

Shall We Continue in Sin?

A Study on Romans 6:1-2a

Dr. Jack L. Arnold

Probably every one of us can think of people we have known who at one time professed faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, but later fell away and walked again with the unsaved world. Were these people saved and then lost? Were they saved and later became carnal (fleshy) Christians? Or were they professing Christians who never really possessed the person of Jesus Christ, those who showed initial spiritual zeal based on religious experience but then fell away, indicating that they were never truly Christians? Romans 6 has the answer to this problem.

Paul's basic thought in this section is that it is impossible for a truly saved person to be lost, but it is just as impossible for a truly saved man to live just as he pleases, habitually in sin. The key that unlocks the marvelous truths of Romans 6, especially verses 1-11, is union with Christ. At the moment a person trusts Christ, he is placed into spiritual union with Christ (a fact and not necessarily a feeling). He is then one with Christ, so that he is a partaker of Christ's death for sin and his resurrection unto life. Thus, the death and resurrection of Christ are not just historical events, but are shared by the Christian and so become personal. The two basic thoughts are: (1) the Christian died to sin through Christ's death, thus the power of indwelling sin is broken in the Christian; and (2) the Christian shares Christ's resurrected life, thus the Christian is a partaker of Christ's life which will manifest itself in a new kind of life for him.

RELATIONSHIP OF ROMANS 6 TO THE ARGUMENT

In Romans 1:18–3:20 Paul proved all men to be sinners, separated from God, under God's wrath, and headed for eternal condemnation. Why? Because all men are sinners, and a holy God must judge sin. Man has no righteousness in himself that can commend him to God. He needs the forgiveness of sin and a righteousness that will give him an acceptable standing before God.

In Romans 3:21–5:21 Paul showed that God in his love has made a provision for men to find forgiveness of sin and a perfect righteousness. God has provided the death of Jesus Christ, a substitutionary atonement for the sins of men. All who believe that Christ died for their sins will receive the forgiveness of sin and a righteousness from Christ that will make them acceptable before God. All who believe will never again have to fear God's wrath unto eternal punishment, because Christ's death was a complete and perfect sacrifice for sin. Paul showed that the moment a person believes in Christ he is justified (declared righteous) and

receives a perfect standing or position before God. He is declared righteous through Christ's work, not through his own fallen human effort.

The basic theme of the first five chapters of Romans has been justification. In Romans 6 the subject is sanctification. This deals with the fact that God, through the death of Christ, is changing the Christian in his everyday experience to give him progressive victory over the power of sin in his life, and to conform him more and more to the person of Christ. Both justification and progressive sanctification flow from union with Christ.

CONTRASTS OF JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

Justification declares the sinner righteous.
Sanctification makes the sinner righteous.

Justification is a once-and-for-all act.
Sanctification is a continuous work.

Justification causes salvation.
Sanctification is the result of salvation.

Justification deals with the Christian's standing before God.
Sanctification deals with the Christian's experience in life.

Justification is objective.
Sanctification is subjective.

Justification removes the guilt and penalty of sin.
Sanctification removes the growth and power of sin.

Justification changes a person's position before God.
Sanctification changes a person's nature and character.

Justification, again, changes a person's position before God.
Sanctification changes a person's disposition in relation to God.

Justification deals with the imputation of righteousness.
Sanctification deals with the impartation of righteousness.

Justification is for the sinner.
Sanctification is in the saint.

Justification and sanctification are not the same, but they cannot be separated. Sanctification is a necessary step that proceeds from union with Christ. Thus, every person who is justified must experience some sanctification. Every person who has been delivered from the penalty of sin also must be delivered from the power of sin:

“Christ came to save us from our sins, not in our sins. Though men seek to pervert the gospel, the Christian must not be drawn aside to any position other than that which demands holiness and which leads to holiness.” (Barnhouse, *Romans*, p. 10).

IMPORTANCE OF ROMANS 6

This chapter deals with progressive sanctification — how we can be made righteous in our experience. It shows us God’s power for victorious living over our present sins. It deals with how the Christian can keep from sinning habitually in his everyday life. It shows us that the power to live righteous lives comes through union with Christ as the Christian appropriates this power through faith. God has broken the power of sin in the lives of all those who are in Christ so that they no longer have to obey sin as they did when they were unsaved.

THE QUESTION OF THE POSSIBILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN CONTINUING IN SIN — Romans 6:1

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” This question is asked in light of Paul’s statement in Rom. 5:20: “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” He has said that a person may be declared righteous by God’s grace and have eternal life. Where sin abounds, grace superabounds. Since salvation is by grace through faith, which is contrary to all human thinking, questions might be raised.

This particular question would be asked by an antinomian — one who is opposed to the law or one who is a complete libertine, one who feels he should have no restraints now that he is a Christian. It would be natural for an antinomian to conclude that because sin abounded and grace superabounded in his initial salvation, he should go on sinning as a Christian so that God will pour out even more superabounding grace on him. An antinomian today (and there are many) might say, “I’m saved, declared righteous before God, eternally secure. Therefore, I may live as I please in order to get more grace from God.” He would want to use salvation as a license to sin more. Many were antinomians in New Testament times. Jude called them “ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). Paul answered the

antinomian, “God forbid that a Christian saved by grace through faith could ever again have the same attitude and sustain the same relationship to sin that he did before he was saved!”

We know that Paul taught salvation by grace through faith alone, because this question would have never been asked had he been teaching salvation by works. There are some who would repudiate salvation by grace through faith and give the same arguments as Paul’s critics in the first century, but by doing so they simply display their ignorance of God’s grace.

To what does the word “sin” refer in the context of this passage? Some think it refers to acts of sin, but it may refer to the sin nature, that inherent capacity within all men for evil. Every person born into this world has a sin nature. Even the Christian, although he also has a new nature, still has this sin nature after salvation. The question is not about continuing *to* sin, but continuing *in* sin. Paul takes the problem back to its root — the sin nature. He is not talking about whether a Christian can sin at all, but whether a Christian can be the slave to sin that he was in his unsaved state. Paul is arguing as to whether or not a person can deliberately and purposefully go on yielding to and feeding the sin nature after salvation. Before being saved men are slaves to the sin nature (living only for self). Sin has dominion over them, and they love this sin. After salvation the power of sin is broken in the Christian, so that he no longer has to obey the dictates of his sin nature. He may sin, but he no longer loves it as he did before.

In this passage what does the word “continue” mean? It means “to abide, to fellowship, to be dependent on, or to have cordial relations.” Can a Christian sustain the same cordial, intimate fellowship and dependence upon the sin nature that he did when he was unsaved?

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN CONTINUING IN SIN — Romans 6:2a

“God forbid.” — Paul’s first answer is one of outraged indignation, and he recoils at the thought that a Christian would habitually continue to live in sin after salvation. There are no English words to capture this negative in the Greek, but others have expressed it as, “Certainly not,” “Not at all,” “By no means,” “What a ghastly thought,” “May such a thing never occur,” “Away with the thought.”

The idea that a Christian should continue to sin is untenable, unthinkable, and blasphemous. It is inconsistent with God’s grace. Union with Christ will not permit it. God’s grace that put the Christian in union with Christ will produce progressive sanctification; a Christian will not continue in sin and be a slave to it as he was before salvation.

This verse does not teach that a Christian cannot do acts of sin (for every Christian does sin). Rather, it teaches that no true Christian can continue to be dominated by the sin nature as he was before his conversion. God has broken the power of the sin nature in the Christian so that he no longer has to obey it (although he may do so at times). God has made a provision for the Christian to live a life of progressive victory over sin.

CONCLUSION

Those who are without Christ need to be justified. You need the forgiveness of sins and righteousness from Christ that will give you a perfect standing before God. Christ alone can justify you (declare you righteous). Without him you are hopelessly lost for time and eternity.

If you will receive Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, He will not only fit you for heaven but he will fit you for earth. He will begin to give you the power to live a life of progressive victory over sin. The truth of sanctification is for those who know the Lord. Before Christ can deliver you from the power of sin in your everyday life you must, he must deliver you from the guilt and penalty of sin.

Will you turn from your present life and receive God's gracious and free offer of salvation in Christ? He alone can justify and sanctify you.