



## Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

### Session 7 – Free to Be a Slave | Romans Chapter 6

carte blanche / kärt bläSH **noun**

Complete freedom to act as one wishes or thinks best; writing one's own terms for an agreement.

*Synonyms:* free rein; a free hand; a blank check

To hear some people tell it, this is the definition of grace. Since God's grace is inexhaustible, why worry about living a holy life? Paul knew that some would misinterpret his statement that, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20 ESV).

People have a strong tendency to overcorrect one mistake by swinging to the opposite extreme. Live long enough and you just might see it swing back again!

Grace frees us from a legalistic, work-for-your-salvation mentality. In this chapter, Paul explains that grace frees us from sin so that we can pursue holiness. Spoiler alert! Pursuing holiness is not a dour, teeth-clenching resistance to sin. As Jesus said in John 8:36, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (NIV).

### Icebreaker

If you could break one bad habit this year, what would it be?

### Goals for this Session:

- Discover the meaning and significance of water baptism.
- Consider how relentless grace gives us freedom to live obediently.
- Pray honest prayers that embrace grace and reflect righteousness.

## Dead . . . and Alive!

### Romans 6:1–14

Paul explains what God has done for all believers, and what our response should be.

1. What does Paul ask and how does he answer his own questions? (verses 1–2)

- a. Paul used two metaphors to explain freedom from sin. The first one is *baptism* (verses 3–11). What does *water baptism* symbolize? Explain each aspect in your own words.

Death

Burial

Resurrection

#### #wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

**baptized** (baptizo) Immersed in, fully absorbed; identified with.

**continue in sin** (epimeno) Persist in; live in a state of habitual sin.

**dead to sin** (apothnesko) Reject and renounce sin's power to rule in you.

**slave** (doulos) A willing servant.

**dominion** (kurieuso) Control; to exercise rule over.

**holiness** (hagiasmos) Set apart to God (sanctified). A position *and* a process. In relation to God, we are made holy because of Christ. In life, the continuing process of becoming more like Christ in character and action.

- b. *Reckon yourselves dead.* This is the same word Paul used back in chapter four to describe what God did with Abraham's faith. God *credited* (reckoned) Abraham's faith to him as righteousness. Paul says, *you are dead to the old life.* Sin no longer has any authority over you. It may not always feel like it, but it's a fact. Count on it and live it out. Use the verses below to write a simple explanation of how we do that.

Galatians 2:20

Ephesians 2:1–5

Colossians 3:3–5

**“Reckoning is not claiming a promise as much as it is acting on a fact. God does not command us to be dead to sin. Rather, He tells us that we *are* dead to sin and alive to God. Then He commands us to act on it.”**

Greg Laurie

2. **Dead to sin.** Paul repeatedly says that Christians have “died to sin.” What does that mean? Put a **T** (true) or **F** (false) next to the following statements. Then briefly explain your response. Being dead to sin means that:

\_\_\_ Christians no longer have sinful desires or inclinations.

\_\_\_ Christians can sin when they want to; but if they repent, there’ll be no consequences.

\_\_\_ Christians get sick of sinning and eventually decide to give it up.

\_\_\_ Christians no longer have to live under the dominating power of sin.

3. **Alive in Christ.** How would you explain what being “alive in Christ” means? Use the following verses for help with your answer.

John 1:12–13

John 3:5–6

John 5:24

2 Corinthians 5:17

→ How would you explain being “alive in Christ” from your own personal experience?

### **Memory Verse**

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

Romans 6:14 NKJV

*Think About It . . .*

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? In what way?

## True Freedom

### Romans 6:15–23

Paul explains that grace gives us freedom to live obediently and become the person God designed us to be.

1. What does Paul ask, and how does he answer his own question? (verses 15–16)

a. The first illustration Paul used to explain freedom from sin was baptism. The second one is *slavery* (verses 16–18). What point is Paul making here?

#### Good to Know

Paul's illustration of slavery was easy for his readers to grasp. Nearly half the people in Rome were slaves. Some were slaves against their will (war captives), some were born slaves, and some chose slavery just to survive. There was no "middle class" in Rome and all the menial jobs were done by slaves. So even a free man had few options to make a living.

b. Does grace mean that you can live however you want, as long as you're comfortable with it? Why or why not?

Rome's version of welfare was for wealthy men (patrons) to aid poor men (clients). Having lots of clients was a status symbol. They created a fanfare wherever their patron went and loudly cheered him in court to sway the jury in his favor. In return, the patron doled out a meager allowance and a daily meal. This arrangement was demeaning but it seemed unavoidable. Needless to say, Paul's slavery illustration struck a chord with his listeners.

c. *Slaves to whom you obey*. What motivates us to obey—or for that matter, to disobey? It comes down to this: we are all followers going after fulfillment. What we find depends on who we follow (verses 19–21).

To *yield* or "present your members" describes an intentional act of the will. Paul is saying, offer yourself to God—all in, no holding back.

Paul asks his readers (including you) to think back on what it was like to be a slave of sin. What did it accomplish? What did it fail to deliver? Looking back at your life before salvation, how would you describe it?

What is one valuable lesson you can share about finding fulfillment in yielding yourself obediently to God?

2. **But now . . .** (verse 22) Paul leans in to remind us of the benefits of grace. Grace isn't a license to do whatever you want; actually it's so much more than that. When we *offer ourselves* in obedience to God, an incredible transformation begins to happen.

Paul writes more about this later, but for now he calls this *your fruit to holiness*. He is talking about sanctification, the ongoing process of becoming more like Christ in character and behavior (see Gospel at a Glance).

**Galatians 5:22–24** – Producing fruit is the Holy Spirit's work in us, but our part is to tend the soil, water the roots, pull weeds, and fully cooperate with the process of growth.

- a. List and briefly describe each fruit of the Spirit.

**"This world is no friend to grace. One harmful aspect is assuming that anything worthwhile can be acquired at once, quickly and efficiently.**

**There is a great market for religious experience in our world, but little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue; and little inclination to sign up for the long apprenticeship of holiness.**

**We are people who spend our lives apprenticed to our master, Jesus Christ. We are in a growing, learning relationship always."**

**Eugene Peterson**

*A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

- b. Consider this. Spiritual fruit is not the same as spiritual gifts. There are a variety of spiritual gifts and God chooses who gets what (see Romans 12:6). But the Holy Spirit is intent on growing *every* spiritual fruit in *every* Christian.

Remember this too. Spiritual fruit is not rooted in emotion. You may not feel particularly patient or inclined toward self-control, but when you offer yourself in obedience, that trait will begin to develop in you because it reflects the character of God.

Take time to inspect your spiritual fruit. Ask for feedback from someone close to you.

→<sup>1</sup> Which traits seem to grow easily for you?

→<sup>1</sup> Which traits need more cultivating?

→<sup>1</sup> In what ways is the Lord pruning you to bear more fruit?

→<sup>1</sup> Are you reaping the benefits of spiritual fruit in your life? Are others? In what way?

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* Paul boldly declared that sin doesn't own you anymore. Trouble is, your old nature isn't done with you. When we remember that in Christ, the old life is gone and a new life has begun, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

a. The gospel is incentive to break old patterns and behavior. Paul calls it pulling down strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4). Strongholds take many shapes, but are formed when we believe a lie—about God, about life, about ourselves. When the serpent approached Eve, he smoothly convinced her there was more to life than God was letting them in on (Genesis 3:1–7). *Do it your way to get what you need.*

We're all wired for something. It might be approval, or comfort, or control. These can be good things but they will never satisfy the core need of our heart. Jesus said, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (John 10:10 NLT).

**"Strongholds put a chokehold on the joy, growth, freedom, and strength you are meant to experience. They neutralize your effectiveness and lock you in a state of arrested development. This much is for sure—you'll never experience all that life holds if you're living with strongholds."**

Levi Lusko  
*I Declare War*

Anything that consistently pulls us in the wrong direction gives sin a foothold. Left unchecked, it will become a stronghold. Like the **HOME** app on an iPhone programmed to run your house ("just set it and forget it") sin still wants to control your life and automate your behavior. Ask the Lord to show you hidden sins or neglected strengths in your life.

**Lights** (truth/culture/opinions)

**Locks** (morals/integrity/standards)

**Thermostat** (passions/desires/dreams)

**Public zones** (relationships/habits/pursuits)

**Private zones** (thought life)

b. The gospel is incentive to live obediently. Earlier, Paul described holiness (sanctification) as spiritual fruit. Jesus said that fruit comes from abiding in Him (John 15:4–5). What does "abiding" look like? Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a leading voice in the 20th century church, described it as, "Not passive and clinging—it is to do what He tells you to do, positively, and to pray without ceasing. Abiding is a tremendously active thing."

In Colossians 3:12–14, Paul distills these virtues in a condensed list and makes it practical. What would your life look like if you consistently obeyed this command?

What would be different? What would be the same?



**Gospel at a Glance: Sanctification** | “Sanctification is one of the key words we learn from Scripture that helps us understand what our salvation means. It covers the space of time between our *justification* (the moment of conversion when God declares us righteous through our faith in Christ’s payment for sin) and our *glorification* (when we stand before Him in eternity). Sanctification means *to make holy*—a process that is crucially important for us since by nature we are *not* holy, and we *need* to be holy. More and more holy. In every place . . . to increasingly conform ourselves to the Word of God, living with a pure conscience, being quick to respond to the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

So this is what God is doing with us right now as we wait for Christ’s return. We’re being sanctified. Little by little. Day by day. One step at a time.” —James MacDonald\*

**“We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV).**

**A**doration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A \_\_\_\_\_

C \_\_\_\_\_

T \_\_\_\_\_

S \_\_\_\_\_

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\* James MacDonald, *Our Journey Devotional*, Walk in the Word (Elgin, Illinois), November 16, 2018

