

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part twelve

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DOES IT REALLY MATTER IF CHRISTIANS SIN? (Romans 6:1-11)

Romans 6:1 - "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"

This opening question of chapter six arises out of a statement Paul made in **5:20** - "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more...."

This is a simpler restatement of the more convoluted way Paul raised this question before in **3:5-8** - "But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) [6] By no means! For then how could God judge the world? [7] But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? [8] And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just."

Put simply, if God's grace shines all the more brightly when sin abounds, *how much does it really matter if I continue in sin?* What harm is done? What are the effects of sin in the life of the saint? The fact that Paul has already raised this issue several times shows his concern that misunderstandings about the power of grace abound. To put it another way, is there any *necessary* relationship between *justification* and *sanctification*? Can the former be present apart from the latter? It's all well and good to talk about my condition in Adam and in Christ, but what about the way I live on Wednesday afternoon? We need Paul's explanation.

1) **LIVING AN INTEGRATED CHRISTIAN LIFE**

Romans 6:2-7 - "By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? [3] Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. [5] For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [6] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin."

We are not to wait until we go to heaven to start living like Christians. While we are justified by faith in Christ Jesus, apart from any works of righteousness, the *reality* of the faith we *profess* is manifested in the way we live day to day. We *were* justified by faith - past tense - so the life of Jesus might be manifested in our *lives today* - present tense.

Notice something very important. The first thing Paul talks about in this *new life* in Christ is *death and dying*. Paul keeps these Roman Christians from emotionally withdrawing from this key issue of being "*baptized into Christ's death*"(6:3). He knows we'd much prefer to only speak of *eternal life* - "He who has the Son has life...."(John 3:36). There, that's more like it.

But *how* does this new life come? What brings it about? The first step toward new life is becoming *integrated with Christ's death* - **Romans 6:3-7** - "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.[5] For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [6] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin."

Notice the way Paul puts it. We have been "*baptized into his death*"(3), and "*...with him by baptism into death*"(4). This is the key. Christ's death is not just something to be *known about*. It's not just something we *affirm*. It's something we *step into*. There's a *participation* in Christ's death. There's a kind of *symbiosis* by which we *experience* His death in our own lives.

This concept is so central to Paul's thinking. It explains so many other strong passages in the New Testament:

Galatians 2:19b-20 - "...I have been crucified with Christ. [20] It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

1 Peter 2:24 - "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

2 Corinthians 4:10-11 - "...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. [11] For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

All of these verses move in the same direction. The experience of faith in Christ's death moves from the *inward profession* to the *visible physiological expression*. This isn't some inner *mystical* state. Paul labors to see its *manifestation*. That's why he talks about Christ being manifested in the "*life I now live in the flesh*" (Gal. 2:20), and the "*body of sin*" being brought to nothing (Romans 6:6), and not letting sin reign in our "*mortal bodies*" (Romans 6:12), and carrying around "*in the body the death of Jesus*" (2 Corinthians 4:10).

This is very *physical*. It's very *literal*. It's something people can see in me the way they can see my hair turning gray. That's what Paul means when he says this participation in the death of Christ is something "*manifested*" in my body.

Now, it is true that Christians aren't perfect yet. We *do*, at times, sin. Sin isn't yet impossible for us. But Paul is presenting the way we are to *look at our lives*. Here's how we are to *consider* our present condition in this world. We have *died* to sin. We don't *plan* sin. We don't *relish* sin. We don't *linger* over sinful options. We don't *play with the edges* of sin. *We consider all sin a part of our past life*. We consider it something we are now *dead* toward.

Sin, of course, is far from dead. But *we* are dead to *it*. Being "*in Christ*" has no meaning at all without this. We think of our involvement in sin as much as a corpse has involvement in playing baseball.

- 2) **BAPTISM IS AN EXPRESSION OF MY COMMITTED INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEATH AND LIFE OF CHRIST**
Romans 6:3-4 - "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

It is hard for us to imagine just how central baptism was to the conversion experience in the New Testament. We tend to minimize it as some kind of optional religious ceremony, not really essential to saving faith. I noticed that even our announcement slide says, "*Considering Baptism?*" We're not going to use that anymore. It should read, "*Be Baptized! Right away!*"

That's the way it's constantly presented in God's Word: **Acts 2:36-38** - "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." [37] Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" [38] 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."

This is Peter's declaration of the Gospel on the day of Pentecost. Today *we* would tell people to "*accept Christ*." Not Peter. First "*repent*." Then "*be baptized*." There was no such thing as "*accepting Christ*" apart from these steps.

But *why*? Why is baptism so crucial in the theology of the salvation process in the New Testament? Because only baptism makes clear what the Christian life is all about. And only baptism gets the *order* of events right.

Baptism involves my *stepping into* the death and resurrection of Christ. *Baptism is the inaugural act of repentance*. Only baptism launches the rest of the Christian life in a direction that can be successful. Baptism visualizes a kind of *sympiosis* into the death and life of Christ. In the act of baptism I'm not telling the church I *believe* Christ died for me. Baptism is my *stepping into my own death to sin so the new life I profess can be manifested in my daily experience*. So every act of baptism is a kind of *suicide*.

How can I say it? Baptism isn't just a proof of my *orthodoxy*. Rather, it's *engrafting my life into Christ's death and resurrection*. There is a *real death* to be experienced just as surely as there is a *real life* to be received. More

than that, baptism demonstrates that the impact of **eternal life** can only become genuine **after** the impact of my **death in Christ** is experienced.

To make this point with even greater intensity Paul not only talks about **dying with Christ**, he even describes our **burial** - "**We were buried therefore with him by baptism....**"(Romans 6:4a). Not only does Paul describe the process of dying, he compares baptism with the very **end** of the death process - **burial**.

I've been to a lot of funerals. People get involved in services, bulletins, memorials, eulogies, funeral homes, lunches, cards, and the like. Then the body is laid in the ground. People get back into their cars. And what makes the end of the process so hard for those loved ones left behind is the **finality** of the burial. Someone goes home to an empty house. Someone sleeps in a bed alone, where there used to be two. Breakfast is so quiet. There used to be two eating Cornflakes, now someone has to get them out and pour them all alone. And the departed is **never** coming back in this life.

There. That, says Paul, is exactly what has happened to your old life. It's dead and it's buried. **You have to learn to live without it**. Then Paul tells us why this is not a sad thing but a joyful thing:

3) **ONLY THROUGH A GENUINE PARTICIPATION OF CHRIST'S DEATH IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR NEW LIFE**

Romans 6:4-8 - "**We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. [5] For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [6] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin. [8] Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.**"

Dying with Christ is only negative in terms of the old life of sin. This is where we must **start**. But it is not the **end of the journey**. The result of dying with Christ through baptism is "**newness of life**"(6:4). Or, in **verse 10** he says the goal is being "**alive unto God**."

Let me wrap this session up with a remedy to what I feel is perhaps the greatest misconception of spiritual life in the church today. You can't **pray** this new life into your soul. If I understand my Bible aright you can't **study** this new life into your soul. You can't become "**alive unto God**" through the work of any church or preacher. You can't fast enough and you can't give enough. You can't receive it at any altar. All of those things have their own place and their own importance. But, in terms of becoming "**alive unto God**," they can't produce it.

You and I become "**alive unto God**" only through **dead to something else**. I can't tell you anything more important than that. If you don't know, in a very practical sense - not a mystical sense - what it is to "**carry around in your body the death of Christ**"(2 Corinthians 4:10-11), you will never know what new life in Christ means. You will **hear** about it and **talk** about it and **pray** about it, but never **manifest it** in your daily life.

The power of the life of Christ can't be pumped into your present life. When the branch gets ingrafted into the vine, it's not only the **life** of Christ that gets infused. It's His **death** as well. When you "**ask Jesus into your heart**" He brings first His **death**, and then His **life**. He won't come on any other terms. More on this next week - "**What happens when Christians sin?**"