

Last week in the previous section, Paul said this: "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." So grace is something that abounds, something that even hyper-abounds, as we heard last week. Whenever sin increases, grace increases even more, because God wants to pour out his rich mercies upon us in his Son, Jesus Christ. But the trouble is that someone might hear what was just said and come to a wrong conclusion. They might think: "Well, if sin increases, and that causes grace to increase even more, maybe I should sin more so that grace increases all the more. Maybe I should sin more and continue in my sins so that I can show to everybody else just how great God is in saving me! I can show how wonderful his forgiveness is by showing how much I need to be forgiven." This, of course, is what is called antinomianism, something we've talked about before in this book. "Anti" meaning against, "nomian" meaning the law. "Against-the-law-ism." Thinking that the law of God somehow doesn't apply to me, that I can do whatever I want and live however I want because God is going to forgive me anyway.

That might leave us wondering, though, "Well, who actually thinks that? Who actually thinks in this way? That they can go on sinning and it doesn't make any difference. I mean, we don't think that way, right? At least we don't think we do." But Christians, this is always a temptation for us. This is always something that we're going to struggle with, because we think that maybe what I am doing in any given situation is okay, because God is going to forgive me for it anyway. So that maybe I can go on and fall into this sin once more, because I know that God will forgive me in Jesus Christ. That is the temptation that we all face, the temptation of antinomianism.

So, for example, in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 8, Paul tells us very clearly, "Do not get drunk with wine." Drunkenness is also a sin which is condemned in many different parts of the Bible. But there's always that temptation to say, "Well, it's okay for me in this case because I just want to have a good time. God will forgive me anyway, so it's not that big of a deal. In fact, maybe I'll drink more so that other people will see that I'm free to do this, that I can do this and God will forgive me anyway. And that's how I will show him to the world: by getting drunk in this way." That, unfortunately, is antinomianism, the temptation which we all face. Or to use another example from Matthew chapter 6, Jesus says very clearly: "If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Seems clear enough. And yet we might be tempted to say, "Well, it's okay if I don't forgive in this situation, because that person hurt me too badly. I could never forgive them for what they've done. And so I'm not going to forgive them, and God will forgive me anyway." In fact, we might say Jesus forgives us when we can't forgive others, going directly against what the Bible itself says. That's the danger of antinomianism, the temptation we all face. Or to use another example, this can even happen with pastors. Because Paul says very clearly, 1 Timothy chapter 3, that "an overseer," that is, a pastor, "must be above reproach." He must not do things that would cause him to be disgraced in the eyes of the world, anything that would cause him to be removed from being a pastor. And yet too often you hear cases of pastors who commit some public sin, like adultery or something like that, and then they will be tempted to say, "Well, it's okay in this case, because who is perfect? Paul is setting up an impossible standard that we could never possibly reach, so I'm not going to be expected to keep it." "In fact," they might say, "I'm a better pastor as a result of this experience, because now I can show by staying a pastor what it means to be forgiven!" But that's the temptation of antinomianism, thinking that by continuing in our sins, by going against what God says, that somehow grace will abound as a result of it. That God will continue to forgive me, no

matter what happens, because that's just the kind of God he is. A God who forgives and forgives and forgives. That's the temptation which we all face as Christians.

Paul rejects this idea entirely. He wants nothing to do with it. He says, "By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" We have died to sin. That is no longer who we are. And we are no longer under the rule of sin. So why would we live as if we still were? And the surest proof that we have that we have died to sin, Christians, is the fact that we have been baptized. Because when we were baptized, Paul says, we were baptized into Christ. We were united with him, made one with him in all things, so that whatever happens to Jesus also happens to us in baptism. So Jesus died, and because we have been baptized into Christ, we have died with him. Jesus rose, and because we have been baptized into Christ, we will rise with him too. Jesus now lives to God, and because we have been baptized into him, we too will live with him. Whatever happens to Jesus also happens to us. So we have become like him, then, in all things. So why would we go back to what we once were? Why would we go back to being dead, to being before we were baptized? That's not who we are. We are now alive in Christ because we have been baptized into him.

But Christians, baptism does more than just this. Yes, it makes us alive. That's absolutely true. Yes, it unites us with Christ, makes us one with him. That's also absolutely true. But baptism also gives us a new master. It sets us free from what we once were and brings us into something new. Because you'll remember in the previous chapter how Paul presents sin as a king, as a tyrant. One who is ruling over us, one who is dominating us, who's trying to make us do whatever it wants to do. It has bound us in a kind of slavery. And notice that he continues this language of ruling and of dominance and of kingship in this chapter too. In verse 6, for example, he says that "we are no longer enslaved to sin." We were once slaves to sin. Sin was once our master, our slave master, and we were bound to do its will. He says in verse 7 that we "have been set free from sin." We've been emancipated. We've been set free, brought out of our bondage and made free to God. In verse 9, he says about Jesus that "death no longer has dominion over him." Dominion, ruling, kingship, to dominate something. It's that same language. Or in verse 12, he says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body." To reign like a king, to rule over us like a ruler. So Paul, then, is presenting us here as having once belonged to a different master, once belonged to a master called Sin. But now we've been set free from that. Through our baptism into Christ, we are made part of God, separated from sin and brought to God so that we now live to him. We are no longer bound to do the will of Master Sin. We live for God.

And we know that that's true, Paul says, because of Jesus Christ himself. Because Christ died to sin. Christ took our sins upon himself, went to the cross to pay for them. He took them all away. But Christ also died once. It's not like he rose from the dead and then died a little bit later. He has died once, and now he lives for God forevermore. Because if he were to die again, death would still have power over him. But death no longer has power over him. Death is no longer acting like a lord towards him. Jesus is free from the power of death forever, and he is now alive and will continue to live forever. And because we have been united with him through baptism, Christians, that's who we are too. Consider yourselves dead to sin, Paul says, just like Christ is dead to sin. Don't go back to what you once were. Don't go back to death. Sin is not your master anymore. You are now alive in Christ. And because Christ lives, you too will live in him.

So ultimately, then, Paul tells us we should not let sin rule over us like a king. We should listen to our true King, to the Lord, and carry out his will. This is what he means in verse 13 when he says: "Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness." And that word "instrument" that he uses here could also be translated as a tool or even a weapon. So the image is of something that you put in your hand so that you can do something else, like a hammer or a knife or a sword or anything like that. That's what he means by an instrument. So if we present ourselves as an instrument to someone else, we are presenting ourselves to them to do whatever they want. It's like a player who's out on the field running the plays that the coach tells him to play. That would be acting like an instrument in the coach's hand. Or like a soldier who's carrying out orders from a superior officer. That also would be like an instrument in the officer's hand. Or even a slave doing the will of his master. That would again be an instrument in the master's hand. So whoever we present ourselves to, Christians, we're basically saying: "Here I am. I'm ready to go. Tell me what to do!"

But are we presenting ourselves to sin in that way? Have we become tools in the hand of King Sin? To carry out his will, to do whatever he wants to do? That's what it means to be an antinomian. But we are presenting ourselves to God to be a tool in the hand of God, to carry out his will and to do whatever he wants. That is who we are because we have been baptized into Christ.

So Christians, having been baptized, let us turn away from our sins. We are dead to sin. That is not who we are anymore. Sin no longer rules over us. Sin is not our master anymore. We are alive to God in Christ Jesus, tools in his hand to carry out his will. So let us listen to the Lord in everything, because we have been baptized into him through Christ Jesus.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have set us free from bondage to sin through your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us always to follow after you and to carry out your will, so that we may do what is pleasing in your sight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.