

Is Grace Permission to Sin?

Romans 6:1-2

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No matter what you are into, every hobby or interest has its sacred spaces. *Golf* – Augusta National. *NASCAR* – Daytona International. *Military History* – Normandy, Gettysburg. *Motorcycles* – Sturgis, South Dakota. Places or spaces that represent the pinnacle. The best.

We have crested a hill in our teaching series in Romans and there lies before us now three chapters that most would say are the three greatest chapters of Christian teaching in the whole Bible.

As I told you, I have waited so many years to teach through Romans, and in some ways, I have waited these years to teach these three chapters. That is not to say that I have them all figured out. I'm excited to teach them as it allows me the privilege of studying them in depth, so I can share them with you. Please pray for me!

What makes them so special? Better than anywhere in the Bible they explain gospel blessings including the love of God, our adoption into God's family, our victory over sin in Christ, our new life in the Spirit, and the future glory awaiting us. All of these are found elsewhere, but nowhere are they more clearly explained and celebrated than these three chapters.

Romans in Review

Why here in Romans? Let's review what we have seen in Romans so far. Paul says in Romans 1:16 that he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Why? It is the power of God to save. Save from what? He answers that beginning in verse 18 (ESV), "*the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all...unrighteousness of men.*" The gospel is a message of how to be saved from God. Ironically, saved from God by God. But he goes on to describe what the world is like when men refuse to worship their Creator and instead have created things, material things, as their ultimate. Even good gifts become twisted into identities and idols.

He highlights sexuality as an exceptional example of human brokenness. We experience the full range of this brokenness in our relationships with others, with ourselves, and with God. This is true for all peoples including Jewish people who are the focus of chapter 2. Lest anyone think that having God's law means you avoid God's wrath, Paul points out that while Jews have the law, they don't fulfill it. They don't obey it. Not with the perfection God's righteousness requires. This failure is so universal that there is no one righteous, not even one person. God's moral requirements shut us all up and hold us all accountable.

Let me pause here and ask, does Romans 1-3:20 accurately describe the world we are in? Broken. Divided. Selfish. Decaying. Death all around us. When the Bible explains something, and it perfectly correlates to the world we are living in, at least the skeptic should ask, is this a coincidence? Might it actually be true?

Then in 3:21 Paul writes, "*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*" 3:20 couldn't end worse and 3:21 couldn't start better! Now there is a way to have right standing before God forever. He goes on to

explain this in terms of justification, a legal declaration by God granting righteous status to all who personally trust in Christ and his death for our sins on the cross. This righteousness is not temporary but eternal. It is entirely by the grace of God to us. We do nothing but receive it by faith.

In chapter 4 Paul goes to the quintessential saved man in all of history, Abraham. He shows that even Abraham, as godly as he was, wasn't godly enough and needed justification by faith to be saved as well.

Chapter 5 explains that when Adam sinned, we all sinned with him. From Adam on, we all inherit guilt. All for one and one for all. God gloriously uses that to save us by Jesus also representing us. When Christ died for sin, he died for all of us. As horrible as our sin is, God's grace super abounds over all our sin. His grace is higher, stronger, deeper, and greater than all our sin could ever be. We end chapter 5 understanding our verdict as sinners and our vindication by God's grace. Where sin increases, God's grace increases all the more.

If you are tracking with this and you understand that God's grace expands more and more to meet the guilt of our sin, what conclusion might you come to? If when I sin God's grace and glory expands, then why not sin a lot so that God can be glorified more and more?

Makes sense! You are thinking, *I'm liking where this sermon is going. Yeah, let's sin more so God's grace can be shown more. If I love God then I would want him to be glorified, right? He is glorified by his grace, right? Then let's get out there and do some really good sinning. Let's do God a favor. Let's sin epically. Publicly. Massively. All for the glory of God!* That is the very criticism which Paul often heard as he taught on grace. Which is why chapter 6 begins with this rebuttal,

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."
(Romans 6:1-4)

With these verses Romans moves from a focus on how God *declares* us righteous to how God *makes* us righteous in our living. These three chapters focus on the result of justification. What difference does justification make in the way I live? Should it make any difference?

We can hardly overstate the problems down through church history on this question. Despite these three chapters and many other New Testament passages teaching, many of the most volatile controversies in church history have something to do with the relationship between law and grace, justification and sanctification, being declared righteous and living righteously. This explains much of the difference between Protestants and Roman Catholics and gives rise to teachings like perfectionism, legalism, antinomianism, and a host of other "isms" and untold pain and confusion they have created.

I know this from my own story. I was raised in a kind of Christianity that tried to solve the apparent law/grace issue by emphasizing law. Law motivated obedience. Not God's law, but man's law. Laws intended to curb sinful desires. Many of which I think were well meaning but which created incredible confusion in my life and the life of other young people I grew up with. We had salvation by grace, but then everything after that was human performance.

Saved by grace, live by law. It was a performance-based grace. Lost in all the extra-biblical rules was the gospel of grace. So much so, that many, many of the young people that grew up with me in this brand of church left the church and the faith as soon as they could. If you asked them to this day, *why?* You wouldn't hear anyone say, *I hated all that grace talk! Grace, grace, grace. I couldn't handle it!*

They would say, *I hated all the hypocrisy. All those rules pounded on us like they were as important as the virgin birth.* There is a lot of bitterness against weird versions of Christianity. My friends who have survived have come to realize that legalism is not a version of Christianity; it is a perversion of Christianity. Once they realized that, real Christianity is very attractive.

That's my story and I know that we have many from similar backgrounds who can identify with me. I'm convinced that many people who reject Christianity aren't rejecting Christianity, they are rejecting a Picasso version of it. Twisted and distorted.

You maybe don't come from that sort of background, but this goes in many directions. We all know people who claim to be Christians, but their moral and spiritual lives are in sharp contradiction to their profession. And they are OK with it. This is yet another perversion of grace and law. People who live like grace is freedom to live carnally and immorally. Yet they remain convinced they are saved. Maybe they were told *once saved always saved* and they thought, *then a sinning we will go!* Their basic view of the gospel is a get-out-of-hell free card. These and many other distortions are all summarized by Paul's question, *should we go on sinning that grace may increase?* Can you think that and actually be under God's grace?

These three chapters are awesome, but for reasons far deeper than merely encouragement. They clarify both the gospel and gospel byproducts like obedience and my posture toward my sin.

"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Romans 6:1-2)

Is Salvation by Grace from Sin Permission to Sin?

This is my summary of the question, *"are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"* (Romans 6:1) Paul is not making this question up. It was either the active approach of Christians in the early church or the charge against Paul for preaching salvation by grace through faith. Probably both.

There is a word used to describe people who take the position that the Christian has no responsibility to obedience yet remains under the grace of God.

Antinomian	Anti	Nomos
	No	Law

Nobody thinks they are antinomian. There are no antinomian societies. Nobody introduces themselves as an antinomian: *Hi, I'm Bob, I'm an antinomian.* Everybody presents themselves as champions of grace. Their books have grace in the name. They sing *Amazing Grace* with gusto. The issue is whether obedience or sanctification are necessary byproducts of genuine saving faith. Does justification change anything in us? Antinomians dismiss any role God's commands play in salvation by grace.

A few years ago, we did a series on The Ten Commandments. We talked about the role of the law of God in the life of the believer. We said it is a *muzzle, a mirror, and a map*. God's law restrains sin in this world through conscience, like a muzzle. It is a mirror that shows our sin. It is a map to guide us in how to live in a manner pleasing to God.

It is this third role, primarily, that antinomians dismiss. What's the need and what's the point? Is grace grace or not? Paul couldn't say it any stronger than he did. See his response.

"*By no means!*" (Romans 6:2) Paul uses this phrase 14 times in his letters and it is reserved for his strongest outrage.¹ Its sense is, *never, never, never!* I remember professors in seminary talking about this little phrase with amazement at how strong it is. Paul wants to make it clear that God's grace is NOT permission to sin. He follows with the question, "*How can we who died to sin still live in it?*" (Romans 6:2)

The "we" refers to Christians. We died to sin. What's that? How exactly did we die to sin? And aren't we all nervous reading that knowing that, we continue to sin? How can I die to something that seems to still be present in my life?

We Died to Our Sin When Jesus Died for Our Sin

Think with me brothers and sisters. When Jesus died on the cross, he died as a substitute. For who? Us. What exactly did Jesus die for? He died for the moral guilt of our sin and paid the moral price for our redemption. All of this relates to sin and our moral and spiritual failure to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Our falling short of God's glory. Romans 3:23. Our rebellion against God.

Most Christians say, *I get it. He died for my sin.* But what many people don't get is that when Christ died *for* our sin we died *to* our sin. We died to sin as our master. We died to sin as the leading power and purpose of our life. Now Paul's question makes sense: *how can we who died to King Sin go on living with King Sin as our master? "It is not the literal impossibility of sin in believers which Paul is declaring, but the moral incongruity of it."* (John Stott)²

I often get the question, *so what's it like being married?* By this they think that because I was a bachelor for so long that getting married was a big change. Indeed, it was. What if I said, *nothing's really changed? I sleep and get up when I want. I golf when I want. I'm away from home whenever I want. I spend my time and money in whatever way I want. I watch the TV shows I want when I want. So, nothing's really changed.*

And they're going to respond, *Did you really get married or just pretend to? Because I was at the wedding and I thought you actually did get married, but it sure doesn't look like you did.* Friends, sin is a kingdom. Sin is a Darth Lord. Sin is a Caesar to whom sinners bow. If Christ is our Savior, then can we live as if Darth Sin is our Lord?

Me geneto! Never! Never! Never!

There is a reason which we will get to next time.

¹ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, p. 259.

² John Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, p. 169.

Our Union with Christ

I'm going to illustrate it before I preach it just to get you ready. I used the ropes two weeks ago to illustrate how we were connected to Adam when he sinned. When he sinned, we all sinned in him. But faith is connecting to Jesus who fulfilled all righteousness and died in our place. Adam took us down, Christ takes us up.

So how exactly did we die to sin? When Jesus died *for* our sin, we died *to* our sin by our union with Christ. It is the eternal tether, the spiritual carabiner that forever links us with all that Christ did. His death to sin was our death to sin. What this means is massive and wonderful and sobering for how we live free by grace through faith in Jesus' victory over sin.

That will be next time. More to come....

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