

## **Does a Gospel of Free and Abundant Grace Lead to More Sin?**

Romans 6:1-14

Pastor Jason Van Bommel, Forest Hill Presbyterian

*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, ESV*

Can something be too good to be true? We're familiar with that concept, but how about too good to be good for you? We've all met and interacted with spoiled children. Children who are never told no and who always get everything they ask for don't benefit from such parenting, do they? Their childhoods may be described as being too good to be good for them.

Is that how the Gospel works? Paul has been very clear in the first five chapters of Romans that we are not saved by obeying the law or by any other good works. In fact, at the end of Romans 5, Paul brought the grace of the Gospel to a rousing crescendo by saying, ". . . *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" (Rom. 5:20-21, ESV)

If an increase of sin causes grace to abound all the more, does that mean that grace leads to sin? Is this a case of God being the kind of Father who spoils His children by excessive grace to their harm? Absolutely not! That's Paul's answer: "By no means!"

Why not? Because the grace that saves us is grace that unites us to Christ. We receive the righteousness of Christ apart from the law by grace alone through faith alone, but the faith that brings us justification does so by uniting us to Christ. Baptism is the sign and seal of that union with Christ.

When we are united to Christ, we are united to His death and resurrection. That means that not only does His righteousness become ours, but His death and resurrection also become ours. We become members of the body of Christ. If this is all true, then we must not willingly offer ourselves to sin.

The very first command in the book of Romans comes in Romans 6:11. Think about that for a minute: Through more than five full chapters of Romans, Paul has not given a single command. The focus has been on what God has done in Christ, not on what we must do. But now, in chapter 6, Paul is ready to start telling us how we must live in the light of the Gospel. The first command is what we must consider, or reckon: "*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*"

How can we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, when our sinful nature is the opposite? Because God has given us a new nature in Christ. Our union with Christ changes the fundamental truth of who we are.

Paul then follows this first command immediately with two negative commands and one positive one:

1. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

2. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but . . .

3. . . . present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

As those who have been given a new nature in Christ, we have an obligation to stop indulging our sinful nature and to start living out holiness unto the Lord. We can do so because Christ lives in us and we have the power of His nature in us.

God's grace does not spoil His children the way over-indulgent parents do for one key reason: God has the power to change our hearts, giving us a new identity and new desires. That's something no human being can do for another, or even for ourselves. That's the true power of the grace of God!