



# FIRST LIGHT CHURCH

# SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Date: 4/30/23

Series: My Next Step

Text: Romans 6:15-23

**BIG IDEA: Sin always leads to death, but life is always found in Christ.**

**ICEBREAKER:** When was the last time you received something for free that was not a birthday or holiday gift?

**CONTEXT:** In the first few chapters of Romans, Paul establishes that everyone has a sin problem. In fact, Paul uses the analogy of slavery to describe this relationship to sin. The good news is that there is an answer to this problem. Whoever places their faith in Jesus Christ is freed from the penalty of sin. Salvation comes by God's grace; not by keeping the law. In Chapter 6, Paul addresses some misunderstandings about freedom in Christ and explains what it truly means to live under grace.

**PASSAGE:** Have a volunteer read Romans 6:15-23.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

1. What would you tell a follower of Christ who says that it's no big deal to sin occasionally because we are under grace?
2. What is the "law" and what role does it play in the life of a Christ follower?
3. What does it mean to be a slave of righteousness versus a slave of sin?
4. What does it mean to be obedient from the heart?
5. How does someone move from being a slave of sin to being a slave of righteousness?
6. What are the results of living a life enslaved to sin versus living a life enslaved to righteousness and God?
7. What's the difference between a wage and a gift? Why is it important that eternal life is a free gift of God?

#### **APPLICATION:**

If you are a follower of Jesus, He has set you free from sin. Reread verses 20-23 and take a few moments to do a "fruit inspection" of your life. **Is there something that is keeping you from reaping the kind of fruit that leads to sanctification (holiness, becoming more like Jesus)?** Be open about it with your small group members. Allow them to encourage you and pray for you.

#### **K4 CONNECTION:**

There are many people around us who are still enslaved to sin. They have not yet experienced true freedom that can only be found in a relationship with Jesus Christ. As followers of Jesus, it is our responsibility to spread the hope of the Gospel message so others may know the truth that will set them free.

#### **CARE AND PRAY:**

- Share wins and concerns with each other.

## COMMENTARY

**[v.15]** “What then” echoes verse 1. But now Paul raises a different question. “Not under law” in verse 14 might conjure up the notion that sin is permissible—or even advisable, since sinful acts so often seem desirable. Does “under grace” justify indifference to compliance with teachings such as the Ten Commandments? Does it permit canceling out the Bible’s consistent testimony on the sanctity of life (so that abortion on demand is affirmed) and marriage (so that same-sex unions are blessed by the church and its ministers)? Does it mean that no matter how often and deeply a Christian commits sinful acts, it is not an issue because Christians are “under grace”?

For NT writers “sin” is an important concept because God’s law remains intact as an abiding testimony to God’s character and, therefore, His standard for human behavior. True, portions of the OT are descriptive and not prescriptive. Parts are no longer binding (animal sacrifice, food laws) because Christ fulfilled much of what the OT promised and foreshadowed. Yet “law” as the overall body of OT writings retains an important place precisely “under grace.” That is why NT writers, as well as Jesus himself, quote from and allude to it so frequently. That is also why Paul’s reply to the two questions of verse 15 is an emphatic negative.

**[v.16]** Sin remains an issue even under grace, because violating God’s law signals allegiance to sin and not to Christ, who is Lord over His followers and frees them from their sin (cf. Rev. 1:5).

In a sense 6:16 is simply an application of Jesus’ principle, “You will recognize them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16, 20). A person claiming to be “under grace” but sinning against God, as if His law and expressed will were not true and binding, is a contradiction in terms.

**[v.17]** Earlier in Romans we learned that the audience apparently had heard and received the gospel message and thus are “called to belong to Jesus Christ” (1:6). Indeed, they are “saints” (1:7). Now in 6:17 we learn more. Their reception of the message was not shallow; they became “obedient from the heart.” Nor did they proceed in a random or self-directed way. Rather, they deferred to the “standard of teaching to which [they] were committed.” This “teaching” is most likely the gospel message and its direct entailments. “Were committed” refers to “God’s action in bringing believers under His authority through the gospel.”

This verse also depicts initial gospel reception as obedience, not shallow assent, and “from the heart,” not just mental acceptance. Paul’s understanding of saving faith was never what some in recent times have called “easy believism” or cheap grace. His mission was to bring about the “obedience of faith” among the Gentiles (1:5; 16:26). The Romans’ obedience to the teaching that explained the gospel was a sign of their authentic involvement in this mission.

**[v.18]** Paul’s expression of gratitude to God that began in verse 17 continues. He points to a pair of effects of the reception of gospel teaching. The first is liberation from sin. The whole of creation is in “bondage to corruption” (8:21). Liberation was and remains at the core of Christ’s mission, both at His first coming and in the continuing work of His body, the church, through gospel outreach and instruction: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1). Paul’s correlation of the gospel with being set free is seen in five uses of the verb “to set free” (Gk. *eleutheroō*) and seven uses of the noun “freedom, liberty” (*eleutheria*).

Both verbal forms in Romans 6:18, being “set free” and becoming “slaves,” are passive. The active agent is God; these moves are His work. Believers are no longer under the Devil’s thumb, suffering his tyranny and storing up wrath for themselves at the end of this life (recall 2:5, 8). They rather become adopted children of their creator and redeemer whom they can now call Father (8:15). This makes being “slaves of righteousness” not some burden or bore, but rather the best thing that can

happen to a person, in this age and the next. As Paul later observes, "The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"

**[v.19]** All analogies break down if pressed too far. God is like a benevolent slave master, and believers are like His *douloi* ("slaves"), but a religion that reduces pleasing God to submitting to His inscrutable and absolute mastery would be Islam ("submission"), not the Christian faith. Paul acknowledges the limits of the master-slave analogy with his words, "I am speaking in human terms." The Romans' "natural limitations" include the fact that they live in an era and empire in which human slavery is ubiquitous. Paul draws on that everyday phenomenon to drive home theological truths. He is not condoning slavery any more than we are necessarily condoning oppression by wearing athletic gear made in certain exploitative locations.

Verse 19 angles toward exhortation. That exhortation, extending the slave imagery, is to "present" their bodily "members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification." "Righteousness" here denotes the disposition and behavior consistent with union with Christ, whose righteousness is reckoned to believers through faith in Him. "Righteousness" (Gk. *dikaïosynē*), sometimes translated "justification," is not merely a spiritual concept, but a truth that changes everyday living and lives.

**[v.22]** "Now" is emphatic (see also the same form, *nyini*, in 3:21; 7:6, 17; 15:23, 25).<sup>65</sup> Paul seeks to highlight that with faith in Christ, a new day dawns. With gospel reception four truths brighten the landscape.

(1) Believers are "set free from sin." This has been a theme in previous verses. While sin is tempting and proves irresistible to persons at large, causing untold misery around the world, its stranglehold can be broken. "Under grace" (6:14) there is new management of our lives, by Christ. Our inevitable defeat "under law" (v. 14) is removed. In fact, it is reversed.

(2) Believers "become slaves of God." This too has been explained and explored in previous verses. In the second word of this epistle Paul identifies himself as *doulos* ("slave"). Long before Paul's day the psalmist had written, "A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10). Being God's slave at its worst beats a life of deluded self-mastery (which is actually bondage to sin).

(3) Believers "get" the "fruit" of sanctification (cf. Rom. 6:19). This is the main verb, grammatically, of the whole verse. The fruit here is the opposite of the fruit in verse 21, which leads to death. The good fruit of the gospel leads to dedication to God. "Fruit" (*karpos*) appears over three dozen times in the Gospels. Jesus teaches, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:8). Paul shares Jesus' deep desire to see gospel reception ripen into fruitful practical expression. He will return to this theme in Romans 7:4.

(4) Believers attain the highest "end" (*telos*), or goal, possible: "eternal life." This can be understood eschatologically: after believers die, they enjoy unending blessing in the coming and glorious never-ending age. But the "not yet" makes all things new "already" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

**[v.23]** Paul concludes a wide-ranging, nuanced, and profound discussion with the simple affirmation of a truth no one can escape: sin's payoff is certain and lethal. Paul will describe his own harrowing close escape from it in chapter 7. It entangles us all, and despite its ugliness we work for it gladly despite its miserable wages: "death."

But God offers a "free gift" (Gk. *charisma*), the very "eternal life" mentioned in 6:22. But now Paul makes explicit what talk of "eternal life" everywhere assumes: the Christological dimension. "Eternal life" is not a slot-machine jackpot we attain for ourselves by a formula of certain words or deeds. It is not the automatic reward for either correct conceptions of theological truth or the refutation of

error. It is rather the work of “Christ Jesus our Lord.” Faith in Him through the gospel message gives Him the password to cleanse and reboot our inner lives, with comprehensive and transformative outward effects. We are no longer “under law”; we are rather “under grace” (v. 15).

*Commentary used from the ESV Expositors Commentary - Romans 6:15-23*

## WHERE'S THE GOSPEL

You are the slave of the person to whom you present your life (v. 16), so, by all means, present yourself to God (see also 12:1-2)! The “standard of teaching” of the Gospel calls forth a dedication “from the heart” (6:17). Our very hearts have been changed. The Gospel brings heart-transformation, not merely behavior modification. Sin is not inevitable, as it was before. We have been “set free” (v. 18). We are not miserably enveloped in impurity and lawlessness; rather, “righteousness leading to sanctification” is the promise of the Gospel (v. 19). “Sanctification” here means progressive conformity to God in His holiness.

These brief verses give the “backstory” of the sanctification promised in the preceding verses. Before the Gospel is received, sin has the upper hand (v. 20). There is no way out, and deep down we sense this (v. 21). The Gospel makes God our Master, produces His fruit in our lives, and sets us on course for the age to come (“eternal life”; v. 22). We do not dread sin’s bitter payoff. There is rejoicing in God’s “free gift” (v. 23). All is of grace.

*Commentary used from the ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible - Romans 6:15-23*