

Romans 6:15-16

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Paul dismisses the false notion that he endorses sinful living among Christians. God will always forgive our sins; we cannot out-sin His grace. Even though God will always forgive our sins, we shouldn't consider it an advantage to sin, because there are still dire consequences for living sinfully.

Paul now addresses the next claim of slander, which is one of many. Throughout his letter to the Romans, he systematically responds to every aspect of the slanderous statements by the competing Jewish “authorities” in Rome. He is simultaneously encouraging and teaching the Roman believers how to live harmoniously by obeying God, while also refuting the slander and confusion that has been taught by his opponents regarding the law, sin, and grace. It's vital that Paul brings these Roman Christians clarity regarding the truth of how to live; if they follow the teachings of the competing Jewish “authorities” they will depart from living under God's grace and will slide into legalism. Given the influence of Rome on the world at that time, it could also poison much of the rest of the Roman world.

Paul's question, *What then? (v 15)* is a prediction of how someone will distort what he has just said in verse 14, “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” Paul anticipates the competing Jewish “authorities” in Rome's response to his assertion that Christians are under grace, not law, by saying *Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace (v 15)?* In other words, “Okay Paul, you're saying we can sin and do whatever we want, because we don't have to obey any law. God will give us grace no matter what, and that's good because it glorifies God. We should therefore sin that good may come.” This is the idea of the slander that Paul is defending against to protect his ministry (Romans 3:8). This defense will also help Paul's ministry partners Aquila and Priscilla, who host a church in their house in Rome, to dispel the misleading teachings of the competing Jewish “authorities” (Romans 16:3; Acts 18:2, 18, 26).

Paul says in response, *May it never be (v 15)!* Paul emphatically states he is not endorsing sin. What he is endorsing is the reality that if we do sin, grace abounds, which was what the slanderers were objecting to. We are under grace, we don't have to follow the law, but does that mean we ought to sin? No. Why? Because it is a bad choice. It results in death. Paul does not want us to choose death when we can choose life. Why live a sinful life of death when we can live a resurrected life?

Paul then reminds his readers that all humans serve a master of some kind: *Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey (v 16)?* We are slaves of either sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness. Serving sin leads to death—a separation that hurts our fellowship with God but does not remove us from God's grace.

If, however, we submit ourselves to God, it results in righteousness, a life of fulfillment and meaning. Paul is writing to devout Christians; they already believe in Jesus's death and

resurrection, but the way they live their lives is up to them. They and we get to choose. Every day, every moment, we can ask ourselves, “Who’s my master?” Sin leads to death and the consequences are death. When are the consequences of sin death? Right now. As we live on this earth, we experience consequences of our choices. Paul admonishes us to choose life instead of death.

Death is an interesting word; it can be used in a variety of contexts. We use it in everyday language the way the Bible uses it. We can say a battery is dead. We can say “My dream is dead.” A football team’s chances of going to the playoffs are dead. All that means is there has been a disconnection; there was something connected, and it has been disconnected. That’s what happens when a person dies. Their spirit was connected with their body animating it; then it was disconnected and it went somewhere else. That’s also what happens when a relationship dies. We are disconnected from someone. We cease to have intimate fellowship with them.

So, when we present ourselves as slaves to sin, we’re disconnected from God’s design for us. God designed us to work and live in perfect harmony with one another. This is what righteousness means: cohesion through serving, not through compulsion. When you serve, you bring harmony. The letter to the Roman believers is largely about power. There is the power of sin, and the power of Christ’s resurrection. Paul wants us to live in the power of the resurrection.

God designed us to have oneness with our spouse, to have unity in our family, to have the body of Christ function together with each part serving the other parts. When we serve sin, all those things are broken up. We make everything about the self.

Paul is simply pointing out where either choice takes us, depending on which master we devote ourselves to. He maintains that believers are under grace, but that doesn’t change the natural outcome of devoting ourselves to sin, to living “However I want to live.” If we do not live in obedience to God, we disconnect from God’s design and become slaves of sin.

Biblical Text

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! 16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?