

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
June 22, 2008

From Sin to Grace

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for the sermon this morning comes from the Epistle which was read earlier.

I have bad news to report this morning. This may come to a shock to people. **I am a sinner.** Yes, that's right. Your pastor is a sinner. It's not something that I'm proud of but it's something that you need to know about me. Now, is there something that you would like to confess to me? Let me help. **"I, insert name here, am a sinner."** I know that it's difficult for all of us to say, but it's something that we have to admit, not only to one another, but to ourselves. Once we admit that we are sinners, we can truly understand what God has given to us because of our sin: grace.

Though we have received grace, Paul asks a wonderful question to the Romans: *"Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"* It's a good question to ask. If you think about what Paul is saying, then it would be smart for a person to sin: the more that you sin, the more grace that you receive. If we use that line of thought, the less sin we commit, then the less grace we would receive. Who wouldn't want a large measure of grace in their lives?

Paul does not focus on the more you sin, the more grace you receive. Instead, he focuses on the fact that we should do all that we can **NOT** to sin. The old lusts are still present in the community: pride, greed, envy, bitterness, sensuality, gluttony, apathy. Their source is in the desires of the flesh. They promise life but deliver death. If baptism

did not exist, their fatal deception would still triumph through the reign of sin. Sin reigns in deception by compelling obedience to these lusts. For the baptismal community this obedience has been broken and makes no sense. Having emerged from the baptismal waters, it knows a Lord greater than death, a reign greater than sin, and a truth greater than deception. It can therefore be exhorted to submit itself in obedience to the risen Lord.

It would be useless to tell sinners not to let this powerful king, sin, reign over them, whether in their mortal bodies or in the rest of their being; sinners could not prevent the sin's reigning over them. But Christians who have died to sin, who are alive to God, they can prevent the sin's reigning so that they no longer are slaves to sin. How is this done? How does a Christian prevent sin from reigning over them? It is not anything that the sinner does themselves; rather, it is Christ Jesus who has done all the work for the sinner.

For many, if not all of us, we don't need to go looking for sin; it has a tendency to find us. We should flee from sin, yet instead we run to it. We should be disgusted by sin, yet instead we frolic in it. Why do we do what we do when it comes to sin? The answer is simple: sin leads us to sin. Sin makes us do those things that are contrary to the Word of God. That is the purpose of sin, to lead us away from God. Sin does a very good job of that. Satan can rejoice in the work of sin and its separation of God and His people.

That is not how God desires to see His children. He does not rejoice when He sees His people sinning, from the greatest of sins to the least. He does not rejoice when He sees the effects that sin has on His children. Paul tells us in our text to "*present*

yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.” There is something important that we must keep in mind here: there is nothing that we can do to present ourselves to God. It is not by our words, it is not by our actions. It is by the actions of Jesus Christ, working for us. It is by His life, death, and resurrection. It is by our baptism into Christ, the act of us being made children of God, that we are able to be presented to God. Through this act, we are brought from death to life; death to our sins which eternally separate us from God to new life in Christ which brings us everlasting life.

All of this is done by grace: unmerited favor given to us by God. We don't deserve it, yet God has chosen to give to each and every one of us the greatest gift that one could ever have: the gift of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Paul asks the same question twice in chapter six of Romans, once at the beginning and now again in our text: are we to continue sinning for the sake of grace. He restates the fact that appears in our text: *“you are not under law but under grace.”* For Paul, this is the defining point that he is trying to make.

There is a strong inclination to think that law stops sinning, that unless we have at least some law, we shall not be kept from sinning, even when we are under the fullness of grace; that grace alone is insufficient for this purpose. For this reason, so many Christians are legalists, striving to keep every law and commandment that has come out of the mouth of the Lord, in the hopes that they will have done enough by life's end to achieve salvation. On the other hand, some are inclined to think that, since grace pardons sins so freely, one need not be so careful about not sinning; a few sins more or less make

no difference to grace which will take care of the additional sins. However, that is not what Scripture teaches. Scripture teaches that we are to flee from sin. When we do sin, we are to confess our sins and to seek that forgiveness which comes through Christ's death. We do not disregard our sinfulness, thinking that grace will overshadow our sins.

We, who were once slaves to sin, *“having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”* Paul has most emphatically said that our deliverance from sin was no less than having our old man crucified with Christ. Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified. Jesus Himself wanted to be delivered, wanted to be crucified for the sake of our sins. We too have been delivered by being made slaves, slaves to righteousness, obeying as slaves, obeying the voice of our Master, God the Father, who speaks His Word of forgiveness to each and every one of us.

Of all the points that Paul makes in all of his letters, the most pointed one comes at the end of our text: *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* There are two outcomes for a person: death or eternal life. Prior to the Fall, there was no such thing as death. After the Fall, death became a new and added aspect to creation which was not intended. Death is the ultimate result of sin. Adam earned these wages for himself and for us. The full and final payment is made to each sinner, every man, woman, and child, when they reach their earthly end.

However, there is another gift that is given, the gift of eternal life. This gracious gift of eternal life is ours by way of a gift already given to us the moment we believe and are justified, the moment we die to sin and become alive to God.

Death is not only the inevitable consequence of sin, it is what sin deserves. The

wages of sin is death. Eternal life, by contrast, is not what anyone deserves. Having emerged from the waters of baptism, no thanks to ourself and our shameful bondage to sin, we have been transferred to a new Lord, to a new set of loyalties, obligations, and allegiances, to a new future, and therefore to a new form of life even now. This is the grace of God, given to you, for the sake of Jesus. In the name of Jesus, amen. Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, amen.