

Why Be Good if there's Grace? Rom.6

Pax Romana #12

◇ **Intro:** A Third Century Bishop was shocked to see devout martyrs (those about to be) of the Christian faith devote their last nights in prison to drunkenness, revelry, and promiscuity. Since martyrs' death would make them perfect, they reasoned, what would it matter if they spent their last hours sinning?

◇ We immediately may sense that there is something wrong with this, but what?

◇ A man comes to his pastor, tells him he plans to go to such and such a town, have an affair with a woman he met on the internet just to see if she's right, and worth leaving his wife and 3 kids. He wants to know if, since God is a forgiving God, he will be forgiven. For then he will feel better about doing the whole thing.

◇ Something feels off, but what? Could a person who really has a love relationship with God even do this?

◇ The unbelieving French writer Voltaire is quoted as saying, "I sin. God forgives. Things are admirably arranged." What incentive is there for us to be good if there is all this "amazing grace" that loves a wretch like me? Or as one writer puts it, "Why strive to be just as God wants when he accepts me just as I am?" Of course the question alone betrays a twist in thinking: it assumes that the only reason to be good is because we *have to* for some reason.

◇ If we don't *have to* do something to get a benefit (God's love, the gift of heaven, eternal life) why do it? Can a man not be a notorious sinner (think of Paul the assassin, or David the wife-stealer/murderer) right up to the very end (think of the thief on the cross), be sorry and get forgiven and danced off into paradise? Grace seems oh so cheap, and easy to

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abuse. Is there any reason not to? I am happy to say, "Yes, there are a many."

◇**1. Goodness is a natural overflow of Grace. If I have the one, I will also have the other.**

◇**A. If you are a forgiven sinner by the grace of God, you are also someone God had given a new identity; what's true of Christ is true of you!**

◇In verse 3f Paul is pointing out our new identity. Basically he argues that if you are really the Messiah's man/woman ("in Christ" v3,11; "united with" v5) when you gave your heart to Jesus you were spiritually linked. So when Christ died for your sins, the old you died too. When he rose, the new you, the true you rose too. He became your federal head instead of Adam.

◇That means in the eyes of God, in the spiritual realm you are dead to sin. In the spiritual realm you are raised to eternal life. You have a new home, a new King, and new name. Sin isn't you! It doesn't fit. It's like sleeping in a doghouse when you own a mansion! In fact, you are now a citizen of the spiritual realm!

◇**B. If you are a forgiven sinner, then you are also someone who is in the process of changing into a different being, a holy being** (sanctification) that will take up residence in that spiritual realm.

Back in chapter 1:5 Paul used an interesting phrase:

◇"Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the *obedience that comes from faith.*" Romans 1:5, NIV.

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- ◇ Elsewhere he puts it:
 - ◇ "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." Titus 2:11-14, NIV.
- ◇ This should also be clear from our passage:
 - ◇ v16 obedience leads to righteousness as a natural outcome.
 - ◇ v19 righteous living (being good) produces holiness (a pure, smoothly operating-as-it-should life.)
 - ◇ v22 obeying God's pattern, leads to holiness, which in turn leads to life, or should we say "real living"
 - ◇ [Why is it that so many, maybe even listening to my voice right now, think that holiness is a downer? That holiness is no fun, and that to "live a little" requires breaking rules and adding a little evil? In truth it's the opposite! Everyone should long for, aim for, want to have, be seeking holiness. Holiness is the best way to live.]
- ◇ **B.** Some folks think that evil is *necessary* for grace. (this is what Paul is objecting to in our chapter). So my being bad affords me more opportunity for grace. Verse 1 asks if we shouldn't do more sin so as to get more grace.

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- ◇There have been people who taught this. Some churches down through history actually encouraged for example, and hour of cursing so as to procure a load of grace.
- ◇This of course represents quite twisted thinking. We might as well say, "Stitches bring healing to our cuts, therefore let us cut ourselves all over, that we may experience many stitches and healing!" It's ludicrous! Is it not far better to be uncut?
- ◇We forget that grace is love for the underserving. But it isn't *because* we are underserving. And Love does not need ugliness to exist! And you don't have to sin more to get grace. All you need to do is ask for it.
- ◇So why be good if there's grace? We don't have to be good to get grace. We will be good if we get grace. Goodness comes along with the gift of grace. If you really have received grace, you will be also progressing in goodness because Jesus is about the business of renewing our identity and our actuality! Another reason to do good...
- ◇**2. Love returned is love best experienced.**
- ◇A. When someone gifts you, loves you, blesses you –and when you in turn return it, –that is the best of experiences. Put it this way: when someone graces you, and you are grace-ful back (grateful), it completes the circle of love.
 - ◇Love offered but not returned can actually hurt very much. Think of a young woman in love with a boy who doesn't notice her yet. Think of the ecstasy of when he does! Love must be shared for there to be relationship.

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◇ Why be good? Being good is being grateful, or returning the grace and thereby finding relationship with God.

◇ St. Augustine said "Love God, and then do as you please." Excuse me, Mr. Saint, sir? Isn't that a little dangerous to be advising Christians struggling in a sinful world full of temptations?

◇ Not really. The more I love my wife (or say, the more you love your Dad) the more you want to bring them joy. That's why Jesus, and Paul summarized the law with the simple command to love God. Remember? That's why you ought to pray that God will make you love him and your wife more than you do.

◇ Law or rules have never succeeded in keeping people good. The one thing that makes transgression impossible, observes Philip Yancy, is love.

◇ **B.** Is there a rebellious **son** having much trouble following the rules of the house? The solution is not more and tighter rules, though these are surely necessary in some fashion. It is a truer experience of a love relationship if those involved are willing to seek it. Again, the **daughter** that feels deeply loved at home, does not need to look for it behind the masquerade of sexual freedom, which says a lot about the homes in our culture. Do you want to overcome **chronic** tendencies to lie, or be arrogant, or find fault with coworkers? Perhaps memorizing scripture on these sins is not the key. Perhaps you need to memorize scripture on how much God thinks of you, and does for you and has given you.

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◇ I don't think those Christians in prison tying it on in their last moments were even Christians at all, or if they were, they had a very small notion of how much they'd actually been given in Christ. Why do good? The right question is really "Why love God?" *Don't try to be holy. Try to love and praise God, holiness will come along with it.*

◇ **3. Everyone has a master, so chose a good one.**

◇ **A.** The fruit of your life tells you who your master is. There is no one without a master. Whatever you chose to pursue will be the controlling master of who you are. This is the explanation of v16

◇ Again Philip Yancy in his book about grace put it, "Paradoxically, a headlong pursuit of freedom often turns into bondage; insist on the freedom to lose your temper whenever you feel anger, and you will soon find yourself a slave to rage. In modern life, those things that teenagers do to express their freedom—tobacco, alcohol, drugs, pornography—become their relentless masters."

◇ On the other hand, if you set out to be the world's best ballroom dancer, you submit to the master of lessons, critique, hour upon hour of practice. You are not free to eat cheeseburgers, and play frisbee all afternoon. But when you get on the dance floor, you are free; free to do the moves and spins that others can only dream about.

◇ Complete and utter freedom is a misnomer. Since we will be slaves to what we choose, let's choose something good!

◇ **B.** Certainly you may choose poorly, as the knight in *Indiana Jones Search for the Holy Grail* put it. You may choose all manner of cups, or chemical mixes. But it's always best to choose wisely,

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according to what works. Paul flat out urges in our text "Don't chose sin." v12-14

◇Sin doesn't work. That is the reason God tells us not to do it. He is not the God of the Gotcha, forever setting you up to do a "don't" so that he can catch you at it. As the perfect being he desires that which is good, all around. Sin won't get us to what is good.

◇Note the phrase "sin...leads to death" in v16, 21, 23. Each of these shows us disagreeing with God is a bad experiment.

◇Rafiq Abdul Mortland clearly needed to choose another career. The 38-year-old found that what he was doing put him under pressure, not to mention that the work was illegal. Mortland committed a string of robberies in Hennepin County, Minnesota. After capture, he received a sentence of eight to ten years in prison for holding up eight local businesses.

◇During his crime spree, Mortland received the nickname "The Roloids Robber." This came about after Mortland repeatedly asked store clerks for antacid tablets while the felony was in progress. His explanation? Mortland said he needed the antacid because of the stress that came from committing crimes.

◇*"I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea." ... "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked.""* Isaiah 48:17, 18, 22, NIV.

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◇What is a river like? There's always water there, even though it's always going past. What are the waves like? They just keep coming. There's never an end to the waves.

◇**C.** Here's another thing related to the master we chose: a lot of times in life we who follow God, or struggle to love him well, wonder if we are genuine. Satan whispers to us that "it's all a fantasy", that "religion is man-made", that "you don't really feel anything at all. You're merely going through socially acceptable motions. You're a fraud." Well friends,

◇Real, live good in our lives assures us that God lives and is real. We know he is because we see him changing us. When God has taken away your desire for alcohol, you know God is real by what you see in yourself! When you find a way to bless your neighbor for no reason, you are seeing the reality of God before your own eyes.

◇**4. My good links other people to God.**

◇"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16, NIV.

◇Sin by definition distances us from God, not because he leaves, but because we put do (Isa.59:2). We change ourselves and our world with every act of rebellion, but **also** with every act of righteousness.

◇We saw earlier that good solidifies our relationship with God as we return gratitude for grace given. It is also the case that our good has such an effect on other people as well. We'll address this more another time.

◇**Conclusion:**

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◇Some people kid themselves that they can walk excitedly into a sin on the security of future forgiveness. Maybe they should ask "But will I even want or even accept forgiveness later?"

Forgiveness is not something **forced** upon us like a new set of clothes at gunpoint. For forgiveness of sin to take effect it has to be offered but also accepted! It is not likely that the person not minding her own sin will also be a person accepting forgiveness for it. So we should think again about such crazy rationalizations as "Oh, God will just forgive me later." He may offer. But that type of fellow will probably turn him down.

◇In the end the ones God wants are the ones who give him their hearts, not recitations of certain statements or good performance.

◇So there are a host of reasons why we care about goodness even though it is a response and not a cause of grace.

◇**B.** Lets end with a few practical things for becoming the holy beings were are made in Christ. Two verbs from our text stand out to me:

◇1) Count yourselves: v11. This is so important. The word (logidzomai) is the root of our term "logic"; reason. Ie. "Calculate" it this way. So when you talk to yourself, **tell** yourself the truths of God, right? You've gotten caught, you feel ashamed, you say to yourself "Im a dirtbag. I'll never... I'm not worth..." No, that's the evil one. Remember who you are in Christ and speak who you are! "I am a brother to Jesus. I am loved by the Maker. I am free from the penalty

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of my sin. I am accepted by God because of Christ." Count yourself. Recount the truths.

◇2) Offer your yourselves: v13. One of the best ways to "not offer yourself" to sin, is to give yourself to good. Instead of merely trying to avoid evil, be a person who looks for ways to bless others all the time, any time. Holiness is not merely absence of evil. It is the presence of goodness. Volunteer. Ask if someone needs help. Give. We call that "offer"ing.

◇In 1563 some of our Christian predecessors also struggled with the question we've been asking: why be good if there's grace? Lets close by looking at how they summed it up.

◇(read HC.86)