Session 5: Freedom.How can we avoid negative cycles?

Welcome to Session 5 of our teaching series on Romans. In this session you will find worship song suggestions, a sermon outline and a written prayer.

KEY VERSE:

'We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.'

ROMANS 6.4 (NIV)

BIBLE READINGS:

Romans 6.1–7, 11–14

MAIN QUESTION:

How does knowing the truth of the gospel empower us to live free from the power of sin?

MAIN THEMES:

Gospel, grace, sin, death, resurrection, baptism, freedom, righteousness

Context:

Having unpacked the gospel of grace and celebrated the peace that Jesus brings, Paul now addresses a particular objection: does grace mean we can just carry on in sin?

Summary:

Having walked through the gospel in Romans 1–5, Paul now applies it directly to the lives of the Roman believers, showing them how they can live free from sin. He begins with their beliefs, reminding them of what is already true about their identity, before turning to their behaviour, instructing them to present their bodies to God as instruments of righteousness.

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS:

- · Amazing Grace
- Cornerstone
- Your Grace Is Enough
- · All Hail King Jesus
- · Hymn Of Heaven
- · Who You Say I Am
- · Glorious Day

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Reflections:

The gospel is radical; it's no wonder people often misunderstand it! So here Paul addresses a misconception that his readers may have about the idea of grace: namely, that it gives us a licence to sin. Our sermon notes focus mostly on Romans 6 rather than Romans 7. However, if your context would be better served by emphasising the freedom we have from legalism then see the course book for how to unpack Romans 7.

In this talk, you will get to speak about the ongoing difference the gospel makes in us living lives free from sin. But the point of the message should not be 'Now you're a Christian, you'd better stop sinning!' but rather 'Now you're a Christian, you're released from the power of sin – you can choose to live free of it!' Make sure you keep communicating the wonder and power of the gospel, so that people feel filled with hope that change is possible.

One of the central metaphors Paul uses here is baptism. Depending on how it is practised in your church tradition, people may not be familiar with baptism by full immersion, so you should take time to describe the process of being plunged into the water and being brought back up again, to help people understand the symbolism of dying and rising. And, if appropriate, you may want to invite those who have not been baptised to consider baptism, however you practise that in your tradition.

Suggested sermon outline

INTRODUCTION

This section begins with a question provoked by Paul's explanation of the gospel of grace.

Begin this sermon by recapping the gospel, helping people to understand how radical the offer of grace is, and why someone might be tempted to ask the question in Romans 6.1.

Paul replies to the question, 'Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?' with an emphatic 'No'! And he begins to unpack what it looks like to live a life of freedom.

KEY POINTS: TWO HARD TRUTHS NOTES Belief: knowing the truth (Romans 6.1–7) - Before addressing their behaviour, Paul addresses the beliefs of the Christians in Rome. The things we believe to be true, shape the way we live. And if we try to change our behaviour without changing our underlying beliefs, then the new behaviour simply won't last. As Jesus said, 'you will know the truth and the truth will set you free' (John 8.32). - Paul uses the imagery of baptism to remind the Romans of what happened to them when they responded to the gospel. Explain how baptism symbolises dying and rising to life with Christ, and show how it links to the story in Exodus 14 of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea. Baptism is a picture of the Exodus: freedom from slavery. - Paul reminds the Romans of the reality that they have been united with Jesus in his death and resurrection. The Israelites were baptised into Moses (1 Corinthians 10.2), but Christians are baptised into Christ, sharing in his death and resurrection. If Moses brought about the first Exodus, Jesus brings about a new and better Exodus: true and lasting freedom from the powers of sin and death. Paul's words are in the past tense. For those who are in Christ Jesus, it is already a reality that we have died to sin (verse 2), and we were buried with him through baptism (verse 3), so just as he has been raised, we now live a new life (verse 4). As well as reminding Christians of the reality of their new life

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in Christ, remember to invite those who are not yet Christians

to receive this new life today.

2 Behaviour: living the truth (Romans 6.11–14)

- Paul moves from belief to behaviour. Having told the Romans to know the truth, he now instructs them to live in the light of that truth.
 - He tells the Romans to 'reckon' or 'consider' themselves dead to sin (verse 11). That is, he wants them to not only know this as a theory, but to apply that truth to their own lives. The result of which will be that they live differently.
- Paul tells the Romans that sin is no longer their master. They shouldn't offer their bodies as instruments of wickedness; they should offer their bodies to God as instruments of righteousness.
 - Being dead to sin and raised to new life doesn't mean we can't sin anymore (I wish it did!) but it does mean we have a choice in the matter. We don't have to sin. In Romans 6.15–23, Paul uses the imagery of slaves and masters to make the point that sin has no power over us we have a new master. To return to sin makes as much sense as returning to do a day's work for an old boss. Or worse still, for the Israelites to return to Egypt and put themselves back under the power of Pharaoh which tragically some of the Israelites longed to do (Numbers 14.2–4).
- Share a testimony of someone discussing their struggles with sin and how God has helped them.
 - You may want to use the testimony video from *The Romans Course* or share another story that you know. It may also be powerful to share your own experience, as personal stories can often connect with people more than stories about people they may not know. And, while dramatic stories of radical change are really inspiring, sometimes it's the more down-to-earth stories that connect with people, because they're often more relatable. It is also important to be honest that Christians still struggle with temptation and sin and to be vulnerable about how that affects you. Perhaps draw on the phrase in the Lord's prayer: 'lead us not into temptation'.

NOTES

CONCLUSION

How do we live in the light of this?

Below are some suggested points of application. Feel free to select a couple of points which are most appropriate to your setting.

- Make some suggestions for how people can regularly remind themselves of the truth of who they are in Christ. Perhaps people may want to start each day reading and affirming their new identity. You could draw out a selection of verses from Romans – or the rest of the New Testament – and make them available to people.
- You may want to write a short prayer that people can keep with them or memorise, and use whenever they feel tempted. Something that reminds them that their old self is dead, that they have been raised with Christ, that sin no longer has mastery over them, and that they can choose to walk in righteousness.
- Remind people that they don't walk alone and there is hope even when they fail. Romans was written not to an individual believer, but to a community, and we are meant to help and support one another. Signpost ways that people can find help and accountability within your church. It may be that you have midweek groups, an accountability programme, or a pastoral support team. You can encourage people to find a trusted friend with whom they can be honest, to encourage and support them.
- If people in your congregation do experience serious addictions, you may also want to signpost places they can receive support, whether through Christian counselling or a recovery programme. And of course, do offer prayer.



READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Romans: A Letter That Makes Sense of Life by Andrew Ollerton
- The Message of Romans by John Stott
- Romans 1–7 For You by Timothy Keller
- God's Lavish Grace by Terry Virgo



WRITTEN

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the wonderful and powerful truth of your gospel. Thank you that freedom from sinful patterns of behaviour is possible and that we no longer have to live under the weight of our sin. Where we need to find freedom, please set us free. Holy Spirit, please come and live in our hearts and empower us to live free, for your glory. May your truth truly set us free! Amen.