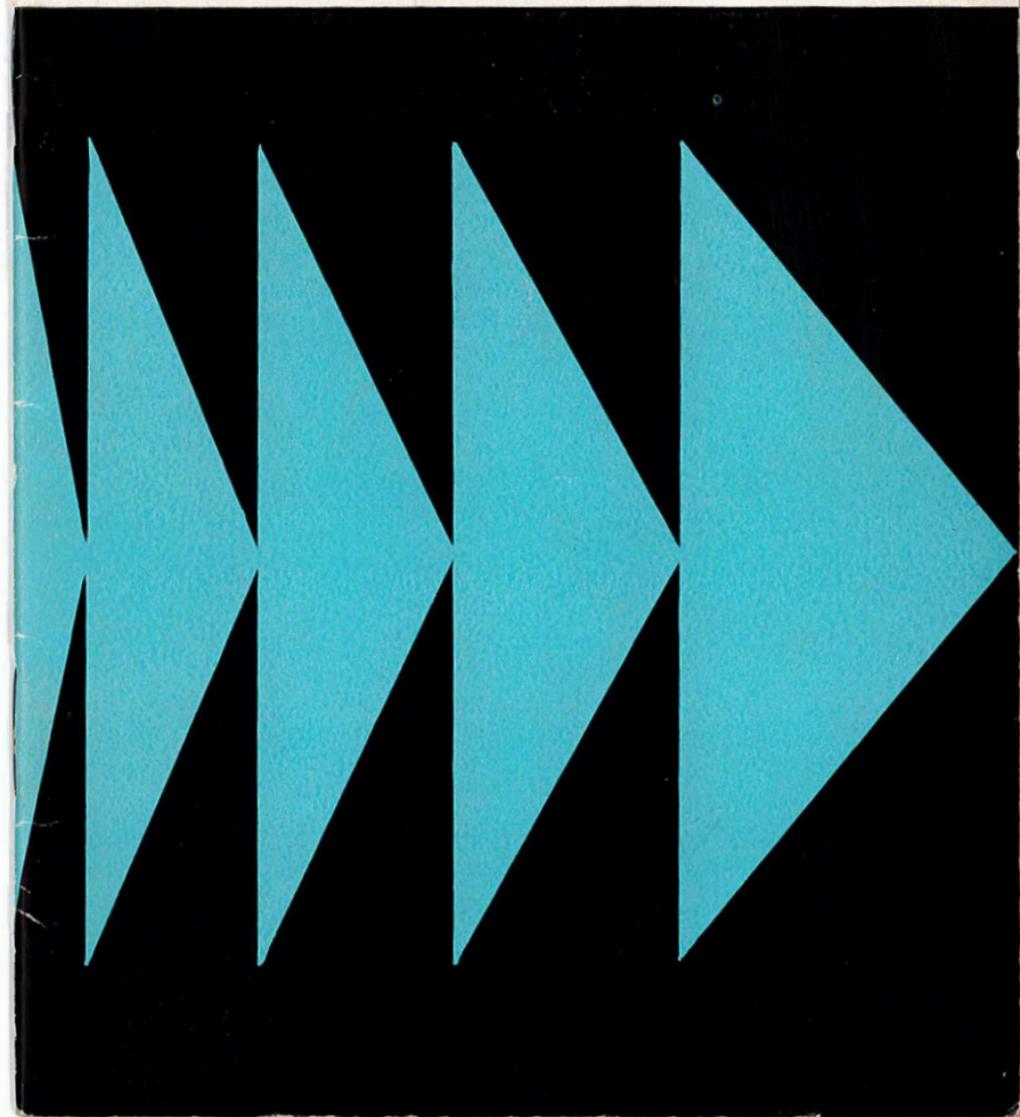


MORE GRACE THAN SIN

BY W. STUART HARRIS



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*One of a series of messages first given
by the Rev. W. Stuart Harris at the
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More Grace than Sin

THERE ARE three facts which we need ever to keep in mind. The first concerns the Word of God ; let us have a deep respect for it. Let us acknowledge its authority. Let us apply it to our own hearts and not be afraid to do so. We have in our hands the Holy Scriptures; here are the answers to all the deep questions of the soul.

Another great fact is the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Author of this Book. He lives in the heart of every believer. If we make it the prayer of our heart every day: "Oh God, let Thy presence be more real to me than the presence of anyone else," then we shall experience the Breath of God in a very real way.

*"Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou would'st do."*

The third basic truth we should keep ever before us, is the fact of Christ's victory on the Cross of Calvary, when He dealt with every enemy. If we are to know 'full Salvation', the blessing which God has promised us and which is the message of 'Keswick', then these are the three basic facts we must keep in mind; faith in the Bible and application of the Word of God to our hearts; the presence of the Spirit of God, and the victory of Calvary's Cross.

GRACE SURROUNDING AND ABOUNDING

Now in Romans 6:1-2, we are faced with a question: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

The subject of the fifth chapter of Romans is 'Grace', and it is mentioned there that we are standing in grace.

"By Whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (verse 2). Here we have the proximity of grace. We are surrounded by the grace of God and God is dispensing His grace to every one of us. "Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (verse 20). Boundless grace! Oh, the wonder of this, more grace than sin! Surrounding grace; abounding grace; but also reigning grace. "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 21).

So the Apostle takes up this question: "What shall we say then?" Shall we continue in sin? Shall we persist in sin in order that grace may abound? Shall we habitually sustain an attitude of dependence upon our sinful nature? is what it really means. It is not sins in the plural here, but sin in the singular. We know something about sins. We read about sins in the Gospel of Mark, chapter seven, verse fifteen: "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man . . . For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and defile the man". This is the fruit of the sin within us, this sinful nature which has its home in our innermost being. The Apostle Paul says on this great theme of the grace of God; "Shall we continue in sin? Shall we be so dominated by our sinful nature that the grace of God

may overflow and abound? God forbid! Banish the very thought! Never yield to it for one single moment. "God forbid," the Apostle cries, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?"

SIN—DOES IT MATTER?

Now there are two propositions we may consider here which it seems are at the back of this question. First of all, there is the reasoning. Because we are saved by grace and not by the law; because there is boundless grace, more grace than sin, can we live carelessly? Does it matter whether we sin or not? Shall we persist in sin that the grace of God may abound towards us? We know we can seek and obtain God's forgiveness; we know God is rich in mercy; we know there is boundless grace dispensed to us moment by moment. Are we, therefore, to persist in sin because there is abundant grace? God forbid! I believe we should ask for the same hatred of sin that is in the very heart of God.

Some years ago when I was travelling to France, I remember reading the first chapter of Romans. As I read verses three and four, whilst I was on the boat crossing the Channel, this word came to me with a fresh flash of light: "Concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Jesus Christ Who bore our sins in His body on the Tree, took them all away. And when He was raised from the dead He was raised by the Spirit of holiness, and sin had gone! That Spirit of holiness, this resurrection life of the Lord Jesus, is now imparted to the believer. We have not only a new life, but a resurrected life, a divine life, a holy life, and God has given us this life. How can we, therefore, live carelessly and sin easily?

A second consideration is: the more I sin, the more grace will be manifested. Someone has translated it this way: "Does it follow that we ought to go on sinning to give still

more occasion for grace? God forbid! We have died once for all unto sin. How can we grieve Him Who has saved us?"

This question is posed once more in this sixth chapter of Romans, in verse fifteen. "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace?" Again the same answer: "God forbid." "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (chapter 7 verse 5). By the law we knew that we were sinners. Before the law, man was guilty but did not know it. Afterwards, when the law came, he was guilty and he knew it. The law sentenced us to death. We have been condemned by the law, and we stand condemned before God. Dr. de Haan in his book on Law and Grace, has given a very simple illustration of this truth by the use of a glass of water. It is dirty water in the glass, but the water has been allowed to rest for some time so that the sediment has settled at the bottom of the glass. Apparently it seems to be quite clean water. "Now," says Dr. de Haan, "I take a spoon and stir up the water, and as I stir, the dirt is seen coming up from the bottom and spreading through all the water. That which appeared to be clean is now seen to be dirty. But the spoon did not add anything to the water; the spoon did not corrupt the water; neither can the spoon purify the water. The spoon represents the law and so we see clearly what has happened. The law of God has been applied to our hearts, and we find ourselves condemned by the law. The law cannot change us; it cannot transform us; it can only condemn us." That is why the grace of God has been manifested in the Person of Jesus Christ, Who was without sin. He took the sin of the whole world on Himself, and bore it away upon Calvary's Cross. By the Spirit of holiness He has been raised from the dead to impart His life to any trusting sinner.

A NEW 'WANT TO'

When we find ourselves as sinners standing condemned before God, guilty, lost and helpless, and we reach out for

the grace of God, then we find there is more grace than sin. Hallelujah, what a Saviour! When we receive Jesus Christ into our hearts and lives, we find that our hearts have been cleansed from sin through the precious blood of Jesus. Now the Spirit of holiness has been given unto us—a new life in Jesus Christ. I remember a young Christian who had been asked the question: "Can you do anything now that you have been saved by grace? Can you do anything you want to?" He replied, "Yes, but the Lord has put a new 'want to' in my heart."

Notice, therefore, the answer to this question: "Shall we persist in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin, or who have died to sin, live any longer therein?" The Apostle does not say; ". . . we who have been forgiven . . ." He goes right to the very root of the matter; he says, we who have "died to sin", we who have finished with sin! Yet some of us are still playing with it. Let us take up our position by the Word of God and declare with joy and thankfulness in our hearts, "I have died to sin."

In Galatians chapter two verses nineteen and twenty, we read that we have died twice already, even though we are still standing on two feet! "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." We have been slain by the law. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me." Slain at the cross! For when Jesus died, we died, and now we "live by the faith of the Son of God", not by our faith. He Who prays for us, trusts the Father for us. What a wonderful Saviour! He is pleading and believing for us in heaven. We are kept safe by the very life of Jesus; by faith in Him and by the faithfulness of the Son of God.

Turning back again to Romans chapter six, let us look again at this Death question, and this death and life matter. In verse nine, the Apostle says: "Knowing that Christ being

raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him." I always rejoice to find a negative and a positive in the Word of God, especially when they are in the one verse of Scripture. Notice it here: "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more . . ." He will never die again! And "Death hath no more dominion over Him"—a double truth emphasizing Christ's perfect victory. "For in that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God." "Likewise . . ." If you put a ring round the word "once" in verse ten, and a ring round the word "likewise" in verse eleven, join them together, and you will see the forcefulness of its meaning here, **"For in that He died, He died unto sin" ONCE FOR ALL.** "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus Christ finished with sin at the Cross, and He says to you and to me: "Finish with it! Be decisive! Turn your back on it completely!" And if this decision is reached in our hearts, although we are faced with the possibility of sin from day to day, there is a decision reached which enables the Spirit of God to move across our hearts and to fill our lives. As the Word of God is applied to our hearts from day to day, we shall know what is sinful and what is holy. We shall claim and experience His victory.

POWER IN THIS LIFE

Now in the sixth chapter of Romans we are told about Life again and again. In verse four we read that: "We also should walk in newness of life". And this life is a new life. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new" (*II Corinthians 5:17*).

*"Heaven above is softer blue,
Earth beneath is sweeter green,
Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen . . ."*

There is a newness about this life; it is entirely different. I like to talk to someone who has recently been converted, and put this question to him: "Tell me, how did it all begin?" And again and again I have received the reply: "I met somebody who was different, and I said to him, 'What is it you have that I do not have?'" This is newness of life!

Then verse five: "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection"—the likeness of His resurrection! Here is the mighty power that brought Jesus out of the grave, and took Him from earth back again to Heaven. This same power is the power that is in the very life of Jesus given to you and to me. We not only have a newness about this life, but we have a power in this life.

Again, in verse eight: "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him". What deep fellowship is this, living with Him! "Oh, it is glory, just to walk with Him!" That is a chorus that many young people love to sing. Fellowship with Him! We are never alone. Wherever we go, Jesus Christ is with us, and He is in us. We are walking in fellowship with Him. Not only in newness of life, not only in powerful life, but in the fellowship of the Lord Himself.

In verse eleven we read: "alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." So it is a life unto God. It is a life for His glory. It is a life for His purpose. As we face the challenge of what this means, we shall be asking the question: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" I am alive—unto God, living for His glory, living for His purpose. Then in verse thirteen we have it again: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments (or weapons) of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." Weapons of righteousness unto God!

In the Old Testament we read in the book of Judges about Samson: "And Samson found a new jaw bone of an ass, and he put forth his hand, and he took it, and he slew a

thousand men." And we have to-day a stronger than Samson, One Who wants to put forth His Hand and take the members of His Body, of our body, and use them. Can we trust Him, that He can take actually our "jaw bone" — our mouth, our voice — to slay a thousand men, to win a thousand souls? Remember, it is not only talking to people, but talking to God upon our knees. Who can estimate this side of Heaven how many souls have been led to Christ through the faithful, agonizing prayers of God's people?

ARE WE READY FOR THE TESTING?

But this 'New Life' is to be tested. As we come to the Biblical conclusion that now we have finished with sin because Jesus Christ finished with sin when He bore our sins in His Body to the tree, and as we open our hearts to receive the fulness of His gracious Spirit, then we know that the application of His Word from day to day will show us very clearly what is sin and what is righteousness. This new life of God we intend to live will be tested thoroughly. Are we ready for the testing of our new experience of God? Let us think how that testing may come to us by observing how God tested others.

Remember the testing that came to Abraham—testing in the realm of his reasoning. "Behold the fire and the wood," said Isaac, "but where is the lamb?" Abraham's reply was, "God will provide Himself a lamb." Yes, but God had told him to take his son, his only son, the one he loved, and the one in whom the promises were to be fulfilled. God had told him to take Isaac. But in the Epistle of the Hebrews, chapter eleven, we read these words: "He accounted that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." Here is a faith rising to God—expecting a miracle—anticipating the mighty working of God. Oh, is it not a sad thing when our reasoning is so different from God's! We draw away, and doubts fill our minds. We do not believe Him. We are living in a day when man would like to dispense with the miraculous. He wants to make God smaller. I used to say that man wants

to make God as small as he is, but I do not say that now. I believe that man in his pride desires to make God *smaller* than he is. Otherwise, how could he reason as he does, and dispense with the miraculous? The Psalmist said: "Thou art the God that doest wonders." And Abraham believed God. He accounted that "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." This was a great test in the life of Abraham, but he was faithful. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts," says God, "neither are your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

There was a Russian professor of Marxism, who had before him a group of students. He said to them, "I believe that Jesus was a magician. But," he said, "I can do even more than Jesus. Jesus changed the water into wine, but I can change the wine into water." So he produced a red powder and he sprinkled it into the water. "There," he said, "the water now has become wine." Then he produced another powder and he sprinkled that into the water. "Now the wine has become water," he said, "I can do more than Jesus!" A brave Christian stood up. He said: "You have amazed us, Comrade Professor. We would ask you one thing. Drink a little of your wine." "Oh," he replied, "I cannot. It is poison!" "That is the difference," said the student. "Jesus has given us the pure wine of joy for nearly two thousand years, and you are giving us poison." You can guess what happened to that man! But he had borne a faithful testimony to Jesus Christ. Abraham responded to the testing, and he was victorious. Have we succumbed to the peril of wrong reasoning, and are, therefore, doubting God? Do we no longer believe that God can work the miracles that are recorded in the Bible? Oh, we need a great God! We *have* a great God! The God of wondrous grace, the God of omnipotence, the God Who does wonders.

To Joseph there came testing of another kind. For as Abraham was tested in the realm of reasoning, Joseph was tested in relation to his moral character. Potiphar, an Egyptian

officer and guard, gave all to Joseph, except his wife. Now the temptation came to Joseph through Potiphar's wife. Remember the answer that Joseph gave: "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" When we read carefully that account in the book of Genesis, we notice the persistency of the woman. There was not only one occasion, there were several occasions, and each time Joseph stood upright. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

THIS PROBLEM TODAY

I remember speaking with a pastor who had been delivered from prison in Eastern Europe. He told me that just before his release, the guard said to him, "Do not forget two things. We can pick you up anywhere in the world. We can kidnap you and bring you back just here into prison once again." And the pastor knew that well, because he had said 'Goodbye' to people before and then they had been replaced again in the prison cells. The guard continued, "And if we fail to kidnap you, should you speak against us, then we will ruin you morally. We will spread slanderous tales about you and your character will be ruined." Such is the work of the enemy. "Lust not after her beauty in thine heart," says the Proverbs, "neither let her take thee with her eyelids." Oh, what a subtle temptation is indicated by these words.

I want to emphasize this gently and kindly. We are faced with this problem to-day. We have the Word of God in our hands; we have the Spirit of God in our hearts. Do not yield to the enemy. The works of the flesh are listed in Galatians chapter five, verse nineteen, and the first one on the list is, "Adultery". When our Lord was speaking in the Sermon on the Mount, in the fifth chapter of Matthew, verses 27 and 28, we have these words: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time; 'Thou shalt not commit adultery', but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust

after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Notice the Scripture makes it quite clear that it comes both ways, from the woman to the man, as in the experience of Joseph, or the man to the woman as mentioned in the verses just cited. Shall we persist in sin because grace abounds? God forbid! How shall we who have died to sin live any longer therein when He lives in our hearts? And He is putting a new "want to" in our hearts, a new desire of holiness, and of righteousness and of joy in the Holy Spirit.

NOTHING COULD STOP PRAYER

The last character to whom I want to refer, who faced testing triumphantly, is Daniel. We read in the sixth chapter of Daniel that he was threatened with being cast into a den of lions. What lies were told by the leaders of that nation! Daniel was the chief president; he was the first of them, and in verse seven we read: "All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors and the princes, the counsellors and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions." But Daniel was not in this. When the writing was signed, and Daniel knew it, we read that glorious statement in verse ten: "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." Nothing could stop Daniel praying. Can anything stop us praying?

There is one thing that is certain to stop us praying, and that is, sin in the heart; anything that we are lusting after that is not of God. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." He will not hear me! And that is why prayer dries up in the heart; because we have not fellowship with Him. I remember one of our Keswick speakers saying,

“Have you ever had the feeling of being reluctant to kneel down, and relieved to get up?” Yes, I have had that feeling. It is a dreadful feeling, when we can do anything but pray. When sin rules in the heart, when sin has come like a big, ugly, black cloud between us and God, it is then we even do not want to pray. But, “if we confess our sins” (yes, that includes the sin of prayerlessness) “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” “God forbid,” said Samuel, “that I should sin in ceasing to pray for you.” Is there not a need to-day for the release of prayer from the heart of the believer? But there can be no release of prayer until sin has been dealt with.

Think, then, of these three testings. Have we gone astray in our reasoning? Have we sought to make God smaller than He is? Have we doubted Him? “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Just confess it! Has there been a moral fall? Has there been uncleanness? Has there been wrong affection? Has this disturbed our joy and our peace, bringing unhappiness and misery deep down in our soul? We cannot have fellowship with a holy God whilst sin remains in the heart unconfessed. Or have we allowed something to keep us from the place of prayer? We feel we would rather go anywhere but to a Prayer Meeting. God can restore the flow of prayer in our heart. I am humbled every time I recall that Jesus Christ is praying night and day. Sometimes my heart is cold and I am not praying, but Jesus is praying continually—our “great High Priest”.

WE CAN FIND THE ANSWER

Shall we then persist in sin, maintaining an association with the old, sinful nature “that grace may abound?” God forbid! It may be that there is something that, in the past we thought was not sin, but now we know it is sin. As we read the Word of God, and as the Bible is applied to our hearts, we discover things in our hearts which we never realized before were sinful. But God touches our conscience. I believe that anything to-day that is questionable, anything about

which we are uncertain, we can find the answer here in the Bible. And as God points it out to us, let us yield to Him. Think of Calvary where the sin was taken away. Think of the decisive act to which God now brings us, to reckon ourselves dead unto sin once for all.

But there is something else, and this is far more serious. It is possible that there is something that was sin to us before, and now it is not sin. This indicates a spiritual decline. There was a time when we could not do it. There was a time when it was sin to us, but now we can do it without any trouble. What has gone wrong? See the slippery slope upon which we could so easily be treading, taking us away from God. Is it not wonderful to know that, although all these horrible sins come from within us, yet now in Christ from the inner man may flow out the “rivers of living water”?! What a triumph, that in the same heart from which previously proceeded so many evil things, now flow the rivers of living water by the holy life of Jesus Christ!

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