

Back at the beginning of January we began a journey together as a church family, week-by-week, verse-by-verse, through the NT book of Romans, the letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians living in 1st Century Rome. So we walked through the first five chapters of Romans, and then we took a break, kind of like pulling off the interstate to refuel and grab a snack and stretch our legs. So for the past four weeks we've been refreshing ourselves in the Psalms. But this morning we are recharged and energized and rested and ready to jump back into Romans 6.

Now if you have been here pretty regularly since January, you might remember that chapters 1-5 of Romans focus on the essence of the gospel. Paul clarifies what the gospel is: the timeless message that the eternal Son of

God took on humanity and came to earth as the Son of God in flesh, that He died as a perfect man for imperfect men, and that He was raised to life as the Son of God in power to rule and reign, revealing the righteousness of God to save all who would believe. Paul clarifies why it is necessary: people are desperately unrighteous and under God's righteous wrath for their sin, and they are unable to save themselves through their good works, their ethnic pedigree, or their religious observances. And Paul clarifies how it works to save sinners: Jesus' perfect life earns righteousness for the unrighteous and His death atones for their sin, so that if they will simply place their faith in Him and His work, they might be justified before God totally apart from any righteous works.

Now a major part of that discussion looked back to events in the distant past, things like Adam's sin in the garden that brought in a death into the world, Abraham's faith that justified him and made him the father of all who would believe, Jesus life and death and resurrection. All things that happened thousands of years ago. And then another part of those chapters looked ahead into the future to the promise of being rescued from God's wrath on the day of judgment. Something that hasn't happened yet but that we anticipate with confidence. And both of those are important, those long past events and the awaited future ones. But there's also the question of the present. Now. Today. Not just what past events comprise the gospel. Not just what future promises are guaranteed by the gospel. But what effect the gospel has on our lives right this minute.

Specifically, there's an unanswered **question about sin**.

And by "sin" I don't mean the disobedient acts we commit, but rather "sin" as a power, a force that imprisons people, that holds sway over them, that reigns in death over people and all creation. In the past, Paul says that sin entered the world through Adam. In the past, Jesus' sacrifice paid the penalty, the price, for sin. In the future, in the new heavens and the new earth, Christians will be free from even the presence of sin. But how are believers to relate to sin now? What should our attitude be toward sin right now? Are we still hopelessly subject to its power? Or are we completely free from its influence at all? What does sin have to do with us, and what do we have to do with it? Especially when Paul just said in 5:20 that "where sin increased, grace increased all the more." Where sin

abounded, grace super-abounded. If sin provokes abundant grace, should we sin more? Could sin be seen as a good thing? Should it even be something we're concerned about at all?

Well Paul addresses those exact questions in the first eleven verses **of Romans 6**. So I want to invite you this morning to take a Bible and turn with me to Romans 6, and I would ask you to follow along as I read v.1-11. And as I read, I want you to see if you can find the answer to that question: what should the attitude of a believer be toward sin and why? [READ ROMANS 6:1-11]

Paul begins **with the question** prompted by his statement about sin and grace in 5:20. Since there is a super-abundance of God's grace to exceed all our sins, why not

just sin as much as we like? Maybe you've asked that question. It's a good question. It's always been a common objection to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Paul heard it from the Judaizers and those that they influenced, like the Galatians. Roman Catholic apologists still level that accusation against Protestants. In fact, Roman Catholic dogma says that anyone who believes that we are justified by faith alone apart from works is accursed, is damned, is bound for hell. Others who believe that works are necessary for justification will ask this question. Legalists. And to be honest, it is a very real danger. Christians who believe that we are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone apart from any works are certainly tempted to go from celebrating grace to abusing it. We might certainly be tempted to grow complacent toward our sin, simply rationalizing that God is a gracious

and forgiving God. And so Paul anticipates this question, this objection, this danger, and he addresses it head on.

And what is **Paul's answer**? Are we (Christians) to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! Certainly not! May it never be! God forbid! It's an emphatic denial. He repudiates that suggestion in the strongest terms. But he doesn't just leave the denial just hanging out there. In typical Paul fashion, he reasons through it. He explains why. He gives a reason. The reason believers are not to persist in sin is that those who died to sin can't continue to live in it. Now that's kind of a loaded statement. What does it mean that we "died to sin?" I mean, he's talking to people who are still alive, so they haven't died in a physical sense. And he's talking to people who, we assume, still sin to some degree. So they haven't stopped

sinning. So what does he mean by that phrase? Well remember that when Paul talks about sin here, he's not primarily talking about the specific acts of sin that people commit. He's talking about a power that entered the world through Adam's disobedience, that came with the consequence of death, that spread to all humanity, and that reigns over them. It's a power representing an old era that certainly leads us to commit specific sinful acts, but sin as a principle is bigger than that.

And Christians died to that principle, the power of sin, in the sense that, as believers, the dominion, the reign, of sin has been broken in their lives. He's not saying that Christians are no longer tempted by sin. He's not saying that Christians are unable to sin or don't sin. He's saying that followers of Jesus, those who have placed their trust

and hope in Him, are no longer under the lordship of sin. They are not indebted to it any longer. They aren't obligated to obey it. And understand that what Paul is saying here is not a command. He's not saying that as a believer you should die to sin. He's declaring something that is true. He is proclaiming it as fact. You have died to sin. In regard to sin, from God's legal perspective as the just Judge of the world, believers have died to the controlling power of sin over them. They have been transferred out of the realm where sin ruled. But it's not JUST a legal or forensic declaration. It's also experiential and transformative. You dying to sin isn't just something God says ABOUT you. It's not just something God did FOR you on your behalf. It's also something that happened TO you, IN you that delivered you from sin's dominion. Dying to sin isn't just something theoretical that

a preacher says in a sermon and you amen it and nothing changes. When you die to sin, there is a radical, definitive, once-for-all break with sin and with the old way of living that changes a person's loyalties, their allegiances, their affections, their relationships, their interests, their priorities. It's a transfer of kingdoms that is as different as life is from death. If you have never experienced that kind of transformative change, you might need to ask God to search your heart to see if you truly have died to sin.

Paul goes on to explain that two things take place in the life of a believer to bring about this reality. Those two things are death and life, crucifixion and resurrection. He starts by expounding on this idea of death. Believers are **dead to sin**. Now Paul insinuates that his readers already know what he's about to tell them ("Do you not know?"),

but he says those baptized into Christ are baptized into His death. That they are buried with Him by baptism into His death. So let's break this down one idea at a time.

When Paul speaks of those who have been baptized into Christ, he is probably referring there to the physical act of water baptism. BUT he's not saying that the simple act of water baptism has some sort of spiritual effect. I say that every time I baptize someone. This water has no magical power to change your spiritual condition. He's not saying that getting dunked in water causes you to die to sin. He's not saying that simply going down in water identifies you with Christ's death. You see, part of the problem is that we – and by "we" I mean modern day evangelicals, Baptists – in an effort to hammer home the point that baptism doesn't save you, have driven such a wedge between salvation and baptism that sometimes it might seem like they don't

have ANYTHING to do with each other. We've gone to the other extreme. In Paul's writings (and in the thinking of the early church), when they spoke of baptism it was often shorthand for the entire experience of conversion. Faith, repentance, receiving the Holy Spirit, and being baptized were all components of one unified experience. The idea of an unbaptized believer was unimaginable to them.

Biblically, the thought of an unbaptized believer is virtually non-existent. And so when Paul speaks here about being baptized, baptism stands for the whole experience. When he says, "All of us who have been baptized into Christ..." he is saying, "All of us who have been baptized in water..." but he means, "All of us who have placed our faith in Christ..." All of us who have trusted Him. All of us who are truly Christians. And so ALL Christians (and only Christians) have participated in the death and burial of

Jesus by faith in Him as evidenced by baptism, the universal, outward initiation rite for believers identifying them with Christ and His people.

But they're not just baptized. They are baptized into Christ.

Paul is talking about our union with Jesus. Believers belong to Him. We are identified with Him. We are spiritually united to Him. We are WITH Him. That phrase is repeated over and over. And we are not just baptized into Christ. We are baptized into His death. We are plunged into His death. We are immersed together with Him in death, participating with Him in His death and the burial that confirms it. So Jesus' death was not just a historical event. It was not just an example of sacrifice. It was not just a display of love. It accomplished something real and timeless and spiritual FOR and IN those who would

believe in Him. When He died and was buried, we died and were buried with Him. His death becomes our death, spiritually. Not identical to His, but in the likeness of His. At the moment of our conversion, we share in the benefits of His death because we are united to Him.

In v.6 Paul gets more specific. He says our old self was crucified with Him. Our old self, the whole of the person we were in Adam, our former life before we knew Christ, is finally and definitively dead. The fundamental reality of our existence before our conversion, the version of us who represented the former age, the old era, was crucified with Christ so that we might belong to Him. And the purpose of this crucifixion, Paul says, is that the body of sin might be brought to nothing. So that our whole self as it related to sin – our physical body, our thoughts, our desires, our

attitudes, our affections – might be destroyed, abolished, annihilated. It wasn't just part of us that died. Not just our sin nature. What we were is no more.

He goes on to say that this happened so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. In Adam, from birth, before faith in Christ, we are all slaves to sin. We have no freedom to choose anything else. We invariably choose sin because it is our nature. It is the sum of all our desires. But believers are liberated from that slavery. We are set free from its controlling power. That doesn't mean we don't or won't sin. It's just that we don't have to. It is no longer our master. We are no longer bound to obey it. It's not that Christians cannot sin, but that sin cannot rule Christians. It's not perfect sinlessness, but broken dominion. We may not be free from sin's presence until Christ returns, but followers

of Jesus are certainly free from its power, its tyranny, its mastery. Those who have died to sin by sharing in the death of Christ have been set free from slavery to sin.

But it's not just about death and crucifixion. There is a corresponding truth: life and resurrection. We have not only died to sin; we are **alive to God**. In v.4 Paul writes, "Just as Christ was raised from the dead...we too might walk in newness of life." God's grace doesn't lead us to sin more, not JUST because we died with Christ and that broke the power of sin and freed us from its enslaving dominion. We ALSO don't continue in sin because we were raised with Him to live a new and fundamentally different life, a life empowered by the realities of a new age and that reflects its values. The future reality that one day all things will be made new has broken into this

present age and we see the signs and shadows of it even now, even in us.

And just as our death to sin is grounded in His crucifixion, our newness of life – both now and to come – is grounded in His resurrection accomplished by the power and the glory of God. In the same way His death was more than just a historical event, so His resurrection is also more than just a thing that happened to Him. His resurrection accomplished something TO and IN us! As He was raised, we were raised. We walk and live new lives as His followers because the One we are united with was raised from the dead to live a new kind of life. For the believer, there is no death without resurrection, and so those who have died to sin will necessarily live with Him. And when Paul says that we shall certainly be united with Him in a

resurrection like His, he seems to be referring both to a guaranteed full future reality AND a real partial present reality that serves as a foreshadowing of the consummation that is to come. Because of His resurrection, the lives we live now as His people are fundamentally new and different. But not as new and different as they will be when He returns.

Paul says because Jesus was resurrected, He cannot die again. That's what set His rising apart from people like Lazarus or Jairus' daughter. They were merely resuscitated, only to die again later. Christ's resurrection broke the dominion of death. And by conquering death, He defeated the power that gives death its sting: sin. He voluntarily experienced death as the consequence of sin to break its dominion. And so the two powers that reigned

in Adam – sin and death – are both overcome. So now, Christ lives for the glory of God, and we share in His victory and in His life.

Paul finishes this text with a concluding “so what” verse. It’s a verse that going to lead into a bigger “so what” passage next week. But he says, in light of these things that have been established as real and true – in light of the fact that you ARE dead to sin and that you ARE alive to God – consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. In light of the fact that these things are true of you, reckon them to be true. Regard them as realities. Judge them to be established facts. Let their truth impact how you act and think and speak. Let them shape how you see yourself in regard to sin.

There is a verified psychological condition called Stockholm Syndrome, in which a victim ends up identifying with and empathizing with his or her captor or abuser. They begin to believe, in the face of all reality testifying saying the opposite, that the one who is their enemy is actually on their side. You see it in hostage situations where hostages end up sympathizing with their captors. You saw it when slavery was abolished, that slaves felt an allegiance to their enslavers. You see it with abused women who defend their abusers. They find themselves unable to discern the truth about who they are and about who their enemy is. They are deceived into thinking that the one who intends to do them harm is actually their ally. And they believe these things, often, to their own destruction. The Bible makes it plain that, for those who do not know Jesus, sin is a captor. It is an enslaver. It is an

abuser. And even for believers, it remains an enemy. And yet we are tempted to sympathize with it and excuse it and rationalize it and toy with it and entertain it as though it were a friend. Sin is not your friend. If you have never trusted Christ, sin reigns over you and has subjected you to death as an object of God's wrath. If you will turn from your sin and turn to Jesus and cast yourself on His mercy, you can be changed. You can be united with Christ in His death and resurrection. You can die to sin and live to God. And if you are a Christian this morning, you are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Is that how you consider yourself? Is that how you regard yourself? Is that how you live, as though you have died to the thing that seeks to kill you and are alive to the one who seeks your good? What you were is no more. And even though the temptation to live like what you were always remains, let

the truth of what you are be evident in the way you live. If you know Christ, you HAVE died to sin. Don't live as though it still has power over you. You HAVE been raised to new life. Live it in the power of the Spirit and for the glory of God.