

The Righteousness of God

Romans 3:21 - 31

¹What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We died to sin; how can we live 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 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. ⁵If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

In some Bibles, the heading for the verses in today's study is "Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ." That was Paul's argument too. In chapter six, Paul took up the theme of sanctification...the present dimension of our salvation. Remember that "justification" has already happened if you are a Christian. God has pronounced you "not guilty" and forgiven your sins. Justification, for the Christian, is a one-time, completed event.

Sanctification, however, is a process, not an event. It transpires over the course of a Christian's life, faith and walk with the Lord. Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Jesus every day in every way. The next three chapters, six through eight, all deal with God's work in us, which we call sanctification.

There were some in Paul's day who would argue that because of the power of God's grace, one could sin with impunity. Grace would always be available. Indeed, some argued that because of God's grace we could and even should sin, so that there would be even more grace available to us. Paul countered that such thinking was absurd. We have died to sin (verse 2). Our challenge is to live and dwell in grace and pursue the likeness of Christ while fleeing from sin.

There are four key truths we need to see in verses 5-6...

- 1. We have died with Christ to sin and the old ways of life.**
- 2. We will one day rise with Christ in resurrection.**
- 3. The old self has been crucified and put to death...because sin had overtaken it and assumed control.**
- 4. We have been freed from sin's power, possession and penalty by virtue of the cross.**

There is a saying in science that nature abhors a vacuum. So too do the spirit and soul of man. With the crucifixion of sin and the old nature, the door has been opened for Christ to fill, indwell and enliven. When Christ increasingly takes possession of who we are, then we call that process sanctification. On nine different occasions in 6:2-13, Paul says we are now dead to sin. Because of the depth of human sin and our fallen nature, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit each day.

In describing the battle that we all have with sin, Martin Luther once remarked that while in Christ the old Adam nature that we have may have been drowned, but that old nature is a good swimmer and repeatedly tries to return to the surface of our lives. Take joy in verse 7, anyone who has come to Christ and identified with His death has been set free from sin.

Some people may read today's verses and conclude that baptism is necessary for salvation or that baptism is an act of salvation. But that was not Paul's position or conclusion in verses 3-4 (or anywhere else in his writings). Kenneth Wuest defines this particular use of baptism to mean "*the introduction or placing of a person or thing into a new environment or into union with something else so as to alter its condition or its relationship to its previous environment or condition.*" Some argued that we have been placed in Christ, an altogether new environment. This new location or position changes you as a person and changes your standing before the Father. You have been introduced to and identified with the Son. Christ has become our home and victor. In and through Him we gain victory over our sins.

Remember, sanctification is a process. No one attains perfection in just a few hours. We all struggle each day and trust in the Holy Spirit to empower and strengthen us in our journey to becoming more like Christ.

Applications . . .

1. Read all the passages in Romans 6 that relate to being "dead to sin."
2. How would you explain to someone the meaning of baptism and how baptism differs from the experience of salvation?
3. Is there an area in your life where you struggle in dying to Christ? Give that battle or struggle to Christ now as you pray.