



#5 “Aren’t rules needed to promote good behaviour?”

To consider that ‘grace’ (the death of Jesus to pay for our wrongdoing) is a powerful incentive to obey God rather than indulge in wrongdoing (Romans 6:1-14).

“Romans” is a letter in the latter half of the Bible. It is believed to have been written around 60’s AD, by the Apostle Paul, to the young church in Rome (hence the name). Paul wanted to encourage the church by explaining the “gospel” to them. The key sentence of the letter is this: **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...” [Romans 1:16]**¹

The word “gospel” just means good news. The good news is to do with salvation – with being saved from God’s anger at humanity. It’s a solution that God himself provides in the sacrifice of his son Jesus (see session 1 on Romans 1:18-32, and session 2 on Romans 3:21-26). It’s a solution that requires trusting God’s promise that Jesus’ death is enough to pay for our wrongdoing (see session 3 on Romans 4:18-25). Two of the benefits of relationship with God are peace and hope (see session 4 on Romans 5:1-11).

‘Grace’ or gift is a shorthand way of speaking of the sacrifice Jesus made that was undeserved by those who benefited from it. ‘Sin’ is the Bible’s way of speaking of the wrongdoing of humanity. ‘Baptism/baptised’ symbolizes a washing or renewal or fresh start in life.

Romans 6:1-14

¹What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with², that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

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² Or be rendered powerless

¹¹In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Q. According to Paul, people live in either one of two 'realms' where something is master. What are these realms?

• *From the picture Paul creates, one realm is where 'sin' is the master. In this realm, people are slaves to sin (Romans 5:6). This doesn't mean that people are as bad as they could be, all the time. It just means they live for their own self-interest (and again this is not saying that people are incapable of any unselfish acts).*

• *The other realm is where 'grace' is the master. In this realm, sin is not completely absent, but it is possible for people to resist it (Romans 5:12). They can live for God instead (Romans 5:13).*

• *Moving from one realm to another is only possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus. Trusting in his death gives a person a new life and moves them into the realm of grace (Romans 5:4).*

In March 2009 Former Federal Court Judge Marcus Einfeld was caught lying to evade a speeding fine³.

I lied, but I'm basically honest, says Einfeld

MARCUS EINFELD has spoken on camera about his fear of going to jail and begged for forgiveness for lying about his unpaid speeding fine. **While admitting his guilt, the former Federal Court judge tried to defend his integrity as a basically honest man who made a "mistake" by lying.** ...When the former justice's car was photographed by a speed camera on January 8, 2006, travelling 10kmh above the speed limit, he gave a sworn statement that a friend, Teresa Brennan, was driving, despite his knowledge that she had been dead for three years. "It's probably more shameful than the driving," he said. "She was a wonderful person and for me to use her name is more hurtful than anything else." ...*Four Corners* follows Einfeld in the days leading up to his sentence while he still hoped the testimony of his supporters would persuade the Supreme Court judge, Bruce James, against a jail term. "They are going to prove that ... these offences of mine are out of character, that I'm a person of integrity," he said. **In defending his character, he said: "I don't think I'm the slightest bit dishonest. I just made a mistake."**

Q2. How do the Former Federal Court Judge's comments reflect common perceptions about why people do the wrong thing?

³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 23, 2009, story by Anna Patty

- *The common perception is that people are basically good, and just make “mistakes” from time to time.*

Q3. What would Paul say in reply to former Federal Court Judge, do you think?

- *According to Romans 6:1-14, Paul would say that Einfeld - like everyone else - is not basically good and just makes mistakes from time to time. He would say that Einfeld - like everyone else - is a slave to sin. Under pressure the true state of the heart is seen. You could even argue that to think that we aren't bad and just make mistakes is further evidence of the self-deception of sin!*

Paul raises a hypothetical question in Romans 6:1 “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”. What he is saying is that if it's all about grace, then doesn't that act as an incentive to sin even more?

This question is still a contemporary one. Here's the modern day equivalent posed to Caroline Spencer (City Bible Forum staff member).

“So you say it's not about keeping the rules to be right with God - but about being forgiven...I seriously can't see how that would work. To me, the **rules keep people doing the right things**. If it's not about the rules then doesn't that actually act as an incentive to sin? I mean, the more we sin, the more forgiveness God has to do...Sure you get to see more of God's forgiveness, which is a good thing, but wouldn't the even better thing be to have a rule to stop people committing the sin in the first place??”

Paul's first response to this hypothetical question is to say “by no means” (Romans 6:2). If we translate the original language into modern terms: “no way, not on your life”!

Q4. How does grace help those who trust Jesus do the right thing?

- *When we think about it, grace is a much more powerful motivator to produce certain behaviours than rules can ever be. For example, imagine there is a rule “be kind to all people”. Now imagine if someone saved you from drowning. You'd be more than just kind to that person, wouldn't you? You'd thank them, but if you also had the opportunity, you'd do more than that. You'd give them a present. You'd maybe even offer them your friendship.*
- *So if we move to the spiritual realm...The sacrifice of Jesus (an act of grace) is what moves people from the realm of sin to the realm of grace. If sin is no longer master, then it is possible for these people to resist it. Out of thankfulness for what Jesus has done, they will live a new life that seeks to please God.*

“Become a Christian - no thanks! There's no room for *me* in that. I don't want to live for God. I will not. I want to be free to make my own choices in life. Live the way I want to live.”

Q.5 Is becoming a Christian just a matter of swapping one form of slavery to another?

- *The short answer is: yes! In the realm of sin, sin is master. In the realm of grace, God is master. God's people are no longer to offer themselves to sin as "instruments of wickedness" but offer themselves to God as "instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6:13). Living in the realm of grace does not mean people are free to do their own thing.*
- *It then becomes a question of the quality of the master. Slavery to sin produces death. Living in the realm of grace gives life (Romans 6:8). A relationship with God might appear "dehumanizing" in the sense that it looks like it has to be all God's way – becoming God's "slave". However this God also stooped to serve humankind by sending his son into our world to die for our wrongdoing. Living in a way to please God is a constraint, but thankfulness for Jesus' sacrifice means this constraint doesn't feel like a burden. (We understand this when it comes to human relationships. For example with romantic love, people give up their freedoms and place themselves under certain "constraints" of pleasing the other person. But ask any person in love, and they will say this doesn't feel like a burden at all!).*

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