
Believing Gospel Principles

Romans 6:1-11

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What you believe to be true governs what you do.

What you want flows from what you believe.

Conflicting wants arise from conflicting beliefs.

What then is most important to living the Christian life? In our Bibles are a cluster of texts that define, describe and declare what reality really is. These are located all throughout the Bible, with the most significant for us as New Covenant Christians, those in Paul's writings. They would be texts like Ephesians 1, Colossians 1-2, Hebrews 2-4 and Romans 6-8.

Our study brings us to one the most important of those clusters of texts. They are significant because they build-on and assume the others while being intensely practical and life transforming. Romans 6-8 are how the gospel with its saving and transforming power causes us by faith to have hope while living in a fallen world. It tells us how, though we live in the presence of sin, we are not subject to its power.

Paul has been powerfully arguing that salvation is by grace received through faith. He has highlighted the utter sinfulness of man, the condemnation resulting from both Adamic sin and personal acts of sin and the marvelous grace in Christ. He has been insistent on faith, not works. He has elevated grace to the point that where sin increased, grace abounded. Now here is the test for whether you understand grace like Paul did and teach it like Paul did: does your teaching of grace cause people to respond with one of the following ways:

1. Since grace abounds where sin increases, let's just sin more so we will have more grace.
2. Since we are under grace and not under law, then we can do almost anything we want.

These two statements framed as questions are the basic structure of Romans 6. Verse 1 frames the first question: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" [ESV]. Verse 15 frames the second question: "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" [ESV].

All of this is fine hermeneutical structuring, but our personal questions are often unsettling and near as well to Romans 6. Here are the questions that plague us and are answered here:

1. Can I continue to sin since we are under grace? More frequently this is, "Sin doesn't matter since I am under grace." So, people think or say, "If I keep on thinking, wanting, doing or feeling this way, God will forgive me regardless." We are thinking of grace only as the benevolence of God and not thinking of grace as a realm or sphere in which salvation places us.
2. Must I continue to sin since we are under grace? More often this is stated as, "I can't seem to stop sinning." What is being thought or said is, "Sin is too strong and powerful for me." We are not thinking of grace as an enabling power received by faith.

What is troubling here is that both become excuses for sin.

- (1) because sin doesn't matter and
- (2) because I can't help myself.

Paul's responses to these questions, statements or implications are emphatic.

- (1) Christians *ought not to sin*,
- (2) Christians *do not have to sin*.

You ought not sin because of your union with Christ (v.1-14) and you do not have to sin if you yield to Christ (v.15-23).

Now, it is important to deal with a false and very prevalent view of Romans 6 and 7. There was a notion that if we just believe the facts in Romans 6 of our co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ, then we will stop sinning. because we will be like a corpse to sin, dead to it. Therefore, what we must do is just believe God's word, rest in it. We must stop fighting sin and living as though sin were a reality to us. This gave rise to the "Let Go and Let God" slogan. This view was popularized by the Keswick Conferences in the 60's and 70's and is the centerpiece of the writing of Watchman Nee and the teaching of Bill Gothard. Dr. John Stott effectively responded to this teaching and corrected the error in his book *Men Made New*.

One other note. Death in this text is meant to convey the concept of judgment. That is not to say that the death here is not real: it is. There is physical death and spiritual death. Sin leads to both. It does so because God takes a holy initiative to judge sin. Though sin has natural consequences as you violate God's law, death is God's judgment.

As I said when began this series, Romans 6-8 is absolutely essential for people who have a right standing with God – that is, they are justified – to please and glorify God in every aspect of life – that is, they are growing in grace. You must not only understand the meaning of the text, but the essential structure that frames it in and the two major doctrines taught in it. All of this informs and builds our faith – what we believe – so that we will have grace to obey.

How do I get what I have been saying? Recognize that verses 1 – 11 are full of indicatives. They are full of statements of fact. They describe spiritual realities. This is simply the way it is. Therefore, here are truths the you must know and you must believe.

Its Initiation- How it Begins (v.1-3)

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?
²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been placed [baptized] into Christ Jesus were placed [baptized] into his death?

Now don't be put off by the word baptism. Just write in your Bibles the word *immerse* or *immersion* or *to place into*. That way, we will be translating the text. Now the text tells us we were united with Christ when we were placed into Christ. We were placed into Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit at our conversion. The ordinance of baptism is meant to outwardly portray what has inwardly *already occurred*.

Its Instruction – What it Means (v.4-9)

I want to spend a bit of time here. I believe that there is much confusion about what is being said here. I am asking now to do some deep and difficult pondering, thinking.

Do you know that these things are true?

Do you believe that these things are true?

You cannot and will not understand them until you know them and believe them. Understanding only comes through believing.

⁴We were buried therefore with him by being placed [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.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

You were born *in Adam*. You were in the realm or sphere of sin and darkness, occasionally called *the flesh*. In that realm you had what is called the old self, the person you were as spiritually dead and training yourself in habits of sin. Then, when you were converted/saved, God placed you *in Christ*. You were transferred into the Christ's kingdom and spiritually united to His body through the Spirit. These are the invisible (and admittedly, difficult) spiritual reality. When you were placed into Christ and united to Him, you were joined to His death and resurrection.

Thus, the cross and resurrection are a spiritual reality to you in several ways.

You have physical life here on earth experienced in your body and through your five senses. It is real and authentic. It is not normal in the sense that we

live in a fallen cursed earth with bodies that will decay and die with all its attendant difficulties and hardships.

You have spiritual life in the heavenlies and that spiritual life is hidden in Christ and will be unveiled when He comes. You are now seated in the heavenlies and have access to the throne room through Christ. However, this reality is only experienced *by faith* – not by sight (or our physical senses). When Jesus comes and we are glorified, our spiritual life in heaven will be reunited with our glorified physical bodies. This life in heaven is just as real and authentic as your life on earth – it is just invisible to you.

You have been separated through the cross from the old person that you were, the old self. You have a new identity in Christ. The old creation is gone and all is made new. But not completely. Remember that realities (1) and (2) are not yet joined in our physical bodies. So, the old inner person that we were, has been crucified. Through the resurrection and our regeneration, we are a new person.

You have a physical body that is living in the presence of sin. But the power of sin in your soul and body has been broken because of the death and resurrection of Christ. You have trained that body into habits of sin that you must now retrain into habits of righteousness. You do this, not by mere human willing and power, but by believing truth and God's promises and receiving enabling grace.

The point and purpose of all this are in verses 4 and 6: *so that we may walk in newness of life and not be enslaved to sin*. These great and wonderful truths are all aimed the outworking of having been sanctified, our growth in grace, our practical holiness.

The principle here is demonstrated in Christ, His death and resurrection. His death and resurrection breaks sin's dominion over Him. Since we are placed into Him and united with Him, sin does not have dominion over us.

Its Implementation – How it Acts (v.10-11)

¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

These verses then call for us to carefully consider these truths about Christ (v.10) and then count them to be true for us (v.11). The call here is not to imagine something that is not so. We are not making up something that does not exist. We are not putting something to our account that is not ours. The clear call here is to believe these facts about the death and resurrection of Christ. Then, knowing we are in Him and united to Him, we must believe, trust and count them to be true for us *because they are*. So, because Jesus is dead to sin through the cross and alive to God through the resurrection, so are we dead to sin and alive to God because we are *in Christ*.

So here is what you have to know and believe:

You must know that you have been placed into Christ.

You must know what Christ's death and resurrection mean.

You must know how being placed into Christ and thus His death and resurrection applies to you.

Once again, let us remember that Christians are not people with simple lists of what to believe and what to do. Christians are people with a Biblical view of all things. If we do not know the truths we need to know, and we do not believe them, then we cannot have the power of grace that comes through believing those truths. So, I challenge you to think deeply about all this, believe God's Word.

Verses 1-2 show us "the incongruity, but not the impossibility of ongoing sin." [Stott] It is not that it is not possible. The very imperatives through the rest of this chapter and through Romans show us that it is possible. But we must not think that our union with Christ and our being now in the sphere of grace frees us to live any way we choose.

Reflect and Respond

How We Confront Ourselves and Others

- Examine thoughts and wants behind choices and emotions.
- Teach or remind the truths that we must know and believe.
- Apply and personalize truth through dialog - questions and answers.
- Surrender and yield in practical ways so as to overcome sin.

All of us by nature are enslaved to sin - we don't rule sin, sin rules us. God is the decisive deliverer from sin - and our efforts, though real and crucial, are dependent on Him. Without this deliverance from sin and the resulting new direction of righteousness and sanctification, we have not and will not inherit eternal life.

- We have union and identification with Christ.
- We may not live as though sin does not matter.
- We may not live as though sin has control.
- We have been delivered from the old life and are empowered for the new life (v.4-11).