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How Should We Then Live?

Romans 5:20-6:4

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1. Abounding Grace (5:20-21)
2. Newness of Life (6:1-4)

A little over 40 years ago (in 1976), Francis Schaeffer wrote a very influential book, entitled, "How Should We Then Live?" The subtitle of the book is this: "The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture."

The book is basically a survey of the history of Western Civilization, beginning from Ancient Rome through the Middle Ages--the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment, right on up to our society today.

As he surveyed these eras of history, Schaeffer paid particular attention to the philosophic, scientific and religious ideas that dominated each era of history, because ideas turn into actions. Francis Schaeffer wrote, "There is a flow to history and culture. This flow is rooted and has its wellspring in the thoughts of people. People are unique in the inner life of the mind--what they are in their thought-world determines how they act."

What is true of civilizations and cultures is every bit as true as the sanctifying work of God in the heart. How we think, in great measure, determines how we act.

My message this morning is entitled, "How Should We Then Live?" because this is the question that Paul asks right in the middle of our text. Our passage this morning covers the last two verses of chapter 5 and the first four verses of chapter 6. In this way, it brings us through a transition, not merely between two chapters, but, really, between two major sections of the book of Romans.

If you remember, we have outlined the book of Romans with six words: Sin, Salvation, Sanctification, Security, Sovereignty, and Service.

First, we saw, "Sin." After half a chapter of introduction, Paul begins addressing sin with these words about sin:

Romans 1:18-21

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

In other words, God has made himself known to all men through the creation. And so, all are accountable to the Lord, because they all know the Lord (Romans 1:21). And those who turn away from the truth are under his wrath. Now, the reality is that we all turn aside.

Romans 3:10-12

as it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside;
together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one."

The picture cannot be painted any darker. None of us is righteous. None of us understand. None of us seeks for God. None of us does good. Not even one. But as dark as our sin is, so brightly shines our salvation.

Next, we saw, "Salvation." The transition comes in chapter 3 and verse 21.

Romans 3:21-24

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it--the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

There is the great news of the gospel: through faith in Jesus Christ, we can be justified in God's sight! (3:22). Yes, we have sinned (3:23). But God's grace is greater than our sin (3:24). When we believe, God counts us to be righteous.

This is so contrary to what we might naturally believe. We naturally believe that we must work for our righteousness. If you work, you will be paid. If you do not work, you will not be paid.

But this isn't the way that God deals with our salvation.

Romans 4:4-5

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

In other words, there is nothing that you can do to earn your salvation. It comes by God's free gift of grace through faith. We simply need to believe! We simply need to trust in Jesus, and not in our own works.

His salvation comes to us by grace through faith. Chapter 4 is all about how our salvation comes through faith. Chapter 5 is all about how our salvation comes by grace.

Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, ...

We stand before God, only by his grace.

Years I spent in vanity and pride,
Caring not my Lord was crucified,
Knowing not it was for me He died
On Calvary.

Mercy there was great, and grace was free;
Pardon there was multiplied to me;
There my burdened soul found liberty,
At Calvary.

Do you remember those great salvation summaries in chapter 5?

Romans 5:6-11

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Christ died for us when we were weak (Romans 5:6). Christ died for us when we were sinners (Romans 5:8). Christ died for us when we were his enemies (Romans 5:10). We simply need to believe in him! It cannot be more simple than that!

Well, for the past two weeks we have been looking at two men, who have performed two acts, leading to two results. Adam sinned and brought death to mankind. Jesus was sacrificed on the cross and brought life to mankind.

The summary comes in verses 18 and 19.

Romans 5:18-19

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

And our connection to Adam is just like our connection to Jesus. Adam was our representative. He sinned and so we receive death. Likewise, for those of us who believe, Jesus is our representative. He was righteous and so we receive life through him!

So, we come this morning to verses 20-21 of chapter 5. And these verses will close out the "Salvation" portion of Romans. And in chapter 6, we begin focusing our attention upon "Sanctification."

I chose my text this morning to connect these two themes: Salvation and Sanctification. Because I wanted to point out the connection between these two words. Salvation is the way to be right with God. Sanctification refers to the process of being made holy.

The order of these events is important. We are first saved. Then, we seek sanctification in our lives.

In other words, through our faith in Jesus, God declares us to be righteous and saves us from our sin. We then respond in love to him with efforts at sanctification, becoming more and more like Jesus.

Too often, people mess up the order of these two words. They think that they need to pursue sanctification first. Then, when God sees how

good they are, he will save them. But, this is totally wrong. This will lead to damnation.

The Biblical way is just the opposite. By grace through faith, God forgives us of our sin and justifies us in His sight through the blood of Jesus. And our response is to seek him and grow in our likeness to Him. That's what chapters 6 and 7 are all about.

Don't mess up the order. It is salvation, then sanctification. It is not the other way around!

Well, let's conclude the salvation portion by looking at chapter 5 and verses 20 and 21. By way of outline, I'm calling these verses, ...

1. Abounding Grace (5:20-21)

Look at verse 20, ..

Romans 5:20-21

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Much of the previous section has dealt with Adam. But with verse 20, Adam fades and Moses comes into focus. Particularly, it is the law that comes into focus.

This brings us back to verse 13, where we read, ...

Romans 5:13-14

for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, ...

In other words, though there was no law given in the book of Genesis, the people died. They didn't die because they broke the Mosaic law, for indeed, the Mosaic law wasn't given. In fact, they didn't die because they broke any law. They died because Adam broke the law that was given to him, "... of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:17), and because of their solidarity with him.

But now, in verse 20, Paul brings us into the book of Exodus, where the law was given through Moses. And with the law came an increase in trespass.

Romans 5:20

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, ...

Take it to the bank: with more laws come more transgression.

This is just the way that life works. You put more "Speed Limit" signs up, and drivers will have more opportunity to speed. Where once you could drive 45 miles per hour on that road. But now that the speed limit has been changed to 30 miles per hour, more of the cars crossing that road will be speeding.

The legislature says that seat belts must be worn, then you are giving more drivers opportunity to break the law by not wearing a seat belt.

Parents, you tell your children, "Guys, I'm off on an errand. While I'm gone, I want you to clean the kitchen, vacuum the rugs, make your beds, mow the lawn, and finish your homework." What have you done? You have given them more opportunities to sin by not obeying you. That's just the way that it works.

Now, while the laws of the state may well be arbitrary, the law of God is entirely different. It brings out God's moral compass for the way that we ought to live. The result, however, is not salvation, but despair.

Paul said back in chapter 3 and verse 20, ...

Romans 3:20

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

That is, when you hear and understand what it is that the Lord requires of you, you can see clearly how you fail in those things.

Paul had a love-hate relationship with the law. On the one hand, he affirmed how good the law was. Yet, on the other hand, the law only exposed his own sinfulness. Look at chapter 7 and verse 7.

Romans 7:7-14

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

For Paul, it was that 10th commandment that got him: "You shall not covet." He was doing pretty good on the other nine. In Philippians 3:6, he called himself "blameless" according to the law. Yet, when the commandment came, "You shall not covet," he gained a knowledge of sin. That which wasn't sin to him before now became sin, because "through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).

By the way, did you notice that this was the very purpose for that law. Do you see it?

Romans 5:20

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, ...

You might well translate this verse like this: "The law came in, in order that the trespass would increase." Or, you might say it this way, "the law came in, with the purpose that the trespass would increase."

See, when God gave the Mosaic law, it was never given as a means for salvation for his people. On the contrary, it was given with the purpose that the people of God would become more sinful than ever before.

Now, lest you charge God with evil-doing, look at how Paul finishes verse 20, ...

Romans 5:20

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

And this is where I get my point, Abounding Grace (5:20-21). You might translate it this way, "Now the law came in order to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace super-abounded." That is, whatever detriment the law was in increasing sin, grace more than made up for it.

In other words, when the parent says, "Clean the kitchen, vacuum the rugs, make your beds, mow the lawn, and finish your homework," only to return with few, if any, of these things finished, it's opportunity for grace to come in. It's an opportunity for grace to "super-abound!" By doing those things with your children and for your children!

In the case of the law, increased transgression was an opportunity for God to put his grace-giving nature on display! Rather than condemning, he forgives! And when the sin increases, it's an opportunity for God to show exactly how deep his grace actually is. And we will never exhaust the grace of God in our lives!

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

It's like the widow's jar of oil that kept flowing and flowing and flowing (2 Kings 4:1-7), until it paid all of her debts. It's like the sun that brings its life-giving heat to the earth every day. It's like the hole in the sand that children dig at the lake. Once they reach deep enough to be the level of the lake, they can bail water out of that hole all they want, and it's only going to fill up more and more.

As Ray Ortlund Jr. writes, "When I repent of the very worst sin I will ever commit, I will not find that I have gone beyond the depth of his mercy. No pit of my sin can go deeper than his grace."[^{\[1\]}](#)

Perhaps you remember in Pilgrim's Progress, when Christian came to the home of the interpreter. Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a Fire burning against the wall, and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the Fire burn higher and hotter.

Then said Christian, What means this?

The Interpreter answered, This Fire is the Work of Grace that is wrought in the heart; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the Devil: But in that you see the Fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, you will also see the reason of that. So he had him about to the backside of the wall, where he saw a Man with a Vessel of Oil in his hand, of which, he did also continually cast (but secretly) into the Fire.

Then said Christian, What means this?

The Interpreter answered, This is Christ, who continually with the Oil of His Grace maintains the work already begun in the heart: By the means of which, notwithstanding what the Devil can do, the souls of His people prove gracious still. And in that you saw, that the Man stood behind the wall to maintain the Fire; this is to teach you, That it is hard for the Tempted to see how this Work of Grace is maintained in the soul.

Such is the abounding nature of the grace of God in our lives! It's how Paul ends chapter 5.

Romans 5:21

so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our sin brings us to death, but God's grace is greater. It brings us to life, but not just any life--to eternal life. That's where grace abounds. Not simply restoring us the place from which we fell, but taking us beyond.

See, God's grace doesn't merely allow us to live again. But God's grace grants us life that never ends! eternal life! This is amazing! It's all by his grace!

And then the question comes in chapter 6 and verse 1. This question that heads my message this morning, "How Should We Then Live?"

Romans 6:1

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

Now, any time that Paul asks a question in Romans, it's a great opportunity for us to stop and think. And our question is this: "Why did Paul ask this question?"

Because, if we understand why Paul asked the question, then we are understanding the passage correctly. And it's also instructive to see how he answers the question. Because in answering the question, he can further clarify our misunderstanding. Just in case we didn't really understand what he said.

Here's the background to Paul's question: He has just presented the marvelous grace of God in Christ as being so free and so vast and limitless. And it comes to us in such an easy way: by faith alone. He has just presented the abounding grace of God to any sin we commit!

And so, the question comes: should we not worry about sinning. Because we know that we will be forgiven! And we know that God's grace will abound to us! Perhaps, we should even sin intentionally that God's grace would abound to us! Who doesn't like grace? Grace is good for us! Grace magnifies the character of God!

Paul simply says, ...

Romans 6:2

By no means!

Other translations say it this way: "Absolutely not!" (HCSB). "May it never be!" (NASB). "God forbid." (KJV). "Certainly not!" (NKJV). "I should hope not!" (The Message). To put it in the vernacular, "No way, Jose!"

Then, notice how he answers, ...

Romans 6:2

By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

What is instructive about this answer is that in no way did Paul try to clarify what he said, or limit it in any way. For instance, he didn't say, "By no means! Don't you know that your salvation rests partly upon what you do?" He didn't say, "By no means! Don't you know that faith and works that bring you to salvation?" He didn't say, "By no means! Don't you know that there is a limit to God's grace."

Paul didn't answer in any of these ways. Rather, he points us to our union with Christ. Just as we were joined to Adam in his sin, so we are joined to Christ in his work on the cross.

Romans 6:2

... How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Verses 3 and 4 further link us in union with Christ.

Romans 6:3-4

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.

It is here that we see my second point.

2. Newness of Life (6:1-4)

It comes in verse 4, "... we too might walk in newness of life." Note that Paul (in no way) pulls back anything that he said in chapters 3 4 and 5 about our salvation. He stands on everything he has said. It's by grace through faith! It comes to us freely, apart from our works!

The best way to understand this is that grace changes us. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). And being in Christ means that we have a new life! We will live differently.

We won't live in our former, dead ways. We will live in new and different ways. Abounding Grace (5:20-21) leads to Newness of Life (6:1-4).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 30, 2017 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] A Passion for God, Raymon C. Ortlund, Jr., p. 84