

## II. SALVATION—THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED (3:21–8:39)

### A. Justification—declared righteous in Christ (3:21–5:21)

1. The Divine Method (3:21–31)
2. The OT Illustration of Justification by Faith (4:1–25)
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### B. Sanctification—made holy in Christ (6–7)

#### 1. The fact of our dying and rising with Christ (6:1-10)

The word “sanctification” occurs for the first time in chapter 6 (it is translated as “holiness” in some versions in 6:19, 22). The first five chapters have dealt with how the sinner can be saved. Chapter 6 addresses the issue of how the domination of sin in our lives can be broken.

Romans 3:21–5:21 focused on justification. Justification is related to the guilt of sin. When we sin we are guilty and deserve to be punished. However, by virtue of our union with the death of Christ, God declares us righteous. We are not made righteous (i.e. we still sin), but are declared righteous and are treated as such.

Once we have been justified God desires to make us holy in character by removing the dominance of sin over our lives. This is sanctification which is the focus of chapters 6 and 7. Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Tit 2:14; Eph. 2:10). “If there is such an intimate connection between justification and sanctification in the purpose of God in giving His Son to die for us, there must be a like intimate connection between them in the experience of the believer” (Hodge, 194).

Both justification and sanctification are aspects of the same saving work of God and cannot be separated from each other except for the purpose of study.

#### 1. The right way—union with Christ (6)

##### a. Know the facts of our union with Christ (6:1–10)

#### 6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?

The doctrine of justification by faith is a wonderful truth, but some see it as dangerous. If men are declared righteous by faith alone, and if the grace of God super-abounds where sin increases (5:20), then won't some people conclude that they can continue in sin (Jude 1:4)? Paul anticipates this question in 6:1 and asks, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Ro. 6:1) His answer: “Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live in it any longer?” (6:2)

The very design of Christianity is to deliver men from sin. It is unthinkable to assume that God would pay a tremendous price to deliver humanity from the penalty of sin, but have no concern if the person continues in sin or not. If someone comes to Christ to be delivered from sin, it is a contradiction to suppose that he does so in order to live in it.

**6:2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?**

In 6:2 Paul says we have “*died to sin*” (6:2). Our death to sin is a past event, an accomplished fact. Paul’s question is how can we continue in something that we died to?

When did we die?

The answer comes in the following verses: In Romans 6:5 it says, “we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death;” verse 6 says, “our old self was crucified with Him;” and verse 8 says, “we have died with Christ.”

In other words, according to verse 5 there is a union between Christ and Christians: “we have become united with Him.” In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul says, “by His [God’s] doing you are in Christ Jesus.” To be “in Christ” is another way of saying that we are united with Him. This means that what happened to Christ is considered by God as happening to us. Therefore, Jesus’ death is counted as our death.

So when verse 2 asks, “How shall we who died to sin, still live in it?” it is referring to our death with Christ when He died. Although Jesus’ death happened in the past as a fact of history (notice all of the past tense verbs in the above verses: “we who died;” “our old self was crucified with Him;” “we have died with Christ”), it is applied to us now through faith. When Jesus was crucified, we were crucified; when He died, we died.

This is a continuation of what Paul had said in Romans 5. In Romans 5:12–21 we saw that God established a union between Adam and his people, and a corresponding union between Christ and his people. Condemnation came through our union with Adam. Justification comes through our union with Christ (5:18). Now in Romans 6:5, Paul makes that union explicit and relates it to sanctification as well as justification.

What does Paul mean by, “we can’t go on living in sin”? Is Paul teaching that once you are saved you won’t sin anymore? Is the Christian life one of sinless perfection?

There are a couple of reasons from the context that show that this is not what Paul means.

1. Paul asked, “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” “Living in sin” corresponds to the question in verse 1: “Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” The word “live” means to “abide in” or “continue in.” To continue in sin, or to live in sin, refers to a settled course of life. He is not speaking of sinlessness, but is speaking of continuing on in an unchanged pattern of sin in our lives.

2. Verse 6 says, “our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.” Likewise, Romans 6:14 says, “sin shall not be master over you.” The result of being crucified with Christ is that we are not “slaves to sin” any longer.

What does this mean?

The analogy is between a slave and his master and our relationship to sin. A slave is bound to follow his/her master. The master’s will determines the slave’s actions. Being freed from sin means that it no

longer has any power to tell us what to do. We don't need to obey our sinful desires any longer. We are free to serve God. An unbeliever does not have such freedom. Romans 8:7–8 says, “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for *it is not even able to do so*, and those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God.”

However, being freed from sin does not mean that we will never submit to sin again; it only means that we are not under sin's rule any more. Though we are not obligated to serve sin, we can still sin if we so desire.

Paul assumes that growth into our new position will take time. The commands in verses 11, 12, and 13 show that Paul does not think of freedom from sin as synonymous to sinless perfection. In verse 11 he says, “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin.” In verse 12 Paul says, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body.” And in verse 13 he says, “Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness.” The clear implication is that we may not consider ourselves dead to sin; we may continue to let sin reign over us; we may keep using our bodies as instruments of unrighteousness—so Paul has to tell us not to let these things happen. He believes there will need to be a conscious effort to combat sin.

Thus, “we must distinguish between the *activity of sin*, which is true in all believers, and the *dominion of sin* which is true of all unbelievers. Sinclair Ferguson has written, ‘Sin is not primarily an activity of man's will so much as a captivity which man suffers, as an alien power grips his soul’” (Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 70). The presence of sin doesn't disappear from the believer's life, nor does its influence, but the dominion of sin has been destroyed by the work of Christ. This is the first reason for Paul's belief that preaching the gospel will not lead to irresponsible living.

As Piper says,

The Christian life is an already and a not-yet experience of this sinless position and identity in union with Christ. What happened to Christ Jesus historically and finally and unchangeably—and to us in Him—is applied to us not all at once in its fullness, but some now completely, and some now progressively, and all fully in the age to come. We are already fully forgiven and acquitted and declared righteous and justified in our union with Christ by faith alone. And we are already delivered from the slavery to sin, that is, from the power of sin as the defining direction of our lives. And we are already able by faith to grow more and more triumphant over sin in our daily life.

But we are not yet perfected in our daily, earthly experience. We must fight the fight of faith and become in experience, by faith, what we are perfectly in our union with Christ. Paul put it like this in Philippians 3:12, “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”

He then summarizes:

If you are a Christian, God created a union between you and Christ, as verse 5 says. Because of this union you died with Christ when he died. Because you died, you are now free from the guilt and power of sin in your fullest and truest identity, that is, in your union with Christ. And because of this unshakable position and identity, you are already justified, and you are most certainly being sanctified, but you are not yet perfected.

This raises another question. If we are dead to sin, why do we still struggle with it? More importantly, how do we overcome it?

There are three key words that answer this question: (1) *know* (6:3, 6, 9), (2) *reckon* (6:11), and (3) *yield* (6:13).

**6:3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?**

In Romans 6 Paul is rebutting the charge that a believer may remain in sin in order to underscore grace.

Accordingly he uses the language of “realm transfer” to show how inconceivable that suggestion really is. Christians, Paul affirms, have “died to sin” (v. 2b). We have been transferred from the realm of Adam (sin) to the realm of Christ (life, resurrection, grace), and as such, it is quite impossible for us to live in sin; its power in us has been decisively broken due to our union with Christ in His death. When did this realm transfer, this “death to sin,” take place? Significantly in vv. 3–4 Paul connects “death to sin” with our baptism, meaning that when we were “baptized into Christ Jesus” we were “baptized into His death” (v. 3). We have died to sin because we have become one with the Lord who died and rose for the conquest of sin and death. Furthermore, “We were buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . we too may live in new life” (v.4). In this sense, then, baptism serves as the instrument by which we are united with Christ and his death, burial, and resurrection. Once again, Paul’s point is not to say that the practice of baptism itself unites us with Christ. Rather, as in Galatians 3:26–27, baptism functions as shorthand for the whole conversion experience. Thus, Douglas Moo is right in concluding that “just as faith is always assumed to lead to baptism so baptism always assumes faith for its validity. In verses 3-4, then, we can assume that baptism stands for the whole conversion – initiation experience, presupposing faith and the gift of the Spirit.” In truth, if we understand Paul’s argument, it is not baptism which is the primary focus at all; rather, the redemptive events themselves are what Paul is stressing. Baptism is only introduced to demonstrate that we were united with Christ and His redemptive work, and now all the new covenant blessings that our Lord has secured for us are ours by virtue of our relationship with Him” (Wellum, *Believers Baptism*, 150–151).

Paul appeals to the readers’ knowledge of baptism to remind them of what has taken place spiritually. In other words, Paul reminds them of their baptism since it pictures their union with Christ—specifically their death with Him. His comment assumes that they understood what their baptism meant when they were baptized.

Three things about baptism should be remembered:

1. In the Bible, proof or evidence of salvation through baptism is assumed to be part of every Christian’s experience. “Baptism was the appointed mode of professing faith in Christ, as avowing allegiance to Him as the Son of God, and acquiesces in His gospel. Those, therefore, who were baptized, are assumed to believe what they professed, and to be what they declared themselves to be” (Hodge,

194). “[The early church] could not conceive of a true Christian who was not willing to express commitment to our Lord [through baptism]. That was not one of the options given to the person being evangelized. He either trusted in Christ and was baptized, knowing the implications in terms of commitment and lifestyle, or he rejected the truth” (GTJ Vol. 2/2; 1981, p. 288).

The assumption that all Christians were baptized is obvious even in this context. First, Paul was writing to the church in Rome—a church he had never visited and yet he takes for granted that they were all baptized. It never even entered his mind that anyone could be a Christian who wasn’t baptized. His illustration that being baptized into Christ means that we have been baptized into His death depends on the assumption that all were baptized. Secondly, in verse 3 Paul says, “Do you not know. . . ?” In other words, he also assumes that they understood that all believers were baptized and knew what it meant.

2. Baptism indicates identification. It means to be brought into union or a relationship as a disciple with the one in whose name the person is baptized. When I Corinthians 10:2 says that the Israelites were “baptized into Moses” it means that they were identified with him and participated in the privileges of the Mosaic community. When Paul asked if people were baptized in his name (I Cor. 1:13), he was asking if they were identifying with him when they were saved (a thought he rejected). When Jesus commanded that every believer be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19), He was demanding that they identify with the triune God of the Bible and the promises He made.

To be baptized into Christ Jesus meant to identify with Him in every way. Paul stresses here that our death with Christ that was accomplished at Calvary was first experienced when we were united to Christ by faith.

3. Paul is not saying that we die to sin by being baptized. Rather, he is reminding the readers that baptism symbolized the spiritual reality of being united with Christ’s death. In other words, baptism is the symbol of salvation, not the instrument that results in salvation. The overwhelming teaching of Romans and the rest of the New Testament is that we are justified by faith alone. Romans 5:1 says, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God,” and Romans 8:1 tells us, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” There is no mention of baptism in these places (also see Acts 4:4, 32; 10:43; 11:21; 13:39, 48; 14:1; 15:5, 9; 16:31, 34; 20:21; Romans 1:17; 3:22, 25, 26, 28, 30; 4:5, 9, 11, 13; 5:2; 9:30; 10:6, 9–17; 13:11; 1 Corinthians 1:17–21; 15:2; Galatians 2:16; 3:2, 5, 7–9, 14, 22, 24–27; 5:6; Ephesians 1:13; 2:8; Philippians 3:9; 2 Timothy 3:15; etc. where the saving nature of faith apart from baptism is mentioned).

**6:4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.**

If it was through baptism that we visibly demonstrated that our old life ended, then to live in sin is not only positive evidence that we are not real Christians, it is to misrepresent and slander the gospel of the grace of God.

“But death to sin is not of itself an adequate characterization of the believer’s identity with Christ, rather it is the precondition of the life that we also share with Him (cf. 5:17, 17, 18, 21)” (Murray, 216). That is, we need to die first in order to be raised to newness of life, just as Christ did. Our union with Christ means that both have happened. The result being that we too might walk in newness of life.

NOTE: Romans 6:3–4 is one of the passages that I believe refutes paedobaptism (infant baptism). The following observations could be made in this regard.

1. Baptism is linked with the believer's death to sin and salvation.

As Schreiner says,

In Romans 6 and Colossians 2, death and burial with Christ indicate participation in the new age. When Paul speaks of death and sin in Romans 5, these refer to twin powers of the old era which exercise control over human beings. In Romans 5:12–19 Paul argues that Jesus Christ has conquered these two powers as the second Adam. The first Adam introduced sin, death, and condemnation into the world. The second Adam has overcome these powers and has granted righteousness and life to His people. Thus, Paul argues in Romans 6 that sin can no longer rule or master believers because they have died with Christ. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He stripped death and sin of their authority forever (Rom. 6:9–10). They can no longer exercise mastery and control over Him. This triumph over death and sin is not a matter of historical interest relating only to Christ. Believers have died with Christ (Rom. 6:3–4), so that His triumph over death and sin has become theirs. Baptism, therefore, functions as a reminder of the new eschatological reality that has been obtained with the death and resurrection of Christ.

Paul's theology of Christ as the second Adam is the key to understanding what is meant in Romans 6:6 when he says that "our old self has crucified with Christ." Our old self is who we are in Adam, totally under the subservience of death and sin. Since believers are united with Christ, we are now in the second Adam. Our old self is no longer the fundamental reality of our lives. Death and sin have both been stripped of their power since we were united with Christ in both His death and resurrection.

When Paul speaks, then, of being baptized "into Christ" (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27), he has in mind that union with Christ that is ours by virtue of our participating with Him in His death and resurrection (Schreiner, *Believer's Baptism*, 89–90).

Infants are not yet believers and, therefore, are not united with Christ nor do they share in His death. Infant baptism cannot portray the things that Paul says it does.

2. In Romans 6 Paul uses baptism in his illustration about being united to the death of Christ so that the believers he is addressing would recall their conversion and remember the change that transpired from their old to their new life.

People are not Christians because they are born into a Christian family, nor are infants united to Christ because their parents believe. Furthermore, baptism does not save anyone, including infants. If infant baptism was practiced in the early church, Paul's illustration would be meaningless since infant baptism is not connected to conversion; in fact, many baptized infants never believe. What would Christian baptism possibly mean to them?

**6:5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,**

**6:6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;**

**6:7 for he who has died is freed from sin.**

In verse 4 Paul had said that being united with Christ explains how we can walk in newness of life. “Newness of life” is not simply a part of life; it is all of life. Now verse 5 begins to explain how this newness happens. What's the basis of it—the origin of it? This passage is about how we become a new kind of people in all of life.

Verse 6 describes this newness as no longer being slaves to sin. In other words, the newness of life that the believer experiences is a freedom from sin in all of life.

Thus, the goal of these verses is to aid us in our fight against sin. They tell us that our newness is not confined to our religious life. Rather, it extends into our work life, social life, and psychological life as well. All of life is new; all of life is free from the dominion of sin. In verses 1–2 Paul had asked, “Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” His answer was, “May it never be!” Paul’s desire is to help us not continue in sin. He wants us to triumph over sin—or, to put it positively, he wants us to walk in newness of life. These verses are designed to help us behave like new people.