

Liberated | Week 3

Romans 6:1–14

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Imagine living as a slave who had no choice but to obey his or her master. This master has complete control over you. With no inherent rights or freedoms, you would be considered property and used as the master saw fit, no different from an animal or a tool. If your master was cruel and abusive, there was no one to whom you could appeal. You would be trapped.

In Paul's day, people understood the dynamic of slavery. Scholars estimate that as many as 35% of the population of Rome were slaves. In this country, some of our brothers and sisters in Christ are only a few generations removed from the reality of slavery in their families. It seems incomprehensible to us now that slavery was ever an accepted practice. No human being should have complete control over another.

Yet there is a force in this world that has the power to enslave us all. We can't escape it on our own. In Romans, Paul discusses our relationship with sin and death as one of master and slave. Yet in Christ, we have been set free. We are liberated! For the next few weeks, Paul will teach us how to live into and out of this freedom, beginning with Romans 6:1–14.

Day 1

As Paul is explaining in Romans, by faith in Christ, humanity can move out from under the reign of sin and death and into the reign of grace and life. To first-century Roman ears, this language would have resonated deeply. The original hearers of this letter knew what it was to be under the lordship of a powerful force. Paul is promising a relief from oppression, not by liberating Christians from the dominion of Rome, but by dealing with a deeper enslavement. The escape from slavery to sin comes because believers are united with Christ.

As you read the passage for the week, notice how Paul speaks of dominion or rule, and describes our union with Christ.

Read the Word

Romans 6:1–14 (NIV)

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus

were baptized into his death? ⁴ 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.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

- Where do you see words or phrases that indicate rule or reign? What about words or phrases that speak of believers being “with,” “in,” or “united” with Christ?

Reflect

Paul insists that our freedom comes from an exchange in the dominion we are under. Because of our union with Christ, our allegiance shifts to his kingdom. This shift in loyalty is characterized by a change in our understanding of sin. We can stop living like it is our master, because it no longer is. As believers, we are not under its rule. If you struggle with sin habits and feel like you can't break free, this should give you hope. As we move through Romans 6 and 7 in the next few weeks, Paul will be showing us the liberating power of the Spirit through Christ. Pray that this freedom will be yours. Start today.

- Is there specific sin pattern that you long to be set free from? Invite the Spirit's guidance and empowerment in that area. Pray that he will use your study of Romans to transform your life. It will take time, but there is no moment like the present one to start.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Help me understand what it means for me to be dead to sin and alive to Christ because I want my life to be different. I know that you love me and that you desire the best for me. I am yielding myself to you, Spirit. Change my heart and my desires. Work in me through your Word this week.

Day 2

What would you say about the man who cheated on his wife, promised he would never do it again, received her forgiveness, but then began an affair with a co-worker? What about the adult daughter who stole retirement savings from her aging parents, begged for forgiveness, seemed grateful when she received it, but then stole from them again? You'd probably think that these people were awful.

Now, suppose that when these people got caught a second time, their response was something like, "well, it made you feel good to be so gracious, kind and forgiving, so I thought I would give you another chance to show what a good and loving person you are."

It's terrible to act as if you're sorry and regret your actions, only to take advantage of the person who offers you forgiveness. It's despicable to act as if your betrayal is somehow to their benefit.

Let's see what our verses for today have to say about this attitude.

Read the Word

Romans 6:1–5

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ 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.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

- Why do you think Paul asks the rhetorical question in verse 1? Based on what he says in verses 2–7, why is his answer "by no means!"?

Reflect

There are a couple of ways we can think about Paul's question in verse 1. On the one hand, it answers a criticism he had likely received from his fellow Jews. Recall that at the end of

chapter 5, Paul claims that the law increases sin and that grace also increases with sin (Romans 5:20). You can imagine Torah-observing Jews being incredulous and objecting. Wasn't it really Paul's "reign of grace" that would encourage more sin?

To put it in modern terms, without hard and fast rules, wouldn't people just go wild doing what they want and relying on God's grace to bail them out? Even today, it's true that there are people who act like it is God's job to forgive them, no matter what. They hear that "God is love" and think they can live completely independent of God, sin against him and others, and God's grace will just take care of it.

Paul's point is that anyone who acts this way hasn't really experienced the union with Christ that comes from genuine faith in him and allegiance to him. How could they? If a person has truly shifted their loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ, then how could they act as if they are still under the control of another master? According to Paul, believers are dead to sin, and "the one who becomes a believer breaks with sin as sharply as one who dies breaks with life."¹

Paul connects baptism to our union with Christ. Whether you think baptism is a symbolic representation of a spiritual reality, or that our participation in Christ's death is somehow mediated through baptism depends on how you understand the preposition "through" in "we were buried with him *through* baptism" (verse 4). Regardless, Paul is clear that somehow, we participate in Christ's burial and resurrection because we are "united with him" (verse 5). We abide in him and he in us.

As Jesus tells Nicodemus, to enter Christ's kingdom, a person must experience the new birth and be born of the Spirit (John 3). In our natural state, born in Adam, we are as unsuited to live in God's kingdom as a fish is to live on dry land. You can't teach a fish to walk and breathe air; it would have to be completely remade for a new environment. Likewise, we can't just be given new information about Jesus and then instructed to go and do better. We don't need a rule book; we need to be re-created. That kind of transformation only comes by the Spirit when we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. It begins the moment we trust in Christ and continues until the Spirit's work is finished. As believers, we become part of a new humanity.

As Paul proclaims, we are united with Christ by the Spirit, so a life independent of him and heedless of his will is simply not possible. We will still sin, and may even wander from him for a time, but with our spirit tethered to his, we will return and find life.

- In American Christianity, we sometimes encounter people who attended a church service, revival, or retreat and said the "sinner's prayer," but their attitude reflects Paul's question in Romans 6:1 — they seem to be hoping they can live as they want and God's grace will bail them out in the end. In your own words, how would you explain Paul's point in these verses to someone with that view?

¹ Thomas Hoyt, "Romans," *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 259.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, you are faithful and just in your forgiveness, and I don't ever want to take advantage of your grace. Spirit, I invite you to convict me of sin. Help me experience the new life I have in Christ so that I gratefully turn from whatever sins have me ensnared. I ask this because I love you and I trust in your great love for me.

Day 3

In the mid-nineteenth century, a Hungarian physician named Ignaz Semmelweis made a revolutionary discovery that saved many lives, at least for a time. He observed that the rate of “childbed fever” declined drastically when doctors washed their hands with a diluted chlorine solution before delivering newborns. Although he had no scientific explanation for why this worked, hand-washing made a clear difference. You would think that such a discovery would have been celebrated and immediately put into practice everywhere. It wasn't.

The medical community at the time rejected Semmelweis' theory because it conflicted with the established theory of disease. The doctor responsible for saving the lives of many children was discredited and mocked for his ideas. The idea that disease could be caused by tiny microbes, invisible to the naked eye, wouldn't be proven until after Semmelweis' death (from an infected wound, sadly). Even though germs were affecting the lives of every human being, it would be many years before anyone understood exactly what they were and how they impacted human health.

In Romans 5–8, Paul is explaining spiritual realities that we can't perceive with our physical senses, yet their effects are everywhere. We don't understand the mechanism by which we are affected by Adam's sin. We don't fully understand how sin is more than an individual action, but a power that rules over humanity. We can't explain precisely how we participate in Christ's death and resurrection. But we do experience the effects of each of these realities. What's more, Paul is giving us the good news that because we are united with Christ, our lives can be characterized by freedom and new life.

Read the Word

Romans 6:5–10

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

- In what ways are we united with Christ?
- According to verse 6, what is the effect of our being crucified with Christ?

Reflect

Paul uses the word *symphtoi*, translated here as “united,” to describe our relationship with Christ. According to Lancaster, this word is “taken from ordinary life and means grown together — the way a grafted plant of a healed broken bone grows together”² We are bonded to Christ so we can live a new life. We are no longer under the rule of sin but have been liberated from that enslavement.

Just as God rescued Israel from bondage to Pharaoh and led the people across the sea to safety, we have been brought through the waters of baptism and arrive on the other side as people free from slavery. But also like the Hebrews, we are not just saved from an old way of life, and then left to figure out what comes next. We are being led and sustained by God to a new life in Christ. We will not enter the promised land immediately. We will be required to continually rely on God’s grace and fight for the faith to obey him, even when we don’t understand his reasons. We may even romanticize our old life and want to go back to the sins that seemed to satisfy us, at least in the moment. But because we abide in Christ and he in us, we have every reason to press on. We have a vision for our future that cannot be matched by anything the world offers and all the strength we need for the journey.

Much of the Christian life can be summed up by the imperative to “be who you are.” We will have to continually remind ourselves of the spiritual realities that Paul points out Romans. We are under the lordship of Jesus and the reign of grace, dead to sin, and no longer under its dominion. We need let those spiritual realities shape our thoughts, emotions, and actions. By the Spirit’s power, we can become who God intends us to be.

- In what ways do you need to “be who you really are”? How would relying on the spiritual realities Paul describes here increase your faith and remind you that your allegiance is to Jesus alone?
- Consider what it would mean for our local body of Christ to collectively “be who we are.” What kind of effect could we have on our communities if we were to be a people characterized by life, love, and righteousness?

Pray

² Sarah Heaner Lancaster, *Romans*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 108

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, I want to be ever mindful of your grace. I abide in Christ, and he abides in me. I am bonded to your Son in a way that I can't fully comprehend. Jesus, you sacrificed your own life to make this so. Grow my faith, help me experience your love and strength. Let me be so aware of your presence that sin loses its enticement. I pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ, that together we would turn from sin and be a people who work for good in our communities.

Day 4

This week we're considering what it means that we are out from under the reign of sin. Because we are united with Christ in his death, all our old accounts are settled and severed. We have no obligation to our former master, but instead we live and serve our new king. Our loyalty is to him alone. Though we will still struggle against temptation, and sin will affect us as an individual and as a body of believers, we are dead to the old way of life. Together, we represent a new humanity whose head is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The only right response to this new dominion in which have been graciously given the opportunity to live is to turn from sin and live for God.

Read the Word

Romans 6:11–14

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

- Because of everything Paul has said in Romans 6:1–10, what should we NOT do according to verses 11–14?

Reflect

Imagine that you had an absolutely horrible boss. He's a bully who puts you down and degrades you in front of others. He takes credit for your work and never pays you for the overtime you put in. He's petty, mean, and spiteful. You dread work every day, and leave feeling depressed and depleted. This job is draining the life out of you, but because you need the money, you stay, all the while praying for a way out.

One day, someone offers you a new job. You start working there and things are infinitely better! You're treated with respect and kindness. You feel appreciated and are well paid. Your work has value. Now imagine that your old boss shows up at your new place of employment. He starts his old intimidation tactics and demands that you do precisely what he says. For a second, the old familiar fear and dread rises up in you. Your stomach ties itself in knots and you shrink down your chair. You're about to nod and say, "yes sir," but then you remember. You don't work for him anymore and don't have to do anything he says! You're not only free of him, but you have a wonderful new position working for kind and generous people doing a job that leaves you fulfilled.

You pick up the phone, call security, and have your old boss removed from the premises. You smile as they drag him away. He no longer has any power over you.

Sin is like that old boss — degrading, demanding, and destructive. When it shows up in our lives, we can react as if it still has power over us, and slip back into old, familiar patterns. We yield ourselves to its influence to be used and abused as if we have no choice but to be its slave.

Slaves were often seen as tools to be used by their masters as they saw fit. Paul warns us not to allow our bodies to be "instruments of wickedness," but instead offer ourselves to God for his righteous use. Why? Because he is our master, but unlike our old boss, his desire is to see us flourish in our new lives. Jesus will never burden us but will lift us up. In our new life, we can experience the satisfaction that comes from living according to his good design. "Living a life pleasing to God flows from the real experience of liberation from sin's domain secured by God for us in Christ"³

- So, when the "old boss" shows up, how are you going to respond? Are you going to let the Spirit escort him off the premises, or are you going to do what he says?

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Lord, I don't want sin to reign in me. I don't want to be its instrument. Empower me to turn from sin and to you. Show me what you have for me that will be life-giving and fulfilling in a way that my sin never could be. Grant me a taste for righteousness, holiness, and love so that I might worship you more fully and bless others more abundantly.

³ Douglas J. Moo, [*The Epistle to the Romans*](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 359.

Day 5

It's Friday! Spend some time reflecting on what you've learned, connect it with your life, spend extended time in prayer, and consider your next steps in following Christ.

Reflect on what you've learned

Read through Romans 6:1–14 again. How would you summarize Paul's main points in these verses?

Make Connections

As Christians we sometimes struggle to live as if the spiritual realities that will be revealed in the age to come are true now. Because we live in the “already...but not yet” we can too easily succumb to the tension between the two. Although we are no longer slaves to sin, we can put the chains back around our necks and obey our old master. Paul insists that we don't have to.

In Colossians 3:1–4, Paul writes, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Stephen, the first recorded Christian martyr, was being stoned for proclaiming Christ, had his heart set on the things above. Acts tells us, “But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God’” (Acts 7:55–56). He is an eyewitness to the very reality that Paul proclaims.

We can also be full of the Holy Spirit. And while we may not get a glimpse of heaven in the same way that Stephen did, the Spirit will give us the faith to know that it is there. So, let's set our minds on things above and throw off the chains of our old master.

Pray

I pray that you've been allowing the Spirit to guide you this week as you consider what old, sin habit you need to turn from. Pray over whatever he has brought to mind. Consider what it would mean for you to turn from that habit and to whatever God has for you that is life-giving in a way that sin never could be. Remember that you are under the reign of grace. Rely on the Spirit's presence and power. He will walk with you every step of the way.

What's Your Next Step?

If the Spirit is guiding you to turn from a habitual sin, pray over the practicalities. What changes will you need to make in your environment? How will you make times of prayer a

priority? Most of the time we can't make these kinds of changes alone. We need the family of God to help us. Be honest with your small group and ask them to support you. Who can you enlist as a prayer partner who you can call or text with a prayer request? Who do you trust to lovingly hold you accountable?