

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	58		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Romans 6:15-18		
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The Gospel Truth

31. Lord's Day

Question 83. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

Answer: The preaching of the holy gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers.

Question 84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?

Answer: Thus: when according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God, and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted: (a) according to which testimony of the gospel, God will judge them, both in this, and in the life to come.

(a) Matt. 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matt. 16:19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Matt. 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. Matt. 18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. Matt. 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Matt. 18:18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Matt. 18:19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. John 20:21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. John 20:22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: John 20:23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

Question 85. How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by christian discipline?

Answer: Thus: when according to the command of Christ, those, who under the name of christians, maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent therewith, and will not, after having been often brotherly admonished, renounce their errors and wicked course of life, are complained of to

the church, or to those, who are thereunto appointed by the church; and if they despise their admonition, are by them forbidden the use of the sacraments; whereby they are excluded from the christian church, and by God himself from the kingdom of Christ; and when they promise and show real amendment, are again received as members of Christ and his church. (a)

(a) Matt.18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. Matt.18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. Matt.18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Matt.18:18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 1 Cor.5:2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. 1 Cor.5:3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, 1 Cor.5:4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Cor.5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 1 Cor.5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. 2 Thess.3:14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 2 Thess.3:15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 2 Cor.2:6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. 2 Cor.2:7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. 2 Cor.2:8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

The New Testament equates obedience to God with believing the gospel. Commenting on Romans 1:5 and the expression 'the obedience of faith,' Morris says, "obedience is not an option (cf. 1 John 3:23-24). It is binding on all Christians. 'Faith's obedience' is a reminder that, as Paul understood it, faith is not an easy out for those who find strict morality irksome. When anyone is saved through faith, it is with a view to obedience. The life is given in service to the Lord in whom one has come to believe."¹ Doug Moo adds, "Paul's task was to call men and women to submission to the lordship of Christ (cf. 4b and 7b), a submission that began with conversion but which was to continue in a deepening, life-long commitment. This obedience to Christ as Lord is always closely related to faith, both as an initial, decisive step of faith and as continuing 'faith' relationship with Christ. In light of this, we understand the words *hypakoē pisteōs* to be mutually interpreting: obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience."² This is a very important issue. The doctrinal implications are massive if we lose sight of this point. As James Boice rightly points out, "It is important because it affects how we understand the gospel and how we seek to obey Christ's command to evangelize. How is it that most of today's evangelism is conducted? It is true, is it not, that for the most part the gospel is offered to people as something that (in our opinion) is good for them and will make them happy but that they are at perfect liberty to refuse! 'The Holy Spirit is a gentleman,' we are sometimes told. 'He would never coerce anybody.' With a framework like this, sin becomes little more than bad choices and faith only means beginning to see the issue clearly. What is missing in this contemporary approach is the recognition that sin primarily is disobedience and that God commands us to repent and repudiate it. As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, 'Sin is not just that which I do that is wrong and which makes me feel miserable and unhappy... not just that thin which gets me down and which I would like to overcome.' It is that, but it is also much more. Primarily, sin is rebellion against God. Sin is refusal to listen to the voice of God. Sin is a turning of your back upon God and doing what you think."³ So, when the gospel is preached, it must be preached not merely as an invitation to experience life to the full or even to accept God's invitation. It must be preached as a command. (This is why Paul is so concerned to

stress his role as an apostle, as one called and commissioned to be God's ambassador.) We are commanded to turn from our sinful disobedience to God and instead obey him by believing in and following the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. This is the way Paul himself preached the gospel, though we frequently overlook it because of our own weak methods. Do you remember how Paul concluded his great sermon to the Athenians? "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He *commands* all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed..." (Acts 17:30-31). In God's name, Paul commanded the Greeks to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus. It is the same in Romans. Note the number of times the Apostle underscores this. In Romans 6:17, Paul summarizes the response of the Roman Christians to the gospel by saying, "Thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly *obeyed* the form of teaching to which you were entrusted." In Romans 10 he argues that the Jews, "did not *submit* to God's righteousness" (v. 3); in verse 16 he says, "But they have not all *obeyed* the gospel..." (KJV). At the end of the letter the idea appears again in a great benediction: "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the *command* of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and *obey* him – to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen." (Romans 16:25-27).

I. THREE GREAT PRINCIPLES

Romans 6 defines in a remarkable way just what is a Christian. Simply mouthing a prayer or walking forward to an altar call does not constitute a person a Christian as such. What is a Christian?

A. A Christian is a Person Who has Undergone a Great Change.

Note the language of 6:17 – "you were." The tense of the Greek word is very emphatic and could be translated "you were, but are no longer." A great change has taken place, one that the Apostle thanks God that the helpless bondage to sin is a thing of the past and not of the present. Note also the stress on "heart obedience." Lloyd-Jones writes, "It is not enough for us merely to know that we have been changed, or that a Christian is a man who must undergo a change; we must have some adequate conception of the greatness of the change which is undergone. We see the greatness in this way, that it is a change which affects the whole of a man's personality. Look at it again. 'Ye have obeyed' – there is your will. 'From the heart' – there is your emotion. What have you obeyed from the heart? 'The form of doctrine delivered you.' How do you apprehend doctrine? You do so with your mind. So the change a man undergoes to become a Christian is a change that affects him in his mind, in his heart, and in his will; the entire personality is involved."⁴ This heart-felt obedience had to do with what Paul calls, specifically, a "form of doctrine" which literally refers to a formal summary of Christian doctrine.⁵

B. A Christian has a New Master.

Before conversion, we are slaves to sin by nature. Psalm 51 declares that we are born in sin, shapen in iniquity. Ephesians 2:1-3 declares that we are dead in sin and children of wrath by nature. It is not simply that we adopt a new life style or undergo a change of perspective. A deep transformation takes place, one that changes the heart and changes the master.⁶ Shedd comments, "Freedom from sin is slavery to holiness. There is no liberty in indifference, so that the will is equally facile to sin and holiness. If there were, then believers might 'sin because they are not under law but under grace' (v. 15); and might 'continue in sin, that grace may abound' (v. 1). Bias to holiness implies the absence of bias to sin; and vice versa.

But without bias, or inclination, no moral act can be performed in either direction. Hence, inclination in one direction is impotence in the other.”⁷

C. A Christian is an Obedient Believer.

“It is not belief only,” declares Lloyd-Jones. “There is, alas, such a thing as giving intellectual assent alone to the truth of the Gospel. That does not save anyone. There are men who are still the slaves of sin, and utterly carnal, who enjoy reading the Scriptures and playing with its doctrines as others do with crossword puzzles. If you happen to have been brought up in such circles it can be a highly intellectual occupation. Such men are interested in their minds, they believe the teaching intellectually; but it has never led to anything in their lives. What of them? They are not Christians. If the will is not involved you are not a Christian. Let me say again that it is not belief in forgiveness only. There are people who believe that God forgives them in Christ, but they go on sinning. That is no true belief; that is of no value at all. That is why I must say once more that there is nothing that is so unscriptural, so utterly wrong, as to place or create division between justification and sanctification. No such thing is possible.”⁸

CONCLUSION: Paul is not telling the Romans that Christian *ought to be* slaves of righteousness. His point is that true Christians *cannot be anything but* slaves of righteousness. They were taken out of sin’s servitude for precisely that purpose: “Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18). That corresponds exactly to what the apostle John wrote: “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God” (I John 3:9-10). For the Christian, the life of slavery to sin is *past*. Sin cannot continue to be the chief characteristic of our lives. Fleshly disobedience interrupts the new life frequently and we do sin. At times sin may *appear* to dominate a Christian’s life completely (as was the case when David sinned). But all true believers still have a new and holy nature. They hate their sin and love righteousness. They cannot live in unbroken sin or hardened rebellion against God and enjoy it. That would be a contradiction of who they are (cf. I John 3:9). The very purpose of grace is to free us from sin – “so we too might walk in newness of life” (v. 4). Grace is much more than merely forgiveness for our sins, or a free ride to heaven. Grace certainly does not leave us under sin’s dominion. Saved by grace, “we are [God’s own] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Grace “[instructs] us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:12). This is the very reason Christ gave himself for us: “That He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (v. 4). Yet it seems there have always been those who have corrupted the grace of God by turning it into lasciviousness (cf. Jude 4). They characterize grace as total freedom, but they themselves are enslaved to corruption (II Peter 2:19). Thus they nullify the grace of God (cf. Gal. 2:21). “The true grace of God” (cf. I Peter 5:12) does not offer freedom from moral restraint. Grace is not sanction *from* sin. It frees us from the law and from sin’s penalty, but it also liberates us from sin’s absolute control. It frees us to obey God.”⁹

¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (IVP, 1988), p. 51.

² D. Moo, *Romans 1-8: The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (Moody, 1991), p. 44.

³ J.M. Boice, *Romans 1-4: An Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1991), p. 56.

⁴ M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Expository of Chapter 6, The New Man* (Zondervan, 1972), p. 207.

⁵ The Apostle uses the word PARADIDŌMI which was used of giving a child an education. Cf. E.H. Gifford, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (rpt. James Family, 1977), p. 131.

⁶ Though many interpreters admit that the term DOULOS and its verbal cognates (see vv. 16-22) can be rendered *servant* and *to render service*, as well as *slave* and *to be enslaved*, there is no unanimity with respect to the translation of these words in the verses indicated. Some throughout prefer *servant* and *render service*. It is true that something can be said in favor of *slave*. In a sense even deeper than that which pertains to ordinary slaves and their earthly masters, believers have been bought with a price and are therefore owned by their Master (I Cor. 3:23; 7:22), on whom they are completely dependant, and to whom they owe undivided allegiance. They are totally committed to him. If by thus defining the concept *doulos* its meaning were exhausted, and if our word *slave* conveyed nothing of a sinful nature, the translation *slave* throughout, for *doulos*, might be unobjectionable. But as Paul uses the term, a *doulos* in the spiritual sense, in one who ministers to the Lord with gladness of heart, in newness of spirit, and in the enjoyment of perfect *freedom*, as v. 18 shows (cf. v. 22; 7:6), receiving from a God a glorious reward (v. 22, 23). Love and good will toward God and man fill the heart of this *doulos*. See Gal. 5:13; Eph. 6:7. However, with the English word *slave* we immediately associate the ideas of involuntary service, forced subjection, and (frequently) harsh treatment. It is probably for this reason that, in addition to those who here in Rom. 6:16-22 throughout prefer *servant*, etc. (A.V., A.R.V., Phillips, Berkeley) and those who consistently use *slave*, etc. (Goodspeed, R.S.V., N.A.S., N.I.V.), there are also those who, while not altogether avoiding *slave*, etc., render vs. 18b, "...you have entered the of righteousness," and v. 22 "and having entered the service of God." W. Hendricksen, *Romans: New Testament Commentary* (Baker, 1981), p. 205.

⁷ W.G.T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 165.

⁸ Lloyd-Jones, op. cit., p. 217.

⁹ This section is adapted from John MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience* (Word, 1994), pp. 223, 224.