

Sermons through

Romans

Newness of Life

Romans 6:1-4

With Study Questions

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What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-4).

Introduction

While seeking to unravel and re-stitch the tattered fabric of lives torn asunder by the tentacles of egregious sinful behavior, I was asked a question by the perpetrator. Appearing to be growing impatient with how long the restoration was taking, they (almost rhetorically) asked, “Well there’s forgiveness, right?” The question was posed as if they were speaking of a warrantee on a broken dishwasher or car insurance for a fender-bender. They seemed to be under the impression, at some level, that Christianity meant they could sin with impunity or that it was some meager bump in the road.

It made me think of a common complaint, or at least confusion, regarding Christianity – that Christians can do whatever they want and just be forgiven. The blood of Christ becomes this limitless debit card that can be continuously swiped through all the ATMs during a debased Spring Break odyssey; it is, after all, woven into human nature – even our regenerate human nature to be sinful. There is forgiveness, right?

Numerous theological trends have contributed to this error. Some Christian systems have consigned the law (since “**sin is lawlessness**” [1 John 3:4]) to a defunct dispensation, so the vast majority of Scripture which defines sin (the Old Testament) no longer applies. Others believe that when Paul says Christ is “**the end of the law**” (Romans 10:4), Paul is seeking to usher in a new system of ethics derived from the Spirit which may or may not be consistent with the law revealed in Scripture. Still others insist that man, being made in the image of God, has access to a sufficient system of ethics via his observation of the natural world.

The Apostle Paul himself had been accused of being antinomian (against the law of God):

And why not do evil that good may come? – as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just (Romans 3:8).

It is not very difficult to gather from certain passages in Scripture that people used their freedom in Christ as a backstage pass for licentious behavior:

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another (Galatians 5:13).

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God (1 Peter 2:16).

The passage upon which we meditate this morning begins by addressing the similar issue. Paul had just finished explaining how grace can out-jump sin – **“where sin abounded, grace abounded more” (Romans 5:20)**. No matter how deep the hole in which we find ourselves due to our lawlessness, offenses, and sin – grace doesn’t merely bring us back to the surface, but elevates us out of the hole and straight to heaven **“through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:21)**.

He then begins chapter six with the rhetorical question:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound (Romans 6:1)?

Perhaps we can best demonstrate this tortured logic with a syllogism:

Premise one: God likes to demonstrate His grace.

Premise two: God demonstrates His grace when I sin.

Conclusion: I should continue to sin so that God can do what He likes to do.

Another possible conclusion: **“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).**

It would be like me helping my wife clean the house and she says “thank you” and I say “It’s an honor to help you honey. I enjoy it!” so she empties the trash can in the middle of the living room so I can help her even more. Paul answers his own question with a very firm “*me genoito*” or...

Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it (Romans 6:2)?

Dead To Sin

Unlike many politicians, Paul is not shy about giving the answer right up front with the explanation to follow. Whatever your understanding of grace, if it somehow fosters a liberty from practicing goodness, righteousness and holiness, you’re either misunderstanding it or not in it. Because Paul now asks another question, and the question contains some information about Christians. They are people “**who died to sin.**” It is the aorist tense (past tense) and the indicative mood (indicating a state of being as opposed to a command or an imperative).

The imperatives will come later in the chapter (verses 11-13 and others), but here Paul appeals to the reasonable expectation of behavior based upon something that has happened to a person. When Jesus said “**rise, pick up your bed, and go home**” (Mark 2:11) to the paralytic, He said it recognizing something significant had transpired (or was at that moment transpiring) in order for the man to obey.

When Paul writes “**How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?**” it’s as if he is saying “You’ve been healed of your paralysis, why do you stay in your bed, or in a wheel chair or crutches?” Something significant has happened *for*, and *to*, those who have placed their faith in Christ.

For many chapters we have rejoiced in what has happened *for* us – in short, by the obedience of Christ, we were “**made righteous**” (Romans 5:19) in the eyes of God. But this is something that happened outside of us, on a cross on Calvary. Our hope of peace with God is found outside of ourselves, our eyes fixed upon Jesus (Hebrews 12:2).

But here Paul writes of something that happened *to* us – we “**died to sin.**” So in Paul’s mind it makes no sense at all that we would continue to “**live any longer in it.**” But what do these phrases mean? What does it mean to be dead to sin? What does it mean to cease living in it? Because sin certainly does

appear to continue to be a pesky foe – it's not as if sin died. And what does it mean to no longer live in something that rears its ugly head at every turn in our existence?

In order to explain himself, Paul pushes our thinking with this somewhat difficult passage utilizing something that has happened to every member of this church--baptism.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3, 4).

Baptism

One might ask why Paul uses baptism here. For one, in the sacrament(s) God graciously provides an image for His children to more accurately grasp His covenant (His promise, His grace) and their favored status in His eyes – it would be like a mom painting a picture holding hands with her toddler so the child can more vividly enjoy her/his mother's love for them.

This is not to diminish the sacraments into child's project; certainly the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper) contain the very spiritual presence of Christ and can be the source of great blessings or curses. Nonetheless, they seem to be God's way of helping us see things more clearly. It should also be noted that for Paul, it would have been quite unheard of for a believer not to have been baptized, so he might have used convert and baptized synonymously.

One other thing we need to be warned against is the notion that the sacraments are magic and work *ex opere operato* (out of the operation they operate or from the work done). Like the Ark of the Covenant or the splitting of the Red Sea, the sacraments will do something – guidance and deliverance for some, boils and devastation for others. Calvin explains:

In short, he teaches what is the real character of baptism when rightly received. So he testifies to the Galatians, that all who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:27.) Thus indeed must we speak, as long as the institution of the Lord and the faith of the godly unite together; for we never have naked

and empty symbols, except when our ingratitude and wickedness hinder the working of divine beneficence. ¹

Any participation in any biblical or godly enterprise must be taken in faith, lest it be a source of judgment rather than blessing. **“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required” (Luke 12:48).**

Baptized Into His Death

The words of Christ above should sink deep while considering how Paul uses baptism here. We generally think of baptism as cleansing and it certainly includes that. But Paul here says we should, in pondering our baptism, realize that when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into His death. So in what might be called a sacramental sense, we have died to sin. Therefore, when we look to the death of Christ and our participation in it through baptism (or conversion), we are reminded of death to sin.

And again, this is not merely a pep talk to overcome bad habits the way we might speak to anyone who wants to do better in life. Those who trust in Christ have been set free from the shackles of sin – we are **“no longer slaves of sin” (Romans 6:6).**

Going back to our questions, what does it mean to be **“dead to sin”** let’s say, in an experiential sense? Because, if we’re honest, we recognize that we’re way more alive to sin than we’d like to admit. It might be helpful here to call upon Paul’s language in chapter five where he wrote of the **“reign” of “sin”** versus the **“reign” of “grace” (Romans 5:21).** Because if **“dead to sin”** means no longer having any reaction whatsoever to the temptations of the world, flesh and devil, one is hard-pressed to find one candidate in all of Scripture (except Christ Himself) who fits the bill.

It might make more sense for us to recognize that when the regenerating work of the Spirit opens our eyes to the truth of Christ, granting us faith by which we are justified before God (Romans 5:1), that same life giving work also opens our eyes to a new Master and effectively ignites our resolve to follow Him. Notice below that which clearly anticipates what baptism represents (cleansing), includes another promise:

¹ Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Calvin’s Commentaries (Ro 6:4). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

Then I will sprinkle clean water (baptism) on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them* (Ezekiel 36:25-27 [parenthesis mine]).

When we are cleansed through the waters of baptism (the blood of Christ), we are not put on the mantle like some inactive, pristine trophy. Schreiner explains it this way:

The forensic, or legal, dimension (justified by faith) cannot ultimately be separated from the transformative change in the lives of believers (parenthesis mine).²

Elsewhere Paul says it a little differently:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Being “**baptized into Christ Jesus...into His death**” takes us beyond the status of mere cleansed artifacts, to the doers of good works. Paul makes the comparison of Jesus being raised from the dead to Christians walking in “**newness of life.**” We are a workmanship with moving parts. There is a behavioral overhaul! When God calls us and puts His name upon us, He shows us the terrain of life from an entirely renewed perspective. Like a child whose new video game just popped onto the screen and they are hopping to get started. This is the reasonable disposition of the Christian.

To die to sin does not mean we no longer contend with sin but that sin has lost its dominion over us. Prior to faith in Christ we all were willing slaves to sin (Romans 6:6). But that taskmaster has been slain. There’s a new sheriff in

² Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Vol. 6: Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (305). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

town—a loving, benevolent, life giving sheriff. The old sheriff was a thief who came only to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). Paul seems to be addressing a disposition in the church where Christians are living as if that old despotic master is still calling the shots.

So we're hit with what appears to be dumbfounding to Paul—if you're dead to sin, how can you live in it? We need to make a distinction between contending with sin and living in sin. It is one thing to recognize a sin or fault, repent and seek forgiveness; it is quite another thing to redefine sin, or content ourselves to embrace it as acceptable behavior or a way of life.

Is there forgiveness? Certainly there is. This goes to the heart of the faith. When we go to the Lord's Table we are depending on it. But notice how the Apostle John prefaces his reference to the great advocate we have in Christ:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1).

He doesn't write, "If you sin, don't worry about it...you have an advocate!" "**That you may not sin**" is his exhortation. This is a strong exhortation, so much so, that earlier he wrote, "**If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth**" (1 John 1:6).

So you see the answer to the opening questions. Of course there is forgiveness. There must be or what hope do we have. But to have the attitude that I can just sin all I want betrays an unregenerate (unsaved) heart. Those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus are baptized into His death which means that along with being cleansed from our sins, we will dead to sin and seek to "**walk in newness of life.**"

Questions for Study

1. What are some common complaints you've heard about how it's okay for Christians to sin and just get forgiveness? How do you respond to that (pages 2, 3)?
2. What are some ways people have redefined sin (pages 2, 3)?
3. What is antinomianism (page 3)?
4. How were some people in the Bible using grace or freedom to endorse antinomianism (page 3)?
5. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Explain what was meant by that question and how Paul responded to it (pages 3, 4).
6. How does Paul use baptism to explain his point (pages 5-7)?
7. Are Christians dead to sin? Do you feel like you're dead to sin? What does it mean to be dead to sin (pages 7, 8)?