

Romans 6:1-14

Dead to Sin – Alive to God

Romans 6:1 *What shall we say then? Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound? By no means!*

Clearly some people were concluding that since the gospel is all about grace, sinning some more to get more grace might just be the way forward! Bonhoeffer called this cheap grace. Paul said, *No way!* Paul's main point is in the next verse,

Romans 6:2 *How can we who died to sin still live in it?*

The subject here isn't salvation but Christian living. But what does it mean to die to sin? A corpse is totally unresponsive and uninterested in anything around it. Likewise to be dead to sin is to be unresponsive and uninterested in it. In this passage Paul unpacks what this means and what it doesn't mean.

1. Baptised into Jesus Christ

In Romans 6:3-4 Paul reminds *all of us*, Jew and gentile, that those who have been baptised into Christ Jesus have been baptised into his death, and buried with him. The purpose is that we may be raised with him in newness of life.

To baptise means to immerse. Baptism has been a contentious issue in the church. Should we baptise babies? Should baptism be by immersion or sprinkling? The rallying cry of the 16th century Reformation was to get back to the Bible. Some people started reading the Bible and took this further than even Luther imagined. They began to realise that immersion was for believers and not for babies. In this country John Smyth was the first believer to be baptised. Smyth trained for the Anglican ministry at Christ College, Cambridge. But he came to believe in believers' baptism and after just 6 years he renounced his Anglicanism. Since there was no-one to baptise him, he baptised himself (though he later regretted this.) He then baptised his congregation. This caused trouble, and it wasn't long before Smyth and his congregation had to flee to Holland. But they returned a few years later to form the first English Baptist Church.

If we go back to the Bible we discover that baptism finds its roots in the Levitical purification rites. Immersion was used for different reasons, including preparation for worship at the temple, for priests, for a woman after her period of menstruation, and interestingly for the last stage for a gentile converting to Judaism. The idea was that immersion was like dying to the old way, being born anew and receiving a new status.

On the day of Pentecost Peter told the 3000 Jewish men who responded to the gospel to repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. They had come up to Jerusalem for temple worship and they would already have immersed themselves to be ritually clean. In telling them to be immersed Peter was giving a new meaning to immersion, no doubt from Jesus. Immersion would be a way of demonstrating commitment as a disciple of Jesus; a way of publically identifying with Jesus' death and resurrection; an outward sign of an inner conversion to Jesus as Lord and Saviour (to use evangelical language!). There was no problem finding pools to be immersed in: they were all over Jerusalem.

2. Spiritually, the old me is dead.

Romans 6:3 *Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?*

The immersion pool was and is like a grave, which is why it's best if it's in the ground. You can't breathe in water, and when you can't breathe you are dead. But Romans 6:5 says we are united with him *in the*

likeness of his death. It's like his death, we don't really die. The point is that when we identify with Jesus in baptism, we identify spiritually with his death and we spiritually or legally died to sin. This is the mystical side.

Romans 6:6 *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—*

What is our old self? It's not the image of God in us, or the abilities and gifts God has given to us. Our old self is our old unredeemed self; our sinful self; our self without the Spirit, and without the law of God written on our hearts. This is the self that died with Christ when we believed: RIP! The old self was crucified that we may no longer be slaves to sin, but walk in newness of life. Paul repeats this theme in these verses.

But in 6:9-10 Paul talks about Jesus,

Romans 6:9-10 *For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.*

There are a number of resurrections in the Bible such as the boys Elijah and Elisha raised, the widow's son Jesus raised, and Lazarus. There was a miraculous element to these resurrections, but really they were more like resuscitations because all these people died again. But Jesus was raised never to die again; he was raised with a resurrection body. Death no longer has dominion over him and, I suppose sin has no more influence on him at all.

To summarise, this is great news! We have spiritually identified with the risen Jesus in his death and resurrection. Death doesn't reign over him, and so it won't reign over us; we are freed from sin. No more temptation, never sin again ... well, unfortunately not quite!

3. How to live when you're dead

It would all be true, except we don't have resurrection bodies ... yet. We still live in this mortal body, which is still subject to temptation and sin. And the reality is that even Christians sin, sometimes quite a lot! Paul knows this. What he is saying is this: *now you are spiritually dead to sin because you have identified with Jesus in his death in baptism, live in such a way as if this is true.*

Romans 6:11 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

In 6:12-13 Paul goes on to show we should choose not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies, but live for righteousness. David saw Bathsheba bathing, and he let sin reign in his mortal body. Ananias and Sapphira lied to God on a financial matter and let sin reign in their mortal bodies. But Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, and he ran away, choosing not to let sin reign in his life. We all have many choices to make every day, not only when it comes to obvious sins, but also in our attitudes and the words we speak.

Romans 6:14 *For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.*

In this verse sin and grace are being contrasted. The phrase *under the law* may mean a number of things, but it works if we understand it to mean *under the condemnation of the law*. A thief who is caught knows he is under the law because the law says: thou shalt not steal. Sin has gained dominion in his life. We have all sinned, and are all under the condemnation of the law, and this is why we need Jesus. He died for our sins and brings us under his reign of grace.