

LIVING BY GRACE

STUDY ONE

A Flyover Glance at Guilt and Grace

Romans 5:18–21

Since we have been rescued through Christ at the cross, we now live in the realm of grace before our God.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

As the waltz begins, the ballroom comes alive. Men in tuxedos dance with elegantly dressed women whose flowing gowns whirl with every turn. The couples seem to float on air—their movements fluid and relaxed, their steps effortlessly timed to the 1-2-3 rhythm of the music.

These graceful dancers illustrate *living by grace*. They are relaxed, carefree, light, joyful. God created us to live this way—to feel secure in His favor, to move with freedom in His kingdom, and to respond easily to the guiding rhythm of His indwelling Spirit.

Many Christians, however, live by guilt, not by grace. They exist in a state of anxiety that their best efforts are not good enough and that God's gavel of judgment may come crashing down on them. They see themselves as slaves—like the storybook girl in the cinders who dreams of attending the ball but who can't escape her cruel masters. These Christians are anything but free or joyful, languishing under relentless demands, petty rules, and fault-finding criticism.

Has guilt shackled you to a burdensome lifestyle? Do you long to follow the lead of the Spirit and move easily to the rhythm of freedom in Christ? If so, this *Searching the Scriptures* series will help you live by grace. It is your invitation to the dance.



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Romans 5:18–21



PREPARE YOUR HEART

These hopeful words of Jesus set the tone for our studies: “If the Son sets you free, you are truly free” (John 8:36). *You are truly free!* Not because you earned freedom but because Jesus granted you freedom. Pray in gratitude as you open God’s Word.

Father, thank You for sending Your Son to rescue me from sin and death and to free me to experience the life You intended. Open my eyes to understand Your truth, and open my heart to receive Your grace so that I can live truly free. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the book of Romans, Paul laid the groundwork for how Jesus set us free. First, in Romans 1:18–3:20, Paul described our hopeless state of bondage, declaring, “All people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin” (Romans 3:9). Personal effort won’t free us because “No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands” (3:20). Consequently, “the entire world is guilty before God” (3:19). We call this section of Romans—*Humanity’s Ruin*.

The next section, 3:21–5:11, is *Humanity’s Rescue*. Since people can’t achieve the righteousness God requires, they remain in their guilt. Jesus Christ, however, bore sin’s penalty on the cross, satisfying God’s judgment and opening the way to freedom through Him. “We are made right with God *by placing our faith in Jesus Christ*” (3:22, emphasis added).

Through faith in Christ, sinners receive what they don’t deserve—a righteousness from God that they couldn’t achieve on their own (4:1–25). *That’s grace!* God leads sinners out of guilt’s prison into a new realm where *Christ is Ruler* and *grace is the rule*—which Paul explained in Romans 6–8. We call this section of Romans the *Rulership of Grace*.

We’ll focus on Romans 6–8 throughout this series, but before we turn to those chapters, let’s reinforce our foundation by digging deeper into these three Rs of living by grace—Ruin, Rescue, and Rulership.



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Romans 5:18–21



Searching the Scriptures Method and Resources

Searching the Scriptures is a four-step Bible-study method that includes observing the passage, interpreting the meaning, correlating with similar passages, and applying the principles. For helpful instruction, consult the Insight for Living Ministries online web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).” There, you can also follow the [link to purchase a copy](#) of Pastor Chuck’s book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*.



Observation: The Three R’s of Living by Grace

In *Searching the Scriptures*, we begin with observation. Read [Romans 5:12–21](#) carefully and slowly, and then use your skills of observation to answer the questions below. Pick out the strong verbs, find the contrasts, and note key words. Take your time in the observation phase, which sets the stage for interpretation.

Humanity’s Ruin—Romans 5:12–14

According to [Romans 5:12–14](#), how did sin enter into God’s perfect creation? For background, read [Genesis 2:16–17](#); [3:6](#).

What were the consequences of the original sin?



A Flyover Glance at Guilt and Grace

Romans 5:18–21

We all have the same problem. We have this pollution called sin that began with Adam, and the sewage flows through the bloodstream of humanity. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Humanity’s Rescue—Romans 5:15–19

While Adam’s sin brought ruin, God’s gracious gift of His Son brought rescue. Read [Romans 5:15–19](#), and observe key words and phrases that Paul used to contrast Adam with Christ. Note your findings in the following chart.

Contrasts between Adam and Christ <i>Romans 5:15–19</i>	
Adam	Christ

Adam’s sin locked humanity in a prison of sin where death reigned. But Christ bore our guilt on the cross, and through His sacrifice, God offers the gift of righteousness—our key to freedom and a new life. “Even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive [God’s gift] will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17).

Did you see the word, “greater”? Even greater than the drag of sin and its power over you is God’s wonderful grace. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Romans 5:18–21

Rulership of Grace—Romans 5:20–21

Paul wrapped up his teaching about our triumph over death in [Romans 5:20–21](#). What did Paul conclude about sin and righteousness, guilt and grace?

Romans 5:20–21 forms a bridge, linking everything Paul taught so far in Romans with what he will teach in Romans 6–8. In interpretation, let's dig deeper into the meaning of these highly significant verses.

We now have a new ruler—His name is Jesus. He delivers us from the control of the old nature within us when we claim that triumph we have in Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: From Death to Life

Feel free to use your Bible-study resources to answer the questions below, including [Insights on Romans](#) from Pastor Chuck Swindoll's New Testament commentary series or [Constable's Notes](#), an online resource at [netbible.org](#).

Review Romans 5:20–21 below and mark central phrases or words to define.

God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

“God's law” refers to the Torah, the first five books of the Bible that contain the instructions God gave the people of Israel through Moses. God gave the law (1) to reflect His holiness, (2) to expose our sinfulness, and (3) to show our need for His grace.



A Flyover Glance at Guilt and Grace

Romans 5:18–21

Under the law, people sinned more and more, but they couldn't out-sin God's grace! What did Paul mean, "God's wonderful grace became more abundant"? To aid your interpretation, read [Romans 5:20](#) in the *J. B. Phillips New Testament* and the *Amplified Bible*.

Verse 21 contrasts death under the rule of sin with life under the rule of grace. How do you define "death" and "life" in [5:21](#)? The *paraphrase* of this verse in *The Message* is helpful.

Just as Adam and Eve's sin removed them from the garden of Eden, our sin had separated us from God until He reconciled us to Himself through Christ ([Colossians 1:21–22](#)). By grace, we received *eternal life*—a completely new kind of life. Let's examine this concept in more detail.



Correlation: Grace and the New Life

God sent His Son to earth on a life-giving mission. Jesus said, "I came that they would have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10 NASB). *The Message* paraphrases Jesus' words: "I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of" (John 10:10 MSG).



A Flyover Glance at Guilt and Grace

Romans 5:18–21

What promise did Jesus give in *John 5:24*?

What truth did Paul teach about our standing in grace in *Romans 5:1–2*?

Correlate these verses about eternal life, peace with God, and standing in grace with 5:18: “Christ’s one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone.” What does “new life” mean?

You can live without the shackles of guilt and shame because you’ve been rescued. You have triumph over these things through the death of Christ. He liberates us from the domination of sin. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Romans 5:18–21

Application: Accepting the Invitation to Living by Grace

How do we live by grace and experience new life? The first step is to affirm your faith. According to Paul, “We are made right with God *by placing our faith in Jesus Christ*” (Romans 3:22, emphasis added). Have you placed your faith in Jesus as the One who bore your sin on the cross? If you’re not certain, in the space below, in a prayer, tell God that you believe in Jesus as your Savior and receive His pardon for sins and eternal life.

Second, view yourself as God sees you in Christ. You are no longer a lost sinner but a saved saint, set apart for God’s purposes. Christ has rescued you from sin’s mastery, and His redemption has ushered you into “a right relationship with God and new life” (5:18).

Regarding your relationship to God, how do you see yourself? If your self-perception is uncertain, ask the Lord to reveal His view of you through His lens of grace.

We’ve crossed the Romans 5 bridge, and Romans 6 lies before us. In the next studies, we’ll take more steps to living by grace. It’s one thing to receive salvation by grace, but it’s another to learn a lifestyle of grace. God is inviting you to leave behind the guilt and shame of sin and experience the freedom of following Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Living by grace is the most wonderful way to live. The music has begun. *Come, join the dance.*



A Flyover Glance at Guilt and Grace

Romans 5:18–21



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I accept Your invitation to live by grace, not by guilt. I long to join the dance that You have made possible for me, to be free from the fear of condemnation, and to shed sin's mastery and follow the music of Your Spirit in me. Thank You for Your wonderful grace that's greater than my sin, and thank You for the hope I have of new life in Christ. In His name, amen.

