

STUDY GUIDE 7 – ‘Transferring the allegiance’

Read **Romans 6:1-23** in the dramatised script and/or in another version.

(1) What does <i>baptism</i> mean for us in relation to <i>sin</i> ? (1-2)	
(2) What does <i>baptism</i> mean for us in relation to <i>Christ</i> ? (3-4)	
(3) Why needn't we be <i>slaves to sin</i> any longer? (5-7)	
(4) By what power are we to live now and in the future? (8-10)	
(5) To whom should we <i>offer every part</i> of ourselves? (11-13)	
(6) What does being <i>under grace</i> mean? (14)	
(7) So why can't I <i>sin</i> as much as I like? (15-18)	
(8) What choice am I faced with? (19-21)	
(9) What are the results of being <i>free from sin</i> ? (22-23)	
(10) So what is the answer to the question in v1?	
(11) In the first study we tried to define some key words. Here are a few more: see if we can come up with, in our own words, what the following mean. <i>Don't consult the Glossary until you have had a go yourself!</i>	
SIN (occurs 17 times)	
DEATH (16 times)	
LIFE (10 times)	
GRACE (vv1, 14, 15)	
HOLINESS (v19)	

(A) <i>Read the dialogue overleaf.</i> How does the Bishop's attitude to Jean Valjean illustrate God's grace to us in Christ? Will Jean now go back to his old life of selfishness and dishonesty?	
(B) Does slavery exist today? What kind of things are people slaves to?	
(C) In smaller groups, look up the following and report back on what they teach us about freedom from sin: <i>Ps 107:10-16; Mt 11:28-30; Jn 8:31-36; +Gal 5:1, 13; +Ps 116:5-9.</i> <i>+ optional extras</i>	
(D) Look at the <i>Weakest Link</i> story that starts the notes. What does Romans 6 tell us about the love of God for us in Christ?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there one point about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) that I have understood in a new or deeper way? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there one practical step I could take as a result of studying this section of Romans? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there something in this section which I could turn into praise or prayer to God? 	

'Transferring the allegiance' (6:1-23)

From Scene 3 of *Jean Valjean*, a play by Augusta Stevenson based on Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.

The story so far: Jean Valjean, a criminal on the run, has been given hospitality by the Bishop and his wife, and has been sleeping in the alcove. Early next morning he tiptoes into the Bishop's dining-room and steals some plates and a ladle, all of solid silver; then he flees into the street, where he is apprehended by the police....

[A knock is heard at the street door.]

Bishop Come in. [Enter an Officer and two Soldiers, dragging in Jean Valjean.]

Officer Your Reverence, we found your silver on this man.

Bishop Why not? I gave it to him. I am glad to see you again, Jean. Why did you not take the candlesticks, too?

Jean (Trembling). Your Reverence—

Bishop I told you everything in this house was yours, my brother.

Officer Ah, then what he said was true. But, of course, we did not believe him. We saw him creeping from your garden—

Bishop It is all right, I assure you. This man is a friend of mine.

Officer Then we can let him go?

Bishop Certainly. [Soldiers step back.]

Jean (Trembling). I am free?

Officer Yes! You can go. Do you not understand? [Steps back.]

Bishop (To Jean). My friend, before you go away — here are your candlesticks [going to the mantel and bringing the candlesticks]; take them. [Jean takes the candlesticks, seeming not to know what he is doing.] By the way, my friend, when you come again you need not come through the garden. The front door is closed only with a latch, day or night. (To the Officer and Soldiers.) Gentlemen, you may withdraw. [Exit Officer with Soldiers.]

Jean (Recoiling and holding out the candlesticks). No — no — I — I —

Bishop Say no more; I understand. You felt that they were all owing to you from a world that had used you ill. Keep them, my friend, keep them. I would I had more to give you. It is small recompense for nineteen years. [Jean stands bewildered, looking down at the candlesticks in his hands.] They will add something to your hundred francs. But do not forget, never forget, that you have promised to use the money in becoming an honest man.

Jean I — promised —?

Bishop (Not heeding). Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you: I withdraw it from thoughts of hatred and revenge — I give it to peace and hope and God.

[Jean stands as if stunned, staring at the Bishop, then turns and walks unsteadily from the room.]

A Christian minister was on the TV show *The Weakest Link*. Anne Robinson really went for him: 'So you believe in the gospel, do you?' 'Yes,' he replied. 'Well then. I challenge you to sing the gospel to me in two sentences.' The minister thought for a moment then sang Simon and Garfunkel's 'And here's to you, Mrs Robinson. Jesus loves you more than you will know.' Romans 6 is often thought to be too hard for the ordinary Christian to understand. But it's all part of the gospel, about Jesus' love for us and our new relationship to God, thanks to what he has done in dying for us and rising again.

6:1-4 The real meaning of baptism (a). 1 *Shall we go on sinning?* Ch 5 ended by demonstrating the triumph of grace over sin. One response might be, 'OK then, let's sin as much as we can, to give grace all the more room for operating' — put like that, it sounds ludicrous, but it's the way twisted human nature tends to argue. **3-4** Paul therefore takes us back to the start of our Christian lives, *baptism* (or in our case it may have been confirmation), when we publicly acknowledged Jesus as our Lord. This wasn't just a boring ritual for getting church membership, it was a declaration that we believe in Christ, we belong to Christ and we want to behave like Christ, and that we need the Holy Spirit to make this new allegiance a reality in our daily lives.

6:5-10 Dying with Christ — what it means (a). 5 Being baptised is like dying by drowning, and it symbolises our union with Christ in his death and resurrection, because we come up out of the water into new life with him, leaving our old lives 'dead in the water'. 6 *The body ruled by sin*. Our physical nature (hands, eyes, brains etc) used to be at the service of our own selfish wills. When we put our faith in Christ, we submit freely to his will, so we don't have to obey sin and self any longer — though the choice to do so is still open to us. 8 *We believe that we will also live with him*. Yes, we do share his risen life now, but the full experience of it still awaits us. Meanwhile, faith is crucial - not just believing certain things or a one-off conversion experience, but an ongoing, daily attitude involving heart, mind, will and body, and affecting everything we do.

6:11-14 Dying with Christ — how it works (a). The initial step of faith doesn't mean the end of the battle; we all have a very real tendency to go back to the old life, centred on self and out for all it can get. This will last as long as we have mortal bodies. We can either offer them to sin, or to Christ. This is both a once-for-all decision, and a daily attitude (the tenses of *offer* in v13 show this). It doesn't depend on how we happen to feel on any given day, but on what sort of people we are determined to be. 14 The great thing is God's promise that sin isn't going to order us around any longer; this doesn't depend upon us keeping the rules, but on Jesus' love for us on the cross and his life in us by his Spirit — in short, on the *grace* of God.

6:15-23 The challenge: which master to obey? (b). 15 Paul repeats the question he started with in v1, but gives the answer in slightly different words, using the idea of slavery even though he doesn't condone it as an institution (1 Cor 7:20-23). 16 *Slaves to obedience* sounds as though Christ's service is not 'perfect freedom' (as the old prayer has it); but much as we may wish to be lords of all creation, we are subjects — either of the Death-Lord or the Life-Lord. 17-18 By trusting in Christ, we have a brand-mark on our foreheads — no longer the 'S' of sin, self and Satan, but the 'J' of Jesus, justification and joy. 19-20 Paul apologises for using a fairly blunt analogy, but it represents reality. However virtuous we thought we were, we were in fact members of Sin's rebel crew, and 21 the *benefit* (the 'fruit' of our lives) was ugly things like pride, greed, jealousy and lust rather than love, joy, peace and so on (Gal 5:19-24). 22 Now, however, the tree of our lives produces *holiness*, not a self-generated piety but a transparent openness to the Spirit of God for the doing of his will. 23 *Wages ... gift* finish with the same idea: serve sin and you will be paid in death and destruction; serve Jesus and you will be showered with royal presents and look forward to a heavenly homecoming.

Thus ch 6 isn't (as some have thought) a magical formula for living a victorious Christian life, but an emphatic challenge to *offer ourselves* to Christ rather than to sin and self.