

## The Gospel Story: Freed from Sin

*A Study of Romans*

**Romans 6:1-11**

Pastor Bryan Clark

On September 22, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring all slaves to be free. Booker T. Washington, in his autobiography, talks about that day—talks about how that day started with joy and celebration, as something these slaves had only dreamed about had finally become a reality. But he also talks about, before the sun set that very first day, the joy and the celebration had given way to the sobering reality that none of them knew how to live free. All they had ever known was slavery. And now, suddenly faced with their freedom, they simply did not know what to do, which is why many of the first generation would choose willingly to go back to their master. Not now because they *had* to, because they simply knew no other way to live. I find myself wondering: how many Christians could be described in the same way? Having been set free, we are free to live. But not knowing how to live in that freedom, we go back to what we know best; we go back to the bondage of sin. When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he said, “It is for freedom that Christ has set you free.” That’s what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Romans, Chapter 6.

In Romans, Chapter 5, Paul taught us that every single person somehow, some way, sinned in Adam. We all, by virtue of the fact that we are human beings, are in Adam, where the reigning principle is sin and death. That’s what defines our story. But as a result of God’s gift of salvation to those who receive freely His gift, He offers the chance to convert from being *in Adam* to being *in Christ*—to be radically, fully and totally changed, to be justified in the presence of God where the reigning principle is no longer sin and death; the reigning principle is grace and life—total, full, fundamental, radical change. He even goes so far as to say that even when sin abounded, the grace of God abounded even more, so that every person would be freely offered this gift of new life. But that raises an objection from Paul’s critics: If that’s true, then maybe we should just sin more in order that grace may abound more. And that’s where we pick up chapter 6:

**What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?**

(\*NASB, Romans 6:1)

Now again, Paul’s using a familiar technique; we’ve seen it several times in Romans. It’s called a *diatribe*. He imagines an objector, a critic, and then he imagines what that objector would say, and then he’s going to respond to it. This must have been a criticism that Paul heard often because it shows up several times in the book of Romans—that somehow, some way, grace is a license to sin. The question is: Is that true? Now this is not just a criticism in the first century. It continues to be a criticism today. As a matter of fact, one of the criticisms that other churches have leveled toward Lincoln Berean is: we talk too much about grace. As a matter of fact, that’s been a criticism of my preaching personally—just talks too much about grace and grace becomes a license to sin. But here’s the question: Is that true?

The idea that, under the umbrella of grace, we can live as we please and grace just covers all that was called *antinomianism*, just a fancy Greek word that means against morality. And that’s what Paul was being accused of—that His preaching of grace alone became a license for sin. I think of two questions: Is that true? And the second is: What does it say about the belief system of those

who made such criticisms? Let's take the second question first. First of all, I would say no works-based righteousness preacher has ever been accused of antinomianism. No legalist has ever been accused of antinomianism. In other words, nobody says of those people, "You are preaching too much about grace." So, if the accusation is going to be made, it must be that it's because we are saying, "It's grace alone". And I find great comfort in the fact that Paul was so criticized. It must mean we are rightly reflecting the message of Paul if we are experiencing the same criticism. I think when people make that charge, they are actually exposing their true belief system. They may say, give lip service to salvation by grace through faith. It's grace alone; it's faith alone. But deep down, they don't really believe that. They believe that too much grace becomes a license to sin. So you've got to mix with grace some work, some religion, some rules, some regulations, or people are going to be out of control. At the end of the day, they do not believe that grace is enough.

But what about that first question: Is it true that too much emphasis on grace turns into a license to sin? The response of the Apostle Paul is: "Absolutely not! If you make that charge, you don't understand the most fundamental thing about grace." **What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?** His response:

**May it never be!** (That's very strong. Absolutely not! Why does he say that?)  
**How shall we who died to sin still live in it?** (Vs. 2)

Now that's a really important phrase. As a matter of fact, I would go so far as to say that understanding what he just said is the key to the discipleship process. It is the key to your sanctification. It is the key to your growth as a Christian. First, notice the "**we**". The "**we**" in the Greek language is emphatic; what that means is it has a high level of emphasis. Paul is going back to Chapter 5 and saying that one time we were *in Adam* where the reigning principle was sin and death. But the moment we trusted Christ as Savior, we are *in Christ*. That's complete and radical change. The "**we**" he's saying is we who are now in Christ. We died to sin. Now the grammar here is really important. He does not say: we should die. He doesn't say: we should try to die. He doesn't say: we should die daily. It's a past-tense aorist verb which means: at a moment in time in the past, we died. Whether you understood this or not, the moment you trusted Christ as Savior, you died to sin. So what does that mean? I think the easiest way to understand it is to look how the exact same phrase is used as it describes Jesus in verse 10. In verse 10 it says:

**For the death that He (*Jesus*) died, He died to sin, once for all.** (Vs. 10a)

It's exactly the same phrase. We are used to the phrase Jesus died *for* sin; we are not used to the phrase Jesus died *to* sin. What does he mean by that? I think the rest of the phrase gives us an important clue: **He died to sin, once for all.** It means that in all of human history, there will only be one time in history where God will become flesh and God will willingly subject Himself to death on a cross, whereby He takes the transgressions of the world upon Himself to pay for them fully and completely—**once and for all.** When Jesus hung on the cross, at the end of that payment, He Himself said, "It is finished."—done, over, once for all time. Sin died that day in terms of its power, in terms of its mastery, in terms of its reigning principle in the life of those who receive God's gift of salvation. There will never be another moment in time where Jesus will have to die again to sin. It would be right to say, "On that day sin died when Jesus died, **once for all.**" What he's saying then, in verse 3, is the moment you trusted Jesus as Savior—in entering into Jesus' death on the cross—you too died that death to sin. Sin is no longer your master. Sin is no longer the reigning principle. Sin no longer has dominion over you. You died in Christ's death; that no longer defines you. That's no longer your identity. That's no longer who you are. You have gone from a

reigning principle of sin and death to a reigning principle of grace and life. Paul's argument then is: if the believer died to sin, how could you make the argument that makes that person more sinful? It's absurd. For the first time in our lives, we are released from the bondage of sin and we live in the freedom of Christ.

He's now going to try to illustrate what he's talking about through a couple of different pictures. The first is the picture of baptism:

**Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.** (Vs. 3-4)

Now there's a lot of discussion around these two verses in terms of: what do they actually mean as it relates to baptism? Now first of all, it's important to understand this text is not about baptism. It's about: dead to sin and alive to Christ. There are only two verses that refer to baptism and it's merely an illustration of the point he's trying to make. There would be those who would say, "This is referring to baptism in the Spirit, such as Paul talks about it in 1 Corinthians Chapter 12." Most people that make that case do so because they're afraid of identifying water baptism as a means of salvation—a doctrine known as baptismal regeneration. But I don't think that's a legitimate concern. There is absolutely no way you can make that argument. There are a couple of reasons why I say that. Number one: Paul has been so clear. It's not by works...it's not by works; it's by faith; it's a gift; it's a free gift; it's *no* works. Some people would say, "But baptism isn't a work." Of course it's a work. Any kind of a ritual is a work. And Paul has been very clear: that's not a means of salvation. But even more compelling is the reality that in the logic of Paul's argument in Romans, Chapters 3 and 4, was the discussion of how someone *is* justified; how someone *is* saved. In Chapter 5 he starts with the discussion: **Having being justified...** In other words, now how do you live in the salvation that was discussed in Chapters 3 and 4? It isn't until Chapter 6 that he introduces the concept of baptism. There's just no way you can make the argument that that's necessary for salvation when it's discussed in this section of Romans. So I don't think that's even a legitimate concern.

It's also helpful to understand, while every time we hear the word baptism, we immediately think of church ritual, some sort of sacrament or ordinance. But that's not how the first century reader would've understood this. The word baptism was a more generic term. It was basically the idea of something being immersed, and immersed to the degree that there's some sort of radical change. It was fairly dramatic. For example, this word was used to describe a ship sinking. There's a complete change in status. It was floating; now it's sinking. It's immersed in the water and the change is dramatic. It was used to describe someone drowning. Someone was swimming; now they are drowning. They are immersed in water. The change is dramatic. Josephus uses this word—he was a first century historian—to describe this mob of people, this riotous mob of people coming into Jerusalem, zealots, in order to start a riot. And he says, "The city was baptized." It was immersed with these zealots seeking to bring about dramatic change to the city. So when Jesus stands before people and says, "Believe and be baptized," He's not first saying, "Run down to the river and do a ritual." He's saying, "Be radically changed by being immersed in me. Go from the defining principle *being in Adam* to the defining principle *being in Christ*." Water baptism is simply an illustration of the greater principle of this word: of being immersed and having it bring about radical change. So what does he say? He's saying when you were baptized or when you watch baptism, what is the picture? **Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized**

**into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?** In other words, when someone's being baptized, what is the picture if it isn't the picture of death? When that person is being lowered into the water, what is being pictured is: that person is dead, or identifying with the death of Christ. **Baptized into His death, therefore, we have been buried with Him.**

In 1 Corinthians 15, when Paul is writing a summary of the gospel, he talks about Jesus being crucified, being buried, and then being resurrected from the dead. And sometimes people ask the question, "Why the emphasis on the burial?" The answer is: because burial is completion; it's closure. It wasn't that Jesus died on the cross and then revived. No one could make that charge. Jesus died on the cross. He was buried. How dead was He? He was so dead they buried Him, which gives credibility to the resurrection. It's exactly the same idea here. When you trusted Christ as Savior, that *me* that was in Adam, that *me* where the reigning principle was sin and death, that *me* that was struggling with addiction and sin and in slavery to who I was in Adam, that *me* died. How dead is he? He's so dead we buried him. The old boy's gone; he's buried; he's not coming back.

Sometimes, when I get in discussions with some of my peers who hold to a position that you can lose your salvation, the discussion usually comes back to *free will*. And they usually say something like this, "I'm all about free will and, if somebody somewhere along the way chooses to reject Christ, they can still choose to do that, choose to do that and go back." In my opinion, the only way you can maintain that view is if you believe salvation is nothing more than a ticket to heaven. And somewhere along the way you can say, "I decided I don't want my tickets. I'm going to give them back." But that's not what the Bible teaches about conversion. It's radical. It's transformation. It's complete. And what the text is saying: the old *me* that was in Adam died the moment I trusted in Christ as Savior. How dead is he? He's so dead we buried him. There is no way I can go back; back doesn't exist. There is no back. The only option is forward. Back is gone. He's dead. Why? **... so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.**

Why is *me in Adam* dead and buried? In order that I might enter into the resurrection of Christ and be raised to new life—new life that is now in Christ, new life where the reigning principle is grace and life. The old boy's dead in order that I might live new life as God intended for me. Verse 5:

**For if we have become united...**

This is the second metaphor. It's a word that means to be grafted in.

**...if we have been united (or grafted in) with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this... (Vs. 5-6a)**

Now this is the key to this passage. This is something we need to **know**. He said in verse 3, **do you not know...** He's saying here, **knowing this...** The temptation is to think we have to fix our lives. We have to deal with this problem, and this problem, and this habit, and this addiction. We've got to fix this and that, and we are trying to manage our behaviors. I'm telling you: that will never work. Ultimately you have to **know** and understand and believe what's true. You believe it to the point that you actually live like it. So what do we need to know?

**Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, (Vs. 6a)**

Literally our old anthropoids—our old man—was crucified. He's just going back to the same thing again. The old *me in Adam* is dead. How dead is he? We buried him. How did he die? He was crucified. We enter into the crucifixion and the burial of Christ.

**...knowing this, that our old self (*who I was in Adam*) was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with,** (Vs. 6a, b)

What does he mean by **body of sin**? It does not mean *sinful body*. That's bad theology. What he does mean is this metaphor of *me*, every sin I've ever committed somehow goes through this body. This is just the *me in Adam*. That body—he's just keeping with the metaphor—was dead, was crucified with Christ, *is* buried. He's gone, forever gone. He was done away with. Why?

**... so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for He who has died is freed from sin.**  
(Vs. 6c-7)

We were crucified with Christ, the *me* that was *in Adam*, he's dead; he's gone. How dead? We buried the old boy. And he's never coming back in order that I might be raised in newness of life. I am no longer a slave to sin. I no longer am identified by my habits and my addictions and my behaviors and my junk that was mine *in Adam*. That's not me anymore. That *me* is gone, dead, buried, never coming back in order that I might be raised to newness of life. I have been set free!

Again, it's really important to understand the grammar of the text. He is not saying: you should die. He's not saying: you might die. He is saying: the moment you trusted Christ as Savior, you died. You that were *in Adam*, you died and with that was the death of sin and death as the reigning principle of your life. You were no longer a slave to sin. It is no longer your master. It no longer has control of you. You don't have to live that way. The change is fundamental. It's complete and it's radical. And what he says is: you need to know this. You need to know it; you need to believe it, believe it so much that you choose to live like it. So verse 8, let's sum it all up:

**Now if we have died with Christ (*and it's in a tense that means that we know that we have*), we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing (*there's our word again, something we need to know*) that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.** (Vs. 8-10)

What is the possibility that the *me* that was *in Adam*, that dominated my life before, could come back from the dead? It's the same chance of Jesus coming back and dying for sin again. No chance! He died for sin, once for all. It's theologically correct to say that as a result of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, both death and sin died that day, died in terms of their power, died as master, died as a reigning principle in the lives of those who enter in to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Verse 11:

**Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

The word **consider** we've seen several times. It's a bookkeeping term. It means to credit, look at the ledger. God has credited in the ledger that you have died to sin. Whether you knew that, whether you understood it or not, doesn't change it. This is not something you have to go out and

do. It's done. Look at the ledger. You died to sin in order that you might live in newness of life in Christ. That's what God's ledger book says.

It would be interesting at this point in Romans to ask ourselves a question: We are six and a half chapters into Romans. How many imperatives, how many commands has Paul given us so far in the book of Romans? Answer: One! Romans 6, verse 11 is the first command in the book of Romans. And the command is: Believe this! Consider it! Look at the ledger and believe that God tells the truth. The old boy's dead. That's not you; that's not your identity; that's not who you are; that's not what defines you. That old boy is dead. How dead? He's so dead we buried him. And he's never coming back. And I say, "Good riddance. He was nothing but trouble." What has been raised is a new life. With a reigning principle of grace and life, I've been set free. Sin is not my master. It does not control me. It does not dominate me. I am free in Christ. And the first command in Romans is: just believe this!

There are some of you here this morning, because you're struggling, because you're seeking, you've got habits; you've got addictions; you've got junk in your life and you can't seem to get over it. You can't deal with it; it just stays with you. You've tried everything. There are things you do in private. There are things you do in the dark. There are things you do behind closed doors that you are ashamed of, that nobody knows. You don't want to be that way but you can't seem to get past it. And you are wondering, "Is there hope? Is there some way to fix that? Is there some way to do a remodel? How do I find freedom?" As long as you are trying to fix and manage those behaviors, you stand no chance. Your only hope is to go from being *in Adam* to *in Christ*, is to go from the core, fundamental reigning principle in your life to be sin and death, to a reigning principle of grace and life. And God offers you that freely as a gift of His grace. You simply receive it by faith. It's your only way to freedom.

Some of you, over the last couple of months, would say, "For the first time in my life, I get this. I get what Jesus did for me. I get justification. I get that I've been set free. And I believe. I'm in!" A great next step for you would be the step of baptism. Just like the text talks about, it would seal in your mind the truth of what we've talked about today. The *old me in Adam* is dead. Let's bury the old boy. Raised up to newness of life, I am free. If you don't understand what baptism is, or you'd just like to talk about it some more, we are offering a class next Saturday morning from nine to noon. If that doesn't work for your schedule, just contact one of us; we'd be happy to sit down with you. If you say, "Okay, I already get it. I'm in! When is the next one?" We are hoping for some time in February. Those of you that have trusted Christ as Savior and never taken that step need to take that step of obedience. All you have to do is call the office, say, "I want to be baptized." They'll take your information. If we have enough people and I think we will, we'll look at probably February-ish to have a baptism service to celebrate the truth that we've studied this morning.

Thirdly, for all of us who have trusted Christ as Savior, for all of us who are *in Christ*, again it's very important to understand this is not something you need to go out and do. This is something that's done. It happened the moment you trusted Christ as Savior. You have to know this. You have to understand this, and you have to have the courage to believe this. As long as you are trying to change your life by managing your behaviors and fixing yourself and fixing others and trying to get rid of these habits, you are never going to win that battle. And even if you can go several days in a row without your bad habit, you still don't feel freedom. It's bondage. It's a struggle every single day. You do not have to live that way.

But there is an enemy out there who is a liar. And he lies to you and he says, “You are never going to be anything but your past. You are always going to be that guy that messed up, that failed, made a mess of life, has this addiction, has this struggle, has these bad habits. That’s you. It’ll always be you. You might as well just accept that.” Friends, I’m telling you: That is a lie! And I ask you this question, “Who do you think is telling the truth—the God who loves you or the enemy that wants to see the destruction of your soul?”

Think of it this way: Imagine you are five or six years old. In your backyard, it opens up into a beautiful park. It’s very safe, very secure, full of all kinds of fun things to do. And your mom says to you, “Honey, any day you can go out there and play all you want in the park.” But day after day after day you stay in the house, bored to tears, and your mom can’t figure out: why don’t you go out and play? What your mom doesn’t know is that I’m your creepy neighbor and I got to you because I told you in that park is a man-eating lion. And if you set one foot into that park, that lion will eat you and it’ll eat your mom and it’ll eat your dad. Is that lie true? No! But if you believe it, I can totally control your life. I can make you a slave to my lie. It’s only when mom finally figures out that the creepy neighbor down the street lied to you and asks the question, “Honey, who are you going to believe? Your mom who loves you and would die for you or the creepy neighbor down the street that wants to see you destroyed?” It’s only in that moment where that child says, “I’m going to believe my mom tells the truth,” and enters into the freedom that has always been available.

So let me ask you the question one more time: Look at the ledger. Who do you think tells the truth? The God who so loved you that, even when you were an enemy, he died to make you His friend forever or the enemy who is a liar and wants the destruction of your soul? Which one do you think is telling the truth?

“It was for freedom—it was for freedom that Christ has set you free!”

*Father, we’re thankful that this is true. The enemy’s a liar and he tries to get us enslaved to what we were when we were in Adam, before Jesus. Lord, help us to have the courage to believe that You tell the truth, that from the moment we trusted Christ as our Savior, we died to sin as a master. Lord, we don’t have to live that way. Our new reigning principle is grace and life. Lord, help us to live in the freedom, the freedom that You freely offer, that we might find the fullness of this new life in Christ. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

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# **The Gospel Story: Freed From Sin**

*A Study of Romans*

**Romans 6:1-11**

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## **Opening Discussion**

1. Is there a difference between being set free and living free? Explain.
2. Do you think talking too much about grace will cause people to sin more? Why or why not? What would be the alternative?
3. The key to the Christian life could be summarized around understanding, believing and applying the truth. The order is important. People won't apply what they don't believe and can't believe what they don't understand. Where do you think most Christians focus their attention and where do you think the real breakdown is?

## **Bible Study**

1. Read Romans 6:1-7. What objection is Paul anticipating as a result of what he said in Romans 5:20? What do people reveal about their own theology when they claim that too much grace will lead to more sin? Are people who teach a works righteousness ever accused of promoting more sin? What do we learn from this?
2. The emphatic "we" in 6:2 is referring back to Romans 5:12-21. Who are the "we" and what does it mean to "die to sin"? How does the parallel statement in 6:10 help us understand what it means to "die to sin once for all"?
3. Paul uses baptism to illustrate the point he's trying to make. The term itself refers to someone immersed into something bringing about a dramatic change. In the first century it was used to describe a sinking ship or someone drowning. How does water baptism illustrate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus? What is the point Paul is trying to illustrate? How is this illustration consistent with what we learned in 5:12-21?
4. What does Paul mean that our old self (man) was crucified with Him? Notice the past tense language. This is not something we need to do. It's something that's already done for those who are "in Christ."

5. What do we need to “know” in 6:6-7? We know in order that we might what? In order that we might what? Is this something we should be or we already are?
6. Read Romans 6:8-11. What do we need to “know” in this text? Is it possible according to this text to go back to who we were before salvation? What’s the only option?
7. Romans 6:11 records the first command of the book of Romans. What is it and what does it mean? Is this something we need to go out and do or something we need to first believe?

### **Application**

1. Do you think most Christians spend more time trying to “fix” bad behavior or trying to learn more of God’s truth? In other words, do the books stores have more books on what to do or on what to believe (theology)? Why? According to Romans do we need to do more or know more?
2. What are you currently doing to learn and understand more of God’s truth? Are there some options available that might help you know more so you can live better?
3. On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being totally free, does your life reflect someone who is freed from sin or still in bondage to sin? What can you do to be living more in the freedom that is yours in Christ?