

How do we relate to the law?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we are continuing our study on Romans this evening. We can read again from chapter 6 verse 15. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means. 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. But thanks be to God that you who are once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed and having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness.

Now throughout this study we have been saying that the main theme of Romans is the Gospel. Paul is giving us a detailed explanation about how the good news of Jesus Christ works and he began by explaining to us the problem of sin and then he gave us the solution which hinges on the great doctrine of justification by faith. Having established that he started to explore some of the great blessings that flow on from justification and that we enjoy as those who have been saved. And he has highlighted the fact that ultimately there are two humanities.

There's the humanity that is in Adam and then there's the humanity that is in Christ. Adam of course the first man sinned against God and we sinned and fell in him. But God has provided a way of salvation whereby we can be transferred from that broken humanity into a humanity that is being restored and saved through union with Christ. And at the very heart of that message is a key word and that is grace. The fact that God freely gives what we do not earn. The relationship between us and God is broken and in terms of restoring that relationship we are helpless. We can't do anything. We don't have the resources and we do not deserve salvation. But God instead of expecting us to earn it he gives it as a gift. He is gracious and his grace is big enough and abundant enough to deal with all of our sin. So we don't earn salvation as a transaction. We receive it as a gift. It is all because of God's amazing grace. However as we said a fortnight ago grace is easily misunderstood. And that's what Paul deals with in chapter 6 and 7. The fact that we can often easily misunderstand this whole doctrine of God's grace. And in chapter 6 and 7 Paul anticipates questions that his readers might have. And as we said a fortnight ago you can identify them very easily because they all have the same answer. He says by no means. Chapter 6 verse 1's example. What should we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. And the other questions are in 6:15, 7:7 and 7:13.

And they all have the same answer. By no means. And as we highlighted before that's probably not really a strong enough translation. Paul is saying absolutely no way. It is the strongest negative that he can find. The authorised version says God forbid. And that's a very good paraphrase of what Paul is meaning. And as you may remember we use these questions as a framework to split chapter 6 and 7 into 3 sections. And in each of these sections Paul is addressing problems or errors that can arise from a misunderstanding of grace.

We summarised it under 3 questions. As Christians how do we relate to sin? As Christians how do we relate to the law? And as Christians how do we relate to ourselves? We looked at the first question a fortnight ago and we saw that Paul gives us the astonishing answer that if we are trusting in Jesus sin no longer has any dominion over us. We are united to Jesus. That means that just as sin does not reign over Jesus neither does sin reign over us. And for that reason we are not impotent or helpless in the face of sin and temptation.

[5 : 01] By God's grace we are able to say no. We are able to live in a new way and through the Holy Spirit sanctifying work we are turning away from sin and following Jesus and living in his way. We must never ever think that sin is still our master. If we do then the devil is going to carry on using us for his purposes. But as Paul says you are not instruments for unrighteousness rather you are instruments for righteousness. Sin has lost its grip on us the cross destroyed the power of sin. Tonight we are going to look at the second question how do we relate to the law as Christians? And I think that this is a question that probably every single one of us has struggled with because we think to ourselves well if I am saved by grace and if I am totally forgiven by God sins in the past sins in the present and sins in the future and if even though I do sin grace abounds all the more does that mean that now that I am a Christian I can forget about God's law and sin as much as

I like because God in his grace will forgive me. Now many many people think that that's true more or less. So you'll hear people say well I'm not sure if this is right or wrong but God knows my heart and I know I'm forgiven and it's not that serious anyway. Other people might say the minute you start talking about the law that's legalism and we hate legalism rightly so and therefore people often go to the opposite extreme of legalism which is called antinomianism. You can see the two extremes here. Legalism is the view that says you cannot be saved unless you obey God's law. You need to earn your salvation you need to do what God commands in the hope that you will get up to a high enough standard and he will forgive you. It's all about your works that's legalism. Antinomianism, nomian comes from the Greek word for law so it's anti law, anti lawism, antinomianism basically says God's law doesn't matter I'm forgiven I can do what I like it doesn't matter how I behave and really it's the antinomian question that Paul is addressing here and there's lots of examples that we can think of. For example is it okay for a Christian boyfriend and girlfriend to sleep together before they get married because God knows their hearts and they're forgiven anyway. As a Christian is it okay to go out and get drunk it's just a bit of fun. God knows my heart. As a Christian is it okay to fall out with somebody and not talk to them because I'm just taking a stand. God knows. As a Christian is it okay to gossip it's not that serious everybody does it. God knows that I don't mean any harm. As a Christian is it okay to not forgive somebody because they deserve it they've done wrong they're the ones who should say sorry. These are all real life examples of the kind of thing that

Paul is referring to. So here's the question does grace mean that it is okay to do these things? What's the answer to the question can we just ignore God's law and sin as much as we like because we are guaranteed to be forgiven by God's grace? Well the answer to that question is absolutely no way. Paul says God forbid by no means and that should make us all sit up and think. As Christians our relationship to the law is not we can do whatever we like because we're forgiven. That's the anti-nomian attitude and Paul says it is totally unacceptable and he explains why and that's what we need to study together tonight because that's what this passage is talking all about. So we're going to go through this together and it's a very full passage so my sleeves are rolled up because we're going to roll up our sleeves and go through this passage together and see what it says because there's a lot for it to teach us. It's the kind of passage that's easy to read through and think

I don't really understand what Paul is saying but let's go through it together and I think we'll I hope see that Paul has a very very clear message for us. A key issue in all of this is in terms of our understanding of sin. Paul starts off by saying in verse 16, do you not know? And then he carries on and when he says do you not know that phrase should immediately warn us that perhaps we could be very much mistaken in terms of our thinking and our perspective in regard to sin. So what does Paul say? Well let's we'll work through it together and at the end we'll do a wee summary so don't worry if you're not totally sure as we're going along we will summarise it at the end and I hope bring it all together.

Let's start at verse 16 he says 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. Now the key phrase in the middle of that verse you are slaves of the one you obey and it's really really important that we understand the implications of that phrase. At the heart of Paul's argument here is a dichotomy, a division into two parts and Paul is dividing us into two realms and the boundary between the two is the law of God. On either side are two areas, one is the area of sin the other is the area of righteousness. The area of righteousness consists of obedience to God's law the area of sin consists of disobedience to God's law and as I'm sure you would have guessed I couldn't resist making a wee diagram so you've got two areas dividing line between the two is God's law. Now we often think that we have the freedom and the autonomy to venture into either of these two areas so we think to ourselves well we can choose to obey in one area of our lives we can choose to disobey in another area of our lives and ultimately we remain in charge so often we place ourselves on neutral ground at the top. I hope you can read that okay yeah we can. So we imagine that we're at a neutral ground just at the top there you've got disobedience on one side obedience on the other and we kind of dip into one or the other and we think to ourselves well I can try this I can try that and I'll still be okay because basically I'm in charge of what I do. I am the one in charge.

[13 : 02] We tend to think yes I'm a Christian but I can wander back into sin and I know it's not right but it'll be fine it won't do much harm and I'm forgiven anyway ultimately I am safe enough because I am in charge. Now Paul's great message here is that we are never ever ever in charge and we are never ever on neutral ground and the idea that sin is just this little thing that's bad but not too bad and we can dab that we can dabble with and dip into is a drastically inaccurate understanding of sin. Paul is saying you cannot ever stand on neutral ground above God's law and dip your toe into the opposite realms of disobedience and obedience. In our relationship to God's law we are never neutral that's why he's saying do you not know you are slaves to the one whom you obey. Now to help us understand this Paul uses kind of imagery as he says in verse 19 he says I speak in a human way because he's simplifying things in order for us to understand them. Very often scripture talks about these two areas in terms of two kingdoms so I want you to imagine that the whole world is divided into two kingdoms there you have it very technical drawing here okay there's no political basis behind everything that I'm going to say this is just for illustrative purposes imagine that the whole world is divided into two kingdoms the northern hemisphere is the kingdom of sin the southern hemisphere is the kingdom of obedience the equator is

God's law so the northern hemisphere looks at God's law and rebels against it the southern hemisphere looks at God's law and strives to obey it. Now the question is where in the world is the neutral ground in which you are in charge and the answer is nowhere because it does not exist if the whole world is divided into two kingdoms then you're either in one or the other you are either under the rule of one or the other. Paul is reminding us that the human race is never ultimately in charge that's why he uses the language of slavery a slave is somebody who's not in charge and so he says you're one of two types of slave either a slave to sin or a slave to obedience so that means that in terms of a relationship to God's law we are either under God's rule seeking to obey him or we are rebelling against him and obeying Satan and all of this is teaching us a really important point in terms of how we view sin all too often we think that sin is something that we are in charge of so we think even though I know it's wrong I can dabble with it I can experiment with it I can even enjoy sin and I'll be okay because I'm in control that view of sin is totally wrong sin is not a plaything sin is not something that we can muck about sin is a brutal slave master and every time we sin we are putting ourselves under the grip of sin's vicious rule and we know that's true because we see it in people's lives you see people who are enslaved to gambling or to alcohol or to something like that are these people free? No they're in slavery but there can be even more subtle examples as well there's lots of areas in my life and your life that have the potential for sin areas that are good in many ways but yet they have the potential to sin so sport for example I love sport sport is fantastic but sport has the potential to stir up anger aggression even hatred Facebook is a good thing great way for people to get in touch it's got the potential for pride and other sins the telephone is a great thing isn't it yet it's got the potential to be an avenue for gossip films or magazines again great things but they have the potential for leading us into lust now if you can imagine if you can identify sin in your life in any of these areas ask yourself the question can I as of this moment rid my life of Facebook or sport or films or the telephone and never ever ever use them again and if the answer to that question is no which I look at myself and the answers probably no I have to ask myself who's in charge if I can't live without these things I'm not the one who's in charge

the great point that Paul is making is that we are never in charge we're either submitting to God or we're submitting to sin we are never our own master as he says you're either a slave to righteousness or a slave to sin one or the other there's no neutral ground now having established that Paul then raises another important point that we have to recognize and we have to ask ourselves another question what does the master of each realm want to do with those under his dominion so we have these two realms slavery to sin slavery to obedience the master of one is sin and Satan the master of the other is God what does the master want in each realm well the answers in verse 21 to 23 but what fruit will you get at the time from the things of which you are now ashamed for the end of those things is death but now that you've been set free from sin and have become slaves of God the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end eternal life for the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord these verses summarize what each kingdom wants for its citizens God wants to give you life eternal life that's God's great goal that's what God wants for every one of us but what does sin want to give you and this is the crucial point that we often get wrong we often think that sin wants to give you a wee bit of fun we think that sin wants to give you a wee bit of freedom we think that sin wants to give you a wee bit of pleasure that's what the devil wants us to think that God is really trying to spoil our lives by imposing laws on us and if we sin against God we're actually going to be freer and happier as Paul says if you're a slave to sin in regard to righteousness you're free in regard to righteousness you don't have to obey God remember that's what the devil said to Eve he said to Eve God's trying to restrict you by giving you this law he's trying to spoil your life and so often the devil says the same to us live a little enjoy life have a bit of fun come into my realm and it'll be good now you and I must recognize that that is a toxic lie the devil does not want to give you fun or pleasure or freedom the devil wants to kill you the realm of sin has one ultimate objective to kill all of its citizens and what Paul says what's the end result of those things the end result of those things is death verse 23 makes it abundantly clear the slaves in the kingdom of sin will all receive the same reward the wages of sin is death wages is a very good word to choose from Paul because wages is describing what you actually get the kingdom of sin promises you all sorts of things fun pleasure freedom happiness good laugh popularity etc etc it's what no intention of giving you any of those things no intention whatsoever the one thing it will do though is pay its wages and that's death and this is what Paul wants us to understand this is why he's saying do you not know this do you not recognize this sin's not trying to give us a funner happier easier way of life

sin is trying to destroy us and that's why sin must never be viewed as this kind of play thing that we can dip into and keep control of sin must be viewed as a vicious brutal hideous slave master whose great goal is to suck people in and then destroy them and it's interesting that the realm of sin often abuses god's law in order to kill us that's a really important point that's what the devil tried to do with eve tried to twist the law of god and make it look like god was was had bad intentions for eve and tried to to to to abuse the law of god in order to get us to rebel against him and the realm of sin is constantly pointing us to god's law and saying see that law that's your problem it's restricting you it's hurting you it's stifling you you need to rebel and of course it's a trap that's why Paul says the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me because we rebel against it sin is a vicious horrible slave master but the great and wonderful message of the gospel is that you if you are a christian or if you become one you have been set free from that vicious satanic slavery verse 17 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 and having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness so if you're a christian or if you become one you've been set free from sins murdered us grip that's the glorious hope of the gospel god has rescued you as Paul says you've been set free and that should make every one of us just want to shout with joy we have been delivered and rescued from that awful awful enemy we rejoice in the fact that Jesus has saved us from our sins he's delivering us from that awful grip and from the guaranteed death that sin wanted to inflict upon us we have been set free from that awful slave master now where does all this leave us in terms of the question can i just sin as much as i like because godness grace will forgive me well the key point that paul is emphasizing is that we need to recognize the true nature of sin sin is not something small it's not something naughty it is something that is hideous and that means that as christians sin should absolutely appall us sin should absolutely appall us and if we really recognized the horribleness of sin then we would instantly lose the desire to even ask the question can i carry on sinning because i am forgiven imagine for example that you ingested poison and it was a lethal dose and you weren't going to survive but thankfully you got to the hospital in time and the doctor said we have an antidote and he gives you an injection and you're saved you would be so thankful but would you then go on and say to the doctor oh well seeing as you have an antidote i think i'll go and take that poison again would you do that that would be crazy

but that's exactly what we're saying when we're thinking to god can i just sin as much as i want because your grace will forgive me it's like running back to a bottle of poison that we've just been delivered from it's an absurd question to ask can i carry on sinning and the only person who asks it is the one who has a woefully inadequate understanding of sin the key point is that if we recognize what sin is really like then we will never ever be trying to find a way to make excuses for it we would just run from it and that's why our prayer needs to be lord show me what sin is really like that's a prayer that we should pray now none of this means that christians never sin and next week's section highlights that fact that the christian life is a constant battle between the spirit and the flesh we constantly stumble paul's going to talk about that in the at the end of the chapter and we'll look at that later the key point here is about our perspective and our understanding paul is basically saying do you know how dangerous and awful sin is and all too often we don't but when we do recognize that we will always do what we can to keep well away from sin in our lives paul is now as you can see he's creating a very strong point a very strong argument as to why we can't just treat sin casually but this raises a kind of final question for our last week section for the last five five ten minutes in all of this we are saying well we need to recognize how awful sin is and we need to keep away from it and see that it's so dangerous but we then have to ask us as well how do you know what sin is how do you know what to avoid how do you know which realm you're serving and how do others know who you are serving and the answer to all of these questions is found in god's law how do you know what a sin is god's law will tell you that's why we said that it's like a border between the kingdom of evil and the kingdom of righteousness if we are rebelling against god god's law tells us what to rebel against if we are striving to obey god on the other side god's law is telling us how we want to live god's law is the dividing line that shows us what sin is and what obedience is now before we come to faith whilst we are still sinners while we are without christ the law functions in various ways paul highlights that in chapter 7 verses 7 to 10 first of all the law diagnosis our condition paul says if it hadn't been for the law i would not have known what sin was as we said it's what shows us what sin really is but but our relationship with sin before we are converted is is more serious than that because the law actually arouses sin in us so paul says in verse 8 that's really interesting he says the sin ceasing an opportunity through the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness and so the law is actually arousing sin in paul what's paul saying there well he's highlighting the fact

[31 : 36] he's highlighting a reality that i think every one of us will recognize in our own lives the fact that the minute we are told something is forbidden we're attracted to it so the minute you're told you can't do something or the minute you're told something is out of bounds we want it we're drawn to it the sin the law arouses sin in us until we are saved and then thirdly the law condemns us it shows that we're sinners if we could obey the law we would have life but we are slaves to sin we can't obey the law as paul says the very commandment that promised life if we could obey it proved to be death to me because we all rebel against it now all of these are negative aren't they they're all negative which is why paul says in verse 7 what shall we say that the law is sin paul says is the law a bad thing he's saying no way the law is not bad but the key point is that without christ our relationship to the law is bad and we can't escape that by ourselves the law exposes our sin it arouses even more sin and it proves that we are deserving of condemnation and we are stuck like that without christ the laws are written code that constantly exposes our feelings and condemns us to death paul illustrates this is the start of chapter 7 by talking about marriage he's basically saying that as sinners we are married into this bad relationship with the law and we cannot escape unless we die but of course the great reality of the gospel is that through our union with christ that's exactly what has happened we have died to the law and so our participation in the death and resurrection of christ through our union with him means that we've died to the law in other words our former bad relationship with the law is over we are free so the law stops diagnosing a condition because we've been healed of that condition the law stops arousing sin in us because we've been liberated from slavery and the law stops condemning us because christ took our condemnation in our place we are free and we are free to have a new better relationship with the law which is what paul says in verse 6 we've been released from the law having died to that which helped us captive so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code so instead of serving sin and being condemned by the law and pushing against the law as rebels we are now serving god in obedience to his law as those who love his law following the way of the spirit doing all that god is guiding us to do through the words of his law we are not servants of sin we are servants of righteousness and it all comes down to a simple question really how is anybody going to know who's slave you are if you're a slave to sin or a slave to god how is anybody going to know the answer is shown in terms of who you obey and by obeying god's law in our lives as christians we show that we are living for him

okay you've been very very patient because it's a big big chapter and a big passage all of this that we're working on let's just summarize in the last two minutes before we stop at seven o'clock as we said at the start Paul's great point is that we are not in charge you are not in charge we are under the dominion of one of two realms before we come to faith in christ we are under the realm of sin after we come to faith in christ we are moved into a new realm we are living under the rule of god in our lives under this one realm our master sin is trying to kill us but under the other realm our new master god is wanting to give us life under this realm god's law is kind of the the the enemy that we want to rebel against but under this realm god's law is the perfect guide that we want to shape our conduct every day and this is a great reminder that for us as christians god's law is really important it's not what makes you a christian we don't become christians by obeying god's law that's what the whole of romans is all about we are saved by god's grace but now that we are christians we have no desire to go back to the horrible ways of a life that disobeys god we want to live a life that pleases him we want to live in his way we want to please our master we want to thank him for giving us eternal life and the way we do that is quite simple we do what he tells us we live in obedience to his law and that's why we look at the 10 commandments we look at the Sermon on the Mount we look at every practical instruction the New Testament we think oh god by your grace I want to do that I want to live in that way you may have noticed the quote of the week in the slides before the service and it's from steward olio to he's written a really good little book on romans the proof that you are a true believer does not lie in your words but in the life that you live and I think that's a very very very important quote um sometimes people worry about what to say if they were going to come forward at a communion they worry about what they would say what questions they might be asked the elders aren't really looking at what you say the elders have been looking for a long time already they're looking for a life that shows that you love Jesus sometimes we can't articulate that well what we want to say but our life can do the talking for us the proof that you're a true believer does not lie in your words but in the life that you live and that's a really important point if you're maybe not sure if you become a christian or not because some people are like that some people think I want to become a christian but I'm not sure if I am a christian well ask yourself the question am I different think back to what you were five years ago or 10 years ago or 20 years ago and ask yourself am I different that's a good place to start because faith in Jesus christ should bring a change in the way that we live steward olyops quote is very good but do you know Jesus put it a lot more powerfully Jesus said not everyone who says to me Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven

but the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven on that day many will say to me Lord Lord did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name and then will I declare to them I never knew you depart from me and I look at what he says at the end there you worker of lawlessness the people who've got no interest in living God's way they're interested in the spectacular stuff but no interest in day-to-day obedience our faith in Jesus Christ should lead us on to living for him our love for Jesus goes hand in hand with all that he's commanded as I said that doesn't mean that we never sin we all stumble and we'll look at that together next Sunday morning God willing because that's a key point that Paul makes but when we do stumble these mistakes should break our heart our failings as Christians should fill us with a spirit of repentance and motivate us to renewed obedience we can sum it all up by saying that as Christians we should love our master's commandments if we love them and if we love him our constant aim should be obedience so there's a lot of important teaching there for us as Christians but there's also a very important message in these verses for anyone who's not yet a Christian and this is the last thing I'm going to say if you are not yet a Christian you need to ask yourself the question who do you want as your master remember there's no neutral ground if you choose sin as your master the fruit of that is death if you choose God as your master he'll give you eternal life it's a no-brainer which one's better let's pray

God our Father we thank you for your word and we're very aware that there's so much for us to learn and every one of us Lord has to confess that we've we've dabbled in sin we thought sin is something that we can play with and it's something that we could get a bit of pleasure out of and yet every time we've done that it's left a bitter taste in our lives in our mouths we pray oh God that we would see sin for all that it really is and that we would live in your way loving you enjoying all that you have made in a way that is righteous and honoring to you help us Lord to live every day of our lives with words and thoughts and actions that are shaped by your spirit oh God you are the giver of everything that's good in our lives we pray that we would live in your way in Jesus name amen