

May 17-18, 2014
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Eureka Faith Center
NCBI/Redwood ELN Graduation
Teresa Repair commissioning
Postscript to the Prodigal Son - Romans 6

Introduction

So there was this guy who grew up in the Silicon Valley. When he turned 18 he demanded his inheritance (share of his wealthy father's estate) and he moved to Humboldt County with his girlfriend to live out his dream of growing marijuana in the hills while making as much money as possible, staying high as much as possible and working as little as possible. He quickly made friends, began a life of non-stop partying, started his own grow, began trading other "commodities", and then things started going south. His new "friends" stole his first crop. This was devastating. A home invasion left him beaten to a pulp and they took all the cash he had left. His girlfriend OD'd on heroin leaving him heartbroken, massively in debt, paranoid, homeless, and unable to even get a job as a dishwasher.

He ends up cleaning out stables at a ranch in Ferndale where the ranch owner lets him live in a tent on the property. One rainy night, when he is feeling absolutely at his worst, he thinks "I should try to go back home. I could work for my dad as a custodian at his tech company, rent a room, and I would be way better off than I am right now."....(you know how the story goes). The fact of the matter is that this is our story. The circumstances are different, but the basic plotline is the same.

The Postscript: Today I want to share with you a hypothetical postscript to the story: Two years pass by and things are good at dad's place. He is back in the mansion and he has everything he needs. His older brother still is a little self righteous, but besides that, things are good. Then it all begins with a thought, temptation: "On the one hand I never want to leave this place. On the other hand, there are aspects of that life out there that I actually enjoyed before I "crashed". It was exciting. Perhaps I can sneak out for just a night. I know that some of those old friends of mine would love to party with me again. I will not go as far as I did in the past. I'll just go for a weekend. If I get caught by my dad, I am sure he'll still love me. I'm convinced he'll take me back in." So steals a stack of cash from his own dad and takes off for the weekend...When comes back it's no secret what went on. He is haggard and hung over. This starts a pattern. Every week... But the old man is no fool. He is not one to enable destructive behavior.

The serial prodigal doesn't realize it, but he is killing himself. His life has taken a turn down a painful road. He becomes physically sick. He misses out on having a family of

his own, but he will never know that. He is absent from the holiday dinners and the parties and the vacations the father has for him. The rich relationship that he had known with his family becomes cold. Walls are built up. Smiles are fake. The hurt deepens.

The prodigal son settles into a life far below the Father's will and his own personal happiness is compromised, diminished and his future is literally destroyed by his choices. Choices made because of a misunderstanding of grace.

Is this story outrageous? Far fetched? Or is this our story?

Have we ever applied the axiom "It's better to ask for forgiveness than permission" to our relationship with God? I think if we're honest, we will all find ourselves in the postscript to *The Prodigal Son*.

The profoundest of all the freedoms given to us by God – is the freedom to choose between good and evil, between right and wrong, between better and best, between acceptable and great.

We have been given an equal opportunity through grace. (Grace: The unmerited (unearned/undeserved) favor of God).

His grace gives us the opportunity and the potential for good or evil as followers of Jesus. In that place of moral responsibility and decision, we make constant choices and our choices echo into eternity.

Knowing our sinful nature, and the power of the freedom that we have been given, God addresses this issue frequently and directly in Scripture.

Romans 5 makes it clear that in Christ, grace now reigns - God's favor allows for forgiveness and righteousness. Romans 6 then points us to our responsibility.

Romans 6

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be

slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Let's just take this passage as fact. It is very clear:

I. I am dead to sin

This passage states what has taken place in the spiritual realm. When we become Christians by choosing to follow Jesus, our sinful nature is issued a death certificate, because of the death of Christ.

It is a legal document. It has to do with what Jesus did.

The only life now expressed by our sinful nature isn't really life. It's an expression of death in us. It's that sinful nature becoming the "un-dead". But this doesn't change the fact that it's dead, by God's own declaration.

Because of this...

I no longer "live in" sin.

• I have a new address

It is common to hear the term "living in sin", either as a joke or as a way of describing a person who has chosen to walk away from grace and chosen a life that is inconsistent with Christian living.

We can't live in sin if we have died to sin. Imagine for a moment that your life is a city that has two neighborhoods. One neighborhood is "sin" and the other one is "Christ". We grew up in sin. Our old house is still there. We have many old friends there. We have many memories there. It is a place of death, crime and lawlessness. We were dying there and Jesus came, rescued us and relocated us in "Christ". He put us in a clean neighborhood with healthcare, education, good people, family and safety. He gives us the freedom to walk across town if we want. In fact, our house there remains vacant and furnished.

With a new house over here in "Christ" shall I leave it and go back to the shack that I grew up in? Shall I continue to allow issues of sin in my life because of grace? Absolutely not! Yet in spite of the clarity of the Word of God, many of us do this very thing. This passage is directly addressing a common mistake that many Christians make and many have made historically.

It's the notion that if we have grace, then we don't need to worry about our behaviors because we can always rely on that grace. We can go back and forth between "in Christ" and "in sin".

Some have called this "cheap grace" and it is the doctrine or belief of Christians whose lives do not reflect their stated beliefs.

There is a fascinating figure in Russian history by the name of Rasputin. He was murdered in 1916, but prior to that he exercised great influence on the Russian Monarchy just before it collapsed. He was a Russian Orthodox mystic who taught the Bible and was thought to be a faith healer, but he definitely lived a very carnal life.

His believed and taught that spiritual salvation lay through repentance: There could be none without sin to precede it, and by being very promiscuous, he supplied God-fearing women with this essential prerequisite - the opportunity, by sinning, to then receive grace.

This was also the mistake of the Corinthian church, and it is a mistake today. It is expressed in many excuses: "God will forgive me." "He understands". "I'm not strong in that area but God loves me anyway." You cannot say these kinds of things without going directly against the Word of God in Romans 6.

Shall we go on sinning, so that grace can increase? "By no means".

He then reminds us of our baptism:

- **Baptism was the burial (interment) of my sin.**

It was the funeral service. Baptism symbolizes the spiritual reality of the death of sin. Tomorrow is our baptism class. If you haven't been baptized yet, go to the class and get baptized. It's where you say, "You're dead to me sin. Bye bye forever".

- **I am justified – just as if I had never sinned**
With this death, new life begins. The books are clear. The sins of my past are erased.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

- II. **I am alive to God** I am not just dead to sin, I am alive to God. (The reality of "new life" (vss. 11-14)). New life has started. Who or what "reigns" in this new life? It sounds like its up to us to determine who will rule. I have to offer myself to God in order to live in that reality. I am capable of still offering myself to sin but why would I want to do that?

- I pledge allegiance to a new king. I now have to offer my total allegiance to a new king - “reigns” I have experienced my own regime change. Now, I have a new focus.

- “New Life” is more about what I pursue than what I deny.

If we spend all of our time focused on what we are not supposed to do, we will be miserable. I could make a list of all the things I am not supposed to do and Christianity would look really miserable. I could get depressed looking at the list and I would be tempted by all the “do nots”.

But instead, my focus is on what I am called to pursue: Love God. Love people. Do what is right. And remember, our God is a God of grace!

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ ~~Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?~~ ¹⁷ ~~But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.~~ ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

III. (vs. 15 repeats vs 1): I am under grace.

- Not a license to sin (permission) - Titus 2:11-12 (Illustrate)
- Not an excuse to keep sinning

Grace doesn't give us the freedom to sin. Grace gives us freedom from sin.

Illustrate: Randall Lee Church, at 18, he was locked up for murder. It was 1983. Ronald Reagan was president. Cordless phones were modern technology. McDonald's had just introduced the Chicken McNugget. Inside his small, gray cell within the Texas prison system, Church forgot the world and it forgot him. Stepping out to freedom, “I didn't know how to use computers or cell phones or the Internet,” Church said. “The weirdest thing was walking into a store, like Walmart, and have parents hide their children from me, like I was supposed to jump at them.” Fed up on July 10, 96 days after his release, he poured gasoline through a window of the empty house on the Southeast Side, then threw in flaming rags and paper towels, setting the place on fire. Days later, he told police he did it because he wanted to go back to his job at his former prison unit. Most former inmates confront some measure of fear or anxiety upon release, experts say. They tend to have low levels of education, few job skills and high incidences of mental

health and substance-abuse issues. Many have no money or family and struggle to find affordable housing and social services.

This is sad and tragic! He was so comfortable with his life in prison that he couldn't adapt to a life of freedom. Old patterns are hard to break.

It is possible for us to go from freedom in Christ back into the slavery of sin or of legalism. Enjoy your true freedom!

I am not just talking about the "big sins" - criminal behavior, drug addiction or use, sexual deviancy, abuse ,etc. I am talking about little sins, like harboring a grudge. Like gossip. Like self righteousness. Like unchecked anger. Like the sins of the tongue. Like being a workaholic which is often a lack of trust in God. Like having to be in control. Like having pride that keeps me from apologizing. The Lord wants me to apply this to today's struggles, however great or small they are. Be free from the little issues.

¹⁹ I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

IV. Grace gives:

- Motivation for a life of "holiness" – a life set apart
- Freedom from slavery to destructive choices. Key word: "destructive"
- Grace doesn't make it easy to sin. It is meant to make sin very difficult– "I have been ruined for sin". I can't enjoy it anymore. It messes up my relationship with God. I destroys my life. I used to be able to get away with it. Not anymore.
- Now I am bound to doing good. I can't help doing good. I can't help loving people. Grace doesn't give me a license to sin. It gives me a license to love and to do good.
- Life over death now -- (Read the last verse again) "Eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" – Let Him reign over sin in your life. Revolt against it. Live free in the pursuit of the good and the great things of life.

Conclusion/Application

Go back to the Prodigal story - The Father comes in and says, "I need to talk to you." You immediately feel nervous. You feel busted. He sits you down and looks you

straight in the eyes. "I know what you've been doing on the weekends and it has to stop." "Are you changing the locks? Do you want my keys? Are you kicking me out?" No. But here is the deal: You are hurting yourself and I'm afraid that one of these times you are not going to make it home. You're hurting other people. You're breaking my heart. You're missing out on the better things of life. Are you ready to change?

That is the question. Are you ready to grow? ***Grace motivates us to do right.***

What then?

- Identify any areas of sin and struggle that you tolerate or justify
- Receive His grace (forgiveness through repentance)
- Joyfully do what is right (righteous) This is not the drudgery of denial but rather it is the freedom and the joy of doing right.

N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone – Romans Part One*.

F. F. Bruce *Romans* – Tyndale NT Commentaries.

C. E. B. Canfield *Romans – A Shorter Commentary*

Rienecker and Rogers – *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*