

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

Rev. Dr. John V. Callahan, Jr.

Sermon Text: Romans 6:1-14

Sermon Title: "Sin and Grace, Death and Life" (A Journey through Romans)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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**{SLIDE 1}** As I read this passage for today, two words jumped out at me. Sin and grace. These words would be found at either ends of a long spectrum. Sin is rebellion against God, and grace is a loving response to such rebellion on God's part. Sin is accusatory, judgmental, condemning. Grace is compassionate, forgiving, healing. Sin is not an invention of God. Grace pours out of God without reserve. Both words are the polar opposites to each other. We might mention them in the same sentence, but they will never work together to help each other out. Sin's desire is to destroy, and grace's desire is to rebuild. Sin will always work against God, and grace will always work for God and God's creation.

We could probably leave it at that, but Paul comes up with an argument about these two words. Actually, Paul has to raise this argument to clarify what it means to be a Christian who lives between the tension of sin and grace.

Apparently there were people (critics) who thought that Paul was saying that we may be able to increase

God's grace if we increase our sinning.<sup>1</sup> With all the bad things we could do, God will just pour more grace on it all like maple syrup over flapjacks. Back in Romans 3, Paul says, "Why not say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'..." In Romans 5:20, Paul says, "Where sin abound, grace bounded much more." So it does sound like one has a direct effect on the other. Increase sin, rebellion, condemnation, and we will increase grace, forgiveness, healing. If we put more fuel on the fire, we will get a bigger fire. If this is the case, then everybody has a ready-made excuse for the things they do. We are justified in our actions, and we can just carry on hurting others and ourselves and God.

**{SLIDE 2}** Paul wants to nip that argument in the bud. He is not saying that we should have a free-for-all, no-holds-barred kind of lifestyle. We cannot increase grace by increasing our sin. It doesn't work that way.

Paul could have gone back to Chapter 3 and said, "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. And if we continue to sin, we continue to fall short. We never reach that finish line. We never get to be in continuous fellowship with God, because sin is

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*, cf. 166-167.

always getting in the way.” Paul could have gone back to Chapter 5, when he talked about sin entering the one man Adam. Paul could have said, “You see what happened to Adam, and to Eve for that matter? They sinned and death came to be. We all have inherited that horrific condition, so that because of our sinfulness we too will die and be separated from Gods forever.” Paul could have gone that direction.

Instead Paul introduces this word, baptism. **{SLIDE 3}** We are familiar with baptism. It involves water. It involves either a pool or a font. But more is going on here. According to our *Book of Order* (the organizational structure of our Church), Baptism along with the Lord’s Supper is a sign “of the real presence and power of Christ in the Church... Through [Baptism, in particular], God seals believers in redemption, renews their identity as the people of God, and marks them for service.”<sup>2</sup> How does this stack up with what Paul is saying? When those new Christians in Rome were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, at that moment God became very real to them. Jesus Christ wasn’t just an idea or some mystical figure in history, but Jesus Christ became a true-to-life Savior who transformed their worlds forever.

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<sup>2</sup> *Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Part II, 2013-2015, W-1.3033(2).*

When we were baptized in whatever way (dunking, sprinkling) in whichever church (Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, etc.), Jesus Christ became real to us. To every infant that has been baptized, to every youth and adult who have been baptized. By the way, since I have been here we have had more youth and adults baptized than babies. That is a cool thing. In each situation, Jesus became the only One to save us from ourselves. He became the Reason why we get up every morning and go about our days. He became our existence, and we know of no other way.

Through our baptisms Jesus became real, and Jesus became our Savior. He sealed us in God's redemption, God's salvation. This is where the word *grace* enters in again. {SLIDE 4} We said that grace is God's loving response to rebellion against him. Grace is compassionate, forgiving, healing. God's grace leads us to God's redemption, rescuing us from our destruction and wiping away all our sin and changing us back into the people God meant for us to be in the first place. Frederick Buechner said this about grace, "[It is God saying to us,] I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us... I love you."<sup>3</sup>

{SLIDE 5} Now, God's grace increases when sin

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<sup>3</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*, 39.

tries to increase. When sin rears its ugly head, grace is right on top of it ready to remove it. This is when the critics of Paul would say, “Ah, see, the greater the sin the greater the grace, so we should try to sin in order to increase our grace.” Um, no. We do not increase our grace. We can increase our sin.

Sadly, we increase our sin every day, and look what happens when we do that. We are in a worse state than when we started. Take a look at the gunman who killed 50 people in Orlando, plus injure more than 50 more. He filled himself with radical ideas that he thought would solve all the problems of the world, if not solve all his personal problems. He thought violence was the cure to some disease that affect his mind, body, and spirit. Little did he know was that by filling himself with brutal, hateful ideas, he was only increasing his sin. He sunk deeper in rebellion and destruction, and not only did he pay the price but so did 50 others. We can only increase our sin, not our grace.

However, God can increase grace upon us. God’s desire is to increase grace, so that sin loses its hold on us. When sin tries to get the upper hand, God’s grace is there to save us from harm. God’s grace shows us another way to handle a situation. God’s grace shows us how to think more compassionately and act more graciously. God’s grace reminds us that God is with

us. We can turn from the sin that plagues us. God's grace reminds us that God will walk with us every step of the way, that nothing will separate us from God as we take each step. God's grace tells us of God's deep and wild love for us that increases each day of our lives.

God increases grace upon us. God will always increase grace upon us. Sin loses its hold.

{SLIDE 6} And then, as we read along, there is another word that is mentioned several times. The word is death. We usually associate sin with death. In fact, Paul does this when talking about Adam (and Eve) in Chapter 5: “[Just] as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.”<sup>4</sup> Sin is the rejection of God, and when someone rejects God, he or she reject God's life; therefore, sin leads to our death and eternal separation from God.

Yet, what is Paul doing in Chapter 6 with the issue of death? This is what he says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” What is Paul saying? “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death...”<sup>5</sup> What?!? Is Paul saying that Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> Verse 12.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 6:3, 4.

Christ is somehow connected with death, and therefore he is connected with sin? This cannot be right. We are talking about Jesus, who is the antithesis, the complete opposite, of sin and death. And yet, we who are connected to Jesus through baptism are connected to his death? Maybe Paul's critics were right in saying that we should increase our grace by increasing our sin. The more we sin, the better off we will be.

{SLIDE 7} Um, no. When Paul says that we are baptized into Jesus' death, he is trying to explain to us the significance, the importance, of our relationship with Christ. Christ is real to us in many ways, especially in the way he died for our sin and raised up for our new life.<sup>6</sup> Christ died for us, and the reverse is true: we died with Christ. We died to our sin that rejects God at every turn. We died to hurtful thoughts and destructive actions. We died to everything that would ruin us. Paul says a little later that the old self is gone. Some translations say the old man or the old woman is gone. This has nothing to do with actual age. It has to do with our old state, our former sinful humanity that was full of corruption and senselessness. Karl Barth describes the old self as

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<sup>6</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*, cf. 173.

“the fallen Adam [and Eve], reappearing in every human EGO as it comes under the dominion of self-love.”<sup>7</sup> The old self is gone, doesn’t exist anymore, in Jesus Christ, because Jesus died to put the old self away. So we can say that when Jesus Christ died, we too died to our sin with him, because of him. It is buried and finished.

{SLIDE 8} However, Jesus didn’t stay buried. Jesus rose again from the tomb. Jesus left sin and death behind, and raised up to a new life. Since we are associated with Christ through baptism in his death, we too are associated with him in life. When Jesus rose, we rose as well with him, because of him. Paul says, “Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, *so that*, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with [Christ] in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”<sup>8</sup>

We have an excellent life to live in Jesus Christ. We have the grace of God pouring down on us every day, showing us how to live out this excellent life. In the morning, we are thankful for the day that God gives us, providing for us many opportunities to praise

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<sup>7</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 197.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 6:4-5, italics mine.



him and enjoy him. During the day, we worship God with the gifts we have to work with others: to solve problems, to encourage, to coach, to sympathize, to follow, to support. At the end of the day, we thank God once more for what we were able to do, and we pray we can do more in the next day that God gives us.

God's grace pours on us, showing how to be people of God who reflect the life that Jesus lived. We don't get it right all the time – sometimes sin enters in to make a mess of things – but we remember that we are associated with Christ by baptism through his death and through his life. When sin enters in, we know that sin doesn't dictate how we live. Sin doesn't have the final word on all our plans, decisions, and goals. Jesus does. Jesus dictates what sort of people we will be, and we are joyful for it. Jesus has the final word on everything about us, and we welcome him with open hearts and minds. Paul says in two different places, “[Whoever] has died is freed from sin... For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”<sup>9</sup>

**{SLIDE 9}** This takes us to one last thing that struck me as I read this passage last week. I said at the beginning that sin is all about destruction, and

grace is all about rebuilding. One hurts and the other heals. I think I misspoke, when I said that grace only rebuilds and heals. I believe grace also has the capacity to destroy. I think grace is able to eliminate, and what grace eliminates is sin and death. Under grace, sin and death can no longer exist. They have no dominion over Jesus, as Paul says, and thus they have no power over us.<sup>10</sup> That's why I think that grace has a destructive power but only over sin. Sin and death focus on everything within us to kill us, and grace only focuses on sin and death, and they are no more.

The more grace increases, the more life increases. The more we are the people God created us to be. The freer we are to live that excellent life that Christ created for us.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Romans 6:9.

## **Assurance of Pardon:**

Hear the *Good News!* The saying is sure and worthy of our full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might be dead to sin and be alive in Christ. Friends, in the name of Jesus Christ, you and I are forgiven! Amen.