

Romans 6, Living to God

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Introduction

1. Can you imagine a soccer team where the captains tell the players, “Do whatever you think is best, because the coach loves you.” 2. Can you imagine an orchestra where the section leaders tell the musicians, “Play whatever you like, because the conductor loves you.” 3. Can you imagine a teacher telling the students, “We don’t need rules, because the principal loves you.” Good idea? 4. Can you imagine a world where preachers tell the believers, “Live however you want, because God loves you.” Good idea? **Let us pray:**

Lord God, form our faith by your Word, that we might show ourselves faithful as your disciples to a lost and dark world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

I. A Leap in Logic

By grace God forgives us all our sins, so that we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Where there is sin, grace abounds. In Luke 7, Jesus has his feet washed and oiled by a weeping prostitute. His host, a religious man, is offended, so Jesus tells him a story about a lender and two borrowers. One person borrows a little, the other borrows a lot. The lender forgives both debt. Which of the borrowers will love the lender more? The one who was forgiven more. The religious man was treating Jesus like a peer; he was cool and professional. The prostitute, experiencing a much more dramatic change, treated Jesus like a King and a Savior.

Paul states that where sin is great, grace increases all the more. Jesus showed us that this is true. So Paul raises the question, in Romans 6 verse 1, “Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?” Some Christians in Paul’s day, and in our own, seem to have jumped to the

conclusion that since in increases the abundance of God's grace, it is okay to sin. Some with more trained and subtle skills in theology will say things like, God in grace cancelled sin through the cross of Christ, so that sin is no longer to be understood as an alienation from God. Instead it is our choices that either make the world a better or a worse place, and *society* holds the moral barometer for what those choices should be that are approved.

Whether untrained or not, any belief that God's grace has made sin okay belongs to the same leap of logic. In a leap of logic one begins on a solid basis of truth, and then leaps off of it into a quicksand of lies. The solid basis of truth is this: God is holy, but no human can be holy on our own, so God justifies the sinner by grace alone. In doing so God shows us that to err is human, to forgive is divine, for this is at the core of God's holy nature. From there, many leap into the quick-sand that says, *the more we sin the more we can experience the joy of God's grace and forgiveness*. Or, with greater subtlety: *Because of what Jesus did on the cross, what we do does not matter anymore to God*. In effect, because God loves us and forgives us, *we can live the way we want*.

Paul does not allow for that leap. Asking, "Shall we continue in sin?" in verse 1, in 2 he answers, "By no means! How can we who died in sin go on living in it?" To say that we can live however we want because God loves us, is to misunderstand our baptism, our faith, and the death of Jesus. To be baptized into Christ Jesus is to be baptized into his death of Christ Jesus so that our sinful self is dead and buried. In dying to ourselves we give the Spirit of Christ room to live in us and for his glory. Now in this death of the self, Paul does **not** mean we should repress parts of ourselves, or ignore the truth of who we are. To be buried with Christ in baptism is not the same as burying a painful memory, it is not the same as cutting yourself off from your emotional needs, it is not the same as disconnecting your present from your past.

To be buried with Christ in baptism is to be raised up in the life of Christ, it is to be born again, born from above, with a new nature which is the very character of God. Not only is the sinful nature put to death, self-esteem is restored to health. When you have received the mind of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, your self-image reflects the image of God. In that grace, the past is not ignored or buried, it is explored and reconciled and healed. Feelings are not repressed, they are owned and understood. Being fully human himself, Jesus Christ is at home with you in all your feelings and frustrations, your struggles and temptations.

In Christ, you have the power to be master over your flesh: its fears, feelings, frustrations, struggles, and temptations. In Christ you can turn away from what tempts you, and when you feel weak, give a call to a prayer partner or sponsor or pastor, to walk with you through the darkness. In Christ you can devote your energies to the service of God, rather than to your flesh.

Today's gospel, Matthew 10, shows us no end to the opportunity to be a healer and evangelist and peacemaker, to become a thorn in the eye of the devil and the world which serves his lies. Matthew 10 describes the power of the repentant life, which rises boldly in the face of persecution, all the time in meekness and kindness showing the character of God to friends and enemies alike. This is the life that shows the world the Father. For those who disown the Father before the world, what testimony is left? A witness to a cheap grace?

By no means! The Father disowns those who disown him, as put in Romans 6 verse 23, "the wages of sin is death." Shall you go on sinning that grace may abound? How can you, when the Mind of God governs your actions by the Holy Spirit? You are being renewed daily in the character of God: Why would you even want to sin? Instead, as Paul writes in verse 4, "We walk in newness of life."

II. Sharing the Life of Christ

This life is possible because Christ Jesus is risen from the dead. Since he lives in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, the life that remains for us to live is the life of Christ Jesus within us, that we might show the world the character of God. So why do we Christians sin?

This is nothing new to Paul. In verse 12 it is clear that Christians have a bad habit of letting sin master our flesh, so that in verse 13 we offer our bodies as “instruments of wickedness.” These verses introduce the language of slave and master which continues out to verse 23, which speaks of the different wages doled out from each master. Will we be slaves to sin, or let God be our master?

These verses may call to mind a long history of human enslavement. Today slavery is mostly a hidden, illegal market that exploits the kidnapped, the betrayed, and the undocumented. Paul is actually describing slavery as a legal status, and that is how most of his readers would have understood it. Those who are slaves to sin are legitimately bound by sin’s claims on them and they will receive their wages, death. As Americans we may look at our own legacy of slavery to help us interpret this text, since the American system that prevailed until the 1860’s had much in common with the Roman system.

However, ancient Egyptian slavery, the system from which the Israelites were liberated in the Exodus, might be the best way to understand what Paul means. While there are parallels between the Egyptian system and the American system, the latter was unknown to Paul. What mattered were the spiritual parallels between the slave and the sinner. In ancient Egypt the heirs to Abraham and Israel, were living in a foreign land under the service of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne of Egypt as a god. Their bondage was severe. God rescued them from it. Then from the moment of that rescue and on, the People of Israel struggled with their identity of faith. In their journeys with God as their guide, they would often complain about how they were better off in

Egypt, under the Pharaoh's enslavement, and would even raise the issue of whether they ought to go back. Now let us bring the spiritual parallel closer to home:

In the novel and movie *Gone With the Wind*, when General Sherman's army occupied the plantation, most of the slaves seized that opportunity for their liberation. A few did not, despite the Emancipation Proclamation and the presence of Union soldiers; there were some in the household who continued to submit themselves to Scarlett O'Hara as though they were slaves. The author and the film-makers, being sympathizers to the old Confederacy, portrayed this as a good thing. I read the novel and watched the movie as a dyed in the wool Yankee, descended from abolitionists on my mother's side who were in Sherman's army. Notice that the author admits that it was the field hands who seized their freedom. The house servants, who had enjoyed a more comfortable life, continued in their slavery.

We carry in our hands this Emancipation Proclamation (hold up Bible). By the Executive Order of God the Father, we are liberated from the dominion of sin. Our freedom is in force when we, repenting, turn from our slavery to sin and ask for the redemption, bought by Jesus Christ on the cross, to include us. Repenting, we ask Jesus Christ to be our Master. Then receiving the Holy Spirit into our hearts we are given the power, on our lips and fingertips, to be instruments of the righteousness of God.

If this is so, then shall we be like the Israelites, looking to good old days when sin was our master, and desire to return to our slavery? Maybe we do this because we have not yet felt the worst of sin's cruelty: our addictions have not yet wounded our health, our habits have not yet ruined our finances, our marriages still hold together because selfishness has not yet broken the bond. American Christians, in our lives of relative comfort, continue to behave as slaves to sin because we have not suffered....yet.

Wake up and repent, People of God. Do not be swallowed up by the quicksand of cheap grace. Remember Israel: a whole generation failed in faith and perished without seeing the Promised Land. The wages of slavery to sin is death, **but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Master.**

Conclusion

Through participation in the death of Christ in baptism, and in his body and blood as we proclaim his death until he comes again, we show ourselves to be the servants of God. In the New Covenant faith, God's part is grace, and your part is trust. As Christians we each have one duty: *To live by faith, trusting that Christ lives in me.* By your trust in God's grace you are able to live the pattern of discipleship Jesus calls forth from his disciples in Matthew 10. You are able, as Paul writes in Romans 6 verse 13, to **“Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.”** Then you become living tools to show the world the character and image of God, and the boldness and perseverance of your faith.

In view of the marching orders in Matthew 10, clearly the new life in Christ described in Romans 6 is active and full. Abounding in the grace of God, it leaves no room for sin. Amen.