

# Mastering Sins that Master Us

## *The Gospel's Power to Break Habitual Sin*

Romans Series  
PBC 2026

### **Text: Romans 6:15-23**

*What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!*

<sup>16</sup> *Do you not know that **if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey**, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?*

<sup>17</sup> *But thanks be to God, that **you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed**,<sup>18</sup> and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*

<sup>19</sup> *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

<sup>20</sup> *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.*

<sup>23</sup> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

### **Introduction:**

Last week, we listened to Paul address a question from someone who, while thankful for grace, was struggling with the Gospel's demand that they make a radical, clean break with their past life, given what it would require or cost to fully leave that old life behind.

Their question for Paul in 6:1 is this: "Why can't the grace that covered all my past sins continue to cover **the sinful state** I feel I need to stay in now that I am a Christian? Since grace abounds where sin exists, can I keep on

sinning without needing to make such a radical break from my old life?” Paul’s answer was kind, gracious, gentle, and definite – “Absolutely not!”

***But now in 6:15, a second question arises for Paul:*** “Now that I have made a clean break with my old life, what in the world am I supposed to do about the sins that I just can’t seem to overcome? Can I ***continue to sin*** because I am not under law but under grace?”

## **I. The Question/Issue Paul Addresses (6:15)**

*What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!*

- Let’s make sure we understand who is asking and what is really being asked in this question. The person asking the question is not suggesting that grace might give them room to remain in their old way of life – that question has been settled for them.
- However, now that they have made the break with their old life, they are discovering that some of the old, sinful habits are very deeply entrenched and are proving almost impossible to break. (Ruts)
- Put simply, their question can be broken down into two parts: *“What do I do about the habitual sins that have such a grip on me that no matter how hard I try, how much I read my Bible, or how fervently I pray, I eventually find myself right back in bondage to them.”*
- And secondly, *“Since I can’t overcome them, is it OK to just do them and move on to fight other battles – after all, grace covered their guilt and removed the Law’s condemnation– so why go through the trouble of fighting a battle that I can’t see any hope of winning?”*
- And honestly, that’s where many of us find ourselves this morning! We are so grateful for the grace that has saved us! We have decided to make a clean break from our old way of life and are working to live out our new identity in Christ every day.
- However, sin has carved deep ruts into the road of our lives, and no matter how hard we try, the wheels of our lives eventually slide right back into those ruts! *(Illustration: ruts in roads on Malta)*

- And honestly, we're so tired from the struggle and discouraged by the repeated failures that we wonder if it's even worth fighting the battle anymore. Since we're no longer under the condemnation of the Law for that sin, why should we keep fighting against it?  
*(Illustration: Parking ticket and not moving my car)*
- Paul's answer – God forbid! Just like you had to make a clean break with your old life, you must engage in an ongoing, relentless, daily fight against the sins that beset you. ***And in verse 16, he provides a powerful explanation for why this must be so for every believer!***

## II. The Explanation Paul Provides (6:16)

*Do you not know that **if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?***

- Paul accompanies his answer with an important point he expects his reader to understand (“do you not know”): ***who you choose to follow and obey is who you are truly serving.***
- Two words are important in this explanation – “present” and “obey.”
- The term “present” (*present active from παρίστημι, v. 16, 19, 12:1*) is a term that the Romans would immediately understand – it relates to offering yourself to do the will or fulfill the desires of another. Paul uses the same term in Romans 12:1, urging us, in view of God's immense and manifold mercies, to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, fully dedicated to discerning and doing the good, acceptable, and complete will of God!
- The term “obey” (*present active ὑπακούω*) comes from a word that means to hear or heed, responding to someone who has made a demand, given an instruction, or extended an invitation.
- Paul's point is this: Every Christian publicly declares at their baptism that they have turned away from their old life and are committed to following and obeying Jesus as their Savior and Lord. ***What they choose to do with their body will confirm both the truth of that declaration and the depth of their commitment.***

- Paul rules out any neutrality in this issue. There is no “Switzerland” for believers! When faced with a persistent pattern of sin that continually calls, invites, tempts, or even commands you to act, ***what you do with your body shows who you are willingly serving at that moment.***
- And those two ways of serving/obeying lead to two very different ends:
  - ***When you “present your body” to your old master for disobedience, it always leads to death – something dies.***
    - Hope and joy die*
    - Trust and confidence die*
    - Relationships die*
    - Worship dies*
    - Spiritual vitality dies*
    - Marriages die*
    - Ministry opportunity dies*
  - ***When you “present your body” to your new master for obedience, it always produces righteousness – something lives and grows.***
    - Hope and joy grow*
    - Trust is restored*
    - Relationships are rebuilt*
    - Worship and Spiritual vitality are revived*
    - Marriage and love are rekindled*
    - Ministry is revived and empowered*
- In other words, if you publicly declare that you no longer serve your old master, the evil king, but still act on his desires and lusts with your body, then you really are still serving him and fulfilling his purposes instead of those of your new master! And this is a very serious matter for a genuine Christian who is truly grateful for grace and truly loves Jesus Christ!
- In fact, if left unaddressed, it could eventually take over your life to the point where it raises questions about whether you truly were delivered from your sins and saved by God's grace. This is precisely

what happened to another group of believers in Paul's time who lived in Corinth, and due to their unrepentant impurity, immorality, and sensuality (2 Cor 12:21), Paul urges some of them to "examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith!" (2 Cor 13:5).

- This explanation is intentionally blunt. Paul wants someone who claims to be a Christian but shows no real desire or effort to abandon certain sins or patterns they plan to keep doing to face what that says about them—you might not be the Christian you think you are! Actually, Paul urges them to stop and carefully examine whether they are even Christians at all. ***Our deliberate, willful choice to continue practicing these sins without any significant effort to resist and turn from them raises a real question about whether we have been truly justified.***
- However, Paul's plain speech might actually have an unintended effect on the life of a person who is truly a believer and is struggling against these sins but cannot seem to gain victory over them. They might conclude that unless they overcome sin all the time, they are not genuine believers. To prevent that person from drawing the wrong conclusion, Paul provides an assuring reminder in 6:17-18.

### III. The Assurance Paul Gives (6:17-18)

*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,<sup>18</sup> and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*

- Paul looks at a ***genuine believer*** who is exhausted from their struggle against persistent sins and assures them of something that has fundamentally changed everything for them and about them!
- A. Someone has delivered you from something – “Thanks be to God!”**
- Paul reminds believers who are struggling with certain sins that overcome and at times overwhelm them, not to lose hope because God has already done something for them that can never be

reversed or changed! ***He has forgiven them for those very sins that at the moment are overcoming them!***

- Moreover, He has granted them a righteousness that was never based on their obedience and can never be diminished or stained by their disobedience! This is why imputed righteousness is so important for us as Christians in our fight against sin!
- And the reason this assurance is hope and not a license to sin is what follows in the next phrase – God delivered you over to something stunning that changed everything!

***B. Someone has delivered you over to something – “to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.”***

- Paul reminds the Roman Christians that the same God who at one time delivered (*παραδίδωμι*) them over to defiled desires (1:24); degrading sexual passions (1:26); and to depraved thinking and debased living (1:28) has intervened on their behalf and lifted them up out of all of this depravity that came out of their rebellious, disobedient heart and has now delivered them over (*aorist tense, passive voice παραδίδωμι*) to something else – “to a standard or pattern of teaching” which they “obeyed from the heart!” ***And the kind of obedience that Paul is talking about comes out of a very different heart than their old one!***
- What is this standard or pattern of teaching that has made such a powerful, life-changing, character-transforming impact on them?
- ***It is whatever Paul has been teaching and explaining for five chapters: The Gospel of God’s Son! (1:9 – “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son . . .”)!***
- And the reason Paul is so unashamedly passionate about this gospel is that “*it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “the righteous shall live by faith.” (1:16-17)*
- And when God took you by the hand and delivered you to this Gospel, it changed everything about you!

**C. You have obeyed that teaching with a new heart – “having become obedient from the heart.”**

- How did they come to obey it from hearts that had been so hardened against God, defiled by sin, and depraved by rebellion?
- What God did: **Jeremiah 31:33** *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*
- How God did it: **Ezekiel 36:25–27** *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

**D. And because you obeyed from the heart, you have been set free from sin and have become willing bondservants of righteousness – “and, having been set free from sin, have become the slaves of righteousness.”**

- Because of what God did ... you are now doing something: you are now willing servants who obey and serve righteousness! You have become the kind of people Jesus exhorts us to be when he said, “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness!*”

#### **IV. The Illustration Paul Uses (6:19)**

*I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

- In order to help them understand the contrast he is making between their past service to their old Lord (master) and their present service to their new Lord (master), Paul uses an illustration that would be very familiar to them but easily misunderstood by us and then he develops that illustration along three lines:

##### **A. Think about the nature of Roman slavery/bond-service:**

*I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations.*

- There were three ways a person became a slave in Paul’s day: 1) captured in war; 2) willingly indentured as a bond servant; 3)

born into slavery. You could gain freedom by purchase, by means of reward for some great service, or by redemption.

- In the Roman Empire, slavery for many was a means of survival and a pathway to freedom, education, and perhaps even citizenship. There were approximately 100M people in the Roman Empire, and 60M of them were in some form of slavery.
- If you were a slave, you had a master (Lord); he had a will for you to obey, and you received some form of wages or compensation for your service (wage for obedience; punishment for disobedience).
- Of the many points Paul could have made about Roman slavery, the one he focuses on here is this: at the heart of this kind of slavery is the concept of “obedience” (4x in 6:15-18).

### ***B. Obedience to something leads to more of that thing!***

*For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness*

- Remember what happened when you used to present your members to do things that were impure and against God’s moral law and ethical expectations? It led to more lawlessness!
- In fact, when this went on unrestrained in your life over time, *“you were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, and malice! You were full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, gossip, slander, rejecting God, insolent, haughty, boastful, creative in evil-doing, disobedient to your parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless toward those who stood in your way!”* (Romans 1:28-31)
- Unchecked sin leads to even more unrestrained sin!
- Illustration: Ants in back-yard! (ant spray, wD-40; Windex!)

### ***C. Presenting your bodies as servants of righteousness will produce more righteousness in your life!***

*so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

- In light of this truth, do the hard work required to present your body as a willing servant of righteousness because that kind of serving leads to more and more righteousness in your life over time!

## V. The Motivation Paul Employs (6:20-22)

*For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.*

**A. The fruit that grew out of your obedience to sin produced two horrific things: Shame and Death**

**B. The fruit that grows out of your obedience to God also produces two things: Sanctification and Abundant, Eternal Life**

- How does this happen? What produces this kind of fruit in me when all of my human effort has failed? **Answer: This fruit is grown in me through the power and beauty of the Gospel!**
- The gospel has **power** to bring dead things to life (to revive life).
- The gospel has **ability** to cleanse defiled things and repair broken things (to restore life).
- And only the **beauty** of the Gospel is compelling enough to draw me away from the lusts of the world that grab my eyes and bring me back to the beauty of Jesus!
- And until I really stop and see the stunning beauty of the gospel so that I never forget it; until I see and treasure the incredible wealth and value of the gospel, my lusts will win out every time!
- And this is why, for many of us, the little things we do to try to overcome our lusts and defeat our sins never work long-term. We need to return and revel in the beauty and power of the gospel that saved us because it is ultimately the one thing that will break the power of sin that Jesus canceled at the cross!

## VI. The Power God Supplies (6:23; 7:6)

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. . . . But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*

- The proof of everything Paul has said can be summarized like this: *“While this sanctification demands your energy and effort, **the fruit does not come from your effort alone.** It is a fruit that God grows in you, which comes from the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-26).”*
- And the proof is this: *“The wages you received from sin you earned as a recompense for disobedience. But the life you have and the fruit it is growing in you come as a free gift from God to all who are in Christ Jesus our Lord!”* (cf., 1:11; 3:24; 4:4; 5:15 on free gift)

**A. The gift of God through the gospel gives us Life and Hope!**

*but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**B. The Scriptures give us Guidance and Training whereas the Old Code inevitably led to the legalism and bondage of law-keeping as a means of obtaining or maintaining righteousness before God!**

*But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive,*

**C. The Spirit gives us enlightenment and enablement!**

*so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*

## **Conclusion: How does this help me overcome sin?**

*My question for Paul: I don't know how to do this. How does the gospel bring this about? What does the gospel contain that teaches me and trains me to live this way? Paul's answer to me: Have you not been listening and learning for the entire time I have been speaking to you? I wrote five chapters of gospel truth – that goes way beyond just praying a prayer and getting your ticket for heaven. Did any of it sink in?*

*I gave you five chapters of deep, beautiful, life-changing truth, and the only thing I asked was that you know and understand that truth. I didn't issue a single command or imperative until 6:11! But you were so focused on finding a task to do or a practical application to execute that I suspect you listened politely and then just moved on in your mind.*

*And now, when you most need what the gospel contains*

- *that will fuel unquenchable hope that banishes depression and despair,*
- *that is so stunningly beautiful, it draws your eyes away from those images on the screen that capture and enslave you,*
- *that is so astonishingly large it gives meaning to your pain and suffering so you don't have to resort to behaviors that destroy you or substances that addict you in an effort to numb that pain,*
- *that so powerfully displays the wisdom and sovereignty of God that you don't have to resort to compulsive behavior patterns to control your life and bring order to the chaos around you,*
- *that is so bountifully merciful it banishes your guilt and shame, it isn't there to draw on because you never learned it, or you never took the time to really understand what God gave you in the gospel!*

And that is why Paul wrote the book of Romans the way he did! He poured all of that hope, beauty, wisdom, power, and meaning into five powerful chapters! Read them repeatedly. Savor them deeply. Treasure them fiercely. Reflect on them intensely – until the truths in these chapters are so deeply embedded in your soul that they change how you think and feel about life and shape your perspective and approach to life.

God took you by the hand and delivered you over to (committed you to the care of) a new and powerful standard of teaching – the gospel! And that Gospel has the power to help you conquer sin in your life!

- Do you know it truly?
- Do you believe it deeply?
- Are you treasuring it joyfully?
- Are you being shaped by it personally?

Illustration – Brycen and Kayla