

# Free From Sin and Excited About Life

## Lesson 5

### GROW DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM

#### Engaging the Learner

Sin is an ugly word—or at least it is for the Christian. For us “sin” brims with pain, lust, hatred, failure, confusion, and the past. The Christian understanding is a far cry from the “sin” of contemporary culture—the highest experiential compliment that can be paid. “The chocolate mouse truffles were positively sinful.” “His love was the sweetest sin.”

Saint Augustine, one of the greatest theologians of the first millennium, became a Christian during his adult years. Struggling with a background in Greek philosophy and hedonism, he found sin’s hold to be maddening even as he attempted to free himself from its iron grasp to pursue a godly life. In *Confessions*, his spiritual autobiography, he offers the following description:

*The enemy held fast my will, and had made of it a chain, and had bound me tight with it. For out of the perverse will came lust, and the service of lust ended in habit, and habit, not resisted, became necessity. By these links, as it were, forged together--which is why I called it "a chain"--a hard bondage held me in slavery. But that new will which had begun to spring up in me freely to worship thee and to enjoy thee, O my God, the only certain Joy, was not able as yet to overcome my former willfulness, made strong by long indulgence. Thus my two wills--the old and the new, the carnal and the spiritual--were in conflict within me; and by their discord they tore my soul apart, (Book 8, Chapter 5).*

Do Augustine’s words resonate with your own experience? Have you found sin’s grip on your will, your actions, and your habits to be too pervasive to deny? Do you long to live a Christ-like life but find yourself powerless against attitudes and appetites plainly contrary to God’s will? Are you tempted to resign yourself to a lifetime of defeat and accept sin as a necessary part of the Christian walk?

#### Exploring the Lesson

Paul powerfully explores the issue of sin and the Christian life in Romans 6:15-23. The members of the church of Rome (to whom Romans was written) were not immature Christians. Indeed, Paul compliments them in 1:8 by noting their faith was being reported “all over the world.” Nevertheless, these famous Christians were making a serious spiritual mistake. Because God was so loving and merciful, they began to believe Christians could continue sinning as they had in their heathen days (6:15). In 6:16, Paul reminded the Romans (and us) that our actions reveal to whom we belong. “You are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness.” So Christians, even mature believers, have a basic decision to make: Who will we serve? Like Augustine, we may find ourselves in agony over this decision, but Romans goes on to explain how God frees us to belong entirely to Him.

*Whose are You?*

The person or thing you are committed to determines the kind of life you live. For instance, someone

“enslaved” to narcotics arranges schedules, priorities, and finances around acquiring his or her “fix”. Likewise, an individual enslaved to the stock market allows moods, activities, and vacations to be determined by the highs and lows of financial markets. Romans 6:16 tells us that, ultimately, we are enslaved to one of two masters--sin or God.

Enslavement to sin--continuing to engage in a sinful lifestyle--leads to spiritual death. On the other hand, enslavement to God, manifest by obedience to Him, results in holiness and eternal life. Sometimes we are tempted to believe we don't serve anyone. “I'm my own master,” we find ourselves believing. However, those who follow themselves eventually find they have become addicted or enslaved to other things (for example, money, alcohol, sex, or pride). They are no longer who they wanted to be (and admit they are no longer in control). Enslavement to oneself is an illusion and only another form of slavery to sin.

#### *God has Freed You Already*

If you are a Christian, God has already accomplished so much in your life. Paul describes this transformation in 6:17-18. Before accepting Christ, you were a slave to sin. However, you obeyed the gospel taught you. In so doing, God freed you from an enslavement to sin, and you have become a slave to righteousness. Of course, a slave cannot free himself or herself. So, God has chosen to free us and given us a choice: Who will you now serve? Amazingly, some will choose to go back to being a slave to sin leading to death, even though they have tasted the sweet service to God leading to eternal life!

#### *A Love-Slave to God*

God beckons unmistakably: “Offer (the parts of your body) in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness” (6:19). Through His grace, God offers the opportunity to choose slavery to Him. In Paul's day, two types of slaves were prevalent. The most common was the bond-slave. Owned and worked by his or her master, the bond-slave was forced into slavery. However, a second form of slavery also existed wherein a free person willingly chose to give himself or herself to a master. This person was known as a love-slave. Romans describes our previous state as a slave against our will (a bond-slave) to sin. However, as Christians, “we have been set free from sin” (6:18). We now can choose to be holy and right with God as His love-slave. God asks us to offer, yield, or present ourselves to him.

#### *Love-Slave Needed: Great Benefits*

Compare the benefit package of slavery to God verses slavery to sin's. Romans 6:21 reminds us that sin results in embarrassment, guilt, and, ultimately, death. On the other hand, the next verse (6:22) offers God's 401K. He gives holiness and eternal life. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23).

#### *Decision*

In conclusion let's review what Romans has taught us about sin:

- 1) We are going to serve someone—Sin, God, or ourselves.
- 2) Before conversion, you were a bond-slave to sin.
- 3) Through God you have become a new person, a spiritual person, and a free person.
- 4) What are you going to do with your spiritual freedom? You can choose to return to sin slavery or become a love-slave to God.
- 5) God is asking you to offer yourself to Him.

Paul Rice was a student in traffic-control school. During the course, his instructor mentioned that a traffic regulation allowing cars to enter a main thoroughfare from a side road without stopping was sorely needed. Paul invented the “Yield Right of Way” sign, now shortened to “Yield” and posted on highways across the nation.

If you know how to merge into traffic, you know what is meant by the call to “yield” yourself to God. He has priority. As you go through life, you must merge into the mainstream of His plan by giving yourself

entirely to Him. Would you like to yield yourself entirely to God? Pray to Him now, answering the questions in the next section.

## Enhancing Our Lives

Read again the quote from St. Augustine in the **Engaging the Learner** section. As a Christian, do you feel that sin will rip you apart? Do you know the chain he describes—from perverse will, to lust, to habit, to necessity—all too well? Romans illuminates our position: We are stuck between two masters. Let's consider a couple more points.

1. List three things you do (or don't do) because you want to please your spouse, girlfriend/boyfriend, or parents:

A.

B.

C.

Because we are committed to specific persons, we behave in particular ways. When we are committed to God, we behave in ways that we know will please him.

2. Name five differences God has made in your life since your conversion:

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

Aren't you glad for these changes?

3. Now, offer yourself to God unreservedly, as His love-slave. Pray, covering the following areas.

A. Thank God for making you a new person.

B. Thank Him for freedom from guilt.

C. Tell God how much you appreciate the differences (listed above) made in your life.

D. Ask God to accept you.

E. Give Him every aspect of who you are. Search the different compartments of your life, allowing God to identify areas you need to present Him. Start with your job, then consider family, friendship, romantic relationships, entertainment, hobbies, etc.

F. Tell God you will serve Him in any way He wants.

G. Pledge Him your love and obedience.

H. Thank God for the assurance He provides.

## Outline for Small Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

All questions and exercises are useful for either personal or small group reflection. While exercises marked with an asterisk (\*) are written specifically for a small group leader, individual learners can easily modify the exercise for their personal study.

### Engaging the Learner

What is your reaction to the word “sin”? What “chains,” such as the ones Augustine mentioned, seem to hold you? Which of your own desires or lusts have now become necessities?

### Exploring the Lesson/Enhancing your life

\*Read Romans 6:15-23 to the class.

*Whose Are You?*

Ultimately, what are our choices for a master?

What are the outward marks of being enslaved to God? To sin?

Can you be enslaved to yourself?

*God Has Freed You Already*

How were you freed from enslavement to sin originally?

\*Divide the class into groups of four to five. Have group members share, as they are comfortable, areas that God has already changed in their lives. Also, have them share areas they know they need to continue to work to change with God’s grace. Stress that no one is required to speak in these exercises.

*A Love-Slave To God*

What does slavery to righteousness lead to?

What is the difference between a bond-slave and a love slave? Which would you rather be?

*Love-Slave Needed: Great Benefits*

\*Divide a dry-erase board or chalkboard down the middle. Ask the class to list the sins they see rampant in our society on the left side. Then, ask them what results these sins lead to for individuals and for society. Write this list on the right. Example: Gluttony: obesity, heart disease. Now, erase the board and have them list the “demands” or changes God asks of us on the left side. Again, ask what these changes result in for individuals and for society as a whole.

*Decision*

What areas do you have a difficult time yielding to God?

\*Ask the class to orally outline the major points in this lesson. A good basic 5-point outline can be found in the *Decision* section. The final point should be that God is asking us to offer ourselves as slaves to Him. Ask if anyone was able to make that commitment over the past week and is willing to share. Allow a private prayer time for the last ten minutes or so of class. Distribute the prayer outline (#3 of **Enhancing Our Lives**).