

*Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit,
are you now being perfected by the flesh?*
~ Galatians 3:3



Grace: The Risk We Need to Take

by Josh Glaser

I was exhausted and had contemplated staying home from church. The night before, I had stayed up until the early hours of the morning watching a rented ‘B’ video and pouring over the pages of a pornographic magazine. On Sunday, standing near the back of the sanctuary, I felt vulnerable, embarrassed, and ashamed—as though somehow others could see through me. The people around me were worshipping. I tried to worship, too, if for no other reason than to not draw attention to myself. But my heart wasn’t in it. Feeling like a hypocrite, I bowed my head and began to pray.

“Father, I shouldn’t be here. I’m not like the rest of these people. I’ve confessed my sins to you this morning, but I don’t want to be a hypocrite. Should I just go home? I feel so far from You. And so ashamed.” I yearned for the service to be over so I could get out of there as fast as I could.

Although this was years ago when I was single, I still remember how I felt that morning . . . and what happened next.

Many who struggle habitually with any type of sexual sin can relate to these thoughts and feelings. This article isn’t about whether these feelings are good or bad. Sin brings death and gives the enemy access to our lives. It’s terribly destructive, and these kinds of feelings could be a natural consequence of sexual sin. But the thoughts frequently associated with these feelings are not, and in my work with sexually addicted men and women, I suspect something else often underlies the feelings: an *unwillingness or inability to receive the Father’s grace*.

This knee-jerk response to want to “get away” from God and His people is deadly. When we refuse to receive the Father’s grace after sexual sin, when we heed the impulse to pull away or stay away from God and His people, we don’t change for the better. Instead, we perpetuate, even worsen, the sexual sin habit. It is His grace that will most change our hearts and behaviors.

Beating Ourselves Up Is Not Repentance

For much of my Christian life, I had the impression that there was a direct correlation between how much God would welcome me in His presence and how long it had been since I had fallen into sexual sin. In my gut I felt the more recent my sexual sin, the more distant God was; the more heinous the sin in my eyes, the less God wanted me in His presence; the more frequently I did it, the angrier He was at me. I felt the converse was also true: the longer I abstained from sexual sin or the less serious it was, the more He would welcome me in His presence.

We may have been taught that grace is present, available, and victorious, and we can try to believe it is true, but it is only through risking it in actual life situations that we give substance to our belief.

(Gerald G. May, M.D.,
Addiction & Grace)

How about your life? What do you do after sexual sin? See if you recognize in yourself any of the following responses common to Christians who fall into sexual sin.

1. Biding Time: After falling sexually, do you wait any length of time before approaching God again? Many of us have tried this. We act like disobedient servants waiting outside until our master’s anger subsides. In truth, we hang on until *we feel* we can approach Him again. But the waiting time is arbitrary. How long is long enough?

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2. Doing Good: After sexual sin, do you increase your efforts at being a good person—working more diligently, serving spouse or kids more humbly, intensifying efforts to have quiet times, or increasing personal standards of sexual purity? Outwardly, the activities may look good, but deep down we’re trying to earn our way back into God’s favor, to displace the bad with good. This, too, is arbitrary. How much do you need to do to be good enough?

3. Being Hard on Ourselves: Do you beat yourself up—subtly cutting out pleasure (e.g. isolation, sabotaging relationships, refusing compliments, dodging opportunities for potential success) or engaging in “Christian” activities (e.g. fasting, giving, Bible reading, intensive or extended times of prayer) all to inflict punishment on yourself? Outwardly, these may look good, but inwardly can all be ways we try to even the score for the sexual sins we’ve done. But how much punishment is enough?

I’m not suggesting there are no consequences for sinning (there are), that the Father won’t discipline us (He loves us so He

will). And I’m not saying that waiting on God, working hard, loving your spouse, or practicing spiritual disciplines are bad. These are good things. But here’s the difference: With a clear understanding of grace, doing good is good, *but it does not have any ability to make us right with God.*

In fact, trying to gain even the tiniest bit of acceptance from God based on what you do or do not do is equivalent to trying to uphold the entire Old Testament Law, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9), “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it” (James 2:10). In light of this, those wrestling against sexual sin must let go of legalism if they ever desire to walk in freedom.

The underlying concept for each of the above three methods is this: We have transgressed against God and therefore we must make recompense for it somehow. This is entirely different than godly sorrow or godly discipline. And, as I stated before, it does not work to change us. For those of you who recognize yourself in any of the descriptions above, perhaps it’s time to try something different.

Why These Won’t Work

The problem with these ways of reacting to our own sexual sin is this: You and I cannot overcome sexual sin without God. The more a man fantasizes and masturbates, the more he *needs* God’s help to stop. The more a woman becomes entrenched in an emotionally dependent relationship, the more she *needs* Christ’s courage and resolve to walk away. The more a man becomes ensnared in anonymous sexual encounters, the more he *needs* God’s Spirit to walk him to freedom. If God’s answer to us when we sin sexually were to send us away (even for a little while), then we would never sin less. Consider the logic: If God welcomes me less the more I lust, then the more I need God to help me stop lusting, the less He will.

“But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20b).

Grace, not law, is the antidote to sexual sin. As the antithesis of legalism that says we must do good to gain or keep God’s acceptance, grace says God lovingly accepts us into His presence as we are, and that is why we want to do good and how we are able to do it. As Christians, we know the power of grace to save us at conversion. We must also

Please Pray With Us . . .

Please pray for . . .

- **Ruth Wilson** (our Baltimore Program Coordinator’s wife) will be giving birth to their fourth baby sometime in the 2nd or 3rd week of December. Because of a condition called placenta accretia, the doctor’s anticipate a complicated surgery. Please pray for a healthy delivery for both mom and baby **Gabriel**.
- Please pray for fruitful writing and editing for **Alan Medinger** and **Josh Glaser** as they continue work on their book.

Join us in thanking God for . . .

- The Regeneration of Northern Virginia 20th Anniversary Dessert held in October (*see p. 4*). It was a wonderful night of celebration and testimony.
- The addition of **Ann Cohrs** to our Northern Virginia staff. Ann joins the staff team as an Interim Ministry Associate after many years on the distinguished NoVA Living Waters ministry team.
- The ordination of **Bob Ragan**.
- The financial support and prayer backing of our ministry partners this year.
- God’s presence and provision for Regeneration’s ministry’s in 2007.

For more information or in-depth monthly prayer requests,
E-mail info@RegenerationMinistries.org.

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experience this grace to save us from engrained habits of sexual sin and from that which keeps us from God after we sin sexually. We could not earn our way to the Father before we became Christians. We cannot earn our way to Him now.

Receiving God’s grace takes courage sometimes. It doesn’t seem fair. We know we deserve worse, much worse. What if we come for grace and receive something else? But as we learn to come to Christ with our sexual sins, falling before Him with nothing but the dirty rags of what we’ve done, we begin to discover something beyond our wildest dreams: He does not reject us, He is not angry, He is not our adversary. He is our Father. He reaches out His hand not to strike but to wash clean, to lift up, to restore.

When we are loved in this way by our Father and when we receive this love, our wills are strengthened and our hearts grow to love the Father in response. Might you sin again nonetheless? You might. I have. Does God like it? No, He most definitely does not. But He loves you and me. In fact, do you know why He hates sexual sin? *Because* He loves you and me. As mentioned earlier, sin brings death and gives the enemy access to our lives, and your loving Father doesn’t want those things for any of His beloved children.

Daring to Receive Grace

Remember my story from the beginning of this article? That wasn’t the end of it. That miserable morning ended up becoming one of the most significant moments of my own journey so far—one that continues to remind me of God’s great grace and its power to change a human life.

With my head bowed in shame and fear that morning, the Father spoke to me in the silence of my heart: “Don’t let your sin keep you away from Me this morning, Joshua. *Dare* to enter into My presence. Now more than ever you need my grace. Worship Me—not because you are worthy, but because

you have sinned and I am a God who loves sinners. Receive My love for you, even now . . . especially now.”

With trepidation, I started to draw near to God in worship. It wasn’t easy. Memories of what I’d seen and done came into my mind. Several times I heard accusing words like, “You hypocrite—worshiping like you have it all together,” or “You’re making God angry for presuming you can approach Him after what you’ve done!”

I was disconcerted and hesitated repeatedly. “*Lord, do you really want me to keep worshiping?*” “More than ever you need Me, Joshua,” He replied, and then gently and encouragingly, “Don’t dare *not* to come.” I pressed closer to Him in my worship. I mentally released memories from the night before into Jesus’ body on the cross. I worshiped because for some reason beyond my capacity to understand, this holy God carried my sin and died under its weight so I wouldn’t have to spend any time apart from Him. As the church service went on, I realized how backwards it was to think of leaving church because of my sin. By the nature of Christianity, walking into a church service is an admission of sin and the need for God’s grace. That morning, as I stood in His grace, I found I wanted to worship all the more, to be with Him all the more, to be with my brothers and sisters in Christ all the more.

He knows your struggle with sexual sin. Do not run from Him to try to get cleaned up first. He alone can clean you up. Let the blood of Jesus wash you wherever you are in the struggle. Receive His grace at the cross. There is no condemnation left for you. Christ took it all. As you come and receive from Him, you will find greater freedom from your sin and greater love for Him. ■

From the Mail-box to the In-box

Beginning in January, *Regeneration News* will be available via E-mail. You can enjoy the same great content conveniently and privately in your E-mail in-box. There is no cost to you to sign up. In fact, by signing up you’ll be helping Regeneration save money!

So, if you have an E-mail account and prefer to have this newsletter sent to you there, simply E-mail us and let us know—we’ll sign you up free of charge.



To sign up, contact info@RegenerationMinistries.org. We respect the privacy of our subscribers and will never share your email address.

MINISTRY NEWS

Bob Ragan's Ordination

In October, **Bob Ragan** was ordained as a Deacon in CANA (Convocation of Anglicans in North America), which is affiliated with the world-wide Anglican Communion. Bob was ordained at the Falls Church in Falls Church, Virginia by Bishop Martin Minns, long time rector of Truro Church in Fairfax. The Falls Church and Truro have been among Regeneration's strongest supporters for more than twenty years, and both churches have recently separated from the Episcopal Church, joining with other Anglican churches around the world who hold to Biblical orthodoxy. We want to congratulate Bob on this very significant development in his life and ministry which continues to help to transform so many lives! Deacon Bob continues to serve as Director of Regeneration of Northern Virginia.



Thank You NoVA 20th Anniversary Dessert Guests!

Sincere thanks to all of you who joined us for Regeneration of Northern Virginia's 20th Anniversary Dessert in October. It was a blessing for us to visit with you and celebrate together the powerful and restorative love of Christ in the lives of so many men and women in the past 20 years. Thanks to your generous contributions, \$40,000 was raised in pledges and one-time gifts to further help the men and women in the Northern Virginia and DC Metro area who struggle with sexual sins and brokenness. God bless you!

Save the date

*2008 Spring Banquet
to Benefit the Ministry
of Regeneration Baltimore*

Friday, April 11, 2008
Towson, Maryland

Come celebrate how
Christ's love is
changing lives.

Merry Christmas to You!

With Christmas and New Years upon us, we thank you for your ongoing partnership with Christ's work through Regeneration.

Please remember Regeneration in your prayers and year-end giving, as together we bring Christ's redemptive love to men and women seeking freedom from sexual sins and brokenness.

**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to You
from the Staff and Board of Regeneration!**

Regeneration Is . . .

Staff Team

Joshua Glaser
Executive Director

Bob Ragan
Northern Virginia
Director

Jay Wilson
Baltimore Program
Coordinator

Ann Cohrs
Interim NoVA Ministry
Associate

Devon Medinger
Staff Accountant

Stacey Feehley
Administrative Assistant

Alan Medinger
Founder &
Executive Director Emeritus

Group Meetings

Baltimore, MD

- Living Waters
- New Beginnings
(Sexual Addiction Group)
- New Directions
- Growth Into Manhood
- Wives' Group

Northern, VA

- Living Waters
- Women's Group
- Wives' Group
- Men's Group
- s.a.l.t.
(Sexual Addiction Group)