

Dead to the Sin Nature

📖 Romans 6:1-4

👤 Pastor Jeremy Thomas

📅 January 11, 2015

🌐 fbgbible.org

📍 Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin Street

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

(830) 997-8834

Q: Is the doctrine of supergrace taught in Romans 5:20?

A: The term supergrace was coined by Bob Thieme, pastor-teacher of Berachah Church in Houston, TX, from 1950-2003. He coined the term from James 4:6, "But He gives a greater grace" (*μειζονα δε διδωσιν χαριν*). He used the term as a synonym for "spiritual maturity" and emphasized the special blessings that come only to believers who reach spiritual maturity. He taught that supergrace is God's objective for every believer in time. On that basis he saw his role as teaching to train believers so they could attain spiritual maturity and receive their supergrace blessings. James 4:6 does teach the concept of a greater grace made available to believers who are humble rather than arrogant. The humble believer receives a greater grace that enables him to overcome satanic opposition, have close fellowship with God and be exalted by God. So the concept of supergrace is a biblical concept whether you like the terminology or not. Do I see this doctrine taught in Romans 5:20 by the expression "grace abounded all the more"? No. Contextually what Romans 5:20 is teaching by the expression "grace abounded all the more" is that as the number of personal transgressions increased relative to the Law given at Mt Sinai, so the amount of grace increased all the more in bringing the imputed righteousness of Christ and eternal life to the one who believes. In other words, the imputation of Christ's righteousness and the impartation of eternal life go beyond the condemnation due us for our sin in Adam and our personal sins which manifest our sin in Adam. Therefore, to answer this question succinctly, the doctrine of supergrace, or special blessing for humble believers, is taught in the Bible but is not taught in Romans 5:20.

We are studying the Book of Romans verse-by-verse and we have just finished Romans 5. Since this is a transition point it's a good time to review the background of the letter and the teaching of chapters 1-5. Paul wrote Romans in about the year AD57. It is considered his magnum opus. He wrote it to the Church at Rome which was composed of a mixed group of Jewish and Gentile believers. The Church had originally been Jewish since Luke notes in Acts 2 that on the Day of Pentecost there were Jews from Rome who were among the first to believe in the crucified risen Lord Jesus Christ. When they returned to Rome with their newfound faith they began to

spread the gospel to their Jewish brethren. In the course of time realization set in that the gospel was for Gentiles also and so the gospel began to spread to Gentiles. By the time Paul wrote the letter the Church at Rome had come to be a complete picture of the body of Christ, both Jew and Gentile in one new man, the body of Christ.

Since this Church was not established by an apostle, Paul longed to come to them. His desire was to encourage them and make sure they were well-grounded in the fundamental truths of Christianity. In order to prepare them for his hoped for arrival he wrote the Book of Romans. The letter is unique among all the NT epistles in that it reads less like a personal letter and more like a systematic theology. A systematic theology is a treatise that presents categories of doctrine in a logical and interconnected progression. A systematic theology helps us think clearly about the different doctrines of Scripture. God wants us to think clearly as He thinks and He created us with minds in order to be able to organize His thoughts in a systematic fashion. Romans is referred to as the first systematic theology by many theologians and serves as the justification for believers writing systematic theologies down through the Church Age.

Paul, in Romans, systematizes six categories of doctrine in a logical and interconnected progression. First, he discusses Condemnation where he is answering the question "Why is man not right with God?" Second he discusses Justification where he is answering the question, "How does a man get right with God?" Third he discusses Sanctification where he is answering the question, "How does a man who is right with God live a life that is righteous before God?" Fourth he discusses Glorification where he is answering the question, "How does a man who is right with God get outfitted to dwell with God for all eternity?" Fifth he discusses an Explanation for the question, "What about Israel, God's covenant people?" And sixth he discusses the Application or the question, "So what?" So there is a very systematic organization of Bible doctrine in the Book of Romans that covers a vast array of truths and for that reason many, many bible students have found Romans to be the most influential book in their lives.

In our verse-by-verse study we have covered the first two categories of doctrine. The first doctrine is Condemnation and Paul teaches it in 1:18-3:20. Condemnation is the legal pronouncement of guilty due to our sin in Adam. In this section Paul proves that man's fundamental problem is a lack of righteousness before God. This lack of righteousness is manifested by man's natural inclination to suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness. The evidence is that man suppressed the truth about God revealed in creation (1:18-32), conscience (2:1-16) and the canon of Scripture (2:17-3:8). Paul's conclusion is that all are under sin, both Jew and Gentile; there is none righteous, no not even one (3:9-20). We refer to this section as covering the Doctrine of Condemnation because it refers to man's lack of righteousness with God.

The second doctrine is Justification and Paul teaches it in 3:21-5:21. Justification is the legal pronouncement of righteous due to Christ's imputation of His righteousness to our account. In this section Paul states that a righteousness of God has been provided by Christ. This righteousness is available as a free grace gift to both

Jews and Gentiles. At the moment of faith Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer even while ungodly so he is at the same time righteous and a sinner. By virtue of following in the footsteps of Abraham's faith we become heirs of the world to come. As a result of our free grace justification we have peace with God, access to God and hope through difficult times because of the assuring work of the indwelling Spirit of God. We refer to this section as covering the Doctrine of Justification because it teaches the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

The third doctrine is Sanctification and Paul teaches it in 6:1-8:17. Sanctification is the impartation of Christ's righteousness through us so we live lives pleasing to God. This is the section we are moving into today. I don't want to spoil everything we're going to learn here by giving it away in advance but Paul has already alluded to where he is going by stating a critical positional truth in 5:5. When I say positional I mean it refers to a truth that it gives you a position before God that is non-experiential. It's not a feeling. But it gives you a status or a standing with God. There are actually three points we want to make up front before we begin the verse-by-verse and two of these are positional. First, the positional truth of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In 5:5 Paul said that as a result of our justification God has given us the Holy Spirit; aorist tense. The aorist is a past moment in time. When we first believed and were justified God gave us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has several ministries in our lives but the basic ministry from which all the others stem is the indwelling ministry. The doctrine states that, beginning on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in the Church, indwelling each believer.¹ His indwelling presence is permanent as even sinning believers at Corinth in 1 Cor 6:19 are said to have the indwelling Spirit and Paul says later in Romans 8:9 that if someone does not have the Spirit he is not a believer. So all believers since the Day of Pentecost have the indwelling Spirit. This is not known by experience but by revelation. The Scriptures teach that at the moment of faith in Christ the Spirit came to indwell us. His indwelling presence is the basis for the filling ministry which is necessary for victory in the Christian life. Interestingly, Paul mentioned this in 5:5 but will not mention the Holy Spirit again until Romans 8. Apparently Paul wanted the believers at Rome to fully realize "their severe need of aid to fulfill God's demands." Therefore, apart from the indwelling of the Spirit there is no availability of the Spirit for us to depend upon so that we can be sanctified. So the first essential to sanctification is the indwelling Spirit of God. This is a positional truth relative to all who have believed and been justified.

Second, the positional truth of deliverance from the power of the sin nature. In Romans 6:1-11 Paul reveals that we have been delivered from the power of the sin nature. The statements in 6:1-11 are all indicative. The indicative mood is a statement of fact. Note in verse 3, "all of us have been baptized into Christ Jesus." There is no questioning it. There is no command to do it. It is a simple statement of fact. Also note in verse 4 that "we have been buried with Him." This is another statement of fact. And note in verse 6 another indicative, "our old self was crucified with Him." In verse 7 another indicative, "he who has died is justified from sin." These are all statements of fact. Paul is teaching us the positional truth that we have been delivered from the power of the sin nature and this means that we are not required to be in subjection to the sinful nature. So there are two

positional truths so far that are a necessary basis for sanctification to occur; the truth of the indwelling Spirit and the deliverance from the power of the sin nature.

Third, the experiential truth of our responsibility to yield to God on a daily basis. In Romans 6:12-23 Paul reveals our experiential responsibility to yield to God. The statements in 6:12-23 are imperatives. The imperative mood is commands to follow. Note in verse 12, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body." That is a definite command we have a responsibility to follow. Note also in verse 13 that Paul says "do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead." The positive presentation of ourselves to God is a command we are to follow. And also note the end of verse 19, "so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification." This again is an imperative laid on us to present ourselves to righteousness and that this is necessary for sanctification. So three truths, two positional that form the basis for sanctification; the indwelling Spirit and the deliverance from the power of the sin nature, and one experiential; the responsibility to yield to God on a daily basis. These are all indispensable elements in the advancement of sanctification.

That connects us back to justification in Romans 5 and transitions us nicely into sanctification in Romans 6. As far as chapter 6 is concerned I like to outline it thematically according to the indicative and imperative moods. First, Romans 6:1-11 is the indicative section. Paul is here giving statements of fact concerning our position as those who have been delivered from the power of the sin nature. This is not something that needs to be repeated. It is a once for all declaration that the power of the sin nature has been broken. Second, Romans 6:12-23 is the imperative section. Paul is here giving us commands to follow concerning our reckoning these things to be so and yielding ourselves to God. It is not a once for all reckoning but a daily reckoning that needs to take place in order to actually have victory in our experience. Both are necessary components that set the stage for understanding the basis and condition upon which the indwelling Spirit of God is activated in our lives to produce sanctification.

The final introductory remark is to say that this is far and away the most important passage on sanctification in the entire Bible. There is one other important passage, 1 Thess 4:1-12, but Romans 6-8 is far more extensive. I think this is the number one difficulty in Christianity - wanting to learn how to live a successful Christian life. I think it is more problematic than any other issue: "How to live the Christian life?" So this is the passage and I would say that there are many genuine Christians who are failing miserably in their Christian life and marked by others as non-Christians, but in reality they simply do not understand the principles for how to live the Christian life. So this is the passage to really delve into to learn how to live the Christian life. It's not by operation boot strap. You can't force it. You have to understand the positional and experiential truths we are going to unfold in these chapters.

In 6:1 Paul makes a marked transition: **What shall we say then?** A. T. Robertson says that initial question is "A debater's phrase." Paul is predicting a possible logical inference could be drawn from what he's said. The use of

the inferential conjunction *οὐν* supports this contention. The following question reveals the logical inference that we might be tempted to draw. **Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?** That may seem like a logical inference from what Paul said in 5:20. What did Paul say in 5:20? “but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” Applying simple logic to this statement we might conclude that believers shouldn’t really worry about sinning since it results in a greater manifestation of God’s grace and His glory! Many Christians have exploited this very argument in their pursuit of a sinful life. “God’s grace will cover it!” Of course, Paul’s argument is that such an attitude is wildly contrary to grace. Grace is not a license to sin but God’s enablement that prevents sin. The point is we no longer have to sin.

But to really grasp this question we have to understand the grammar of the question. First, the word **sin** is preceded by the definite article and therefore refers to the sin nature. Paul’s question is not, “Are we to continue in personal sin?” but “Are we to continue in the sin nature?” This changes the entire focus of the passage. The passage relates to the believer’s life relative to his sin nature. Many theologians deny we even have a sin nature but Paul takes it for granted in v 1 that we do have a sin nature. What’s the “sin nature?” It’s the natural man’s “propensity” or “predisposition to sin.” Paul uses it sixteen times in this chapter (6:2, 6 (2x’s), 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22 and 23). And therefore what is in view is the believer’s life relative to his sin nature.

Second, the word **continue** refers to continuing in something which you once persisted in. The question then is, “Are we to continue in the sin nature that we once persisted in?” That is the nature of the question. Certainly if it’s true that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,” then we should as Christians continue living in the sin nature? Isn’t that good for the grace of God’s manifestation and His greater glory?

Paul’s response in verse 2 is quite clear in His. **May it never be!** This Greek expression, *μη γένοιτο*, is the strongest Greek negative possible. Dan Wallace says, “*μη γένοιτο* usually has the force of abhorrence” and is “(a very strong negative).” It is a horrible thought that we should continue in the sin nature. We might say “Perish the thought” or as the KJV says, “God forbid.” Paul’s point is that the believer who is now justified before God should by no means continue living by the power of the sin nature. Why not?

Paul’s rhetorical question in verse 2 indicates why not. **How shall we who died to sin still live in it?** Now, before salvation we were obligated to **live in it**. There was no other way to live other than the sinful nature. That’s why the unbeliever is in a heap of trouble. But Paul reveals that something has happened such that we don’t have to live by the sin nature anymore. And in the question he reveals that we **died to** the **sin** nature. We died to it! The verb **died** is emphatic and aorist in tense. The aorist tense is a point action concluded in past time. Paul says that we died a once for all death to the sin nature. We don’t have to die to the sin nature daily! We already died to it the day we believed. We died to it the same time we were justified and the same time we were regenerated and the same time we received the indwelling Spirit of God and 30 other riches of divine grace. God did tremendous things for us at the moment we believed and the one being reported here is we died to the sin nature. The word **died** means “to cease to have vital functions.” In other words, we don’t have to live according to the sin nature

anymore. That was then, this is now, and things have changed. We're not alive to the sin nature anymore so how shall we **still live in it**. The verb **live** is a future tense and refers to the life post-faith. At the moment of faith our entire way of living changed once for all. Not many Christians know that. They're still trying to live the way they did before and they keep getting the same tired results, a life of sin. Paul says it's inconceivable that we should go on living in the sin nature. The word **live** is ζαω and means "to conduct oneself in a pattern of behavior." Paul does not say that we can't still live in the sin nature but that it is unimaginable that we should. Why we're dead to that way of living. Why live that way? Why even would you want to? That's not life, that's death. Sin is always a foolish way to live. And so to think that we should go on living that way borders on ignorance.

So Paul asks in verse 3, **Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?** He speaks to those who are the *αγνοειτε*, "the ignorant," those who are without knowledge of this most important fact that he will now spell out. He acts as if they might know the first fact, that we **have been baptized into Christ Jesus**, but they don't **know** the second fact, that we **have been baptized into His death?** What does this mean we **have been baptized into His death?** Is this water baptism? More than half of commentators launch into some spiel about water baptism here. But the problem is that whatever this baptism is it's one that caused us to die to the sin nature. And it's hard for me to imagine that going out to a river and being baptized by some fella is going to cause me to die to my sin nature. I'm just not seeing it. That's a ritual baptism. It's symbolic. It's a picture. A picture of what? A picture of the real baptism of the Spirit. What the Spirit did is real. It accomplished a spiritual matter of slaying me to the power of the sin nature. But what the water baptism did was paint a wonderful picture of that and that picture is most well-stated in verses 3-4. It's a picture that comes in three stages; stage one, above the water I died with Christ, stage two, under the water I was buried with Christ, and stage three, back above the water I was raised with Christ. So water baptism is a wonderful picture but what it pictures is far more wonderful; the baptism of the Holy Spirit who really did those things for me spiritually. He is the Baptizer here. He baptized me, He baptized you and He did it at the moment of faith in Christ. But what is baptism? Baptism is from a Greek word group that means "to dip, to plunge" so as to so thoroughly change the essence of a thing that it has a new identity. For example, when people would dye clothes in the ancient world they would take a white fabric and dip it into the dye so that it looked like a totally new shirt; it had a new identity. That's the mundane usage and we find that usage in Scripture. But far more important is the theological usage and this is the concept that when you believed in Christ what the Spirit of God did was actively plunge you into the death of Christ so as to so identify you with Christ in His death that just as Christ died for sin so you died to sin. You were taken back through the cross, so to speak. This is not something you felt. This is a positional truth. You don't feel positional truth. If you're waiting to feel this you never will. But its results are necessary for sanctification. You have to die to the sin nature because otherwise you are obligated to live by it. And if that is the situation then you can never do anything that pleases God.

Now another thing here is to point out that the verb **have been baptized** is aorist. The aorist refers to a past completed action, it's a one-time event; done, accomplished. You're not being baptized by the Spirit daily or

even more than one time. It's just one time and it's once for all and it's totally sufficient. You don't need to have the power of the sin nature broken day after day after day. It's not in the process of being broken. It is broken, once for all. This is just another reason we have eternal security. It's been quipped that you can get eternal security 1,001 different ways. Here's one. We have been baptized into Christ's death. So if we could lose our salvation what would have to happen? We would have to be baptized back into Adam and made alive to the sin nature once more. No friend, that is ridiculous. No passage teaches any such thing. The power of the sin nature has been broken once for all on the day you believed.

A final thing to notice is that we were so identified with our sin nature before we believed that all of us had to be baptized into Christ Jesus. He doesn't say in verse 3 and 4 that our sin nature was baptized into Christ's death, that it was put to death, but that we as total people were put to death. What this means, I mean the implication of that, is that when we were unbelievers we were so permeated by sin that we were sin. There was no real distinction. There's just no other way around it. God doesn't keep the good parts of us and carry them over into the Christian life and add a few things. There were no good parts to keep! We were totally sinful and therefore we had to be baptized into His death in order to die to who we were and become new people.

Now we are new people but a point of clarification is that does not mean that the sin nature is dead to us. We are dead to it; it is not dead to us. Verse 16 points out very clearly that we can still present ourselves as a slave to the sin nature and let it have its way with us, which way is death. But as a position we are dead to the sin nature. We don't have to allow it to rule our lives. We don't have to. Get that down in your mind. You're not obligated to follow the dictates of your sin nature.

Now what came after Christ's death? Christ's burial. They took His body down before Sabbath and laid it in a tomb. And what came after our death with Him? Verse 4. **Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death.** What was the burial really about? The historical evidence that Christ really died. What's the historical evidence that we really died to our sin nature? **We have been buried with Him.** Aorist tense again. See? This all happened at an instant of time when we first believed. We were buried with Him **through baptism into** the death of deaths, the death of Christ Himself. Turn briefly to Col 2:12. Paul wrote Colossians a few years later. Note how he puts it starting in 2:9, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." If that's not a statement of deity I don't know what is! Verse 10, "and in Him you have been made complete," complete, entire, "and He is the head over all rule and authority;" meaning He's ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father on high, above all angelic powers. Verse 11, "and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; ¹²having been buried with Him in baptism," there it is, "in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way,

having nailed it to the cross." Bingo. Talk about a package deal. We died, we were buried and we were raised to live a new life with Him. He is our life. Just wanted to show you these truths aren't isolated. They're in other places.

What happened after the burial? The resurrection. Why the resurrection? It's a new life. Christ had immortal human life. So what comes next? In 6:4 we have a purpose clause. Why were we baptized into His death and buried with Him? **So that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we to might walk in newness of life.** Whatever this **newness of life** is it's a resurrection life. We are already spiritually resurrected and we are to walk in that resurrection life now. This isn't something future. In the future there is the resurrection body. But now we are already resurrected spiritually. All these are indicatives. They are simply statements of fact. We were baptized into His death, we were buried with Him and we were raised to walk a new resurrection life.

The way of that new life is the same way Christ **was raised from the dead. Through the glory of the Father,** by which **glory** refers to His majestic power. So then we walk not in our own strength but in His strength. The same strength of God the Father that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is the same strength that is toward us to walk in newness of life. The little word **as** makes this certain. It's the comparative adverb *ωσπερ* and means "just as," identical, by exact parallel, there's no difference. The same power of God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is the same power made available to us **so we might walk in newness of life.** The verb **walk** is from *περιπατω* and simply means "the way you live your life," "the way you go about life" in tense two sanctification. These positional truths are there and necessary. They don't mean that we will necessarily live the new life but that we are dead to sin and alive to God and that capacity is available. To tap into it Paul writes vv 12-23 which tells us our responsibility relative to these truths. So for now Paul is content to lay down the positional truths because they undergird our experiential responsibility that he will highlight later.²

What have we seen? In 6:1 Paul expects a possible logical inference from his statement in 5:20 to the effect that the more we sin the more grace abounds. In that light, shall we continue to live by the sin nature so that grace may abound to the glory of God? In 6:2 Paul answers, "Perish the thought." How shall we who died to the sin nature still live in it? In 6:3 Paul answers by questioning their knowledge. Do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We have been identified with Christ in His death and are therefore dead to our sin nature. We are by no means obligated to obey the dictates of our sin nature any more. In 6:4 we were also buried with Him through baptism into the death of deaths so that, in the exact same way that Christ was raised from the dead by the majestic power of the Father, so too, in that same strength, we might live a new life.

In conclusion, what principles can we learn? First, there is no license for Christians to live sinful lives. Grace is not a license to sin. Grace is God's enablement to prevent us from sinning. Second, it is inconceivable that we should live in the sin nature. To do so is contrary to who we are. Third, the critical truth revealed here is that we have

had a change of identity, we have been identified with Christ in His death and therefore new people. Fourth, this happened in an instant of time. It is not an experience that we feel. It is not something that happens multiple times. It happened one time only when we first believed and were retroactively killed, buried and raised to live a new life. Fifth, we have God's omnipotent power toward us to enable us to live this new resurrection life. The power of the sin nature has been broken and our obligation is no longer to the sin nature but to the new resurrection life, what we might call the new nature.

¹ John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, p 151.

² The phrase newness of life is an attributed genitive and simply means "a new life."