



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

The Roman Road: Grace, Religion, or License

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Pastor Tim Boettger

Romans 6:1-14 (ESV)

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by 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.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We 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. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

For a person to have a sense of the love of God is to have a sense of God's grace for them. We're talking about God's grace today, as Paul expounds on it in Romans chapter six. In Romans chapter five, Paul was talking about the legacy of two men. We talked about this last week on the CC broadcast. One man has a legacy of sin, sin and pain and suffering and darkness in the world. Sin entered the world through one man. And of course, this man was Adam. And then Paul talks about the fact that grace came through Jesus Christ.

Our rebellion against God started with the temptation of Adam in the garden, and then our reconciliation with God came through the gift of Jesus. And now we no longer need to be under the judgment of breaking God's laws with our sin. We can be under his grace. And this grace is, of course, scandalous. It's marvelous. It's hard to understand. It goes against human nature. And so when we talk about it, oftentimes human beings will resist grace in one way or another because of how foreign it is to our nature.

Paul says this then at the end of Romans five, where sin increased and it increases even as our understanding of it grows and where it increases in our activity and thought, word and deed, then also grace increases all the more through Christ. It's hard to comprehend, but grace covers all of our sins.

We are no longer under the law. Paul says in our passage for today, under the judgment of the law before God, though, it's a guide for us and teaches us about God's ways, we're now under grace. And what is this grace? A definition of grace. You know, one of the most common definitions is undeserved favor. It's the sense of having unmerited treatment given to you in a good way. One man has described it as undeserved favor in the face of deserved wrath.

Now, if we study Romans one forward, we see that wrath is what we deserve, the judgment of God. But God sent grace to us through his Son Jesus. He wrote about it to those in Ephesus. Paul did when he wrote Ephesians chapter two, verse eight, when he said, "For it is by grace that we are saved, not of ourselves. This is the gift of God." It's undeserved favor that God brings us into his goodness, into his kindness, into his presence, even for all eternity. Not because of ourselves, but because of his mercy, his kindness to us. This is hard on our human nature, because on one hand, we're used to trying to earn things to work and get them and accomplish something, and then receive something in response for what we did in our nature wants to do that, to take credit for what we get.

And then on the other hand, when we find out it's just given to us and it's absolutely free to us, even though it cost God greatly, but it's free to us. We might take it lightly. We might abuse it. Sometimes if we don't work for something, we don't take it that seriously. It's just human nature.

My wife and I are sent tickets every year to a circus nearby our home, and the tickets are free. And we've never gone to the circus because we're just assuming if it's free, it's probably not that good. And you might wonder if people receive God's grace and just take it for granted.

And it happens. And that's what Paul is addressing here in Romans chapter six. And grace is more than just a one-time event in our lives where God gives us grace to be accepted by him. His grace is operating in our lives constantly in a freely given and merciful way. God's grace continually comes towards us when we're operating in faith before God because we need it. We keep making mistakes. We keep falling short of his intent, and therefore his grace covers that. The more sin abounds, the more God pours out more of his grace to cover our sin. And then Paul is asking this question shall we then continue sinning so that grace could abound more, increase more? And he answers it.

He says by no means. Another version interprets it this way. Absolutely not. Another says, God forbid. Another says, of course not. Another says no, that's unthinkable. We shouldn't keep sinning so that we can get more grace. We should allow God's grace to work in our lives to clean us up from sinning. That's what Paul is saying here. But make no mistake about it, God has made it allowable for his grace to be abused. And there are grace abusers. And perhaps all of us have abused his grace at one time or another.

When God has told us that where sin abounds, grace will abound all the more, he's basically saying, whatever you do under the shed blood of my son, I'm going to forgive you, I promise it. The more you sin, the more grace I'll pour out upon you. And that's why it's so scandalous. But understand that Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. And God in his grace is driving at you and I, falling into love with him so that we would restrain ourselves to please him. We would restrain ourselves in such a way in life that we would live in a way that honors him. And we would do this under his grace, his love, his kindness.

You know, Peter, when he was talking with Jesus at one point was being challenged by other people sinning against him. And so he went to Jesus and he said, you know, Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother, my sister when they sin against me? Should I do it up to seven times? And I bet he thought he was being pretty righteous with his use of the number seven, God's perfect number, using God's perfect number with God Himself.

How many times should I forgive my brother and sister? Up to seven times? And Jesus replied, I tell you, not seven times, but 70 times seven, which equals 490, which is the number of wholeness, perfect wholeness, which is Jesus saying, there's no limit. You just forgive because if you don't forgive, your heavenly father won't forgive you. It's a flow of grace through our lives. But what Jesus is saying here is there's no limit to the flow of grace. Grace can continually flow through our lives, no matter how many times we sin against God, he's

going to forgive us. And when we know that, we might abuse it because we're human, we're frail in our flesh. And this is why the freedom of grace is sometimes traded in for the safety of religion. When the freedom of God's grace is too much for people, and we see that God isn't going to force us to behave before him, we sometimes then decide, well, let's form religion and let's build some rules ourselves to help keep people in line so that they'll live right. They won't do what's wrong.

And I don't know if you've experienced this in your life, but many people have man-made religious rules imposed on them in their lives. When I was younger, there were groups around us who wouldn't allow anyone to play cards. The Bible doesn't say you shouldn't play cards, but I understand cards can be a game of luck, and that sometimes luck is inappropriate when we think about the sovereignty of God. But they thought that then not playing cards would keep you from thinking wrong about God and about life. And so playing cards became the biggest sin.

Other groups say dancing is the worst sin because dancing can lead to feelings that are inappropriate before God. But when you read through the scriptures, David danced and many people danced before the Lord. Now, there's no question that certain kinds of dancing can stir up lustful thoughts, lustful behaviors. But that doesn't mean all dancing is wrong. And then there's the idea of appropriate clothing. The Bible does talk about using modesty in our dress, but what is modesty? There's different rules that are imposed in different groups. Sometimes a gal should not wear pants, but they should wear a skirt that goes below the knee. But then I don't know, what do you do with that? Their ankles are still exposed. And so we have these rules that sometimes become grace killers, where people start to worry about whether they're obeying man-made rules or not, or doing something terribly wrong before God, and they miss the freedom of a relationship with him.

The joy of grace, the power of grace in their lives. So grace is scandalous this way it'll allow us to cheat on God. It'll allow us to do things, and he'll pour out more grace. In that sense, sometimes we're so afraid of the freedom of grace that we withdraw into religious rules. Pharisees. Behavior, and we impose different kinds of things on people that maybe they're not even struggling with grace. Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more, and it sets people free. Free from religion, and also free from the power of sin.

And I don't want you to miss this, friend. Grace is an invitation not to religious behavior, and not to be abused by us in our lustful desires in the world. But it's an invitation to be in

relationship, a deep, loving relationship with God, where our heart is transformed to want to please him, to want to honor him. It's his kindness, his unmerited favor, his love being poured out towards us. And as we grow in our experience of it, we just want to please him more. I want to read you some scriptures that refer to the grace of God, and I just want you to let these settle in on you, these truths about God's grace for us.

First Peter 5:10. God himself is the God of all grace. He pours out this unmerited favor to the world. Second Peter 1:2. Grace is multiplied to us in the knowledge of him. As we grow in our understanding of him, we should grow in the understanding of his grace being poured out to us. Jesus came among us. He was sent among us full of grace and truth. John 1:14. First Peter 1:10 tells us that much of the Old Testament foreshadowed the coming of this grace that we have today. First Timothy 1:14 says, there's more than enough grace to go around. Romans 5, as we talked about today, tells us there's an abundance of grace available. John 1:16 tells it, grace upon grace upon grace that overflows to us and works in our lives. And Titus tells us, it teaches us to say no to sin. And on and on the Bible goes, teaching us that grace can be our strength. It can help us stand strong. It's something we can hope in. And so today, friend, as you think about Grace, I want you to think about God inviting you into a personal relationship with him, where in his pouring out of grace, he wants to continually purify our hearts, to give them a desire to want to live fully right before him, empowered by him, strengthened by him, built up by him in such a way that it begins to overflow in our lives and move out into the world.

And people taste the goodness of God through us. Friend, is this your desire? Do you want to grow in the grace and the knowledge of God, drawing closer to a relationship with him, where his life starts to flow in and through you? If you do, I want to encourage you today. James tells us this if we draw near to God, he will draw near to us. John said this if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The Holy Spirit is given us. The Bible says, as a helper to draw us to him. God is constantly wooing people towards himself through the kindness of his grace, his mercy, his unmerited favor, and at any time, any place, anywhere you and I can reach out to God, call upon his name. His grace will come into our lives no matter what our past, no matter what our history, no matter what we're experiencing. In the moment where sin has abounded, wreckage in life has abounded. Grace will abound even more. And if you call out to God in the quietness of your heart in this moment, at this time he will hear you and his grace will start to come toward you.

Now understand, God opposes the proud, but he'll pour out his grace on the humble. And as we humble ourselves, his grace will come to us and we'll start to grow with him. And over time, if we seek him, he promises us that we will find him. You will never see someone who is truly seeking the kingdom of God forsaken. If you draw near to God, he will draw near to you, and he will in some way. If you're humbling yourself before him and seeking his face. Show himself in his goodness and his kindness to you. He promises it and I promise it to you as well. God loves you, friend. No matter what you've done in your past to violate God's ways, whatever shame you have, or no matter how safe you've played it with religious behavior. God invites you into a relationship, a dynamic personal relationship with him.

Father in heaven for all of us. Now, as we're hearing this, your words inviting us into your presence through your kindness, your unmerited favor, give us a desire to respond to this, to lean toward you. You bring us closer to you, that we could walk in the fullness of this grace. By the power of your Spirit. Help us in this. Father. Thank you for the great gift of your Son Jesus and the shedding of his blood, which made all of this possible. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.