



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## Baptism and New Life

Romans 6:1-14

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### Introduction

1. One thing I liked about teaching school is that there are more opportunities for starting over. A *new* year begins about the time the rest of us go into a holding pattern for next year's resolutions. The semester break gives both students and teachers a chance to make some changes, to get a fresh start. At the least, you get *two fresh starts* every calendar year.
2. We can start over outside of school, too. Most of us are glad about that. Nearly everyone wants a chance for a do-over. Sensitive souls want the same thing spiritually.
  - a. "While belonging to a new realm, the believer brings with him into it many of the impulses, habits and tendencies of the old life, a constant threat to putting into actual practice the realities of our new realm status" (Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 352).
  - b. We know that, though a defeated foe, sin has not given up attacking us (cf. 1 Peter 5:8). We live in tension between who we want to be and the reality of the temptations we continue to face.
3. As we struggle with this tension, we are inclined to lament, "If only I could lay sin to rest!" Romans 6 shows that we are ahead of the game because we *have already* done so—at our baptism.

### Body

- I. In Search of the New Way.
  - A. The New Testament is about newness and a fresh start in Jesus.
    1. He established a *new covenant* (1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24).
    2. He replaced old hostile relationships with "*one new man*" (Ephesians 2:14).
    3. He gave us a *new way of serving and relating* to God (Romans 7:6; Hebrews 10:20).
    4. He enabled us to start over in the way we live, to put on a *new self*, with a *new life* and *new priorities* (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10; 1 John 2:7-8; Romans 6:4).
  - B. The overriding problem we have to overcome in being new creatures is sin.

1. Romans is especially valuable for understanding the seriousness of the problem, for Paul talks more about sin in Romans than in all his other letters combined;<sup>1</sup> in doing so, he presents a more complete understanding of what sin is and does.
    - a) That doesn't surprise us since we understand that God is opposed to sin.
    - b) But, we tend to think of "sins" (bad thoughts and deeds); Paul sees a bigger problem.
  2. In Romans, especially in 5:12-8:3, Paul seldom speaks of "sins" (only at 3:25 and 7:5 and in quotations at 4:7 and 11:27), but rather of "Sin" as a *personified* force.
    - a) Sin entered the world (5:12), has reigned through death (5:21), and can rule or lord it over a person (6:12, 14), acting like a master who pays wages (6:16-23).
    - b) "In 7.8-11 sin is likened to a living being (the serpent of Genesis 3) or a cunning enemy which seizes its opportunity and builds a bridgehead within weak humanity" (Dunn, 112). (Cf. Genesis 4:7 where sin "crouches at [Cain's] door.")
  3. In Romans, "sin" is more than misdirected religion, self-indulgence, or specific wrong deeds,<sup>2</sup> it's an independent power that gets us in its grips and pushes us away from God.
    - a) "'Sin' is the term Paul uses for a compulsion or restraint which humans generally experience within themselves or in their social context, a compulsion towards attitudes and actions not always of their own willing or approving" (Dunn, 112).
    - b) "It is that power which has caused countless individuals of good will but inadequate resolve to cry out in deep despair: 'I can't help it,' 'I can't fight it'" (Dunn, 112-113). Cf. 7:14-25.
      - (1) This does not diminish personal responsibility—see 7:14-23 where Paul describes the tension—but does show us that will power over certain misdeeds and bad attitudes will not suffice to resolve the problem.<sup>3</sup>
    - c) Romans 3:9 summarizes the problem: *all* are "under sin."
- C. What can be done about Sin?
1. Paul's answer is "grace," centering in the new Adam (Jesus) and given according to the enormity of sin in each life (Romans 5:14-21).
  2. But exactly how does grace work?
    - a) One answer—and history shows it to be not at all far-fetched<sup>4</sup>—is to try to obtain as much grace as possible by not worrying about holding sin in check (5:20; 6:1; notice that the same Greek word [πλεονάζω, *pleonazō*], translated "abound" and "increase" in the ESV, is used in both verses).
    - b) Paul rejected that answer out of hand (6:2), and then issued an imperative that they should stop letting sin rule their lives and should instead keep yielding themselves (and their members) to God's way of righteousness (6:12-13).

<sup>1</sup> James Dunn notes "the astonishing predominance of the term in Romans. Of 64 occurrences in the Pauline letters, no less than three-fourths appear in Romans. Putting the point the other way round, *hamartia* occurs three times as often in Romans as in the rest of the Pauline corpus as a whole. Moreover, 41 of the 48 Romans occurrences occur in 5:12-8:3—an extraordinary intensity of usage" (James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 111).

<sup>2</sup> These categories are taken from Dunn's discussion of how Paul sees the effects of sin personified. See Dunn, 114-124.

<sup>3</sup> As Paul emphasizes, if that were the case, the law would have sufficed.

<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce notes that "in every generation, people claiming to be justified by faith have behaved in such a way as to lend colour to this charge" and then relates the case of Gregory Rasputin, "the evil genius of the Romanov family in its last years of power. Rasputin taught and exemplified the doctrine of salvation through repeated experiences of sin and repentance. He held that, as those who sin most require most forgiveness, a sinner who continues in sin with abandon enjoys, each time he repents, more of God's forgiving grace than any ordinary sinner" (F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, Revised Edition, 127).

- c) But this imperative is not a matter of human determination, but of cooperation grounded in the spiritual reality that they were no longer under sin's power (6:14), having been brought from death to life (6:13) and therefore made "dead to sin and living to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11, literally translated).

## II. When They Died to Sin.

- A. In verse 2, Paul makes his point: we cannot continue to live in sin because we died to it.
- B. The importance of this death to sin is spelled out beginning in verse 5.
  - 1. Death to sin came when we were united with Christ in his death and resurrection (v 5).
  - 2. The purpose (seen in the conjunction ἵνα, *hina*, "in order that", v 6) of our old selves being crucified with him (a synonym for dying with him) is to bring "the body (σῶμα, *sōma*, the self) of sin" to nothing (aorist passive subjunctive of καταργέω, *katargeō*, make ineffective, powerless; abolish, set aside) (v 6), thus setting us completely free of sin (v 7; literally "acquitted" — perfect passive of δικαιόω, *dikaioō*; cf. Romans 3:4, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 5:1, 9; etc.).
  - 3. Verses 8-10 underscore the importance of being united with Christ, and especially his death and resurrection.
    - a) Paul makes two connected points.
      - (1) It is only in dying with Christ that we will live with him (v 8).
      - (2) This is as permanent for us as it was for Christ (vv 9-10).
    - b) "Paul is telling us, then, that the historical events of the saving work of Jesus have their counterpart or fulfillment in a specific historical event in the life of every Christian, . . ." (Jack Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical Study*, 80).
- C. Verses 3-4 tell us that we died to sin when we were baptized.
  - 1. Remember his premise: we died to sin (v 2).
  - 2. Anticipating their question, "when?" he asks, "do you not know" (present tense) what happened when you were baptized?
  - 3. Verse 3 declares what happened.
    - a) Notice what verse 3 does *not* say (see Cottrell, 77-79).
      - (1) That the deaths of everyone benefitting from the death of Christ occurred when he died and was raised 1900 years ago (a view popular among those who hold to a view of limited atonement of the pre-ordained "elect").
      - (2) That death occurred the moment the heart turned to God in faith and/or repentance.<sup>5</sup>
    - b) What Paul *does* say—twice (vv 3, 4)—is, when you were baptized, you were united with Jesus in his death and resurrection, setting you free from sin as surely as he was set free from the death that Sin effected.
  - 4. But that is not all Paul says: verse 4 makes it clear that the purpose (again, the conjunction ἵνα, *hina*, "in order that") of this baptismal death was so that we could walk (subjunctive) "in newness of life," the life to be found in being united with Christ.

<sup>5</sup> Cottrell elaborates: "He does not say, 'Remember when you first believed' or 'Don't you know what happened when you first repented'; he does not say, 'Think about the time you bowed your head and received Christ into your heart.' He says, 'Remember your baptism!' Why should he so magnify baptism if this were not the specific point where the life-changing and heart-renewing work of God was actually accomplished?" (Cottrell, 83).

### III. Significant Things to Understand About Baptism.

- A. Baptism is *the point in time* when our participation with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection brings about the “change within us that breaks the grip of sin upon our hearts and makes it possible for us to live a life that is holy and pleasing to God” (Cottrell, 82).
1. His point “is not that the believer in baptism is laid in his own grave, but that through that action he is set alongside Christ in *his*” (G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 130).
  2. This is not something *in addition to* faith, but is a definite commitment *of* faith (cf. Romans 5:1).
- B. Since we did not physically die as Jesus did, we understand that baptism is a symbolic representation of the deeper reality of being united in Christ where we find new life.
1. But, it is not a symbol of “a reality that has *already occurred*” (Cottrell, 81).
  2. Rather, it is an external symbol that “occurs *simultaneously* with the spiritual reality it is symbolizing . . . the death and burial of our old life . . . and our resurrection to new life. It is a reality that occurs because we are ‘baptized into Christ’” (Cottrell, 81).
- C. The goal is not to “get baptized,” or even to “get into the church” (though the latter goes with it since the church consists of all who are saved - cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13); rather, the goal, as the phrase “in order that” in v 4 shows, is to enter newness of life (Cf. Moo, 366).
1. This life is empowered by the realities of the new age.
  2. This life is also expected to reflect the values of that new age (cf. vv 11-14).

#### Conclusion

1. For years, I have turned to this text when asked the question, “do you think you have to be baptized in order to be saved?” Simply by reading the text, and asking what Paul thought and what he wanted the Romans to understand I have seen students visibly moved as they wrestled with this text’s implications.
2. That’s because of the straightforward power of what it says. That death to sin is possible. That a new beginning can happen for all of us. That we have the power to sustain us even as sin continues its hopeless attack on our lives.
3. We believers need to remember what happened at our baptism and what that means in terms of the way we are to live. Any who have not done what they did should seize the opportunity to get out from under sin. Die with him. Rise to new life. Why not be baptized now?

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