

# WHAT CONTROLS YOUR LIFE?

Romans 6:15-23

This morning we need to talk about *neuroplasticity*.

*Neuroplasticity can be defined as our brain's ability to change, remodel and reorganize for the purpose of improving our ability to adapt to new situations. Despite the fact that the concept of neuroplasticity is quite new, it is one of the most important discoveries in neuroscience. The fact is that neural networks are not fixed, but appearing and disappearing dynamically throughout our whole life, depending on our experiences. While we repeatedly practice one activity such as a sequence of movements or a mathematical problem, neuronal circuits are being formed, leading to better ability to perform the practiced task with less waste of energy. Once we stop practicing a certain activity, the brain will redirect these neuronal circuits by a 'use it or lose it' principle.*

In other words, our brains are constantly being re-wired. Whatever we think over and over again causes our brain to re-wire itself. Whatever we do over and over again strengthens the neural pathways involved in that activity. Matt Smith shared with me a saying, "Whatever fires together, wires together."

WATCH VIDEO: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpfYCZa87g>)

Though the Apostle Paul did not know about neuroplasticity, he did understand its practical outworking: whatever we give our minds and bodies to eventually controls us. As we've just seen, whatever we think about over and over again strengthens the neural pathways involved with that thought process. Whatever we do repeatedly with our bodies eventually controls us for good or for ill.

What we will discover in Romans 6:15-23 is that *neuroplasticity* or rather its practical outworking is one of the reasons why Christians should not continue in a sinful lifestyle.

Paul begins this new section of chapter six in exactly the same way he began this chapter – with a question.

## WHY NOT CONTINUE IN SIN SINCE WE'RE UNDER GRACE? (6:14-15)

*Romans 6:15–23 (ESV)*

**15** *What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?*

Why did Paul ask this question?

He anticipated some Christians would twist his words in verse 14 as an excuse to continue in sinful lifestyles.

*Romans 6:14 (ESV)*

**14** *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

Paul is writing to believers in the church in Rome. They have been justified by faith in Christ. Paul is now teaching them about sanctification. Justification delivers us from the *penalty* of sin. Sanctification delivers us from the *power* of sin.

Sanctification proceeds primarily by the renewing of our minds. From Romans 6:1-11 we are to continually count it as true that we were united with Christ in His death to sin and in His resurrection to new life. Understanding a bit about neuroplasticity we can see that continually counting this to be true can literally affect the neural pathways in our brains!

In verse 14 Paul is teaching that sanctification does not proceed by legalism, but by God's grace. In other words, we will not be spiritually transformed by externally keeping the Mosaic Law or any other Christian code. Sanctification proceeds under God's grace, not under legalism.

Paul anticipates some will twist this truth as a rationale to continue to live in sin. This is similar to the twisted thinking confronted in verses 1-14. There, Paul showed that continuing in sin is contrary to who we are in Christ. We were united with Christ in His death to sin and His resurrection to life. Sin's power

over us has been broken. We have been resurrected to a living relationship with God. To continue in sin is completely contrary to who we are in Christ. It leads to a divided, conflicted soul.

The second reason a Christian should not continue a sinful lifestyle is given in verses 15-23.

### IF YOU FIRE IT, YOU WIRE IT (6:15-19)

Paul shows that what we give our minds and bodies over to eventually takes control of our lives. Paul uses the imagery of slavery to explain this principle. This has to do with control. If we continually give ourselves over to a self-centered, self-serving lifestyle, we will be controlled by sin and reap the things related to death. On the other hand, if we continually give ourselves over to the truth of who we are in Christ and to living for Jesus we will reap sanctification.

Repeated thoughts and actions strengthen the neural pathways involved in those thoughts and actions. What we give our minds and bodies to eventually takes control. This can lead to spiritual transformation or it can lead to bondage.

Because of this, Christians are foolish to continue to live in sin and again come under its control.

*Romans 6:15-23 (ESV)*

**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.

What do we lose by giving control back to sin? So many of us foolishly think that in becoming a Christian we lose out on all the fun things we could be doing like fornicating and partying. But if you really enter into God's kind of life here and now there is no comparison to the life we were living in Adam. By continuing in sin we forfeit all the good things of our new life.

### IS THE FRUIT OF SIN BETTER THAN THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT? (6:20-23)

**20** For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. **21** But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. **22** But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. **23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Isn't life so much better as a Christian living for God?

It is foolish for us as Christians to continue a lifestyle of sin. To do so is live in a manner completely contrary to who we are in Christ. To continue a lifestyle of sin is to once again relinquish control to sin and reap the things associated with death. To continue a lifestyle of sin is to forfeit the wonderful, life-giving fruits of the transformed life – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Is sin worth it?