

License to Sin?

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[0 : 00] Well folks, great to see you this morning. I hope you are well. Let me encourage you to have Romans chapter 6 open up in front of you as we journey through this morning. If you are here today and you are wondering what this Christian business is all about, what it means to be a Christian, then let me encourage you to really listen up over the next 25 minutes or so, because this passage is going to take us right to the heart of what it means to be a Christian, the transformation that's happened in the life of the Christian.

And if you are a follower of Jesus, then again I encourage you to listen up, because this passage is going to help us remember our identity in Jesus Christ. And it's been my prayer all week that the truth of this would impact our lives, it would stir our affection for the Lord Jesus, and it would stir us to live lives of holy obedience to him, out of love for him.

So come with me to Romans chapter 6. And to kick us off, I'm going to put somebody on the screen. And I wonder, and this is one for a certain generation, okay, let me just find my thing. Here he is. Can anyone tell me who this is on the screen?

Come on, somebody must know the answer to this. Come on, who's this? It's not Gloria Gaynor?

So this is Gladys Knight. I thought that might go down better than this.

This is Gladys Knight. She is known as the Empress of Soul. And in 1989 she released one of her most famous songs, and maybe this will begin to kick in with people, one of her most famous songs, and it's called A License to Kill.

[1 : 31] Anyone heard of A License to Kill? If we're on the ball, you'll know that that was the soundtrack, that was the theme song to the Bond film that was released that year with the same title starring Timothy Dalton.

Okay, most underrated Bond, if you ask me, but there's Timothy Dalton. So she's singing this song, A License to Kill, and it was a song that captured something about who James Bond is.

He's the man who prefers his martini shaken, not stirred. We learn that as you watch the Bond films. He's the guy that loves driving a vintage Aston Martin complete with gizmos and gadgets. That's James Bond.

And here we got something more about who he is in this song. Because as well as being those things, he's the man who has a license to kill. So he works for the Secret Service, and he has this special dispensation to kill people.

He's free to kill. And all the while he's free to kill knowing that he's covered. He's got his license, he's covered. And it's worth having 007 in your mind as we journey through today.

[2 : 34] Because as we hit chapter 6, what we need to understand is that Paul, remember off the back of chapter 5, he's written that we are saved, we are right with God, not because of what we do, but rather because of God's grace to us shown in Jesus Christ.

We are justified because of Christ before God. That's what we were singing just earlier. Grace is free. It's the truth. Last week we thought that we should love the Scottish people because it's free.

And Paul, having off the back of chapter 5, laid this out in glorious technicolor.

He's anticipating a question that should be in the mind of his readers. And I wonder if it's a question that maybe you had in your mind as we finished chapter 5 last week.

Or maybe it's a question that as we go through this now, as we unpack this a little, you say to yourself, do you know what, I hadn't thought about it until now, but now that you mention it, I've always wondered how that works. And you'll see Paul pitch the question at verse 1 of this chapter, and it goes something like this.

If we are saved by grace, right, free grace, we've done nothing to deserve it, not because of us, because of Jesus. If we are saved by grace, does that mean that as Christians now, we're a bit like

James Bond, we're in the same category as him?

[3 : 50] Not that we have a license to kill, but now, because of God's grace, do we now have a license to sin? Are we, because of God's grace to us, do we now have that freedom to do what we want, all the while knowing that we are covered by God's grace?

That might seem a silly question. Am I free to do what I want? That might seem a silly question. But let me just say this. If you fully understood the impact of chapter 5, if you understood in your mind that we are saved by grace, then this question is a perfectly logical question to ask.

And let me just say, if you've found yourself explaining this to your friend, to your colleague, your family member, explaining grace, and people come back with these kind of questions, then let me encourage you that you've explained it right.

You've explained it right. But think about this. Does that seem a silly conclusion? Well, it doesn't at all. Because people will be asking, does it really matter then how I live in light of God's grace?

Does it matter? I mean, can I live however I want, then at the last minute can I go rummaging around in my pockets, looking for my wallet, thinking, there's my Tesco Club card, there's my Boots Advantage card, there's my Nando's loyalty card, there's my NHS donor card.

[5 : 07] Oh, where I found it! Aha, there's my grace card. Right? There's my grace card. I'm so glad I took that out back in the day. Boy, am I glad. And before God, when he judges the world, we play the grace card.

And we say, I think you'll find that entitles me to get to heaven. Forget how I've lived. I've got the grace card. Is that how we should respond to grace? Or you could look at another way.

If you've seen this guy, you know about this guy on the screen. Probably not his best picture, but could you think about it the way that famous Russian monk Rasputin looked at it? How he responded to grace?

Because he taught his followers that the more we sin, the more we show to the world our need of grace and forgiveness. And actually, we're doing God a massive favour when we sin and do so living recklessly because we make God's grace and forgiveness look so much more glorious in the eyes of the watching world.

And if you know that Boney M song that goes with Rasputin, or if you know anything about his life, you know that might explain his let's go beg or go home, let's go out and let's party like it's 1989 kind of lifestyle, right?

[6 : 18] And let me just suggest to you that given that, your boy might have got it wrong. Is that what it means to live under grace? Is that what it means? I don't know about you, but as I've tried to explain grace to my friends, I've been met with those kind of questions and those kind of reactions.

You know, I remember one friend who I read John's gospel with a few years back, who read it for four years. And he struggled to get his head around this concept, just couldn't quite get it.

And I remember him telling me that not only did grace seem unfair to him, but surely it took away, rather incentivized, any kind of desire to want to obey God and live for him.

So that's what it means to live under grace. You ever ask yourself those kind of questions? How should I live? In light of God's grace? Well, look what Paul says, writes rather at verse two, right? So he's got that question, he's pitched it at verse one. Here's verse two. What does he write? Two words. Absolutely not. Absolutely not. Or as quintessential Englishman J.B. Phillips paraphrases it, what a ghastly thought.

[7 : 28] To which we all reply, hear, hear, J.B. What a ghastly thought. And here's Paul's point. If that's the difference that you think God's grace to you in Jesus Christ makes to your life, then you have totally missed it.

And what he means is that if we fully get the contours of chapter five, if we understand grace and the difference it makes to our lives, then we'll understand that this is something far bigger that God declares to be true for us.

And something that God has pulled out all the stops to do for us in our lives is he's bought us for himself and makes us his own in Jesus Christ. Right, so this chapter is all about identity.

Sorry, the first half of chapter six. Understanding your identity as a Christian. Have you ever had that moment when you're walking down the street and you look at, I mean, this has happened to us before, you pass your favorite restaurant that you used to go to a couple of years ago and all of a sudden you see things are different in the front.

Right, and those words at the top of it, under new management. You ever seen that before? Under new management. And you think to yourself, ooh, I wonder what's going on here. What's going on here? What difference has this made? Because there's new people in charge now.

[8 : 37] Let's go and see. Well, this is what Paul's declaring to be true in this chapter of the Christian, that the label above your life, what it reads, when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, is you are under new management.

You're under new management. That's what he's saying here. If you're a Christian, you're under new management. This is what he's saying. Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ? Yep, I have. Great. Have you understood you're saved by grace and not by works?

Yep. That's wonderful. Do you know what that makes you? It makes you Jesuses. Makes you his. You're united to him. That's what we were saying before. Your life is caught with him. And the key verse for us today is verse 11.

Verse 11, here's what Paul wants them to understand. Here's how Paul wants them to view themselves. He wants them to understand themselves. Verse 11, in the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

So do you see what he says? He says count yourself, consider yourself. So this is how I want you to think of yourself. You know, that way you would do, if you were doing, I don't know, some kind of planning in your life, you would look at what's going on in your diary and you would think about it and you would think about, yep, that's what I'm doing this day.

[9 : 49] That's what I'm doing this day. You go to your wardrobe, you look in your wardrobe and you think to yourself, that's me today. That's me today. This is what he's saying, right? Get your head around this. This is who you are.

This is what's going on in your life. Because we need to understand this, first and foremost, our identity in Jesus Christ if we're to see the difference that it should make to our lives. I don't know if you've ever had that experience of changing jobs.

And I predict that I remember going from working from, a few years ago, working from, for one law firm and I had one boss tell me what to do every day, giving me instructions that I had no choice but to answer to and do.

And then three weeks later, I find myself working for another boss down south in Bristol. Another boss telling me what to do and expecting me to do certain things and saying, hey, you work for me now, not that guy he used to work for.

You ever had that kind of experience? You go from, maybe you're a student as well, you found this with the person who's overseeing your work, you're a lecturer, the term ends and all of a sudden you go into another year and you start listening to another lecturer who's telling you how to work.

[10 : 58] This is what Paul is saying has gone on here. Right? Pidge yourself in that situation. You've changed your job. You've located the stationary cupboard.

This isn't your first day. You've located the stationary cupboard. Your name's on the door. You've clocked where the canteen is. You know all the important stuff when you start a new job. And you've settled down at your desk and you've opened up your emails and you see in your emails that there's an email there from your previous boss.

And you're saying, oh great, how great to hear from them. And you open this email and it doesn't say, listen, just clocking in to wish you all the best for the future. Actually it says, there's a piece of work I want you to do and it'd be great if you could have it on my desk for five o'clock on Friday if that's okay.

How would you respond? How would you respond? Surely you would think to yourself when you say it, we're English, well it's not English, we are British and you would say it a lot more politely than this but surely you would say on your bike mate, not a chance.

Because that relationship has ended, I don't work for you anymore, I work for somebody else. And that's exactly what Paul is saying in this chapter. That that relationship we'll see with sin has been severed.

[12 : 11] Its power over our lives has been severed. We are dead to sin and we are alive to God. So let me just take those, this is all we're going to do this morning, we're going to think about what it means to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

So let me just think about the first one here, you're dead to sin. Think about this, you're dead to sin if you're a Christian because before we were Christians, you see sin was our master. Look how

Paul describes that, verse six.

Sin, what did it do? It ruled over us. It mastered us. It enslaved us. So before we were Christians, sin dictated our lives.

This is what it did. It called the shots. We just went our own way. We weren't bothered about God's way. You know, I was thinking about it this week, before I was a Christian, see if somebody had told me that I was a sinner, do you know what?

I would have laughed them down. Laughed them down. I had no idea, I had no concept of what sin was. I was just interested in me and progressing my life. I wasn't interested in God and if truth be told, what I thought was that God owed me for how my life was going.

[13:16] I didn't know him anything. That's the very definition of sin, isn't it? Going our own way, going our own way, pushing our own agenda rather than submitting to our makers, our creators. You know, looking back at it now, I had absolutely no idea that I was like a dead fish that was just flowing downstream.

So what is it about fish? It's the alive ones that's them upstream, isn't it? I was a dead fish that was flowing downstream. But look what happened. Verse 3, Christ died.

Somebody writes, Christ died. There's the fact. Christ took the death that my sin deserved, that your sin deserved. And when I put my faith in him and I said, Jesus, you're my saviour, I need you, that death, his death, became my death.

Do you see it? Verse 6, we were what? Crucified with Christ. And think about this. If you want to understand it this way, if sin's ultimate and final weapon against you and I because of a rebellion against God, it's not just physical death, but it's what the Bible calls the second death.

It's the eternal death when God judges the world on that last day. Friends, if my life is united to Jesus, then that ultimate and final weapon that sin has over me is gone.

[14:34] It's not a possibility anymore because Jesus took that death. It's not on the cards for me. It's been totally disarmed. And you see, that death hasn't just affected, sorry, that death has affected my future, but it's also affected my present.

You see how united to Jesus, sin's power over me has been decisively severed. Verse 6, look at the word he uses there. It's what is powerless. You see, there's been a once and for all break.

The tense of that Greek word is a complete one. So this was a once in a lifetime permanently established break with sin and its power over us.

That's what's happened in Jesus Christ. I love that great old hymn that we sing, Oh for a thousand tongues to sing. What is it, the line of that song? He breaks the power of cancelled sin.

The power of cancelled sin. And he sets the prisoner free. His blood can make the foulest clean. His blood, it availed for me. Or if you want a more modern song, who breaks the power of sin and darkness, whose love is mighty and so much stronger, the king of glory, the king above all kings.

[15:49] We celebrate this truth that Jesus Christ has severed the ties that sin has with us. It's mastery over us. So what that means for us is now that we're united to Jesus as Christians, sin can shout all at once, it can bark orders at us, it can send us an email with detailed instructions on it about what it wants us to do, our flesh.

But now, we have the power, because the Holy Spirit lives in us, of saying, I don't answer to you anymore on your bike mate.

Now of course, we have to understand that doesn't mean we'll be perfect in this life and we'll see that in the next chapter. This is a daily battle, even a losing one sometimes, with sin, as we still grapple with this flesh.

And I want to encourage you today that if you find yourself in that battle with sin, if you think, why is this such a struggle? I want to encourage you that that is a sign of faith, of living faith, and not of failure.

Because this wasn't true for you, you wouldn't be fighting it. If God had opened your eyes, if you weren't like fish swimming upstream, you wouldn't be fighting it. You should take courage from that. Jesus has broken the power of sin and darkness.

[17:06] This is what he's done for me, for you, that we can choose now to say no to sin and we want to worship God. I'm dead to sin. That's how Paul is saying to think of yourself. You're dead to sin. You've got a new master now.

That tie has been severed. And your new master, you need to understand, is the best boss you could ever serve. He is the best master, Jesus Christ, one who has so lovingly given his life for you,

a one who has so graciously wooed you to himself, wooed you to himself and says, come and follow me.

Come and serve me. That's what Paul means when he writes in the other half of verse 11, what are we? We are alive to God. Alive to God.

You see, you're not just united to him in his death if you're a Christian. You're united to him in his life, in his resurrection. Get your head around that one. I am raised, verse 4, do you see the language?

So important, we see his language, what's he saying? I am raised to what? Wander about my own? No, I am raised to walk in the newness of life. I'm spiritually experiencing that life now and I will physically experience that life one day when Jesus gloriously returns.

[18:24] See, friends, his life changes the future. That resurrection, we're united to that. It changes the future. I'm sticking with the Bond theme. You know, one of the earliest films was called You Only Live Twice.

Never watched that Bond film? You Only Live Twice. What Paul is saying is true for the Christian, which is not true for the non-Christian, is that in Jesus, friends, flip it around, we will only die once. So what are you saying? We're only going to die once. I don't know if you saw in the news recently that a recently married Christian couple from London who tragically died in Santorini in Greece a few months ago.

Anybody see that in the news? It's all over the BBC News. Well, they had their joint funeral this week down in Kennington in London. 1,200 people turned up for that funeral.

And this week, I met up with one of my good friends who was called Hamish. And unknown to me as I was chatting with him, it turned out that he spoke at that funeral. I said, what on earth did you say? Where do you go with 1,200 people mourning for a loss of two wonderful individuals?

[19:35] And he said to me, do you know what, there was only one place I could go. Only one place I could go. And that was to John chapter 11. And the words of Jesus to Martha is she's, before Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead, is she's mourning for the loss of her brother.

She's in tears, is she's devastated for the loss of her brother. And Jesus says those words to Mary, I am the resurrection and the life.

And the one who believes in me will live, even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. You see, united to Jesus in his resurrection, what a wonderful, comforting truth for the future.

That we will only die once. Our lives are his. In fact, I've walked with many of you through many of these periods in your life. And those words of Jesus have so much power.

And I pray, and I've been praying this week, that for many of us, these words of his would be timely refreshment to our souls. I am the resurrection and life.

[20:48] Your life is safe with me because I bought it. I bought it with my blood. So wonderfully liberating for the future, but friends, it is so wonderfully freeing for the present.

You see, God hasn't just saved us from something. God has saved us by his grace for something. In other words, he hasn't called us out.

He hasn't saved us. And he's saying, you're free to wander. You're free to go. Do what you please and just send me a postcard once in a while. He's not said that. He's called us out not to be wanderers.

He's called us out to be worshippers. To be part of his people who are from every tribe and from every tongue and from every nation. This wonderful multitude from across the world down the generations that he's gathering to himself to be, as Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 1, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people who make it their life's ambition to proclaim the praises of the one who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light.

That is what God is doing. That is what God is doing today. That is what God was doing yesterday. That is what God will do tomorrow and for the rest of our lives.

[22:10] The lives until he comes, Jesus comes and winds this world up. You see, in light of that second half of verse 13, once you understand what God is doing, it's so much bigger than us, it's so much bigger than the age 10, it's something he's doing across the world when you understand that.

Do you see what he says halfway through verse 13? Look at his appeal. He says what? He says, offer all parts of you. Do you see it? All parts of you.

Love that phrase. Do you not? Get that. Your eyes, your ears, your hands, your feet, your mind, your will, all of you. Offer it, all of you. As what? And get your head around this phrase. I mean, here should be the phrase that stays from this passage, right? Offer yourselves as what? As instruments of righteousness. Instruments of righteousness. Now here's the cool bit that I found out this week.

See that word instruments in the Greek, it can almost be translated weapon, weapon. Some of your translations here this morning might even say that word, weapon, mine does, as weapons of righteousness.

[23 : 21] Love that thought. See, what God is doing through us as his saved people is making an impact on this world as we live dangerously different lives for his kingdom.

God glorifying lives in this world. And it's, we are the means through whom God reaches the people of this world. As we live our lives giving ourselves as instruments, weapons to righteousness.

Isn't that a wonderful thought? Wonderful thought. You know, I was lucky enough to attend a meal last night. Corey and Jonathan invited me to this meal. There's certain perks of this job, I tell you. Invited me to this meal to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the work of street pastors in Edinburgh. After a wonderful evening, I was blown away by what God is doing in this city. Blown away by the many people he has in this city.

It shouldn't have surprised me, but it did. And one of the guests that he invited along to say a few words was the chief superintendent of Edinburgh police. And she spoke for 10 minutes, cracked a few funnies, what not, but she delivered some wonderful truths about how she perceives the work of street pastors.

[24 : 30] And basically, the essence of her message was to the team, thank you. Thank you for what you do. Thank you for complimenting the work of the police. Thank you for being a blessing to our city.

And thank you for loving our people. Loving our people. And she said particularly, and this is just the statistics for what those guys are doing, the work. She said, thank you on behalf of the 297 vulnerable people who you supported.

Thank you so much for the 78 aggressive situations that you guys managed to diffuse, which otherwise would have led to crime. Thank you so much for the, I love this one, 5,374 lollipops you handed out to make sure people had a good time Friday and Saturday night in our city.

As you see, offer yourselves as instruments as weapons to righteousness. Isn't that a wonderful testimony of something what God is doing in this city?

I know there's many, many different organizations who are doing similar things. But we want to be a blessing to this city, don't we? We want to be a blessing to the people. We want to care for people, love people.

[25 : 39] Because the gospel is holistic, isn't it? Of word and deed. And we want to be people who, as people would look into what we're doing, they would say, thank you that you guys exist. I'm so glad. I'm so glad.

I would be devastated if you moved on. Offer your bodies as instruments to righteousness. Here is Paul taking the theology of who we are, our identity in Christ, and he is saying, here is how it should outwork in your life.

Weapons to righteousness. See, as we bring it to a close, God is saying through his word, understand who you are. Understand that you are united to Jesus in his death.

And understand that you are united to Jesus in his resurrection. And understand that I have called you out of darkness. And I've called you to be part of my people. I've called you into my light.

And what I've called, and we saw this last week with Adam, if you were here, why did God do this? What is God doing? He has made us in his image. The one that sin entered through Adam affected all of us.

[26 : 41] The one that, that image sin is distorted. And God has saved us to bear that image once again in our lives as we live our lives in worship of our creator God.

And I love it, our Presbyterian brothers and sisters, dear friends, they write this in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Let me get my geek on for a minute, okay? Question one. What is the chief end of man?

Why are we here? What do we exist for? That's the question. How would you answer that question? They answer it. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

That's why we exist. That's why we're here. That's what's going on. That's what being a Christian is all about. And all of that symbolized in baptism. Do you see that? All symbolized in baptism. Come on, as a Baptist, you wouldn't let me, you wouldn't think I'd be leaving that part, would you? All symbolized by baptism. That's what Paul points out here. Think of your baptism. Think what went on. And if you were here a few weeks ago when Pete was baptized, Pete and Garrett, you'll realize that Pete wanted those verses read out at his baptism.

[27 : 43] 1 to 14, chapter 6. It's almost like he was saying, I've come to a point in my life where I know this to be true of me. I'm living this. This is me. And so he wanted Romans 6 read out as baptism.

And I didn't understand it, I'll be honest, three weeks ago. And so you haven't studied the passage this week? Oh, I totally get it. Totally get it. This is what went on at baptism. We died. We died with Christ.

And we raised with him in his resurrection life. Baptism is almost like saying, that's true for me. That's what's going on in my life and my heart. You know, it's funny, I heard a joke about a minister this week, it actually happened, I think, who at baptism kept the person who's been baptized underwater for just a little bit too long, right?

Made everyone in the congregation feel really uncomfortable with what was going on before he raised them out and he lifted them as high as he could. As a way of kind of helping them see and everybody there see the reality of what was going on.

You're dead to sin and you're alive to God in Christ Jesus. And maybe if that's true for you this morning or you think I want to investigate that a bit further, what's that all about? Then can I encourage you to chat to somebody and if you think, do you know what, that has happened to me.

[28 : 56] Friends, can I encourage you to come and get baptized? Tell the world, this is what's going on in my life, that's what God has done. Because Paul says in the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, right?

The old you, that's gone, dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. So flip back to James Bond in your mind. This is where we started, James Bond.

What does living by in God's grace mean? I mean, does that mean that I have license to sin? Am I in the same category as James Bond? Am I free to do what I want but I'm covered? What's going on?

Well, just see how Paul has logically helped them see that if you think that, friends, you've totally missed it. Because if by God's grace we are Jesus's, you understand his logic?

If we're Jesus's, then to run back to our old masters, to run back to how we used to live, it doesn't make any sense at all. Grace isn't a license to sin, friends.

[29 : 54] It's a license to serve. To serve the God who saved us, who called us out of darkness into his glorious light. Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take my moments and my days and let them flow in ceaseless praise. Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love. And take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

This is the difference that the risen Jesus Christ makes to our life. Praise God for his grace. and let's go. Thank you.

So, let's go to bed.