

Growing in Grace

Lesson # 7

Guiding Others to Freedom

Romans 6:15-23

[Taken from "The Grace Awakening" by Charles Swindoll. (Dallas:Word, 1990)]

Introduction

During the 1988 presidential election, an unexpected shift of attention occurred. Instead of the evening news focusing on the candidates, all eyes were on three gray whales that were cut off from their migratory route by a frozen sea of ice. At first, only a few Eskimos with chain saws attempted to rescue them. But when the media brought the whales' plight into our living rooms, volunteers flocked to the scene with heavy machinery and a determination to set those stranded whales free. But volunteers' ingenuity and energy were soon exhausted. Enter the National Guard. Their helicopters dropped a five-ton concrete basher to break up the ice. Then, in a cooperative effort with the United States, the Soviet Union dispatched two of their ice-breaking ships to facilitate the rescue. After three weeks and an expenditure of \$1.5 million, the whales were freed. [Charles Swindoll, "The Grace Awakening" (1990, Word Publishing), pp.125-126]

The heroic and noble rescue sparked a sense of compassion throughout the world. But it did something else too. By showing how willing we were to save a couple of ocean-going mammals, it underscored how hesitant we are to join hands in rescue efforts that involve mankind. It has always seemed ironic to me that most of the save the whales, and other environmentalist seem to accept the pro-choice position concerning abortion. They are willing to fight to save the lives of whales but accept that human being can be slaughtered without thought. They are so willing to save the whales yet, so reluctant to do anything to save our fellow human beings.

Unfortunately, the same reluctance can be found within the Family of God. Many people are quick to want to free some heathen halfway around the world from the shackles of sin, yet they are pathetically slow to raise a finger to loose other Christians from the chains of legalism.

While it is true that Christians in Paul's day didn't wrestle with exactly the same issues that we wrestle with today, they did struggle with issues of freedom from legalism. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (10:25-30), established some principles that apply to us today. *"Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; (26) for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." (27) If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. (28) But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." (29) "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another*

man's conscience? (30) But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks?"

This passage centers attention on the eating of meat offered to idols. In those days the premier taboo was not about going to movies or dancing or playing cards or wearing cosmetics. Back then the major question was whether meat that had been offered to idol could be consumed with a clear conscience by Christians. Paul didn't set up a lot of legalistic rules and rigid, pharisaical regulations. He made it clear that God has given His children a wonderful freedom in Christ, which includes not only freedom from sin and shame, but also freedom from living under legalistic lifestyles imposed by other Christians.

When questionable things aren't specified in scripture, it then becomes a matter of one's personal preference or convictions. In the same letter in chapter 6 Paul speaks on the issue of liberty when he says in verse twelve; *"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful, but I will not be brought under the power of any."* When Paul says all things are lawful he means all things not specifically commanded or specifically forbidden. The verse means "All things God has not spoken on are lawful to me.

In those things that are not specified in Scripture Christians have liberty, that is that your convictions in those areas may not and do not have to match mine and mine do not have to match yours.

In our previous study we referred to the first part of Romans 6 and now we will focus on the second part of that chapter. But first, let review what we learn in that study. You will remember that two groups were highlighted in those verses based on their position towards grace.

The first group (outlined in verses 1-14), were those who didn't claim their liberty and continued to live like slaves. These people fail to live in freedom, living their lives oversensitive to sin. Sin dominates their every waking moment. Paul lets them know they have grace and are free from the shackles of sin in verses 1-14.

The second group (outlined in verses 15-23), are those who take their freedom too far and take advantage of liberty. These verses tell of those who feel like they can do anything they want and call it "grace." These people abuse grace. These people are not living in a way that would allow them to restrict their freedom for other people's benefit.

I. WONDERFUL TRUTHS REGARDING FREEDOM

Here are some Scriptures concerning freedom:

1. (Gal 5:1) – *"Stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has*

made us free, and do not be entangled again in the yoke of bondage."

2. (Rom 6:7) – *"For he who has died has been freed from sin."*

3. (Rom 8:2) – *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."*

4. (Rom 8:31-32) – *“What, then, shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He with him, also freely give us all things?”*

5. (John 8:32, 36) – *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free....*

(36) Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

II. WARNINGS CONCERNING FREEDOM

Romans 6:16-23 set up our warning signs as we travel through life in freedom.

The Overall Principle – *“How we live depends on the master we choose!”* (Verse 16) *“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?”*

Some years ago there was popular folk song (Bob Dylan) that stated this very evident principle; *“You gotta serve somebody, You gotta serve somebody. It may be the Devil or it may be the Lord but you gotta serve somebody.”* Before grace, we were trapped in bondage to sin but grace freed us from the slavery of sin. Though we may lapse in sin from time to time, we need not live in subjection to its control any longer.

This passage further tells the believer that, *Grace Has Freed Us To Obey Christ* - (Verses 17-18) *“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. (18) And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”*

Grace doesn't mean we can live any way we want; it means that you are free to choose righteousness or disobedience. Grace gives us the choice of serving Christ rather than sin. Even as a Christian we can place ourselves under the control of sin, we do not have to, but choose to do so! Freedom is not the ability to do what I want, but rather the ability to do what I know I should do.

III. IMPORTANT REALIZATIONS

First, we are warned: *“Never hide behind grace as a cover for disobedience.”* When someone deliberately decides to disobey, that person isn't living free...those decisions bind and restrict. (Prov. 5:22-23) – *“An evil man is held captive by his own sins; they are ropes that catch and hold him. (23) He will die for lack of self-control; he will be lost because of his incredible folly.”* (NLT)

Do you remember the commercial on TV from some years ago about potato chips which challenged the viewer with, *“I bet you can't eat just one.”* Well this is a good statement of the truth about sin. It's like the man who says, *“There is nothing to quitting smoking. I have done it a thousand times.”* Jesus said in John 8:34, *“I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave to sin.”* When we engage in sin and choose willfully to disobey God we become slaves to sin.

Secondly we are told that, “We cannot live by grace without guidance.” Even though our nature yearns to be free, the indisputable fact is that we need a master. (Verses 19-23) *“I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. (20) For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. (21) What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. (22) But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. (23) For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

These verses say two things:

1. Make the right choice! (vv. 19-21)
2. Focus on the benefits of your current

position in grace! (vv. 22-23)

- Because of God’s grace, we are free from sin’s mastery.
- By God’s grace, we are enslaved to God.
- Through God’s grace, there are benefits to be derived.

What are the benefits to be derived through grace?

- * The exciting process of growing to maturity as a Christian!
- * A guilt-free lifestyle characterized by creativity and freedom!
- * The joyful outcome of eternal life!

In contrast what are the wages that taskmaster of sin doles out?

1. An instant break in our fellowship with God. (Isa. 59:2) – *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”*

2. The removal of God's blessing. (Dt. 28)

3. The misery of a guilty conscience. (Ps 32:3-5) *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. (4) For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. (5) Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"—and you forgave the guilt of my."*

One horrible side-effect of sin is that it produces memories. One of the problems we face as Christians is how do we face the memories of past sin. Sin fill us with regret and guilt. Satan will try to use those memories against us. He causes us to recall those memories to shame and condemn us, to render us useless to God's kingdom.

4. Loss of personal integrity. David's loss of integrity because of Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12:1-12 & 16:5-8

5. Sudden stop in spiritual growth. Sin affects us by making us dead on the inside to the things of God. We become dead to love, dead to the joy of serving the Lord; spiritually blind, spiritually insensitive, and spiritually dead. Solomon experience this after he fell into sin with foreign women in (1 Kings 11:1-4). *"But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites— (2) from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. (3) And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. (4) For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David."*

6. Strained relationships with fellow Christians. (1 Cor 5:9-13) *"I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people- (10) not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. (11) But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. (12) What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? (13) God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."*

Conclusion

Helpful reminders that keep us balanced:

1. Abusing grace stagnates us!

- It dulls our spiritual taste buds to the sweetness of God.
- It causes us to live casual, indifferent lives, instead of committed ones.
- We lead others astray.
- We become embarrassments to the Kingdom rather than an exemplification of its King.

2. Living in freedom motivates us!

- It motivates us to let go.
- When we're not free, we want to control others and the circumstances around us.
- When we're operating in a grace state of mind, we release others to make their own decisions about life and lifestyle.
- We free ourselves to accept each day as it comes.

To "Let Go" Takes Love

*To "let go" does not mean to stop caring,
it means that I can't do it for someone else.*

*To "let go" is not to cut myself off,
it is the realization that I can't control another.*

*To "let go" is not to enable,
but to allow learning from natural consequences.*

*To "let go" is to admit powerlessness,
which means the outcome is not in my hands.*

*To "let go" is not to try to change or blame another,
it is to make the most of myself.*

To "let go" is not to care for, but to care about.

*To "let go" is not to fix,
but to be supportive.*

*To "let go" is not to judge,
but to allow another to be a human being.*

*To "let go" is not to be in the middle arranging the outcomes,
but to allow others to effect their own destinies.*

*To "let go" is not to be protective,
it is to permit another to face reality.*

To "let go" is not to deny,

but to accept.

To "let go" is not to nag, scold or argue,

but instead to search out my own shortcomings & to correct them.

To "let go" is not to adjust everything to my desires,

but to take each day as it comes, and to cherish myself in it.

To "let go" is not to criticize and regulate anybody,

but to try to become what I dream I can be.

To "let go" is not to regret the past,

but to grow and to live for the future.

To "let go" is to fear less and to love more.

[Charles Swindoll, "The Grace Awakening" (1990, Word Publishing), pp.146-147.]

Our study today shines a light on the two paths that stretch before us: sin and righteousness. On which path do you find yourself?