

DEVOTIONAL

WHEN IN ROME VI // ANSWER OR IGNORE?
APRIL 3, 2022

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: How does being committed to following the Bible's teachings help us resist sin?

Key Text: "What then? Are we to 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 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? ¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." (Romans 6:15-18)

A few years ago, the Christian magazine *Discipleship Journal* shared the results of an interesting survey in which readers ranked the top areas of greatest spiritual challenge to them. Here are the results:

1. Materialism
2. Pride
3. Self-centeredness
4. Laziness
5. Anger/Bitterness
6. Sexual Lust
7. Envy
8. Gluttony
9. Lying

When asked, "When are temptations strongest?" 81% said when they had neglected their time with God, and 57% said when they were physically tired. When asked, "How do you resist temptation successfully?" 84% said by prayer, 76% said by avoiding compromising situations, 66% said by Bible study, and 52% said by being accountable to someone.

The article closed with the observation that when we see a fellow Christian in sin, there are three things we do not know: 1) We don't know how hard he or she tried not to sin, 2) We don't know the power of the forces that assailed him or her, and 3) We don't know what we would have done in the same circumstances.

Discuss: What would your list of top areas of spiritual challenges look like? Do you agree or disagree with the article's three observations? Why?

1. **We are free from sin, but this does not mean we are free to indulge in sin or refuse to fight our desire to sin** (v.15).

Paul has already reminded us that sin has no authority over us since we are no longer under the Law but under God's grace through faith in Christ (6:12-14). Now Paul wants to make sure that our freedom from sin's enslavement will motivate us to resist and reject sin's temptations to go back and indulge in sin. Paul answers his own question: "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" (v.1) with an emphatic "By no means!" (v.1) or "Absolutely not!" or even "Heaven forbid!"

Discuss: What might cause a Christian to go back to damaging old habits, thought patterns, etc.?

2. We become slaves of whichever we choose to obey: sin which leads to death, or righteousness which leads to life (v.16).

We live in an ongoing battle to choose the right master to obey, and the choice we make will either contribute to death or to righteousness. The Bible asserts that at the moment of salvation, we are saved from the penalty of sin (Romans 3:21-25) and the enslaving power of sin (Romans 6:7-11), but we do not become sinless (1 John 1:9-10). Until we get to Heaven, we will never be free from temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13) or the presence of sin. Paul warns us not to volunteer to sin!

Discuss: How can a Christian's choice not to sin put him/her on a path toward righteousness?

Discuss: How can a Christian's choice to sin put him/her on a path to death?

Discuss: How would you explain to a new Christian these three "tenses" of a Christian's freedom: Our past is free from the penalty of sin; our present is free from the power of sin, and our future will be free from the presence of sin?

3. At salvation, we were released from living as slaves to sin to now being obedient to the teaching of God's truth from the heart (v.17-18).

Like Paul's Roman readers, we have sincerely committed ourselves to obey the teaching of God's Word. The word "*standard*" (v.17) comes from the Greek word *typon*, which was used to describe the surface used to imprint an image on—kind of like a modern-day notary stamp on a document. The idea is that we have willingly committed ourselves to God's truth, allowing it to be imprinted in our hearts and minds. Now we are obedient to that "*standard of teaching*" (v.17) instead of living as slaves to sin (v.18).

This devotion to the teaching of God's Word has, of course, been the pattern of the church since the beginning. Acts 2:42 says, "*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*" Those early Christians were continually growing because they were continually studying. God's Word contains an inexhaustible supply of spiritual truths that we cannot completely understand in a dozen lifetimes. To study eternity requires an eternity! So, studying God's Word requires a lifetime commitment. It is God's will that all who follow Christ continually devote themselves to studying and obeying the teachings of the Word of God.

Discuss: What do you think it means to be "*obedient from the heart*"? (v.17)

Discuss: How would you instruct and encourage a new Christian to study the Bible?

For Further Study:

How to Break a Stubborn Habit by Erwin Lutzer

"What Are Some Different Methods of Bible Study?" article at www.gotquestions.org

Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health by Donald Whitney