

Sunday, September 10, 2023

## Shall We Continue In Sin, That Grace May Abound?

**What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:1-4)**

I did a sermon on June 11 of this year entitled "[Christ In You, The Hope of Glory](#)." I ended that sermon like this: *"If you forget, neglect, misunderstand, etc., your union with Christ, you are going to have a warped view of the grace of God. And when you separate the gifts of God from God Himself (and from His presence in us), you are in danger. Two of the most common ways for things to go south is for a person to slip into legalism (works-righteousness, the spirit of bondage, [moralism]) or antinomianism (lawlessness, cheap grace). This can happen in a lot of ways, some of which are quite subtle."* Last time, on July 23, I did a sermon on the topic of legalism called "[The Spirit Of Bondage](#)." Today, I would like to continue with a sermon about antinomianism. I defined legalism as "the false doctrine that you can earn or merit a right standing before God by your own works." I will define antinomianism as "the false doctrine that Christians don't have to obey God." I hope to show that such a doctrine is so foreign to the teaching of the scripture that the exact opposite is true – the grace of God only enhances and increases our will and obligation to obey Him.

I ended the last sermon reminding everyone that the solution to the problem of legalism is the gospel of the grace of God, which is a good thing to continue with this week because it was for the preaching of the free grace of God towards sinners that Paul himself was accused of being an antinomian – that is, accused of being lawless and promoting sin and evil works. It's probably why Jesus was accused of being "a friend of publicans and sinners" as well (i.e., they were accusing Jesus of partaking in and encouraging sin). I think spending a few minutes on this would be instructive, because I know that I've certainly fallen into this trap, and I suspect others have too. What happens is you start coming up with objections and suspicions when it comes to preaching the grace of God. For example:

**Objection 1:** If you preach the grace of God, then you're going to look like a phony Christian.

**Answer:** I feel this one very acutely. But without any doubt in my mind, this type of thinking is a device of Satan, and he has been extremely successful with this particular device. What he does is he associates the Word of God with something (or someone) that you find to be repugnant, so you get to the point where you are repulsed by that part of the Word. You might even have a physiological reaction to it, and then you do and say stupid and sinful things. There are a lot of variations to this device. Maybe someone has deceitfully used some part of the scripture to try to manipulate you. Maybe someone has misapplied some part of the scripture to you or to someone else. Maybe someone has abused, twisted, or wrested some part of the scripture to teach a false doctrine (and what doctrine has been abused more than the grace of God?) But we can't let our emotions and our visceral reactions rule the day - we have to be faithful to the scripture. Don't let the devil take that blessing of the scripture away from you, beloved. If you do, he's playing you like a fiddle. He wants to get you to despise what the Bible says. He wants you to be silent. He wants to keep sinners from knowing about the whole Christ.

One thing that might help is what Paul says in Philippians 1. The situation was very different, but the principle is the same. Verse 15 says "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will." Paul's reaction was not "well, if that phony is going to preach Christ, I don't want to sound like him." No! He said, "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." (v. 18). If someone manages to get some truth out about Christ (whether in pretence or in truth), this should be a matter of rejoicing for us. And I mean actual rejoicing – not using the passage as a retort, or to make ourselves feel better when someone says something mean about us, or to try to convince everyone around you (including yourself) that you're rejoicing when you're really not. Remember that Judas Iscariot was a gospel preacher! (See Matthew 10, Luke 9). The Lord uses earthen vessels as He sees fit. Remember who is supposed to be glorified here: it's not the one speaking in pretence; it's not the one speaking in truth; it's Christ. When Christ is preached, Christ is glorified.

**Objection 2:** If you preach the grace of God, then people are going to use it as a license to sin.

**Answer:** I have a multi-point answer on this one:

1. So what? If you are faithfully preaching the Bible and someone abuses what you said to justify their own sin, that's their problem, not your problem. See Ezekiel 3. The problem is not with the Word of God – the problem is with the sinner.
2. The solution to this objection is to do what Paul did and preach "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).
3. This objection is just a variation of the accusation that Paul's enemies were leveling against him. Paul reports this to us in Romans 3:8 – "And not rather, (as we be

slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.” The accusation was “Paul, when you preach stuff like ‘Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound’ (Romans 5:20), you are preaching that the more evil, the better, because the more sinning you do, the more glorious God’s grace appears. You are turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.” This is a slanderous accusation, and Paul responds by saying that the damnation of such slanderers is just. (Note: This ought to make any of us pause before making this accusation against someone. We better make sure we have evidence for such a thing.)

Preaching the grace of God is not the same as turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. But some people do turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and that is what we call antinomianism, which is our topic today. To use the grace of God as an excuse to sin means that you do not understand what the grace of God is. It means you do not understand salvation. It means you do not understand the gospel. It means you do not understand Christ. It means you do not understand what it means for you to be in union with Christ. I wish I was making this up, but I received the following brief email recently:

*What is the point of not sinning if jesus died for our sins. So I will continue to sin by loving other men so jesus didn't die for nothing*

That’s about as blatant and extreme as you can get when it comes to the false teaching of antinomianism. Of course, the reality is that Jesus did not just die to forgive us of our sins; He also died to join Himself to us and deliver us from the power of sin so we would be zealous of good works and “live unto God” (Galatians 2:19). If the Jesus that you worship only died for your sins but doesn’t transform the way that you live your life, that type of belief system might be a lot of things, but it is certainly not Christianity.

**Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)**

**For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)**

**But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. (Romans 13:14)**

**For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God**

**and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:11-14)**

If you think that the grace of God gives you license to sin, you have a couple of screws loose. Grace does the exact opposite. It teaches you to live soberly, righteously, and godly. I don't have the space to quote it all here, but I highly recommend that you read Colossians 2-3. It is very heavy in "union with Christ" language. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so **walk ye in him**" (2:6); "Ye are complete in Him" (2:10); "In whom also ye are circumcised" (2:11); "Buried with him in baptism" (2:12); "Ye are risen with him" (2:12); "Quickened together with him" (2:13); "the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." (2:19); "Dead with Christ" (2:20); "Risen with Christ" (3:1); "Your life is hid with Christ in God." (3:3). After all that language, He says this:

**Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. (Colossians 3:5-10).**

It is BECAUSE we are saved – BECAUSE we have been given grace – BECAUSE we are united to Christ – that we are able and required to mortify our members and put off these sins, and to walk in Christ. Now, here's where we run into trouble. You might look at these and say "yeah, I got the 'no fornication' part covered" and then cruise right on by the others, because you might think they are lesser sins. Covetousness? Anger? Filthy communication coming out of your mouth? Those aren't a big deal, right? I don't need to worry about minor things like that since I'm a Christian, right? I mean, compared to fornication, these things almost seem like virtues, right? Wrong! They are worthy of the wrath of God. Don't minimize them.

In the last sermon, I pointed out that nobody in this church would ever come right out and say, "I believe I can merit salvation by my good works." Even so, a spirit of legalism often lurks in our hearts. Likewise, nobody here would ever blatantly say, "I believe it's OK for me to sin because Jesus died for my sins already." But also likewise, a spirit of antinomianism can lurk in our hearts, and you can live your life as a practical antinomian. It can be very subtle. One of the ways that it rears itself is in the example I just gave – you will find a list of sins in the scripture, focus on the ones that those "other people" commit, but then skip over or minimize the ones that you know full good and well that you're guilty of. And a lot of the time, if your

conscience convicts you, you might relieve yourself by thinking “Jesus died for that sin” and then move on as if nothing happened, until the next time your conscience convicts you for that very same sin. Let me be clear – you SHOULD be comforted by the fact that Jesus died for your sins, and I hope that that thought crosses your minds a lot - but it’s very easy to move from that to letting it excuse the sin. You might not even be doing it intentionally. You might not even realize that that’s what you’re doing, until someone points it out to you. Here are some other ways that this might show itself:

1. In a perverse way, legalism might turn into antinomianism. You realize that you’ve had a legalistic attitude in this or that situation, and then you swing the pendulum to the opposite extreme. Example: all you ever talk to your kids about is obedience, never about grace, and you look up one day to realize that you have a bunch of little works-righteous monsters running around. Your solution? Ease up on the command “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.” (Colossians 3:20). Remember, the other extreme is not the solution. The solution is the gospel of grace.
2. Letting a sin remain unaddressed under the cloak of “graciousness.” We see this in a stark way in 1 Corinthians 5: “And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.” (verse 2).
3. Committing a “lesser” sin to avoid a “greater” sin. Example: verbally railing on someone instead of physically attacking them, and then saying it’s good that you let some steam off by attacking them verbally because that kept you from attacking them physically.
4. Excusing a sin by saying things like “that’s just his personality.”
5. Looking at “smaller” sins with a dismissive attitude, or an aw-shucks attitude, or making light of the situation by joking about it, etc. Example: the sins of the tongue. How often do we wave a dismissive hand at a verse like, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” (Col. 4:6).
6. Calling evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20) by redefining sins as virtues. “I’m not angry; I’m just righteously indignant.” “I’m not a backbiter/talebearer/gossip; I just think you should know all the details about this other person so you can pray for them.” “I’m not impatient; I just don’t suffer fools.” “I’m not a glutton; I’m just enjoying the blessings that God has made available to me.” “I’m not a contentious blowhard; I’m just zealous.” Note that I’m not saying that there’s no place for righteous indignation, for example, because there absolutely is. What I am saying is that you ought not try to explain away sinful anger by saying that you’re just righteously indignant.

This is why we have warnings about abusing the liberty that we have in Christ Jesus like this:

**For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)**

**But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. (1 Corinthians 8:9)**

**As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. (1 Peter 2:16)**

And we are warned of false teachers who infiltrate the church, calling themselves Christians, who abuse and pervert the grace of God, using it as a cloak to excuse sin, encourage sin, and coddle people in their sin.

**While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. (2 Peter 2:19)**

**For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 4)**

**Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?  
(Jeremiah 7:9-10)**

There are a few passages that I'd like to go over in a little bit of depth, and I hope what I say will give you a new (or a renewed) perspective on all of this. For the first one, often, on issues of great importance, we find answers back in the Garden of Eden. So, I'd like to briefly go over the very simple commandment of God, and the temptation of Eve:

**And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die...Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-5)**

First, I'd like to point out a few things about the strategy of the tempter, Satan:

1. He immediately sows seeds of doubts. “Hath God said...?” ie, “did God really say this?”
2. He twists and obfuscates the commandment of God, using ambiguous language, the sense of which could either be “Did God really say that you weren’t allowed to eat from every single tree in the garden?” or “Did God really say that you weren’t allowed to eat from any of the trees in the garden?” It’s a lot easier to attack the commandments of God if you can doctor them up and make them sound confusing.
3. He maligns God. The implication of his question is, “What kind of a God would restrict you from beneficial things? If He was actually good and kind and gracious, He wouldn’t be holding anything back from you. He would let you partake of all the delights in the garden. He wouldn’t be restricting your happiness. What an unreasonable commandment! Are you sure that you heard Him right? There must be some mistake here.” Of course, there is no mistake. God doesn’t give us commandments to hurt us – He gives us commandments for our own good and blessedness. Consider that, among other benefits, the tree stood there as a constant reminder to Adam and Eve that they were subservient to and dependent on God their Father, which should have been a check on pride and ambition and should have served to work humility and thanksgiving in their hearts. That commandment was a great blessing.
4. He contradicts God. “Ye shall not surely die” is the opposite of “thou shalt surely die.”

Next, I’d like to point out a few things about the one being tempted, Eve.

1. When she references God’s commandment, she adds to it. God never told them not to touch that tree. But Eve says that God said, “neither shall ye touch it.” I believe that this is significant, and that Satan’s technique had worked to cause her to already start thinking that God’s law was too harsh. “We can’t even touch it.”
2. When she references the punishment for breaking the commandment, she lessens it. God said “thou shalt surely die” (or, “thou shalt in dying, die”), but Eve said that God said, “lest ye die.” I believe she’s expressing some doubt here – like “because we might die.” Whatever the case, she softens what God had actually said. Perhaps she’s thinking, “maybe the punishment won’t happen; maybe it won’t be that bad.”

Remember, beloved, that Satan is smarter than you. He’s more experienced than you. He’s more patient than you. He’s stronger than you. With a few well-placed words, Satan plants seeds of doubt in Eve’s heart, and she begins to question the goodness of God, the blessedness of His commandments, and the certainty of His retribution. It is this type of deceitful thinking that ends with you thinking that it’s alright for you to disobey God. You almost want to weep when you think of Eve going up against this devious snake, and taking it hook, line and sinker, because we know that we’ve all done the same thing. But Christ, to whom you are united, has the victory over Satan.

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Romans 6 is Paul's most extensive answer to the false teaching of antinomianism. It is dense material, but I hope to point out a few things. He is answering the question "since where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, should we continue in sin so that grace would abound?" (I believe he's answering the slanderers who said this is what he taught). To me, the tone of the whole thing is, "How could you even ask a question like that? Don't you understand what it means to be a Christian? Don't you understand who you are in Christ? Don't you understand the state you're in?" His answer to the question begins with, "God forbid!" It's an instinctive response. We don't even have to think it through - the very thought that we would sin so that the grace of God would abound should be repugnant to us. But he doesn't leave it at that. Using the image of baptism, he goes on to say, "Don't you understand that when you were baptized into Christ, you were baptized into His death?" Baptism isn't just a public profession of faith - it is an emblem that we are joined with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. It is an emblem that we are now dead to sin and raised to newness of life. It is an emblem that we are now part of the family of God - being baptized "in (literally "into") the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19), we are now called by His name. And if all those things are true about you, then live that way! Live like you're dead to sin. Live like you've been raised to newness of life.

He personifies sin in this chapter, presenting it as a king, a military leader, a slave master, an employer whose wages is death. We were once under the dominion of sin, but now we are dead to that tyrant. We don't have to do what he says. He has no authority over us. We no longer live under his dominion. Verse 7 says that we are "freed from sin" and verse 18 says that we are "made free from sin." The Greek words translated "free" in those two verses are different. In v. 7, it literally means that we are "justified from sin." I read somewhere that this word "justified" was used in the ancient world when someone received the death penalty from the government. If a person was executed, they would say, "such-and-such was justified," meaning that they had been released from all obligations. In v. 18, the word is the one used for when a slave is released from the authority of his master. Between the two, the message is that we've been released from the guilt of sin (i.e., we don't have to pay the penalty), and we've been released from the dominion of sin (i.e., we no longer have to obey it). But we have not yet been released from the presence of sin, as we all know from our own pitiful experience in which we continue to sin. That sad truth is expounded in Romans 7.

The bottom line is, it doesn't make any sense for a person who has received Christ, who has been united to Christ, who lives under the dominion of God where grace rules, to continue to live as if they were living under the dominion of sin. It is irrational to do so. We must reckon ourselves dead to sin (because we ARE dead to sin), and live our lives accordingly:



**Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments [i.e., weapons] of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:11-14)**

(Note: that last verse is, shockingly, one of the key texts for people claiming that we don't have to obey God. Ignoring the context, they zero in on "ye are not under the law" and say "See? That means we don't have to obey God." The other common text is one like Romans 13:10, "love is the fulfilling of the law," and the interpretation is, "as long as what we're doing falls under our definition of 'love' then we otherwise don't have to obey God.")

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**And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)**

This is a beloved passage which I have often used piecemeal. I might use verse 28 when something is going on in my life, and I don't understand why it's happening, but I can take comfort in the promise here that "all things work together for good." I might use verses 29-30 when I want to talk about "the golden chain of salvation." But I often skip right past the last part of verse 29. The more I read this, though, that part of verse 29 seems to be the thing that holds the whole passage together. The good that is being worked, and His purpose in calling us, is so that we will "be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Why is this thing happening in my life? It's not just some generic "good" that's being accomplished – it is to make me more like Christ. And why is God making me more like Christ? So Christ will be the firstborn among many brethren. Yes, the whole plan centers around Christ. We exist so that we might be His brethren in glory throughout eternity, with Him as the firstborn (that is, the one who is first in rank and honor and privilege and inheritance). This is the plan, starting with His foreknowledge (i.e., forelove) of us and ending with our glorification, when, with our new bodies, "we shall be like him." (1 John 3:2).

One of the things that characterized Christ was His obedience to the Father. John 4:34 – "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." You cannot say that you're being conformed to the image of Christ while simultaneously saying that you don't have to obey God. We are to "follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14) and we are commanded to "be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter

1:16). In my last sermon, I stressed that your works will not justify you in the sight of God. But that doesn't mean that works are unimportant. Without holiness, you won't see the Lord. Good works are essential – but they are not the CAUSE of being right in the sight of God. They are the RESULT. One of the fruits of Christ's work is our desire to serve the King. Last time, I was talking about justification. Because Christ has given you His righteousness, God looks at you and declares you just, righteous, sinless, perfect, not guilty. You're saved by grace, not by works. Today, I'm talking about sanctification – the working out of your salvation (Phil. 2:12).

Don't confuse the two, justification and sanctification. Justification is a one-time act of God where you are declared righteous. Sanctification is a progressive growth and walk throughout your life. Think of a baby – it is born (one time event) but then it grows and develops and matures (life-long progression). The baby isn't any more alive at age 70 than it was at age 7 days. We are born again (one time event) but then the scripture describes what happens after that as involving movement, using words like follow, grow and work (life-long progression - see 2 Cor. 7:1, Heb. 12:14, 1 Thess. 5:15, 1 Cor. 14:1, 1 Tim. 6:11, 2 Pet. 3:18, 2 Thess. 1:3). When you are saved, you have eternal life. But I think it's obvious that if we were already conformed to Christ, then we wouldn't need to be conformed to Christ. Some development and change is required there to make that happen. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Corinthians 3:18).

If you want to do a humbling exercise, go through the four gospels and see how far you fall short of Christ, giving particular focus to those things that Christ did and said that are irritating to you. You could also compare yourself today to yourself 10, 20, 30 years ago – if you haven't grown in grace and knowledge and faith, then something is very wrong. But let this also be a warning – just because someone hasn't reached your level of understanding or your level of holy living does not mean that the person is not a child of God. Just imagine the havoc you would wreak if you applied a standard like that to yourself – "I understand more today than I did 5 years ago, I love God more today than I did 5 years ago, so 5 years ago I must not have actually been saved." And then 5 more years pass, and you're back in the same boat.

To tie up the last couple sermons, I think we all have a little bit of legalism and antinomianism hiding in our hearts. No matter how it manifests itself in each person, identifying it and mortifying it is our job, and we can only do that by the power of God dwelling in us. From beginning to end, our salvation is all about the grace of Christ – the same Christ who died for our sins while we were yet sinners is the Christ who said, "if you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). The same grace that quickened you when you were dead in trespasses and sins is the grace that teaches you to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.