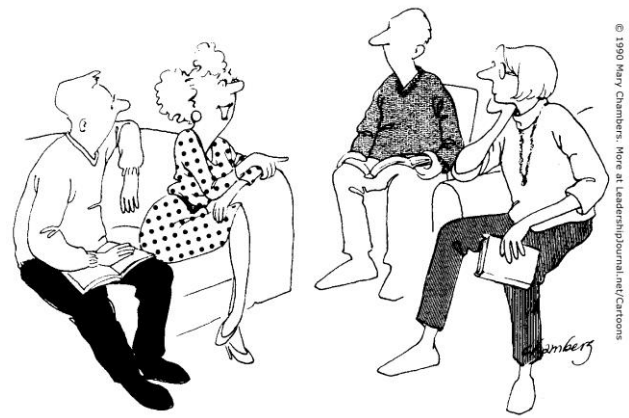


# Have You Died to Sin?

## Romans 6:1-5

Have you ever felt like the woman in this cartoon? These two couples are at a home Bible study and one woman says, "Well, I haven't actually *died* to sin, but I did feel kind of faint once."

In our scripture today from Romans 6 Paul asks a rhetorical question in verse 2, "**How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?**" or it could be translated, "How is it possible for such as we who died to sin to live in it?" A question like this is really designed to make a statement. The statement it makes is in two parts: 1) We died to sin; 2) We cannot live any longer in it.



"Well, I haven't actually *died* to sin, but I did feel kind of faint once."

## Why does Paul bring up this subject of death to sin?

In the first five chapters of Romans Paul has presented the gospel of salvation, a righteousness from God that is given to us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In chapters 1-3 he detailed for us why we need this good news, because we are all sinners deserving of the wrath of God. At the end of chapter 3 Paul stated the gospel of justification by faith, that we are declared righteous by believing in Jesus Christ who died for our sins and was raised to life. In Chapter 4 Abraham was Paul's great illustration of justification by faith apart from works of the law. The first half of Chapter 5 showed us the great assurance we have of being declared right with God. And the second part of chapter 5 demonstrated how God justifies by grace by contrasting the sin of Adam with the righteousness of Christ. He concludes that just as we are condemned in Adam as his sin is credited to us; we are justified in Christ as His righteousness is credited to us.

So in the previous three chapters Paul has focused on justification by grace through faith. Our sin was put to Christ's account and He paid for it by His death on the cross. Christ's righteous is then credited to our account when we believe in Him. That is the past event of our salvation, we have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Justification deals with the penalty of our sin. In Chapter 6 we turn a corner and Paul now begins a practical section on sanctification. Sanctification is the present experience of our salvation where God is progressively making us into the holy people that He has already declared us to be. Sanctification is God breaking the power of sin in our lives through the finished work of Christ.

So Romans chapters 6-8 form a unit on sanctification, the process of how God makes us righteous through the work of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Romans 6 deals with the believer being dead to Sin, how Sin no longer reigns over us.. Romans 7 deals with the believer being dead to the Law, how the Law no longer reigns over us. Romans 8 deals with the believer alive in the Spirit, how the indwelling Spirit gives us life and liberty in Christ Jesus.

As he frequently does, Paul anticipates the objections that people will bring up. Salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from works is so radical that people will naturally object to it, or try to distort it. In 5:20 Paul has just said, "**where sin**

**abounded, grace abounded much more.”** Now in 6:1 he asks **“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”**

Paul knew from experience that people would try to distort the gospel of grace through faith in one of two ways. First, some would try to add to it the requirement of keeping rules and rituals, especially the law of Moses in the Old Testament. We might call this legalism. Legalistic Jews charged Paul of advocating the idea that because we are saved by grace through faith alone, that would encourage people sin because God will forgive it all by His grace anyway. So to protect the faith from that danger, the legalists required Christians to strictly adhere to the law of Moses. The church dealt decisively with this error at the Jerusalem council where they declared that God purifies our hearts through faith, not by keeping the law.

The other danger is to distort the gospel of grace by using it as an excuse to live in sin. Jude wrote that **“... certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Paul knows that some will be think, “If God’s response to increased sin is abundant grace (5:20), then why not sin more?” Or, another form of it is, “If God is gracious towards sinners, then I’ll just sin and ask for His grace.”

If we understand and teach grace correctly, some people will at least think what Paul here anticipates. Here is the great objection to justification by grace through faith apart from works of the law. It seems to open the door to rampant sinning. In fact, it seems to invite more sinning because by grace God forgives and accepts sinners on the basis of Christ's righteousness, not ours, then would not that grace shine all the brighter if we kept on sinning? The more sin there is, the more forgiveness there is. And the more sinning there is, the greater must be the righteousness of Christ to compensate for it. So doesn't Paul's radical teaching on justification open the door to careless living and indifference to holiness?

That is the question Romans 6 (indeed 6-8) is meant to answer. Here is his answer: Verse 2: “Certainly not!” or as another translates it, “May it never be!”

Why not?

Before we look at Paul's answer, think about what his answer is not. Paul did not say, “Oh, you misunderstood – I didn't really mean that justification is all of grace based only on the righteousness of Christ without us doing anything.” He didn't say, “What I really meant was that justification is really based on your behavior after all. So you must keep the law.” No, we understood Paul correctly. Justification is really only by grace through faith on the basis of Christ's righteousness. That is how we get right with God. That is the foundation of the Christian life. It's this radical view of grace that seems to cause the problem.

So then, what is Paul's answer to why people who are justified by grace through faith do not continue in sin? His answer is in verse 2. After he says, “No, may it never be!” he gives the basis of his answer in the form of the question: **“How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”** The rest of the chapter explains what Paul means by that question.

This is a rhetorical question, which expects the answer, "There is no way that those who died to sin can still live in it!"

But this raises a lot of questions. If Christians are dead to sin, then why do they sin? Can we attain sinless perfection in this life? If so, doesn't this statement imply that we attain this state of being dead to sin at the moment of conversion? If not, do we need to work at being dead to sin? So,

### **What does Paul mean when he says that we "died to sin"?**

Clearly, Paul does *not* mean that believers cannot sin or that they are immune to temptation. If this were true then much of the teaching of the New Testament would be unnecessary. Such a view makes all of the moral commands in the Bible to be superfluous. Why command me not to lust if I can't lust because I'm dead to it? Why command me not to steal if I'm dead to greed? Besides, all of us who are Christians know from experience that we still are tempted and we still are able to sin. So he does not mean that believers cannot sin or that they are immune to temptation.

What does he mean? We just saw (5:12-21) that all people are identified either with Adam under the reign of sin and death, or with Christ under the reign of grace through righteousness. There are no other categories: Either you are in Adam or in Christ. We all entered this world in Adam. His sin was imputed to us. When Adam sinned, we sinned. But when we trust in Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us. Christ's one act of obedience on the cross justified all who receive His gracious gift of eternal life.

So Paul means that if you are in Christ, when He died on the cross, you died in Him. The verb died here is in the aorist tense, which refers to a past completed, fully accomplished, historical act. Paul repeatedly uses this tense in this chapter to refer to our death to sin, our death with Christ: Ro 6:2 "died to sin" = aorist tense; Ro 6:6 "crucified with Him" = aorist tense; Ro 6:7 "has died" = aorist tense; Ro 6:8 "have died" = aorist tense; Ro 6:10 "died" {2x} = aorist tense.

In the Bible, death is *not* primarily *cessation*, but rather *separation*. At physical death your soul is separated from your body. When we died with Christ, we were separated from the reign of death and put under Christ's reign of righteousness. Its reign over us was broken.

It is *not* primarily something that you *feel*, but rather a *fact* that is true of you because God declares it to be true. Because Christ for us, we who are in Him died with Him. Verse 5 speaks of this spiritual union with Christ in His death and resurrection: **"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection."** This is our new status or position before God. Since Christ died to sin (6:10) and we are now in Him, we died to sin. We derive the benefits of His death because we are now in Him.

So just as our justification comes through our union with Christ, our sanctification also comes through our union with Christ.

That's Paul's answer to the first question: What death does Paul refer to when he says in verse 2, "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" It was our death with Christ because of our union with him.

The second question we need to deal with is,

## **What does Paul mean that "you can't go on living in sin"?**

Again verse 2 says, **"Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"** That is, if you have died to sin, you can't go on living in sin. In what sense are we beyond sinning? We have died. And we cannot therefore go on living in sin.

Paul is not talking about committing acts of sin, but rather about living in sin as a way of life. Wednesday night we looked at 1 John 3:9. It says, **"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God."** John is not saying that believers cannot sin at all, because in 1 John 1:8 he wrote that if anyone claims that he has no sin is deceiving himself. And in 2:1 he wrote that if we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father. He means that those born of God cannot continue in their old way of life, which was characterized by sin. The new birth removes them from it.

So both John and Paul mean that those who are in Christ cannot continue in sin as a way of life. We cannot live with sin as the dominate principle of our life. When we are saved by God's grace, He places us in a new realm, under the reign of grace. We now want to obey God and keep His commandments as our pattern or habit. So Paul says that we need to know this fact and believe it: In Christ we died to sin, so we cannot still live in it.

## **Baptism pictures your union with Christ in His death and resurrection (6:3-4).**

**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.**

In these verses Paul is referring to the spiritual reality that takes place at salvation, which water baptism symbolizes.

Keep in mind that the apostles all associated saving faith with water baptism to such an extent that the concept of an unbaptized believer would have been foreign to them. When people in that day professed faith in Jesus Christ, they expressed it by being baptized in water. Paul assumes that all of the Christians in Rome had been baptized. ("All of us who have been baptized" means, "all of us believers.")

The clear pattern of the New Testament is that a person first believed in Christ and then expressed that faith in water baptism. But if you have believed in Christ as your Savior, you should be baptized in water to confess your faith.

What does baptism picture? The main thought is that of identification. The word baptize clearly means to immerse. To be baptized into Christ's death means to be totally identified with Christ in His death. When He paid the penalty of death for sin, we paid the penalty in Him. When He died to sin, conquering its power, we who believe in Him died to sin and its power.

Why does Paul emphasize not only Christ's death, but also the fact that we were *buried* with Him through baptism? Generally speaking, you don't bury a living person. To say that we were buried with Christ means, we really died with Him. Baptism by immersion pictures this when a person goes under the water. Immersion pictures the

spiritual reality: When we believed in Christ, we became fully identified with Him in His death and burial.

Baptism pictures our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ, which took place historically when Christ died, was buried, and was raised on behalf of His people whom He redeemed. It was applied to us the instant that we believed, but we express it symbolically in water baptism.

### **We should walk in newness of life (6:4b).**

As a result of our union with Christ in His resurrection, we are to walk in newness of life. This means that our new walk in Christ should be totally distinct from our life before Christ. We should develop transformed minds through God's Word, so that our whole worldview lines up with Scripture. Our motives for why we do what we do should no longer be selfish, but rather for God's glory. Our attitudes, especially in trials, should not be complaining, but rather thankful to God. Our emotions should be marked by joy and hope in the Lord. Our character should be developing the fruit of the Spirit. Our use of time and money should be managed in light of eternal values. And we should be walking in consistent obedience to God's commandments, which are for our good.

The description of this newness of life as "a walk" implies a long, steady, gradual process. Paul is not talking about sinless perfection, but rather a direction of life in which we sin less and less. Over time, we should make progress in holy, obedient living as those who have been raised up with Christ.

### **Conclusion**

I realize that the concept of being dead to sin and alive to God in Christ is difficult to comprehend and apply. We'll look at it further in weeks ahead as we study chapter 6.

Let me just make a few applications today:

*(1) Do not take God's grace as permission to sin.* Grace does not excuse sloppy living. God is committed to your holiness, and if you play loose with sin, He will discipline you, perhaps severely!

*(2) As a believer, make a break with your past life.* Becoming a Christian means burning all your bridges to your past life of sin. If you have drugs in your possession, destroy them. If you have alcohol and you are tempted to get drunk, pour it down the drain. If going to bars tempts you to drunkenness, stop going there. If porn is a problem, get rid of it or stop using the Internet. As God points out these things to you through His word, deal decisively with them. That is not your new life.

*(3) Declare your faith publicly in baptism.* Confess your new faith publically in water baptism.