

*Romans 6, Pt. 1*

In the previous chapters, Paul described the good news of God's righteousness. God will be vindicated as righteous by both the way of judgment and the way of mercy. Paul's understanding of the Old Testament, the work of Christ, and his own heart propelled him to be a missionary. It is true to say that his theology beat with a missionary heart. In sharing the realities of the gospel with his Roman audience, he sometimes chooses to block off dangerous paths before the unsuspecting and easily misled find themselves in deadly places. One of the constant dangers is that someone might fall into the idea that **sin isn't a big deal because it becomes the occasion of establishing God's righteousness.**

A challenge of this sort showed up back in 3:5 - "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He?" In other words, if my sin gives God the opportunity to show himself righteous, then isn't it a good thing? In our present chapter, **two more questions** of this sort show up. The first is found in **v. 1** - "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?" The second is found in **v. 15** - "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" **Both of these questions revolve around the idea that sin is the occasion for the work of Christ and the revelation of God's righteousness.** The first suggests that we should just go for it in regard to unrighteousness because grace will abound. The second suggests that the freedom we have from judgment is a freedom to live as we see fit. Both of these ideas are **absolutely deadly**, and Paul must address them both in this chapter. This week, we will address the first question. Next week, we will address the second.

Why can't we just go with the flow when it comes to sin? If we know that we are forgiven by God, then why is there any need to worry about how we live? The answer is developed in verses two through fourteen - **we are united to Jesus and connected to his story.** His story has become our story, and as a consequence, we can never be the same again.

There are different types of stories. Our esteemed drama professor just taught his Sunday school class that Greek drama came in three forms - tragedy, satire, and comedy. Shakespeare also had three basic types of plays - histories, comedies, and tragedies. I have heard many times that there is an obvious difference between a comedy and a tragedy. In a comedy, everyone gets married at the end. In a tragedy, everyone dies. **Every story, no matter the type, follows a narrative arc.** There is a beginning, a middle, and an end. But the ends of our stories can be remarkably different. In chapter one, Paul told the story of the corruption of humanity and the spread of sin. In chapter five, Paul told two contrasting stories, the story of Adam and the story of Jesus. The story of Adam's disobedience ended in death. The story of Jesus's obedience ended in life.

**What was the story of Jesus?** It was the story of the Son of God coming from heaven to earth and taking upon himself a complete human nature. He was truly united to our flesh, our full nature. He did acts of mercy and righteousness. He was crucified for sin that he did not commit. He was killed and buried. Then on the third day he rose from the dead. He ascended to the right hand of God on high. **And part of the great mystery of Christianity is that you and I have not only been united to Jesus through the incarnation, but through faith.** Our faith - which itself is a gift - is a vital connection to the life of Jesus. And this life flows through us like the life of a vine flows into a branch. In chapter eight, we will see how the Spirit is involved in this vital connection to Jesus. It is enough for the moment to observe how this union with Jesus transforms our stories by **shaping them into the pattern of his story.** And through this process of being conformed to the image of Jesus, God brings righteousness to the world through our lives. The doctrinal word for all of this is **sanctification.** This is the reason that we can't simply go with the flow that grace may abound. The God who justifies us in Christ also transforms us to be more like Jesus.

Let me show you how this works in the text. According to Paul, Christ was crucified, died, buried, and then resurrected from the dead. This is the story of Jesus. Now Paul appeals to his audience **on the basis of baptism.** We were baptized into Christ's death (v. 3). We were buried with him by baptism into death (v. 4). On the basis of this unity, we walk in newness of life

resembling his resurrection (v. 4). Paul strengthens this point in v. 5 - "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united in a resurrection like his." Baptism is no longer mentioned but **the principle of union persists**. We were crucified with him (v. 6). This death means freedom from sin (v. 7). We died with Christ, and we will live with Christ (v. 8). Death no longer has dominion over Jesus (v. 9). Jesus died to sin, and now lives to God. (v. 10). We now must count ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God (v. 11).

**So we have been united to the story of Jesus, and that story exerts itself upon our lives in transformative ways.** What does this have to tell us about baptism? Our Baptist brothers and sisters take this passage to mean that baptism should look like death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, they insist that baptism take place via immersion. But I think this is missing the point. If we were to literally imitate the actions of Christ in the sacrament, then why don't we also imitate the crucifixion? We were, after all, crucified with Jesus. Baptism does not require imitation of actions. The point is that baptism is a sign pointing to identity and union with Jesus. No matter if you were sprinkled or immersed, you were identified with Jesus in your baptism. You were baptized into his death, not because your baptism looked like a burial, but because baptism is the sacrament of initiation, identity, and union. **You were baptized into the story of Jesus.** And this story exerts itself upon your life in transformative ways.

In particular, you can't simply go on in unrighteousness because you died with Jesus - you died to sin - and you were raised with Jesus to a new life with God. Now, of course, union with Jesus in his resurrection means that one day we will be raised from the dead. But it also clearly means that we will have **a new life now**. Eternal life is not something that we get for the first time in heaven. It is something that begins for the Christian right now. Since we have been joined to Jesus, then we must do three things according to Paul.

First, **you must count yourselves dead to sin and alive to God.** This is a matter of belief. Do you think of yourself as someone who is vitally connected to Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus wants to share his life with you? Second, **you must not let sin reign in your body.** This is a call to

negative discipline. In light of who you are in Christ, you must say no to some things which are not helpful to your spiritual growth. You need to change your behaviors. We can not let ourselves be legalists, but we also can't ignore our behavior and the need to make adjustments from time to time. Third, **you must present yourselves to God**. Sin will not have dominion over you. You are in the kingdom of the beloved Son. And as a member of this kingdom, **you must present yourself to the king**. This is positive discipline. God has told us what he wants for us. To study his Word. To fellowship with his people. To pray earnestly and constantly. To seek his will. To do acts of mercy and justice. These are the ways that we present ourselves to God. This morning, we have an opportunity to give ourselves to our king by coming to his table and offering up our lives even as we are fed by his grace. I have said it many times before, but the great dynamics of the Christian life are the same for the person who has followed Christ for one year and the person who has followed Christ for seventy years. Present yourselves to your king.

And slowly over time, God's righteousness takes deeper and deeper root in us, as the life of Christ shapes each of us. And the end of our story is no longer the Adam story of Romans 5. The end of our story is life with God forever, with a meaningful, personal relationship with God available right now.