

Main Idea: As we examine Romans 6:1-7, we will discover two reasons why cheap grace is unacceptable for the Christian.

Review: Key truths from Romans 1-5...

1. All people are sinners under the wrath of God (1:18).
2. The Law could not save us (3:21).
3. We were not saved by what we did, but by grace (5:21).

I. Cheap grace is unacceptable because of our identification (1-4).

- A. In Christ, we have died to sin (1-3).
 1. In the legal sense, we died to sin when Christ died.
 2. In the personal sense, we died to sin when we received Christ.
 3. In the moral sense, we die to sin daily.
 4. In the ultimate sense, we will die to sin when we actually die.

B. In Christ, we have been raised to new life (4).

II. Cheap grace is unacceptable because of the implications (5-7).

- A. In Christ, we can live a new life (5).
- B. In Christ, our old man was crucified (6).
 1. We will not be sinless.
 2. We have the power to sin less.

C. In Christ, we can be set free from sin (7).

Make It Personal: Let's commit ourselves to the following...

1. Let us refuse to tarnish grace.
2. Let us cherish grace.

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:18-6:14

When I was a young Christian our church loved to sing the following song by Haldor Lillenas, "Wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all my sin; How shall my tongue describe it, where shall its praise begin? Taking away my burden, setting my spirit free, for the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me."

Last week we finished the service with the song by Julia Johnston, "Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt! Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured--there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt. Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that will pardon and cleanse within, grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sin!"

God's grace is great. But I want you to consider something. If God's grace is greater than all our sin (and it is), and if God's grace covers all our sin (and it does), then does it follow that sin is no longer a big deal? If God's grace takes care of our sin, does it really matter if a Christian sins?

Some don't think it does. Oh, most don't say so in such blatant terms, but not a few people move through life with the unspoken notion, "I'm washed in the blood of Jesus and on my way to heaven, so a few 'little sins' here and there aren't that big a deal. You know, we're under grace now, not law."

Do you know what that attitude represents? A couple generations ago the German pastor and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined a term for it. "Cheap grace," he called it.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous message on this passage, see the Romans series in the 90s.

What is cheap grace? It's the flippant attitude that says, "I've been forgiven and I will go on being forgiven whatever I do, so I can do whatever I wish in my life."²

Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes the problem this way in *The Cost of Discipleship*:

Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite...

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

We've been studying great grace-texts in the Bible, but a series on grace would be incomplete without addressing this potential pitfall head-on. What does the Bible have to say about cheap grace? No doubt, there are several places we could turn, but no text addresses the issue more plainly than Romans 6.

This morning we'll confront the problem of cheap grace—that's Romans 6:1-7. This evening we'll see the solution for it—that's Romans 6:8-14—which is what Paul refers to as living "under grace" in verse 14.

What is the problem with cheap grace? I've talked with non-Christians who see the problem. They've told me, "I'm not going to be a Christian if I'm not serious about living it. There are too many hypocrites who profess one thing, but live something entirely different."

Ever faced that objection? Cheap grace and hypocrisy go hand in hand. Cheap grace leads to hypocrisy.

Let's turn our attention to Romans 6:1-7 where we discover two reasons why cheap grace is unacceptable for the Christian.

The Setting: A Quick Look at Romans 1-5 – Romans is the cadillac of Paul's letters. He wrote the epistle to the Christians living in the capital city of the Roman Empire around the year AD 57. His purpose in writing was to prepare the believers for an upcoming visit he hoped to make to see them (1:10-11). Apparently, he had never been to Rome before, and had not met the Christians to whom he was writing.

In Romans, Paul explains the essential foundation stones of the Christian life. The first eleven chapters deal with doctrinal issues, namely, what God has done to provide righteousness for an unrighteous world. The final five chapters deal with duty, namely how Christians should live in light of what God has done.

I don't intend to rehearse all there is in Romans 1-5, but if we are to grasp Romans 6, we need to put it into context. There are three key truths established in Romans 1-5.

1. *All people are sinners under the wrath of God (1:18).* "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness (1:18)." All men are born as sinners under

² see Briscoe, 130

God's wrath. We learn in chapter 1 that the heathen is under God's wrath. In ch 2, we discover that both the humanist and the Hebrew are as well. All are born unrighteous and under the severe sentence of a holy God.

2. *The Law could not save us (3:21)*. God's Law is good, for it reveals the character and will of God, but the Law can't save anyone. It can't produce the righteousness we need, as 3:21 makes clear, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is manifested."

3. *We were not saved by what we did, but by grace (5:21)*. That's what the gospel is all about, isn't it? Righteousness must be received, it can't be earned. That's why Paul wrote in the theme verses of the letter (1:16-17), "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes...For in it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith."

So we who have been saved were not saved by what we did, but by what God did. God extended His grace toward us in Christ Jesus. Paul sums it up at the end of chapter five with these words (5:20-21, AV), "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Now, think carefully. If that's true, if we are saved by grace, by what God does and not what we do, does it matter how we live? If God's grace is so great that the greatest sinner can enter God's family, does our sin really matter any more? Or to take it a step further, should we saved people keep sinning to give God an opportunity to display more of His grace? Or to put it simply, if I am saved, can I live however I want?

We know the answer is, *absolutely not*, but why not? It's not just that it turns off non-Christians. Paul goes to the heart of the problem in Romans 6:1-7. Cheap grace is unacceptable for two reasons.

I. Cheap grace is unacceptable because of our identification (1-4).

First, we need some vocabulary. The first five chapters of Romans deal with *justification*. Romans 6-8 deal with *sanctification*. What do those Bible words mean, and how do they relate? Justification is righteousness imputed (put to my account), while sanctification is righteousness imparted (made a part of my life)³. Justification is the foundation upon which sanctification rests.

J. Vernon McGee simplifies the distinction (103), "Justification is an act; sanctification is a work. Justification took place the moment you trusted Christ--you were declared righteous; the guilt was removed. Then God began a work in you that will continue throughout your life. I believe in instantaneous salvation, but sanctification is a lifelong process. In other words, justification is the means; sanctification is the end. Justification is for us; sanctification is in us. Justification declares the sinner righteous; sanctification makes the sinner righteous. Justification removes the guilt and penalty of sin; sanctification removes the growth and power of sin."

Keep in mind as we enter chapter 6 that Paul's talking about sanctification, not justification. Cheap grace is unacceptable because of our identification. What is true of us if we have been justified? Notice two realities in verses 1-4.

³ Wiersbe, 531

A. In Christ, we have died to sin (1-3). Verse 1 (AV) "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" In the NIV, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"

In essence, Paul takes a legal approach to the problem and poses two potent rhetorical questions. He raises some questions that his readers might be asking. He doesn't want them to draw wrong conclusions about what he has just said. If God's grace is so great, and if our acceptance before God depends entirely on His grace and not our works, then can we live however we please?

His answer in verse 2? "By no means," says the NIV and ESV. In the AV, "God forbid!" The words are a strong objection. No way. Unthinkable.

Then he raises another question, in the second part of verse 2. "We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" The AV reads, "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer in it?"

If we are in Christ, something fundamental has happened to us. We've entered the realm of a new reality. What is true of us if we are in Christ? We have *died to sin*.

When did that happen? Verse 3, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" In the AV, "Know ye not that, as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?"

Don't you know? Right here is the reason so many people flounder in their Christian experience. They lack knowledge. They don't know better.

What do we need to know if we are to experience the Christian life as God intends? We need to grasp a fundamental reality. It has to do with our identification with Christ, and those who are identified with Christ have died to sin.

What does that mean? Some use this verse and others to teach perfectionism, that a Christian will never sin. But that teaching is off base because it's too narrow. When we look at the rest of the Bible we find out that there are actually four different senses in which we have died to sin.⁴

1. *In the legal sense, we died to sin when Christ died.* Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ died on a cross, and when He died we too died. In God's eyes, it was as if we were there nailed to the wood. Christ identified with us and took our sin upon Himself when He hung on the tree (2 Cor 5:21).

So in this legal (positional) sense, we died to sin when our representative, Jesus Christ, died. By the way, the same goes for His resurrection, and ascension. When He rose again to new life the third day, in God's mind, so did we (see Col 3:1). When He ascended to heaven, so did we (see Eph 2:5-6).

2. *In the personal sense, we died to sin when we received Christ.* We're told in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come." Writing to Christians living in Colosse, Paul said in Colossians 3:3, "*For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*"

When as an eleven year old boy, I died. It's true. When I knelt next to my pastor in his study, confessed that I was a sinner and received Christ as my Savior and Lord, I died to sin. As far as our omniscient God was concerned, I died to sin legally twenty centuries ago when Christ died, but in the personal sense, I died to sin when I received

⁴ see Cranfield, 128-9

Christ. That was the day the Spirit of God applied to my life what Christ had done. My old identity passed away and I became a new person.

Paul puts it this way in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." What happened to Christ happened to me. In the legal sense, we died to sin when Christ died. In the personal sense, we died to sin when we received Christ.

3. *In the moral sense, we die to sin daily.* Here's where passages that tell us to "mortify" the flesh enter.⁵ Notice verse 11, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin." And verse 12, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body." And verse 13, "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness."

So here's a question. If we have already died to sin, why does Paul give us these commands? Because in the moral sense, we need to live in light of what God says is true of us in the legal sense. In the language of Ephesians 4, we must put off the old man and put on the new. Will the battle ever end? Praise the Lord, yes! When?

4. *In the ultimate sense, we will die to sin when we actually die.* Our struggle with sin will end the day we take our final breath and enter the Lord's presence.

Several years ago I had a graveside service for a man who had no church or family. As I stood there looking at the vault containing his casket in the ground, one thing was for sure. Before me was the body of a man who was no longer sinning. A dead body does not sin. It sins when it's alive. I do not know the spiritual condition of that man, but this I know. There are only two places for our sins. Either they were on Christ when He died two thousand years ago, or they are on us, and the judgment for them is coming. There is no third place for our sins.

Where are your sins, my friend? Do you know? We all have sin, inherited sin as well as a host of sins we've committed, and a just God must punish all our sins justly. This means we will pay the penalty for our sins, or...we will put our trust in the One God graciously sent to pay sin's penalty as our substitute.

Can you say with confidence? "I died to sin." If so, then this will be the evidence that you've died, the question, "How can I live in it any longer?"

In Christ, we have died to sin. There is a second reality relating to our identification with Christ seen in verse 4.

B. In Christ, we have been raised to new life (4). Verse 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."⁶

What happened to Christ happened to us. Thus, if we are in Christ, we died to sin and we have been raised to new life.

How did it happen? Notice the activity of *baptism*. In verse 3, Paul says that we who were "baptized" into Christ Jesus were "baptized" into His death. Now in verse 4 he says that we were "buried with him through baptism into death." What does he mean?

The Greek word has two basic meanings. Literally, baptize means "to dip or immerse." Figuratively, the term means "to be identified with." For example, 1 Corinthians 10:2 says this of the Israelites, "And were all baptized unto Moses in the

⁵ See Col 3:5, "Put to death therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature."

⁶ AV, "Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death, that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

cloud and in the sea." Is Paul saying the Israelites got wet in the Red Sea? Were they immersed? No, when they crossed the dry ground, they were "identified with" their leader, Moses.

In which sense is Paul using the term baptism in Romans 6? Is he talking about a literal or figurative baptism? While there is difference of opinion on this, it appears that the apostle had BOTH in mind. It's through water baptism that a person is publicly identified with Christ.

Paul's readers, particularly the Jews, could grasp this, though it may sound strange to us. In that day, when a Gentile wanted to become a Jewish proselyte, he had to go through the rite of baptism. The candidate changed his old clothes and got completely in the water. While in the water, he gave testimony to his confession of faith. Once he emerged from the water, in the eyes of the Jewish people, he was regarded as a new man.

The same was true in Christian baptism. Baptism was a significant matter in the first century. When a person was baptized, he was giving public testimony that he was turning from his old life and giving allegiance to the Savior, Jesus the Christ, in every area of the just-made-new life. By being baptized, the sinner was identifying with Christ. He didn't just *say* it, but *showed* it. By going into the water, the sinner identified with the death of Christ, in essence saying, "I believe He died, and when He did He died for me." By coming out of the water, the sinner identified with the resurrection of Christ, thus saying, "I believe He rose again so I can now live a new life, which I will do for Him."

That's the point in Romans 6. In Christ, a believer has died to sin. Died. A fundamental change occurred. If a cocaine addict dies, he is no longer tempted by cocaine. Why not? Because his body is dead to all physical senses. He can't see the drug, smell it, or desire it. He's dead. In Christ, we have died to sin. Sin does not have the same hold on us it once had.

But there's more. In Christ, we've been raised to new life. We need not live the way we once lived. Indeed, we *will* not live the way we once lived.

This truth can transform your life. The key to a vibrant Christian life is learning to live in light of the work of Christ. Every day I must affirm these realities. When Christ died, I died. When He was buried, I was buried. When He was raised, I was raised and given the potential for new life.

John Stott draws this conclusion (34), "A Christian is not merely a justified believer. He is someone who has entered into a vital personal union with Jesus Christ."

Well said. Have you entered into a personal union with Christ? You say, "I'm not sure. How does it happen?"

Paul answers that question four chapters later in Romans 10:9-10, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."

There's how a sinner identifies with Christ. By believing in one's heart and professing with one's mouth that Jesus is the Lord whom God raised from the dead. Do you believe this and are you professing it with your mouth? Then you are identified with Christ. What happened to Him happened to you.

What about baptism? Baptism does not make the union with Christ happen, but it does make it public. As the Lord wants it to be.

When you got married, did you keep it a secret? “It’s a private thing, just between the two of us. I don’t want anyone else to know.” Hardly. You started wearing a wedding ring. Why? That ring didn’t make you a married person, but it made the reality public.

That’s what baptism does. It makes our identification with Christ public. When we enter the water, we are saying, “I am identified with Christ. I have died to sin, and have been made alive. He did this for me, and now I gladly give my life to Him.”

Perhaps you have put your faith in Christ but have never made it public by being baptized. I encourage you to spend time in this passage, and others too. Such as...

Matthew 28:19 “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” When we make disciples, what’s the first thing we are to do with a person who professes allegiance to Christ? Baptize them into the name of the Triune God who saved them.

Acts 2:41 “Those who accepted his message were baptized...and added to their number.” Notice the order of these three important actions. First, *accept* the message—that is, accept Christ as Savior and Lord. Then get *baptized* to make your faith public. Then be *added* to their number, that is, be added to the church and start doing life with others who have accepted the message and made it public through baptism.

Think of it this way. Baptism is all about making our new identity known. We are saying, “I am no longer who I used to be. I have a new identity and Jesus Christ gave it to me, and I want the world to know it, for I want the world to know Him.”

So why is cheap grace unacceptable? The first reason is our identification. In Christ we have died to sin, and in Christ we have been raised to new life.

II. Cheap grace is unacceptable because of the implications (5-7).

While I was growing up, my dad was a High School principal for a time. My dad’s occupation affected my identity in some interesting ways. When it came to ball games for instance, that identity was my ticket to a free pass inside. That identity also had something to do with what was expected of me in the area of behavior. There are implications related to a person's identification.

So too in the Christian life. In light of our identification with Christ, there are some clear implications. Paul highlights three in verses 5-7.

A. In Christ, we can 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.”⁷

What’s Paul saying? “For if we have been united with Him,” and we have, for by faith we have entered into a union with Christ. We have been “united with him in a death like his.” What happened to Him happened to us on the cross.

If that’s true, so is this. “We will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.” What happened to Jesus in the resurrection will happen to us. It has to be so. We are united with Him. He is no longer lying in a grave. He conquered death, and therefore so will we.

Indeed, we are already beginning to experience the reality of His resurrection. How so? We are now living a new life, for He is living in and through us.

⁷ AV, “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death (and we have!), we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.”

Or to put it another way, if we have experienced the benefits of Christ's death, namely justification, we certainly are entitled to experience the benefit of His resurrection, namely sanctification.

Brothers and sisters, we have the ability to live a new, God-pleasing life, and we have it because of our identification with Christ. There's a second implication.

B. In Christ, our old man was crucified (6). “For we know that our old self [AV, ‘old man’] 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.”⁸

The first issue we must address is what is this “old man” (AV) or “old self” (NIV, ESV). It refers to what we were in Adam, our old identity. It’s the old ego, says Wiersbe.

We learn something else. The “old self” does its work through what Paul calls “the body ruled by sin” (in the AV, “the body of sin”). Keep in mind that the body itself is not sinful. Everything God made, including our bodies, is good. Jesus said that sin comes, not from the body, but from the heart, the inner life (Mark 7:21).

But here’s the problem. The body has become the vehicle of sin. It's what our heart uses to take it where it wants to go. The heart works through the eye to lust after a woman, through the hand to shoplift, and through the tongue to spew forth bitter words on someone.

Is there hope? Yes. If we are in Christ, something happened to the “old self.” It was “crucified with Christ.” That’s strong language, and that’s exactly what happened to our old man, our old self, our old identity, our old ego. It was killed on the cross.

And what happened to the “old man” had a direct effect on the "body of sin" too. “Our old self was crucified with him *so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with.*” The AV uses the term “destroyed.” The word means “to render inoperative, to make of no effect.”

This is strong language, and this is a powerful reality. The old man was killed at the cross so that the body of sin might be rendered inoperative. As the ESV puts it, “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing.”

I was talking with the men who replaced our boiler this week. One of them remarked that every time he went to church, which wasn’t very often, all they talked about was wanting money. I said, “You know, I’m sorry to hear that. The truth is, I don’t like religion.”

“Really?” he said.

“It’s true. I’m not interested in religion. Religion is man’s way to try and reach God. But God has chosen to reach us by His grace through a relationship with His Son.”

That’s what we see right here. We all sin. All of us. So what does God say? Clean up your life, and then maybe I’ll accept you? No. He says, “Trust in my Son, because on the cross my Son crucified the old self, so that your body of sin might be brought to nothing.”

Think of what this means for us. If we’re in Christ, two things are true.

1. *We will not be sinless.* But...
2. *We have the power to sin less.*

⁸ AV, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8)." We will not be sinless this side of heaven. We must battle with sin day by day, and hour by hour. On the one hand, yes, the old self has been nailed to the cross, but on the other hand, we sometimes choose to live like he is still alive.

We need to refuse to do that. No tolerating cheap grace. On the one hand, the Bible says the old man has been crucified (Rom 5:6), but on the other hand, we read exhortations like the one in Ephesians 4:22 that tell us to put off the old man. Both are true. Though we have died to sin, we still battle with sin.

So we battle. We are not passive. Yet we don't battle *for* victory. We battle *from* victory, all because of our identification with Christ.

We now have resurrection power available to us. Before we were justified, we didn't. We sinned because it was our nature to sin. We were powerless NOT to sin. But when we placed our faith in Christ, that changed. Now in Him we have the capacity to say no to sin and do right. We have the power to sin less.

We learn about a third implication in verse 7.

C. In Christ, we can be set free from sin (7). "...because anyone who has died has been set free from sin."⁹ Set free. No longer in bondage. No longer held captive. Anyone in Christ has been crucified with Christ and therefore has been set free from sin.

Again Paul isn't talking about sinless perfection. Everett Harrison makes the important point, "What he does present here is not the impossibility of committing a single sin, but the impossibility of continuing in a life dominated by sin."¹⁰

That's it. In Christ, there is no place for cheap grace. We can be, indeed, we have been set free from sin. Our identification demands it. So do the implications.

Is there any sin in your life that is enslaving you? Perhaps it's profanity, or pornography, or greed. If so, why is it there?

You say, "I've struggled with it for years. It's just who I am. I can't change."

My friend, if you are in Christ, that's just not true. It's not who you are. You received a new identity when you put your faith in Christ. His identity. When He died, you died. Your old man was crucified. When He was raised from the dead, you were raised, and now you can live a new life.

How does it happen? How can the old patterns of sinful behavior be broken in our lives? We'll find out this evening as we move to the next section in Romans 6 and learn how to live "under grace," as Paul puts it in verse 14.

Make It Personal: Let's commit ourselves to the following...

1. *Let us refuse to tarnish grace.*
2. *Let us cherish grace.*

⁹ AV, "For he that is dead is freed from sin."

¹⁰ Everett Harrison, p. 68.