

Romans 4-7

By Trish Gerstel

This passage of Scripture includes some of the Bible's strongest descriptions of God's character and love, first describing His promise to Abraham, and then telling of the marvelous gift He's **provided through His son Jesus. We would be remiss, however, if we focused solely on faith and redemption; it's critical that we also meditate on Paul's call for obedience.**

Obedience has become a dirty word. The world today lauds rebels – people who thumb their noses at societal rules and traditions while asserting their right to live as they please. To an extent, I agree with this sentiment in-as-much as society has fallen so far away from God and His decrees that to live a Christian life means rebelling against modern society. I would love to see

hordes of people turn their back on twenty-first century's prideful thinking and lusting after youth, fame, fortune, etc. Of course, this is not the rebelliousness that appeals to us. What we are enchanted by, instead, is a rebellion against

God's laws and towards sin. But obedience to the Lord is, in fact, what our God-created souls long for (Psalm 19:7-11, John 15:10-11) and is a critical part of our relationship with Him (1 Peter 1:14-16, John 14:21)!

Christians face a particularly dangerous pitfall in that, because we understand the gift of salvation (that it cannot be earned, but is freely given by grace through faith; and that it covers all of our sins) we can become willfully disobedient to God, thinking of this as something that is "covered" by grace (after all, God knows we're not capable of living up to His standards – that's why He had to send Jesus to die on the cross – so why worry about it? He'll forgive us!).



Q. Shall we sin because we are under grace rather than the law?
A. May It Never Be So!

Paul addresses this mistaken thinking in his writing to the Roman church. After he confirms – through the story of Abraham – that salvation comes through faith

not works (4:13-25), and reiterates several times how truly amazing the gift of salvation is (5:1-2, 5-20), he goes on to make a firm statement about obediently following Christ and turning away from sin. In chapter six, verses one and two as well as verse 15 make it very clear how Paul feels about thinking that sin should be allowed because of the New Covenant (“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ... Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!”). His illustrations surrounding these statements, as well as his illustration in the beginning of chapter seven (7:2-6) are similar to the parables told by Jesus – they help us visualize the Biblical truth that’s being presented. Statements like, “all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death,” “we know that our old self was crucified with [Christ] so that the body of sin might be done away with,” “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus,” and, “by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit” (6:3, 6:6, 6:11, 7:6) paint a vibrant picture of power over sin. An important part of this picture, of course, is the illustration in verses 6:15-23, which explains how we should use that God-given power – like obedient slaves.



Lest we think that Paul did not face the temptations that we do today, or that his background as a Pharisee (someone devoted to the Law of Moses) made it easier for him to follow his own teaching on this matter, verses 7:7-25 show us exactly how temptation tormented Paul. But at the close of this confession of sorts, Paul gives us the key to his obedience: “Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:24b-25, **emphasis added**). Paul did not rely on his own strength to be obedient, but on God Himself, and that is what He desires of us as well.

*Scripture quotations taken from the New International Version.

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