



Pastor Kyle Mercer
You're Not as Free as You Think

April 19, 2026
Series: Be Free
Romans 6:14-23

BIG IDEA - IN CHRIST, YOU ARE NOT UNDER LAW, BUT UNDER GRACE

Good morning, Two Cities Church. We have a big week ahead of us. We have a big week behind us. We just had the Weekender. I think I have some pictures. We had over 100 people here taking their next step. It never gets old for me. Very, very exciting. This week, we have two big events.

Let me just say this. Hear me say this. Okay? We are not an event-driven church. I will not, by the grace of God, let us become an event-driven church where we're just doing events, events, events, events, events, and we will never do an event that could have been an email. Events exist to equip people in our church to be stronger, or we might say to be centered and sent.

We're bringing in Albert Mohler. Who was here last time he did an "Ask anything"? Yes! Look, guys. I have had a man crush on Dr. Mohler for 20 years. When he came here last time, I was coaching myself in the parking lot. "Don't be too excited when you see him. Don't be too excited. Don't forget your name."

Guys, he's coming back. It's going to be incredible. Bring your questions. Go ahead. Bring your questions on technology. Bring your questions on theology. Bring your questions on geopolitical realities. He loves talking about all that stuff. So, be here Wednesday night. Come with your Community Group. Go to dinner before or after. Have a great time.

Then, can I talk to the men for a second? We have our annual men's night. Clayton King is back. I talked to him on the phone this week. He said he's going to be giving a sermon called *Men (or a man) of Action*. It's going to be incredible. Speaking of men of

action, the Butner Campus... Men of Butner, welcome for week two. Can we give them a round of applause?

Men of Butner, I want to say something. I was thinking about you guys this morning, and I was thinking about how what the apostle Paul would do when he couldn't be with people he loved and wanted to be with was he would write letters. I want you to know we have sent a team, and that's part of the way we say we love you. Our desire and ability to actually put a campus in Butner is part of our way to say we love you, and I hope one day soon to be there and meet you as well.

Romans, chapter 6, is where we're going to be today. If you're new, we're launching series within a larger series for the year. Today we're launching *Be Free*. What's interesting is... I was talking to Pastor Dave about this after this service. There was so much chaos at the 9:00 service. I'm not even going to get into it. Several things happened. I actually think it's spiritual warfare. I think this is a very important message. So I'm ready. Let's get ready together in prayer, and then we're going to dive into Romans 6.

Lord, I want to take a moment, and I want to pray for every person in here. We show up each week, and we're not exactly sure what's going to happen. What we want to do today is we want to understand sin. More than that, we want to understand the grace of God.

Lord, I pray for clarity to teach. I pray for a humility among our church to listen and to apply what the Bible says, Lord. As Paul will say today, we want to be set free, but we want to be set free not just *from* something but *for* something. Would you do it? In Jesus' name we ask, amen.

Statements are powerful. Right? There are certain statements... It's more than just a sentence. A statement can change history. "I have a dream." Four words, and we remember them. MLK repeated them again and again and again. "Tear down this wall." Those of us who were alive can remember Reagan saying that. "I declare these truths to be self-evident." These are statements.

Now, there are statements that change history. Then there are also statements that change *your* life. Now, it could be something good. "I now pronounce you husband and wife." I just did a wedding this week. It's amazing that in that statement, we speak a new reality over this brand-new couple.

Here's another phrase that'll change your life: "It's a boy." Or, you know, how many times has your wife or your husband or maybe your boss or your parents, or somebody, walked in the room and said, "We need to talk"? Nothing good ever comes after those four words. *Ever*.

Guys, today we're going to look at a statement in chapter 6, verse 14. This statement is the "Be free" statement. This statement is a declarative statement. It's not a command. I'm going to read it to you in a second. Paul just gave a bunch of commands. He'll give more commands later.

You know, we saw last week, "Present your members to God. Present yourselves to God." Those were commands. This is a promise. This is a fact. This is an assurance. I'll read it to you. Romans 6:14: ***"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."***

I'm going to try for the next 40 minutes to unpack this statement, but here's what I need to say, and I need you to listen up. (Last time, right around here, was when it got a little weird in here. Stuff started happening.) Some of you are living under a different statement than this statement, and it's a statement somebody else said about you.

It might have been your ex, and the statement was, "I don't love you. In fact, I settled for you." It might have been your parents. It's so long ago you're embarrassed to talk about it. Here was the statement: "Why can't you be more like your brother?" or "Why can't you be more like your sister?"

Sometimes it's a coach or a mentor. "You just don't have what it takes to get to the next level." Sometimes it's a peer, and they say something like, "You know what? You're awkward, and you're not that pretty, and everybody is just nice to you because they feel sorry for you."

I know those statements... It's like, "Can somebody live under a statement like that?" Well, I have done enough pastoral counseling for the last 15 years to know that there are statements somebody said a long time ago that you're still living under, and I want you to not live under *that* statement, but I want you to live under what God says about you.

Here's what he says (verse 14): "Sin will not have dominion over you." Okay. We need to talk about the word *dominion*. I'm guessing you didn't use the word *dominion* this week. It's kind of a scary word. If I walk into an area, and I'm like, "I'm about to have dominion," it's like, "What are you about to do?"

Here's what's interesting. We're told, "Sin will not have dominion over you." But guess what's interesting. If you go back to Genesis 1, the first command to humans, the first command to Adam and Eve, was to have dominion. Back in our *Multiply* series, opening sermon, Genesis 1: "Be fruitful, multiply, subdue the earth, and have dominion." Here's what *dominion* means: "Use it for your purposes." Ultimately, *God's* purposes, but that's what it means. I'm going to explain how sin has dominion.

So, here's what *dominion* is: take the raw materials of creation and reorganize them for human flourishing, for good purposes. If you've ever wondered, "How did we get planes that stay in the air and toilets that flush and cars that drive, and how can I hit a switch and there's electricity, and how can I turn on water and it comes out of the sink?" the answer is that was man, in God's image, having dominion.

Now, why am I telling you that? Because it says that after Genesis, chapter 3, when sin enters the world, sin has dominion over *us* before we're in Christ. Here's what that means. If you talk to the average person in America today, they think, for sure, that they're in control of their sin.

Does anybody ever wake up and say, "I decided to destroy my life today"? No, because sin always takes us farther than we want to go, charges us more than we want to pay, and keeps us longer than we want to stay. Here's what Paul is saying: sin actually uses people for its purposes, and oftentimes, they don't realize until later in life. We'll talk about that later.

He says, "You're not under law but under grace." I want to talk about law, and I want to talk about grace. Here's what he says. There are two kingdoms. By the way, if you haven't noticed this, the Bible is binary. There's heaven and there's hell. There are believers and there are unbelievers.

We tend to think, "Oh, I'm looking for a third option." There is not a third option. There are two kingdoms. It's the kingdom under law or the kingdom under grace. The kingdom under law is later called *sin*. The kingdom under grace is often called the *kingdom of life* or the *kingdom of Christ*.

Think about it this way. You know, here we are. We haven't had to live in a kingdom for hundreds of years, so how do you understand kingdoms? Think about it this way: operating systems. He's basically saying, "You've been under an old operating system called the *law*. It affected how you lived, how you thought, your heart...all of that." He's saying, "It's time to get a new operating system."

Let me make this really practical. He's like, "Some of you are still using an Android." Too soon? "And it's messing up everything...green bubbles for the rest of us." He said, "You've got to get rid of that old operating system. You need a new operating system." See, here's the difference. By the way, if you haven't noticed, sometimes I have to talk about the same things again and again and again in different ways.

Paul has kind of talked about this already, but let me just say it. *Law* is an external motivation. Law doesn't work long-term. The problem is as soon as your parents tell you not to do something, what do you want to do? Do it. I mean, am I the only one

who wants to pull fire alarms? I've never done that, but every time I see one, I'm like, "Man, I know I shouldn't pull it, but I kind of want to."

Paul says later the law often puts in you the desire to do the exact opposite, whereas *grace* is an internal motivation. Think about it this way. The law informs; grace transforms. You know, you buy some cookie. The law is the nutrition label on the back, which you don't even want to look at. You're like, "Forty percent of my sugar for the day. How many carbs are in this?" All it can do is inform. The nutrition label cannot give you the power not to eat the cookie.

Grace transforms; the law informs. He said, "You need to live under grace." Let's talk about what grace is. You've probably heard the acronym. Grace is "God's riches at Christ's expense." I mean, what we teach kids is important for a reason. That is a good definition of grace. You could say grace is God's goodness toward us because of what Christ has done for us.

There are different types of grace. Did you know that? Part of what we need to do... It's 2026. We need to become a little more sophisticated in our thinking. Is God gracious to everyone? The answer is...*What type of grace are you talking about?* If you're talking about what's called *common grace*, the answer is *yes*.

Common grace is all the grace God gives to people that doesn't save them. This is health. This is food. I mean, there are Bible verses on this. "He makes his sun rise and his rain fall on the just and the unjust." But this isn't talking about living under common grace, because everybody lives under God's common grace. That's why everybody doesn't go to hell immediately for the first sin they commit.

He's talking about God's saving and transforming grace. The saving grace of God is you realize, "The only thing I brought to my salvation is the sin that made it necessary, and now I understand that the primary way, the first and foremost way that I relate to God is by the grace of God."

Here's the thing. This works for everybody. You've never had such a great day that you didn't need the grace of God, and you've never had such a bad day that you were outside of the grace of God. That's helpful to know. Let me say it again. You've never had such a good day that you haven't needed the grace of God, and you've never had such a bad day that you were outside the reach of the grace of God.

The grace of God doesn't just forgive us; it transforms us. Think of it this way. The grace of God is not an excuse to sin; it's an empowerment to say no to sin. The grace of God does not give you permission to sin; it gives you power over sin. Think of it this way. When you understand the grace of God, you stop saying, "I have to," and you start saying, "I get to." That's such a big difference. Right?

By the way, it honors God a lot more that I *get* to than I *have* to. I mean, "I have to go to church. I have to go to Community Group. I have to read my Bible. I have to share my faith. I have to pray. I have to say no to this tempting sin," versus "I get to." Just try that in your mind one time. "I get to talk to the God of the universe. I get to read God's thoughts for me written down in a book. I get to share the hope of Christ with other people. I get to be part of a local church with other believers on mission together."

Well, here's what he's going to say. Now we're going to unpack the rest of this chapter. He goes, "If you're under grace and you're not under law..." He goes, "If you're going to understand these things, you actually have to understand slavery and freedom." You'll see how this is connected. Follow me. Look at what he says in verse 15. **"What then?"** Paul is back to asking questions. **"Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!"** "May it never be that."

Then he says, **"Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God..."** By the way, do you notice that Paul praises God in the middle of writing about being a slave of God?

"But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." Okay. We're going to spend a lot of time talking about freedom and slavery, because basically, Paul says everybody is a slave.

Now, Paul is not making a moral judgment on slavery. He's using something everybody understands to talk about something nobody understands. So, he's like, "I'm going to use this metaphor and analogy of slavery to talk about a couple of things." By the way, in a few minutes, you'll see this. At the end, he goes, "Human language gets in the way. This isn't the best." He kind of says, "It's hard to describe spiritual realities with human language."

When you talk about being a slave... If you told the average American, modern people, they're enslaved, they would say, "No, I'm not." They would say, "I do whatever I want to, whenever I want to, with whoever I want to." The number one value of Americans has to be autonomy. It has to be the anthem, "My body, my choice." The water we're swimming in is expressive individualism, which is "Let me find out who I am and share that with others."

So much of consumerism is the Burger King mindset: "Have it your way." I mean, think about how much freedom we have as consumers. Imagine that your wife sends

you to the grocery store to get toothpaste. Have you ever seen what a toothpaste aisle at a grocery store looks like? Some of you need to visit the toothpaste aisle.

If you go there, you're like, "What brand do I get? What size do I get? What flavor do I get? Do I have sensitive teeth? Does whitening work? Should I be worried about cavities?" We have so much choice. So, we're going to have a deep conversation together on this Sunday morning.

Here's a question: Do you have free will? This is the kind of thing that nerdy seminary students debate at night. When you ask the question, people feel silly. I feel silly even asking it, because people are going to go, "Of course I have free will. I mean, just ask ChatGPT. The average American makes, like, 30,000 decisions a day. I went to the school I wanted to, took the job I wanted to, and married the person I wanted to. Of course I have free will."

Well, here's what the Bible says: the will is not neutral... We like to think our will is neutral. "I can choose anything." Your will is not neutral; it's bent. Here's the Bible's definition of free will: You have the ability to do what you want. The problem is you won't want the right things.

I talk here a lot about a guy named Martin Luther, because he's a famous Christian from the 1500s. I mean, he literally started the Protestant Reformation. You've probably heard of him. He nailed the 95 Theses to the door at Wittenberg. Look him up sometime if you don't know who he is. He did so many things.

Here's what's interesting. At the end of his life, he said his favorite and most important book he wrote was *On the Bondage of the Will*, in which he talks about this idea that the problem with you and me is we do get to choose what we want, but we're not going to want the right things. Jonathan Edwards, this other guy, wrote a book a couple hundred years later called *The Freedom of the Will*, where he basically says we have natural ability, but not moral ability.

Think about it this way. Imagine a guy or gal is a workaholic. Jonathan Edwards would say they actually have the natural ability to take a nap. They have the natural ability to say, "At 9:00, I should get in my bed, lie down, turn the lights off, and fall asleep." He said they would have the *natural* ability, but they wouldn't have the *moral* ability, because they are greedy or their identity is found in their productivity or they're a slave to their boss or whatever it is.

So, what I want to talk to you about for a little bit is what the Bible teaches, which is not... Here's what the world teaches: freedom *from*. That's the definition of the world. Freedom from constraint. The Bible teaches freedom *for* Christ. Those are two different mentalities.

Think about it this way. I always like to do a little history together. Over the last 300 years, we have been in a project, as the American people, to try to get free from more and more constraints. What was the first constraint Americans wanted to get free from? The crown. The American Revolution. That's a good thing. We didn't want to be under the crown.

What's the second thing we got free from? The state church, which later became getting free from the church. What's the third thing we got free from? You can look at the dates on all this. They wanted to be free not just from the crown and the church; they wanted to be free from tradition, from all of the things in the past, from all of the teachings of the past, from all of the lessons of the past.

Then, what's the fourth thing we wanted to be free from? Our families. This is why we live in what's called a *first-name culture*. Nobody even tells you what their last name is anymore, because they don't really care. They care about their first name (that's who *they* are), not their last name (who they're connected to).

Now we're trying, in like 20 different ways, to be free from our biology. We're actually trying to be free from our whole bodies. Like, "Let's go into the metaverse. Let's do AI everything. Let's upload our consciousness. Let's do virtual reality everything." We're trying to be free from constraints.

Think about this. What does the average American want as they grow up? "I want to get out of my parents' house, to be free from that. Not just that. I want to be free from the place I grew up in. I want to go live somewhere else." People try to be free from all... "I want to be free from work. I want to somehow find out how to get money without having to work."

We're always trying to think, "Freedom would come if I would just have less and less constraints." The Bible actually says the exodus narrative is the paradigm. God tells Moses, and Moses says to Pharaoh, "Let my people go..." That's freedom *from* sin and slavery. Why? "...so that they may worship me." That's freedom *for*.

What happens when you become a Christian is God gives you the right desires and helps you to order your fears, your affections, and your priorities so you can live out your divine design. Look at what he says. I'll read it one more time. He says that we're slaves. I want to talk about this idea of being a slave. I'm going to read verse 16 again.

"Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of

teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

We don't like thinking of ourselves as slaves. Basically, Paul goes, "There's no middle ground. You're either going to be a slave to sin or a slave to God." You're not even on the menu to choose yourself. You know, "I'll be a slave to myself." No, you can't choose that. It's either God or it's sin.

Here's the thing. Every time you talk about slavery with people, they think, "I'm not enslaved," because people think of slavery as "I'm enslaved to something I hate." That's certainly a form of slavery, but most people experience slavery like this: "I'm enslaved to something I love." Americans are, for the most part (which means you guys and myself)... Here are four areas we tend to be enslaved to.

Other people. For how many of you, if you're honest, people are big and God is small? People are living rent-free in your mind. You care way too much about (you hate to say it out loud) who "likes" and comments on your social media. You care way too much about the opinions of other people.

See, here's what happens. When you're young, we correct you and go, "Hey, don't give in to peer pressure." Every parent has that conversation. "Don't give in to peer pressure." Then when you get older, we say, "Please be careful with people-pleasing. That's not going to go well for you." It moves from peer pressure to people-pleasing. Then, when you end up in counseling, they call it *codependence*.

How much worry, how much fear, how much anxiety is because we are actually enslaved to the opinions of everybody around us? Some of you are 40, and you're still enslaved to what your parents think about you. This happens all the time to people.

Here's the second one. We're enslaved to our *work*, our *career*, our *productivity*. Why does everybody have a side hustle? It's a new idea. I mean, growing up, I didn't know any parent...*anybody*...who had a side hustle. I'm not saying it's wrong to have a side hustle. I'm saying everybody has this. We're just working all the time.

It's like, oh, Mom and Dad, or Mom *or* Dad, are going down to the basement again as soon as the kids go to bed, so then they don't connect with each other at night, because they both have to do their work for their second job, for their extra [whatever]. There's no margin. There's no time.

Guys, it's interesting. You guys don't know this, but busyness as a badge of honor is a new idea. For most of human history, what you bragged about was *not* having to work. The elites and the aristocrats... I mean, that's what everybody wanted to be.

They would brag about what they *didn't* do and how little they worked and how much they rested.

But if you came up to me and I told you anything other than I was busy, you would be concerned about me. If I came up to you, and I was like, "I'm actually sleeping nine and a half hours a night. It's great. I have a fairly easy schedule. It has been actually a very easy week this week. Not much on my schedule," you'd be like, "Something is wrong."

The average American works 100 more hours a year than the average European. We're enslaved to our side hustles, our productivity, our boss. I mean, the same guy who goes, "I don't answer to anybody..." Wait till he gets a notification from his boss on his phone. He'll answer right away.

Here's a third one: *comfort and convenience*. Interestingly enough, when I got here to Winston 10 years ago, I had never lived here before, so I wanted to know, "What is the idol in the city of Winston-Salem?" because I had known enough theology to know that cities have idols.

Think about it. Boston's idol is intellect. MIT is there. Harvard is there. New York City's idol is money. DC's idol is power. Miami's idol is looks, vanity. LA's idol is fame. It's like, why do people go there? What is that about? So I said, you know, "Winston-Salem is the fifth-largest city in North Carolina, but it's smaller. I wonder what *its* idol would be." So, I went and asked a lot of people on the launch team. I got one answer again and again and again: "Comfort and convenience."

You can have a Whole Foods and a Trader Joe's in a small city with the tiniest Lululemon you'll ever go to in your whole life. But it's there. Everything is 15 minutes away. You know, after 2020, everything is more expensive, but it's actually fairly affordable. You can get down to the Charlotte airport in an hour and 20 minutes and fly anywhere you need to, and if you're willing to live 20 minutes outside the city, you can get some land. A lot of people move away for a season, and they come back to Winston.

Listen. They say there were at least two big moves in making us enslaved to comfort in the last 50 years. The first one is air conditioning in every home. Why would you leave? Why would you go outside? Why would you meet your neighbors? Why would you go to a place where you *can't* control the temperature when you stay in a place where you *can*? That one is more obvious. The second one that really made us lazy... Are you ready for this? In 2013...it's not the phone...DoorDash.

Do you understand how lazy you have to be to consistently use DoorDash? You're like, "Yeah, I don't want to cook, and I don't even want to pick it up. I don't even want

to go sit somewhere and have someone cook for me. I don't have time for that." Americans spent \$150 billion last year having food delivered to their homes. Guys, comfort doesn't feel like a chain of slavery; it feels more like a couch. We don't do hard things. We don't take risks. We are enslaved to comfort.

Finally, we're enslaved to our *appetites*, obviously. I've talked about that before. Just so you know, your appetites only know two words. The favorite two words for your appetite are *now* and *more*. Very straightforward, very simple words...*now* and *more*. Here's what's interesting. When you say this out loud, it's like, "Is this really true?" But it is. Pornography websites get more traffic in a year than Amazon, Netflix, and Twitter combined.

There's substance abuse. There's addiction to gambling. I mean, there are all different types of addictions we're enslaved to. By the way, if I said one of those four, and you're like, "Ha, ha, Kyle, you didn't get me," here's the thing I'd say. What you're enslaved to tends to be what you defend.

So, here's a question. What can nobody talk to you about? Is it your work schedule? It's like, "Ooh, can't touch that." Is it your hobby? Is it your nightly routine with just a little bit too much drinking every night, and that's an area that as soon as anybody tries to talk to you about it, you get defensive? Why? Because slaves love to defend their masters.

Here's what he says, though. I already read it to you, but let's see it one more time. Verse 17: "***But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin... This is what happens when you become Christian. "...have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."***

The Bible gives us a counterintuitive answer. It says the way to be set free from sin and being a slave to sin is to be a slave to God. Basically, what Paul is saying is there's no option to not be a slave. It's not in there. It's not on the menu. There's no third option. What he's actually teaching is something that, if we would just think about it for a second, we know.

Here's what Paul is teaching (you've heard this before): *the only way to true freedom is through mastery*. In other words, say you're like, "I want to learn the piano." Well, the piano is complex. It's a bunch of keys. Then you say, "I'm just going to go up there and hit whatever keys I want to hit." Well, none of us will want to listen to that.

But if you're like, "No, what I need to do is I need to submit myself to a piano teacher. I need to submit myself, even if I don't want to, even if I want to go outside and play with my friends, to sitting for hours a week working on the piano. I have to learn how

to read music. I have to serve this. I have to come under this. I have to be mastered by it, then master it," that's how you end up having freedom.

He says, basically, God is a good master. See, sin wants to take from you. Sin takes from you. It takes your peace. It takes your youth. It takes your health. It takes your energy. It takes your integrity. God wants to give. So, he says, "You became obedient from the heart." The transformation that happens when you become a believer is you *want* to obey God now.

See, when I use the word *obedience*, nobody likes the word. It's similar to whenever I talk about submission in marriage and men and women and submission. It's just hard to talk about. Well, that would be specifically when I'm talking about marriage, but in general, as soon as we get specific about obedience, people don't like it. They just want to be ethereal. "I just love Jesus. I just want to worship the Lord and love Jesus." Well, how about obeying him?

Here's what obedience is: responsive trust. That's probably one of the most common definitions. Or think about it this way: obedience is faith with its work clothes on. Or how about *this* one? Obedience is love with instructions. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey my commandments."

How are you doing obeying God? Is there an area of your life where God has been telling you to do something and you know you have been disobeying? It's the same thing you teach your kids. Right? Delayed obedience is disobedience. He's saying God is a good master, and there's no option. You're either going to serve sin or you're going to serve him.

Paul goes, "Okay. I'm done with this section." He goes, "Actually, it was kind of hard to talk about." Look at verse 19. "***I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations.***" Paul is like, "Guys, this is hard to talk about, because these concepts...faith, hope, love...it's hard to define them, so I'll use metaphors and analogies."

He says this, though. I love what Paul does here. "***For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.***" Here's what Paul is saying. I told you this last week. Paul gets really practical, so I'll get really practical. Let me summarize that whole passage we just read.

Paul said, "You used to be really good at sinning. Now get really good at obeying." Think about it. I'm not thinking of any one person in here, but some of you are really good at sinning. We would never know who you are because you're actually that

good. This is like when someone's life blows up, everyone is like, "Him?" "Her?" They were good at sinning.

It takes a lot of energy to get good at sinning. At its height, you have to live a double life. *That's* hard. You have to lie a lot, so you have to remember what you have to say. You have to make up things that didn't even happen that are the opposite of reality, but they have to sound true.

You usually have to keep it a secret from the people you love for a very long time. It usually involves hiding money as well, if things escalate, so then you have to get creative with how you're going to do *that*. Maybe you're using cash or something else. Maybe you have a second phone.

Here's what Paul is saying. Paul is going, "You guys, before you were in Christ, and some of you now even in Christ... The amount of energy, commitment, and creativity you have in being sinful..." Paul is looking at you, going, "You have some transferable skills." Isn't that interesting?

He's almost like a football coach who walks by an elementary school playground and sees some big fifth grader pushing some kids around and goes, "Future linebacker. There it is. I just need to take that energy, take that aggression, and turn it for something good."

Here's what Paul is saying: "Guys, it's not going to be easy to walk with God. It's not going to be easy to read your Bible every day. It's not going to be easy to share your faith. It's not going to be easy to have a prayer life. It's not going to be easy to disciple your kids. It's not going to be easy to love your husband or wife. You're going to need to bring the creativity, the conviction, and the consistency you brought to sin now to obedience."

Here's what he says. Here's what happens. I'll read it to you, because I don't want you to miss this. I want you to see it in the text. Look at what he says in verse 19. ***"For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."***

Here's what he's basically saying. In your life, whatever you obey gets momentum. You know, here's what happens. You start doing bad things, and you do more bad things, you do more bad things, and you do more bad things. He says if you start doing good things, you can have momentum in the other direction.

By the way, what is momentum? I mean, we could give Newton's law. You know, an object doesn't move until acted upon...all that kind of stuff. But what is actual

momentum? If you're like, "I want momentum," what does momentum feel like? The old joke is you don't always know when you have momentum, but you know when you don't. Momentum is simply the sense that you're winning.

My dad has been a Pirates fan for 60 years. The Pittsburgh Pirates. Pray for us. Still, every couple of years, if it just looks like they're going to win a couple of games in a row, and they maybe have the longest shot to be the wild card, or whatever, he will call me. It's because as soon as you start winning, there is momentum.

You need to watch yourself win in an area of your life. You need to watch yourself three or four days in a row read your Bible. You need to watch yourself pray. You need to watch yourself go on a prayer walk more days this week than you don't go. You start having that positive momentum.

Now, what hinders momentum? Well, just think of the physical world. What hinders momentum? An object stays in motion unless acted upon. Friction. If you're going to walk with God, if you're going to come to the altar in a few minutes, and you're going to pray and say, "I'm going to walk with God," that's awesome. That's the first step of momentum. But then you're going to experience so much friction.

It might be your spouse because he or she is not on the same page. They don't want you to change, because actually, if you change, it's just going to show the terrible condition they're in. They would like to stay in their condition, and they would like you to stay a dimmer light so you don't see how bad they are. I mean, that happens all the time.

You could be discouraged, because you'll make two steps forward, but then one step backward, but that's okay. You're still making progress. You didn't do it for three weeks, but then you did. You relapse into something. It's like, "Okay. There's the grace of God for that." You could discourage yourself by the way you talk to yourself. Paul goes, "It's time." Guys, I think today, for some of you, you need a new experience of the grace of God, and you need some positive spiritual momentum.

Here's how Paul ends. He goes, "Guys, let's think about something together." Let me read you verses 20-22. ***"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness."*** He goes, "Yeah, when you were a slave of sin, you were free of being righteous. That's about the only thing you were free from."

Look at this. Here's the question. Paul asks a question none of us want to ask. ***"But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?"*** Look here. This phrase is repeated twice. ***"For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life."***

Paul says if you need to be motivated... And we do need to be motivated. A lot of us struggle with personal motivation. We know what we need to do. We just don't really have the desire or energy to do it. Paul goes, "Think about where things lead." Paul is like, "I want to tell you the one thing your flesh doesn't want to think about: where lying leads."

I want to tell you one thing your algorithm doesn't want you to think about and advertisers don't want you to think about and sin doesn't want you to think about and Satan doesn't want you to think about. He doesn't want you to think about where this will lead across time.

The great lie we all tend to believe... We all believe a version of this. "I can do something sinful... I can do something wrong, and it will not lead where it has led for every other person who has ever done this." You know, it's interesting. Recently, I was watching an interview with a guy named Arthur Brooks. I don't know if you've heard of Arthur Brooks. He has become kind of famous. He has written a lot of books. I don't know that he's a Christian. He's a professor at Harvard.

I was watching this interview, and in the interview he said, "There's a quadrant of life that everybody wants to be in at the end of their life, but very few people get there." He said, "We'll call this quadrant *healthy and happy*." Maybe an oversimplification, but kind of interesting.

He said if you started out, and you talked to someone at 15 to 20 years old, they might define what that looks like a little bit differently, but, yeah, happy and healthy. Right? And a lot of times for our kids, "I want them to be happy and healthy." He said, "Here's the problem: almost nobody lands there."

He said a lot of people... In fact, after his research and all this, he said the natural default, the older you get, is to end up unhealthy and/or unhappy. He said every once in a while, you'll find somebody who's an extrovert, a party guy, the life of the party. He says they're happy, but nobody wants their life. They're not healthy.

He says and every once in a while, you'll find a very disciplined person. They're counting their macros, they're doing their CrossFit, and they're doing whatever else. He says they're healthy, but they're not really happy. They've cared for their body, and they haven't cared for their soul. He said you have to have a plan if you're going to be happy and healthy.

Here's what you need to do. You need to think through, "What are the decisions I'm making? What is the influence this is going to have in a decade, two decades, three decades?" I mean, think. Do you still want to be struggling? Say you're 31 years old in here today. Unless you die, you're going to be 55 one day.

Think about it this way. Do you want to be a grandma or a grandpa and still struggling with exactly what you're struggling with the way you're struggling with it? No, you wouldn't. Here's a question you can ask for yourself, too, in an area of your life: "Would I want my kids to have my marriage?" "Would I want my kids to prioritize work like I have or...I love my kids...would I tell them they don't need to work that much?"

See, all this started with a declarative statement. "Sin won't have dominion over you. You're not under the law, but you're under grace." Do you know the reason that statement can be so declarative over us? It's because of another declarative statement that Jesus made on the cross. It's maybe the shortest declarative statement in the Bible. Three words: "It is finished."

What is Jesus saying? Here's at least part of what he's saying. When he says, "It is finished," he's saying, "I already lived under the law." Jesus Christ shows up, and he lives under the law for 33 years. That's why he had to be a baby and a kid and an adolescent and an adult. He had to live under the law through every stage of life, perfectly obeying it.

So, he was under the law in the sense that he was under its commands and he obeyed it, but then when he went to the cross, he went under the curse of the law, under the penalty of the law, and he experienced the wrath of God for us. That's why at the end he says, "It is finished." Notice he didn't say, "*I am finished*," because he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, and he's still saving. He's still discipling. He's still redeeming. He's still breaking chains, breaking bondage.

So, here's what I want to invite you to. I want to invite you across this room. I think there are three types of people, at least, across our campuses and in this room. I think some of you are enslaved. It might be something as silly as you are enslaved to what your mother thinks about you, even though you're 37 years old. You're enslaved to the opinions of others.

Some of you are enslaved to comfort. You haven't done something hard or risky in a decade. I just want to invite you to come forward and pray and say, "God, the option isn't if I am going to be enslaved; the option is if I am going to be enslaved to the opinions of others, to sin. I want to be enslaved to a good master, God."

Others of you think you're free. There's an arrogance about some of you. The people who think they're most free often are the people whose sin is having dominion in their life in ways that it may not show up for another decade. But what does Paul say at the end? "***For the wages of sin is death...***" Here's what that means. Sin always pays. It doesn't always pay on time. It doesn't always pay immediately. It means that, if you do not repent, you will get what you deserve for all your sin.

Finally, here's the last thing I want to say. There's a group of you who are spiritually numb. That's what sin does to us. Christian, if you're in here and you are spiritually numb... Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Some of you used to worship God, and you used to raise your hands, and you used to feel it in your heart.

Now you sing the songs, and you don't even believe it. You pray the prayers, and they hit the ceiling and come back. You read the Bible, and it just feels like an old book, and it doesn't feel alive anymore. Maybe at least one of the reasons is there have been some areas of your life that you need to get right with God today.

I just want to invite you, all across this room, to come forward. Part of the positive spiritual momentum sometimes is making a decision one time. Some of you, I really believe... I'm so excited for you. You're one decision away from momentum beginning to happen in your life. It's always hardest at first. You have to tell one person about your struggle. You have to take one next step to get connected to community. You need to make one decision, and I'm excited for you. Let's pray together.

Lord, there are so many different ways we should respond. Last week, we talked about presenting our bodies. Lord, I pray that every person in here would live under the grace of God, that every person would desire to obey, that we would have that responsive trust, Lord, that you would set us free from sin for righteousness, for worship, for the good of others.

There are so many good deeds to be done. There are so many people to be reached. There are so many missionaries to be sent. There are so many prayers to be prayed. There are so many disciples to be made, Lord. Would you do it? Would you do it in us, through us, and beyond us? We ask this in Jesus' name.