

“Is Grace Lawless or Does Grace Reign?”  
Romans 6-8  
“*Citizens of Another Country*”  
Part II

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©  
Title: “Is grace lawless or does grace reign?”  
Text: Romans 6:15-7:6  
Theme: Liberty *from* sin is not a license *to* sin.

Introduction:

What is the tone of our entire study? Listen carefully to its glorious theme as captured by Moule:

“Sin shall be no more your tyrant-creditor, holding up the broken law in evidence that is has right to lead you off to a pestilential prison, and to death. **Your dying Savior has met your creditor in full for you**, and in Him you have entire discharge in that eternal court where the terrible plea once stood against you. Your dealings as debtors are now not with the enemy who cried for your death, but with the Friend who has bought you out of his power.” (H.C.G. Moule, The Epistle to the Romans, 171).

Its eternal view:

It is only when we die to self believing the work is done, that we have rest. Unless it is finished, we live a fevered existence.

I would like to begin with a poem whose author and title is lost, but whose theme and subject matter is true.

“Weary, working, plodding one,  
Wherefore toil you so?  
Cease your doing, all was done  
Long, long ago.

“Till to Jesus’ work you cling  
By a simple faith,  
Doing is a deadly thing,  
Doing ends in death.

“Nothing either great or small,  
Nothing, sinner, No,  
Jesus did it, did it all,  
Long, long ago.

“Cast your deadly ‘doing’ down,  
Down at Jesus’ feet;  
Stand in HIM, in HIM ALONE,  
Gloriously complete.”

The present danger:

As preachers and congregants we are confused by grace. We find it indispensable for our salvation from sin's penalty, but find it woefully inadequate in our salvation from sin's power. Yet the grace that saves also sanctifies. **We fear because grace appears powerless in our fight against sin.** We somehow believe grace is inadequate thus we attach to it law and in so doing render grace powerless. It is this charge that the apostle tackles head on.

What is the law in our text?

"The law assumed to be known is surely the written law of the Old Testament particularly the Mosaic law." (John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 240).

I would like to make a simple comment on antinomianism. Antinomianism means "against law." In theology there is a discussion as to whether or not Christians are under the law. The law being referred to is Mosaic Law, the law that governed the nation of Israel. Included in this law are the 10 commandments. Paul's emphatic response is no. New Testament believers are not under the Mosaic code. This, however, does not make the believer lawless. Although we are not under the law of sin and death, we are under the law of grace and life.

This same idea existed in the days of the Reformer Martin Luther. Listen to the dialogue between himself and Philip Melanchthon:

"In a letter to his friend Philip Melanchthon, on August 1, 1521, Martin Luther wrote, 'Be a sinner and sin boldly...' The short phrase, 'Sin Boldly,' is one of the more widely known sayings Luther ever uttered.

Of course, as with so many misquoted ideas, Luther's intent is not conveyed at all in the quote. The full quote from Luther to Melanchthon reads: **'Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly... Pray boldly - for you too are a mighty sinner.'** The idea was that God's grace is so powerful, it finally defeats sin altogether. We do not become paralyzed by the fact that we are still vulnerable to sin, but instead rejoice in God's power to overcome sin.

**Luther's quote was a result of the joy and spiritual liberation that came to him via the grace of God.** Having struggled with a profound sense of sinful unworthiness for years, Luther finally understood that we are saved by grace alone and nothing we can produce on our own. Luther's opponents said that his doctrine of salvation by grace alone apart from our own righteous deeds was a "license to sin." [http://www.lectionarysermons.com/june\\_30\\_02.htm](http://www.lectionarysermons.com/june_30_02.htm) June 30, 2002 Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
LECTIONARY READINGS from the Revised Common Lectionary "Sin Boldly!" Romans 6: 12-23

Let us examine this holy subject and see the glory of Christ for Christ is Grace.

ILLUSTRATION:

A friend of mine who equally pursues Christ exhorted me to say every Sunday, **"Christ is Grace."** I assured him that I do, but then he asked the question, "Do you think they understand this?" I cannot affect understanding, but I can tell you that "Christ is Grace."

### Why am I teaching this?

Charles Spurgeon, a Baptist Pastor of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, made the following comments when addressing the great theme of Romans 6:14, 15:

“If you take away the grace of God from the gospel **you have extracted from it its very life-blood**, and there is nothing left worth preaching, worth believing, or worth contending for. Grace is the soul of the gospel: without it the gospel is dead. Grace is the music of the gospel: without it the gospel is silent as to all comfort.” The Doctrines of Grace Do Not Lead to Sin A Sermon (No. 1735) Delivered on Lord's Day Morning, August 19th, 1883, by C. H. SPURGEON, At Exeter-Hall. (<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1735.htm>)

The question challenges the power of the cross to produce holiness in the justified. Paul seeks to end this discussion with dramatic thrusts. Both the first and second paragraphs of this chapter deal with the same issue, “Should the believer continue to sin?”

**Question 2**    What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? **May it never be!**” (6:15-7:6).

Question 2 is in response to the inquiry, “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?”    What follows is Paul’s response to living under grace and not under law. His lead question assumes that they should know. It is the same pattern he used earlier.

**The language used by the apostle is that of government, of administration, of regime.** He uses the Greek verb for “rule or reign” four times (Rom. 5:14, 17, 21; 6:12 [the noun is not used]).

“Nevertheless **death reigned** from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come” (Rom. 5:14).

“For if by the transgression of the one, **death reigned** through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will **reign** in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17).

“so that, as **sin reigned in death**, even so **grace would reign through righteousness** to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:21).

“Therefore **do not let sin reign** in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts” (Rom. 6:12).

**Paul’s thoughts address a citizen within a kingdom under a definable ruler.** As a citizen you will submit before your ruler, master, authority (v. 16). If you are a citizen of a kingdom marked by sin, you will die. If you are a citizen of a kingdom marked by righteousness, you will live.

## ILLUSTRATION:

As a citizen of the USA, I am not under obligation to keep the laws of a foreign country. If, however, I visit another country then I am obligated to obey its laws. I am not a citizen of that country, but as long as I am visiting inside the country I am obligated to keep its laws.

Notice the language of verse 17. There is a “form of teaching” to which we became obedient (Aorist Active Indicative) and to which we were committed (Aorist Passive Indicative). The word “form” is our English word “type.”

“The word ‘form’ suggests a mold into which molten metal is poured so as to take its destined shape. The believer is the molten metal, the doctrine or teaching of the gospel is the mold.” (John Philips, Exploring Romans, 109).

**“It is to be *delivered into it*, as into a mould, as the wax is cast into the impression of the seal, answering it line for line, stroke for stroke, and wholly representing the shape and figure of it.”** (Matthew Henry’s Commentary)

The word committed means “to hand over, to betray.” The statement, “To which you were committed,” means “they were handed over to the teaching.” It was not an active choice on their part. They were handed over to the teaching.

There is a body of information that creates the mold into which we are placed and through which we are shaped. I would suggest that this form is what we are finding in the letter to the Romans. The cross-work of Jesus Christ molds us into its image. From the cross emanates justification, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, adoption, and union with Christ. This is the mold that shapes us. Thus our lives are to look like the justified, redeemed, reconciled, propitiated, adopted, and united.

## ILLUSTRATION:

It is like being delivered over to an authority. There is an exchange taking place and you are the object being exchanged and you are being delivered over to someone or something else.

**In salvation, there is a transfer.** You are handed over from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. You are moved from the reign of sin and death to that of grace and life. This is the divine transfer.

“They had now been ‘handed over,’ by their Lord’s transaction about them, to another ownership, and they had accepted the transfer, ‘from the heart.’ It was done by Another for them . . .” (H.C.G. Moule, The Epistle to the Romans, 173).

The word obedient means “to listen.” “You [wholeheartedly] obeyed” - Aorist pointing to a **decisive act of believing the gospel**, turning to Christ = “the obedience of faith.”  
<http://www.lectionarystudies.com/sunday13aae.html>

There are four movements that answer the question, “Is grace lawless or does grace reign?” The first movement is the presenting of the question.

I. The question presented, “Is grace lawless or does grace reign?” (vv. 15-16)

Is living under grace living without law? Is grace lawless or does grace reign? Again, Paul addresses the underlying issue of ignorance as it relates to our union with Christ.

**“Do you not know** that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16).

The issue is one of presenting the members of your body as an instrument of expression to either sin or righteousness.

“The principle established by the question is that we are the bondslaves of that to which we present ourselves for obedience.” (John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 231).

This brings us to our second movement within the paragraph.

II. The question answered, “Is grace lawless or does grace reign?” (vv. 17-20)

Those who are under grace and in union with Christ are slaves to righteousness resulting in their sanctification. Those who are under law and in union with sin are slaves to sin resulting in their damnation.

The present danger:

There is a tendency for us to soften the text by creating two kinds of disciples. The first is one who has been freed from sin and the other is still living in bondage to it. Paul does not afford us the luxury of such lax thinking. Those who are in bondage to sin are among the damned and those who are freed from sin are the disciples. All disciples are freed from sin. Only the unbelieving are in bondage to sin. If you are a disciple and find yourself submitting to sin, do not be deceived into thinking you are its slave. It wants you to believe you are and by so doing keep you under its mastery, but this is a lie of the devil.

Because you are no longer under law and are freed from sin (v. 18), you have become obedient to righteousness and not to sin (v. 17). As a citizen of grace your obedience in righteousness results in your ongoing expression of holiness (v. 19). You are either a citizen of law or of grace, but not both (vv. 20-22). **Neutrality is impossible.**

Notice the grammatical structure of his statement “just as, so now.” Paul makes a strong appeal to your will, your power of choice.

- Do not go on presenting (Present Active Imperative) the members of your body (v. 13)
- Present (Aorist Active Imperative) your members as instruments of righteousness to God (v. 13)

- When you present (Present Active Indicative) yourselves (v. 16)
- Just as you presented (Aorist Active Indicative) your members (v. 19)
- So now present (Aorist Active Indicative) your members (v. 19)

This choice, however, is based on what you know to be true. You are dead to sin and freed from it. Sin is no longer your master, so do not present yourself to it as you would if you were a citizen of another country. **Your power to choose the good is directly affected by your knowledge of your union with Christ. But let us not think the choices for sin or grace are equal choices.** The two choices have significantly different weight. Because you are dead to sin, its siren voice to temporal pleasure has been broken. The power of the good is considerably weightier than the power of sin. When sin is placed on the scale competing against the satisfaction of God's glorious being, its true self is exposed for what it is. Listen carefully to the words of Matthew Henry concerning our struggle against sin as presented in Romans 6:14.

**“God's promises to us are more powerful and effectual for the mortifying of sin than our promises to God.** Sin may struggle in a believer, and may create him a great deal of trouble, but it shall not have dominion; it may vex him, but shall not rule over him.”

**Let us always and forever thank God that our victory over sin is NOT contingent on our strength of will, but in the power of God.** When you were slaves to sin you obeyed sin, but now having died to sin you are freed from sin and thus slaves to righteousness that is resulting in your sanctification.

Those who are sanctified are . . .

- No longer slaves of sin (vv. 17, 20 [Aorist Passive Participle])
- Freed from sin (vv. 18, 22 [Aorist Passive Participle])

Earlier we asked the question, “Is grace lawless or does grace reign?” Notice how Paul answers the question in verse 19.

“I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification” (Rom. 6:19).

Paul uses a common picture of a slave to a master.

“The institution of slavery, well known to his readers, is the medium through which he expresses the truth. The dullness of our understanding makes it necessary that we be taught the truth in figures drawn from the sphere of our human relations.” (John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 233).

Notice the contrast. Those who are slaves to sin are lawless and their involvement results in more lawlessness. In contrast to this are those who are under grace. Those who are slaves to righteousness are lawful and their involvement results in

sanctification. Living under grace is not lawless living. We are freed from law only to be captured by the law of grace. This law is called a reign in 5:21.

**You are either a slave to sin or to God, but a slave you are. Your servitude is not the issue, to whom it is directed is the issue.** Listen carefully to my words, sin is a horrible master. It cares nothing for you and when it has finished its course with you, it will discard you.

- Sin will always keep you longer than you want to stay,
- cost you more than you want to pay, and
- take you farther than you want to go.

Remember this, the death Christ died freed you from the sin you are currently choosing. The sins you commit are the sins He died for. We have a skewed perspective as to what happens when we are saved. When asked the question, “What does slavery to God look like?” We respond by talking about what we can no longer do. Such thinking is fallacious.

The only thing I gave up when I was saved was being . . .

- Hated by sin
- Rejected by sin
- Guilty because of sin
- And in bondage to sin

As a Christian you are a slave to God. This slavery is a joy to behold. He is a kind and gentle master. His concern is for His glory and you are the benefactor of this holy pursuit. This master loves you and gives to you everything you need for this life and for the life to come. The differences between the two masters could not be more dramatic.

What kindness can we ascribed to our Master and Lord? **How can we go about unfolding the strength of His reign over us and the love exuded from the extension of His gracious touch?** His people are enslaved to Him. We are His slaves. Such imagery is heady because of historical precedence. We do not see slavery as a good thing. Wars are fought over issues of slavery and conquered nations sit in servitude before their conquering adversaries. Misery and injustice are painted on the walls of antiquity that cry out against its cold and sterile grip. Yet Christians are slaves of God.

It is an enslavement that resulted in freedom from sin. Freedom from sin caused the enslavement to God. **Neutrality is impossible. Both are mutually exclusive.** Neither one tolerates disloyalty. Both demand complete and exclusive fidelity. **Sin’s slavery is dark and foreboding. In contrast, our enslavement to God is different . . . significantly different.**

His voice soothes the agitated soul. His touch calms the quivering of the body. His look stills the unsettled spirit that rages within seeking to overthrow the ocean's calm.

“In the light of a king's face is life, and his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain”  
(Prov. 16:15).

“The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, But his favor is like dew on the grass”  
(Prov. 19:12).

**His gifting surpasses performance.** There is something within Him that engulfs all that I am in the midst of my troubled existence and sets me firmly on the rock of His choosing. His direction is soft and His paths are pleasant. Purity and justice flow freely from His handling of life's moments. There is no fear in this enslavement. His wisdom guarantees that only the best means are chosen to accomplish the highest good. This enslavement is marked by contentment and rest.

The wage sin pays is one of death, but the free gift of God that pours forth in abundance to those enslaved is eternal life. Such life is rooted in who Christ is and what He has done, not in who we are or what we have done or failed to do. **The overwhelming sense of release swallows up the enslaved. They heave a sigh of freedom.**

Slavery implies submission. It speaks of having been conquered. It communicates obedience. The enslaved kneel before their master. This is all present in the Christian's enslavement to God. **Yet for the believer the bowing is one of adoration and worship. It is gratitude that bends the knee and bows the heart.** The very nature of the service rendered is completely voluntary although inescapable. The benefits to the enslaved far outweigh any expression of control expressed by the Lord. Submission and obedience are for the profit of the enslaved.

How can we understand this enslavement? What word pictures can be painted against the walls of our hearts? Consider the lyrical content of a modern hymn. It captures who He is and the joy that results from our enslavement to Him.

Beautiful Savior  
Artist (Band): Casting Crowns

All my days I will sing the song of gladness  
Give my praise to the fountain of delights  
For in my helplessness, you heard my cry  
And waves of mercy poured down on my life

(chorus)  
Beautiful Savior, wonderful counselor  
Clothed in majesty, Lord of history  
You're the way, the truth and the life  
Star of the morning, glorious in holiness

You're the risen one, heaven's champion  
And you reign, you reign over all

I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer  
I will sing of the LAMB that never fails  
Of sins forgiven, of conscience cleared  
Of death defeated and life without end

(chorus)

Beautiful, beautiful Savior,  
Wonderful counselor, beautiful risen one

(chorus)

I long to be where the praise is never ending  
Yearn to dwell where the glory never fades  
where countless worshippers sing one song  
And the voices of the nations  
Sing worthy, worthy, worthy  
Worthy beautiful, beautiful one  
Jesus you are worthy, beautiful, beautiful one  
Jesus you're worthy, beautiful, beautiful one  
You are worthy, beautiful, risen one

Those who are enslaved to God cannot imagine life any other way.

This brings us to our third movement within the paragraph.

III. The question summarized, "Is grace lawless or does grace reign?" (vv. 21-23)

Everyone is a slave to something or someone. The cry for autonomy is a cry of self-deception. As believers we are "enslaved to God."

**"There is no middle state of personal independence; for which we were never made, and to which we have no claim.** When we would not that God should reign over us, we were in righteous judgment "sold under Sin"; now being through grace "made free from Sin," it is only to become "servants to Righteousness," which is our true freedom." (Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible [1871])

If you are living under law, then you will die. But if you are living under grace, then you will live. Living under grace is a free gift of God. Living under grace is having eternal life. Living under grace is living in Christ Jesus.

**"Therefore** what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death" (Rom. 6:21).

**You will never repent until you feel the full weight of sin's burden and taste the bitter dregs sitting at the bottom of its dark barrel.** What fruit of sin causes you to boast? The offspring of lusting is sin and sin when it conceives brings forth death (James 1:14, 15).

Verse 23 “is the **triumphant conclusion** to chapter 6 and should be compared in this respect to 5:21 as the triumphant conclusion to chapter 5.” (John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 237).

“This concluding verse--as pointed as it is brief--contains **the marrow, the most fine gold**, of the Gospel.” (Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible [1871])

“God’s free grace in contrast with the notion of remuneration [i.e. recompense, compensation, wage] and the magnitude of this free grace is emphasized by the nature of the gift bestowed. **When wages are in operation our lot is death, inescapably and in its ultimate expression. When the free gift of God is in operation our lot is life, eternal and indestructible.** How totally alien to such contrasts is the importation of merit in any form or degree into the method of salvation.” (John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 238).

**“Sinners merit hell, but saints do not merit heaven.** There is no proportion between the glory of heaven and our obedience; we must thank God, and not ourselves, if ever we get to heaven.” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary)

Nothing we have or benefit from the Father is ever found apart from Christ nor can they be enjoyed except in union with Him.

“Is life worth living?” It is grace that plants us firmly in the soil of God. “Our root, after hopeless explorations in the dust, has struck at last the stratum where the immortal water makes all things live, and grow, and put forth fruit for heaven.” (H.C.G. Moule, The Epistle to the Romans, 178).

Augustine’s observation echoes this truth.

“Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in Thee.”  
Saint Augustine (Bishop of Hippo from 396 to 430)

This brings us to our fourth movement within the paragraph.

#### IV. The question illustrated, “Is grace lawless or does grace reign?” (7:1-6)

For the third time in our text the apostle raises the question, “Do you not know?” (6:3, 16, and 7:1). The question once more “returns to the question of release from the law and shows how this discharge has come to be.” (John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 239).

“Romans 7:1-6 are to be connected with what the apostle had stated in 6:14.” (John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 239).

A. The illustration (vv. 1-3)

“Or **do you not know**, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?” (Rom 7:1).

“So **then (Therefore)**, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man” (Rom. 7:3).

Although the law is not dead, our relationship to it is.

Earlier (6:19) Paul used a familiar picture to describe an eternal truth. The intent was not to be a commentary on slavery. It was only used to illustrate his point. The same is true with his thoughts on marriage. What he states is true, but his intent is not to teach on marriage, divorce, or remarriage. His intent is to illustrate our release from the law.

7:1-3 provides another metaphor. He moves from a citizen within a kingdom to that of marriage. The metaphor is not teaching directly on marriage, but is a picture of our relationship to the law, sin, and death and grace, righteousness, and life. Verses 4-6 are an application of the metaphor. When I was wedded to law, the union produced death. In my union with grace the offspring is spiritual fruit. My “marriage” to law, sin, and death has been severed. I am now “married” to grace, righteousness, and life.

Paul clearly establishes our death to the law in 6:1-14. Because of this death in Christ and to sin we are not longer under its authority.

B. The application (vv. 4-6)

“The Christian life does not consist in mere conformity to a list of rules and regulations; it is the very life and loveliness of the Lord Jesus being wrought out in us by the Spirit of God.” (John Philips, Exploring Romans, 113).

“Having died to the law and having been thus discharged from it, believers no longer serve in the servitude which law ministers but in the newness of the liberty of which the Holy Spirit is the author (cf. Gal. 3:3).” (John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT, 247).

Verse 6 provides the proposition and verse 7 gives the rhetorical challenge. Verse 6 (“We serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter”) sets us up for the next question found in verse 7 (“Is the Law sin?”).

“What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COVET.’”

APPLICATION: (What is the NEXT STEP?)

On Friday, my family and I ate lunch together. We were accompanied by my daughter-in-law and our grandson Solomon. We drove in separate cars to the restaurant. When we arrived at the restaurant I went to help pull Solomon from his car seat. We had a pleasant lunch together. As we were leaving I went for my car keys and they were not in any of my pockets. I then went back to our booth and they were no where to be found. I thought, "Oh great, I locked them in the car." So we went to the car not only to find the keys still in the ignition, but the car still running. In my rush to be with my grandson, I forgot to turn the car off. I had left the car running the entire time we were eating lunch!

This is how easily we can be distracted in what we are doing. Today I am reminding you of three ideas from the text.

1. Grace reigns and rules over His people. Stop living like you are under the authority of law and start living as one who is under grace.
2. Radiate the cross in every area of your life.
3. You are a slave to someone or something, start serving Christ or you will continue to serve sin.