

p 43 WEEK 6: THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE

Romans 6:1–7:25

The Place of the Passage

Romans 6:1–7:25 is somewhat of a “hinge” for the letter to the Romans, as Paul continues to elaborate on the implications of the gospel of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul will return to explore the promises of God in relation to the salvation of Israel and in relation to the mission to the Gentiles once again in subsequent chapters, but in Romans 6–7 Paul zooms in to show us how God’s grace not only justifies but actually changes people. Romans 6:1–7:25 answers the question “What do we do, then, knowing the truth of Romans 1:1–5:21?” While Paul will later work out the practical details of Christian living, the *theology* of change in Romans 6–7 is equally crucial. Here Paul is showing that grace is powerful enough both to save us from sin and to save us *to* obedience.

The Big Picture

Romans 6:1–7:25 explores the power of union with Christ and the impotence of the law in sanctification.

Reflection and Discussion

p 44 Read through the complete passage for this study, Romans 6:1–7:25. Then review the shorter passages below and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2167–2169; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. The Triumph of Grace over the Power of Sin (6:1–23)

How does Paul refute the idea that, since more sinning results in more grace, we should sin all the more (5:20–6:11)?

Paul moves from the indicative (what is true) of 6:1–11 to the imperative (what to do) of 6:12–14. How would you summarize each of these two sections? What is the relationship between them? Is the imperative built on the indicative, or the indicative on the imperative?

If Paul is telling believers to pursue sacrificial obedience, why is he saying we are not under the law (6:14)?

p 45 How does Paul employ the metaphor of slavery throughout 6:15–23? Is it possible not to be a slave to something?

2. The Triumph of Grace over the Power of the Law (7:1–25)

Comparing our connection to the law to the marital covenant (7:1–6) is not exactly flattering to marriage, but Paul is revealing something powerful about a Christian’s relationship to the law. What is the basic point of Paul’s illustration in these verses?

What are some examples of the law arousing sinful passions (7:5)?

We can get the mistaken impression, because of all the negative implications of the law’s functions, that the law is only bad. For what reason(s) does Paul say the law is good (7:12)?

p 46 Thinking personally, how have you seen the inner struggle Paul describes in 7:18–23 in your own life?

What are your primary means of encouragement and strength during such struggles?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

THE RESURRECTION TO COME. In Romans 6:5–11, Paul asserts, based on the believer’s union with Christ, that we have not only died to sin; we have also been raised with Christ. In one sense, we enjoy this resurrection life now because we have eternal life now. But there is also the future tense, the great day to come, in which we will be transformed and will put off these mortal bodies to put on immortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15). In the resurrection to come, purchased by Christ in *his* resurrection, we will inherit a restored earth and enjoy the grace of God, free from sin and death for all eternity.

“UNDER GRACE.” When Paul writes in Romans 6:14 that we are “not under law but under grace,” he does not mean that we have no obligation to obey God anymore. In fact, he has just spent thirteen verses saying the opposite of that. What he’s referring to is the “engine” of

obedience. The reality of the sin-forgiven life [p 47](#) is that we now live under the dominion of grace. The result is that we live in increasing conformity to the righteousness of God and increasing awareness of and conviction about our failure to fully measure up to God's standard. Under the grace that pardons all our sin, sin does not abound, or else it is not grace that is in charge, but sin itself. This is what Paul is getting at when he talks about our union with Christ making us "slaves to righteousness" (6:15–23).

Whole-Bible Connections

FREEDOM FOR THE CAPTIVES. Paul's exulting in the freedom that grace provides to those who were in bondage to sin is a Christ-centered echo of what is promised in Isaiah 61: "the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound" (Isa. 61:1). Jesus applies this to himself in the synagogue in Luke 4:16–21. The true King has come to announce liberty.

THE LAW. The first command from God to his people comes in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:16–17). Our first parents broke that law, and we humans have been disobeying God ever since. Despite God's lavish goodness to his people, which always precedes his law-giving (e.g., Ex. 20:2), we are inveterate lawbreakers. In Jesus, however, the law is finally kept (Matt. 5:17). United to him, believers are credited with Christ's account (that is, his righteousness is imputed to them and becomes theirs), and they are declared free, once and for all, from the prospect of an eternal penalty for sin (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).

Theological Soundings

ANTINOMIANISM. In the opening verses of Romans 6, Paul is rebuking a reaction to the doctrine of free grace that is often referred to as "antinomianism," which means "against the law." The logic goes like this: If I have total forgiveness for my sin, and if in fact the more sin abounds, the more grace abounds (5:20), then am I not free to sin all the more so that grace may continue to abound (6:1)? Paul finds this logic appalling. Though it claims to champion radical grace, such a sentiment is wicked and reveals a heart that has not truly been touched by redeeming grace. Grace is the antidote not only to legalism but also to license, for Christians have been united to Christ (6:5). The professed believer who claims that grace gives him license to sin with abandon is not a believer at all.

UNION WITH CHRIST. Here is one of the major themes of the New Testament, and the overarching salvific result of Christ's atoning work for God's elect. In [p 48](#) Romans 6:3–11, Paul grounds his thinking in the reality that by God's grace received through faith, a sinner is in fact united to Christ. The recurring biblical phrases "in Christ" and "in him" speak to this eternal reality. We are "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). We have died with Jesus and we have risen with him. Now he is in us (Col. 1:27; 1 John 3:9) and we are in him (Acts 17:28; 1 John 4:13). First John 3:24 says, "Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him." How can

Paul assert that we are free to stop sinning and to start obeying? Because we are united with God's own Son, obedience from our heart, though not unopposed, is now natural to us.

THE BELIEVER'S NEW NATURE. Romans 7 shows us who we *were* and who we now *are*. Is a Christian a saint or a sinner? Does he or she have a new nature or a sin nature? The answer is: yes—in *that order*. We must hold these two realities in tension. We are both saints and sinners. We are redeemed sinners. The reformer Martin Luther used the provocative phrase *simul iustus et peccator* to describe this strange state of affairs: we are “at the same time righteous and sinner.” This is an important doctrine because it reflects the biblical reality Paul sets forth in Romans 7, and also because it gives us both humility and confidence. If I believe I am only a sinner but not a saint, I will remain prone to self-pity and despair, and joy will be elusive. If I believe I am only a saint but not a sinner, I am neck-deep in pride, cloaking myself in the rags of self-justification. And yet, while both of these realities are true, we must see that the Bible teaches that what now fundamentally defines me is the new life I have been given in Christ. While I remain fallen as long as I live, my fundamental identity is as a redeemed, new-hearted child of God.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Romans 6:1–7:25 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

p 49 2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Romans 6:1–7:25

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Romans. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you.