

“SINCE GRACE IS GRACE...” PT. 1
ROMANS 6:1-7

Two years ago, the former director of Exodus International, a ministry designed to help people struggling with Same-Sex Attraction from a biblical perspective, said this about his understanding about sin:

I think, as Christians, sin is irrelevant. I look at what Jesus did on the cross. He came to fulfill the law. He took care of sin. He ended it forever. Is there sin involved in homosexuality? Sure. Is there sin involved in heterosexuality? Sure. I think the damage is done when we live in a place where we're pointing out what is and is not sin. Leslie and I don't want to live there anymore. That's not a place where life is found. We're not to be in the seat of judgment for anyone, not ourselves and not other people. What we long to do is to love our neighbor, our friends, LGBT people, straight people, you name it, without pointing out things that aren't ours to point out. [quoted by [Denny Burk](#)]

Did you catch his key statements? “Sin is irrelevant.” And, “...the damage is done when we live in a place where we're pointing out what is and is not sin.”

Is Alan Chambers correct? As you contemplate his words, it seems that he could be speaking for those who misapplied the apostle Paul's understanding of justification and sanctification in Romans 6 — since grace is so gracious, let's sin more so that God can give more and greater grace! But that is a horrible misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of grace. The grace of justification is not given so that the believer can engage in sin; the grace of justification is given so that the believer can live freed from the power of sin. In fact, that is the theme of the first two verses in Romans 6 (and of the following section):

THE GRACE THAT JUSTIFIES SINNERS ALSO FREES SINNERS FROM THE POWER OF SIN.

As Paul begins this section on sanctification, he helps us to see the relationship between justification and sanctification through one question and one answer:

Q: Since Grace is Grace, Can We INDULGE in Sin? (v. 1)

- ✓ The “logic” behind the question
- ✓ The relationship between justification and sanctification

A: Since Grace is Grace, We Can Live WITHOUT Indulging in Sin! (v. 2)

- ✓ What “died to sin” means
- ✓ What living by GRACE looks like
- ✓ What KIND of person are you?

- In chapter four, Paul explains justification by faith alone in Christ alone (3:28; 4:5, 23-25).
- In chapter five, Paul begins explaining the benefits of that justification in terms of our identity with Christ, the second Adam. Adam was our forensic head and placed us under the domination of sin and the condemnation of God (5:12). But Christ is also the forensic head of all believers and frees us from the domination of sin and condemnation of God (5:15-17).
- And Paul culminates that chapter with the powerful statements of vv. 20-21.
 - ✓ When we addressed those verses we noted that sin *is* abundant. But grace is *super*-abundant. Wherever sin grows in one's life, Paul says **grace abounded all the more**. Sin got bigger. But grace was bigger than that sin. And sin grew still more. And grace grew even beyond that sin. Wherever there was sin, there was grace to overwhelm it. That's verse 20.
 - ✓ And sin is not champion. Sin may be reigning in this world, but it is not the King. Grace is sovereign. Grace is King because Christ is King. Sin doesn't get the final word, Christ does. Sin doesn't win, but I won't ever defeat it. It was only defeated by Christ. *But if I am in Christ, then I also know and experience that victory* (6:4). That's verse 21.
 - ✓ So in chapter five, Paul is moving from the truth of justification to the truth of sanctification — if God declares us to be righteous, then how will that impact the way we live?
- And those statements then lead him to ask a question he supposed would be on the minds of many.

Q: Since Grace is Grace, Can We INDULGE in Sin? (v. 1)

The "logic" behind the question

- ✓ There are some attributes of God that have been eternally manifested: even when only the Trinity existed, God's self-existence and omniscience and omnipotence and omnipresence and love and holiness and beauty and glory and immutability (among others) were evident. But until creation and until the fall of Adam into sin, some attributes, which existed in God, were not manifested — attributes like God's patience and mercy and wrath. And His grace. Before creation when only the Godhead existed, there was no one for God to demonstrate His wrath against, there was no one for God to be patient with and merciful towards. And no one needed His grace. It took sinful creatures for God to be able to demonstrate those attributes.
- ✓ And since God's grace can't be manifested until there is sin, then some might suppose, "let's give God an opportunity to be gracious by sinning more!" That's the question Paul is addressing in v. 1 (and you might remember that the topic already surfaced in this letter, 3:7-8).
 - These individuals say, let's **continue in sin**. The word **continue** has the idea of remaining and staying. It's a word of persistence and permanence. And it is a present tense, which indicates the habitual nature of the abiding and continuance in sin.

- And when Paul says **sin**, he uses the singular form, and by that he means the state of sin; he's not talking about "sins" (plural), but a condition of one's life — his identity is "sinner" (5:12).
- Paul is not talking about lapses into occasional sin. Paul is not talking about people who even sin regularly in a particular area but are working to fight against that sin and hate that sin, but they are weak and have difficulty overcoming it. But the sin grieves them and they want to change. It's not an intentional pattern of their lives.
- Paul is talking about a lifestyle and pattern of ongoing sin.
- ✓ The reason that these sinners might say this is **so that grace may increase**.
 - The word for **increase** indicates an abundance of grace. They don't want just a little bit of grace — they want *lots* of grace. The question being asked is a manipulative one — "is there a way that I can make more grace? Can I make God to be obliged to give me grace — even more grace than He already has?" The question minimizes the extent of grace already given, misses the purpose for which grace is given, and misconstrues the nature of grace (by definition grace can never be an obligation; it is *always* a free gift that is undeserved). If grace can be *compelled* (forced) from God because of our sin (or by any other means), then it ceases to be grace.
 - We see illustrations of this mindset in the world:
 - ... Voltaire: "God will forgive; that is his 'business.'"
 - ... W. H. Auden (though one of his characters in a poem): "I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really, the world is admirably arranged."
 - And we see illustrations of this way of thinking in the church as well [John Cotton and the Synod of Elders, quoted in *Antinomianism* (10-11)]:
 - ... "To evidence justification by sanctification or graces [is akin to] Rome." Here they are suggesting that obedience is just legalism (and thus obedience should be shunned).
 - ... "If I be holy, I am never the better accepted by God; if I be unholy I am never the worse."
 - ... "I may know I am Christ's, not because I do crucify the lusts of the flesh, but because I do not crucify them, but believe that Christ crucified my lusts for me."
 - ... These have modern parallels; one movement essentially says, "You don't have to bear fruit as a believer — life will go better if you do, but you don't have to be obedient..."
 - ... "The Bible clearly teaches that God's love for His people is of such a magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand." [Charles Stanley]
- ✓ If you put this together, the question being asked is, "Can a believer persist in perpetual, habitual, intentional sin?" Paul is not asking if believers will still sin (chapter 7 makes clear that he believes believers *will* still sin). But he *is* asking if it is morally right for someone to intentionally pursue a life of sin without repentance.
- ✓ To answer that question, we really need to understand the relationship between justification and sanctification.

- The relationship between justification and sanctification

- ✓ We might categorize at least four different views relating justification to sanctification
 - Works → justification – faith (liberal view)
 - Faith + works → justification (Roman Catholic view)
 - Faith → justification – works (Antinomian view; Rom. 6:1)
 - Faith → justification + works (biblical view)
- ✓ Does Scripture assert that works are a necessary reality for the believer after conversion?
 - Gal. 5:16-24 — spiritual fruit is the supernatural product of every believer's life (cf. v. 24).
 - Eph. 2:10 — salvation is by grace through faith (vv. 8-9), for the purpose of doing good works
 - Tt. 2:11-12, 14; 3:5 — works do not save a man, but God saves men to purify them so they will be zealous to do good works.
 - Js. 2:17 — faith without good works is dead (works don't justify, but they are the result of justification)
 - Jn. 14:15, 21 — Jesus Himself teaches that faith in Him (loving Him) will result in obedience to Him. One cannot be a follower of Christ and be rebellious to Christ.
 - And note that all these passages emphasize that works follow justification; there is nothing that a man can do to make himself right in God's eyes; but being declared right, now he can obey God (cf. 1 Jn. 3:4-9; 3:23-24).
- ✓ For one to be right before God, he must be justified. And the only way he can be justified is by grace. There is no work he can do to commend himself to God. In fact, God condemns all acts of self-commendation (Rom. 3:7-8).
 - But that does not mean that works are not necessary; they are the consequence of all saving faith.
 - Everyone who is saved will perform works of righteousness, not in order to be saved, but because he has been saved.
 - So we say, "justification is by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone — good works will always follow justification." Works are an inevitable fruit of faith in Christ.
 - Luther said, "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man; but a wicked man does evil works."
- ✓ So there is much grace (5:20-21). Infinite, eternal, abounding grace. Grace beyond our sin.
- ✓ Can that grace be a just motive to engage in more and more sin? Paul gives a resounding, "NO!" Instead, he answers his question by asserting through another question...

A: Since Grace is Grace, We Can Live WITHOUT Indulging in Sin! (v. 2)

- Paul answers his question with an explosive response: ***May it never be!*** This phrase appears 15x in the NT, and Paul uses it 14x (10x in Romans). It's one of Paul's pet phrases and it means something like, "No way!" or "What a horrid idea!" "Might the end of the world come before that happens!" The question he has proposed is an outrageous and blasphemous idea. He cannot tolerate the thought. Perhaps he is so outraged by the idea because he has seen what happens when licentious living infiltrates the church (1 Cor. 5:1-2). Ungodliness in the church becomes pervasive (1 Cor. 5:6). Christ died for our ungodliness, not so that we would live in it (1 Cor. 5:7). His death should transform the way we live and conduct ourselves (1 Cor. 5:9-11).
- The key phrase to understanding verse 2 is ***died to sin***. If we understand what it means, then we will know how Paul relates justification to sanctification.

• What *died to sin* means — one author identifies at least four possibilities:

- ✓ They died to sin when Christ died on the cross for them; God views them in Christ's death — when Christ died they died (v. 6). His wrath against their sin was poured out on Christ and He no longer is angry against them.
- ✓ They died to sin and were raised up in baptism — their baptism signified their faith in Christ and His justification of them (vv. 3-4).
- ✓ They die to sin every day by "crucifying it" and mortifying it. They actively fight against sin (v. 12).
- ✓ They will finally and fully die to sin when they are redeemed in glory and every aspect of sin is irreversibly removed from them eternally (8:30).
- ✓ What does Paul mean with this phrase?
 - Notice that Paul says we ***died to sin*** (past tense). If Paul is thinking about present mortification or future glorification he would say, "we are dying to sin," or "we will die to sin."
 - While he relates baptism to this death in vv. 3ff, it seems more likely that if he had baptism in mind here, he would have used that word here also.
 - Notice also that he says, we died ***to sin***. In Eph. 2:1 he said that we were ***dead in sin***. There he's talking about a state. But here he's not talking about a state — "we are dead," but he is talking about our relationship with sin. The best way to understand ***died to sin*** is to think of it as dying "to the detriment of sin." There was a break in our relationship with sin. There is a decisive separation from our identity and relationship with sin.
 - Throughout the previous chapter, Paul spoke of the headship of Adam and how we are all in Adam and because we are in Adam, sin has dominion and power over us — notice the images of rulership and authority (5:12, 14, 17, 21). When Paul says that we died to sin, he means that the power of sin is removed. It no longer compels and controls us. Sin's mastery over us is overthrown (6:6, 7, 9, 11, 17, 18, 22). And because sin is no longer master, we don't have to live as if sin is still our master (6:12).

- When Paul says we **died to sin**, he simply means that previously, because of sin's authority, we could only sin; now he says, we can live without sinning. We don't have to sin! There is freedom to obey Christ and please God.
- ✓ In chapters 3-4, Paul demonstrated that through Christ, the wrath of God has been appeased — God is satisfied that Christ's death has sufficiently paid for the sin debt of all who believe in Christ (3:25; 4:7-8, 24-25). Our relationship with God has changed because the penalty of sin is removed.
- ✓ But now Paul is also demonstrating another transforming implication of our justification — our relationship with sin has changed — it's no longer our master; now God is our master and we have ability to obey Him instead of sin. Not only is the penalty of our sin removed, but the power of sin is also removed. We will still sin, but we no longer *must* sin. We have been liberated from the kingdom of sin and its king, Satan. We are free.

- What living by **GRACE** looks like

- ✓ I just said that we are free — but that freedom is not freedom to sin. To engage in a life of willful, rebellious sin would not be freedom, it would be bondage to sin. There is no liberty and joy there.
- ✓ That's why Paul says, "how shall we who died to sin [who through justifying faith have been freed from sin's enslavement] **still live in it?**" (He's not talking about occasional sin, but a life that is characterized and marked by unrepentant sin, similar to what John says in 1 Jn. 3:4-8).
- Notice the contrast here between death and life — we have died to sin (been freed from it); will we then go back to living in sin? Will we return to a life of death and sin?
- Or to put it in terms of the image of freedom from a domain, "you've moved out of the country of sin, will you go back to living there?" Many of you know that I was born in Canada — straight north of here, 1300 miles, in Winnipeg, MB. And I am occasionally asked, "Would you ever move back to Canada?" My answer has always been the same, "Are you kidding? Have you seen the temperatures there?" (The high and low today are 2 and -18; tomorrow it is -11 and -18. With snow.) I have been liberated from that weather. Why would I go back? Why would I want to live there, when I have been freed from that bondage? That's the point Paul is making with living in sin.
- And notice he says, how shall we **still live in it?** The little word *still* emphasizes the incongruity of staying in a state of sinfulness. We might say it this way: "You've died to sin, and *still* — really, still? — you are going to live in it?" The word **still** refers back to the word **continue** in v. 1. "How could you still be doing that? You've moved out and changed addresses — why do you still keep going back there? You do know you don't have to do that, don't you?"
- Paul is not talking here about the impossibility of sinning again, but he is talking about the moral incongruity and the folly of going back to a lifestyle of sin.
- I never had a dog until Raye Jeanne and I moved to Granbury (our family had cats). One day our dog's food disagreed with him and he vomited it up and before I could stop him, he went back to it and ate it (just like the Proverb says!). I about had an apoplectic fit. "Raye Jeanne!

Did you see what he did...????” (Calmly) she said, “Yes...” Say what you will about cats, at least they don’t eat their vomit. And in the same way, when a believer goes back to live in a pattern of sin it’s like he’s eating that filthy dog vomit again. Why?

- ✓ So this final phrase in v. 2 suggests for us what living by grace looks like (Paul will expand this throughout the rest of the chapter).
 - Living by grace means we no longer obey the rulership of sin because we have been freed from sin.
 - Living by grace means we now obey the rulership of Christ because we can obey Him. We don’t obey Him in order to seek His favor; we obey Him because He has already poured out His grace and favor on us.
 - Living by grace means the power of sin has been broken for us and now we joyfully obey God.

- What KIND of person are you?

- ✓ When Paul asks the question, **How...** he puts the pronoun **we who** at the beginning of the question: “we, the ones who died to sin, how will we still live in it?”
 - When he puts the pronoun at the beginning it tells us what he’s wanting to emphasize — he’s not emphasizing death to sin or sin or living a new kind of life. He’s emphasizing the people who have been redeemed by God.
 - And the pronoun has the idea of “ones who are of the nature of those who died to sin...”
 - So Paul is emphasizing, “You...you who have been freed from sin’s clutches...” He is pointing to their new nature and identity and the inconsistency of a believer living that way.
 - There are other reasons that Paul could give for not sinning in this verse. He could say that sin is detrimental and brings painful consequences and hardship (it does). He could say that sin is displeasing to God and invites His fatherly discipline (it does). Instead he points to our new identity and nature — that’s not who you are — so why would you live as if that’s your home and your nature. Why don’t you live in the freedom and joy of who you are in Christ?
- ✓ Believers are the kind of people who don’t perpetually in a state of sin. Struggle with sin? Yes. Fall into patterns of sin? Yes. Get ensnared unwittingly by sin? Yes. But intentionally, willfully, rebelliously, and unrepentantly live in sin? No. Rejecting the clear commands of God? No. Embracing a licentious lifestyle and calling it freedom? No.
- ✓ If you are struggling against sin and hating your sin, even though you sometimes fall into sinful conduct, you should see hope in these verses — Christ has set us free from sin (cf. Gal. 5:1); you have all the resources you need to obey Him and not obey sin (that’s the rest of this chapter).
- ✓ If you are not fighting against sin and you are enjoying your sin and your life is characterized by sinful conduct and you are not repenting then according to Paul you are the kind of person who has not died to sin and you have not been converted and you are still dead in your sin and under God’s wrath. (And by repenting we don’t mean “confess but keep doing the sin;” we mean confessing and turning away from that sin and changing your behavior.) If that is you, then you must repent of your sin and embrace Christ as your Savior.

- ✓ He will forgive you of your sin and, as these verses teach, give you freedom from sin so that you don't have to continue in your life pattern of sin any longer. If you are not repentant and not a lover of Jesus Christ, would you confess your sin and love Him? That's your only hope.

CONCLUSION:

Imagine a successful man. Everything he does seems to produce good results. His employees actually enjoy coming to work and working for him. They not only respect him, but they like him. His reputation outside the company is excellent also; his father was in the same business, and even his competitors acknowledge that he has not only represented his family name well, but that he has exceeded his father. His home life appears to be idyllic. His kids are well behaved and excelling in school; his wife appears happy in their home. And he serves as a Sunday School teacher at church and rarely misses worship.

And then one day his boss receives an email and it all starts unraveling. He has succeeded in business because he has executed a fraudulent business plan that took 3 years to uncover; initial estimates are that he stole \$1.7 million. And with the financial revelations come allegations of sexual misconduct that spans at least 12 years. It appears he may have children with at least two other women in two other states. And apparently he also lied about his college degree; not only did he not graduate with honors, but he never even graduated. He flunked out. The diploma on the wall? Fake. Because you are a close friend from church, you arrange to meet with him and encourage and help lead him to repentance. Over a one-hour meeting he repeats one phrase at least three times: "I appreciate that you're worried about my life, but this will sort itself out; God and I are okay. Don't worry, I know I'm saved." And over the next six months, there are only increasing allegations of sinful conduct and no signs of brokenness and repentance.

Let's replay that scenario with a different ending. You meet with the man, and shine the light of Scripture on his sin and give him the hope of repentance. And instead of the flippant, "I'm okay with God," he says, "You are absolutely right. You have every reason to question my salvation because everything I've done is inconsistent with what I've claimed to be. To be honest, I don't know if I'm a believer, either. All I have done is drag the name of Christ through the mud, and that sickens me; so I am appealing to the only One who can forgive and change me and I am seeking Him. This awful episode has revealed that I really don't know Him the way I ought, and much more than getting out of this problem, I want to get to know Him and His Word. I need change, and I know only He can change me."

The first response is indicative of someone who has never understood grace; the second response is one who understands that since grace is grace, our nature is changed so that we are empowered to live without indulging in sin. To ask the question I asked a few minutes ago, "What kind of person are you?"

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36