to see this morning. Everything else in your life, everything else in my life will be an outworking in some form of that fundamental choice of what is going to be the mastering principle in my life.

Now Romans 6, the whole chapter, addresses the key issue of: how does a Christian live a holy life? Once you become a Christian, there probably isn't anything which is more concerning to you, certainly, as we read the Scripture, there's nothing more concerning to God than that issue: How do we live holy lives?

And this chapter divides into two halves. We looked at the first half last week. It begins with the question: What should we say? Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? Paul answers his own question, "by no means." Emphatically, no. And then he tells you why, in the first half, and we'll look at that in a moment. The second part begins in Romans 6:15 with a very similar question: "What then, shall we sin, because we're not in the law, but under grace? Because God

is so generous towards us, so kind towards us, so merciful towards us, can we just go on sinning?" He says, "by no means." He answers it in the same way.

Now the first question he goes on to answer by explaining our union with Christ. We looked at this last week. He says, "Don't you know," in fact both sections he begins with 'don't you know' - you need to know something. "Don't you know that all of us who are baptized into Christ were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:16)

What he means is this: if you have become a Christian, you have become incorporated into Christ. Your identity now is in Christ, which means that everything that is true of Christ has become true of you. Jesus Christ died as a consequence of sin. I am crucified with Christ. I have died. Sin has paid its wages. I've been buried with him, but I've been risen again to walk in newness of life. Water baptism is a picture of that. Water baptism doesn't make it happen; this is Spirit's baptism, an internal reality expressed by an external ritual: baptism.

When somebody goes down into the water, picture being buried or dying, buried, risen again, that's the picture. And Paul says, "Don't you know that this is true of you? You are no longer under the power of sin because the power of sin is death. It has paid its wages. You have died in Christ, and you have risen to walk in newness of life."

Now that's how he answers the first part of this question, "How do I deal with sin?" The second part of the chapter has a similar question, but his answer is different. He answers it not by talking about our union with Christ, but by our obedience to God. Now, Paul uses a stronger word. He talks about 'slavery to obedience'.

'Slavery' is the word he uses. He says in Romans 6:16, "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 — that's one option — which leads to death, or to obedience — that's the other option — which leads to righteousness.

Now, the response that Paul asks for in the first half of this chapter is in Romans 6:13 when he talks about ‘offering yourself as an instrument of wickedness’ or ‘offering yourself as an instrument of righteousness.’

I talked last week about the fact that an instrument is of no use without somebody, whether it's a musician who picks up his instrument and plays, or a surgeon who picks up his instruments to perform his surgery. Instruments operate in the hands, and under the enabling, of somebody else. We're instruments of righteousness. We present ourselves to God, in that sense, that he might play his tune of righteousness in us and through us. But here, in the second part of the chapter, he talks about offering yourselves again, not as instruments this time, but as slaves, either of sin, or of obedience.

The idea of ‘offering ourselves as instruments’ perhaps sounds rather passive. I mean, this piano, which Aaron has played so wonderfully this morning, is sitting there passively doing nothing right now, because an instrument by itself is of little value until somebody is playing it and producing the beautiful music that comes from it.

So, there's this idea of passivity and there's a legitimate sense of that; we must learn to rest in Christ. That is true. But the second part of the chapter is not about passivity, it's about action. It's about activity, because you cannot be obedient passively. You cannot be a functioning slave, as Paul uses the word, passively. And of course, the active and the passive are not in conflict, they run together. Because, although we are to be active in our obedience to God, at the same time, it is in that spirit of dependency on God — because in everything to which he calls us, we obey him — but it is in dependency on him that he in us makes it possible and works it out. So, these two things are not in conflict; they must be understood together.

We brought into union with Christ that we might become instruments of righteousness. How do we become instruments of righteousness? Very simply: by living in obedience to him. Obedience to God. Now let's look at this whole idea of obedience and of slavery. Slavery is the word that Paul uses. Now he does say in Romans 6:19, “I'm speaking to you in human terms” when he uses the example of slavery.

To us, of course, in the 21st century, slavery is something very far removed from our experience. It's a word which is harsh and hard, and everything we know about slavery repulses us, so it's not a good term for us. But actually, it was a very, very familiar term to the first readers of this letter in Rome. I'm given to understand that in the first century after Christ, there were an estimated 85-90% of the inhabitants of Rome that were either slaves or of slave origin. Many of the people in the church in Rome were slaves.

Now, of course, many of these slaves were not slaves by choice. They had been purchased, or had been captured in war, or they been born to their parents in slavery and remained the possession of the masters — that is true. But there was also such a thing under Roman law called 'voluntary slavery.' You see, actually under Roman law, slaves did have benefits. They did receive an income of sorts. You could eventually, if you saved it all up and didn't spend it on chewing gum or something, could purchase your freedom. But there's such a thing as voluntary slavery, too. If somebody, for instance, was living in dire poverty, you could come and present yourself as a slave and your master would look after you. He would feed you and clothe you. You'd have to work, of course, but there was such a thing as voluntary slavery. If someone was on the brink of bankruptcy, their bankruptcy would bring them into slavery. You became the slave of the master or the person to whom you owed your biggest debt.

And Paul seems to imply this here because he says in Romans 6:16, "When you offer yourself to someone to obey him as slaves," he says, you know this! When you offer yourself to someone to obey him as slaves. Some of you in the church say, "There's nothing wrong, this is life because this is how you make your living." Well, you're actually a slave.

In Romans 16, Paul in this final chapter gives a list of 27 names he mentions. They are friends of his that he wants to send greetings to. And some of those people there have names that belonged to the slave class. Very evidently, they were slaves that he's referring to. He talks about the house of Aristobulus and the household of Narcissus. Whoever these gentlemen were, their households would have included slaves; that was normal. So, they understood exactly what this is about.

And Paul says that “Now as you offer yourself to somebody to obey him as a slave” — and you usually do because you see, you want the benefits that accrue from that — that's why most of us work. It's great when you can work, and doing a job you're doing, which nobody pays you for. That's great when you get that sense about your vocation or your job, “I'll do it even if nobody paid me to do it.” Wonderful. But most of us don't feel that way. Well actually, I do. I love what I do. If you go to work, it's probably because you're going to get a wage packet at the end of the month, and that's the prime motivation for going. We only offer ourselves as slaves because we think there's some interest in this which is going to come back to me.

“Now,” says Paul, “I want to tell you that every one of you is a slave, but your slavery is limited to one choice, or two options. That's one choice you have. “Either” he says in Romans 6:16, “we are slaves to sin, or we're slaves to obedience.” And if you're a slave to sin, it's probably because you thought that there's going to be some good returns that come back from this for me. Most of us sin because we think there's going to be benefit in it. But your freedom is limited to that choice. You see, we talk — I feel sometimes —rather glibly about freedom of choice, but our freedom is really limited to the one choice: who is going to be my master?

Everything else we do, every ambition we hold, everything we spend our money on, how we use our free time, is going to be an expression in some way of that fundamental choice we've made: who is going to be the master of my life? It's either sin or it's God. This is what Paul says here.

Now let me look with you first at slavery to sin. I want to talk about three things:

1.Slavery to Sin: How it Commences

2.Slavery to Sin: How it Continues

3.Slavery to Sin: How it Culminates

Those are the three things we'll look at.

1. Slavery to Sin: How it Commences

First of all, in Romans 6:16, “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 to sin or to obedience.”

Now, he says, you offer yourself. You choose your master. Now slavery to sin; let's not get paranoid about the existence of sin, being a reality in our fallen world and our fallen lives. If we say we have no sin, we kid ourselves, we're told in the book of 1 John 1:8. Let's not be paranoid about it, but we're talking about slavery. It's when you find yourself being driven to sin.

Sin here involves anything less than God, in fact, in the New Testament there are a number of forms of slavery to sin that are spoken about. In 1 Corinthians 7:23, for instance, Paul says, “You were bought at a price, do not become slaves of men.” And in that context, by being slaves of men, you are living under the opinions of other people.”

In other words, you live your life looking over your shoulder, making sure you're pleasing whoever it is you want to please, and getting the approval of who you want to approve you. Paul says this is slavery to sin. You're being slaves to another person. And you know, sometimes we Christians can be very good at that kind of slavery, always checking that we're pleasing everybody else around us. And it can put you into bondage. So, slavery to sin can involve being in slavery to men.

In Galatians 2:4, Paul talks about four brothers who had infiltrated their ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Jesus Christ to make us slaves to the law. And again, several times in the New Testament, the ugly face of legalism comes up again, that you are boxed in by the law, living under rules, and that's basically it. That is slavery to sin as well.

In 2 Peter 2:19, Peter talks about those who are ‘slaves of depravity’. And he adds in that verse, “For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.” And when something masters you, you become its slave. He talks of slaves of depravity there. Now, to be a slave of men, to be a slave of the law, to be a slave of depravity are all different aspects of being slaves to sin.

You became a slave to sin when you begin to submit yourself to whatever it is that begins to dominate your life and begin to rule your life and begin to govern your life. That's how it commences. How does it continue? In Romans 6:19, he says, "As you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness." His point there is to say: "Now offer them to Christ." But he's reminding them that as you offered your bodies as slavery to sin or to impurity, there was an ever-increasing wickedness. Notice that: it's not static.

Sin does not remain as it was. Its impact and effect grow; it escalates. You see, when we wilfully sin, we violate a conscience that God has given to us. And one of the most important and fragile parts of us is our conscience. The conscience is the voice of God in the human soul. Romans 2 talks about those who don't know the law have the revelation through conscience of what God requires. God has given us a conscience. But you know, you can rip it to shreds and you can damage it. I've sat and talked with people whose lives are sometimes teetering on the precipice of going right over the edge into some area of sin, and they have always — sometime back — violated their conscience in an area they didn't think really mattered very much at the time, and it began to escalate.

You see, God tells us in 1 Timothy 1:18-20 to hold onto faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and have shipwrecked their faith. Paul says that by rejecting conscience, you shipwreck your faith.

Do you know how you know when you've damaged your conscience or tell you how you know when you damage your conscience: you find it easier to sin than you used to. You see the first time you may commit some particular sin that you know is wrong, but you do it, your conscience probably screams at you, probably keeps you awake at night. You toss and you turn with this sense of turmoil within you because you have violated this fragile thing called your conscience. But let me tell you this: you do it the second time, and you will not toss and turn for quite as long. You do it the third time, it'll become easier still. You do it the fourth time, and you'll sleep as normal. You do it the fifth time and you begin to defend it. You do it the sixth time, and you'll begin to say this isn't so bad. After all, what you've done is you've rejected your conscience and

you are ship wrecking — that's the word Paul uses — shipwrecking your faith. That's why he speaks of ever-increasing wickedness when you are a slave to sin.

Back in Romans 1, we looked at that section which talks about God handing people over. Remember that God gave them over. He described sexual perversion. He describes materialism, where they worshiped created things rather than the Creator: that's materialism. He talked about egotism where they claim to be wise but were actually fools. In those contexts, God gave them over to their impurities, to their materialism. That is, he let them go simply because now that began to violate their conscience, he is letting go further and further out into ever increasing wickedness.

Let me ask you a question: Are there things in your life today that you would have been shocked about five years ago or ten years ago? Are there little things you allowed you knew were not right, but they looked attractive, they looked as though they'd be beneficial to you, and you thought they would be fun. I think we're realizing this today, with all the tremendous benefits we have from the internet, with all enormous temptations too which come from the internet. Especially in the realm of pornography, and chat rooms. If statistics are reliable at all, let's be utterly frank here, folks. In this building this morning, this is a problem for you. Because the statistics are horrifying. You just have a little look to find out. “Oh, that's interesting, well, that's fun, that's exciting.” And you go back, and it gets worse and bigger. In Genesis 4:7, God said to Cain, “Sin is crouching at your door. Its desire is to have you. But you must master it.”

Because if you don't, it'll master you. This is slavery to sin, and it grows. How does it culminate? Romans 6:21 says, “What benefit did you reap at the time from the things in which you're now ashamed? These things result in death.”

So, what benefit came from sin? Two things: 1) Shame and 2) death. For a short while — and let's not be unrealistic — for a short while sin can be fun. As long as you can get away with it, it can be fun. But you see, sin as a debtor- it always pays its debts and has wages to give away.

That's why in Numbers 32:23 says, "Be sure that your sin will find you out." The only gifts that sin has to give us are shame and death. But you see sometimes, when we could reject it, when we could recognize it, we didn't. We allowed it to grow until it began to control us.

I remember several years ago reading in a newspaper in England about a circus act in Italy that the previous day had gone tragically wrong. There was a man — I've forgotten his name — but he was well known in Italy, apparently. And one of his acts involved bringing a huge python into the ring. And this python would wrap himself around him, and he would stand ramrod straight in. This python would wrap itself around him so all the audience could see was a column of snake. And the audience sitting in the circus would probably be feeling the hairs on their back standing on end with a creepy feeling of being surrounded by this snake. And then he would give the signal, whether it was a noise or movement, I don't know, but he trained this python and the python would begin to unravel and slither across the ring. Everybody would break out in applause, and it was the climax of this performer's act. However, on this occasion, he came to the climax and the python wrapped itself around him and he stood ramrod, and this tent was absolutely silent in the circus as people sat there. And suddenly there was a loud crack, and then a scream. Some of the circus workers ran into the ring realizing what was happening. They actually killed the snake, but not before the python had constricted and crushed the man and killed him.

And I read an article a few days later that said this man had got this python when it was just newly born in Africa. And he kept it with him, slept in his pocket, took it to his bed. Everywhere he went, he took this python, so the python grew up thinking this man was its parent, just an odd-shaped python with a couple of extra bumps on. He lived with this python and trained this python. You know, when he got that python as a little baby just a few inches long — I don't know how long pythons are when they're born — he could have taken its head between his thumb and finger and crushed the head like that. But he didn't. He played with it, sought to train it. As it grew bigger- pythons never stop growing- it may have been ten feet. And one day the python, he could have crushed had he wanted to between his fingers, crushed him. I remember thinking when I read that story: what a, what a picture of sin.

At times we can resist, but we don't, and we allow ourselves to be sucked down a road. We say we've got a boundary here, but I push the boundary, and you can be sure once you push the boundary, it is no longer fixed. You go on pushing it until one day it'll crush you in shame, as Paul says here.

What benefit did you reap? You thought you're getting some benefit here! We don't sin other than the fact we think it's beneficial. We tell a lie because it'll help us to get away with something or cheat or whatever it is. But it comes back to pay its debts. It finds you out, it's crouching. The first thing God ever said about sin after the fall was that: sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you. Genesis 4:7. Well, that's likely to seem pretty depressing, isn't it? So it should be!

What about slavery to God? He says there's another choice. Again, the same three things: 1) how it commences, 2) how it continues, and 3) how it culminates.

2. Slavery to Sin: How it Continues

How does it commence? In Romans 6:17-18, he says, "Thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching, with which you were interested. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

Now, says Paul, this was a deliberate response on your part. You used to be slaves to sin, but you obeyed. "You wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teachings with which you entrusted, and you became slaves to righteousness. You see, that is why a key issue in the Christian life is the issue of obedience.

Don't think of obedience as simply God's standing at a distance with a big stick, saying, "Come on, do it, you better do it," and we say, "Alright! I'll try my best." That's humanizing the Christian life. As we submit to God, submission to God is both submission to his will and our obedience to it, but it's also submission to his power so that he enables us to do what he calls us to do.

A great verse that I love and 1 Thessalonians 5:24 says, “Faithful is he who calls you who also will do it.” And that's in the context of holiness, because it says, “May your whole spirit and soul and body be sanctified” — that is made wholly before God — “He who calls you is faithful. He will do it.” Who calls you? God calls you. Who will make it possible? God will make it possible. So, submission to God is not just, “Well, OK, God, I'll try this time to really obey you because you know, and I know that we're weakened, and we can't do that alone.”

But it's submission to his strength, submission to the Holy Spirit who lives within us and empowers us and enables us, and we will never live the Christian life outside of obedience. That's why we must never detach the lordship of Jesus Christ from the Saviourhood of Jesus Christ. Sometimes we tend to think of Christ as Saviour as being adequate; that is, by saving us, he gets us off the hook. We're no longer going to hell; we're going to have him. Phew, what a relief, but I pretty well can go on living as I want to live.

Now that is not the Christian life. He is Lord and Saviour, and he brings us out of our sin in order to bring us under his authority, and we live every day asking the question, or it becomes an attitude of heart: what does God want in this situation? What is the Word of God in this situation?

And by the way, don't think of that as something mystical and remote. Probably 99 per cent of the will of God for your life is in this book. It won't tell you the name of the girl you're going to marry or the guy you're going to marry, or the place you're going to live, but 99 per cent is here and the Holy Spirit will guide you as you live in obedience to what this book says.

God's personal will is always in conformity to his general will. If we're going to live the Christian life, it's under his authority, that's why obedience is a key ingredient. I heard Dr. Stephen Olford say on one occasion many years ago, “God will not teach you anything new until your obedience is up to date.”

Sometimes when there's a blockage in our Christian, we've got to go back to a point of disobedience and repent and surrender again to him as Lord.

So how does it commence? It commences when you offer and submit yourself. How does it continue? (Romans 6:16) "Whether you're slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness. Romans 6:18, "you've been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." Now righteousness — if you've been here in previous weeks, you'll know — is the main theme of the Book of Romans.

Restoring the righteousness of God into our experience, and it is the righteousness of God which replaces sin. And that is important, you see. But the way righteousness replaces sin is not by becoming preoccupied with overcoming sin; that can be a mistake. Sometimes we concentrate on trying to deal with our sin and our very concentration on our sin becomes temptation to sin, because we keep thinking about it.

I'll do a little experiment with you and hope it works. Just imagine if you would, in your mind's eye, get a picture of an elephant, OK, a big elephant in a tree. Just kind of picture this elephant in the tree. Get a clear picture in your mind. And the elephant, you know it's got a long trunk, big ears. It's an African elephant with four legs, and maybe it's hanging on by its trunk to a branch. Maybe it's sitting in the fork of the tree somewhere. You've got the elephant in your mind? Got a clear picture in your mind? You got that picture in your mind? OK, I'll tell you what I want you to do. Take the elephant out of the tree in your mind. Get rid of the elephant, OK? Are you getting rid of him? Is he gone? I mean, just get him out, just get him out of the tree.

Let me give you something else. Just imagine this time a tiger. Get a picture of a tiger, and this tiger, let's say, it's up the CN Tower. Biggest building here in Toronto, in fact, in the world, they tell me every time I go up. Everytime we have a guest we go up, as that's what they all want to see. And imagine this tiger, you've got this tiger prowling around on the first level of the CN Tower. Big ginger: are they ginger? Big teeth. Have you got the tiger in your mind? OK, let me ask you a question: What's happened to the elephant now? Who said, "Still there." Trying to get rid of the elephant is difficult when you're trying to get rid of the elephant, isn't it?

But concentrate on something else and you'll say, "Oh, I've lost the elephant. Somebody told me a story this morning after the first service. I'll tell you about a king many years ago, who called one of his servants and said to the servant, "I want you to take this piece of iron and to turn it into gold, and if you don't, you will die."

Well, it was a pretty desperate situation, so the servant went away. "How can I turn iron into gold?! How can I do it?!" Eventually, he came back to the king and the king said, "Can you do it?" And he said, "Yes, I can. I can turn it into gold. That's just one slight flaw. I have to be in your company and you have to make sure you do not think about a hippopotamus while I'm doing it, because if you think about a hippopotamus while I'm doing it, it won't turn into gold. So, don't think about a hippopotamus, OK? Stop thinking about the hippopotamus, alright? Don't think about the hippopotamus, and I'll turn it into gold." And of course, it didn't turn to gold because the king couldn't stop thinking about the hippopotamus.

All right. We're wasting time here. That's not working very well. The point is this: How do I deal with sin? Not by focusing on dealing with sin! In Romans 8:5-6, it says, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires. Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."

I'm going to talk and look at that passage in Romans 8 about the importance of the mind, thinking. But he says, "Who's the person who lives according to the flesh, the sinful nature? They're the ones whose mind is taken up with that! What about those who live upon the Spirit? Their minds are taken up with the things of the Spirit. There's no mystery as to why one person's godly while another person is a mess. What you think eventually becomes what you are. And so, as you set your mind on the things of God, that's why Paul says in this chapter, twice in each of the first and the second sections, "Don't you know that certain things..." You need to know things, understand these things, live by these things. We don't concentrate on the elephant of sin, elephant though it is, but we focus on righteousness. That's why it's so important to read this book, not because it's some magical medicine.

If you take it better in the morning, you'll have a good day for the rest of the day. But because through the written word, we know more of the living word of Christ, and as we read it, as we meditate on it, as we think about it, we find ourselves being drawn more and more into the righteousness that God intends for us.

That's why Philippians 4:8 says, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things."

Allow them to occupy your mind. So, slavery to God commences with submission, realizing my bankruptcy. That was one of the main reasons why some would present themselves as slaves in Rome — it was because of their bankruptcy. "I'm out of my own resources, so I offer myself."

Sometimes it's the bankruptcy of our own lives, morally and spiritually. We come and say, "Lord, I submit myself to you." And it continues as we grow in him with ever increasing righteousness. And how does it culminate?

3. Slavery to Sin: How does it Culminate?

Romans 6:22 — "Now you've been set free from sin. They become slaves to God. The benefits you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." He said earlier, "What benefit did you get from your sins, shame and death?" (Romans 6:21) What benefit do you get from being a slave to God? It's holiness and life. See, holiness is not something we talk about enough. It's not being 'goody goody.' It's being set apart.

Your life is set apart to God so the way you live — the way you go about your business, the way you run your family, the way you spend your money — is a reflection of the fact that there is someone who rules my life who is clean and holy and pure, and his character is being expressed in us and through us.

So, Paul in this chapter says, “How are we going to cope with sin?” First half of the chapter: by understanding a union with Christ. Everything that is true of Christ is declared to be true of you. You have died and been crucified with Christ, buried with him, risen again to walk in newness of life, a life — which it says in Romans 6:9 — cannot die again because it's already died and been raised: that's why we are eternally secure.

The life we receive is the life of Christ that cannot die again, imparted to us. So, understand your union with Christ. Sin has paid its wages on the cross, death. But that's not all. You don't then become a zombie sitting back saying, “Well, it's not me now, it's just Christ, so I'll just present myself to be an instrument and hope something happens.”

No, the active ingredient is an active obedience and submission, knowing as we say, “Lord, I want to live in obedience to you, I also live in dependency on you.” Those two things can never be separated. “And as you lead me, you enable me. As you call me further, you empower me.”

And something of his character, something of His Holiness, begins to be seen in us. There's no grounds for patting ourselves on the back, of course, because the antithesis of true righteousness is self-righteousness. But in humility, saying, “Lord, thank you for your presence in me. You have removed my sin, so enable and empower me, as I submit to you as a slave of God, to live a life that's holy.”

Do you know Christ this way in your life? You know him as the source of your salvation from the guilt and penalty of sins. Do you know him as the source of your freedom from the power of sin? We'll find out more about that in Romans 7 and Romans 8, because Paul hasn't finished explaining that. But you can come this morning and say, “Lord, I submit myself again.”

Well, maybe for the first time, but it's a daily thing, really, isn't it? “Lord, today, have your way in my life. May your resources — your strength, your power — be displayed in my weakness. And his character will begin to be evident in your holiness of life.

We're going to pray together and then immediately after I've prayed, Kevin Pauls is going to come and sing to us a song which responds to this. It's called, "Your Grace Still Amazes Me."

Closing Prayer

Let's pray together.

First, Lord, we pray here this morning, in the hearts of many of us, you will kindle a fresh appetite for holiness, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and as we live in obedience to you — in submission to you — that the power and principle of sin might be broken and replaced by the power of Jesus Christ and the principle of holiness. Make this real for us, we pray.

In Jesus name. Amen.