

THE GRACE AWAKENING STUDY FOUR

Isn't It Risky to Embrace Grace?

Romans 6:1–15; Galatians 5:13–14

The Christian life creates an inevitable and inescapable tension. On the one hand there are the joyous benefits of being liberated and then there is the very real fact that we could live irresponsibly. Now that is the risk!

—Charles R. Swindoll

THERE once was a man selling quail in a bazaar in India. He attached strings to a stake and tied the other ends to little bands on the birds' legs so they could only walk in circles. A stranger felt sorry for the quail, so he bought the entire covey and set them free. Cut loose, the quail flew off . . . but they landed about twenty yards away and began walking in circles again!

These habit-loving quail illustrate one aspect of the risk of embracing grace. After learning that God saves us by faith and not by keeping the law, some people receive freedom only to return to law-keeping. Grace has set them free, but they keep walking in circles as though still tethered to the law.

Others, however, take their freedom to the opposite extreme. Without restraint, they go wild and indulge every sinful desire! They live by the libertarian's refrain: "Free from the law, oh happy condition. Sin all you please, for there is remission!"

Worried that people might turn their liberty into license to sin, some Christian leaders clip their parishioners' wings with these freedom-killing strategies:

- *Emphasize works over grace:* Denouncing what they view as "easy believe-ism," they add to faith-based salvation a certain level of commitment. Such teaching casts doubt on our faith because we never know if we're committed enough to be true Christians.
- *Give people lists of dos and don'ts:* You won't find these lists in the Bible. Their sole purpose is to keep people on a string.



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- *Leave no room for gray areas:* Moral gray areas are matters about which the Bible neither prohibits nor permits but offers principles for guidance. Leaders who fear freedom teach only black and white, never allowing people to think for themselves.
- *Cultivate a judgmental attitude:* Their condemning scowl brings to earth anyone who dares to take flight on freedom's wings.

Grace is risky. People may take their freedom to extremes, but the solution isn't to stop living by grace. Rather, we must learn how to use our freedom as a pathway to maturity. In fact, the only way to grow up as Christians is to embrace grace, risks and all!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Balancing the extremes of freedom requires wisdom from God. In his epistle, James offered this promise: “If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking” (James 1:5). Take a few moments and ask the Lord for wisdom as you study His Word, and He will certainly give it to you.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

As we've learned, God offers salvation as a gift, no strings attached! We can't earn our salvation even if we try because even our best efforts fall short. Since no one can obey the law perfectly, Paul argued, “No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands” (Romans 3:20).

Because the law failed to make us righteous, God sent His Son to bear our judgment and redeem us. To receive salvation, we simply accept Christ by faith. “He makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus” (3:26). God's grace is truly amazing!



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Well, if it's true that we're purchased with Christ's blood and freed from the law, then we can sin all we want, right? Some who heard the message of grace in Paul's day also wondered about freedom's limits; read the two ways that they posed the same question to Paul:

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace?
(Romans 6:1)

Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? (6:15)

Paul's answer was immediate and emphatic: "Of course not!" (6:2, 15). Let's use our observation skills to examine Paul's reasons for his response.



Observation: Resolving the Inescapable Tension

Paul built his response on three key words that form stepping stones across the swift river of sinful extremes.

Know Who We Are

Find the first key word, *know*, in *Romans 6:2–9*. What theological truths about baptism did Paul teach (Romans 6:2–4)?

Based on these truths, what did Paul say we should know with certainty (6:5–9)?



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Consider Ourselves Dead to Sin

Find the second key word, *consider*, in *Romans 6:10–11*. What was the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:10)?

What was Paul's conclusion (6:11)?

Present Ourselves to Our New Master

Find the third key word, *present*, in *Romans 6:12–14 (NASB)*. What were Paul's negative and positive commands (Romans 6:12–14)?

According to Paul, using our freedom to indulge our desires enslaves us to sin—the worst sort of master. Instead of freeing us to sin, *grace frees us to obey God*—the finest Master.

The whole message of grace is not about sinning and sinning all the more because grace abounds all the more. It is a message that frees you and me from the domination of sin and the authority of men and women over you and brings you in league with the teaching of Christ and a message that frees you to obey Him and to grow up in Christ. —Chuck Swindoll



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In a later study, “If You’re Free, Why Not Live Like It?” we’ll take a more in-depth look at the specifics of how Paul’s strategy of *know*, *consider*, and *present* works. For now, let’s move into the interpretation phase of our study as we seek to understand the *meaning* of our freedom in Christ.



Interpretation: Finding the Benefits and Balance of Freedom

The risk of grace is that we might use our freedom either to return to law-keeping (legalism) or to indulge in sin (license). But God didn’t unshackle us from the law only for us to shackle ourselves to the law or sin. Either way, we’re in bondage! How much better it is to enjoy the benefits of freedom. Paul made this point in Galatians 5:1 and 13.

So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don’t get tied up again in slavery to the law. (Galatians 5:1)

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. (5:13)

According to these verses, why did Christ set us free?

Write your own definition of *freedom* based on these verses.



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Benefits of Freedom

In his message, Chuck Swindoll listed four benefits of freedom:

- *We're no longer helplessly bound to our impulses.* We have the freedom *and* power to reject sin.
- *We're free to make our own choices.* We can ask the Holy Spirit to direct us so we don't feel bound by what others think we should do.
- *We can avoid the tyranny of comparison.* We need only be concerned with pleasing God, not measuring up to others.
- *We grow up!* We become the person God wants us to be, not the person someone else thinks we should be.

Balance of Freedom

Just as a tightrope walker's pole helps prevent him or her from falling, the principle Paul offered in Galatians 5:13 can balance us as we maneuver grace's thin wire: "Use your freedom to serve one another in love."

Lack of love is the primary characteristic of believers who use their freedom irresponsibly. They have little concern for others, and when they hurt others, they tend to rationalize their actions and refuse accountability. How do you think love balances our freedom?



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Correlation: Obeying the Law of Love

Paul stated that although he was free from the Mosaic law, he was obligated to obey another law. What law was that (*John 15:12; 1 Corinthians 9:20–21*)?

Although some might take the message of grace to extremes, the risk is worth the reward of living with freedom to love others!



Application: Suggestions for Living Freely and Responsibly

God frees us not to do whatever we want but to become the people He created us to be! Consequently, *enjoy the freedom grace provides*. Your liberty is a gift from God. *Consider grace a privilege rather than a right*. Be grateful for the freedom God offers and don't flaunt it. *Remember that our freedom cost the Savior His life*. Something so precious should never be taken for granted.

As you live in freedom, Chuck offers three questions to ask yourself so that you can live both freely and responsibly.

1. *Is this wise?* Not everything we're free to do is wise when we're following the principles of God's Word.
2. *Do I have peace?* If the Holy Spirit is needling your conscience and making you feel uneasy, refrain from the action.
3. *Does it show proper respect?* Christ's law of love is the ultimate guiding principle. Always do the most loving thing.

Cast these questions as beams of light against a certain situation in your life. How do they offer you guidance?



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Christ sets us free because He knows rules don't grow us like freedom does. Love is the rudder that keeps our ship of freedom on a steady course. Only in freedom can we learn to love others genuinely, just as our Father does.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, guard me from the extremes of legalism and license. Bring me into balance as I follow Your way of love. Thank You for providing me a life like no other, an abundant life. May I claim and enjoy the life You have for me through Christ, in whose name I pray, amen.



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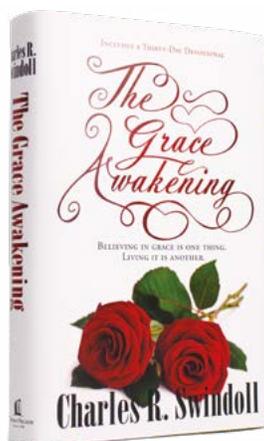
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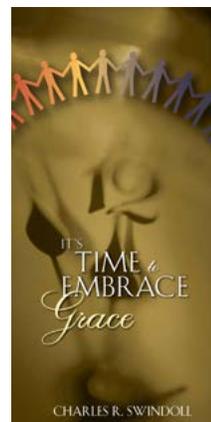
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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