

June 21, Ordinary 12A (Romans 6:1b–11)

I remember when I first had the thought that if God forgives my sins, my behavior doesn't really matter.

by [Trice Gibbons](#) in the [June 2026](#) issue

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I was raised in and by the church. If the doors to our Presbyterian church were open, my family was present. And to make sure the church was fully present in my life, my parents also sent me to St. Martin's Episcopal School. As a kid growing up in New Orleans, I never had a curfew. However, the rule was that I would be at Sunday school and church on Sunday morning no matter how late I stayed out on Saturday night, and there were no excuses.

It only took one late Saturday night—technically an early Sunday morning—out on the town as a teenager for me to learn my lesson. This night out was followed by my rude awakening by my father a few hours later. My father couldn't carry a tune in a bucket, but he delighted in singing over our home's intercom system when it was time to get up. It was awful. No curfew necessary.

In hindsight, I am extremely grateful for this rule of my parents. Though I still remember how awful I felt that particular Sunday morning.

At some point in my development, I remember thinking, *If God forgives my sins, my behavior doesn't really matter. God will just forgive me when I sin. Don't be too concerned.* Even as a child of the '70s in New Orleans—and yes, I still love disco—I was pretty harmless. I didn't have anything particularly awful in mind that I was planning to get away with. But the thought was still there: I could get away with almost anything, because God would forgive me.

It says volumes that I was more afraid of my parents than God. If you met my loving yet strict parents, you might not find this all that puzzling.

This is exactly the type of thinking that Paul is arguing against in chapter 6 of his letter to the Romans. Paul is concerned that Christ's followers will misunderstand grace in a way that encourages sin: More sin equals more grace. Instead, Paul wants his readers to understand that through baptism and our mystical union with Christ, we are dead to sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us; only Christ has dominion over us. Therefore, we should live as Christ modeled and taught.

In other words, grace is not permission to keep living however we please. Grace is the power by which God transforms us into people who live like Christ.

One of the clearest benefits of growing up in the church is the opportunity to see that transformation embodied in others. I witnessed a multitude of examples of people whose lives were transformed and guided by the recognition that their baptism means that they died with Christ, were raised with Christ, and were completely freed from sin's power. And being freed from sin's power transforms a person's life. Through my relationship with the church, I had the privilege of witnessing the lives of the many saints I knew there. The love, support, encouragement, and challenges those saints provided are immeasurable and life-changing.

In my home church, Metairie Ridge Presbyterian Church, there is a window dedicated to my father, the one who woke me up for Sunday school and church every Sunday morning until his death my freshman year of college. There is also a plaque with his name on it in the education wing he helped build and where he taught the adult Sunday school class for many years. Neither of those memorials is necessary, because the real legacy he left is the way he modeled what it looks like to be dead to sin. He did this through his dedication to the church and its ministry, through his insistence that his children be grounded in faith.

My father was in no way perfect. (I can provide a list.) None of us is. But all baptized believers have died with Christ and have been raised with Christ through our faith. This is an immeasurable, unconditional love.