

Bible Study Romans 6

“6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”

Origen says of this verse:

“This is a rhetorical question which arises from what Paul said in 5:20 above:

‘Moreover, the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more...’

He answers in the next verse, saying that those in whom grace abounds have died to sin. It is clear that someone who has died to sin cannot remain a sinner.”

In previous chapters we have mentioned the common Protestant doctrine of “once saved, always saved” – the belief that once a person has faith in Christ, no amount of sin can cause them to lose their salvation. Paul wrote in 5:20, *“Moreover, the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more...”* This verse, by itself, could be construed by some to support “once saved, always saved.” Those who hold this belief could interpret this verse to mean, “As a believer, if I abound in sinning, God’s grace will about abound even more. Therefore, I have no fear of punishment if I continue to commit serious sins. I do not need to repent. I will be saved no matter what I do.”

In this verse, Paul slams the door shut on such a distortion of his words.

“2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”

Ambrosiaster writes: *“The believer who returns to his former way of life rejects the kingdom of God’s grace and returns to sin.”* Paul and Ambrosiaster agree that returning to sins and “abounding” in them without repentance does not make “grace abound much more” in the way “once saved always saved” teaches.

The text now identifies the critical role of baptism in this discussion.

“3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”

The “*sin that abounds*” that Paul is referring to in 5:20 are the sins committed before baptism. In the baptismal waters, all the sins committed previously – including the worst ones - are forgiven. Paul imprisoned Christians, but that serious sin was forgiven at his baptism (Acts 9:18). No amount of sins are too many or too serious for baptism to cleanse. It is in this sacrament that “*grace abounds even more*” to cleanse us from all of them.

According to Scripture, baptism washes away past sins. The washing away of sins in baptism was foreshadowed in the Old Testament:

“Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper... Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha’s house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, ‘Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.’... So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean’?” So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (2 Kings 5:1, 9-14).



Throughout the Old Testament, leprosy was not only an incurable degenerative skin disease, it was also a symbol of sin. Naaman initially resisted, but finally washed in the river Jordan as God’s prophet directed. The results were supernatural. It was not merely a “symbol” as is often thought of baptism today. He emerged from the water miraculously, literally, and physically healed. Had he decided that he could be healed without being washed in that specific river, he would not have been healed of his leprosy. That Old Testament event was a foreshadowing of the supernatural healing powers of the soul in New Testament baptism.

In Psalm 51, David expressed his hope that God would forgive him of his terrible sins as a washing: *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (verse 7).*

When Christ healed the blind man, that healing required a washing:

“Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth... He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing” (John 9:1,6-7).

As with Naaman’s leprosy, this man’s blindness was a symbol of the sickness of sin. The outward physical sickness was healed by washing, and the inner spiritual sickness is also

healed by a washing. The washing effect that baptism has on sin, which was foretold in the Old Testament, was fulfilled in the New Testament.

“And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).

“He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit...” (Titus 3:5).

“There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” (1 Peter 3:21).

The Liturgy of St. Basil says,

“He acquired us for Himself as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Cleansing us in water, and sanctifying us by the Holy Spirit, He gave Himself as a ransom for death, in which we were held captive, having been sold under sin.

“⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”



Baptism by immersion – as practiced by Orthodoxy – is a re-enactment of Christ’s burial and resurrection. The person being baptized is placed under water, which is cold like death. For a few moments the person cannot see or hear what is going on outside the water around them, like being in a grave. The person is separated from air to breathe. If that situation lasted long it would be dangerous to their life. Three times the person has only a moment to breathe, but then return under the hostile water where they cannot breathe. Infants who are being baptized, and do not understand what is happening, feel all these bewildering sensations and usually panic. Even adults, who do understand what is going on, normally feel unnerved and disoriented.

Then the person being baptized – infant or adult - is then lifted from the cold, the silence, the darkness, and oxygen deprivation. They return to their usual world. They can again see and hear their surroundings. They can feel a slight return to warmth and breathe air again. There is a sense of relief. They leave the water dripping the water that momentarily

contained them. It feels like when they leave the bathtub or the shower. Their bodies have been washed on the outside, and their souls have been washed on the inside.

They have re-enacted Christ's past death, burial and resurrection. In so doing they have also simulated their own future death and burial. They have re-enacted Christ's resurrection from death, as He emerged from the grave back into life. They have also expressed their faith in their own future resurrection like His.

One of the prayers of baptism says:

"That, being planted in the likeness of Your death through Baptism, he/she may become a sharer of Your Resurrection; and, preserving the Gift of Your Holy Spirit, and increasing the deposit of Grace, he/she may attain unto prize of his/her high calling, and accounted among the number of the first-born, whose names are written in Heaven."

This re-experiencing of Christ's death and resurrection in baptism changes us. It marks the official beginning of our new life of discipleship and struggle against our sins.



"⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin."

Slaves in the Roman Empire were forced to obey their masters, no matter what.



They had no choice in anything. They could only expect their bondage to end when they died. After that, they would enter the afterlife finally free from their masters. This verse tells us that our new baptismal life in Christ frees us from our former bondage to sin. We now have the choice to sin or not to sin. If we sin, we are voluntarily returning to our former slavery.

“⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This verse teaches us that the baptized now have the choice to sin or not to sin. If we choose to sin, we are voluntarily returning to our former slavery. But if we choose not to sin, we are exercising our new freedom in Christ.

“¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³ And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

Paul extends the metaphor of spiritual slavery and freedom further:

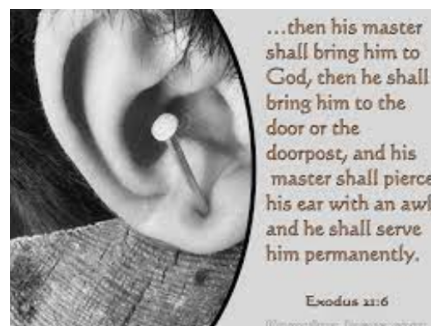


“¹⁶ Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to

righteousness? ¹⁷ But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.”

This passage raises a question. Slavery usually refers to involuntary servitude. How can a person be a “slave of righteousness?” A clue can be found in the Old Testament. “Slavery was permissible in certain situations, so long as slaves were regarded as full members of the community ([Gen. 17:12](#)), received the same rest periods and holidays as non-slaves ([Exod. 23:12](#); [Deut. 5:14-15](#), [12:12](#)), and were treated humanely ([Exod. 21:7](#), [26-27](#)). Most importantly, slavery among Hebrews was not intended as a permanent condition, but a voluntary, temporary refuge for people suffering what would otherwise be desperate poverty. “When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person, without debt” ([Exod. 21:2](#)). Cruelty on the part of the owner resulted in immediate freedom for the slave ([Exod. 21:26-27](#)). This made male Hebrew slavery more like a kind of long-term labor contract among individuals, and less like the kind of permanent exploitation that has characterized slavery in modern times.”

(<https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/exodus-and-work/israel-at-mount-sinai-exodus-191-4038/instructions-about-work-exodus-201-17-and-211-239/case-laws-in-the-book-of-the-covenant-exodus-211-2333/slavery-or-indentured-servitude-exodus-211-11/>)



Among the biblical rules governing this practice of Hebrew slaves/indentured servants is this significant detail: “Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing... But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever” (Exodus 21:1-2, 5-6).

Paul would have been aware of this law, and may have had it in mind when he wrote about Christians being “*slaves of righteousness*” in this passage. God, our Master, released from our former bondage to Satan. The Liturgy of St. Basil says,

“He acquired us for Himself as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Cleansing us in water, and sanctifying us by the Holy Spirit, He gave Himself as a ransom for death, in which we were held captive, having been sold under sin.”

Now, He offers us our freedom. In extreme gratitude and love for Him, we voluntarily live out the terms of the above passage from Exodus. We say *“I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free... and I shall serve him forever.”* This is why Paul often refers to himself as a “slave” or “bondservant” so often in his writings. He had chosen to serve God as a slave. The ear of his souls was pierced by God.

“²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.”

When the Israelites were delivered from slavery under the Egyptians, and followed Moses into the wilderness, they were actually ready to reject their new freedom and return to their former enslavement.

“All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, ‘Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in the wilderness!’... So they said to one another, ‘Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt’” (Numbers 14:1-4).

We can read this story in the Bible and be amazed that some Israelites actually wanted to return to their slavery instead of rejoicing in their freedom. Yet this verse states that we Christians can have the same temptations. We were formerly *“slaves of sin.”* Why would we ever want to go back? *“For the end of those things is death.”* If we do not go back, the reward is great:

“²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

“²³ For the wages of sin is death...”

CS Lewis wrote a Christian fiction book called “the Screwtape Letters.” In it, an experienced demon is teaching a junior apprentice demon tricks how to trip up Christians in their spiritual life. In one of the lessons, the senior demon says,

“All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which [God] has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which he has forbidden. Hence, we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure, to which it is least natural, least redolent to its maker, and least pleasurable. An ever-increasing craving for an ever-decreasing pleasure is the formula...”

All the healthy and out-going activities we want him to avoid can be inhibited, and nothing given in return... one of my own “patients” said on his arrival down here, “I now see that I spent most of my life in doing neither what I ought, or I liked.”

Satan would have us believe that pursuing holiness is the “hard work,” while following our passions wherever they lead us, is “easy.” The reverse is true. Submitting to temptations and passions are the real hard work. And in the end, after all the hard work, that form of “hard work” leaves us absolutely no reward. It is a lifetime of doing overtime work that leaves not only no overtime pay, but no paycheck at all. That is the meaning of “the wages of sin is death...”

Conversely, Satan tries to convince us that pursuing holiness, and carrying our cross as Jesus warned us we must, is the hard work. To that lie, Christ replies, “*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (Matthew 11:29-30.) Satan wants us to spend our lives toiling over the things that not give us happiness, but make us enemies of God. To the contrary, Christ invites us to receive earthly joy in His companionship, and someday experience heavenly bliss. And it’s all free of charge.

“...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”