



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Markers of Grace

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Romans 6:15-19

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¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ But 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, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

(Pastor prays)

It's really hard to watch as people you love make terrible choices that are obviously leading to some horrible end. Jesus said there is a narrow road that leads to life but also a broad road, a superhighway, that leads to destruction. What's more confusing and strangely tragic is when a church member, a professing Christian, hops the track, comes off the rails and willingly, knowingly and blindly chooses to get on the world's superhighway to a painful destruction.

The Bible teaches that all of us are headed somewhere, we have a destination. But sometimes it's hard to know what road people are on. What road are you on... when what you say you believe, or have believed, does not actually match up with how you live? That's when it's time to stop the car and ask the question: am I on the right road? Am I headed in the right direction? If you are on I-77 headed south and you think you're on I-85 headed north, then the very best thing you can do is *stop* and look at the highway signs or markers.

And I really think that's what the Apostle Paul is doing in this passage. He has already said in verse 14 that if you are in Christ you are not under law but under grace. That means you have believed certain things about Jesus. You have believed that He is all God and all man, that He lived perfectly, fulfilling all righteousness, kept the law, and then— on behalf of sinners— He took the punishment that sinners deserve at the cross. Jesus gives every sinner who repents and believes righteousness. That's grace. You don't do anything to get salvation; Jesus did everything to give it. And once you have grace, it shows up everywhere.

The Markers of Grace are Obvious

I think Paul lays out three markers of grace for us in this passage. On the road you are on, look and see if you've got them.

Right Motivation

You find this in verse 15. Remember the context. This verse follows right on verse 14, so let's read them together. ¹⁴*For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.* ¹⁵*What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!*

Paul asks, what then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? And he answers: by no means! Of course not! If you are thinking like that, then the motivating factor is completely off in your life. Anyone who talks like this doesn't have the remotest inkling as to what divine grace actually means. People who are under grace share the life of Christ and are characterized by the spontaneity and glad obedience of the Father's will. Being under grace doesn't mean you have a license to do whatever you want because you're already forgiven. It means *you* want what *God* wants because you are already forgiven.

Every time I hear a professing Christian student asked how far is too far, it sounds like they are saying what can I get away with and still be a Christian? If your motivation is to be able to do the bare minimum and still be a Christian, that's not *Christ* in you, that's *you* in you. Listen, we are of course free in Christ and we are under grace, but that freedom in Christ is not the exercise of unlimited immorality. To be free in Christ or to be under grace means you are set free from the bondage of sin at the cross, and, furthermore, you are set free so that you might live in a way that reflects the nature and the character of God. If you are constantly defending your lifestyle instead of constantly crucifying it, you might be on the wrong road.

What motivates you? Is it God's grace in Christ or your freedom in life? The markers of grace are obvious. The first is the right motivation. Let's look at the next marker.

Strong Clarification

Let me show you where I get that in verse 16. It's near the end. ¹⁶*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?* In order to make his point, Paul introduces the word "slave." And he uses it no less than six times. And he takes the whole living world and places us into one of two kinds of slavery. In the first part of verse 16, Paul assumes that people will know. "Do you not know?" He assumes that people will know that they are slaves of the master they choose to obey. And he is setting it up so that there is clearly no middle ground because he knows how much we love middle ground.

Everyone is either sin's slave or God's slave. You should start to see yourself in one of those two categories because, as Keller says, we all have a god, we are all worshippers and we are controlled by that which we offer ourselves to. We are all serving some sort of cause, some bottom line, some purpose or goal. We offer ourselves as a sacrifice on some altar.

Everyone is offering themselves already to something. And in verse 16, Paul makes it crystal clear that there are two and only two options. In an effort to underscore the further seriousness of the choice between the two masters, Paul specifies the consequences of the respective slaveries.

Let's go back to the verse and read it in full. ¹⁶*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?* Paul says you either choose sin, which leads to death, or obedience, which leads to righteousness. Death or righteousness. In this passage Paul has taken away the middle ground. It's the same thing Jesus said when He said no one can serve two masters. Or in John 8:34 when He said everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. And in verse 16 Paul is telling us that a life under grace is characterized by obedience. And all of humanity, all of us here, serve under one of two slaveries. We serve either under sin and self or God and obedience. And it's healthy for you this morning to get clarity. If you are enslaved by sin you can be free in Christ.

Grace is the key that unlocks the shackles of slavery and that grace is found at the cross. “It is finished” is our Emancipation Proclamation. There Jesus paid the ransom and bought our freedom. If you have believed that or believe it now, then you are clear on grace as a marker. There's a third marker that I'd like to point out in verses 17-18.

Genuine Conversion

I feel like I need to use the phrase “genuine conversion” because there are so many false conversions based on half-gospels preached from non-churches. And I think Paul puts the elements of true conversion packed into this verse.

True Grace. Verse 17 starts with “Thanks be to God.” God is the one who rescued and redeemed us from sin’s domain. In fact, the way verse 18 says it points to it being *all* God and *all* grace. Verse 18 says “having been set free.” That is in the passive voice. It indicates that God is the one who liberated people from the power of sin and turns people into saints.

“They are redeemed.” B.B. Warfield called those the most precious words in the Christian vocabulary. This should inform how we pray for people. It should help us understand their condition. This should even give us the words to use in our prayers as we pray for those without Christ. This informs how we talk about our own Salvation. We don't talk about *finding* God; God *found* us. We were in sin’s dungeon, chained in slavery and serving Satan when our Deliverer saved us. True grace found us.

Sincere Obedience. Verse 17 speaks of “sincere obedience.” That is obedience from the heart. It's possible to have an intellectual or even behavioral Christianity where you can follow Christian ethical principles. That's the heart of cultural Christianity. It works well as long as it works. Then it falls apart. Just think of the number of people you know who have just fallen out of going to church. And that's not Christianity. Once the Gospel penetrates the heart, it shows itself in *real* life change. It is God who works Salvation in a person’s innermost being through the grace provided by Jesus.

Submission to truth. This is the standard of teaching to which we are committed. This is not just a vague commitment to love Jesus or believe in Jesus or even ask Jesus into your heart. All of that language can be so confusing. This is a commitment to live under the lordship of Jesus and the authority of the Bible. You see, conversion begins with a body of truth, a specific

message that must be received, and that's the Gospel. The Gospel is that our Holy God is the creator of the whole universe and everything in it. He created man in His own perfect image, but when man sinned it created a chasm between God and man and condemned man to death, because the penalty for sin is death. Jesus Christ, the son of God, was born of a virgin and lived a perfect life. He willingly gave His life on the cross to cover our sins and provide redemption for man. The Bible says in Romans 10:9, *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

And the choices Paul lays out in verse 19 are the Gospel rejected which leads to impurity or the Gospel received that leads to sanctification — growing more and more like Christ and growing in grace.

And the questions I'll close with are these: Do you see the markers of grace in your life? Does God's grace in Jesus motivate you? Are you clear about the two choices of being a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness? Have you experienced genuine conversion? Will you come to Christ and be freed from your slavery at the cross?

(Pastor prays)