

## From Death to Life

Romans 6:1-11

October 17, 2010

We are taking a break this morning from our series on the letters of John to celebrate the baptisms of three believers in Jesus Christ. For one, this has been a long time coming. The others are celebrating one of their first steps as followers of Christ. In honor of the new birth that has been granted each believer in Jesus and this step of obedience to Him, I wanted to take the time this morning to look at baptism.

This morning's text is only indirectly about baptism. Paul's main concern here is to defend the **gospel** against those who would twist it and use it as an excuse for sin. Paul has been arguing that salvation is a gift from God, not anything that we can earn, not anything that we deserve, and not anything that depends on us in any way. It is provided by God through Jesus Christ. Paul had just gotten done arguing in the previous chapter that, just as everyone is dead in their sins through Adam, all who are in Christ will be made alive.

One thing that has always been true about the gospel of Jesus Christ is that people will twist and pervert it in order to try to use it for their own purposes and to remove the threat it represents to their lusts and licentiousness. Before Paul wrote to the Romans he spent many years teaching the gospel and defending it against these attacks. As he wrote this letter to the church he was already aware of the ways in which people would take what he had written and try to use it to increase sin instead of increasing holiness. He wanted

to cut them off before they could do any damage to the message he had to share.

This morning's text begins with a false implication many people have found in Paul's teaching. People had assumed that, since our salvation is a work of God and is worked out in us by the Holy Spirit through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then it doesn't really matter what we are going to do. "Indeed," some were asking, "isn't it actually better if we sin even more so that the world will see just how gracious and forgiving God is?" As Paul phrased it on behalf of his opponents, "*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*" (v.1) This is the question. How are we to live once we are saved?

God gave Paul an answer. To the question about whether or not we should go on sinning so that grace may abound Paul answered an emphatic, "*By no means!*" (v.2) Continuing in lives ruled by sin and given over to the lusts and perversions of the world is not an option. We are not to continue in sin just so we can test God and see how gracious He is. We know that already. Look at what He has already forgiven in our lives and hearts.

The reason God gives us through Paul is our main concern here this morning. He does not go back to the Old Testament law and point out that God has always expected His people to be holy and obedient. He does not point to Jesus' sinless life and ministry as an example for us to follow. He does not point out that Jesus commanded that we need to be holy, just as God holy, and our righteousness needs to exceed that of the scribes and pharisees. All of these things are true, and

Paul is not above referencing them, but what really determines that we should no longer live in **sin** is that we are dead to it! It's not an issue of trying really hard to change our behavior in order to stop doing the things we want to do. It's more an issue of realizing the part of us that wants to sin is dead, leaving us with the question, why are we still sinning? *"We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"* (v.2) The victory is already ours. It is already worked in us by the Holy Spirit. We just need to start living in it instead of the sinful patterns of this world.

When we come to Christ several things happen all at once. We are given spiritual eyes to see the truth of the gospel. We are given belief that we may believe in the One God sent, call on Him and be saved. We are made holy by having our sins taken away through Jesus' blood, shed on our behalf as He hung on the cross. We are given a new life—made a new creation in the depth of our beings—the very heart of who and what we are. These things are all works of God in us. It is the moment of salvation and the very beginning of God's transforming work in us. Paul doesn't tell us to stop sinning because of God's rules. He tells us to stop sinning because of our new nature. It's just not who we are any more.

The ritual that has always symbolized this new life is **baptism**. Paul defines the new life God gives us in terms of the rite through which we all come into the church. Look with me at verses three and four. *"Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order*

*that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* As we read, Paul goes on to explain that, if we are in Christ, then Jesus bore our sins, our old selves, on the cross. It was our old natures, given over to the evil pleasures and cares of this world, that He carried with Him to the grave. Our bodies of sin are thus dead to the world and the influence and power sin. Perhaps more to the point, they are dead to us in that the desire for sin and the world's pleasures is no longer the greatest desire in our hearts.

God does not only take sin and its power away, however. He gives us holiness, new life, and the power of the Holy Spirit to keep us in return. If we die to sin with Jesus on the cross, then we are raised to life with Him in the resurrection. Those of you who belong to Jesus, who have a part in God, have the wonderful privilege to, *"Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."* (v.11)

The Christian life is not a contest to see who can be forgiven the most by God. We are called to be holy, just as God is holy. But we are also called to remember that holiness is something that was first placed in us by God. It is not ours and we are to steward it wisely. We must live lives in keeping with it and not corrupt it by dragging our hearts through the mud and mire of this sinful world. God has given us a new desire for **Himself** and the life He gives us. Let that desire reign supreme, even as you remember your baptism which symbolized the washing away of your sins and through which you were buried with Christ and raised to new life.