

“At The End of the Day: Does Grace Give Me License to Sin?”
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Grace to you and peace...(Begin Singing)Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound...

I have often heard Christians speak of John Newton's powerful story: how he was once a slave trader who was gripped by God's love in the midst of a tumultuous storm on the high seas. We hear the story and assume that Newton turned immediately from his sin after that awful storm in 1748, and then sat down to write, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." His blind eyes may have been opened on that dismal night, but not wide enough. Upon his return to Liverpool, Newton promptly signed on as mate of another ship and sailed to Africa, where the Christian traveled from village to village buying human beings and returning them as cargo. He then sailed across the Atlantic, studying a Latin Bible in his quarters as 200 slaves lay in the hull, shackled two by two, squeezed into shelves like secondhand books. As many as a third died during the long voyage across the ocean, and many more suffered serious illnesses. When the ship arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, Newton delivered these men, women, and children into a life of toil and oppression while he sat in church services and took leisurely strolls through fields and woods outside Charleston. It is not as difficult to see the mess in others' lives as it is to see the mess in our own. For years, Newton had no notion that slavery was evil—few Christians of his day did.

Part of our mess is not knowing we are a mess. Most of us in contemporary life have never participated in the evil of slavery, never been convicted of a felony, never abused a child. Sometimes we don't feel a pressing need for grace because we do not see our sin as particularly troublesome. Both social science and theology help explain why this is so. Social science research indicates that most people think they are better than others—more ethical, considerate, industrious, cooperative, fair, and loyal. People think they obey the Ten Commandments more consistently than others. One polling expert noted, "It's the great contradiction: the average person believes he is a better person than the average person."

Today we are dealing with the bottom line answer to the question of grace...and how it frees us from sin...and if we are saved by Jesus' blood, is it necessary for us then to keep the commandments, to attempt to live a godly life. Since God is willing to forgive anyway...what's to prevent us from sinning so that God might have more to forgive?! There are two sides of this coin...two directions that have taken Christians off course over the years...two directions which deal with this issue of grace and sin.

1) The first is **Legalism**...this thought is that Christians must follow a certain set of rules and fulfill the law once they are saved...if you are saved, it will show it by how you live your life...and if you fail to live a certain standard of life you are outside of the kingdom of Christ... The Bible is abundantly clear that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 14:6). A person is saved by faith - faith alone. The moment a person believes in Jesus Christ, they are saved and secure in that salvation. Salvation is not gained by faith, but then maintained by works. The Apostle Paul address this issue in **Galatians 3:3, "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"** If we are saved by faith, our salvation is also maintained and secured by faith. It is God who maintains our salvation (Jude verse 24). It is God's hand that holds us firmly in His grasp (John 10:28-29). It is God's love that nothing can separate us from (Romans 8:38-39).

It is only by God's pure and unfettered grace, as demonstrated once for all through Jesus Christ, that we are made something else -- righteous -- **not by avoiding sin, but by trusting him.** Sometimes it seems, the church promises grace, then delivers condemnation. The church headlines the gospel, then expounds good behavior. Jesus did not bring another religion. He brought the gospel, which is good news for sinners, which we all are. For the sake of Christ, God has thrown away all the report cards, homework records and detention notes in the world and given everyone who believes a 4.0 GPA and a gold-plated invitation to eternal life. Only some of us, it seems, "don't want no charity." We have been good Christians, and we don't want to be lumped in with a bunch of immoral losers who do nothing more than put their trust in the Christ we have worked so hard for so long to imitate and obey. (We thank you, O God, that we are not like the rest of people, greedy, dishonest, adulterous or, like this embezzler here)

Take a challenge: give up the charade. Quit pretending to be worthy and righteous, admit you are a hopeless sinner without anything to your credit, and put your trust in Jesus Christ, for whose sake God justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5).

2)The second dis-course the church has gotten itself into would be called **“License to sin”**...since Christ has saved me, I can do whatever I please... So, with all that's been said so far, does this mean that a Christian can live anyway they want to and still be saved? The Bible says about Christians...**there is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).** In response to the accusation that grace promotes sin, the Apostle Paul declared, **"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"** (Romans 6:1-2). Knowing and understanding God's tremendous gift of salvation accomplishes the opposite of giving a "license" to sin. Knowing the price Jesus Christ paid for us how can we go on to live a life of sin (Romans 6:15-23)? How could anyone who understands God's unconditional and guaranteed love for those who believe, take that love and throw it back in God's face? A person who has accepted Jesus Christ as his or her Savior **"can" live a sinful life - but he or she "will" not do so.**

The primary principle that should guide every Christian is one of total love and surrender to the perfect will of God. The question is NOT, "Does God forbid this?" Instead, the first question is, **"How will this affect my relationship with God, and my witness to the lost?"** Will I grow closer or further away from Jesus if I engage in this activity or thought process? TO BE LIKE JESUS! Is this the all-consuming vision that directs your life?

But the truth is that while I will to do what Jesus wants me to...I cannot do it...**the problem is my sinful nature**...listen to the apostle Paul in **Romans 7:15-24** **"I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate.** 16 I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. 18 I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. 19 When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. 20 But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it. 21 It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? F24 25 Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord."

When I look at MYSELF honestly, I see my sin as Paul sees his. I micromanage, consume more than my share of resources, and harbor bitterness from past losses. I hoard my time and resent others for intruding on it. I am vain and consumed with how others perceive me. I wrestle with my sexuality and have strayed away from my wife, with my eyes and my heart. I think more about being great than about being good. I act more spiritual than I am. I am a mess—broken in every way—and my only hope is in God's mercy. It is sin within me that does it Paul says, Satan's work to destroy the very things most meaningful to me in my life: my relationship with my wife, family, God, ministry...I have been socialized in a therapeutic language that proclaims "I'm okay, you're okay." Our culture is fascinated with the cult of self-esteem. Many have become adept at polishing the steel of the defensive armor, but the inner self still longs for love more than self-love, for grace more than impressions, for authenticity more than admiration. Beneath the armor of our pride, we live as vulnerable men and women longing to be loved and known. **Our hope is found in cautiously shedding the armor and clinging to the possibility of amazing grace.** If we will be honest here for a moment...all of us who believe in Jesus Christ, will admit that we continue to sin, even though we have given our hearts to him...

Like most of us, Newton came to his senses slowly. Newton's biography is hauntingly familiar to my Christian journey. We fall short of God's desire for our lives. Our disordered passions do not suddenly become ordered with a flash of insight or a spiritual awakening. Becoming like Jesus is a lifelong calling, an epic journey. It was not until many years later that Newton could write, "[I] was blind but now I see." As Newton's eyes opened more fully with each passing year, he became horrified at his sin. One of his friends later recalled that he never spent 30 minutes with Newton without hearing the former captain's remorse for trading slaves. Seeing our sin occurs over a lifetime of pursuing God—and always in the midst of amazing grace. At the end of his life Newton said to his friends, "My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior."

So here's **the good news(Life in the Spirit)** in Galatians Paul writes, *"For you have been called to live in freedom – not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love. 14 For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." E29 15 But if instead of showing love among yourselves you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another. 16 So I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. 17 The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict."*

Christian freedom happens within the context of Christian community which offers **three helps for our walk** with Jesus: 1) **Spirituality**...*"new life in the Holy Spirit"* Paul calls it Galatians 5. The Spirit is at work in: a) **God's Word as we spend time there each day...and in prayer** as we talk and listen to God's voice; b) as **our focus is on others**...Phil 2: 3ff...have this mind which is your in Christ...think of others more than you think of yourself...; c) **mind on mission**...giving/serving for Christ sake...when we have a purpose, we trust Christ more and think of sin less. 2) **Accountability** – we need Christian relationships where we are able to check in with one another and be built up and encouraged to follow Christ...we can't do it on our own...3) **Responsibility** – authentic community...a place where we can live out our faith and practice the fruits of the spirit, living out the 10 commandments, and the beatitudes...

Faith never happens in a vacuum. The church is the imperfect vessel which carries the gospel of Christ to the world and extends love in community. That's what this place is meant to be...**a hospital for sinners...not a museum of saints**...God has built the church around people like you and me who are fractured, frazzled, frenzied...The church was built around people like Paul...The church will be built around people like you and me...Sinners in need of grace

In the movie, "Batman Begins" we see Bruce Wayne as the son of the wealthy Wayne estates. In an attempt to do good, Batman is forced to make some decisions that destroy his parents' mansion and good name...watch this video clip as his butler Alfred comes to his rescue (**Play video**)...Our legacy is more than our sin...our legacy is the faith that calls us to repentance of our sin and to hear the beautiful words of forgiveness...Jesus is making us, molding us, to be more like him as we live in his Spirit.

Amen