

## FREEDOM FROM TYRANNY

### Freedom charter

Just before a photographer snapped a picture of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, he asked the great Russian writer what he liked about America. The photo, which appeared in Life Magazine's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, said it all. It captured Solzhenitsyn, who had emigrated to the United States after being persecuted in his own land, pressing his hands against his breast, sighing deeply and lifting his head toward the heavens. His answer: "Because you can be free."<sup>1</sup>

The desire for freedom is at the core of what it means to be human. The cry for freedom, variously defined, rises up in every generation in cultures throughout the world. Some 3,400 years ago, the cry of the Israelites rose up to their God, who answered by liberating them from Egypt. Such was the impact of the Exodus that the ensuing generations of Israelites could never stop talking or writing about it.

It made an impression on a First Century Jewish writer named Paul of Tarsus, who breathed new life into the ancient story in his letter to the Romans. He came to believe that God had effected a new Exodus, not just for Israel but for the whole world, and not from Egypt but from sin.

Why do men and women like the gospel? Because you can be free.

We all want freedom from that which would tyrannize us. There is no greater tyrant than sin, which is bent on the destruction of humanity. Living in freedom, however, can be even more challenging than living in sin. Paul in Romans 6 gives us a freedom charter. How do you live in freedom? You offer yourself up in service to your new Master, God himself.

There are two equal and opposite errors in the spiritual life. One is to dismiss sin to the extent that you yield to it without a care. The other is to focus on it to the extent that your life is dominated by feelings of fear and guilt. Paul in Romans 6-8 charts a middle road between ignorance and obsession.

Questions that Paul fielded from his Jewish opponents form the backdrop of Romans 6-8. Paul has argued for grace, the unmerited favor that God grants through Christ to all who believe the gospel, over against the Mosaic Law, whose adherents tended to confine covenant membership to the Jews. His opponents argued that the removal of the law as a restraint opens the floodgates for sin.

In the summer of 1992 I taught the scriptures to a small church in Bulgaria. I emphasized grace. The reaction of one of the members of the church was similar to that of Paul's opponents. This young man was more learned than most of his peers, having received some training in the scriptures. At one point he pulled me aside and said, "I basically agree with you, but you can't teach these people that." Like Paul's opponents, he was worried that grace would lead the church into disobedience.

In Romans 6, Paul sets out to demonstrate the effectiveness of grace to deal with sin. Grace features the saving work of both Christ (Romans 6:1-7:6) and the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-30). The law, on the other hand, is ineffective (Romans 7:7-25).

Romans 6:

<sup>1</sup>What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?  
<sup>2</sup>May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup>Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?  
<sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, <sup>6</sup>knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; <sup>7</sup>for he who has died is freed from sin.

<sup>8</sup>Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, <sup>9</sup>knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. <sup>10</sup>For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. <sup>11</sup>Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, <sup>13</sup>and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. <sup>14</sup>For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

<sup>15</sup>What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! <sup>16</sup>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? <sup>17</sup>But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, <sup>18</sup>and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. <sup>19</sup>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.

<sup>20</sup>For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.  
<sup>21</sup>Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. <sup>22</sup>But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. <sup>23</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **Baptized into Christ**

The two questions in Romans 6, articulated in verses 1 and 15, respond to Paul's assertions in the previous chapter, particularly the final two verses. God gave the law so that sin would increase in Israel and that the Messiah, in faithfulness to God's saving plan, could come and defeat it. God, in his grace, more than matched the increase of sin and now reigns over sin and its result, death. The question in verse 1 relates to status, and the question in verse 15 relates to behavior that ensues from status. Paul's answer to each question is plain enough in verses 2 and 15 ("May it never be!"), but his explanation in each case sheds light on the path of our spiritual journeys.

Some of Paul's Jewish opponents might well ask, mostly to win their argument, "Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?" In Romans 6, sin is depicted as an oppressive ruler. Presumably, Paul expects us to see Satan in his portrait of sin. The question concerns whether we should remain in the domain of sin, under its power. If the increase of sin gave God an opportunity to demonstrate his grace, why not continue living in the domain of sin so that God can continue working in such a manner? The answer to the question concerns our union with Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Because of this union, we died to sin, just as Christ did. Christ came into the domain of sin, took on its full weight and died, separating himself from the rule of sin. Along with Christ, we came out from under sin's domain.

The practice of baptism, which replaces the crossing of the Red Sea in the Exodus story, re-enacts the death of Christ and demonstrates our union with him and with his death: his crucifixion and his burial.<sup>3</sup> This union has rendered powerless "our body of sin"—the old person who was subject to sin. Sin no longer has a claim on us because Christ, in his death, met its demands and we therefore have died to it.

Christ's death defeated sin; his resurrection defeated death. Baptism re-enacts not only the death of Christ but also his resurrection, so that we are not only separated from the rule of sin but we also have been raised to new life. We "walk in newness of life," finally in the future, when we will be resurrected, but also in the present, which anticipates the future. Such language implies the presence of the Holy Spirit, who enables us, like Christ, to live not "in sin" (verse 2) but "to God," as servants of him (Romans 7:6, 8:11-13). The "glory of the Father," his sovereign power, which raised Jesus from the dead, is at work in us through the Holy Spirit.

Sin, though defeated, remains a force that must be—and can be—resisted. Resisting it has much to do with what one believes. And what Paul wants us to believe is that a change in status has taken place. We've changed residences, if you will. We no longer live in the kingdom of sin but in the kingdom of God. We are servants of God, not servants of sin. Because these things are true, we should believe they are true. Because we are dead to sin, we should consider ourselves dead to sin. Because we are alive to God, we should consider ourselves alive to God.

### **Present yourselves to God**

Although we live in God's domain, not sin's, it still remains possible for us to submit to sin. Although we've changed residences, our old friends keep calling, so to speak. The liberated Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt. The wilderness, which called for radical dependence on God, was unpredictable. As we move through the wilderness of this world, the predictability of old patterns, however confining and self-destructive, has its appeal. To live in freedom is to abandon such patterns and depend on God.

Our mortal bodies are subject to death and await final redemption. Sin can, if we let it, exercise control over our bodies. Based on our union with Christ and our appreciation of its implications, Paul urges us to not allow sin or its desires to reign in this manner. To do so is incongruous with our new status.

Our bodies have members, or parts: minds, hands, feet, tongues, personalities, etc. These are instruments, or weapons, that can be offered up in the service of either sin or God, in the cause of either unrighteousness or righteousness. Because we belong to God

and are “alive” to him and not to sin, Paul urges us to present not only the members of our bodies to God but also our entire selves.

Everything Paul has said in verses 2-13 allows him to say, “For sin shall not be master over you.”<sup>4</sup> Sin has no authority in the new domain. What also allows Paul to disavow the lordship of sin is his contention that “you are not under law but under grace.”

The law demonstrated that the Jews, like the Gentiles, were “under sin” (Romans 3:9-20). Under the Jewish law, sin exercised power (Romans 7:11). It increased and reigned in Israel, but grace—God in Christ—abounded and overthrew it (Romans 5:20-21). Grace, God’s unmerited favor, leads to covenant membership for both Jews and Gentiles solely on the basis of faith that responds to God’s initiative in Christ (Romans 3:24, 4:16, 5:2). To be under the law is to be under sin, the place where sin exercises power. To be under grace is to be under God, the place where sin no longer rules.

Far from fighting off sin, as some Jews would have supposed, the law exacerbated it. If you substitute grace for the law, they would suppose that you get an increase in sin. Paul is saying that the opposite is true. If you substitute the law for grace, you get an increase in sin.

### **The answer to Question No. 1**

Having made it to verse 14, we are now in position to answer the question in verse 1, “Are we to continue in [the realm of] sin that grace may increase?”

1) No, we should not continue in the realm of sin to facilitate the increase of grace, because our union with Christ means that we have been transferred from the domain of sin to the domain of God, that we might serve God and not sin. To be under grace means you are not under lordship of sin, and therefore you should not remain in it. In fact, Paul makes it sound as if it isn’t even possible for believers to remain in the realm of sin, though it is quite possible for us to give in to sin.

2) No, we should not continue in the realm of sin in order to facilitate the increase of grace, because the purpose for the increase of sin—to defeat it—has already been accomplished. To remain under the lordship of sin in order that grace might increase represents a failure to recognize that we are already under grace. To remain in sin, as if Christ didn’t die for it, is anachronistic.

3) No, we should not continue in the realm of sin in order to facilitate the increase of grace, because to do so shows that we are deprecating the grace that God has already shown us. To remain in sin so that grace might increase is to show that it’s not grace you’re really interested in, but sin. To remain in sin so that grace might increase is to show that what you’re really interested in is yourself, not the demonstration of God’s grace.

4) No, we should not continue in the realm of sin to facilitate the increase of grace, because the law, not grace, is responsible for the increase of sin.

### **Stunned and staggered**

Elsewhere in the New Testament, we are urged to imitate Christ. In Romans 6:1-14, however, the emphasis is on our union with Christ. We do not have to create this union. Indeed, we cannot create it. It has been created for us. The Holy Spirit has bound

us to Christ. Appreciating our union with Christ is an important step if we are to imitate him by serving God and resisting sin.

Christ's death has become our death. His resurrection has become our resurrection. His destiny has become our destiny. Our stories have become intertwined with his. The Christ story, which has become our story, shapes our lives. Because we know Christ's story, we know where we've been, where we are and where we're going. Our stories, then, are about death and resurrection: death to sin, which has already taken place, and resurrection to a new life, which we enjoy now in anticipation of the future.

It boggles the mind, doesn't it, that such a thing is even possible? To be stunned and staggered that we have been united with Christ is to be ready to imitate him by serving God and resisting sin. The fusing of our lives to the life of Christ, therefore, motivates, empowers and guides us as we serve God and resist sin. In a similar passage, Paul can even say, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

God gave us the rite of baptism to portray the unfathomable story of how two stories—Christ's and ours—become one. Another way to explain our union with Christ is with marriage. Christ is the bridegroom, and we are the bride (Ephesians 5:25-32, Revelation 19:7-9). In marriage, two lives are woven together. Marriage brings about a change in status. A single man becomes a married man and therefore behaves differently, in a manner congruent with his new status. Most of all, he doesn't date other women. A good marriage, in which love is shared, not only demands different behavior but inspires it. So it is with our union with Christ.

## **Slavery to God**

In this new realm, where God and grace rule rather than sin and the law, how shall we live? If we are not to continue living in the realm of sin, are we nevertheless free to make decisions that give in to sin, inasmuch as we are not under the law but under grace? If the law is no longer guiding me and disciplining me, what's to prevent me from disobeying God?

In part, Paul has already answered the question of verse 15 in verses 2-14: To be under grace means that sin is not your lord, and you should therefore not submit to it in any way. Sinful decisions are incongruent with our new status in our new domain. Paul will now demonstrate that such decisions carry negative consequences.

To make his point, Paul contrasts two kinds of slaveries. To obey sin rather than God is to be a slave to sin. To obey God is to be a slave of God.<sup>5</sup> In verse 19, Paul allows that this analogy is odd, because slavery does not fully define the status of those who belong to God. For example, Paul in the same letter also calls us children of God (Romans 8:16).

The consequences of slavery to sin are lawlessness and death, which is ultimately eternal banishment from God's presence. Paul shows that lawlessness, or disobedience, belongs to the domain of sin, not the domain of God, even though the Jewish law does not hold sway in God's domain. The consequences of slavery to God are righteousness and holiness, behavior that represents the character of our Master, and eternal life in his presence.

Paul does not seem to entertain the possibility that a believer can, in fact, be classified as a slave to sin. It is not possible, in light of the trajectory of Paul's argument in Romans 5-8, which features eternal security, for a believer to experience the result of slavery to sin: eternal banishment from God's presence. It is best, therefore, to understand Paul's treatment of slavery to sin and its consequences as an effort to communicate the incomprehensibility, and even the horror, of a believer's submitting himself to sin. Death, after all, belongs to the domain from which believers have been separated.

To commend slavery to God over against slavery to sin, Paul reminds us of our conversion. Slavery to sin is part of our past. We responded with obedience to the gospel message, which concerns the lordship of Jesus Christ. Our response was not mere assent and outward observance, as if inspired by the law, but heartfelt and internal, inspired by the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> In the only command in verses 15-23, Paul in verse 19 exhorts us to devote to the cause of God the parts of us that we formerly devoted to the cause of sin.

Lest we forget, Paul reminds us that the prior life of slavery to sin was nothing to be proud of. We did experience a certain kind of freedom: a freedom from God that simply meant slavery to sin. We are in fact now ashamed of the behavior that proceeded from such slavery. Such behavior indicated that we were living in a way that would result in banishment from God's presence. As slaves of God, our behavior is now characterized by holiness, which indicates that we're destined for eternal life in God's presence.<sup>7</sup>

Sin pays its slaves a wage: banishment from the presence of God. Whether sin's slaves know it or not, death is the payment for which they are working. God, however, doesn't pay his slaves wages. He's a different kind of ruler. He gives an unearned gift: "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." A gift comes from the grace of God. So if we are under grace, and not the law, we receive this gift.<sup>8</sup> It's life in God's presence that we experience now, through the Holy Spirit, and also in the future, when the resurrection of Christ will be completely ours.

## **The answer to Question No. 2**

Back to Paul's question in verse 15: "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" The answer is no, because we are slaves of God, not slaves of sin. You can answer yes if you want to, but you'll be siding not only with sin but also with lawlessness and death. You'll be granting access to your life to a malevolent power that wants to dominate you. You cannot live in God's kingdom, dabble in the kingdom of sin and think that it won't affect you. It will affect you.

Grace will let you sin. But, properly understood, it will not motivate you to sin. The word translated "thanks" in verse 17 is the same word that is translated "grace" in verse 15. Grace is responsible in verses 17-18 for freedom from sin, so sinful decisions cannot be laid at its doorstep. If you've embraced grace, you've done so because you didn't want enslavement to sin.

You can sin if you want to, but if you understand the negative consequences, why would you want to? And if you understand the positive consequences of obedience, why would you want to? Grace, properly understood, motivates thankful obedience to God and decisions that resonate with one's true status because they reflect the heart of the King. Grace, therefore, is transformative.

## **Resonance with God's purposes**

Our union with Christ (Romans 6:1-14) means that we have been liberated from slavery to sin so that we might be slaves of God (Romans 6:15-23). We're free to be slaves of the right Master, which means we're also his children (Romans 8:16). We've been set free to be what in our hearts we know we're supposed to be.

Yet sin, the old master, is not silent, and we are not deaf to its voice. Because of our own history, because of our observation of others and because of passages such as Romans 6, we know what sin can do. We know what havoc it can wreak. You may think you will be satisfied by giving sin a little piece of yourself. But sin wants all of you. It won't be satisfied with a little. If it gets a little, it's going for more. And if it gets a little, it has a better shot for more. Sin wants to addict you to alcohol, drugs, food, illicit sex, shopping, money, deception, power, success, adulation, anger, pride, fear, complacency or whatever else it can use to draw you away from serving God. A little is never enough.

Sin wants to make your addiction more important to you than God. It wants to take away your humanity. It wants to tear your life apart and, through you, the lives of those around you.

C.S. Lewis well captures the progressive nature of sin in "The Screwtape Letters," in which he depicts a senior devil offering this advice to his nephew: "An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula."<sup>9</sup>

Knowing of sin's malevolence, we are motivated to resist it. But it's not enough to resist sin. Sin is attractive because it appeals to deeply felt needs and desires. At our best, we can hold off sin for a while, but unless we replace it with something else, it will break down our resistance. The alternative to sin is God, who promises to meet all our needs in his perfect time and way, satisfying the hunger in our souls. Much of what we would be addicted to has its place. Money, sex and power, for example, have their appropriate—and glorious—uses. Service to God places all that we would be addicted to in its proper perspective.

We were made for God, to know him and to serve him, to radiate the character of his Son, whose life is entwined with ours. The attractiveness of slavery to God, which is true freedom, includes the deep resonance with the purposes of God for our lives.

An instrument can be used or misused. A violin could be used as a hammer. Or it can be played by a master. Which, if given a choice, would the violin prefer? Which, if you were the violin, would you prefer? When the music of the Master emanates from your life, because you've made yourself available to him, you know you were made for God and not for sin.

### **Be who you is**

The replacement of the Jewish law with grace, therefore, does not promote sin, either living in its domain (verses 1-14) or giving in to its influence (verses 15-23). Union with Christ means we've died to sin and we're alive to God. Enslavement to God means we've been freed from sin. Paul encourages us to appreciate our status, and the grace responsible for it, and to behave accordingly. In the words of a wise sage, "Be who you is, 'cause if you ain't who you is, you is who you ain't."

How? Both halves of Roman 6 feature commands to present ourselves to God. If we're looking for something to do, this is what Paul commands. We make ourselves available to the Master for his purposes. Paul envisions more than a one-time offering.

Incorporating “oblation,” which is the offering of oneself to God, into a regular—if possible, daily—discipline of prayer would be in keeping with Romans 6.

What I’m often struck by when I present myself to God is that he actually wants me. I can be inspired by his presence one moment and yield to the influence of sin the next. I know it. He knows it. Yet he accepts my offering. He accepts me. Indeed, it delights him. I delight him. That’s grace.

Scott Grant / 6-11-06

Discovery Publishing © 2006, the publications ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. To receive additional copies of this message or a tape (a complete catalog is also available) contact: Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA 94306. Phone (650) 494-0623. Fax (650) 494-1268. [www.pbc.org/dp](http://www.pbc.org/dp). We suggest a 50-cent donation per printed message to help with this ministry. Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (“NASB”), © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, 1996 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

---

<sup>1</sup> Harry Benson, *Their Own Choice*, Life Magazine, Fall 1986. P. 259.

<sup>2</sup> The Jewish king, and more particularly therefore the Messiah, summed up and represented his people. As goes the king, so go the people (2 Samuel 19:43, 1 Kings 12:16). The victory of David, the prospective king, over Goliath was a victory for the people (1 Samuel 17:8-9). Paul says that the Israelites were “baptized into Moses,” who functioned as king (1 Corinthians 10:2).

<sup>3</sup> Is Paul referring to water baptism or what water baptism symbolizes? He isn’t clear, probably because he would not know of the emphasis in our day on the “decision for Christ” and the de-emphasis on baptism to the extent that the decision for Christ and baptism are often separated by weeks, months and even years. In his day, Paul could assume that when he’s writing to Roman believers, all of them had been baptized. Paul’s concern in Romans 6, however, is more on what baptism means than on the rite itself.

<sup>4</sup> God told Cain that “sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:7).

<sup>5</sup> When Paul speaks of slavery to “obedience” in verse 16 and to “righteousness” in verses 18-19, he’s speaking of slavery to God (verse 22). Paul can also speak of slavery to sin as being slavery to impurity and lawlessness (verse 19).

<sup>6</sup> When Paul uses the word “heart” in Romans, he’s speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit as part of the new covenant (Romans 2:29, 5:5, 7:6). Paul is saving fuller treatment of the Holy Spirit for Romans 8.

<sup>7</sup> As Paul has already indicated, hope for eternal life does not, literally, “make us ashamed” (Romans 5:5).

<sup>8</sup> In Romans 3:24 and 5:15, the gift of God is justification, the declaration, in the present, that those who believe the gospel are the people of God who will be vindicated in the final judgment.

<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, © MCMXC by Barbour and Co., Uhrichsville, Ohio. P. 49.