

Sermon 40: Romans 6:1-4: Why Christians cannot live in sin

OUTLINE

We died to sin

We died with Christ

INTRODUCTION

It sounds too good to be true! That God will forgive every single one of your sins past, future and present. That there is nothing that can snatch you out of His hand. That once you have believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, you are justified, adopted, and sealed with an unbreakable guarantee that you will one day go to heaven, and be finally glorified. I used to reject the teaching that we have been studying in Romans 5, that we have a certain hope that nothing can frustrate, that if God has justified us glorification is guaranteed. I used to hate this teaching thinking, 'If heaven is guaranteed, what is going to keep me from sinning?' If salvation is secure and I no longer have to worry about how to get into heaven, how can I insure that I will not abuse grace and seek after holiness? I used to think that the teaching that tells us that we can never lose eternal life is an enemy of holiness, because if we do not fear that we might not get into heaven we won't pursue holiness. I wanted to take away any security so that people would fear for their salvation and out of that fear live a holy life. Fear was my fall back to insure that Christians would live a holy life.

Paul is coming against a similar train of thought as he proceeds into Romans 6. It appears that he is anticipating an objection to the wonderful statement that he made in 5:20, 'Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.' Now if you were a Jew who disagreed with Paul's teaching that we are saved by grace and not law you would be offended and would be looking for ways to make his argument look bad. You would latch on to certain words and phrases. One particular objection that seems to have been brought against Paul's teaching on grace was a slanderous accusation that Paul was encouraging people to sin in order to magnify grace, '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 appears as if the Jews were saying that Paul's grace doctrine promotes sin. If people see that forgiveness is free and you don't have to work for it, that heaven is guaranteed that this will result in people just throwing off all restraint and running headlong into sin. Paul is going to show us in chapter 6 why a Christian cannot live in sin, and how the gospel instead of encouraging sin, overcomes it. We see from verse 1 that Paul launches straight into this issue. 'What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?' (Romans 6:1)

Today is a baptismal service where Beta, Adele and Cameron are going to be marking themselves as Christ's disciples in obedience to the command to be baptised. Paul speaks about baptism in our text before us. He tells us that baptism is an illustration of our dying to sin by dying with Christ which brings about a new life of holiness in the Christian. Paul

uses baptism as a shorthand to describe what the Holy Spirit has brought about in our relationship to sin when we were united with Christ when we were born again. We will see that because we have died with Christ, which is illustrated in our baptism, we are dead to sin and will live holy lives.

Before we tuck into the passage we need to outline the thought flow as we begin a new section in Romans. We need to see the puzzle box top to appreciate the whole picture before we will be able to make sense of the various parts that we will be examining. You will remember that chapters 1-4 were the explanation of how God justifies the sinner by grace through faith. When we started chapter 5 we showed how 5-8 is a long discussion on the security of our new position, and that Paul's main purpose was to bolster our assurance. Well, we have just finished an initial list of benefits that are ours in chapter 5, with the added argument of how much more we have gained in Christ than we have lost in Adam. Paul has summarised all that he has said drawing attention to the triumph of grace in 5:20. And now as any good communicator would do Paul anticipates some objections and questions to his initial statements. Chapters 6 and 7 are chapters dedicated to the various questions that would be raised as a result of his statements so far. The 2 main issues are holiness and the law. If we are saved by grace not works, what about holiness and the law? If you look down you will see that these next two chapters are driven by questions and answers showing that they are in fact anticipations of objections. Look at 6:1, 15, 7:7 and 13. Chapter 6 deals with sin in relationship to the Gospel and 7 deals with the law in relation to the Gospel.

Today we will only be dealing with 6:1-4, and we will be looking at two issues, dying to sin and dying with Christ. And we will be emphasising how these verses inform the Bible's teaching on baptism specifically.

We died to sin

'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?' (6:1-2). Paul opens the chapter anticipating the objection that grace promotes sin and not holiness, and he answers it with a strong negation, 'By no means!' and then states the new reality that makes it impossible for a Christian to live in sin in the form of a question, 'How can we who died to sin still live in it?' Notice that Paul tells us that the new reality that is true of every Christian, the 'we' he refers to, is what makes living in sin impossible. We died to sin. What does this mean?

This phrase has been misunderstood in several ways. Firstly, dying to sin is something that God does to us when we experience the new birth it is not something that we do to ourselves. You cannot choose to die to sin today, that is like deciding to live without blood. It is an act that is impossible for us to do for ourselves, God is the author of our deaths. He is the hitman who causes us to die to sin, this is a form of suicide that lies outside of any person's ability. Secondly, we died to sin when we were born again. This seems a simple thing to emphasize but there have been schools of thought that have tried to teach a second blessing version of holiness teaching where we reach a higher form of Christian

living by consecrating ourselves to a new level of service, otherwise known as 'dying to self.' Paul is talking about what happened the moment we were converted not a second experience that is added to our lives that enables powerful service. Thirdly, Paul tells us we died to sin, not that we are presently dying to sin. In other words he is describing a once off act that brings about a new relationship to sin, not an ongoing process that we need to nurture by our own strength and vigilance.

Positively, dead to sin means that we have died to the tyranny of sin. Paul has been arguing that we were under the reign of sin but now we are under the reign of grace, it is this translation out of Adam and into Christ with its accompanying effects on our relationship to sin that is in view. Because we are united with Christ we are dead to sin in 2 ways. Firstly, there is dying to sin legally, and secondly, dying to sin's dominion. Firstly, the Bible teaches us that the wages of sin is death. Because of your sin you tally up a debt, the bill that needs paying is the death of the sinner. If you want your sin debt to be paid up in full, death is the payment. Christ was born to die the sinners death, He took our place. His death certificate becomes ours and we are seen as having died with Christ. Remember the illustration we shared last week. In the civil war in America there were two neighbours. The one had just bought the farm, got married and was going about settling down into his new life. His neighbour was a single older man. When the call came to fight, the older man pretended to be the younger man and went away to fight. The older man died in the fighting. When the conscriptors came around and saw that this man had skipped the fighting he was taken to court. The court ruled that this man had already fought and died and that he was exempt from a second call up. This is what Christ did for us. Justice comes looking for us, but upon inquiry, we have already died for our sins, how? Jesus died in our place. So in terms of your legal standing, and all that God requires for your sins, death has been paid up in full in the death of Christ. His death certificate is offered to any who will leave their sins and surrender themselves back to God.

Secondly, we died experientially. If you thought it was hard trying to get your head around being dead legally, this aspect is harder still. In terms of what rules us, the bible tells us that before we become Christians we are like puppets on a string. Being dead in trespasses and sins we wanted nothing but to follow every inclination of our hearts. This does not mean that we were all axe murderers, it means that we were all enslaved to self. And when we were tempted we gave in. However, Paul in Romans 6 is talking about a newness in us because we have died to sin. This means that we are no longer slaves to sin as we once were. The relationship of us to sin has changed. Let me illustrate it like this. Pinocchio experienced three different phases of life. Phase 1 was life as a puppet on a string, he was dead and was merely strung along. This is equivalent to us when we were dead in sin, we obeyed every desire like a puppet on a string, bound by our natures as unholy. Phase 2 Pinocchio comes alive, but he still have the body of a puppet and could surrender his limbs to strings again, but is free from their influence otherwise. This is the new phase of life a Christian enters into when they are born again. The Bible tells us that when we are born again we receive hearts of flesh in the place of our hearts of stone. Because of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit we receive a new impulse for holiness, we now love God and hate sin in all its forms, moral and immoral; but before we hated God and loved sin, some having a taste for money, success and pride, others opting for a life of indulgent

excess. The strings have been cut and we no longer have to be driven by our base desires, there is something new that has been done in us. This is why when someone claims to be a Christian but is living a life of sin, they probably aren't one, for the reality of what makes us dead to sin is not evident. Don't misunderstand me, this does not make us perfect, this does not mean we have no desire to be strung along again, we are not fully changed, that is Phase 3. That is when we will receive our resurrection bodies. Bodies just like Christ's when He rose from the dead. Bodies free from sin, decay, and distorted passions. Everything will work perfectly, no depression, no rage, greed, hatred, unforgiveness, etc. This is where Pinocchio got turned into a real boy. The main difference between Pinocchio and us, is that Pinocchio earned his new body by his own goodness. You and I can't do that, we are saved by what Christ does not what we can do.

Being in phase 2 we are dead to sin's power but not its presence, it still lures us and seems very satisfying but we now have the resources to say no and root out vices and cultivate virtues. Some have interpreted this to mean that we are not even tempted by sin, that it no longer holds any charm for us. But this is a lie, we will only truly be free from the temptation of sin when we get into heaven. This sort of teaching will result in depression. Paul is not teaching a type of perfectionism where the true Christian is not even tempted by sin, that is nonsense. We are tempted but we need no longer be ruled.

Paul uses the phrase, 'still live in it,' in v2 in reference to sin. There is a careful distinction that we need to make here. Paul is not saying that we don't step into sin if we have been saved. He is saying that we cannot live, wallow in, live in sin like we used to before we became Christians. Before a person becomes a Christian they live in a perpetual state of sin. This does not mean that every unbeliever is a convict and should be in prison, no it means that every single one of us had ourselves on the throne of our lives and we were the boss not God. Some of us chose moral lifestyles and some of us chose immoral ones. Some committed criminal acts, others only thought them. But every single one of us was a rebel against God who rejected the one who made us. We took the throne that was rightfully His and we seated ourselves on it. We can see the evidence of this in all the laws of His that we break. We break them daily. We sin in thought, motive, feeling, action, word and attitude. Everything we did we did as the boss of our own lives living as the king and doing what we wanted to do. Whether we did lots of criminal acts or not is irrelevant, the heart of sin is whether God is your God or not, not how moral you are. When someone becomes a Christian they dethrone themselves and give God His throne in our lives back. We allow Him to rule us and command us. And His rule is always good and kind. We may step into sin and get back on the throne from time to time but the general atmosphere of our lives is one of submission to God. This is very different to the one who is a nice person but lives without any regard to their Creator, unmindful of His rule in their lives living out their desires any way they please. That is living in sin. It does not have to look like a tip or a pigsty, it can be very successful and moral, the heart of sin is, 'who is on the throne?'

So then let me ask you are you dead to sin, or living in it? This is not a question about whether you sin, but whether you are living as a slave to sin, and whether God is on the throne?

We died with Christ

As Paul moves on to show how baptism illustrates our dying with Christ, he indicates that this is a basic truth that every Christian should know, 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?' Once again this is a verse that has been misunderstood many times. There have been those who have mistakenly thought that Paul is teaching that baptism is what actually affects the dying with Christ, that it is by baptism that we get automatically born again. This is the view held by the Roman Catholic church, but is safely refuted if we look at Paul's teaching on how we actually get justified. He teaches that we hear the Gospel, we believe, and then we are baptised to show our new faith in Christ. On the other extreme we have those who overreact to the Roman Catholic view that they interpret the baptism in this verse not as water baptism but as Spirit baptism. In other words, because this verse appears to make baptism the cause of new life in Christ, they want to distance themselves from any water baptism and credit the new life to the new birth described as being baptised in the Spirit. Not to be confused with the Charismatic notion of receiving tongues.

However, this is not what we understand it to mean. A good rule of thumb is to take baptism as always applying to water baptism unless it is otherwise specified, for example, Matt 3:11, "'I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'" And John 1:33, 'I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

Now the Bible seems to make baptism responsible for a number of things like cleansing, Acts 22:16, 'And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.' The receiving of the Holy Spirit, 'And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38). And now we see union with Christ appears to be credited to baptism. How can this be so?

Paul is equating baptism with the time of one's conversion. For example, if I were to ask you, 'When did you get saved?' You would most likely point me back to some event in your life when you answered and altar call, or prayed the sinner's prayer. You associate the moment of your praying with the moment of your conversion. Well, the altar call is a modern innovation, if you were to ask a first century believer, 'When did you get saved?' They would answer, 'Well, I was baptised on the 14 of July.' You openly showed your faith and obedience to Christ by baptism. You did not commit your life in a sinner's prayer but the act of baptism. So if Paul wanted to point out a concrete event when you were united with Christ, or received the Spirit, or had your sins forgiven, in the early church because baptism followed so closely on the heels of faith, Paul would point you back to your baptism.

Now baptism itself is a very suitable picture of what it portrays. It pictures well the idea of cleansing, and it looks like bath. It is suitable for the receiving of the Holy Spirit, as this is

what happened to Christ after His baptism. It is a decisive act of initiation into a new life and a new community being controlled by a new identity, but pre-eminently baptism speaks of our union with Christ, that we are united with Him in death and in resurrection. Immersion speaks of death and burial; and emmersion speaks of the resurrection to new life.

Baptism then is the only time you get to go to your own funeral and live to tell the tale. It is an act that shows what God has done in putting off the old man and renewing you in Christ. But it not only speaks about God's work, it is also the identifying mark of a disciple and shows that you have followed Christ casting off the old life and embraced a new life as a follower of Christ.

Baptism is the outward indicator of the inner reality of having died and resurrected spiritually. In this case we do not baptise babies as they have not yet come to faith in Christ. In fact baptising a baby is like burying someone who hasn't died yet.

And since baptism speaks of the old man having been put off, to go back to our old sins is like a widow digging up her husband to be reunited with him. Or a mother digging up her deceased child to hold it once again. In Christ our sins have been put away from us. Our past is buried and we are now dead to sin. Our baptism is a reminder not to dig up the dead in an act of necrophilia.

Baptism does not affect these things it merely reflects them. That we are washed, we are disciples, we have received the Holy Spirit and that we have died to sin in Christ. This is Paul's answer to the objection that grace encourages sin. The Gospel of grace does not cause sin to prosper but creates a new relationship to sin where we are now able to root out vices and plant virtues.