

**“Dying to the Old Way of Life”**

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**Romans 6:1-11**

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? **2** By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?

**3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

**5** For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. **7** For whoever has died is freed from sin. **8** But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

**9** We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. **10** The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. **11** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

**THE PROBLEM WITH GRACE**

“Grace, grace marvelous grace ... grace that is great than all our sins.”

The words of that hymn express the heart of the gospel.

God’s grace is greater than all our sin.

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

But, we often take this gift for granted.

Worse yet, we sometimes use the promise of God's grace as an excuse for bad behavior.

One commentator told of something that happened with her son when he was in preschool. He accidentally spilled an entire carton of milk on the floor and was devastated by his mistake.

His mom mopped up the floor and assured him that everything was going to be just fine.

She said, "Look. The whole floor is nice and clean!"

The young son then turned to his mom and said,  
"Hey, maybe I should spill milk on the floor more often!"

Out of the mouth of babes ... There is danger in too much grace ... or so it seems. Too much spilled milk can be a bad thing.

The French philosopher, Voltaire once wrote,  
"God will forgive me. It's his business."

Voltaire didn't believe that.

He was for all practical purposes an atheist.

He didn't believe in God or grace.

And he was using his biting wit to criticize the Christian faith.

Like many he thought the concept of grace was dangerous.

Voltaire believed undeserved forgiveness would lead to even worse behavior.

If you gave human beings too much grace, the world would be filled with spilled milk!

If God is going to forgive me anyway, why worry about doing the wrong thing?

In fact, why not sow my wild oats now and receive forgiveness later?

Voltaire wasn't the first to offer this critique of the Christian faith.

Paul talks about it in our lesson for today.

## ADAM AND JESUS

In the fifth chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul talks about how sin came into the world, and how God's grace in Jesus overcame that sin.

The sin of the first man, Adam led to a world filled with sin. In other words, Adam's story became our story.

We sin. We fall short.  
We are not the people God meant for us to be.  
Our life is filled with regret and shame.

So what's the answer to this problem?

Well, just as sin came into the world through one man, Adam ... so salvation came into the world through one man, Jesus.

On the cross we see the unconditional love of God in action.

Jesus forgives his enemies, the very ones who were crucifying him.

And, in the same way, he forgives us.

Just as the disobedience of Adam brought sin into the world, so this radical forgiveness brought grace into the world. This is what we mean when we say that Jesus died for our sins on the cross.

Jesus unleashed the power of forgiveness in a world dominated by sin.

We don't deserve his forgiveness any more than those who crucified him deserved his forgiveness.

That's the meaning of grace.  
We don't get what we deserve.  
Instead, we get God's forgiveness.

And that's where Voltaire and (and some folks to whom Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans) had a problem.

Radical grace can be a stumbling block to many.

People will take advantage of this unmerited grace.

## HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO GOD'S GRACE?

So, Paul addresses this problem by asking a rhetorical question,

“How should we respond to God’s forgiveness in Jesus? Does this mean that we should continue to sin so that grace can abound?”

Let’s think about this question in relation to the parable of the Prodigal Son. Most of you know the story well.

The prodigal son comes home from the far country and receives not only the undeserved forgiveness of his father but also a feast of celebration.

But, you may also remember that there was one person who didn’t join in the celebration.

The dutiful elder son is not so happy about what his father had done.

He thinks that before long the younger son will return to his prodigal ways. He predicts that this prodigal son will say to himself in six months,

“Hey, that worked so well, I’ll head for the far country again. I haven’t had my fill of wine, women and song. I still have wild oats to sow.

My father will forgive me.  
He always does.”

We don’t know how the story of the prodigal son ends.

But, we do know that this is how the elder son predicts that the story will end.

He won’t join the celebration because he believes that the younger son will once again prove to be unworthy.

But, our passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans suggests a different ending to the parable. According to Paul, grace calls forth gracious living.

The father didn't rescue his son from the sins of the far country only to abandon him again to that way of life.

According to the parable, the reason the father had a feast was this:  
His son who was lost was found.  
He was saved.  
He had come back home.

The prodigal would not be tempted to go back to the far country because he now understood the depth of the father's love.

And so Paul answers the question that he poses.  
Should we sin so that grace can abound?

"God forbid!  
If we understand the depth of God's gracious love, we will not want to sin."

God didn't save us from our sins so that we could settle down and be comfortable in them.

God saved us from our sins so that we could die to the old way of life and live in a new way.

God saved us from our sins so that we could come home from the far country."

## THE PROMISE AND CLAIM OF BAPTISM

That's what baptism means.  
When we are baptized we die to the old way of life and rise to walk in a new way.

Baptism is not something that we do for ourselves.  
It's something that is done to us.

In baptism we acknowledge the fact that God's grace is prevenient.

That's a fancy way of saying God's grace comes before.

As the Bible puts it,

“But, God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

I like the sacrament of infant baptism because it emphasizes this aspect of God’s grace.

Infants can’t choose the grace of God.  
But, God out of love chooses them.

Grace is a gift based upon God’s love.  
It is not dependent upon anything that we do.

But, the fact that God’s grace comes before we know God and while we are still sinners does not lessen our responsibility to live a gracious life.

On the contrary, the love of God increases our responsibility to live a righteous life.

When a child misbehaves, we sometimes scold them by saying,

“That’s not who you are.  
You know better than that.”

In a greater way, the grace of God encourages us to live a righteous life.  
Living a life of careless sin is not an option.

That’s not who we are.  
We know better than that because we know the love of God.

We know what it means to be forgiven.

According to Paul, baptism is a reflection of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

When we are baptized, we are baptized into the death of Jesus.

We die to the old way of life.  
We say goodbye to the far country forever.

And then, just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so we rise to walk in “newness of life”.

## A BAPTIST VIEW

I grew up in the Baptist church, and I can still vividly remember how we used this verse to describe the process of baptism by immersion.

When the pastor dunked us under the water, he said that we had died to the old way of life.

The pastor of my youth wanted to make a point about the death part. He held us down for what seemed like an eternity!

And when we made it back up, and gratefully sucked in air ... he said that we had risen to walk in newness.

We knew what it was like to be born again!

There's something right about that way of doing baptism.

It's a good symbol of how the grace of God calls us from death to life.

It's not just tinkering around the edges of our life.

It's a whole new life.

It's participating in the death of Christ so that we may also participate in his resurrection.

A proper understanding of the resurrection prevents us from cheapening the grace of God.

When you've died to the old way of life ...

if you've been jerked out of the turbulent water by the grace of God, there's no turning back.

You're on a new path.

You have a new life.

## NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES

Near death experiences have often changed the course of people's lives.

At age 36 Tolstoy was thrown from his horse while hunting. When he came to his senses, a thought hit him like a thunderbolt.

“I’m a writer.”

This brush with mortality gave him the courage to take the risk and live the life that he was meant to live. He went on to have a distinguished career as a writer, his most famous work being the massive War and Peace.

Harriet Tubman said that her life as a courageous liberator of slaves began when, as a teenager, she almost lost her life. She tried to stop the beating of a fellow slave and was felled by a blow to her head by her master.

The blow broke her skull.

She lingered near death for weeks.

For the rest of her life she suffered catatonic spells because of this injury.

Yet, according to one biographer, this incident was, in a way, her liberation.

He wrote, “The blow that cracked Tubman’s skull also struck off her psychic chains.

She had already died once; she had nothing to lose.”

In a similar way, the Christian faith gives us new life by bringing us close to death. And how do we draw near to death? We approach the cross of Christ.

And on the cross we see not only the death of Jesus but also the death of our old way of life.

When we come near to the cross of Jesus, we are changed by His words of forgiveness.

We are changed by a God who loves us so much that He will not allow us to keep on going down the dark path of destruction.

When we draw near to the cross our old way of life is crucified by the power of God’s grace.

## DYING TO THE OLD WAY OF LIFE

We all know what it’s like to leave the old way of life behind.

For example, do you remember what it was like when you graduated from high school?

It was exciting.

But, it was also terrifying.

All of us were headed in different directions.

Some of us were headed to a new job.

Some of us were going to college.

Some of us would be entering a time of military service.

And yet, for all of us, one thing was sure.

The old way of life was dead and gone.

In the end, for most of us, that proved to be a good thing. In order to live a productive life, the old way of life had to die.

We had to leave home in order to find our true home.

And in an even more profound way, the same is true when we become a Christian.

Like the prodigal son, we leave the far country ... never to return again.

The sacrificial love of the Father is so great that we do not want to return.

We have died to the old way of life.

And we have been raised to walk in a new way ... the way defined by the life of Jesus.

It's like ... to use another familiar biblical phrase ... being born again.

Or to use a phrase from our lesson for today, it's like being raised from the dead.

## A NEW IDENTITY

Paul wrote that the Christian is "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Now, of course this doesn't mean that we're perfect. But, it does mean that we're on the road to becoming a different person. We are living into a new identity that is shaped by the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

In some medical schools first year students were instructed to call each other "doctor".

Why did they do that?

They weren't doctors. In fact they had just begun their training.

But, they were learning to be doctors. They were living in a community that was dedicated to adopting this new identity and way of life.

The title reminded them of who they were becoming ... the eventual goal of their training.

Using that title encouraged them to strive toward that new identity.

I heard of a minister who always referred to his congregation as the "saints of God".

I'm sure many in the congregation found that to be a bit odd.

They knew better. They weren't even close to being saints.

But, the preacher named his parishioners not by who they were but by who they were becoming. Calling them saints reminded them of their vocation.

They were special because God had freed them from their slavery to sin. And now they had an opportunity to respond to that grace with a life of service.

## FAITH AND ACTION

In the Bible faith and action always go together. Sometimes we forget that.

What we believe doesn't always shape what we do.

David Bartlett put it this way,  
"We think that because our hearts belong to Jesus,  
our bodies, our checkbooks, our votes and our property values belong to us."

That's not true.

Notice how Paul frames the issue in our passage for today.

He wrote, "... Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,  
so we too might *walk* in newness of life."

The key word in that verse is the word "walk".

Paul didn't talk about what we believe or what we think.

Paul talked about how we "walk".

That's another way of talking about our actions ... how we live.

That's our walk.

We're on the way to a new identity.

We're called to be saints.

We're called to be living, breathing examples of what God's grace can do.

It's not a demand.

It's a wonderful possibility created by God's amazing grace.

Today, God in Christ is calling us.

"Come walk with me ...

... walk with me on this road paved with grace."

Amen.