

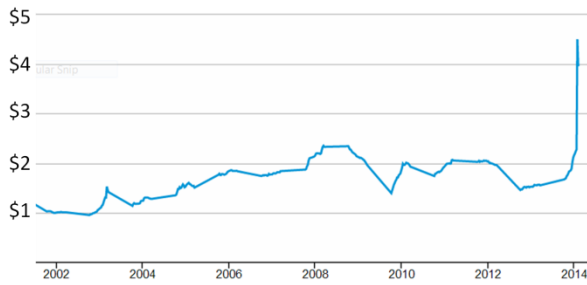
# FIGHTING SIN IN A SIN CURSED WORLD



**Romans 6:1-14**

We are in what may be just the beginning of a propane crisis. Those of you who depend on propane for heating your home already know what this chart will look like. The price more than doubled in one week. Suddenly heating costs went from very expensive to virtually unaffordable. Prices took a slight downturn this past week and I truly do hope they continue down some more.

PRICE OF PROPANE 2002-2014



Any time there is a crisis, our first reaction is to want a quick fix. I think I may have discovered a quick fix for the crisis of skyrocketing propane costs. Have you ever heard of the buttered cat paradox? As we all know, if you drop a cat upside down, it will always rotate and land on its feet. We also know that buttered bread will always land with the butter side down. So if you attach buttered bread to the back of a cat, will the butter side land face down or will the cat land upright? This is the buttered cat paradox. But what will really happen is that the cat and the bread will rotate because the cat force and the buttered bread force does not work against itself but rather in tandem. So if you attach the cat/bread combination



Cat always lands on her feet.



Bread with butter always fall buttered side down



Fasten the bread with butter to cats back



Cat will keep rotating and never fall on the ground.



Attach the Cat-Bread to the generator



∞  
Infinite energy!

to a generator, the rotation will turn the generator and you end up with an infinite supply of energy.

There isn't a quick fix for the propane crisis. In fact, most things that are a quick fix tend to be like putting duck tape on the gaping hole in the Titanic--just a temporary, useless patch. The same is certainly true when we look for a quick fix for our sin problem. We all sin and we all want to sin much less than we do. We want to change but we can get frustrated at the slow pace of real and lasting change. This morning we are covering part 2 of last week's message--Fighting Sin in a Sin Cursed World. Wouldn't you like to have a quick fix for your sin problem? I don't plan to give you one this morning, but what we do have in Romans 6 is an indispensable key to fighting sin. If you want to have success, you must understand and practice these principles.

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

*5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

*12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 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. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

As he so often does, Paul begins with a question. *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?* He did this quite frequently.

6.1-- What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

6.15-- What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?

7.7-- What then shall we say? That the law is sin?

7.13-- Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?

This question doesn't make any sense unless you have read chapter. In verse 20 of the last chapter, Paul wrote, *but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*. So now we can see why Paul raised the question. If grace increases when sin increases, then why not sin more so that you can get more grace? *Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*

I think we understand that this is a rhetorical question. In the middle of this past football season, it's kind of like asking, "How are the Packers going to win the Superbowl without Aaron Rodgers?" That is a rhetorical question. It's not really a question, is it? It's really a statement

turned into a question. We know that the Packers could never win the Superbowl with a back-up quarterback. We all know the answer to the question.

But with Paul's question, some do not assume the answer that he gives. He raised this question/objection because he knew that for some people, either this was a real question or else it was a smokescreen intended to destroy his teaching. If his opponents could find a huge hole in his theology, the entire thing could come crumbling down. For Paul, writing a letter to a church was a bit like being engaged in a debate. Ken Ham and Bill Nye prepared extensively for their debate. A big part of that preparation is always anticipating what your opponent will say, what objections he or she will raise. This is what Paul does. He continually anticipated questions and objections. This is something that you and I should be doing. Our faith should be mature enough that we can not only answer most objections that come our way but even anticipate them before they come.

Getting back to the original question--why would someone even ask such a question? *Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?* Normal rules of logic would dictate that this would be true. If grace increases as sin increases, then it follows that my sin will increase God's grace. There are three basic reasons why this question would be raised. By the way, these are the same basic responses people might have to any difficult question in the Bible.

1. The Learner--"Paul, your logic doesn't make any sense. Please explain it to me." Certainly some in the church at Rome and in the 20 centuries since that time would have had genuine, honest questions about this. I think that if Paul had not answered this question, it would have left most of us confused.

Of the three, this is the category where you and I should be hanging out most of the time. On the one hand, the message of the Bible is so simple and straightforward that a kindergartener can understand it. We teach the Bible to our very young children because they can understand it. The Bible is so simple that a child can understand but at the same time it is so rich a deep that the greatest Christian minds on the planet could not begin to plumb it's depths in ten thousand years. We are learners. We must be learners and when you get to a more challenging section, don't assume the worst. Dig in and ask for wisdom.

2. The Skeptic--"Paul, your logic doesn't make sense. I think your entire theology is wrong." There's one or two in every crowd, isn't there? Some people are always looking for a way to cast doubt on the truth. Now here's the thing about a skeptic. A skeptic doesn't have to be right. All they need to do is to throw enough doubt on the truth to win people to their side.

As I said last Sunday, it does not matter if you hold to a young earth or an old earth. You know full well what I believe but both perspectives are acceptable within our church. What matters almost more than what you believe is how you arrived at your belief.

Never one to be shy about controversy, two days after the Nye-Ham debate Pat Robertson [chimed in with his viewpoint](#) on the 700 Club. I would put his comments into the skeptic category. First, he didn't describe what he was attacking. He mentioned Bishop Usher but he

failed to mention that anyone can add up the dates of the genealogies in Genesis and see that they are truly consecutive and make perfect sense.

One of these days, why don't you take about half an hour to an hour and do this yourself? It's not hard. All you need to be able to do is to read and use the addition button on a calculator. One of the things you will find is that Methuselah, the oldest man who ever lived, died the same year as the flood. People tend to think of genealogies in the Bible as some kind of wild guesstimate. The genealogy in Matthew 1 is very clearly not meant to be complete. Verse 17 states, So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations. Any 3rd grader could tell you that there were far more than 42 generations between Abraham and Jesus. Matthew used a rhetorical device of 14 in each section, possibly because the Hebrew letters in King David's name added up to 14. But the genealogies in Genesis are nothing like the one in Matthew.

The second thing Robertson did was just to string a long list of statements together but prove none of them. Like I said, the skeptic doesn't have to prove anything. All they need to do is cast enough doubt on your belief.

3. The Rationalizer--"Thanks, Paul. This helps me justify my sin!"

The rationalizer is always looking for a loophole. This is like my marriage vows I read last week. I never actually forgot the words, "I am sorry," I simply choose not to say them very often. You see, the rationalizer does not want to reject the truth. They have far too much pride to do that. The rationalizer is usually a legalist. They say that they want to obey God and they do everything they can to make it appear as if they are very spiritual. The rationalizer will use the letter of the law to their own advantage.

A really bizarre example of this occurred in 1700's Europe. In 1740, Christina Johansdotter was living in Stockholm and became extremely depressed. She was so depressed that she wanted to end her life. The only thing that stopped her from committing suicide was the Catholic church's teaching that those who committed suicide went straight to Hell with no chance of redemption. In order to escape hell but also end her own life, she devised an horrendously evil plan. If she murdered a child, she would most certainly be sentenced to death but she would also have time for the priest to absolve her of the sin of murder. She went to a friend of hers and asked to watch their infant so Christina could show the child to some others. Instead, she decapitated the infant.<sup>1</sup> (Ava Litzelfelnerin did the same thing in Austria in 1767.<sup>2</sup>) But Christina was not the only person to arrive at this twisted solution to suicide. It became a type of epidemic. Kathy Stuart, a professor of history at the University of California Davis, reported 300 cases like this in the 1700's.

Obviously, these are old and extremely bizarre situations. No one thinks like this anymore, do they? Actually, I see many people who still live this way. They embody what the French philosopher said."God will forgive; that is his 'business.'"<sup>3</sup> (By the way, I know a lot of you love to have your morning coffee, but beware how your coffee drinking might affect your theology. Voltaire drank somewhere between 40 and 80 cups of coffee per day! Maybe that's what messed him up!?) People who think like this live in state of cheap grace. They don't see the seriousness

of their sin. They know that a particular behavior is wrong but they walk straight into it anyway. "I know it's wrong but I also know that God is a forgiving God, so it will be alright." when you get right down to it, most of the time we sin, we know that we are doing it and therefore we are assuming-presuming really, that God will forgive. What happens when you cheapen God's grace and presume upon his grace is that it actually ceases to be grace. Why? Because you get to the point where you think he owes it to you. God will forgive. that's his job. It's what he does. Do you see ,the moment we think that God owes us forgiveness and grace, it is no longer grace. And if it is not grace, then either we need to do something to earn it this forgiveness or else there is nothing we can do and we are condemned. But grace, by its very definition, cannot be deserved.

But here's the thing. It is good to throw yourself on the grace of God. The grace of God is so free and available to us, that is nearly sounds like this question from Paul. When we sin, rather than hang your head in shame and question if God could ever forgive you or not, it is at that very moment we need to run to God and confess. Where sin increases God's grace will follow in step. Can you feel the tension here? If God was, shall we say, somewhat stingy with his grace, then that would be a different story. But his grace is lavish. That's what the apostle Paul, who, by the way was a terrorist and a murderer, said about God's grace. *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight* (Eph. 1:7-8). Paul needed lavish grace, and that's what he got. As Jesus said, his grace is *pressed down, shaken together, running over* (Luke 6:38).

It's lavish, but it is not cheap. It is free, but it cost God everything. Do you feel that tension? It is so free that we can almost presume upon it, but not quite. We can have absolute faith that his grace will be there when we need it, but not presume that he owes it to us. I tried to illustrate this idea one time when I disciplined one of my children. A while back, one of my kids, and I won't say who, did something that was rather shocking. It was one of those things that I couldn't just apply a quick punishment. This one required more thought and prayer about how to best handle it. The next day I had an idea. I bought a small item at the store that I knew this child had been wanting. When I gave it to this child, they asked me what it was for and I told them I was giving this gift to them instead of a punishment. I wasn't thinking about this verse per se, but I wanted them to catch a big picture of lavish grace.

Now if I did the same thing for all of my children several times in a row, what would happen? They would begin to think, "Hey, the more I sin the more gifts that dad buys for me. This is a like a goldmine. I'll bet if I broke all of the windows I might get a hundred dollars!" That would be sick and perverse, wouldn't it? But that is what it is like when we presume upon God's grace. We are like the rationalizer and we say, "Thanks for the theology lesson, Paul. This helps me justify my sin!"

So it's wrong to presume in this way upon God's grace but Paul went on to explain very specifically why it is wrong.

*2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

The key to this passage and to our success in fighting sin is the truth that we are dead to sin. We have died to sin so how can we go on living in it?

Enslaved to sin (6)	Set free from sin (7)
Slaves of sin (17)	Slaves of righteousness (18)
<b>Unable</b> not to sin	<b>Able</b> not to sin

I happen to like verse three--*do you not know...?* The literal translation is, *are you ignorant?* Yes, Paul. Yes, I am. You are absolutely right. I am ignorant. But the truth really is not so much that I am ignorant, but I am forgetful. I have learned this truth and I have taught this truth so why do I forget this truth?

My favorite passage that explains why we forget basic truths is Hebrews 5.

*11 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

I do not apply. I do not "practice" that which I have learned. If you do not practice what you have learned, you will never move forward in your faith. I am dead to sin, alive to Christ, made holy by his blood, now I just need to live it out--to practice it.

Rich Maurer  
February 9, 2014

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christina\\_Johansdotter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christina_Johansdotter)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/473/transcript>

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, W.H. Auden, one of the greatest writers of the 20th century had King Herod say the following in one of his poems: "I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really the world is admirably arranged."