

Romans 6:1b-11

Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase? ²Absolutely not! We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection.

⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him, to make our sinful body powerless, so that we would not continue to serve sin. ⁷For the person who has died has been declared free from sin. ⁸And since we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he will never die again. Death no longer has control over him. ¹⁰For the death he died, he died to sin once and for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹In the same way also consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Dead and Alive

I.

Movies about the Old West immortalized the “Wanted” poster. The poster often included the phrase: “Dead or Alive.” “Or” was a significant word. Justice was what was important. The criminal being sought was so dangerous that they just wanted the individual brought in. If someone were able to bring the wanted criminal in for trial, a reward would be provided. If, on the other hand, the person attempting to apprehend the criminal was in a gunfight and shot the criminal dead, the court would *still* provide the reward.

God has a wanted poster, too. God's poster is considerably different from those of the old west. God wants us dead *and* alive. He wants the Old Self in us dead, but he also wants the New Self to come out alive.

Paul begins: “Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase?” (Romans 6:1, EHV). There is a strange leap of logic out there, especially among those who are unbelievers and hear the Christian speaking about sin and God's grace that completely forgives sin for Jesus' sake. That leap of logic suggests that forgiveness in Jesus is a license to sin. Since God's grace is so vast and his forgiveness is so free, wouldn't that mean it was just ok to go out and indulge in sin all the more?

The concept is appealing to the sinful nature. Paul will talk more about the conflict between the sinful self and the Christian self in next week's Second Lesson. Here he quickly answers the question: “Absolutely not! We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer?” (Romans 6:2, EHV). The very idea that sin might be appealing so that we can tap in to an even bigger portion of God's grace is out of the question, Paul says. In fact, the very idea is ludicrous. “We *died* to sin,” he says.

The Christian Church is often pictured as the bride of Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians: “A wife is bound to her husband for as long as he lives, but if the husband has died, she is free to be married to any man she wishes, only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39, EHV). Our former husband was sin. Then sin died. The marriage is over. Now we are remarried—to Christ. If sin comes knocking at the door, the old spouse doesn't live there anymore.

II.

We sin against God and our neighbor when we try to do the impossible: we try to stay married to the old and the new spouse at the same time. “We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer?” (Romans 6:2, EHV).

Dying is a complete break. There is a break in the relationship to sin. Absolutely *nothing* connects a Christian to sin. So...if we continue to live for sin as our master, we are demonstrating the fact that we do not live for God.

Does this mean that the Christian will no longer struggle with sin? Certainly not. Next week Paul will detail that there is a war going on within us. That’s because within us are two people—the Old Self and the New Self. The Old Self wants nothing less than to keep on wallowing in the pigpen of sin.

“Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death” (Romans 6:3-4, EHV). Martin Luther used this very passage from Romans to speak about the meaning of Baptism for our Daily Life. He said: “Fourth: *What does baptizing with water mean?* Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death” (Luther’s Catechism: Meaning of Baptism for our Daily Life).

Baptism, Luther is saying, isn’t a one-and-done “ceremony.” Baptism is a sacrament. In Baptism God gives us the forgiveness Jesus won for us. Paul says to Titus: “[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs in keeping with the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7, EHV).

III.

Have you ever wondered about your faith? Have you ever wondered whether you believe purely enough, or have enough faith, or have been a “good enough” Christian for God to care about you? Probably every Christian has had doubts about his or her faith. I know *I* have. I remember asking my pastor about it around the time of my confirmation. How can you be sure that the sinful human nature has died?

Keep looking back to baptism. “Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?... ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him, to make our sinful body powerless, so that we would not continue to serve sin” (Romans 6:3, 6, EHV).

Baptism connects us with Christ. It connects us with his death. He died carrying our sins with him to the cross. He died *for* those sins. Paul says: “We have been united with him in the likeness of his death...¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once and for all” (Romans 6:5, 10, EHV). He died for us. He died for you and for me. We are united with him. We are connected to him in a very personal way.

Having died with Jesus, we have been set free. “For the person who has died has been declared free from sin” (Romans 6:7, EHV). Sin no longer can control us.

IV.

So far, we have spoken mostly about death. The death of Jesus for us and death to sin. Paul, on the other hand, bounces back and forth. Wanted: Dead *and* alive.

Jesus did *indeed* die. But he didn’t *stay* dead. Jesus rose. You and I will, too. No—you and I *have*, too. “For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection” (Romans 6:5, EHV). The likeness of Jesus’ resurrection is his glory. We have been given a likeness of his glory—the New Self.

What does the New Self look like? What does it do? “We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life” (Romans 6:4, EHV). Baptism gives purpose and meaning to our lives. We walk in a new life. We walk with Jesus. Living with Jesus is an ongoing event. Luther said of our baptism that it has a meaning for daily life: to drown the Old Self and live with and for Jesus.

“We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he will never die again. Death no longer has control over him” (Romans 6:9, EHV). Jesus conquered death. Though you and I *will* have to pass through death, in Jesus death no longer has control over us, either.

“In the same way also consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11, EHV). There has been a separation. A separation of the best kind. The face of the Christian is no longer turned toward sin, but toward God.

The New Self is there. The New Self wants to please God. Rather than the skeptic asking whether we ought to sin so that God’s grace might increase, the New Self in the Christian longs to lead a God-pleasing life. We follow what God said in his Moral Law, but not because of fear of his wrath and punishment—those have been dealt with for us by Jesus. We look instead to God’s Moral Law to serve as our compass to guide us toward God-pleasing activities.

Wanted. The Old Self is wanted dead. Dead to sin. The New Self is wanted alive. Alive to Christ. Live in the New Self. Live for Jesus. Even in times of suffering you and I, as Christians, find comfort and strength to resist temptation. Amen.