

January 29, 2012
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Romans 6:1-4

1. Why would someone think that it is best to continue in sin?
2. What does it mean to die to sin?
3. In what three ways are Christians baptized into Christ?
4. What does it mean to be baptized into Christ?

DEAD TO SIN, ALIVE IN CHRIST **Romans 6:1-4**

What to do about sin? That is, or should be, an ongoing question for Christians. There are typically two sides to the issue with the truth lying between the two extremes. One common reaction to sin is legalism. Legalism is an attempt to beat back sin by enforcing stringent rules or regulations on ourselves and others. Some people are convinced that if they just keep all the rules of the Bible as well as the secondary rules that they derive from Bible principles, they will have victory over sin, which will gain God's favor and leave them in good standing before God for eternity. These rules apply to both salvation and sanctification.

In contrast to legalism is libertinism. This view doesn't get too worked up about sin in the Christian's life. People who hold to this position are convinced that God's grace is so sufficient to cover our sins, that we should not be much bothered about sin. The libertarian

claims to have special freedom to live pretty much the way he feels at any given time because we are saved and sanctified by grace not by keeping the law. Since it is impossible for anyone to keep the law, they say, why try? Rather let's just rest in God's grace and dump all the old meaningless traditions. "After all," they conclude, "we cannot gain anymore of God's favor than He has given us through grace." They sing, "Free from the law oh blessed condition; sin all you want with Jesus' permission."

So which position is correct? We must argue from the clear teaching of the entire Bible that God is holy. That truth must be foundational to our chosen lifestyle. Since God is holy, does it not seem logical that any person who is indwelt by that God's Holy Spirit ought to demonstrate that same holiness? When I say "ought," I do not mean that the person should *strive* to be holy as much as I mean that the person *will* be holy. No doubt, as our Christian experience proves, we must have the desire to be holy and work through the power Christ gives us to be holy. But the very desire for holiness and the strength to pursue it actually comes from outside ourselves, from the God of all grace. I conclude that because God indwells a person, that person will by all means demonstrate a desire to be like the indwelling God.

Agreeing with that idea and living it are quite opposed the one to the other. Why do we have conflict with sin if we are truly born again? How can we have victory over sin? *Can* we have victory over sin? Is it possible to be a Christian but, at the same time, appear to be very much like non-Christians, even purposely, in an effort to win them to Christ? This text in Paul's letter to Christians in Rome clearly teaches that a person who does not demonstrate the holy character of God is not a Christian. And at the same time, the person who is so holy that he never sins is also not a Christian because he is a liar. So how do we put these two extremes together? The answer is in the work Christ accomplished for us on the cross.

How Can We Who Died to Sin Still Live in it (vv.1-2)?

Paul began this section of his letter with a response to an anticipated question that would flow from his statements in 5:20-21 in which he described how grace abounded more. "Are we to

continue in sin so that grace can abound more?” This was an anticipated question, one which Paul probably heard even as we do, though the idea is often not stated so bluntly.

The question comes as a result of the teaching in the previous verses in which Paul wrote, “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:20-21). Paul’s argument is that the purpose of the Law is to identify and highlight the sin and sinfulness. Therefore, the Law “increased” our trespasses against God. But the good news is that the grace of God that forgives sin is greater than any and all sin combined.

So where sin became painfully obvious because of the Law, God’s grace abounded even more to cover it! “Would it not be obvious,” someone might argue, “that if grace is abounding, it would be best for us to sin more, right?” At first blush this sounds ridiculous. But to an unsaved person, it is a natural and logical conclusion. If grace is known best in its response to sin, why not have more sin in order to see more grace? False teachers that infiltrated churches since the first century have taught this very thing. There are still teachers who treat sin flippantly in light of the fact that God’s grace forgives it.

Paul was ready with a firm reply to that anticipated question (v.2). By no means! Natural or logical conclusions notwithstanding, Paul is aghast that anyone would suggest greater sin in order to know greater grace. How could anyone in his right mind think that sin could be acceptable to God in any way? The very thought is outrageous! Why? Now begins the apostle’s lengthy answer to why no Christian should ever entertain a light view of sin in his or her life.

No one who died to sin can live in sin or as Paul put it, *How can we who died to sin still live in it?* “We” is an emphatic pronoun. It highlights the kind of person who is at issue here. It is “we” who are Christians as opposed to all the normal, natural people in the world. It is “we” who have died to sin. The verb *died* is in the Greek an aorist tense, active voice verb which describes a action that took place at a particular point of time in the past.

Okay, so what does that mean or not mean in your life? To have died to sin does not mean, in the first place, that a Christian comes to the point that he or she is dead to the temptation of sin. How I wish that were true. But it is not true. If it was, Paul would not have written, “*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 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*” (Romans 6:11-13). None of that instruction is necessary if we reach a point in life where we are dead to temptation.

Second, to die to sin does not mean that a Christian must figure out a way to become dead to the pull of sin. Read all the books you can, attend seminars, meditate by the hour, and you will not find the key for becoming more and more dead. That is because no human has that ability within his own strength to become dead to sin.

Third, to die to sin does not mean that a Christian is dying to sin more and more each day. That is a good description of sanctification. That is also a doctrinal truth found in Paul’s confession: “I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!” (1 Corinthians 15:31). But that can’t be the meaning of this verse because the aorist tense requires an action in a point of time. Sanctification flows from something that has already occurred.

Fourth, to die to sin is not to say that a Christian ceases to sin because he has renounced sin at a point in the past. It is true that all Christians came to a point in life when they acknowledged all their sin and renounced all of it. If a person didn’t do this, he or she is not a Christian. But, no Christian has the determination or wherewithal within himself to stop sinning regardless of past renunciations.

The explanation of “died to sin” is found in a consistent interpretation of Paul’s use of this phrase in the context. For example, in our text we read *we have died to sin*. “By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom. 6:2). But in verse ten we read that *Christ has died to sin*. “For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God (Rom. 6:10). Again in verse eleven we read that *we must consider ourselves dead to sin* .“So

you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11).

Here is the question: “How do I consider myself dead to sin?” The verb is a present tense, middle voice, command which leads to this more accurate expression of the question: “How do I keep God’s command to continually, day after day, *reason, calculate, compute* myself to be dead to sin?” The answer to that important question can be found in this question: “How did Christ die to sin?” (6:10). Notice carefully that verse ten states that Christ died *to* sin not *for* sin. No one dares to conclude that Christ did not also die for sin. It is certainly true that Christ died in behalf of all sin (Heb. 1:3; 5:1; 10:12). But here the argument is that Christ died *to* sin once for all.

What does that mean? We know from the Bible that Jesus was tempted to sin, but never did. We know that Jesus faced all the kinds of sin we face, but never yielded. Jesus died on the cross bearing all the sin His people ever committed or would commit. But after the cross, Jesus’ relationship with sin (i.e. being tempted by it) was finished for good. Never again would He have to deal with sin through temptation. He came to earth to die *for* sin and once He did, He is forever dead *to* sin. He died to put an end to sin’s claim on His people. That relationship to sin is over forever according to verse nine: “*We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him*” (Romans 6:9).

In a similar way, we too died to our former life when we died in Christ. James Boice concluded that “the key to a holy life is not our experiences or emotions, however meaningful or intense these may be, but rather our *knowledge* of what has happened to us.” (James Boice, vol. 2, p.658). Yes, but how does it work? How is it that because Christ died in His relationship to sin in the past, that I to died in my relationship to my past sinful nature?

Do you not know (vv.3-4)?

Oh, we see now. Christ died to sin on the cross; and because we are baptized, we died to the old way along with Him, right? This baptism thing should not be hard to figure out (v.3a). Okay, then what is baptism? I use this passage of Scripture regularly to illustrate the principles of water baptism. Water baptism is indeed the outward

symbol of the relationship Paul described here. But this text really does not teach *about* water baptism. It is a wonderful illustration of baptism, but it does not teach the doctrine of baptism.

Consider the meaning of the word “baptized.” In classical Greek (before the New Testament) *baptizo* always referred to sinking, being overcome, to go under and even the perishing of whatever it was that went under. In the New Testament, the word most often refers to the ritual of identification. And it was not a ritual invented by and reserved for Christians. For example, if a Gentile desired to become a Jew, he went through the public rite of baptism to declare his identification with Judaism. John was baptizing people in the Jordan River as they identified with the idea of repentance of sin. Likewise, when Jew or Gentile wanted to be identified with the gospel and person of Christ, he or she expressed that identification in actual baptism. Therefore, the most important meaning of baptize is to be identified with an idea, a movement, a doctrine, or a person. The means of that identification (in this case immersion) becomes secondary to the purpose.

Now we are ready to consider that Christians are identified with (baptized) Jesus Christ. The argument here is that Christians have died to sin at a time in the past when they were identified with Christ. That identification came at salvation.

Paul laid down three specific points in which we are identified with Christ (vv.3b-4). First, we are identified with Christ’s death (v.3b). This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “I am crucified with Christ . . .” (Gal. 2:20). That same principle holds true for everyone who is born again through faith in Christ. It can be said to and of every Christian “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). That is why Paul concluded, “Therefore, if anyone *is in* Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Dying to sin because of our relationship with Christ is the pinnacle in the Christian’s life. Before salvation we were dead to the Spirit of Christ, the person of Christ, and the work of Christ. But at the same time, we were very alive to sin, which is all we knew and could do. In salvation, we became alive to Christ, filled by His Spirit, risen to newness of life. If a person is alive to Christ, filled with Christ, he has to have died to sin first. In other words, there has to be

a noticeable difference between a person who is alive to sin and a person who is dead to sin. The difference ought to be as obvious as night and day; death and life; one side of the mountain and the other side of the mountain. No one can be on both sides of the mountain at the same time. Likewise the person who keeps wandering from one side of the mountain to the other is lost—eternally!

Second, we Christians are identified with Christ's burial (v.4a). Paul wrote, *we are buried with Him*. What does that mean? What happens when a person is buried? It is sad to admit that burial means "out of sight, out of mind," unless the deceased was a loved one or dear friend. In that same fashion, our old sinner man is supposed to have been buried, reckoned "out of sight, out of mind." The Christ whose body was put in the tomb had fought vigorously with sin and won every time. Game over for sin! Our old man, our natural condition seldom fought with sin and never won over it. Be that as it may, the old man was buried at salvation as surely as Christ's dead body was buried. Leave the old man buried! Out of sight, out of mind!

Third, we are identified with Christ's resurrection (v.4b). We have newness of life *just as Christ was raised from the dead*. Jesus came out of the tomb in a glorified body, never to fight with sin in Himself again. He was raised by the glory of the Father. In His new body, He was no longer subject to sin because it was the immortal, imperishable body (1 Cor. 15:53). Because the Christian is identified with Christ's resurrection, we too are raised to walk in newness of life. *Newness* of life is new in quality and character, not new in time. We are identified with Christ's immortality, but we have not received our imperishable, sinless bodies yet. We still live in bodies that are subject to sin even while our old man has been put in the grave.

Therefore, because a Christian is intimately identified with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, he can keep on concluding, computing that he has died to the old sinful self. Yet, he lives in a body that is effected by sin. Nevertheless, while a Christian might commit a sin, he cannot and will not continue in it. He must confess it and repent of it. What if I go back to the old life? Three things will become obvious in such a retreat.

1. You will be very uncomfortable, yea, miserable.
2. God will not allow you to continue there.

3. If you can return to the sinful life and enjoy it, you were never born again.

John wrote that "no one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). In saving our souls, Christ has done an irreversible, amazing work. He killed the old man of sin, and we do well to remember that when the flesh seeks to draw us back into the old way. Christ's sacrifice is so valuable because it does for us what no person can do for himself.