

Romans 6:12-end

Matthew 10:40-end

Romans 6:15

So, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does this mean we can go on sinning?

Paul continues, "Of course not!"

I have been thinking a lot just recently, about our need to be in control, and how when that control is taken away from us, as it seems to have been for the past three months, we can begin to feel stressed and maybe even angry.

I think most of us feel that "to be out of control" is a negative way of being.

When we are children we are under the control of our parents or guardians for our care.

As we develop into teenagers (or before in some cases) this sense of control can become a bit of a struggle; for the child and, indeed, for the parent.

Most people who have brought up teenagers will admit to some difficulty in maintaining control as the teenagers begin to become aware of their self identity and their right to choose their life path.

This time can be quite wearing and can cause the parents to question what on earth is happening to my family; but it's a natural way of development and, with the support of the parent figure, gradually the child becomes an adult capable of making life decisions.

Then at the other end of the spectrum we have the elderly parent who is considered, by the family on one hand, not capable of caring for themselves any longer, while on the other hand, themselves, see no reason at all for this way of thinking.

So, says the elderly parent, what if I have left the tap running and flooded the kitchen, or lost my keys for the hundredth time, or left the door unlocked at night....NO, I do not need anyone coming in to check in me. I can manage!!

There is a sense that there has gradually been a change in the relationship and the child has assumed control of the care - whilst the parent fights with all they have left

to maintain that control over their life which enables them to keep their identity and sense of place in the family.

I can't be the only one who has begun to wonder why my words of "very wise" advice are suddenly being totally ignored.

And without noticing the place of matriarch or patriarch has somehow evolved into "dependent parent."

And so, we have two choices; we can choose to fight against the natural order or we can choose to accept it; and this way we make the choice, and find some peace.

As our children grow and maybe make life decisions that we don't agree with, or approve of, we can choose to accept them and continue to love and support them or we can choose to be at permanent odds with them and spend hours agonising over what we did wrong, that they should turn out to be different to us, or indeed, how we expected them to turn out.

We have to control the negative feelings and look at how they can be turned into the positive feelings that foster and maintain good relationships.

We have to ask ourselves, why is it so important that I maintain control.

Verse 16 of Romans 6

Don't you realise that whatever you choose to obey becomes your master?

Whatever you *choose* to obey becomes your master.

We can choose to listen to our family who can see that we are getting to the stage where help is needed or we can stubbornly refuse to accept that we are getting older and slightly less capable.

We can choose to listen to our children's decisions and look at them from their point of view, or we can stubbornly hang on to what we believe is best for them. And if they disagree then they are wrong because, we know best.

I once conducted a funeral service for an elderly lady and everything seemed fine. The family were loving and caring and wanted to be sure mum would be with the Lord.

She had lived a long life and everyone respected and loved her.

The service went well, we prayed and sang and recounted her life at the centre of a loving family.

After the service, I found a young woman alone weeping in the chapel. When I asked her why she was alone in her grief she told me her family had refused to allow her to attend her grandma's funeral because, some time ago, she had done something wrong and this had upset grandma.

I didn't ask her what she had done but it was obviously something that the family considered beyond forgiveness.

And they didn't want her presence to taint the funeral service.

She chose to respect their wishes and stay out of sight and apart with her grief.

How I wished that, in that service, I had concentrated my reflections on the scriptures, towards love, acceptance, and forgiveness and doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.

This young woman had had no control over saying a last goodbye or maybe even saying sorry – her family chose for her to be locked out of the family.

My grandma, whom I loved dearly, used to say that she could forgive the wrongs done to her in her life, but she would *never* forget.

And I took that on board and it seemed right to me at that time.

And it is true, we cannot simply forget at will, but I have learned that if we choose to give control of memories over to God then he can use them for good.

I think grandma was referring to the fact that she was sent into service aged 9, as many were in those days, and hated it. She would never forget having to do menial tasks for a family she didn't know, being treated as "just" a servant, whilst missing her mum and her siblings. Running away and being sent back twice.

When she said she would never forget, she made it sound quite negative but actually she subconsciously chose to take control of those feelings and turn them into positive actions in her life.

We all benefitted from her bad experience of childhood and so we knew what it meant to have a grandma who loved her family more than anything and who was always there to offer help, support, acceptance and forgiveness.

Paul says in Romans 6:

You can choose sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God and receive his approval.

It's not always easy to make the right choice. It would be really good if once we commit our lives to following Jesus we were saved 100% from any further temptation to sin.

Unfortunately, that is not the case. Committing our lives to following Jesus means that we are on our way to being saved. The important thing to remember is, we are on our way – that means we are not there yet; this, in turn, means we have to continually choose the right way to live and that often means taking control of all the things that cause us to walk alone or even to backslide in our lifestyle and give them to God.

Fortunately, we live under grace. This does not mean we have no need to consciously make right choices because God will forgive us anyway.

According to David Pawson grace means the undeserved favour of God, which can be resisted and refused, but when it is accepted is one of the most lovely things in the world.

God loves us and is ready to forgive us – that is the grace of God. He is ready to forgive, when we take control of the wrongdoing and give it to him and that means repent, change our ways. If we do not repent he cannot forgive.

So how do we continue on this road to salvation?

We choose to put God first in our life.

We choose to love unconditionally, to seek out the best in people. We choose to seek his grace by seeking his approval in our dealings with other people.

We choose to allow the Holy Spirit to read our hearts and highlight the ways in which we are found wanting and fighting to retain control of.

We make the choice to continue on the path of salvation until we finally are saved and made perfect in him.

Until then, we make the choice to give everything over to God and then, in a moment of weakness, we take it back, but you know what? That is all part of the path, as we learn to trust in God our Father with all that we are.

God is the one Father who we can absolutely trust to give control of our life to, because he is the one person who does truly know what is best for us now and for what is yet to come, in this world and the next. Amen.