

Redeeming Life from Dead Desires

Romans 6:1-14

Introduction:

Christmastime always produces an interesting juxtaposition of belief and worldview wrapped up into one celebration. We scroll through beloved Christmas songs that move from "joy to the Lord" because the Lord has come to a people who walked in darkness, to "being good for goodness sake" because Santa is coming to town (NOTE: this is no statement on what songs you listen to or enjoy at Christmas). Most can function in this tension because we see these competing worldviews in light of the truth, or we simply ignore what they are actually saying. The hope that we have with our kids, our neighbors, and at some point with ourselves is that we have the "Wait -- what?" moment. Here's what I mean.

In a recent article for *"The Gospel Coalition"*, Trevin Wax showed how this tension takes place during this time of year. He recounted a conversation that took place on *The View* (notice, please, that this was an article I read, not a show I watched...not that there's anything wrong with watching it) as they discussed a billboard put up by the *American Atheists*, which said, **"Go ahead and skip church. Be good for goodness' sake"**. Of course, being the bastion of theology that it is, the participants on the show had to talk about it. One used it to talk about the real meaning of goodness. Another was put out and thought we should just leave people alone. And still another said not to worry because Christmas means whatever it means to you. After this a 30 year old actress weighed in and stated that it didn't matter if you believe in Jesus, Allah, or Hindu gods or no gods at all, but what matters is that you try to be a good person. *"That's what all religions are about anyway."*

"Candace and Paula immediately push back. "That's not true." Raven is taken aback by the disagreement. *"You don't think all religions are about being a good person?"* "

"Not Christianity". explained Paula. *"It's by grace through faith."*

Suddenly , both Joy and Raven looked puzzled. Its as if the announcement of grace has stunned the panel. It's a "Wait ---what?" moment.

"It's by grace through faith you have been saved. It's nothing we can do."¹

That is the story that we celebrate, and Jesus' birth made it all possible. We left last week with some bleak, bad news: all people stand condemned because of our sin. We are under wrath, deserve judgment, and had no hope in ourselves. As we make our way through the message of Romans we see that it is *"faith that justifies us"* (5:1), and we obtain access by faith into this grace in which we stand (5:2), that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (5:8) and were saved by Christ *from the wrath of God* (5:9). It was through His death that reconciled us to God and saved us, by which we reconciliation (5:10-11). We entered into sin because of one man, ADAM, but receive grace through one man, Jesus (5:12-14). Grace is given through this second man, a free gift of His righteousness for those who believe (5:15-17).

This message is simultaneously glorious and disconcerting. If we were to bank on our own goodness, we would always fall short. If we banked on our own effort, we wouldn't have enough strength. If we trusted our own righteousness we would only deserve judgment. So salvation by grace alone, apart from our effort or works, is the best news ever produced. However, it is also disconcerting. It's not only

¹ <http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/trevinwax/2015/12/15/the-view-debates-being-good-and-the-gospel/>

hard to believe that belief is enough, but we by nature want to add something to the mix. Historically, there have been problems and misunderstandings of this freeing gospel that leave people thinking they need to "**be good for goodness' sake.**"

There are two extremes that we swing to in this misunderstanding: **obedience (law) does not matter, or conformity to the moral law is necessary to maintain godliness.** The first misunderstands the call of the gospel to follow Jesus into all that He taught, while the second falls short in understanding the power of God's grace.

This is no small issue, nor is it a new one. At stake at Christmas (and all time) is what real salvation is and where the **power to change is sourced.** We not only want to reconfirm our trust in Christ alone that He brings salvation by grace by faith alone, but also how we overcome the sin that weighs us down: our sin, our struggles, our brokenness, our inability to move forward, and our perpetual weakness to do all of this on our own.

Misunderstanding of Grace & Holiness (1)

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

This is a rhetorical device that Paul uses often throughout Romans, posing a question the reader was asking or would ask. There is a great amount of logic and practical wisdom in this question, and one that anyone who has wrestled with the gospel has asked at some level.

- **Logical reasons**

The logic goes something like this: if God is glorified by justifying sinner by His grace alone, then wouldn't sinning **more** bring Him **more** glory?!

- **Practical reasons**

The practical reasons are those that are not as thought through but act on the same premise. If we are saved by grace alone, then it does not matter how much we sin. Sinning is secondary, and there will always be forgiveness in His grace. This subtly (or not too subtly) exposes the insidious nature of our heart and shows that we want it both ways: we want salvation in Christ alone but want to continue to do whatever we want to. Paul spends time clarifying this issue not because it is a minor issue, but because he understands that nature of all of our hearts. We are geared for the **path of least resistance**, finding the lowest, easiest, and most pain free way to get what we want. We remember that the gift of grace is free but not opposed to **effort**; not effort to earn grace but to live in light of it. Paul clarifies in the next sentence the point of the rest of the chapter:

Death to sin means we no longer live in it (2) because:

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

"By no means" is a statement of negative emphasis. The nature of salvation is **death**. The death of Christ, our death in Christ, so that we can die to our sin. All of this matters then, in terms of *how we live*. True freedom comes from and through death. So Paul gives three main reasons why salvation demands obedience at all levels, and grace gives us the strength and power to actually do it.

1. We have died with Christ (3-4)

*Do you not know that all of us who have **been baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into his **death**? 4 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**.*

- **In the picture of baptism**

Baptism is a surprising picture to give of death, but makes sense when contextually understood. Here Paul is NOT referring to the actual ceremony of baptism (though readers would understand baptism from this perspective), but what is representative in baptism.

"In the first century, while the verb could denote this ceremony and Paul certainly means that here, to 'baptize' evoked associations of violence. It meant 'immerse' rather than 'dip'. It was used, for example, of people being drowned, or of ships being sunk."²

The ceremony of baptism takes place at the beginning of our following Christ, and the picture of baptism comes right at the beginning. It means death, death to a whole way of life. It means death to our life without Christ. Christ's death was essential to allow Him to justify sinful man, and our death was essential for us to enter into that justified life. Coming to Christ by faith means death, which also connotes a new beginning.

- **Identified with Him in death**

Not only does salvation mean death, it means that we are uniquely identified WITH Christ. Notice that we were buried **into** Christ but are **buried with Him by baptism into death**. Burial emphasizes completeness and finality of death. But there is something greater than this. We are united with Christ into His death to assure that we are uniquely united with Him in His resurrection. We are raised **by the glory of the Father**, who was the One who raised Christ from the dead (Acts 3:14).

THE POINT: All of this is so that we will walk in a way that is completely new. Death brings about something new. We were alone and now we are united with Christ. Our old life is dead and buried, gone forever, and now what is resurrected is new for eternity.

2. **We have died to our old self (5-11)**

*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. 6 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. 7 For one who has died has been set free² from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

- **Death by crucifixion**

The type of death we experience is a specific one. Crucifixion was a painful, public ordeal that was not only total but excruciating. Seditious to Rome were placed in a public place to dissuade others thinking about revolt. Crucifixion meant that Christ was lifted up becoming a curse and putting Himself in our place. He died the death we deserved. But our unity with Him meant that our life is so fused with Him that we no longer can see our old life but can only see His. We are so fused together that we are no

² Leon Morris, "The Epistle of Romans", p. 246.

longer living independently but dependently on Christ, and for His glory alone. This is what Paul explained in Galatians 2:20:

"I have been crucified with Christ with Christ. 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

- **United with Christ in resurrection**

The type of unity we experience is the type that comes when one tree is grafted into another (like when a plum and apricot forms the revolutionary fruit named the "pluot" - it took marketing a long time to come up with that one). Our life in Christ is not self-originated, but comes from Christ. The idea that we "become" united is a perfect tense verb, which means something permanent. When we become united with Christ, grafted into Him, there is no turning back. It is a forever kind of thing.

Now, all of this is not without purpose. There are clear implications for us now that we are alive in Christ (and that will help us today and tomorrow).

Resulting in

Freedom from enslavement

..."so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin."

We are no longer slaves to sin (v. 6). Sin not only affected our desires and actions, but it actually put us into chains. We believed the lie that sin would satisfy, and in experiences a measure of satisfaction, we continued to chase that fulfillment. As the chase continued, the knot around our necks and the chains were fused. This type of slavery meant that we could not get free on our own, and were without hope. Our death in Christ, however, freed us from sin. Our chains are gone, we've been made free. The weight of blame and shame are gone.

Freedom from the reign and power of sin

..."death no longer has dominion over him. For the death He died He died to sin once for all."

Death and sin had power over us because they had rights over us. "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law". (1 Cor. 15:56). The power that sin held was the power of death, and we were always under its shadow, no matter what we did or how we tried. When Christ resurrected from the dead, it signaled that we will never die again. When death lost its power, so did sin. What is the result? *We no longer are under obligation to sin!* We now have choice in the matter. Before Christ redeemed my soul, my sin was a choice that was already made for me, since sin had power and reign over me. Once the power of sin is broken, the power to choose flooded in. This means that though I still live in the flesh and still face temptation from within, I absolutely have a choice whether or not I act on that sin. I now have a choice whether to act in obedience in righteousness or in sin. Grace gives me the power and means to make this choice.

Freedom from how we consider ourselves

"...So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Two words jump out from the page. The first is the word "*must*", which clearly shows that this is not an optional step for a follower of Jesus but something commanded and demanded. The second is the word

"consider". This word conveys the idea of reckoning, calculating, or recognizing. It means that we have a radical new way that we view ourselves in light of our sin. Our sin is present, but it is now a foreign concept and experience. The light of grace has shown through, the power of sin is broken, and we now have free choice. Its like we were living in an iron mask but now it has been taken off, with its weight, burden, and limitations taken off. Not only are we free, but we are now living **in Christ**, safe, secure, in His hand.

This means that the battle of sin starts in our mind. We must remember our position, who we are, and the truth of the reality of our sin. When sin calls us with its siren call, we can see through it, distinguishing the lie that it tells. The way to live freely in grace is to think rightly about it.

3. **We have died to sins root and fruit (12-14)**

*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, **to make you obey its passions**. 13 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. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace*

- **Died to the root of sin - our desires**

There are two final great realities of living by the grace of God. Grace frees us from the sinful desires and passions that we face. The broken reality we live in is the fact that sin has affected every part of this world: creation, life and death, our bodies, minds, and even desires. That means that even our desires, affections, and emotions, though created by God to glorify Him, have been tainted by sin to the point that we cannot trust them and they can lead us into unrighteousness. Our passions (here, the word lusts or desires) will demand that we obey them. The force is strong with them. Our actions will often follow what we desire. Grace will not only allow us NOT to follow our passions, it will redeem them. It will move us from desiring things that are impure to those that are pure, sinful things to righteous, and from dead to living.

But we must remember this: 1) This does not happen overnight, especially when sinful desires have been cultivated for years of time. This means that we must be patient in our pursuit, remembering who we are. 2) Fleshly desires will ALWAYS want to remind us, convince us, and deceive us into thinking that it has power to control us. Death to sin means our desires NO LONGER CONTROL US. We do not have to obey them.

- **Died to the fruit of sin - our actions**

Desires do not mean we must act on them. In fact, the battle for righteousness starts with battling for affections for Christ. This is what a life of repentance looks like. We turn from presenting our bodies and minds as instruments for sin into instruments of righteousness. When we do this, sin becomes clear, its pull gets weak, and moving away from it becomes possible. That is why pursuing Christ is the solution for health in every relationship. That principle is illustrated in marriage. Proverbs 5 says how do we uncover the call of an adulterous woman? By being satisfied in the wife of our youth. We uncover the conspiracy of sin by thinking rightly and pursuing what is true, better, and truly satisfying.

What does this all mean for redeeming relationships:

Death to sin in the gospel of grace redeems

- **Marriage** - Remembering and living out the reality of our death and resurrection in Christ qualifies us to redeem marriage from the sinful realities stacked against us

- **Broken past** - We remember that our past has died and been buried with Christ, a something new has been raised. This helps give us the power to **forgive**, because there has been payment made for sin.
- **Present struggles** - Grace gives us the power to say "no" to acting out on our desires. By remembering who we are, the reality of our position in Christ, and the ability of the gospel to change our desires, we can move toward Christ away from sin:

By turning continually from our sin - by turning to Christ and pursuing obedience

By saying "no" to sin daily - because we can

By praying and waiting for our desires to change - It may not be all at once, but God God can and will change us into conformity of Christ.

The other night I slept on the couch with several different sick kids working through their illness. I was awoken early and my daughter asked if she could go to the bathroom (I run my house like a prison, apparently - they have to ask the warden to use the potty). As my daughter walked back to the couch in the darkness, her eyes were still adjusting from the light. My eyes were still adjusted in the darkness to watch her walk slowly, legs in a marching manner, trying not to hit anything in front of her. She stumbled, was awkward, and made slow progress. It was a vivid picture (as vivid as it can be at o'dark thirty) of what happens when the light comes, but we walk back into the darkness. Instead of seeing things clearly, we stumble back in the darkness and everything becomes more difficult. The key to walking by grace is having the "wait...what?" moment. That we think rightly and live purposely to the reality that we have died to sin, death does not reign, and we are now "in Christ".

Merry Christmas!