



ROMANS Part 54

Chapter 6:15-16



Death of the Old Humanity

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15 What then? Should we be sinning, seeing that we are not under law, but under grace? May it not be coming to that! **16** Are you not aware that to whom you are presenting yourselves as slaves for obedience, his slaves you are, whom you are obeying, whether of Sin for death, or of Obedience for righteousness?

Antagonists were always falsely accusing Paul of inciting sin, so Paul was just as often preempting the argument. Remember, it happened at the beginning of this chapter: “What, then, shall we declare? That we may be persisting in sin that grace should be increasing?” (Romans 6:1). This was Paul’s follow-up to the startling announcement he’d just dished up in 5:20—no one had ever said *this* before—“Where sin increases, grace superexceeds.” In other words, no one can out-sin grace. Paul had made a similar reference to other false reports concerning him in Romans 3:8, writing, “And why not say, according as we are calumniated and according as some are averring that we are saying, that ‘We should be doing evil that good may be coming?’” The report of these accusations and Paul’s denial of them followed on the heels of the previous verse’s bombshell, Romans 3:7— “Yet if the truth of God superabounds in my lie, for His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?” *What’s that again, Paul? The truth of God can superabound, not only in the face of human duplicity, but through its very agency?* Yes, it’s a fact. No wonder the apostle quickly preempted the anticipated catcall: “Let’s do more evil so that God can bring more good!”

Paul answers, “Let’s not!”

Here he is again at the end of this chapter performing yet another corrective chore. Why? Paul has just spent the bulk of chapter six pointing out how Sin, through Christ, is a vanquished enemy that can no longer dictate to us how we feel about ourselves or assign to us our identity, i.e., “we’re just a bunch of lousy sinners.” Whereas the law disciplined Sin, Grace defeated it and dedicated itself to not only rise to every sordid occasion, but to exceed every sin until Sin lost its condemning power. Rather than a life-changing teaching that would tend to a greater love for God and a blossoming righteousness, some narrow-minded people equated this revelation to a sin pass—a veritable

imperative to sin. It may have been a pass all right, but not a command to miss the mark. In Paul's mind, such people had not truly apprehended the nature of grace, or perhaps had never given up fully on law. Listen to A.E. Knoch on this point, from *The Concordant Commentary to the New Testament*, Romans 6:14-15—

Law, as we shall see in the next chapter, not only cannot deliver from Sin, but actually forges the fetters of Sin, and makes Sin's bondage more cruel and galling. The law said, "Accursed is everyone who is not remaining in all things written in the Scroll of the Law, to do them." Grace says, Blessed are you, whatever you may do, for Christ has justified you and not one dare bring anything against you. The fallacious logic of the old humanity immediately imagines that this gives license and encouragement to sin. But its actual effect is quite the opposite. Grace, not law, has power to deter us from sinning. No one who has an actual experience of grace, reasons that because there is immunity, therefore he will sin. The offender against law flies in the face of law. Its austere threats do not hinder him. But the offender against grace feels the heinousness of his offense and flies from it.

CHRISTIANITY = SIN REMAINS

For those teaching the true gospel of the defeat of Sin, it is a good thing to be falsely accused of inciting it, as this proves the teacher to be holding and forwarding the correct gospel. The correct gospel is, "Sin shall not be lording it over you" (Romans 6:14), and, "Where sin increases, grace superexceeds." As it is so rarely preached, this is always a shocking message. It rattles the ears, and thus incites the predicted objection, "So you're saying we should sin so that more grace can come?" No, not saying that at all, but thanks for misunderstanding me. Your objection means that I have made myself clear on the matter of grace. The "gospel" of Christianity, on the other hand, never invites *or* incites this objection. How could it when it forever doubts the superiority of grace? Christianity's broken record is: "Avoid sin, or fall beneath God's disfavor." If I had a nickel for every time I heard that, I could buy the Crystal Cathedral. How could the predictable objection arise on the heels of *that* scratchy tune? It can't. The false message doesn't breed it. Only the true message breeds the standard, predictable objection. If you teach grace and you field the common, predictable objection, thank God that He's latched you onto the correct message. If you're teaching "grace" and



“If you’re teaching ‘grace’ and you never hear the common, predictable objection, then you’re a messenger of Satan, not of grace.”

you never hear the common, predictable objection, then you're a messenger of Satan, not of grace—I don't care if you *are* a pastor—watering down grace with law like the good little Circumcisionist trooper that you are.

THE MOTHER OF ALL MISSES

According to the Christian religion, the worst sin a person can commit is to not believe in Jesus Christ. This is the Mother of all Misses. After all, this is the sin that gets one tormented in hell for eternity. According to Christians (I am not a Christian, but I read the book), Jesus Christ "died for all sins"—except for one: unbelief. Darn that nasty unbelief. Darn that irritating little exception to Jesus Christ dying for "all sins." Watch the tragedy unfold:

The only sin that gets a person damned to hell forever is the one sin that Jesus didn't die for, that is, the sin of not believing in Jesus. It is the sin of ignoring Him; of disrespecting Him; of dissing Him; of marginalizing His amazing career and His epic death on the cross. Jesus doesn't like it when people do that. He died for all the things that won't damn a person—speaking now of greed, lust, envy, pride, all the ordinary stuff—but leaves untouched the one sin that infuriates Him the most: rolling your eyes at His great accomplishment.

How cruel of Him, really. How fatefully negligent. What an odd, Satanic twist. This weird business of dying

for all sins except the sin of ignoring Him really does tell us a lot about His personality—if we're willing to look into it. Let's look into it.

HOW NEGLIGENT THOU ART

If a Savior really wanted to save the world, He would at least be sure to die for the deadliest sin—the only sin able to doom a person forever. Even if He leaves all other sins untouched—all would still be saved. The *worst* thing such a potential Savior can do would be to die for all non-essential sins, but leave the killer mistake hanging. What a tragedy of wasted blood that would be. After all, as long as one believes that Jesus Christ saved one from one's sins, what other sin really matters? Die for the sin of unbelief, and everyone goes to heaven to live with God for eternity. Die for every sin *but* that one, and the entire world is on probation. No one is saved. Every man, woman and child must then prove him or herself to be a fan of Jesus. Is this what He deep-down wants? Is He co-dependent? A closet narcissist?

Think of all the poor people who don't believe in Jesus. They sin like greasebags and they're going to hell because of unbelief. Now think of all the people who do believe in Jesus. They also sin like greasebags but they're going to heaven because they believe in Jesus. The common denominator between the hell-bound and the heaven-bound is that they all sin like greasebags. They're all lacking of the glory of God—each and every one of them. “There is not one righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). The only difference, then, is belief. The only sin that really matters, then, is the lack of belief.

So? Jesus? May I ask You an uncomfortable question at this point? Did you die for the sin of unbelief? Because if You did, then you are a Master of Salvation, a Redeeming Genius. You will have won every soul because what else is there but believers and unbelievers? Believers are saved because they are believers, and unbelievers are saved because you saved them from the sin of unbelief. None are lost. You've proven Yourself a Genius! This is how You silence the critics claiming that You're the incomplete answer to Adam.

JESUS: I'm afraid I must tell you that I died on the cross for every sin except the one sin that damns every person who gets damned: unbelief. There. You broke the “code.” Are you happy with yourself?

ZENDER: No, I'm not. What kind of “code” is this? Are You playing a game here? Excuse me, but—as long as You're in the business of “taking away the sin of the world”—John 1:29; I'm sure you recognize that reference—why would You leave the worst sin un-died for?

JESUS: It's time for honesty, I see. I have needs. Am I allowed to have needs, or am I the only guy in the universe exempted from needs? I need to see who “gets me” and who doesn't. I need to know how many people like and respect me. Those who don't believe in me really don't like me or respect me, now do they? They don't respect what I did on the cross. I did all that work, and they don't appreciate it. You have no idea how much I suffered on that cross! And then to not be appreciated for it? To not be respected? To not be recognized? To not be acknowledged, at least just a little bit? I don't think so. A tip of the hat is all I ask for, really. Is that so much? The cross was way too hard to not get some sort of validation. I *need* that.

ZENDER: So what You're saying is that people who don't validate You don't deserve to be saved. They deserve to be damned to hell for eternity.

JESUS: Again I say: Is a little respect too much to ask?

ZENDER: Maybe not for Aretha Franklin, but I was hoping for something better from You.

JESUS: Find out what respect means to *me*, Zender. I am not a man who enjoys being ignored.

ZENDER: Apparently not, if eternal hellfire means anything. What about grace?

JESUS: Try to pay attention, Zender, if you can. Unbelief is the one sin that grace doesn't cover.



ZENDER: But Paul said that where sin increases, grace superexceeds. Isn't unbelief a sin?

JESUS: Unbelief is the *worst* sin.

ZENDER: Then why doesn't grace cover it?

JESUS: Here's the dirty little secret: grace is not the God-almighty thing it's advertised to be.

ZENDER: Oh! So I guess neither is Your victory over Adam.

JESUS: Don't be a smart-alec. I told you: I must be respected. If Adam doesn't require respect, that's his problem.

ZENDER: Hey, wait a minute. I just noticed in some of the above quotes that You use a small "m" every time You refer to Yourself.

JESUS: I don't know what you're talking about. Why would you say that about me?

ZENDER: There it is again! You used a small "m" for "me" at the end of that question.

JESUS: I am the great and powerful Jesus Christ!

ZENDER: Ha! No, you're not! You're not the real Jesus! You're the pop-icon Jesus of Christianity! You're a loser! You can only save people who validate your weak personality! I knew something was screwy about you!

JESUS: Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain! I am the great and powerful—

ZENDER: Faker! Faker! Fake Jesus!

JESUS: Get that yappy little dog away from me!

ZENDER: Toto!

JESUS: There's no place like home.

ZENDER: Then click your sandals three times and go back to church where you belong. *Loser.*



WHICH IS THE GOOD NEWS?

The gospel of grace announces the good news of the conquering of Sin. *Every* sin was placed on the shoulders of Jesus Christ, borne by Him, taken to the tomb, and left there—even the sin of unbelief. Even the sin of disrespecting Jesus was placed upon the shoulders of Jesus. How can this be? Because while Jesus was dying, He was saving sinners, not saints. *Everyone* was disrespecting Him. Romans 3:10-18—

Not one is just—not even one. Not one is understanding. Not one is seeking out God. All avoid Him: at the same time they were useless. Not one is doing kindness: there is not even one! A sepulcher opened is

their throat. With their tongues they defraud. The venom of asps is under their lips, whose mouth with imprecation and bitterness is crammed. Sharp are their feet to shed blood. Bruises and wretchedness are in their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God in front of their eyes.

These are the people Jesus died for. How many of them respected Him? How many believed Him? Read the first two words of the above passage again.

Jesus Christ went to the cross for enemies, not friends. "God is commending this love of His to us, seeing that, while we are still sinners, Christ died for our sakes" (Romans 5:8). "But Martin. If belief is required for salva-



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tion, how can unbelievers believe?” The answer is that they must be given faith. Faith is a gift of God, not a gift of man given *to* God: “God imparts to each the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3); “To you, it has been graciously granted to believe” (Philippians 1:29). One day, God will impart faith to all, even to those who have never heard of Him in this life. All must be saved, or God is not the Savior of all humanity, as 1 Timothy 4:10 clearly states Him to be. Jesus Christ must take away all the sins of the world, or else He does not take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Only by saving all can God become all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Reader, you were once an unbeliever. What happened to your unbelief? It was overwhelmed by the opposing force. One day, you believed in Jesus. Where did that belief come from? From some bubbling well of belief within you?

No. Re-read the passage from Romans chapter three. Faith cannot come from within a person. It's not there. It must be generated from without. Your faith came from God (Romans 12:3; Philippians 1:29), and Him alone.

The common sin of all humanity is unbelief. The shocking truth is that, on the cross, Jesus saved unbelievers. He has never saved anyone *but* unbelievers. Not one believer has ever been saved—ever. People believe *after* they are saved, not before.

BACK TO OBEDIENCE

“Are you not aware that to whom you are presenting yourselves as slaves for obedience, his slaves you are, whom you are obeying, whether of Sin for death, or of Obedience for righteousness?” (Romans 6:16).

The translation “obedience” and “obey” here are unfortunate renderings of the Greek word *hupakouo*. This translation suggests a throwback to the law of Moses, where the battle cry was: “Obey or die.” In this context, we are not considering “obey or die,” either in the sense of “do this, or be eternally tormented,” or “do this or never see God again.” We are not even considering the ends of things at all, but rather the quality of life one enjoys (or doesn't) in this present life, in accord with what one pays attention to. As I told you last week, the word translated “obedience” and “obey” is *hupakouo*, a two-part Greek word whose English equivalents are, UNDER-HEAR. It means, “to hear and to heed.” The Dabhar Translation puts the literal meaning directly into the text and lets the reader figure it out. Here is the Dabhar translation of Romans 6:16. It's ultra literal and therefore very odd, but accurate. It supports what I am telling you about what Paul means when he says, “obedience”—

You do not perceive that to whom you give as stand-by yourselves as slaves for below-hearing, you are either slaves of failiance to death, or slaves of below-hearing to righteousness.

The word “under” (“below” in the Dabhar translation) suggests a foundation. In the context of the word in question, it would mean “to really grasp a thing.” “Hearing” means taking serious note of. A deaf person can “hear” something; he or she can entertain an intelligent, mental grip on a thing's true significance. The natural result of properly grasping something is to act in accordance with one's revelation. With this underlying information in hand, here is the Zender paraphrase of Romans 6:16—



If you are hung up on sin, you'll be a slave of Sin and you will “die” a thousand “deaths” every day in guilt and misery. If you throw yourself at God, on the other hand, and consider Sin a conquered enemy that can no longer lord anything over you, you will be happy and free in the fresh air and life-giving waters of grace.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER ONE ...

What are you going to pay attention to? Which message will you hear and heed? Who will you follow? Paul offers two choices: Sin and Obedience. The astute reader, having already come through chapter 5 of this letter, will realize that the “Sin” and the “Obedience” referenced here are not the sin and obedience of the reader, but rather the Sin of Adam and the Obedience of Christ. This is strongly suggested by the wording, “to *whom* you are presenting yourselves,” but rather than saying “Adam” and “Christ,” Paul uses the figure of speech “metonymy,” whereby a thing or concept is called not by its own name but rather by the name of something associated in meaning with it, thus “Sin” and “Obedience” for “Adam” and “Christ.” To refresh your memory, here is Romans 5:19—

For even as, through the disobedience of the one man, the many were constituted sinners, thus also, through the obedience of the One, the many shall be constituted just.

TWO RIVERS

Consider that you are standing on the banks of two rivers that are miraculously flowing in opposite directions. One river's water runs fast and brown from a

muddy bottom and is called “The Sin of Adam.” It heads to a waterfall called “Death.” The other river, pure and crystalline but slow and “lazy,” is called, “The Obedience of Christ.” This river heads to a paradise called “Righteousness and Eonian Life.” The terminus of neither river is advertised, however. From where you stand, no one can know precisely where either river winds up. But now comes a strange command from an unknown voice above (it is Paul speaking from Romans chapter six): “You must throw yourself (‘present yourselves’—Romans 6:16) into one of these rivers. Which will it be?”

Before you decide into which river to jump, the first thing I want you to note is that this voice never tells you to change anything about yourself. There is no preparation required for any jump into either river. There is no dressing up for it, no training, no working up the proper attitude or necessary bravery. You are simply exhorted to give yourself to one of the two bodies of water. Just bend your knees and go. Once you jump, you will be captured by the power of that particular river, which is my parable’s way of representing Paul’s term, “slaves.”

With those clear, crystalline, easy-running waters, who among us would not jump into the river of Righteousness and Eonian Life? Well, wait a minute. It looks clean, but it’s barely moving. It is not known as a sportsman’s river. It’s idyllic yes, but dull to sight. Keep in mind that no one knows where either river goes; it is not initially obvious that the River of the Sin of Adam leads to death, or that the River of the Obedience of Christ leads to righteousness and eonian life. I think I should tell you this as well: The River of the Obedience of Christ is labeled with a sign on the bank that says “Error,” and there are only three people on it. The River of the Sin of Adam, on the other hand, is labeled “Truth,” and is populated by dozens, even hundreds of apparently content individuals floating downstream on inner-tubes and rafts. Only those hearing the voice of Paul know the true names of the rivers, and that the advertised name is not the true. In fact, the advertised name is the opposite of the truth.

Many would look at the clean river and think, “It’s

too good to be true; I can’t trust it; hardly anyone is on it; something must be wrong with it.” The brown river, though less appealing to the sight, is familiar. It is well-populated. People appear to be having more fun on it. Besides that, look how fast it’s moving.

The River of The Sin of Adam is the fight against sin. It is the religious battle to overcome human frailty in order to present oneself acceptable to Christ. To jump into this river is to begin a losing battle against Sin. One feels safe in this river only because of the company. How can so many people be wrong? There may be a semblance of fun here, but semblances lie. A few miles downstream, undetected, are treacherous rapids and large rocks. The longer one rides, the harder becomes the journey on this river. As the waters quicken near the river’s terminus, the experience becomes a living “death.” Most never become aware of this until the roar of the deadly waterfall silences even their heart-

beat. Even then, some imagine that the waterfall will promote them to a better life.

Those jumping into the River of the Obedience of Christ are called “crazy” by the fighters of Sin. The “crazy” ones are warned about taking “the easy path,” which in my parable represents the dangers of “free grace.” They will be warned against the “deceptively clear water,” which here represent the message that one’s sins can no longer condemn one. “That

river will make you lazy,” they say,” a warning that a “pure grace” message will lead to moral laxity and license. “*Our* river looks *normal*,” they announce with pride, an equivalent to the Christian supposition that law must forever prop up grace, “just in case.” Paul calls this, “putting on a fair face in the flesh” (Galatians 6:12). Then there is the paucity of swimmers—and the sign. “Nobody wants *that* river,” the Sin Swimmers taunt. Haven’t you read the sign? You’re making a big mistake.”

You read the sign, yes. But you *heard* the message from above.

It is true that the sign along the River of the Obedience of Christ says, “Error.” Jesus Christ Himself was called a liar, a drunkard, a friend of sinners, and a blasphemer. The religious elite of His day said He had a demon. Those who blasphemed Him were, themselves, labeled “Truth” by the



majority, though they had no more truth than the rocks they wanted to throw at Him. They were, each of them, headed full steam down the River of the Sin of Adam, each of them still struggling against the propensities of flesh, still imagining a self-made righteousness, still competing for perfection via human cunning and ingenuity.

Those who jump into the fresh waters of the River of the Obedience of Christ are no different than the other jumpers. They cry the same tears, harbor the same fears, and drag similar lumps of clay across life's cruel vale. On the banks of these rivers, no one demands moral change: not even God. The word is simply, "Jump, and the river will take care of the rest."

Indeed it does. In the River of the Obedience of Christ, Jesus Christ has accomplished all. The riders of this river are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10). They relax in the gentle current, aware that Another is pulling them along. After some time in the new current, the word comes forth loud and clear: "This is the river of Righteousness!" The water babbles incessantly of the righteousness of Christ. Hearing righteousness breeds righteousness. Beholding the only righteous One invites a partaking of Him. It is not a self-righteousness, and never was. It is a desire to become one with the water of life and its Giver.

How different is the experience in the River of the Sin of Adam. Preoccupation with Sin breeds Sin. The purpose of the law was not to curb offense, but rather to incite it (Romans 5:20). In the River of the Sin of Adam, this is eventually, tragically discovered. To be continuously preoccupied fighting Sin is to be continuously preoccupied serving It. Awash in this terrible water, one is either sinning or falling short. In Adam, there is no third option. As no human ever performs perfectly, the journey down this river is one of dashed hope. Perhaps around the next bend, obedience will come. Perhaps in the next turn of water some magic formula—a prayer, a ceremony, the perfect Christian self-help book—will at last produce the desired obedience. It never happens. Again and again the cruel irony prevails: the preoccupation with sin can only produce more of it. How did this terrible river ever get labeled, "Truth"?

A.E. Knoch comments on verse 16 of Romans 6—

All of us are slaves, however much we may vaunt our liberty. We are controlled either by Sin or by Obedience. It is a cause of thankfulness that we all have had service under Sin, for only so could we realize the nature of such slavery. But we have not been taken from Sin's service to become idle. We have been transferred to the service of Righteousness.

No one is idle. There is only the old creation, and the new; no third option exists. There is either Adam or Christ, one representing Sin, the Other Obedience. Mr. Knoch's word "controlled" here and Paul's use of "slaves" inspired my analogy of the two rivers. I prefer "carried along" to "controlled" as it speaks of moving waters and is a kinder, gentler phrase.

In both rivers, the water does the work. Riders are merely passengers who will and must eventually take on the characteristics of the water in which they ride. The river analogy speaks to me of the truth that slavery to Righteousness and Obedience is more about Righteousness and Obedience than about those presenting themselves to these things. Righteousness and Obedience



"All of us are slaves, however much we may vaunt our liberty. We are controlled either by Sin or by Obedience."

—A.E. Knoch
*Concordant Commentary
on the New Testament*

(Christ) take people places; it is never the other way around. In my analogy, the river is the driving force, the current, the pull, the reason for being, the lifeline to God, the path to eonian life. As with the River of the Sin of Adam, a "slave of the river" goes where the river wills. God is the Divine Director of both waterways, lovingly providing the contrasting experience.

It is always more than possible to jump from the River of the Sin of Adam into the better flow, before the Falls of Death take hold. One must hear a different message. One must become aware of the deceitful signs, placed there by an enemy. One must know one's enemy. This requires a herald; one who stands on the bank, having tasted both waters, and who in the end has "presented himself" to the refreshing relief of the River of Christ.

Can this river be trusted to take care of the rest?
Jump in and see. —MZ (*To be continued.*)