



BIBLE STUDY SERIES

# *Free Indeed*

---

LESSON 7

---

## **The Abuse of Liberty**

**Romans 6:1**

*“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?”*

The doctrine of Christian liberty is both precious and perilous. It can be used rightly, yet it can also be abused. Because of the work of Christ on the cross, all Christians have been liberated from the guilt and penalty of sin. The law of God, which sinners have broken, has been nailed to the cross and the believer is set free to please God. As Paul writes to the Roman believers under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he foresees the abuse of this precious doctrine of Christian liberty. When misapplied, liberty becomes a weapon which harms others. The abuse of our Christian liberty

presents serious danger. Romans 6:1 makes clear that grace is never a license to sin, but rather liberty to serve Christ, not self.

The theological term for the misuse of Christian liberty is known as *antinomianism*, which literally means “against the law.” This recurring perversion of Scripture and has unfortunately become commonplace in Christianity today. Antinomianism tells us we have been freed from the Law and are no longer obligated to obey any of it, even the Ten Commandments. In the 1980’s, the “Grace Awakening” movement popularized the idea that Christian liberty gives us personal freedom without considering the effect of our choices upon believers. This brought about the “normative” interpretive position, which said, “If it is not specifically forbidden in Scripture, it is permissible.” The normative principle reduced the expectations of a Christian to live a holy life set apart from the unbelieving world. Ultimately, a biblical understanding of Christian liberty is that it exists not for self-expression, but rather for Christ-centered obedience.

## **The Purpose of Christian Liberty**

Romans 6:1 asks, “*Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*” The emphatic answer given verse two is, “*God forbid.*” This means that we may not use grace as a cloak for our own sinful behavior. We have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection and have undergone a genuine change in our relationship to sin itself. We

are no longer under sin’s dominion; therefore, sin has no more power to force us to disobey Christ.

In the same chapter, verse fifteen brings further clarification. “*Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?*” Paul again entirely rejects this idea, exclaiming, “*God forbid.*” To be “*not under the law*” signifies freedom from the old curse and old covenant—not freedom from obedience to Christ. The grace of God does not do away with righteousness; rather, it establishes it.

Paul then describes how we have been moved from slavery to sin to freedom to please Christ. In Romans 6:18, we are told that we are to be “*servants of righteousness.*” True Christian liberty, then, is not autonomy; it is a change of allegiance. Genuine Christian freedom enables us to be free from sin’s reign so that we may serve God.

## **The Perversion of Christian Liberty**

For the last two thousand years of Christian history, faithful Christians have refuted antinomianism. It teaches that we are not obligated to obey the moral law of God because we are now under grace. It assures that grace will cover any and all sin, so why not live in sin because we are under grace? Antinomianism reduces salvation to simply an intellectual assent to the facts about the gospel. However, in I John 2:3-6, John the Apostle shows us that obedience is the evidence of knowing Christ. Verse two says, “*Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.*” We are justified by

faith; yet, as true believers, we also should keep God’s commands. Some antinomians today teach “radical grace,” which says that there are essentially no binding commands in the New Testament. Yet, Christ and His apostles gave clear commands that are still valid today. Those who promote the “Grace Awakening” undermine the biblical integration of justification and sanctification.

Antinomians view God as entirely indifferent to our holiness. In fact, they hurl a quick, cutting accusation of “legalism” when someone reminds believers of God’s requirements for holy living. They accuse those who seek to follow Christ’s commands of being Pharisees and requiring things that the Word of God does not require. This pernicious view of grace lowers the bar for Christian behavior. Instead of asking, “Do my actions or words glorify God? Does my behavior reflect Christ’s character?”, the question becomes, “Where is this specifically prohibited in Scripture?” In other words, “We are free to do whatever the Bible does not specifically prohibit.” This argument denigrates Christian living to minimal compliance rather than joyful obedience and devotion to our Saviour.

Antinomianism rejects both biblical principles and apostolic instruction. Very wisely, the timeless Word of God directs us through principles rather than merely listing exhaustive prohibitions. For example, in I Corinthians 10:23 reminds us that though all things may be lawful, not all things edify. Christian liberty is governed by our love for others, our tender consciences, and the good of the entire local body of believers.

The New Testament stands against those who would use their liberty as an excuse for hurting others. I Peter 2:16 says, *“As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.”* Christian liberty not only avoids sinful behavior but also calls us to pursue what is excellent, pure, praiseworthy, and pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of a search for permissibility, true grace brings an inner desire to please the Saviour.

Amid the “Grace Awakening,” many churches affected by this popular doctrinal stance increasingly began focusing only on what Scripture specifically forbids. Christian behavior, once evaluated through the lens of pleasing Christ and obeying Him, is now judged as legalistic, Pharisaical, and contrary to this newly found grace. Titus 2:11-12 says, *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”* This shows us that grace instructs believers to deny ungodliness and to live righteously.

## **The Principles of Christian Liberty**

The Word of God is timeless and is filled with clearly understood principles that guide us in daily life. How wise our all-knowing God is to give us not just a list of prohibitions that would have been limited to the first century, but eternal truths that are practical for the changes in culture and technology that we face today! While those who seek to pervert grace into a license to sin only obey specific prohibitions, scriptural believers seek to follow biblical principles that guide our daily activities.

The Scripture warns Christians never to use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but rather to serve one another in love. Galatians 5:13 instructs, *“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”* Christian liberty is sacrificial. It encourages believers to have tender consciences and prioritize others’ edification over personal preference. Our day-to-day decisions, our entertainment choices, and our words are not morally neutral. We must submit each of these things, not to the test of our desire, but to the test of God’s Word. We must ask ourselves whether our actions, behaviors, and words reflect the character of the Lord Jesus Christ and whether our entertainment choices build up or weaken our most holy faith.

For those seeking total freedom from ethics and morals, antinomianism uses “grace” as a thin veil to cover their own selfish desires and still claim to be thoroughly right with a holy God. Freedom in Christ intensifies our responsibility; it does not remove our responsibility to please the Saviour. Those who know the Saviour should have within their hearts a desire to obey the One Who loves them and gave Himself for them.

In God’s Word, we note that the Apostle Paul does not give a long and specific list of “do’s” and “don’ts.” Biblical principles are given to us so that we may measure our behavior by eternal measurements that are not based on dated activities or possessions. These timeless biblical principles may be applied both to first-century

Christian living and to twenty-first century Christian living. There are several tests that we may give ourselves when asking about our choices for recreation, possessions, and pursuits. How can we, in the twenty-first century, know how to live or know what activities we should engage in, as many choices exist today that did not exist when the New Testament was written? Notice the following questions or tests that help us follow scriptural principles to govern questionable attitudes and behaviors today.

### ***Test #1 – Is it Expedient?***

The first test is found in I Corinthians 6:12, which states, *“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”* To be “expedient” means to be practical or helpful. Ask the question, “Could this choice that I am about to make have the risk of placing me under the power of some outside substance or authority?” For example, the use of recreational drugs or the choice to gamble on sports are not specifically forbidden in New Testament passages; however, the principle that one may be brought under their power is a warning to avoid such activities that may tend toward addiction or be unhelpful by hindering one’s walk with Christ.

### ***Test #2 – Is it Edifying?***

A second test is also found in I Corinthians 10:23. God’s Word says, *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”*

The word *edify* means “to build up.” We should ask, “Does this activity or possession strengthen my Christian walk? Will this keep me from sin and enable me to serve the Lord better? Will it help me be a better witness?” Also, we may measure our behavior by asking, “Would this activity strengthen and build up my fellow believers if they followed my example?” Edification is a test we should apply to our daily choices.

### ***Test #3 – Is it Exemplary?***

A third test is found in Philippians 4:8, which says, “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*” This Scripture test is a ruler to measure our words, our attitudes, our behaviors, and even our choice in possessions. These scriptural filters enable us to think according to biblical principles and in a manner that is pleasing to Christ. Our thoughts, words, and actions are to honor Christ and to be examples that other believers may safely follow.

We can apply these three practical tests for twenty-first century believers in our day-to-day living. Far from using our own liberty in Christ as an excuse to do as we please, we should use it to serve Christ gratefully and love our Saviour who gave Himself for us.