

## Are We to Continue In Sin?

Romans 6:1–4<sup>i</sup>

### A Strange and Interesting Question.

So, *are* we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Of course, the answer is obvious (or at least it should be). Still, it's a strange and interesting question, and one that has been asked before in the book of Romans. In chapter 3, verses 7, Paul wrote:

<sup>7</sup> But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? Romans 3:7 ESV

Which is another way of asking the same thing, but verse 8 is even more specific.

<sup>8</sup> And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying.

Their condemnation is just... Romans 3:8 ESV

wrote Paul, but why would the accusation be made in the first place? Why would anyone say this? Well, everything that we have seen so far in the book of Romans would be one possible answer. And, not overlooking the fact that much of the book could be misconstrued in this way, there is specifically chapter 3, verses 21 and 22, which affirm:

<sup>21</sup> **But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law,** although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ** for all who believe... Romans 3:20–22 ESV

Then, there is chapter 4, verses 13 – 16:

<sup>13</sup> For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law **but through the righteousness of faith.** <sup>14</sup> For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. <sup>16</sup> **That is why it depends on faith,** in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all... Romans 4:13–16 ESV

There is chapter 5, verses 1 and 2:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, **since we have been justified by faith,** we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:1–2 ESV

And perhaps, most of all, Romans 8, verses 1 and 2:

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1–2 ESV

Of course, none of these passages say, “Let us do evil that good may come,” or, “Let us continue in sin that grace may abound,” (that much is obvious), but there is a way of understanding faith—a false way—called antinomianism (from the words *anti*, as in against, and *nomos*, meaning law) which pits faith completely against the Law.

Antinomianism, then, rejects the idea of a self-conscious obedience to an external standard (like God’s Law) claiming that this is mere legalism. It holds that instead of understanding the Law as a guide to or rule for gratitude, we must rely wholly upon the internal working of the Holy Spirit to guide us into what is good. This has taken various forms at various points in church history from the idea of the divine light in Quakerism to the emphasis on directly hearing the voice of God speaking apart from Scripture in many modern evangelical and charismatic settings.

Of course no one, not even the most intransigent antinomian, would outright say, “Let us go on sinning that grace may abound.” That would just be too obvious. It’s more likely to be veiled in a couple of other statements. First, someone might say, “It doesn’t matter if we continue in sin, because grace covers it all.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer identified this tendency toward what he called cheap grace in The Cost of Discipleship, when he wrote:

**Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner.**

Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before...

Well then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world’s standards in every sphere of life...

Let the Christian rest content with his worldliness and with his renunciation of any higher standard than the world...let him be comforted and rest assured in his possession of this grace—for grace alone does everything...<sup>ii</sup>

More insidious still, there are those who hold that there is no longer any such thing as sin, because grace has utterly taken away the law. We must not, in this view, continue to call sinners to repentance, because there are no sinners as such, just people who are still learning how to achieve their full potential by living in a grace that has not and cannot fundamentally change their fallen human nature.

### **Are We to Continue in Sin?**

And never mind the rest of Romans for a moment, the question itself defies this cheap version of grace. Paul wrote, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” The thing is, for the question, “Are we to continue in sin...?” to make any sense at all, there has to be such a thing as sin that we might continue in. And of course there is.

<sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of [God’s] kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Paul wrote.

<sup>5</sup> But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. Romans 2:4–5 ESV

<sup>12</sup> For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. Romans 2:12 ESV

And the fact is,

<sup>22</sup> ...there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all...

(both Jews and gentiles)

...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:22–23 ESV

The idea that sin as a category has been erased by the grace of God, and that all men universally are now saved, is so contrary to the Word that it should barely need refutation. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and can only find salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself, for us and for our salvation, “while we were still sinners”. So then, having been saved by grace through faith—having come to this place where we understand that

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus Romans 8:1 ESV

Are we to continue **in sin** that grace may abound? The answer too belies the various cheap conceptions of grace.

<sup>2</sup> By no means!

(Certainly not! May it never be! God forbid!) wrote Paul.

...How can we who died to sin still live in it? Romans 6:2 ESV

The issue then is not that there is no such thing as sin, or even that since

Grace alone does everything...everything can remain as it was before... <sup>iii</sup>

The issue is that grace does not justify the sin, or even justify us while leaving us in our sin; grace actually changes everything, because by grace those who have been brought to trust in Jesus Christ have died to that which held us captive<sup>iv</sup>.

### Crucified with Christ.

Romans 6, verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Romans 6:3 ESV

If we have died to something, Paul argues, then it's impossible to still *live* in it, and those of us who have been baptized into Christ were baptized into His death, therefore, we have died to sin. Paul wrote of this in Galatians, chapter 2 as well, when he said:

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ... Galatians 2:20 ESV

and later in Galatians, too:

<sup>14</sup> ...far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, **by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** Galatians 6:14 ESV

And just reflect for a moment on the idea of the world being crucified to us, and us to the world. Death by crucifixion was painful, personal, and definitive. When the agony was over (and it was rarely over quickly), the victim was dead to all that life which had been his before. He had crossed a line from one state of being to another; from being alive with all that it implies, to being dead, and we're talking "all dead" here, not mostly dead.

In other words, true grace—the grace of God by which alone we have been saved—actually saves us by killing us in terms of our relationship to sin. I don't think this should come as any surprise either. I really think this is what Jesus meant when He said:

<sup>24</sup> ...If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. Matthew 16:24–25 ASV

This is what the grace of God does, as it says in Romans 6, verses 6 and 7:

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin. Romans 6:6–7 ESV

This is the simple truth. Whether we know it or not

<sup>3</sup> ...all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death... Romans 6:3 ESV

and to make sure that we understand this we were given a sacrament as a reminder—a sign and a seal—

...to represent better to our external senses both what He enables us to understand by His Word and what He does inwardly in our hearts, confirming in us the salvation He imparts to us.<sup>v</sup>

Even so,

<sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death... Romans 6:4 ESV

Therefore,

...How can we who died to sin still live in it? Romans 6:2 ESV

### **Newness of Life.**

But here's the thing. That is not the end of the story. Paul's second argument here takes us beyond our death with Christ. In Romans 6:

<sup>4</sup> 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.  
Romans 6:4 ESV

Death to sin is only the beginning, because,

<sup>5</sup> ...if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Romans 6:5 ESV

See, the Christian life is not simply about dying to sin, and putting away the pleasures of the flesh. We are not called like mystics and monks to go into the desert and sit on a rock to await the return of the Lord. The goal is not to be as miserable as we can possibly be. Jesus said,

<sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. **I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.** John 10:10 ESV

No, in dying with Christ to the death that held us captive to sin, we are born again—we are raised to walk “in newness of life.” That’s what “born again” means, and that’s why when Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ...” he followed up, saying

...It is no longer I who live, **but Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 ESV

As James Montgomery Boice put it,

The Christian way of speaking about this is to say that, for the Christian, death is followed by a resurrection. **And not just at the end of time!** True Christianity is living out a new, joyful, abundant, resurrected life with Jesus Christ now.<sup>vi</sup>

True Christianity is knowing that we are

<sup>11</sup> ...dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus Romans 6:11 ESV

—dead to sin, and raised to walk in the new, abundant life that only is ours through Jesus Christ,

<sup>25</sup> ...who was delivered up for our trespasses...

(our sin),

...and raised for our justification. Romans 4:25 ESV

This, according to the Heidelberg Catechism is the very definition of conversion to Christ. Not walking an aisle, making a decision, or praying a prayer. Conversion is two things,

...the dying away of the old self, and the coming-to-life of the new.

The dying away of the old is

...to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it more and more, and to run away from it.

But the coming to life of the new?

It is a wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a delight to do every kind of good as God wants us to.<sup>vii</sup>

It is abundant life. It is newness of life. And this is why it's so important that the resurrection is not just a story that we tell once a year. The Lord's Day, this one, and every one, is about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and that means it's about our resurrection too. It's about remembering as often as we gather on the first day of the week that:

<sup>20</sup> ...the life [we] now live in the flesh [we] live by faith in the Son of God, who loved [us] and gave himself for [us].<sup>Galatians 2:20 ESV</sup>

And if this is the desire of your heart this morning—if you are desire to be free; if you long for the abundant life that Jesus promised—then hear the call of the Gospel; trust in Jesus, die to sin and be raised to walk in newness of life. Then, present yourself to God as having been brought from death to life, and present your body to Him as a living sacrifice, for

<sup>5</sup> ...if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.<sup>Romans 6:5 ESV</sup>

Let us pray.

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i All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

ii Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1959, 1995), 44.

iii Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 44.

iv Cf. Romans 7:6.

v Christian Reformed Church, "The Belgic Confession, Article 33", in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* ed. CRCNA (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Publications, 1988), 111.

vi James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: The Reign of Grace, vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 666.

vii Christian Reformed Church, "The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33", in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* ed. CRCNA (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Publications, 1988), 54.