

Dying to Sin
Romans 6:1-14
November 12, 2017

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² 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. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 6:1-14 (ESV)

This morning marks a transition point in Paul's letter to the early Christians in Rome, one of several transitions. So far Paul has been mostly talking about the theological concept of justification. While theologians have written big thick books (some up to 1,000 or more) on just the theological concept of justification, I think it's best that we keep it as simple as we can, especially when it comes to sharing our Christian faith with unbelievers.

Justification means our standing before God which comes through repentance, faith in Jesus Christ and what Jesus did for us through His death on the cross. Through faith in Jesus as both our Savior and Lord we are justified, made right with God. Justification is one of the gifts of grace which God gives believers. Believers cannot make themselves any more, or any less, right before God by what they do, by works. Through faith in Jesus we are viewed by God with the same righteousness as Christ. Try as we might, no human being can even come close to that!

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

But there is another aspect of salvation, apart from justification, and it is probably just as much, if not even more, deemphasized in the church today, than it was in the early church, and that is the theological concept of sanctification. Sanctification is the process of believers being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us further ahead in Romans 8:29 that as Christians, "we are predestined by God to be conformed to the likeness of His Son." We need to be clear here, in no way are we saved by our works. **But**, God has prepared works for us to do. Ephesians 2:8-9 is followed by verse 10:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

Salvation = Justification + Sanctification

There is an inseparable connection between justification and sanctification. Another way to put it is that salvation is both a transaction and a transformation.

As Alex pointed out last week, contrary to what many believe today God doesn't just save us for ourselves so we can live however we want to live today while we wait to enjoy eternal life forever in heaven with Him after our life here on earth is done.

After letting both the Jews and the Gentiles know that they are all sinners and that there is nothing they can do to save themselves, all they can do is put their faith in Jesus, and because of that faith they are made right with God, justified by God as a free gift, through grace, Paul begins chapter 6 rather forcefully:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Then Paul talks about the symbolic meaning of baptism:

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.

The Greek word used there for "baptized" means "to be immersed in." Not so much to be immersed in water but to be immersed in Christ. It's why after his own baptism Paul referred to himself over and over again as being "in Christ." He was in Christ as Christ was in him.

When we practice baptism in water by immersion it is symbolic of the new believer's transfer or crossover from death (a life of sin) to a new life (life in Christ). We are not only united to Christ in His death but we are also united to Christ in His resurrected 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. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

One cannot be alive to God in Christ Jesus and not dead to sin.

John MacArthur is considered by many to be one of the best Bible scholars today. He's written extensive commentaries on every one of the books of the New Testament. Perhaps a little more Calvinistic than most of us and a little strong and forceful at times, but probably not that much different than the apostle Paul was back when he wrote his letter to the Romans, and this is what MacArthur writes about our passage this morning:

“As Scripture makes plain throughout its pages, from Genesis through Revelation, a saving relationship with God is inextricably linked to holy living, and a holy life lived by the power of God working in and through the heart of the true believer. In God's redemptive act in a person's heart, true holiness is as much a gift of God as is the new birth and the spiritual life it brings. The life that is not basically marked by holiness has no claim on salvation. It is true that no believer will be sinless until he goes to be with the Lord after his or her life here on earth, but a professed believer who persistently disregards Christ's lordship and His standards of righteousness by disobedience has no claim on Christ's saviorhood.” John MacArthur, Commentary on Romans

Paul isn't talking about occasional sins here due to our human weaknesses and imperfections, even after we come to Christ, those of which Paul himself was very well aware of. He is speaking of intentional and willful sinning as a pattern of one's life. The phrase translated in English in verse 1 “continue in sin,” in the Greek has the meaning of “habitual persistence,” or in verse 12 it says, “do not let sin reign in your mortal body.” Reign, meaning much more than occasional sin.

As Christians we need to try and answer the question, “what controls me, the sin in my mortal body or the new life in Christ which comes through the power of the Holy Spirit?”

Through our faith in Jesus and Jesus' death on the cross, not only are we set free from the penalty of sin (that which comes at judgment day when our life here on earth is over), we are also set free from the power of sin (in our life right here and now).

It isn't just Paul who tells us this, it's throughout the N.T. It's in Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery, “go and sin no more.” That's really what the Gospel of John is all about, “you must be born again.” John tells us in his first letter: *No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.* 1 John 3:9 (NIV)

As human beings we seem to go from one extreme to the other. In fact entire cultures and periods of history have reflected the two extremes. A couple of weeks ago Ramon mentioned the classic sermon which is read by many high school students still today, written in the 1700's by Jonathan Edwards entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” If you feeling really good about yourself and you want to experience the wrath of God, just find a copy or bring it up on your computer. For years now I have thought I would like to write a book entitled, “Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God.” I just discovered recently that somebody beat me to the punch, a man by the name of Brain Zahnd, so I ordered a copy and read it in a pretty short period of time. There were lots of things in the book that resonated with me, especially as someone who grew up with a view of God as a rather strict father and a legalistic background, but there were other things in the book that concern me.

The trouble is that when we go from one extreme of who God is to the other, we find both an incomplete and an inaccurate view of who God is. Today in America it seems like we have swayed much too much to the side where we are pretty willing to accept the free gift of salvation that God offers believers in Jesus Christ, “justification,” but unwilling to accept the transformation into the image of Jesus Christ, “sanctification,” hence we find ourselves in a self-proclaimed “Christian nation,” which really doesn’t look like Jesus at all.

Last week I spent my annual week golfing in Naples, Florida. Each year when I leave there I find myself feeling somewhat depressed. Of course one of the reasons being that it was 82 degrees and sunny when I left, knowing I was coming back to Ohio where it was 60 degrees and raining, with worse to come. But there is another reason as well and it has to do with just how expensive things are there and how much wasted money there really is in this nation. In the area surrounding the golf course there are million dollar (plus) homes and condominiums that most of the year sit empty because for most of the people that own them it is their second or third home. Most of the people down there don’t just drive regular cars, oh no, it has to be a Mercedes, a Lexus, a Porsche, or perhaps even a Bentley, cars that are in the \$100,000 range and more. Many of those people claim to be Christians, followers of Jesus Christ. The same Jesus who told one of his potential disciples to sell everything and give to the poor. The same Jesus who said, “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Why? Because with wealth and affluence, just as with power, comes the potential for great sin. And the truth is in relation to the rest of the world, almost all of us in America fall into the category of the wealthy and affluent. It’s just more noticeable in places like Naples.

And then I come home to discover that 26 people were killed in another mass shooting, including many infants and children, and as a nation, we still don’t want to address the real issue – easy access to guns, high powered guns capable of firing hundreds of rounds in a matter of minutes. Yes, one of the contributing factors is mental illness, but the real issue is that those who might suffer from mental illness have easy access to those types of guns. As Christians residing in America we are more concerned with protecting the 2nd Amendment American right to bear arms, any type of arms, than we are concerned about saving the lives of innocent men, women and children and following the teaching of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ who commanded his followers to put the sword away, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

And we have a President who doesn’t hesitate to crank up the rhetoric with a nation like North Korea and the possible use of nuclear weapons, of which I heard one analyst say the other day that just one strike of a nuclear weapon from either side would probably result in the deaths of more than a million people.

Yes, we claim to be “a Christian nation,” but in very few ways do we look and act like a Christian nation. Because the truth is there really is no “Christian nation” here on earth. Our allegiance is not to any nation of the kingdom of this world, our allegiance is to the Kingdom of God.

In his book, *Devoted to God: Blueprints for Sanctification*” a former pastor and theologian from Scotland, now living in the United States, Sinclair Ferguson writes this:

“As believers we possess a permanent and new citizenship. We are ‘in Christ’ – that is who we are. He once died to sin and now lives forever to God. We are inseparably united to him in this. That is what constitutes our ‘national identity’ or ‘spiritual ethnicity.’ To continue living the old life in sin would be a denial of who we really are . . . **Know your new identity and it will determine how you live!**”

I am first and foremost a Christian, not an American. I am first and foremost a Christian and not a Mennonite. I owe my allegiance to my Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

And a life in Christ involves the continual dying to our sin, putting off our old selves, and living a new life, putting on the new, this exchange captured no better than Paul in his letter to the Colossians which contains our Scripture passage for the year:

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Col. 3:12-17 (ESV)

Then we get to our last verse from our passage this morning, *for sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace* (v. 14). Yes, God’s law is holy and righteous, or as Paul says a little further ahead in Romans 7:12, “God’s law is holy, righteous and good. The law is how God intends for us to live. But the law cannot break the power of sin in our lives anymore than it can save us. The law can only rebuke, restrain and condemn. Christians are no longer under the condemnation of God’s law. We are under the redeeming power of His grace. It is in the power of that grace, with the help of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus calls us to live.

Last week in his sermon Alex mentioned Horatio Spafford, the writer of the song, “When Peace Like a River” or “It is Well with My Soul.” Well a hundred years before Spafford was a man by the name of John Newton who ran away from England when he was a teenager to join a crew on a slave ship. He himself was given to the black wife of a slave trader in Africa. He himself was cruelly mistreated, beaten and starved. After escaping he eventually returned becoming a sea captain of a slave ship himself and repeated the same sins upon others that had been inflicted upon him. In 1748 he had a miraculous conversion experience in which he was born again and

committed his life to Christ. He returned to England and became a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, pastoring a church in London where to this day sits his grave stone with the epitaph he himself wrote:

John Newton
Once an infidel and libertine
(or to put in contemporary language: one who directly opposes Christianity and a person who leads an immoral life, mainly interested in sexual pleasure)
A servant of slaves in Africa
Was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Preserved, restored, pardoned
And appointed to preach the faith
he had long labored to destroy.

Our song of response this morning is the hymn that John Newton is most famous for, *Amazing Grace*.