

Romans

Bible Study

Living in Grace

Romans 6:1—2

Paul has spent the first three chapters describing man's hopeless condition as a sinner. We are all victims of Adam's sin, being born with a sin nature and alienated from God. As Paul continues through the book of Romans, he presents our hope in Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection created a pathway for all men to come to God by faith. Those who believe are credited with Christ's righteousness. This is presented in chapters four and five. God has taken care of everything so that the only thing we need to do is reach out in faith to the offer of salvation. As believers, we have been declared righteous. Paul now presents the next logical step we need to take, living daily in the grace we stand in (Romans 5:2).

Sanctification

Having spoke on mankind's condemnation and hopeless condition, then explaining how God made it possible for us to be declared righteous, Paul now concentrates on our sanctification. To be sanctified is to be holy. The root meaning of this word means to be set apart. To be holy is to be set apart from the world and unto God. This is possible because we now have a new nature, made possible by the reconciliatory work of Jesus Christ and the energizing and regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. Paul concentrates on the process of sanctification in Romans 6, 7 and 8.

Great sin, greater grace

Towards the end of Chapter 5, Paul states that when the Law entered, sin became that much more abundant. In spite of the greatness of man's sin, God's grace is always greater, able to overcome every and all sins of all mankind. This is the power of the cross and the reason Paul gloried in the preaching of the cross (Galatians 6:14). It is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18).

God has power over sin and death. This was clearly evident during His earthly ministry when Jesus Christ forgave sins (Matthew 9:2—6; Luke 7:48), and when he raised people from the dead (Mark 5:21—43; John 11:38—44). He also passed this authority on to His Disciples as they were being prepared to continue ministering to Israel after His ascension (Matthew 10:8; John 20:23). Jesus Christ's resurrection was the ultimate declaration of God's power over sin and death. This was prophesied to Israel in Isaiah 25:8, but now we understand, through Paul, that this applies to all mankind.

This abundant grace of God is disconcerting to some who think the emphasis of grace leads to a lascivious lifestyle. This is one reason the majority of Christians think it's important to incorporate the Mosaic Law into their lives. This is often called "cheap grace," a term coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He basically preached that faith without works was dead (James 2:17), meaning he included works as part of salvation. He condemned those who accepted God's grace but showed no outward manifestation of their faith.

This is exactly the argument Paul quashes with Romans 6. The previous chapters just showed how God has done everything needed for us to have eternal life. Once we accept this gracious offer, by faith, we are eternally secure by the sealing of the Holy Spirit. We don't need to live a life of repentance, go to church, read the Bible or do any activity to prove or keep our faith (Romans 3:28). This is why Paul marvels at the "exceeding riches of His grace" (Ephesians 2:7). It's interesting to note that out of all of Paul's writings, the book of Romans not only mentions sin most often, but also grace. Where sin abounded, grace much more abounded (Romans 5:20—21). Out of God's grace came His answer to our sinful condition.

Calling God's grace "cheap" is a complete misunderstanding of what His grace is all about. Those who accuse us of cheap grace are actually the ones cheapening the grace of God. Paul anticipated that people would question that salvation is truly free, and that people would argue that grace without the Law will lead to an immoral lifestyle. They don't understand the great freedom we have in Christ and the security we enjoy as we rest in our faith.

Paul's answer to this argument points to our relationship with Jesus Christ and the change that was wrought in us when we believed. How can we who are now dead to sin live in sin? We now have the indwelling Holy Spirit and the regeneration of our spiritual life (Titus 3:5). This new man is a new creature that has now taken over, making it possible for God to use us for His glory. We have a whole new outlook on life as we learn to live to please the Lord instead of ourselves. We are now able to grasp the magnanimous love that God had displayed by sending His son to die for us. This new understanding of God's love is the driving force in the believer's life for our reason to serve Him (2 Corinthians 5:14). We are no longer living under the Mosaic Law, but are now under the law of love (Romans 13:8) and the law of the Spirit (Romans 8:2) and the law of God (Romans 7:25). The Mosaic Law was completely fulfilled by Christ so that those in Christ are seen as having fulfilled the Law, and are therefore dead to the condemning nature of the Law (Romans 10:4). This new law is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Our new position

Paul's prime point in chapter 6 is showing that we now have a new status, a new position with God, one that gives us a different outlook and focus. We are now no longer living to please self, but we are to revolve our lives around serving God. We are now free from the body of sin that kept us enslaved to sin (Romans 6:6; Colossians 2:11). The body of flesh has now been removed by the work of Christ. We are now free to serve righteousness instead of being a servant of sin and death (Romans 6:16—18). Our freedom in Christ is a freedom from the Law (Romans 6:14) and freedom from sin and death (Romans 8:2). Sin no longer has a death grip on us. Unbelievers are unable to not sin because they only have the old sinful nature. Believers can choose to live like the old nature is dead and live for righteousness. This new position in Christ allows us to turn our backs on the old nature, to act like it does not exist, because it has been put to death (Romans 6:11; Colossians 3:5).

Walking in the Spirit

The work of the Holy Spirit is a critical part of the Christian life. Without the Holy Spirit, we would not be able to please the Lord. We would be like Israel under the constraints of the Law. They knew what the Law demanded, but the Law gave them no ability to be faithful in obeying the Law (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 7:18). Believers have the Holy Spirit not only interceding for us, He also has cut off our sinful nature (Colossians 2:11), gives life to our new nature (Titus 3:5), indwells us (1 Corinthians 6:19—20) and seals us unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). It is the work of the Holy Spirit that makes it possible for us to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

At the point of salvation, we have stopped living after the flesh and have begun living in the Spirit (Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:25). This does not mean that we are now walking in sinless perfection, however, it is our decision whether we walk in a manner that pleases God or one that pleases self. Our position does not change. We are always seen by God as being perfect, in Christ. However, we can decide to resurrect the old nature and walk in the flesh, or decide if we want to live for the Lord. As we learn more about God and His overwhelming grace, we can't help but to give our lives back to Him in service (Romans 12:1—2).

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