

Romans 6:1-14
Alive from the Dead

Main idea: Being a Christian is more than being forgiven. It's being raised from death to life.

[Aladdin clip: Genie's 3 Rules]

ALADDIN: You're gonna grant me any three wishes I want?

GENIE: Ah, almost. There are a few provisos, a couple of quid pro quos

ALADDIN: Like?

GENIE: Ah, rule number one: I can't kill anybody. So don't ask. Rule two: I can't make anyone fall in love with anyone else. You little punim, there. Rule three: I can't bring people back from the dead. It's not a pretty picture, I don't like doing it! Other than that, you got it!

ALADDIN: Ah, provisos? You mean limitations? On wishes? Some all powerful genie--can't even bring people back from the dead. I don't know, Abu--he probably can't even get us out of this cave. Looks like we're gonna have to find a way out of here--

GENIE: Excuse me? Are you lookin' at me? Did you rub my lamp? Did you wake me up, did you bring me here? And all of a sudden, you're walking out on me? I don't think so, not right now. You're gettin' your wishes, so sit down!

The genie in Aladdin had three rules. He can't kill anybody, he can't make people fall in love, and he can't bring people back from the dead. There were things the genie could not do, even though he claimed to have phenomenal cosmic power, in an itty bitty living space.

Some people think of God like a big cosmic genie in the sky. But the Bible describes God as omnipotent.¹ That means there's nothing that God can't do. Our God is bigger, stronger, and greater than all things, and He has absolutely no limitations.²

So we saw last week at the end of Romans chapter 5 that God's grace is greater than all our sin.³ Paul wrote that just as sin reigned both on the earth and in our lives, resulting in death, so also grace will reign on the earth and in our lives, resulting in eternal life.⁴

But if that's the case, then what motivation do we have to live according to God's commands? I mean, if we're not obligated to obey God's law in order to earn anything from God because God gives us grace, then why should we at all even try to obey God's law? And if more sin means more grace, and if God is glorified when He shows us grace because it magnifies His goodness, then why not sin even more so that God would be glorified even more?

One of you asked me that very question after my sermon last week. Paul anticipated these questions, and answered them in Romans 6:1-14.

What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness

¹ Matthew 18:26

² Isaiah 41:10, Isaiah 55:8-9

³ Romans 5:20-21

⁴ On the earth, because sin entered "the world" and spread throughout the world. In our lives, because sin is not a vague concept, but part of those lives of those who sinned, which is all people. Jesus's work undoes both of these. (Romans 5:12-14).

of life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died is freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him, because we know that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again. Death no longer rules over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once for all time; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness. For sin will not rule over you, because you are not under the law but under grace.

Father, help us to live. Truly live. Help us to turn from all the sins that so quickly and easily entangle us, and help us to live the life that You've called us to live. In Jesus's name, Amen.

In his song "Known," Tauren Wells sings this:

And it's not one or the other
It's hard truth and ridiculous grace
To be known, fully known, and loved by You

I love that line, "it's hard truth and ridiculous grace," because so often, I find that people want to treat Christianity as if it is one or the other. On the one hand, we have the law, and even many Christians insist that you can only be saved if you seek to keep the law. But on the other hand is grace, and Paul writes some of the most clear verses about this in Ephesians 2.

For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

We have these verses written on the wall in our fellowship hall because they are absolutely pivotal to understanding the salvation that we have in Jesus.

But since we rest in the grace of God to save us, it can be very easy for us to rationalize that it's not important to obey God. So does anyone know what comes after Ephesians 2:9? That's right. Ephesians 2:10. It says:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

So we're saved by grace through faith in Jesus, and that faith causes us to engage in good works. This is the biblical understanding of the relationship between grace and works. We rest in God's grace for salvation, which causes us to rejoice in God's grace with good works.

So it's interesting that when you listen to a lot of people, most people believe that we obey God just to avoid consequences. To be clear, there are consequences for sin.⁵ Sin leads to broken relationships.⁶ It leads to

⁵ That's clear even from the first sin. Genesis 3

⁶ James 4:1-3

bitterness, emptiness, and the book of Proverbs says that certain sins lead to poverty and death.⁷ And, of course, the ultimate consequence for unrepentant sin is hell.⁸ Sin definitely has consequences.

But as people who have received the grace of God, the ultimate consequence for sin has been taken care of for us.⁹ Jesus died on the cross, paying the price for our sin,¹⁰ so that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.¹¹ And that's not something we worked for. It's something God gives us by grace. And knowing that we didn't do anything to earn it, and there's nothing we can do to lose it,¹² we might be tempted to rationalize our sin, saying that God's grace is greater than all our sin.

But in answering the question, "Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply," Paul emphatically answers, "Absolutely not!"

We've already seen this answer from Paul several times in the letter to the Romans. In chapter 3, Paul used it to answer three questions. Verse 3.

If some were unfaithful, will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? Absolutely not! (Romans 3:3-4a)

Verse 5.

Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath? Absolutely not! (Romans 3:5b-6a)

And then in verse 31.

Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! (Romans 3:31a)

With each of these responses, Paul was using a phrase that was much stronger than a simple "no." It was something more along the lines of "God forbid!" or "May it never be!" or even, as the Cotton Patch Gospel Bible translates it as you can see on the screen.

So what are we advocating? "Let's wallow in sin, so more grace may pour forth"? Hell, no! (Romans 6:1-2a)

Now, it's not a literal translation, but it does seem to give the emotional sense much more than most of our other modern translations.

So, shall we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! And yet, I'd be very surprised if I was the only person in this room who has ever thought that way.

When I was a youth in church, the True Love Waits movement was extremely popular. Do any of you remember that movement? Basically, teenagers were encouraged to remain pure in their relationships until marriage, and that's certainly something we should continue to encourage. We would have a ceremony, and we'd get a purity ring to remind ourselves of our commitment until we replaced it with our wedding ring. It was a great movement that I and many of my friends in my youth group committed to.

⁷ Proverbs 14:12, Proverbs 20:13, Proverbs 24:33-34

⁸ Revelation 21:8

⁹ Matthew 25:46

¹⁰ Colossians 1:14, 1 Peter 3:18

¹¹ Romans 8:1

¹² John 10:28

[Picture of True Love Waits ring]



Here's my True Love Waits ring.

Several of my friends made the same commitment. But one of my closest friends shared how he was tempted to break that commitment. His girlfriend, who had also made that commitment, invited him to her house, but when he got there, he found out that her parents weren't home. And she basically invited him in and threw herself at him. So he responded, "But what about our commitment to God?" to which she responded, "It's okay, God will forgive us."

Shall we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! God doesn't forgive us just so that we would continue to live a life of sin! Look at what Paul says about that. Verse 2.

Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:2-4)

This is exactly what a lot of people, both unbelievers and believers, just get completely wrong about Christianity. Jesus didn't die on the cross just to forgive you. He did die to forgive you, but that's not the only reason He died. And He didn't die on the cross just to give you some rules to follow. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead so that you would die and rise again with Him and be made completely new.

You are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.¹³

As Christians, we recognize that before we became Christians, we were dead in our trespasses and sins.¹⁴ That realization is why most of us came to have faith in Jesus, so that we would be saved from our sins. But if we recognize that our sins are what killed us, why do we so often cling so fiercely to our sins even today?

This is why the imagery of baptism is so powerful. While baptism does symbolize the washing away of sins,¹⁵ the bigger symbolism of baptism is that it reminds us that we were dead, so we were buried with Christ, and that Jesus raises us up to truly come alive from the dead.

Verse 5.

For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has

¹³ 2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:1

¹⁵ Acts 22:16

died is freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him, because we know that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again. Death no longer rules over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once for all time; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:5-11)

Being a Christian is more than being forgiven. It's being raised from death to life. And yet, that transition also means the death of our old life. It means the death of sin in us. It means turning from the pleasures of this world and embracing the joys of heaven.¹⁶

So ask yourself this: what gives you the most joy in life? If it's something that pertains only to this world, whether or not it's even technically sinful, maybe you need to spend some time in prayer and reflection, asking God if it's really something that ought to be such a big part of your life.¹⁷ As believers, we're to give ourselves first to the Lord. That means that if anything else gets in the way of our devotion and service to God, it needs to be cut out of our lives, or at the very least put into its proper place.

I've shared before that I used to love Stephen King novels. For the most part, they weren't sinful to read, although I can think of at least 1 or 2 of his novels that I probably shouldn't have read. But it was somewhat of an obsession. I read a ton of Stephen King.

So there was definitely a point at which I felt like I needed to give up Stephen King in order to better follow Christ.¹⁸ So I did. Somewhere towards the end of high school, I stopped reading Stephen King, and started devoting more time to reading God's word. It was during that time that I felt the call of God on my life to become a pastor.

I can't remember exactly when, but sometime within the last ten years, I took my kids to the library, and while they were picking out books to read, I picked up a Stephen King novel on a whim. But as I started reading it, I realized that I just had no desire to read it. God had changed my desires so that such things were simply less appealing.¹⁹

And that's how it is with us and sin. As you walk with Jesus, sin becomes less appealing. You're no longer enslaved by sin, and death no longer rules over you. You've been set free.²⁰ Verse 12.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness. For sin will not rule over you, because you are not under the law but under grace. (Romans 6:12-14)

Someone living under the law thinks, "I need to obey this law, because if I don't, there's a consequence." But someone living under grace thinks, "I want to obey this law, because I'm no longer a slave to sin. I'm free to obey not sin's desires, but God's desires, and even my desires as I delight more and more in the law of the Lord."²¹

So we don't serve God because we're under the law, as if we need to earn something from God. No, we serve God because we're under grace, and we've therefore been transformed by grace. We've come alive.

¹⁶ Psalm 16:11

¹⁷ Galatians 5:17

¹⁸ This is in line with Matthew 5:30

¹⁹ Psalm 37:4, Matthew 6:21, Philippians 2:13

²⁰ Galatians 5:1

²¹ Psalm 19:7

So the real question is this: how do you want to live?²²

You see, if we think grace is merely a transaction so that we get what we want from God, we haven't understood what God wants to do in us. He doesn't just want law-abiding citizens, he wants to make us new, so that we come alive. And God alone has the power to do that in us.

The genie in Aladdin had three rules. He can't kill anybody, he can't make people fall in love, and he can't bring anybody back from the dead. But God can and does do all of these things. Maybe we wouldn't use the word "kill," but God certainly takes life. Jesus said that God has the power to destroy both body and soul in hell.²³ And God promised us that because we sinned, dying we shall die.²⁴

And God definitely makes us fall in love, especially with Him. After all, God is love, and all true love is from God.²⁵ And not only that, but Jesus even said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all people unto Myself."²⁶ That word "draw," I think can be translated "woo."²⁷ It's referring to the attractional power of Jesus. Jesus makes us to fall in love with Him. Which makes sense, because we're saved by grace through faith, and even our faith is a gift from God.²⁸

So God has the power to take life, God makes people fall in love, and God even brings people back from the dead. And it is a pretty picture. He doesn't raise us up like decrepit zombies. He gives us life. True life. Not an imitation of life. He gives us the life that we never had, so that we can begin to joyfully serve Him from the heart.

²² When you receive God's grace, you shouldn't want to continue in sin. We should want to obey God. It's not because you have anything to prove, or even because you're trying to avoid consequences. It's because of who you now are in Christ. You're alive. So it's an error to think that we obey God just to avoid consequence and just to get God's stuff. No, He wants to give us His stuff for free, as a gift, and He frees us from the power of sin, death, and hell not because we earned it, but because He loves us, and because Jesus already paid the price.

²³ Matthew 10:28

²⁴ Genesis 2:17

²⁵ 1 John 4:7-8

²⁶ John 12:32

²⁷ Or, more accurately, "drag." See ἐλκύω (Strong's 1670): induce (draw in), focusing on the attraction-power involved with the drawing.

²⁸ Ephesians 2:8-9