

Doing Battle with Sin

Romans 6:1-11

You've all heard it said that there are two things that are certain in life: death and taxes. My youngest son, Sam, told me the other day that his football coach told him that there are three things – death, taxes and practice. Well, I'm going to add another and that is that in this world we will all struggle with sin. I don't have to convince any of you of this truth, right? You know it. You've experienced it this week; maybe even this morning.

Sometimes in this struggle with sin, it can feel so hopeless. It can feel like we have no chance. Dallas Willard, in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, says this about how it can feel at times:

If we think we are facing an irresistible cosmic force of evil, it will invariably lead to giving in and giving up – usually with very little resistance. If you can convince yourself that you are helpless, you can then stop struggling and just 'let it happen' (343).

Does it ever feel like sin is an “irresistible cosmic force of evil” in your life? Do you ever feel helpless in this battle with sin? It's possible that some of you are right in the spot that Willard describes right now. You've given in and given up and you're not even struggling against sin anymore.

Last week Steve mentioned that in chapter 5 and in the passage that we are going to look at today, Romans 6:1-11, Paul is laying the foundation for the command that he is going to give in Romans 6:12. Here's what 6:12 says:

¹² *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,*

Whatever we may feel to times, sin cannot be an irresistible cosmic force if we are going to be able to obey this command. And that's exactly the point that Paul is building in chapter 5 and in Romans 6:1-11. We are not helpless against sin. We can obey this command in Romans 6:12. But the starting point is understanding what our relationship to sin is as believers.

And so today, we are going to be looking at Romans 6:1-11 where Paul defines our relationship to sin. At the heart of what he says is that our relationship to sin is found in understanding Jesus' relationship to sin, because as believers we are united to him.

The first thing that Paul says is that . . .

I. We are United in Christ's Death (1-7)

To get into the flow of Paul's argument we need to go back to 5:20. Paul said there:

²⁰ *The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,*

Paul makes this amazing statement that grace is greater than sin; and even when the Law came causing sin to increase, grace abounded all the more. Paul anticipates that this truth would raise a question and so he hits it head on starting in verse 1:

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

If grace abounds in the midst of sin, wouldn't it be a good thing if we continued in sin that grace might increase? Wouldn't that actually bring more glory to God by highlighting His grace in that way? Paul's response:

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

Paul is shocked at the thought that one might draw such a conclusion from what he has taught. It is an absurd thought, Paul says because as believers we have *died to sin*. This is the first time in Romans that Paul teaches that believers are dead to sin. And if we are dead to sin to continue in sin makes absolutely no sense.

Now my guess is that many of us might be thinking, "I'm dead to sin!? I don't feel very dead to sin. In fact I very much alive to sin." Paul is not saying that our struggle with sin is over, but what he is saying is that as believers we have died to the reign and rule of sin. We no longer live in the realm where sin was our master. How do we know this is true? We know it because we have been united with Christ in His death.

And so in verse 3 and 4 Paul says:

³ *Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?* ⁴ *Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death,*

In these verses Paul uses baptism to make his point that we have been united with Christ in his death. As we look at how Paul talks about baptism here it can sound like he is saying that it is the act of baptism that unites one to Christ. It can sound like Paul is saying that baptism has salvific effect. In light of this, some commentators believe that what Paul is talking about here has nothing to do with water baptism, but rather he is talking about the spiritual baptism that we receive when we trust Christ (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:13). This is one valid way to understand this.

Most commentators, however, believe that Paul is talking about water baptism. I think that is what he is talking about. And so, how should we understand what he is saying? Well, certainly we need to understand this passage in light of what Paul has clearly said elsewhere in Romans that is that faith alone saves (3:24, 28; 5:1). It is also important to remember that baptism is not Paul's subject in these verses. The subject is our unity

with Jesus in his death. He is simply using baptism to explain this unity with Christ. And so we need to make sure we don't lose track of what he is trying to say.

Here's what I think is going on. In the New Testament, water baptism is so closely connected to the whole conversion experience. And so to speak of baptism is to speak of the conversion experience. To speak of baptism, is to speak of faith in Christ. And so, I do think Paul is talking about water baptism, but in doing so, he is pointing to the faith and repentance that took place alongside the baptism.

And so, Paul with his question in verse 3 makes the point that if one has been baptized into Christ Jesus, in other words, if one has believed, that one has been *baptized into His death*. In other words, we have been united with Christ in his death. His death to sin is our death to sin.

He says here in verse 4 that we *have been buried* with Him. Burial is the final proof that someone has died. And so we know we have died because we have been *buried with Him through baptism into death*. And it is out of this truth that we can live a whole different quality of life. He goes on to say:

*so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father,
so we too might walk in newness of life.*

Because we have died with Christ to the reign and rule of sin and because Christ was *raised from the dead* through God's power it is now possible for us to *walk in newness of life*. We are no longer in Adam (5:12-14); we are in Christ. And in Christ we can walk in *newness of life*. This is a life empowered by God's Spirit. This is a life that is not better than our unsaved state by only a matter of degrees; it is an altogether different life. It is a new life free from the dominion of sin and death.

Now in verse 5, Paul gives his reasoning for why we are able to walk in newness of life. He says:

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,

The "if" here is to be understood as "since." Since it is true that the believer has been *united with [Christ] in the likeness of His death* to sin, we can have the certainty that *we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection*. It is possible that Paul is speaking of the spiritual resurrection that a believer experiences the moment she trusts Christ. But I think it is better to understand that Paul is talking about our future bodily resurrection at the return of Christ. Our being joined with Jesus in his death to sin is the guarantee of that future bodily resurrection.

Now as we come to verses 6-7 Paul is essentially restating his point that we are dead to sin. He writes:

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

The *old self* is not just a part of us that has now died in Christ. Rather the *old self* was who we were in total in Adam. John Stott says it this way:

What was crucified with Christ was not a part of me called my old nature, but the whole of me before I was converted.

The whole of me, the one who lived under the domination of sin and death, *was crucified with Christ*. The purpose of this was so that *our body of sin might be done away with*. This expression is a bit difficult to understand. Paul is definitely not saying that the body itself is sinful. Rather, the *body of sin* refers to the whole person and the person's inclination towards sin in this world. The old self, who we were in Adam, was crucified so that our body as a vehicle for sin may be *done away with*. *Done away with* can also be translated as, *rendered powerless*, which I think is a better translation.

And so we are no longer slaves to sin. We are free from the reign and rule of sin and are able to obey God. Does a battle with sin continue? Yes, because we still live in this world and we have habit patterns of sin that are so deeply engrained. But do we have to sin? No, because the body of sin has been rendered powerless.

At Faith, one of our core convictions is that we need to allow the Word of God to form us. It needs to shape how we think and therefore how we live. And so, if you are feeling helpless in the battle against sin, hear what the Word of God says: You are dead to sin. You can walk in newness of life. Let that be the truth that forms you; not your past track record with sin. You are united with Christ in his death to sin.

Now as we move on to verse 8, Paul continues to develop a thought that he raised in verse 5 and that is that . . .

II. We are United in Christ's Life (8-10)

⁸ *Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,*

Again, the *if* here should be understood as "since." There is no doubt about this. The believer has died with Christ and therefore has died to sin. And since this is true we can believe that we *shall also live with Him*. Jesus' resurrected life is one in which he will never again be subject to sin and death. He is alive forever and ever. He now enjoys unhindered and continuous fellowship with the Father. We are united in that life.

Though we have a real taste of this life now, our full experience of it is still a future thing. Our bodily resurrection at the return of Christ is when we will experience in full the life of Christ. But this is something that a believer can have full assurance of because of what

Christ has done and because of the fact that we are united to Christ. And the assurance of that truth is something that should bleed back into our present. We see the destination. And knowing this can help us walk in newness of life now.

Paul says that our assurance of this truth looks back to Christ's resurrection. Verse 9:

⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.

Paul is appealing to common knowledge here. They knew that Christ had been raised from the dead. This was an obvious fact. And the nature of that resurrection was such that he would never die again. Lazarus was raised from the dead, but he still died again at a later date. Christ's resurrection was not like that. Christ's resurrection was one that dealt a decisive blow to death and all of its power. *Death no longer is master over Him.* And this truth, anticipates what will become true for all believers – upon our resurrection death will no longer be master over us.

Verse 10 is really the proof of this statement that death is no longer a master over Christ.

¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

Christ's death was a, *once for all*, death to sin. Jesus of course never sinned, but in His death, he was victoriously separated forever from the ruling power of sin that is present in this world to which he came. And because death arises from sin, since he died to sin, death can never be master over Him again. Jesus having died now *lives to God*.

And so Paul's logic for us is this: We are united with Christ in His death. The moment we place our faith in Jesus for salvation his death becomes our death. It was a once for all death to sin. Therefore we are dead to sin's reign and rule and we can walk in newness of life. And Paul's logic for us is this: We are united with Christ in his life. We have the certain hope that in being united with Christ we will share in a bodily resurrection that will allow us to enjoy unhindered, continuous fellowship with the Father.

These truths provide the foundation in our battle with sin. These things are objectively true of us in Christ. And it is out of these truths that Paul gives the command of verse 11. Here's how he applies what he has just taught. He says that we must . . .

III. Consider Ourselves Dead to Sin and Alive to God (11)

¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

To *consider* (KJV – “reckon”) means to conclude as a result of a calculation. So going back to the question of verse 1, should we continue in sin that grace might increase?

Of course not, because we are dead to sin and alive to God. Paul says that we must count this as true. He writes this in the present tense indicating that we are to keep on considering. It's not something we do just once. This needs to be an ongoing thing.

In considering ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God, we are not making these things true in our lives. They are already objective true. What we are doing is choosing to align our hearts and our minds to what is true of us in Christ so that we will live in light of it.

How we think about our battle with sin will make all the difference in the world. If we believe that what is true is that sin is an irresistible force we will give up. If we feel helpless against sin we won't battle. But if we continually choose to count as true that in our unity with Christ we really are dead to sin and alive to God, we will battle. We need to allow this truth to shape our thinking.

Later in Romans 12:2 Paul says this about the spiritual transformation process:

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

In this world, we can either be conformed to the world or we can be transformed into what God wants us to be. Paul says that at the heart of this is renewing our minds. I would suggest that renewing our minds regarding our relationship to sin is part of this. Day by day the battle with sin will be won as we continually count as true that in Christ we are dead to sin and alive to God.

Some of you, the moment you trusted Christ, experienced in a very dramatic way the truth of what Paul teaches in the passage. The moment you trusted Christ for salvation you found freedom from some areas of sin in your life. The desire was gone. You found power to never give in to that sin again. You've experienced that because you are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.

I wish I could say that all sin sort of falls away like that when we trust Christ. It doesn't. If it did, there would be no need for Paul to give us this command to count ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God. We do need to do battle with sin.

Let me give you two specific thoughts that may help you do this. First, let me encourage you to either memorize this verse or write it down on a card. And then for the next week as a kind of spiritual discipline make it part of your morning routine to say the verse to yourself. Meditate on it. Thank God that it is true. Express to God as you are heading into your day, "Father, I thank you that today, in Christ, I am dead to sin and alive to you. This is true and so help me live in light of this today."

Secondly, as you are moving through your day when you feel tempted by sin tell yourself, "I'm dead to that." Say it out loud even. "I'm am dead to that!" "I'm alive to God." In Christ, these things are true of you. Count them as true. Be formed by this truth.

As long as we live in this world, we will have to battle sin. This is part of the process of sanctification. But is sin an irresistible cosmic force? No! Are you helpless against sin? No! So no matter how intense the battle, do not give in; do not give up.

Amen.