

The Charge of Lawlessness

Often when the grace of God is taught, a charge of lawlessness springs out in the conversation. Usually it surfaces when the security of salvation by grace is emphasized. Simply put, once a person is saved, he cannot be lost. Many will wholeheartedly admit that salvation is by grace, but when eternal security comes up, the assault begins. "Oh, so it doesn't matter what I do? I can go out and murder, rape and steal all I want and of course, according to you, I'm still saved, right?" Usually this is said with much sarcasm. If salvation is by grace, eternal security is of necessity by grace. However, this is a legitimate question and one that deserves an answer. Does the teaching grace actually promote sin? We need to spend some time examining this question. Fortunately, we have the testimony of scripture to lean upon to help us sort it all out. What is interesting is that this is not a new objection to grace, but one that has been around from the beginning.

Jude 1:4 For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

We are not told the identity of these "*certain men*." They seem to have the same characteristics of the early Gnostics which were forming their doctrines at this time. We do know that the Church had also been warned about them from John, Peter and Paul. They are godless and immoral, and can easily be identified by these signs. They know the message of the grace of God but certainly are not believers and therefore not Christians. How do we know this? They "*deny Jesus Christ*," which is essential to being a Christian. Since they know some of the principles of grace they try to use them against God, making a mockery of the faith.

An interesting point is that they "*slipped in*" and were pawning themselves off as Christians. This may have been a deception in those early days, but we clearly reject such things as apostate today. If anyone is openly advocating lawlessness or immoral behavior, this is without a question a clear signal that they are not speaking for God. Even though this is the case today, some foolishness is still tolerated in Churches and the name of Christ is dishonored. If we say we are Christians, there is something important in that statement. We represent Jesus Christ here and now.

2 Tim 2:19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

Eph 4:1-2 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

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There is a high and holy standard for the Christian. God saves us and then equips us with the power to live holy lives. Surely God wants us to conduct our lives according to His divine standards after salvation. Anyone who teaches otherwise is in gross error. If anyone advocates a loose lifestyle, a cavalier attitude about living a holy life or that disobedience does not matter to God, this should signal anyone listening that they are not speaking for God. That is simple enough as a test of authenticity.

Well then, how is it that this charge of antinomianism (lawlessness) is slung around as if it is something that is common today? I have to say, with the exception of a few rouge groups, I don't know anyone teaching that obedience doesn't matter to God. Of course, there are those who don't practice what they preach. Certainly, Christians know they should be obedient, but fail, which is not really the question. But, do you know of anybody teaching that its OK to openly disobey God, to live a life of willful sin? I don't know of any Christian group fitting that description. Certainly Churches may have wrong interpretations of passages; they may teach false doctrines which lead their followers into wrong behavior. Really though, no person that I know believes and teaches that God is not concerned with the life of His child.

I believe the charge comes because of confusion regarding the nature of salvation. We must pay close attention here if we are to rightly divide the word of truth. The charge is leveled against those who believe in salvation by grace with eternal security. The dynamics of this grace salvation are maligned as though they were ridiculous. Once someone responded to my teaching of eternal security with, "So if I'm saved and cannot be lost, then what is the point, what am I being obedient for? If I'm already saved, nothing else matters, right?" Again, thanks be to God! We have the testimony from scripture which addresses this point and gives us a clear answer. Lets examine Paul's words in the following text.

Rom 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

This is the question asked today. It is amazing that this same thought is found in the pages of scripture. We need to pay careful attention to what is taught here and I'm sure we can come away with the answer we seek. We must notice first that there is another question before this one- "*What shall we say, then?*" Say then to what Paul? We must find out just what Paul is talking about before we attempt to answer the question. Perhaps we will find out why he poses the question in the first place. In Romans chapter 5, we can find the context for this question, especially if we look at Romans 5:20, 21.

Rom 5:20 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,

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Verse 20 literally says that God introduced the law, His holy standard into the human race through Moses, and as a result, sin increased. Not only is sin shown up to be utterly sinful, but sin will not submit to the law and so rebels against God's holy standard, causing more sin. The word tells us, "*the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so*" (Rom 8:7 see also Rom 7:10-13).

Notice that sin was in the world before the Mosaic Law entered (Rom 5:12-14). The law did not make sin more sinful, it was already sinful to begin with. The law shows man what God thinks of him. There is nothing wrong with the law, the sin nature is an unruly brute, it will not allow itself to be ruled over by the law, it is opposed to God and His righteousness. It is against God, it is not and will not be subject to God's law, and in every case, it seeks to rebel against the law's restraints. Because of this sinful nature, unsaved man is at odds with God and is not aware of this fact; "*For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*" (Rom 5:10).

"But where sin increased, grace increased all the more!" So no matter how much sin increases or surges, grace surges and super abounds even more. I have to say- WOW! This verse says that no matter how much sin there is, grace will more than cover it. Sin can never defeat grace. No matter what degree of sin we are talking about, God's grace exceeds it by far. What is the Bible saying here? God has an answer to the sin problem through the work of Christ on the cross. This answer is final and complete. The question is, do you agree with God's solution?

Rom 5:21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verse 21 begins with "*so that, just as sin reigned in death*" and is a continuation of the previous thought. Here he draws an analogy to show us more of what is meant earlier. In this verse, Sin and Grace are personified as a Kings reigning. The word "Sin" here is not simply acts of sin, but the very source of sin, the sinful nature which rules over everyone in Adam. This is borne out in the context and the next chapter as the sin nature is the subject. This verse is teaching that the sin nature rules over everyone in Adam. The sin nature reigns in the realm of spiritual death, and both are passed on to us from Adam (Rom 5:17, 19). There is no escape from spiritual death or the sin nature and its power for all in Adam. Sin is reigning on the throne, calling the shots, running the show for everyone in Adam. Everyone born in Adam really does not have a choice in this matter, no exceptions. Their free will is dominated by the ruling sin nature (Rom 6:20). It doesn't matter what they think, they are all born in Adam and because of him, and all inherit the sin nature. "*For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners,*" (Rom 5:19a).

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The important fact is that it is through the disobedience of Adam, one man, that all born in him possess this sinful nature. Notice it is not your disobedience that makes you a sinner, it is Adam's. Your disobedience is only a result and evidence that you do have this inherited sinful nature. The Lord Jesus Christ escaped the transmission of this sin nature because Joseph was not his natural father. God the Holy Spirit provided the 23 male chromosomes which impregnated the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:31-35). Christ did not have a sinful nature; He was born perfect as Adam was created perfect.

The next phrase in verse 21, says "*so also grace might reign through righteousness...*" The "*so also*" means that in the same way sin reigns over everyone in Adam, *so also*, grace reigns over everyone in Christ. If we look at the context of the previous 9 verses, we find Adam and Christ are the heads of the human race. Each one has certain properties which are inescapable. In Adam, there is death, condemnation and the sin nature. In Christ, there is grace, righteousness and eternal life. What is true for Adam is true for ALL his descendants, death (spiritual and physical), condemnation and the ruling sin nature. It doesn't matter what they think, this is the reality for the human race in Adam. Personal merit or demerit does not matter. So also, what is true of Christ is also true for all His descendants, grace rules, righteousness, eternal life, reconciliation, etc. How can a person get from Adam into Christ? He must be born into Christ.

Now, Paul is saying that for those in Christ, grace reigns over them. Paul is not saying that grace abounds over sin for someone in Adam, for the sin nature rules over all in Adam. But in Christ, the sin nature does not rule, it is not on the throne, but grace is ruling. In fact, Paul is saying that no matter how much sin the sinful nature can produce, grace more than covers it. God's forgiveness is unlimited for those in Christ. Just as personal merit or demerit did not matter when the sin nature was ruling in Adam; merit does not matter for anyone in Christ. God sees only the merits of Adam or Christ and imputes that merit to all born in them. This is what Paul is actually teaching here.

Unless we understand this, the question in Rom 6:1 ("*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*"), does not make any sense. Is this true Paul? Yes, it is true. This is one of those amazing facts in the word that goes unnoticed. This is where we need to apply the verse, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts*" God's thinking is not the same as man's thinking, therefore what may seem reasonable to God is not necessarily reasonable to man. "*neither are your ways my ways declares the LORD.*" As a result of different thinking, God's ways, or way of doing things will be different as well. "*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*" (Isa. 55:8, 9). God's thinking and way of doing things is so much higher, that man need not try to figure out God, but must simply allow God to reveal His thinking through His word.

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We should note a principle. Sin cannot defeat grace. No matter how much sin there is in a believer in Christ, grace exceeds it by far. No one is more offended with sin's rebellion than God, but the sin problem has been solved by God Himself, it is no longer a thorn in God's flesh! Instead of glorying in this truth and rejoicing in the fact that God has thought of everything. Instead of marveling in His plan for saving lost man, which is so completely comprehensive, some would rather try to find problems with this so great salvation. The question comes from the Apostle Paul's anticipation of what someone who doesn't understand grace might say to this truth.

God has defeated the greatest foe - sin! His solution to the great problem of sin is the death of His only Son as a substitute for all. Hallelujah! Christ died for the sins of the whole world! It was not a conditional judgment of our sins, God did not ask our permission to judge our sins in Christ. It is not up for debate, it already happened 2000 years ago and Christ himself said, "*it is finished.*" (see 1John 2:2; Heb 2:9; 1Tim 2:4, 6; 4:10). Only two questions remain about what Jesus Christ did. 1. What does God think about Christ's supreme sacrifice for all? 2. Do you believe the testimony of God? The most important question is number one, because if God does not think what Christ did was effective, well then, what man thinks doesn't really matter.

Question 1. What does God think about Christ's supreme sacrifice for all? The answer is found in the pages of scripture. "*And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*" (1John 2:2). Not only are we called upon to believe that Christ took away the sins of the world, but also, to believe God's own attitude to what He Himself and His Son accomplished on our behalf. God the Father's attitude to the Son's work in dying for our sins can be summed up in one word--propitiation. This word in the Greek speaks of the sacrifice that satisfies the righteous wrath of God. Propitiation says to us that God is satisfied with the work of Christ in dying in our place for our sins. Further evidence that God is satisfied, Christ was resurrected, He ascended to heaven and is at the right hand of the Father, the place of highest honor (1Tim 3:16; Phil 2:5-9). As far as Jesus Christ is concerned—mission accomplished!

We must see God's attitude with regard to sin, this is very important. God is infinitely righteous and just. Sin offends the righteousness of God and caused him to condemn the entire race of Adam, for just ONE sin! We as human beings will never begin to understand to what degree sin offends a holy God. We offend God's righteousness and do not even realize it. God's standards are so high, fallen man will never attain them and God already has declared this fact unequivocally, "*As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one"* (Rom 3:10-12).

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If God says that He is satisfied with work of Christ regarding sin, we MUST accept that sin is forever a non issue. It doesn't matter what a person believes about Christ, ALL their sins were judged in Christ. If the justice of God is satisfied, there is no further punishment to be exacted. Our sins were never imputed to us anyway, they were imputed to Christ (2Cor 5:19). Nothing will ever change this, for God knows perfectly every sin that everyone would ever commit. He is not surprised or shocked when these sins are committed, but knows perfectly every sin in human history because He placed them all on His only Son. The fact that God went to such lengths to solve the sin problem, suggests that sin was a very *serious* problem.

Isa 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isa 53:10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

Rom 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Heb 10:12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Question 2. Do you believe the testimony of God? This should really not be a question because all Christians should believe the testimony of God. However, the reality is not so positive. Many Christians will say with boldness that Christ died for their sins; but then deny this truth by their insistence that their sins can still condemn them to hell. Christ's payment was sufficient; you cannot pay for sins which were already paid. What does it mean that Christ *took away* all of your sins when he died on the cross? What does it mean that God is propitiated by what Christ did on your behalf? It means that your sins are no longer and issue standing between you and God with regard to salvation. To make an issue of sin with regard to salvation is to say that you really don't believe God's solution to the sin problem - Christ. If Christ paid God's price for sin, there is nothing left to pay. This is the very heart of the gospel we are commanded to believe. Your attitude about your sins is not the issue; remember YOU are the sinner. God's attitude is what is important, and as far as your sins are concerned, He is satisfied forever. If you don't believe this, your attitude is of no consequence.

Now we must stop a minute! I am not saying that God does not care about sin anymore. I must state this before someone gets the idea that sin has no consequences in time for the believer in Christ. Sin will cause us to break fellowship, but NEVER relationship. In breaking fellowship, we can lose the

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benefits of fellowship, but never our salvation. Our relationship was secured at salvation by Jesus Christ; our fellowship is communion with the Father and Son in time and depends on us. Relationship speaks of *who* we are before God. We are children of God (John 1:12, 13). Fellowship speaks of how we as children behave before our Father (1John 1:1-9).

A human illustration such as parents and children may help us here. A child is born into a family, that is relationship. When that child grows and begins to do things that are not in line with the standards the parents have set, that child needs discipline. If this behavior continues, that child may lose privileges, inheritance and may even be put out of the home; this is being out of fellowship. Or, that child may respect and observe the parent's standards and be in perfect harmony with the parent's will, this is fellowship. Relationship never changes; in fact, neither the parent nor the child has the power to change their relationship to each other. However fellowship depends on the child's behavior. The parable of the prodigal son is also a good illustration (Luke 15:11-32). Back to our question...

Rom 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

Now that we understand what Paul was teaching and the context for the question, we are prepared to understand his answer. Since grace is now reigning, and with any increase in sin, grace increases all the more, shall we habitually continue to remain in the sin nature like we did when we were in Adam as unbelievers so that grace may continue to super abound? Now, I realize that all that may not appear in the question, but when we see the answer, we will see that this is what is meant by asking such a question. By seeing the question from the Greek, this may help, "*What then shall we say? Shall we habitually sustain an attitude of dependence upon, yieldedness to, and cordiality with the sinful nature in order that grace may abound?*" (Rom 6:1, Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Kenneth Wuest Volume 1, page 92).

Rom 6:2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

This was a rhetorical question from the beginning. He says, of course not, by no means, God forbid in answer to the question! Further, Paul points out that it is impossible to do this anyway. He says, "*we died to sin.*" He did not say we *should* die, or will die, or that we die daily, or that we should avoid sin to the best of our ability, he said we *died!* What does this verse mean? I find that often, attempts are made to answer this question without understanding what the text actually says. How can we understand the statement *we died to sin?* First we need to define some terms. The word "sin" here refers to the sinful nature, spoken of in the previous chapter. Death is always a separation, whether it is physical or spiritual death. When we believed in Christ something happened that cannot be reversed, we were baptized with the Spirit into

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Christ. Paul's answer is then; Of course you cannot live in your sin nature habitually, because you have been forever separated from the sin nature. It is impossible to go back to that same relationship again, ever! Then he follows with a question to demonstrate this, "*how can we live in it any longer?*" Well, it is impossible, we cannot! He says it yet another way in Colossians to drive home the point.

Col 2:11-12 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,
12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

By this baptism, or circumcision, the power of the sin nature has been broken. The Sinful nature has been removed from the throne and Grace now reigns as king. The sinful nature is no longer the believer's nature! God has given us a new nature when He imputed His righteousness to us. We must learn to walk in our new nature, "*and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*" (Eph 4:24). The death of Christ not only judged all acts of sin, it judged the very source of sin, the sinful nature. As part of his salvation, the believer is forever separated from his sinful nature. Thanks be to God!

Romans 6:3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

He continues in Romans to demonstrate how the believer was cut out of his sin nature and now in Christ grace rules. How does this happen? It was through baptism. This is not ritual baptism in water, but a real baptism by God the Holy Spirit. "*For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink*" (1 Cor 12:13). Through our physical birth, we were identified with Adam, but through this Spirit baptism, we are forever identified with Christ, in his death, burial and resurrection. This happens for every person in Christ, whether they know it or not. In fact, Paul says, "*Or don't you know...*" The believer needs to learn about his new life in Christ and the properties that govern its existence. In Christ, God does not see anyone as a sinner, even though we may still sin, why? Because Christ is not a sinner and if you are identified with Christ, you will be seen in the same way God views Christ. The believer is now truly identified with Christ and this is the subject from Romans 6:2-14.

Rom 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Since the first question was an impossible situation, no person in Christ can ever habitually live as they did as an unbeliever where sin reigns supreme, Paul anticipates another question. What about occasional planned acts of sin? In

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other words, if grace is going to cover it anyway, why not indulge sin from time to time? Since we are under grace, God is going to cover it, right? The answer is the same - *By no means!* But the reason for this answer is a bit different from the first answer.

This time the question is answered by stating that the believer has changed masters. Our allegiance is not to the old master anymore. This is the subject of the rest of the chapter. For someone to have a careless attitude about sinning is the wrong attitude concerning sin. He is no longer a slave to sin. "*You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness*" (Rom 6:18). When the sin nature was his natural master, he could not do anything or make any decisions apart from that evil nature. Now, for the first time in his life, being set free, he can say—NO to the temptations of sin! Paul noted that God has done a tremendous work to free us from the domination of the sin nature; we are truly set free, but are now slaves to righteousness. "*as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness*" (Rom 6:19b).

Being set free from the sinful nature, we can now live a life of true holiness before God. "*What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life*" (Rom 6:21-22). I cannot find any better words than what the Apostle used himself. When sin was your master, you could not perform any righteousness and everything you did, committing sinful and shameful acts, was offensive to a holy God. With sin as your master, you were on your way to eternal separation, the lake of fire; and that was the benefit you would receive under sin. But now free from this evil nature, your fruit can be pleasing to your new master, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now in Christ, the benefit you receive is eternal life. "*So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God*" (Rom 7:4). We are not only in Christ, we *belong* to Him. With freedom comes great responsibility.

Rom 8:12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-- but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.

Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Gal 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

In concluding this discourse, we have found that the charge of lawlessness is not a new charge. We find that it is an attack on the doctrine of eternal

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security, which is really salvation by grace. We also found that question was dealt with by the Apostle Paul and I'm sure his answer was not what most would have thought. In the answer to the question, we find a golden nugget of truth. God has surgically removed us from our sinful nature and we are identified with Christ forever. Believers are eternally secure in Christ. It is not about us personally, it is about what God thinks of the first Adam and the last Adam - Jesus Christ. "So it is written: *"The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit"* (1 Cor 15:45). Where do you stand?

So we find that the question is really a misunderstanding of the nature of salvation and its benefits. We *must* acknowledge the truth that believers are secure in Christ, come what may. Can a believer do anything he wants, like sin, sin, and more sin? If this is a question of free will, then yes the believer is free to do this, but *not* without consequences. God may not allow this behavior, He may take the believer home through discipline (1Cor 11:29-32), which is totally His choice. This is why we are exhorted NOT to do it. *Should* the believer do this? **God forbid!** We are not robots after salvation, mere mindless beings with no will of our own. We must recognize that the decisions we make after salvation do matter much. They most certainly will bring consequences. God wants us to serve Him voluntarily, from a loving heart that wants to do His will.

God owns us and He has the right to do with us as He pleases. With an attitude that wants to rebel against God, discipline will surely follow. As a parent, if your child looked up to you and declared that they would not do anything else you wanted them to do, it is your responsibility to discipline that child, with the hope that the child may come to his senses. God would certainly do no less. Each believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ; the scriptures bring this out (2Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10-12). Not only is there discipline now, in time, but there may be loss of eternal rewards for those determined to be stubborn. God's discipline is designed to correct our behavior, "*My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,*" (Heb 12:5b).

God has a plan for His children to be obedient, but the first step is for them to become his children (John 1:12, 13). God makes the changes on the inside first. God does it for them; it is not their attempts at moral reform or cleaning up their lives, or their ceasing from some sins. They are given a new nature, which is created after true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). Only then, they can begin the process of growing in grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2Pet 3:18). Then they can begin to be transformed by the renewing of their minds through their consistent intake of doctrine, God's thinking. Then, and only then, can they test and approve what God's will is for them, His good, pleasing and perfect will for their lives (Rom 12:1, 2; 2Cor 3:18).

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From time to time, the child of God may need correction, some more than others. God, who is the perfect Father, knows how to handle every situation the straying child may present. God's discipline will never result in eternal condemnation (John 3:18; 5:24; Rom 8:1; 1Cor 11:32). That would contradict God's own testimony about His children. The child has a permanent place in the family of God (John 8:35). Yes, God is concerned about the obedience of His children, but just as in salvation, it must be done God's way.

Our God is not just any father, He is the perfect Father! Grace is not a license to sin more; it is a license to serve the Father. If you want to be holy before God, you must do it God's way. You *must* acknowledge the truth about what God has done for you and in you, and only then can you walk according to this truth in holiness. If you desire to please God, to follow His plan, then you will listen to His instructions for holiness.

So much more could be said, but hopefully the original question was answered. Through the answer, we learned some foundational things about the grace of God in salvation. If you are teaching grace in the same way the Apostle Paul taught grace, don't be surprised if someone asks you this question, "Oh, so it doesn't matter what I do? I can go out and murder, rape and steal all I want and of course, according to you, I'm still saved, right?" If you get this question, just remember, you may be on the right track.

Rom 11:33-36

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

In Christ, Doug...

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