

Lesson 14: The Strength of Grace I

Romans 6:1-14

Invitation and Objection

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?

Short answer

² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Long answer (We die in order to live.)

³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His **death**?

⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into **death**, so that as Christ was raised from the **dead** through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of **life**.

(1) *We died with Christ...*

⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His **death**, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has **died** is freed from sin.

(2) *...in order to live with Christ.*

⁸ Now if we have **died** with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the **dead**, is never to **die** again; **death** no longer is master over Him. ¹⁰ For the **death** that He **died**, He **died** to sin once for all; but the **life** that He lives, He **lives** to God.

The Logical Application (Consider and Present)

(1a) ¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be **dead** to sin,

(1b) but **alive** to God in Christ Jesus.

(2a) ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness;

(2b) but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.

¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

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Introduction

1. *Paul raises a classic objection to grace.*

There is a classic objection to the good news of grace. When you share the gospel with someone, it goes something like this, "God loves you. But you are sinful and separated from God. Jesus died to pay for your sins. All you have to do is receive his forgiveness by faith. There is nothing you can do to gain his forgiveness. It is by grace; a free gift. You just have to trust him." What is one of the classic responses to that message of grace?

"So, you are telling me that if I believe in Jesus and receive his forgiveness today, then I could go out and kill someone tomorrow, and I would still go to heaven?"

And you really want to say, "No." But you know that the gospel answer is, "Yes."

I feel like the dog of a friend of mine. Whenever he would say to the dog, "You want to go for a walk? Are you ready to go outside? You want to go?" His dog would go get his leash and stand by the door. The key was not in the words. It was in the tone of voice. If my friend said, "Let's stay right here. Let's not go anywhere. Let's just keep on sitting. Ok?" The dog would still go get his leash and stand by the door. Sitting there with my friend and not moving, the dog's head would begin to tilt and he looked at us quizzically. You knew what he was thinking. "Why are you sitting? You just said we are going outside. Why aren't you getting up and going out? This makes no sense."

That's what I feel like when I explain grace and the person responds, "So you are telling me that I can trust in Jesus and then go and live in sin?" I hear what they are saying, but my head begins to tilt, and

I stare at them quizzically, because something does not make sense with the words they are using. “Trust in Jesus means I can live in sin, right?” Something is wrong with that question. Wrong with that perspective.

It is the question Paul is addressing in Romans 6. He phrases it this way in 6:1, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” Paul has just finished contrasting the kingdom of Adam, fallen man, with the kingdom of Jesus. In that contrast he describes the universal effects of sin being overcome by the even more abundant power of grace. The objection in 6:1 presents the classical objection to grace in the terms Paul has just used. “You just said that grace abundantly overcomes sin. So, the more we sin, the more opportunity for the abundance of grace. Where in this Paul is the motivation for righteousness? If we follow your logic, why not continue in sin so that grace may increase?”

This is where our heads begin to tilt, and we start to look confused. “Logically that sounds right Paul, but I know it is not right. So, how do you answer?” Lucky for us, Paul answers.

One of the things that strikes me about Paul’s answer is what he does not say. There are two simple answers to the question; two quick responses that would put the objector in his place. (1) First, Paul could have said, “Oh, you misunderstood me. It’s not just by grace. It’s grace plus doing good things. You have to do good to stay in.” Paul is not going to say that here. (2) Second, Paul also does not say, “Be careful. It is by grace, but there is a limit. If you sin too much or you commit a sin that is too wicked, you lose your salvation.” Paul also does not say that here.

The simple answers are answers of law. Paul is committed to giving an answer of grace even if grace is harder for people to get. If someone objects to your presentation of the gospel by telling you that your explanation of grace will lead people to believe they are free to go out and sin, do not think that there is something wrong with your gospel message. Something is wrong with your gospel message if no one ever objects to grace. If you try to protect grace by emphasizing works or questioning our security in our relationship with God, then through protecting grace, you are likely to lose grace. If no one ever says, “You are just letting people get away with sin,” then you have not emphasized grace enough. You are not preaching the same gospel that Paul preached.

A right presentation of the gospel of grace will lead to this misconception. It means that you are presenting the gospel like Paul presented the gospel. And that is a good thing. Grace is dangerous. Grace opens up the possibility of abuse. It’s like handing your teenage son the keys to the family car. What guarantee do you have that he will not wreck the car? Or that he will not make a bad decision? Risk is inherent in grace. Grace communicates trust in believers to live out of a new heart. Grace presumes that we have a new desire to live as children of the king and calls us to live according to that desire, knowing full well that we also continue to desire what is sinful and that we lack wisdom and experience. Still, grace does not bind us with the law or threaten us with rejection from the family. Paul does not go there in his defense of grace. Where does Paul go in his defense of grace? Before we look at the text itself, it will be helpful to recognize the pattern of the text.

2. Paul uses a consistent rhetorical pattern.

Paul repeats a rhetorical pattern through Romans 6 and 7. It is similar to the pattern Paul used in Romans 3:1-8 and which he will use again in Romans 9-11. Paul’s ongoing use of the pattern in Romans makes it worth paying attention to.

The pattern is made up of several rhetorical questions.

We start with an invitation, “What shall we say then?” Then we get the objection, also in the form of a question, “Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?”

Then we get the two parts of Paul’s short answer. The first part is Paul’s standard, emphatic rejection of the objection. “May it never be!” The emphatic rejection may be followed by another rhetorical question, “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?”

Finally, we get to a question which introduces a longer answer. This question starts with the phrase “Do you not know” and introduces some example or illustration that reinforces Paul’s point. In this passage the reinforcing example is baptism. The introductory long answer question for this passage is, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?”

We see this pattern four or four and a half times in Romans 6 and 7. The pattern introducing our text for this lesson is in 6:1-3. Here it is once again.

Invitation: “What shall we say then?”

Objection: “Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?”

Short answer: “May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?”

Long answer introduction: “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” Following this introduction question, we have the more developed long answer. And in this passage Paul follows the long answer with application. Let’s address the long answer first in Romans 6:3-10 and then we will consider Paul’s exhortation to application in 6:11-14.

Let’s read the long answer in Romans 6:3-10.

Paul’s answer to the objection: We die in order to live. (6:3-10)

[Read Romans 6:3-10]

1. Our baptism symbolizes a union of death and life.

In response to the objection concerning grace, Paul develops his answer around the reality of baptism. Paul’s language through the passage indicates that something more than the legal declaration of righteousness happens to the person who places faith in Jesus Christ. Justification as a gift of grace does not require a spiritual change in the one declared just. It is simply a legal declaration. A statement that God has proclaimed over the one who believes.

Paul points to something more here. God’s gift of grace includes the legal justification but goes on even further. There is a spiritual effect, described here as union with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. I disagree with the interpretation that baptism is merely symbolic, though I need to make a distinction. I do believe that the ritual of baptism is symbolic. Baptism is an identification with the one in whose name you are baptized. Begin baptized in the name of Jesus Christ is to be identified with Jesus. I believe that baptism is the sign of the covenant of grace, just as circumcision was the sign of the covenant of Law. There are two sides to both circumcision and baptism. Circumcision symbolized both the cutting off of the sinful, fleshly heart and the work of a new righteous, spiritual heart. Baptism symbolizes unity with Jesus both in his death, going under the water, and in his life, coming up out of the water. The believer dies to sin and is raised to new life.

I believe that the ritual of baptism symbolizes a real, spiritual baptism that happens when the believer truly trusts in Jesus. We are spiritually united with Jesus in his death and life. I see this as more than symbol because Paul is going to argue that unity with Jesus gives us access to spiritual life and power that we did not have prior to belief in Jesus. There is a real, spiritual effect in our union with Christ. We participate with him in his life.

In fact, Paul says in verse 4 that life is the point of grace, “We were buried with him through baptism into death...so that we too might walk in newness of life.”

This is Paul’s answer. We die to live. The reason that the non-Christian response to grace sounds so strange is that saving faith is a new perspective. We do not simply choose to have faith. Faith is more than a choice. Faith is spiritual sight; spiritual understanding. We move from the kingdom of Adam to the kingdom of Jesus when we see our sin as wrong, destructive, deathly, and we see Jesus as righteous, holy and life-giving. We might not understand the theology so clearly. But we see somehow that our sin is wrong and distasteful, and we see that Jesus is good and desirable. That is

saving faith. It is a new perspective; a new way of seeing, that moves us to accept the gift of grace being offered.

This is why the question about grace sounds so strange. “If you receive grace today and kill someone tomorrow would you still be saved?” “Yes, you would, but why would you want to?” The question is being asked as though sin is desirable for life. **The non-believer sees grace as freedom to sin. The believer sees grace as freedom from sin.**

We still have desire for sin as believers. But we have begun to realize that those desires are deceptive. The desire for death may be a fun desire, but it is not healthy and wholesome. As Jesus taught us in his explanation of the Ten Commandments, there is a continuum on one side of which are thoughts, words, and deeds of spiritual death. When we come to Christ, we turn our backs on death and face forward towards life; towards Jesus. There is a new desire growing in us that does not want freedom to do the deeds of death. This new desire has a taste for life. This is not merely the adoption of a new, positive philosophy. This is the spiritual effect of faith; of being united with Jesus in his death and in his resurrection.

The challenge of explaining the gospel to a non-believer is that, by definition, that person has not yet come to see with the spiritual eyes of saving faith. Their perspective is skewed. We dare not try and fix that by changing our message to fit their misconceptions. We continue to offer grace, knowing that it is contrary to their nature, yet all the while, asking God to give them eyes to see Jesus, so that they can receive his gift.

Paul further develops his answer by emphasizing the reality of our union with Jesus. Verses 5-7 emphasize our death with him. Verses 8-10 emphasize our life with him. So first, the reality of our death with Jesus in Romans 6:5-7.

2. We died with Christ...

[Read 6:5-7]

Paul teaches us that our old self was crucified with Jesus. The intent is to do away with the body of sin and be released from slavery to sin. Somehow, death frees a person from the power of sin.

The next verses emphasize unity with the life of Christ; Romans 6:8-10.

3. ...in order to live with Christ

[Read 6:8-10]

Paul’s statement about Jesus in verse 9 that “death no longer is master over him” is a reference to his resurrection. Jesus temporarily submitted himself to the human curse of death. After three days, with a display of unbelievable power, he took up his life again. We can see how union with Jesus Christ is the ground for our hope in new life after physical death. Just as he died and was raised again, so also, we will die and raise again. But Paul is talking about a process that begins in this life. We are not just looking to our future resurrection. Our union with the death and life of Christ brings the potential for life into the here and now. Understanding how that works takes some thought.

Paul proclaims, “He who has died is freed from sin,” “that we would no longer be slaves to sin.” How much of this is already true of us and how much is not yet true? Are you no longer a slave to sin? Do you still struggle with sin? Paul says that we were crucified with him. If you still struggle, what is wrong with you? Why is it that sin still masters you? Which is it? Are we still worms, forgiven by grace, but hopelessly sinful until our glorification in heaven? Or are we saints who have triumphed over sin able to live lives of perfect love and holiness in Christ now?

Those are the two extremes. “I am but a worm” and “I am free from sin.” Both of these extremes of triumphalism and defeatism contain some truth, though neither successfully comes to grips with the mixture of victory and struggle that we experience in our **already**, but **not yet** state. Notice the language of verse 6, “knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.” What is true in verse 6 is that our old self has been crucified with Christ. That happens when we place our faith in Jesus. But

the phrase “that our body of sin might be done away with” occurs in the Greek in what is called the aorist subjunctive tense. The right interpretation here seems to be that something has happened in the past with ongoing effect pointing towards an intended future goal; “that the body of sin might be done away with...[and] that we would no longer be slaves to sin.” It is **already** true that we have been crucified with Christ, but it is **not yet** true that the body of sin has been done away with or completely done away with.

We find ourselves in a struggle to become that which Christ has already won for us. We can experience the victory of new life in our present state. But we will also experience the failure of sin. The Christian is something like a caterpillar. Sometimes you look and feel like a worm, but you are not. You are a **not yet** butterfly. And there is something about our struggle against sin in this present life that makes us more beautiful when we come out of the cocoon. Help a butterfly too much to come out of its cocoon and it will fail to spread its wings and fly. The struggle against sin is part of our present reality. God has left it to be so. This does not justify our sin but should help us to view ourselves with grace when we fall down in the struggle. God is not unaware that we are going to fall. He invites us each time to stand up and live.

That Paul envisions our new life as not completely triumphant can be seen in his exhortation to application in the last four verses of our passage. If it was simply a natural process for Christians to begin living a new life of grace without sin, then Paul would not need to exhort us to do so. We have been freed, not from all effect of sin, but from the mastery of sin.

We live with strong mental and emotional patterns of brokenness. The sin principle of our natures still works to enslave us. We have been given the power to enter the struggle for life. And it is a struggle that we must engage if we want to experience the life that is available to us.

4. We can sum up Paul's answer as a new perspective and a new union.

Ok. That brings us to the end of Paul's answer to the question, “Are we to continue to sin so that grace may increase?”

In his short answer in verse 2 Paul said, “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” That question sums up our response. Two things happen to the true believer. The person who has moved from the kingdom of Adam to the kingdom of Jesus has a new perspective and a new union. Both are spiritual realities. Our new perspective is spiritual sight or saving faith. We have seen our guilt. We have seen sin as death. We have seen Jesus as life. We come to Jesus in order to die to sin. So Paul says, “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” From our new perspective dying to sin to live in sin makes no sense. Not only do we have a new perspective or new way of seeing things, we also have a new union with Jesus Christ that enables us in our new perspective. Unified with Christ we not only see sin as death, we begin to experience sin as death. And not only do we see Jesus as life, but we also begin to experience Jesus as life. There is a change in our desires and a change in our ability to choose according to those desires.

This is how we answer the person who objects to our gospel. They say, “So, I can believe in Jesus today and go out and commit murder tomorrow and still go to heaven.” We respond by saying, “It depends on what you mean when you say you believe in Jesus. If you mean just repeating some words about Jesus, then no. You were not saved in the first place. And you will not be saved if you kill someone. But if you mean that you truly feel sorrow over your sin, you believe you need a savior and you believe that Jesus is your savior; if that is the desire of your heart; in other words, if God has opened the eyes of your heart to see Jesus, then that is saving faith and if you have saving faith, you truly see Jesus and believe in him then yes, if you believe today and sin tomorrow then you will still be safe in Jesus. And when you do believe in Jesus, he will also begin to work in your heart. You will be unified with him and you will begin to desire to live for him. That is the power of his grace.” So, something like that. That is our answer.

Paul does give us this answer for the objection. Though, I believe that Paul's purpose here is primarily pastoral not primarily apologetic. What I mean is that Paul does not raise objections to grace

primarily to equip us as Christians to be able to answer the questions of non-Christians. Paul has raised this question so that we as Christians will better understand our own gospel and be better enabled to live it out. That is why Paul is not yet done.

He has explained to us our new union with Christ; that in Jesus we have the ability to engage in the struggle for life. Now he wants to exhort us to apply our new perspective and our new union to life.

Paul's exhortation to application: Consider and present. (6:11-14)

There are only two commands in the first eleven chapters of Romans. Paul wants us to understand the gospel well before he urges us to apply the gospel in our lives and communities. Here we have Paul's two general commands for living out the gospel. They are the same two general commands he is going to repeat in Romans 12:1-2 before he gets into specifics. Paul is telling us here how we should approach the second question to the covenant of Grace. If you want to know, "What does God expect from me? How do I live in response to his love and forgiveness?" This is it. These are your first two commands. Let's read Romans 6:11-14.

[Read Romans 6:11-14]

The two commands are consider and present.

1. Consider as true your union with Jesus.

It is not enough for us to be united with Jesus in death and life. We need to mentally consider this to be true. When sin rears its ugly head in our minds, we are to reject it as no longer essentially a part of who we are. We say in our minds, "I am dead to that. That no longer represents who I am. I reject that thought. I am united to Jesus in his death. I am dead to that." We cannot deny what we feel. We have to be honest that the desire for sin is strong, sometimes overwhelming. It is not a figment of our imagination. But we can resist it. We can turn our back on it. We can claim the truth that sin is not central to who we are in Jesus. One day we will be without sin. It is not who you are. It is part of who you are now. But it is not who you are becoming and certainly not who you one day will be.

You have died with Christ to sin, so turn your back to sin and face forward towards Christ. Not only are you to consider yourself dead to sin, but to also consider yourself alive to Christ. The spirit of life is in you. You have been born again in Jesus. You are united with him. This is the truth of the gospel. So, preach the gospel to yourself. Consider what Jesus says is true of you that you are "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

2. Present yourself to God.

Then follow up preaching the gospel to yourself with action. Paul says, "Present yourself!" This is the second command: consider and present. He says it in both the negative form and the positive form. "Do not present yourself to sin." That's the negative; the do not. "But present yourself to God." That's the positive; the do. Paul uses slightly odd language here. He does not just say do not present yourself or do present yourself. He says do not present your members and do present your members. By members he means feet, hands, tongue, eyes and ears. "Do not use your eye as an instrument of unrighteousness. Do not use your hand as an instrument of unrighteousness." And so on. Or positively, "Do use your tongue as an instrument of righteousness. Do use your feet as an instrument of righteousness." The body language makes the presentation of ourselves very physical, very real, very practical. Paul brings us into the physical realm of real things and real people; real relationships. This is not just a spiritual concept. The gospel gives you power to be the master of your body. You now have power to choose how you present the members of your body in this present world, whether as instruments for corruption or instruments for health; whether as instruments for impurity or instruments for cleanliness; whether as instruments for death or instruments for life. Consider what is true about you in Jesus and live it out.

In verse 12 Paul says, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts." Here is your first line of defense, consider in your mind and present with your body. This is how you engage the struggle to prevent sin from reigning in you. You consider these things to be true about yourself. You

say, “I am dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus.” You say it over and over and over to yourself as long as you need to. This is not self-help. This is not psychological fiction. This is truth. And you move past the mental struggle to the struggle of action. You refuse to present yourself in action to sin and you choose to present yourself in action to God.

Paul’s going to help us more on understanding this struggle and how to live in the victory of Christ as we go through Romans. And there are times where we have to call on others to help us. Nobody does this successful on their own. But this is a starting point. Consider and present.

Verse 14; “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

Reflection Questions

1. What stands out to you as interesting or important or strange or confusing in Romans 6:1-10? What are some questions that the text raises for you?
2. How does union with Jesus in his death and life answer the objection to grace raised by Paul in 6:1?
3. What does Paul say is already true about you in your union with Jesus? What is not yet true? How can it be that we are no longer slaves to sin, and yet, we still sin? How do you understand this tension?
4. Considering the command in verse 11, what does Paul want you to consider as true? What does it mean to consider these things as true? What mental action is Paul encourage you to take? When would it be important to consider these truths?
5. What stands out to you in Paul’s exhortation to present yourself to God in Romans 6:12-13?
6. Does the language, “Do not present yourself to sin...present yourself to God,” affect how you think about your actions, whether good or bad? How do you think about “presenting” yourself? Or how do you feel about “presenting” yourself?