

Grace is Much More Than Forgiveness

– Romans 6

In **Chapter 5**, Paul wrote about the overflowing of God's grace to us through the Lord Jesus Christ – the more sin and failure increased, the more his abundant grace was able to meet our need for forgiveness and release from condemnation! And even more than meeting that need, *“even so grace would reign through righteousness into eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (5:21)*

What does 'grace reigning' mean? Certainly NOT just 'lots more grace made available because we go on in sin and failure' says Paul.

Obviously the 'supply' of forgiveness is never going to run out, but there is a whole lot more which is available for us to take hold of, more of what our Father has given us through his grace to us, made available through the 'finished work' of the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll come back to that 'finished-ness' very soon.

We nearly always think of grace in terms of our sin and failure and God's provision of forgiveness through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus, and that is 100% true. We have seen that in **Romans 3:25 & 5:9**, for example. But grace means being given something that you have not earned and do not deserve, and our Father has many more gifts for us than forgiveness! Paul sometimes calls them God's 'riches in glory' and makes it clear that we can know them in experience.¹

At the beginning and end of each one of his letters, Paul expresses the wish that his readers will know the grace of God. All of them will have already experienced God's grace and forgiveness through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Like Paul's readers, we all need to know grace for forgiveness on an ongoing basis, but there is so much more – more riches for us to take hold of!

As we start into **Romans 6**, Paul is not telling us things that we ought to do – or not do! He is showing us **more of what is already ours** because our lives have been joined to the Lord Jesus Christ. First, he makes sure that we have the **correct information** and that we **know it**; then he tells us to **count on it**. We saw this 'accounting' word back in **Romans 4:1-10**, where Paul was writing about God 'counting' Abraham as being righteous, simply on account of his faith.

So, first of all, what is this correct information that we need? **Romans 6:1-11**

- 1) Abundant grace does not mean that we deliberately continue in failure so that there will be more grace! How could we? We already 'died away' from sin! (**6:2**, literally)
- 2) When we were baptised **into** Jesus, we were baptised into his death, we declared our oneness with him in his death. Did we realise what we were doing at the time, or was it just the next thing that we thought we needed to do as new believers?
- 3) We have died to sin and failure by being joined to Jesus' death. More accurately, we died, once and for ever! (Aorist tense) Finished!
- 4) We have been raised to life through being joined to Jesus in his resurrection. Again, the aorist tense means that it is something that has been done once for ever. Finished!

Paul wraps up these enormous facts in the simple picture of baptism, using it as a picture of death, burial and resurrection. He is NOT saying 'Come on, as you have been forgiven so much, you **ought** to be living **as if** you are dead to sin.' *'Are we to continue in sin so*

¹ **Ephesians 1:18 & 3:16, Philippians 4:19, Colossians 1:27**

that grace may increase?’ (6:1) is not saying wh at we should or shouldn’t do, rather what we now no longer need to do!

How has that come about? By the fact that we have been joined to Jesus and so we are joined to his death, burial and resurrection. Perhaps we have not yet realised that to be true? Paul asks his Roman readers ‘do you not know?’ in **6:2**. It’s not a case of trying to live ‘sin-free’ **as if we were** dead to sin, but rather learning to actually live that way **because we already are** dead to sin. As an old friend of mine has said, “it’s not that it is now impossible for me to sin, but rather that it is now possible for me not to sin.” We shall need to explore that a bit more . . .

By being baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have declared with our actions that we are joined to him in his death, burial and resurrection. Although in some ways we might think that simply being immersed in water and coming back up again couldn’t possibly change anything, that would be similar to saying that going through a marriage ceremony doesn’t change anything. It may not change the love and appreciation that a couple feel for each other, but it cements the relationship by the power of public declaration. Its value is not so much for the public witnesses as for those making the declaration. Both baptism and sharing the bread and wine have very similar effects. We shall see more about this in **Romans 10**.

But, of course, simply going through a marriage ceremony, though it might appear to achieve something, is of absolutely no value if the relationship between the couple is not properly established – or has not even started! It may even create more problems. In the same way, baptism on its own, without the reality of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, achieves nothing positive and may actually have a negative effect. There is no magic in the ceremony!

The enacted ‘picture’ of baptism helps us in the **knowing** of our inheritance in Christ. First of all, as Paul says, it speaks of the death of the old person that we once were. The word translated ‘man’ or ‘self’ in **6:6** is the Greek word *anthropos*, meaning ‘person’ or ‘human being’, so the person we used to be was actually crucified with Jesus on the cross. Not ‘should have been crucified’, ‘might be crucified one day’ or ‘will be crucified’ but **was** crucified, at that point in time; it’s over and done – and finished! (The aorist tense again!) You and I **were included** in his death. We need to **know** this! (“*You will know the truth and the truth will set you free*” – **John 8:31-36**)

This may seem strange to us, that we were included in the historical death of Jesus on the cross about 2000 years ago. But we already believe that our ‘debt’ of sin and failure was paid by him all those years ago! How can either of these be possible? If we try to explain it to our non-Christian friends, they may think we are crazy or deluded. Paul knew that, too. “*For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*” (**1 Corinthians 1:18**). The ‘word of the cross’ is not only about Jesus paying the price for our sins, but also about our being included in his death. And both of those together really ARE the power of God!

For me, the key truth is contained in **1 Corinthians 1:30**: “*But by his doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption . . .*” For many years, I thought that I had joined myself to Jesus, but it turns out that God himself did it! Because he does not force anyone to be in Christ, we are given the choice whether we will take hold of this truth or not. But all he needs is our agreement – saying ‘yes’ to what he has already done – and he calls it faith!

Finding out that we have been joined to Jesus – that we are ‘in Christ’ – opens the door to finding out what has been made ours in him. Paul’s little list is a very good start: wisdom from God, righteousness (= justification = freedom from condemnation), sanctification (the process of being made holy, ‘set apart’ for God) and redemption (being ‘freed away’). See **Romans 3:24**.

So, back in **Romans 6**, Paul is writing specifically about the fact that we have been joined to Jesus in his death and resurrection. What difference does that make to us?

Moving forwards in the purposes of God, for each of us personally. Paul says ‘so that’ in **v.4** and ‘in order that’ and ‘so that’ in **v.6**. He is emphasising purpose. Why is it important that our old life is joined to Jesus in his death and burial? **So that**, just as he was raised from the dead, we would also be able to ‘walk’ in new life (**v.4**). The new life that we have in Jesus is **resurrection life**, but we can’t live in resurrection unless our old life is dead.

By the grace of God, as we have seen, that has already been done! **V.6** says that our old life died with Jesus on the cross, in order to put sin out of action in our lives and to remove us from slavery to sin and failure. Because, says Paul *“he who died is acquitted from sin”* (**v.7**). That word ‘acquitted’ is translated ‘freed’ in some versions, but there is only one other passage in the New Testament where ‘freed’ is used for it (**Acts 13:39** – a familiar verse from our study of Paul in Galatia). In every other passage it is translated ‘justified’ – acquitted, removed from condemnation. This is very much part of our redemption, here and now (**Romans 3:24** again).

The simplicity of the ‘picture’ of baptism is the portrayal of our death by going down under the water and the portrayal of our resurrection by being lifted back out again – a ‘likeness’, says Paul, of Jesus’s death and resurrection, through which we show that we are united with him (**v.5**).

(You may like to look at what is almost a parallel passage, **2 Corinthians 5:14-17**. Paul refers to being a new creation and the old having ‘passed away’. *“One died for all, therefore all died”*. Death and resurrection is a recurring theme of his. For example, see **Galatians 2:19-21, Ephesians 2:4-7, Colossians 2:9-15, 3:1-4**)

Does **Romans 6:8** refer to our present experience or the future? I think probably both! Not only shall we live with him in the future, but we are also *“alive to God in Christ Jesus”* NOW! The finality of Jesus’s death and his everlasting victory over sin and death are the basis upon which we can **count** ourselves to be truly dead to sin and failure and alive towards God **in him (6:8-11)**.

Up until **v.11**, Paul has been stating and re-stating the **facts**: we died with him and were raised with him, so that we we can escape the slavery of sin and failure and live in resurrection life. With those facts established and **known**, we can begin to **count on them**. It’s that ‘accounting’ word again which we found earlier with God **counting** Abraham to be righteous because of his faith.

It’s no use trying to count on something that we do not know to be true, so the knowing must come before the counting or ‘reckoning’. Once we know the facts, counting on them is not hard!

“Therefore” says Paul in **v.12**, *“do not let sin reign in your mortal body . . .”* based on the fact that we know our old life is dead and buried with Jesus, and that we are ‘alive to God’ because we share in his resurrection. There is no other way that we can do it. No amount of effort will get us there, it has to be counting on what God has already done, both in respect of dealing with sin and experiencing the life of God in us, changing us from the inside.

Now that we have been freed from slavery to sin and failure, we CAN stop presenting ourselves to sin and we CAN present ourselves to God 'as those alive from the dead', with the result that the members of our bodies are now available for God to use as instruments or weapons (**v.13**). So, because we now can do both these things, Paul says 'get on and do them!'

Through the next few verses (**v.14-23**), Paul continues this picture of having been released from slavery to one master in order to become willing slaves of another. He knows the picture has limitations (**v.19**) but it is graphic and powerful.

In the earlier part of this chapter, Paul has emphasised **what God has done for us in Christ**. Now he writes about our response, and it is all about choices and obedience, not effort (**v.16**).

An obedient slave does what their master tells them to do. We used to be slaves to sin and failure, but now "*sin shall not be master (= 'lord it') over you, for you are not under law but under grace*" (**v.14**). Now we choose to be 'enslaved' to God by presenting ourselves (including our bodies) to him as 'slaves of righteousness', which leads us into becoming holy, set apart for him (**v.18,19,22**).

By the grace of God we have been brought into union with the Lord Jesus, who is himself our way of 'sanctification' – being made holy (**1 Corinthians 1:30** again). Seeing what is ours in him and learning to 'abide' (= make our home) in him, we are learning to take hold of the 'riches in glory' and our lives are gradually being transformed to become more like him (**2 Corinthians 3:18** again, and see **2 Peter 1:1-4**). Jesus's words in **John 15:1-11** are definitely very relevant!

You may have noticed that Paul wrote in **v.14** "*sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace*". The implication is that, if we were to be under law, it would be quite possible for sin to be master over us. Paul had his own battles with law, as we shall see in the next chapter, but it is clear from this verse that living under God's grace (all that he has freely given to us in Jesus) rules out being mastered by sin and failure – Hallelujah!

What were the benefits or fruits of being enslaved to sin? Nothing at all, and the outcome of those things of which we are now ashamed was simply death (**v.21**). The word translated 'outcome' or 'result' means 'goal', 'that by which something is completed'. That was sin's destination all along. (See also **James 1:15**)

By contrast, being 'enslaved' to God and righteousness through the Lord Jesus brings good fruit now – we are being made more like him – and the 'destination' is not just life, but unending life, life 'of the ages' (**v.22**).

In the well-known **v. 23**, Paul mentions 'wages' – something that a slave would not receive, though he would get his rations and provisions from even the meanest master, and the word can mean that as well – and he hints at the next chapter. Wages, rations and provisions are things that we work for, trying to achieve success by our own efforts. But this unending life which stretches ahead of us by virtue of the fact that we are 'in Christ Jesus our Lord' is totally different: **It's a free gift! GRACE!**

Dave Taylor November 2023

Further copies can be downloaded from www.justonecandle.uk