

Freedom not to Sin

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- [0 : 00] Just while you're looking up Romans chapter 6, which is on page 1133, there are notes being given out.
- If anybody would like one, it can help you to follow the outline of the talk and for you to take notes. And if anybody does have questions afterwards, please feel free to come and talk with me or discuss it.
- You may not agree with everything that is said, and that's perfectly fine. So do come and have a chat with me afterwards. Romans chapter 6, and we're going to read from verses 1 to 14.
- Let's read Romans 6 verses 1 to 14. What shall we say then?
- Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means we died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
- [1 : 28] We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death. In order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
- If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with.
- That we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now, if we died with Christ, we believe we will also live with Christ.
- For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all.
- But the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, you count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.
- [2 : 37] Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.
- For sin shall not be your master because you are not under law but under grace. Well, let's pray together and we'll ask for God's help as we look at this passage together.
- Our Father, we come to you and acknowledge that you are the supreme ruler, not only over our country and this world but over our lives.
- And your word is the supreme authority in all matters of belief and practice.
- And so we come to you and we submit ourselves to you and to your authority, praying that you would speak to us afresh, that we would be people who take on board what you say, are changed by it and transformed by it.
- [4 : 00] And above all, we pray, teach us what it means to live under grace and not under sin. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, during the week as I was preparing and thinking this through, I came across the story of a man called Comrade Dutch.

You may have heard of him. In the 1970s, Pol Pot was the ruthless dictator in Cambodia. Comrade Dutch was one of his chief executioners.

He was responsible for the killing of over 15,000 people. Those who showed any opposition were marched into the country and violently executed.

And these mass graves became known as the killing fields. Now, after the fall of that regime, Comrade Dutch went into hiding, never arrested.

[5 : 09] And in the mid-90s, having kept his identity secret, he met a pastor. And this pastor told him the good news of Jesus Christ.

And having heard the gospel explained to him, Dutch responded by repenting of his sin and trusting in Jesus Christ. Dutch had become a Christian with the promise of eternal life.

Now, that's not the end of the story. We'll come back to the rest of it later. But for now, I wonder, how does that make you feel? Think of that man and the regime that he was involved in.

A mass murderer. 15,000 people. He had destroyed countless families. Broken his society so much, the mental and emotional scars are ingrained forever.

How could God forgive someone as cold and as calculated as that? It doesn't seem fair and it doesn't seem right.

[6 : 23] Is it even right? Well, if we are to take the gospel seriously, that is exactly what has happened. Back in chapter 5, we were looking at last week, having explained the overflowing and abundant provision of God's grace towards sinners.

He summarizes his point in chapter 5, verse 20. The middle of verse 20, he says, Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.

The grace of God is always greater than the sin in our lives. In other words, he's saying, No matter who you are, no matter what you have done, if there is genuine repentance and faith, God will forgive you.

In place of your past record, he will give you the perfect record of Christ. And rather than an eternal destiny in hell, which we deserve, we will be welcomed as God's child into heaven.

Now that sounds outrageous, doesn't it? Almost scandalous. How could God forgive people like that?

[7 : 48] How can he forgive me? Now if you have trouble accepting that, it seems like the people that Paul was writing to also had difficulties with it.

Look at chapter 6, verse 1. In response to this scandalous grace, they say in verse 1, What then shall we say? Does that mean we will go on sinning so that grace may increase?

We can imagine them saying to Paul, This gospel of grace that you're preaching, it seems like it's encouraging us to sin. If God's grace is greater than my sin, I can do what I like and God is going to forgive me.

It sounds offensive. It even smacks of arrogance. It's not unlike the attitude of W.H. Auden, who was a great writer and a poet, who said this, I like committing crimes.

God likes forgiving them. Really, the world is admirably arranged. Is this what grace means? A free bailout whenever you need it.

[9 : 03] Sin as you please, and God is going to forgive you. Well, grace is much more than just making someone a Christian.

Grace is something that enables you to live as a Christian. You see, when grace is truly experienced in your life, rather than play around with sin, you'll want to deal with sin.

When Comrade Dutch became a Christian, it actually radically changed his life. His conversion, his coming to follow Christ, was not a quick fix to settle his conscience, so that he could live out the rest of his years and do as he wished.

No, his new faith in Christ meant a radical transformation. He went to the authorities, and he revealed his true identity.

He owned up to his crimes. He confessed and he repented to the nation, and he took responsibility, and today he is still serving a life sentence in prison.

[10 : 12] There's actually another piece to that story, and we'll come back to it later. But for now, can we see how grace does not avoid sin? Rather, it enables us to face up to it and to deal with it.

And I think that's the big issue that's being addressed here in chapter 6. Grace is not just this ticket to get us into heaven, a little passport to kind of get through the pearly gates.

No, grace is something that radically changes your life, enabling you to confront and deal with the sin in your life. First of all then, we want to see how grace defeats sin's penalty.

Let's read from verse 1 of chapter 6. Now, I think the issue here is about the penalty of sin.

If you look back to chapter 5, verse 12, it says, Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, remember we looked at that in Adam, just as sin entered the world through Adam, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned.

[11 : 42] So the penalty, it's saying, of a rebellious life towards God, doing our own thing and living the life that we want to, is death. It's universal.

Everybody sins, everybody dies. But it's not just physical death. It's also a spiritual death. Just as Adam was separated from God, he was put out of the garden, so also there is an eternal separation from God, and all of his good gifts.

But in chapter 6, verse 2, it says, we have died to sin. It's telling us that something has happened in the past.

We died. So it means that sin is no longer able to punish us. In other words, the penalty has already been paid.

How has that happened? Well, look at verse 3. He's reminding them, don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

[12 : 51] We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Now, we need to be very careful here that we don't make too much of baptism. It's not saying that the act of baptism, whether as a child or as an adult, deals with the penalty of sin.

That's not going to make a tap of difference. Rather, when it's using baptism here, it's like a word picture. Talking about our union with Christ, being united with Christ.

So look at verse 3. Look at the language. It says, Baptized into Christ. And baptized into his death, or buried with him.

This is union language. And it's telling us that what happened to Christ has happened to me. By faith, I believe that when Jesus died, I also died.

[14 : 03] When Jesus rose again from the grave, I also rose again. When Jesus died on the cross, he took my sin on himself.

He paid the penalty that I deserve. And when he was raised from the dead, he defeated the penalty. And so the penalty no longer has any hold of me.

And that's the greatness and the magnitude of God's grace. that what happened to Jesus 2,000 years ago has happened to me. It's an event in history, but it's also my story.

It's vitally part of my life. Now if that's true, that means we don't have to invent ways of trying to pay off sin.

Which is what most people try to do. Go to church. Read my Bible. Go to confession. All these different things is some ways of paying off our debt.

[15 : 03] Well, it's actually been done for us, hasn't it? And this new life is ours to enjoy. There's no more paying off to be done. When Cork won the football final last year, we went into the city to welcome back the team.

Maybe some of you were there, I don't know. But when the team came on stage, we all started to sing. We are the champions. I won't go on, don't worry.

No time for losers. We are the champions of the world. All the crowd were joining in. Now I don't know about the rest of the people who were there, but I didn't play in the final.

I wasn't even at the match. But yet I was singing, we are the champions. Because in a sense, I am united to my team.

So their victory becomes my victory. Their celebration becomes my celebration. And in a much truer sense, by faith, we are saying that we are united to Jesus Christ.

[16 : 14] So his victory over sin becomes my victory. His celebration over the grave becomes my celebration.

Look at verse 5. It's crystal clear. If you have been united with him, that united is joining by faith. If you have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

What happened to Jesus has happened to me. I don't need to invent ways of paying it off.

It's already happened 2,000 years ago. That's my story. It can never ever punish me again. The penalty has been paid.

No matter what I do today, what I do tomorrow, or next year, all that has been dealt with. That is the wonder of grace. The penalty is paid.

[17 : 19] But not only is that true, grace also destroys sin's power. You see, sin is not just rebellion for which there is a penalty.

Sin is also a power that rules over us. Look at the middle of verse 6. It says that we are, well, it says we should no longer be slaves to sin.

So it has some kind of hold over us. And down at the end of verse 14, it says, sin shall not be your master. So it's telling us that sin is actually a real power.

Sin is a cruel master, a bullying ruler who controls us. And no matter what we do, we can't escape it and we can't break it. But the grace that defeated the penalty has also destroyed its power.

We have been set free. Look at verse 6. For we know that our old self was crucified with him. Our old self is the life before Christ.

[18 : 29] For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with. Now let's just take a pause there. And at the very bottom of your Bible, you will see a little note.

There's a letter A, I think, beside it. And at the very bottom of the Bible, it says, or rendered powerless. So it's telling us that sin might be made powerless.

Continue reading. That we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Because we are united to Christ, when Jesus was crucified, we also were crucified.

And so, just as he was freed from sin, so we too are free from the power of sin. Now let me give you a little picture to try and get this in our minds.

Picture a slave under the control of a cruel master. Everything he is told to do, he must do. Every time he tries to escape and run away, he's caught and he's hauled back again.

[19 : 48] But then this kind ruler comes and pays for his release. A ransom is given. And he's now free to go. Now, no matter what the old master says, he can shout at the slave, he can threaten him, he can crack his whip, he can order him back again.

But the reality is, he no longer has any authority over that slave. He no longer has any power. He no longer has any control.

Because he has been set free, he now no longer has to obey that old master. And that is the power of grace. It's telling us that it sets us free from sin's ruling power over us.

Now, could you imagine, once that's happened to the slave, could you imagine him walking back again to work for that ruler? It would be absolutely madness to go back again.

No, he wouldn't do that because he has been set free to live for a new master. You see, when Jesus rose from the grave, it was a once and for all irreversible event.

[21 : 04] Jesus has died. He's never going to die again. He now lives. And he lives for all eternity. Look at verse 8. If we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Christ.

For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. It's the same theme, this unity language.

What happened to Jesus in the resurrection will happen to me. It's a wonderful promise that just as Christ was raised to live forever, so one day, I am going to raise, will be raised to live forever in eternity.

I am going to enter the new heaven and the new earth, the new creation, where there will be the complete absence of all sin and all of its effects.

And one day, that is going to be our experience. And if all of that is ours to look forward to because of the resurrection, if that is what our life is going to be like to come, and try and picture it, a life where there is no sin, no evil, no violence, no crime, nothing wrong, everything perfect.

[22 : 22] If that is our life to come, then that is the kind of life we are to start living today. Look at verse 10.

The death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he now lives to God. We have been set free.

We now have a new way to live. Picture that slave again. Who is now a free person. We can picture him walking out the gates with that cruel master behind him, shouting and roaring, but he no longer has to obey him or to listen to him because he has been freed from it.

And this new kind ruler with his arm around his shoulder points him into the distance, and he points to this beautiful castle and he describes it as a place of pure beauty and joy and perfection.

And he says, we're heading there. That's where we're going. There's nothing wrong there. Everything is right. Everything is good. And that slave, now free, as he looks towards us, with the very thought of what is to come, the very thought of his place being there, he begins to live that same life right now where he is.

[23 : 48] And that's exactly the same for us. These verses, verses 8 and 9, are reminding us of the resurrection of all that we have to look forward to, and because of all that we have to look forward to, he says, that's yours for an eternity.

You're going to live like this for an eternity. Well, why don't you start living like that now? Now? That is the power of grace. It sets us free from sin's ruling power, and it gives us a brand new way to live.

Now, while sin is a defeated power, it still won't lie down. It keeps getting up again and snapping at our heels.

And that's why we must be aware of sin's ongoing presence in our lives. Look at verse 11. In the same way, the same way as Jesus, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Because this penalty has been destroyed, it can never judge you or sentence you again, because the power is defeated, you no longer have to obey it, it no longer controls you, you've got a new way to live.

[25 : 09] Now start living that way. And as we live that way, we must know that we will still be confronted by sin. Look at verse 12.

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body. Your mortal body is the life that we have this side of heaven. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

Now as much as what Christ has done and as much as we are united to Him, it's like sin keeps coming back to us, confronting us every single day, offering us all kinds of treats and all kinds of pleasures, enticing us with dreams and ideas, pushing us, tempting us, nagging us all day long, never giving up until we give in.

Sin acts like our master. He acts like a ruler, telling us that we must obey. But because of what Christ has done and because of His grace, we don't have to obey any longer.

Now I can stand before you and I can say, or I can never say, I will never obey sin again.

[26 : 32] But I can say to you that I don't have to obey sin today. We don't have to obey it. We have a new master.

We've been set free. We can choose to obey Christ. Well, you say, how do I do that? Well, we've got to go on fighting with sin.

And there's two parts to this. Look at verse 13. See if you can spot them. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.

So there are two parts. The first part, do not offer your body to sin and instruments of wickedness, but offer yourselves to God and the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness.

The picture here, I think, is of a soldier who has come to his new king where he has been in rebellion against the king. And now he has submitted to his new king and he lays down all his weapons before him and he says, here I am for your service.

[27 : 54] I will now do as you command. I am now going to obey you. And in the same way, we are to bring our instruments.

We are to bring, as it says here, the parts of our body to Christ. We are to lay before Him everything and say to Him, I will do as you command.

In other words, our whole lives. Not just our hands and our feet, but our minds and our intellect. We are to bring them all before God and say, here I am for your service to obey you.

Well, what's that going to look like? How do we give ourselves in service to God? Well, let me give two examples. First of all, your eyes. Have you all got eyes?

I hope they're all open at this stage anyway. If they're not open them. Your eyes. You use your eyes to watch and to read all kinds of things, don't we?

[29 : 07] Now, we can use our eyes, and to use the language here of verse 13, we can use our eyes as instruments of wickedness. So we can watch all kinds of terribly unhelpful things on television.

We can also read unhelpful trash. But we can also use our eyes as instruments of righteousness.

Instead of watching something that's full of porn, we can watch something that's pure. We can read good books that are going to help you in your walk with God.

We all use our eyes every day. We need to choose, well, how am I going to use them? Let me give another example.

What about your intellect? You're all terribly clever people. Now, what are you going to do with your intellect and your mind? Well, you can use it for self and your career, or you can use it for God and His glory.

[30 : 19] So you can study away and get all the results and the degrees that you want to. You can have the career of your choice. You can get your good salary.

You can buy the house of your dreams, and you can live out the desires of your life for as long as you please. Or, you can study and get good results and get your degree in college.

You can choose a career, but a career that will best serve the kingdom of God. That may include a good salary. It may mean you're able to get a big house.

But what it will mean is that you are driven by the desires of Christ and not your own desires. We've got to make choices every single day.

Look at what it says in verse 13. Do not offer your body as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God.

[31 : 23] We've got choices every day. What will I listen to? Where am I going to go on my day off? What am I going to say to that person?

What am I going to do in my free time? We have been set free to serve a king who loves us, who died for us, who's defeated death for us, and has guaranteed heaven for us.

So we deal with sin by giving ourselves completely to God every moment of every day. Remember the story of Comrade Dutch?

Having experienced God's grace in his life, having owned up to his sin, he's now in prison for the crimes that he committed.

But in another sense, he is set free from the penalty and the power of sin. And because of the grace he has received, he is now using his life to serve his new master.

[32 : 37] Although the presence of sin is still there, and for a background like his, I'm sure the pictures are haunting. But now he offers his life not as an instrument of wickedness, but as an instrument of righteousness.

Eyes that once looked for people to kill, he now uses to look for people to share Christ. Where he is in the prison, he shares Christ with his other inmates and with the other guards.

Hands that once brought suffering and death, he now sits in his cell opening up his Bible and helping others to experience life.

A tongue that once spoke fear and hate, he now uses to teach of God's grace. You see, none of us will ever, ever speak about grace.

None of us will talk about Christ to others until we have first experienced grace for ourselves. The one barrier for us talking about Christ to others is our sin.

[33 : 57] We get so full of guilt, so much shame, we think, I can't tell anybody because I'm such a rotten person. But we must remember what Christ has done.

We go back to the fact that we remind ourselves that Christ has defeated the penalty. He has destroyed the power of sin.

So I am free. I now have a new way to live. I can speak of his grace. Not because I'm better than anybody else, but because God has forgiven me for all that I have done.

Now I'm sure our crimes are not as gross as Comrade Dutch, but we've all got our secret and hidden sins, and we can surrender them all to Christ.

Know his forgiveness. Know a brand new life. And by speaking of his grace to others, we do battle with the presence of sin every day.

[35 : 04] We are not under sin. Verse 14. Sin shall not be your master because you are not under law, but we are under grace.

Let's pray together. Our Father God, we thank you so much for your grace towards us, unearned and undeserved, that you would take people like Comrade Dutch, you would take people like me and you would forgive us as we repent and confess.

We pray that you will fill our lives with grace, that we may go on fighting sin, ever rejoicing that sin's penalty is paid, its power is destroyed, we no longer have to obey.

May each one of us here this morning experience that grace in all its fullness. And may we right now give ourselves to you in service, offering ourselves, our eyes, our ears, our minds, our intellect, take our hands and take our feet, that we may serve your purpose and be instruments of righteousness rather than that which is wrong.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.