

Gospel Identity 2, Sunday June 21 2020

'Dead to sin, Alive in Christ – Romans 6:1–11'

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Acts 6:1–11

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. 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—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 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.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Introduction

Grigori Rasputin lead a nation into darkness with a single idea. It's the idea that Paul writes about in our Romans reading, when he asks in v.1:

Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

Rasputin came from a middle-class family and had a religious experience early in his life. While he was never officially a monk or a priest, he travelled and gained a reputation as a healer and teacher of divine wisdom. He soon weaselled his way into the Russian royal family and got the ear of the Tsar/King and Tsarina/Queen of Russia. Rasputin left his wife and kids in the country and became famous in the capital Moscow for his drunken sex parties, which often included the rich people he would leech off.

Rasputin gave the king bad advice which hurt the people and weakened the country. He became one of the most hated men in Russia and was assassinated in December 1916. Three months later the Russian revolution began and the King was overthrown.

Rasputin infected the minds of a nation with one simple idea: sin is good

news not bad news. He said the more we sin, the more we do what we're told not to do, the closer we get to godliness. If God loves to forgive by grace through faith, why not give him more to forgive? If we've already been forgiven it doesn't matter how we live.

While Rasputin is one famous example, the idea that Paul presents is as old as time. So when it rears its seductive head, what do we do? We either give into it or fight it. But how? By the Word of God. As we delve deeper into this passage, Paul outlines for us in Romans 6 what we need to understand to resist this cancerous way of thinking.

Baptism: dead to sin (1-4)

In response to the question '*shall we sin more so grace may increase?*' Paul responds with an emphatic NO! Sin is bad news, sin is what caused Jesus to die and all those who are baptised have died to sin.

Here Paul brings us back to baptism. Hopefully if you've been baptised you know that on that day a part of your identity died. Often we think of baptism as a sprinkling, a cute rite of passage that we forget later, but here Paul puts a line in the sand and reminds us that baptism is partly about death. It's drowning the old self, sinking our sinful-self in a watery grave. There is a seriousness in the word baptism that need to reclaim.

Paul writes:

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

(Romans 6:4)

Paul is saying here that in our baptism we identify with Jesus' death and burial. As Jesus died for our sins, so in baptism we say me too! Jesus died **for** me and I also want to die **to** everything that made it necessary for him to die.

In Paul's day there were two basic ways of life that people had grown up with, they're still around today. On one hand there were Jews from religious homes who ate, dressed and were sticklers for the law of the Scriptures and the other laws people added on. On the other hand were Romans from either stoic families with had their own religious rules, or from hedonistic or pagan families who believed life was meant to be lived so you were happy with yourself. So when Paul comes along and says you're made free from sin and

set right with God by the death of Jesus you can imagine the trouble it caused. Some may have said, “Well there you go, stuff the rules, we can live however we want!” Other might have asked: “Well now what’s to stop me from murdering someone, or sleeping around if law keeping isn’t going to help me?”

It’s at this point that Paul draws the Jews and non-Jews, people from different sides of the fence together and says: remember your baptism. Neither mindless law-keeping nor reckless abandon are OK because they both leave God out of the picture.

Baptism was how all people became members of the church in Rome and so Paul takes them back to their baptism and says: In your baptism you left your old selves behind, you died with Christ and as you rose out of the water you rose a new woman or a new man. You became a new person in Christ on that day. In so doing you committed to God. We fight sin in our lives by living into our baptismal vows to follow Christ. Our saviour Jesus lived a life without sin, so we commit to making our way his way.

United: union with Christ (5–7)

Paul continues to riff off this unity with Christ in verses 5 through 7:

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—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Here again Paul gives a basis for resisting sin even though we know we’ve already been saved by Jesus. He uses the analogy of slavery which would have been familiar to his people.

If he were writing to us specifically today, he might use the boss/employee analogy. If I have a boss, then that person has special power over me.

Here the Bible is telling us that before we hear the gospel, before we take hold of our gospel identity we’re working for the boss of sin. Even the good things we do are sinful because they puff us up and make us think we don’t need God. When our actions lead us to think we’re more awesome than God, that is sin, no matter how good our deeds might be.

If you’ve ever met an addict they’ll often tell you, “I can quit whenever I want”, but it’s not true. There’s a power their particular poison has over

them. When we think we're our own boss, sin is still our boss because it still has power over us. Outside of a relationship with Jesus, sin has power over us, sin is our master.

Lot's of us today don't believe in sin. People say things like "sin is just something religious people made up to make us feel bad". This highlights how deep the issue is and how powerless we are to stop sin by ourselves.

Sin is not neutral. For Paul we're either slaves of sin or we're servants of God. There are really only two ways to live.

But here is where Paul brings us back to our gospel identity. If I lose my job, or get fired, guess what, my old boss has no more power over me. Sure I might act like they do out of habit but ultimately their power is lost. In dying to sin, we make Jesus our boss. We find our place in 'Jesus Incorporated' and we are set free from sin.

Whatever your earthly boss is like friend, Jesus is a better boss, leader, master, and friend. That's why we choose to fight sin in our lives, not because God's ready with a big stick ready to belt us if we stuff up, but because Jesus our boss is working with us through life walking right beside us, giving us a new purpose and a new identity in him.

Renewed: Alive for God (8-11)

This is where Paul really drives home our motivation for fighting sin in our lives. The reason we fight sin is because in v.8:

'we died with Christ, and we believe we will also live with him.'

Jesus gives us forgiveness for the sins in our past, he promises us a future hope in heaven in a world without sin, but he also helps us to live for God in the now.

Mike Bird says of this section:

'Paul is announcing that co-crucifixion with Christ means that believers enter a state of righteousness because God's justifying verdict is a speech-act that begins to create the very reality it declares.'

If I get up every morning and say to the mirror: "I solemnly swear I am up to no good". I'm not actually doing 'no good', but if I mean what I say I will probably go out and live it out. There is power in self-talk.

This is why Paul is telling us over and over again that if we've died with Christ, we also come alive in him. We're to speak this new identity over ourselves until we live it out. Who I believe I am will change how I live. If I believe I have been saved by Jesus, I'll love him, and I'll devote myself to living the way he wants me to live.

Because of Jesus' death, his followers no longer need to fear death. We are united with Christ, his fate is our fate, we're going where he's going. This partnership with Jesus frees us up to leave sin behind and live for him. My work, free-time and even my sleep will change. As someone who has coupled my life with Jesus' I am entitled to the gift of grace and I'm freed up to do the good works he created me to do. Not to earn my way to heaven but because I am already a citizen there.

Application: Burying the old identity to give birth to the new

So friends I'll finish with one simple application. Salvation happens in a moment. In a moment we are brought from death to life as Jesus imparts his right standing to us. Sanctification however, which is what Romans 6-8 is all about, is a lifetime of burying my old identity and living into my new identity in Christ.

Sanctification is putting sin in my life to death every day. We live in a culture that says, 'if it feels right, do it', but the Bible says NO! God calls us to put to death: lying, lust, greed, gluttony, hatred, racism, jealousy, slander, filthy language, pride, gossip, envy, violence, idleness, drunkenness, adultery, selfishness, idolatry, and all things that separate us from God and go against his Word.

God doesn't call us to this battle alone though. God has given us his Holy Spirit who convicts and guides us. God gives us his church, people we can trust to keep us accountable and help us grow. Finally God gives us the example of Jesus who resisted the temptation, the devil, and sin. Let's die to sin and live for Christ, day by day.

I'll finish with the words of professional baseballer turned preacher Billy Sunday. Here's what he said about sin:

"Listen, I'm against sin. I'll kick it as long as I've got a foot, I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist, I've butt it as long as I've got a head, and I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth. And when I'm old, fistless, footless, and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to glory and it goes home to hell." **Amen!**

