

Series: The Reign of Grace

Today's Message: We Who Have Died to Sin / Jeff Kennedy / Oct 2, 2022

Romans 6:1–5 What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? ² Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection.

Illus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Christian minister who opposed the Nazis' unjust imprisonment and murder of the Jews, was arrested and executed in 1943. He saw the German Lutheran Church turning a blind eye to Hitler's atrocities. He saw a grace in doctrinal creed only—a changeless grace that had taken no effect in the lives of those who professed it. He called this “Cheap grace.” In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, he wrote these now famous words: “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*).

But where have Christians got this notion of a cut-rate grace? *They have read the book of Romans only up until chapter 5.* And have ignored Chapter's 6–12.

Paul has, to this point made an iron clad case that the Christian has the assurance of salvation because of Christ's all-sufficient work on the cross, the Christian is saved by grace delivered to the open hands of faith.

Chapter 6 pivots—Paul turns sharply into the direction of power in the Christian life to *live the Christian life.* He ended Chapter 5 by insisting that where sin flourished and thrived among human beings, grace has now abounded all the more. And now he anticipates the natural response of the sinful nature—to turn free grace into cheap grace.

Wouldn't the principle of salvation by grace through faith warrant our living with a license to sin? Nothing could be more objectionable to Paul, more foreign to his Jewish-Christian faith.

We no longer continue a life of sin because...

1. We died to the enslavement of sin (6:2; 7:1-6).

6:1–2 “What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? ² Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

7:1–6 “Since I am speaking to those who know the law, brothers and sisters, don’t you know that the law rules over someone as long as he lives? ² For example, a married woman is legally bound to her husband while he lives. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law regarding the husband. ³ So then, if she is married to another man while her husband is living, she will be called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law. Then, if she is married to another man, she is not an adulteress. ⁴ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were put to death in relation to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another. You belong to him who was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵ For ***when we were in the flesh***, the sinful passions aroused through the law were working in us to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law.”

Illus. Years ago, I spoke with a woman who needed to confess something—it was a secret that she had been holding in for many years. As she recalled all the things in life she was grateful for—her kids and family; she had poured her life into them; and the various tragedies and afflictions in life—loss of loved ones, a mother, a child and last of all her husband after 20 years of marriage.

My reflexive response was to lead her to God’s Word for comfort, for encouragement. I had already begun to formulate those passages in my mind and I said something clumsy like, “I’m sure you’ve carried around a burden of grief and loss for your husband...” she stopped me cold. She said, “Well, that’s what I wanted to tell you. I’m glad he’s gone.” She began to describe her life as a veritable prison. She painted the picture of a selfish, sinful husband to whom she felt captive. She lived in constant fear of his fury and his violent temper. She said, “I loved him. And in some ways I do miss him. But mostly, I just feel freedom.”

I was stunned, but then asked, “Do you have any feelings of resentment towards him?” She said, “None at all. I released him—and I’m glad I’m finally free to follow God’s calling on my life. You know, if he were still alive, I wouldn’t be able to serve Jesus like I do.”

Now whatever you may think of her situation—maybe some would judge her for not being a good submissive wife. Or maybe some of you would sympathize and think, “Yeah, I can imagine how that would feel like prison.” Or maybe you feel a quiet desperation, that’s me, right now.

But here’s the principle Paul teaches in Romans 6, and 7:1–6. She was free from that **marriage covenant**—that covenant bound her to a relationship. It bound her to the laws that govern that relationship.

Death was the freeing principle. **Death and burial free us from our former relationship with sin under the law.**

Paul says, we have died to sinful passions which were enabled and activated by the moral law of God. We lived under the reign of death, and Paul will call it the enslavement to sin.

Until we are set free in Christ we live under sin’s bondage.

Ps 51:5 “Indeed, I was guilty when I was born; I was **sinful when my mother conceived me.**”

John 8:34 “Jesus responded, ‘Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a **slave of sin.**’”

2 Peter 2:18–19 speaking of false teachers he says, “For by uttering boastful, empty words, they seduce, with fleshly desires and debauchery, people who have barely escaped from those who live in error. ¹⁹ They promise them freedom, but they themselves are **slaves of corruption**, since people are **enslaved to whatever defeats them.**”

You see, sin does not just damn us it enslaves us.

Rom 6:16, 17, 20 “Don’t you know that if you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are **slaves of that one you obey**—either of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness? But thank God that, although **you used to be slaves of sin** ... For **when you were slaves of sin**... But now, **since you have been set free from sin** and have become enslaved to God...”

Understand that we died to that which held us captive. In Christ, we are freed from sin’s bondage. That is the point of this chapter.

But how?

We no longer continue a life of sin because...

2. We were buried in Christ's in baptism. 6:3–5 “Or are you unaware that all of us who were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were **baptized into his death**? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection.”

Last week we talked about being born again. Unless a man or woman has justifying faith, and is born anew by God the Holy Spirit, friends, we will not see the Kingdom of Heaven.

But every born-again believer is also dead and buried in baptism.

This is what water baptism signifies—the believer goes down in a watery grave and is raised again to life in Christ.

There are some things we need to understand about the nature of baptism so that we aren't tempted to think that it is optional.

Baptism isn't optional—it's an ordinance, meaning an ordained decree.

- **Water baptism is the outward sign of our inner consecration of the heart.** Now let's suppose you were an ethnic and religious Jew in the first century and you hear the message of the gospel and it just makes sense to you. Now you understand all those prophecies in the OT about God doing away with our sins and forgiving our trespasses—the words of Isaiah the prophet ring in your ears “He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the punishment that brings us peace with God was upon him—and by his stripes we are healed.” God offers you a pardon for sin because this holy righteous son has taken God's wrath upon sin on the cross and exchanges your unrighteousness with his righteousness. You get it. This surely is the way of salvation. But someone comes along and says “don't forget now—all your children still have to be circumcised. Oh yeah and remind those Gentiles they have to follow this Old Covenant sign also.”

It's hard for us to imagine how circumcision could be so controversial in Paul's day. Now in Galatians, some Judaizers have travelled to Galatia to insist that in addition to their faith in Jesus, the Galatian Christians had to add the physical marks of Judaism including circumcision, kosher dietary laws, and sabbath and festival celebrations. In the New Covenant, physical circumcision doesn't matter. ***It is no longer the external sign of covenant membership in God's family.*** What

matters is justifying faith in Jesus which is shown to be true by the outworking in obedience to the Greatest two commandments—loving God and loving others.

Rom 2:28–29 “For a person is not a **Jew** (a covenant family member) Paul uses the words “Jew” and “Israel” in two distinct sense in the NT: (1) as an ethnic designation (Jew vs. Gentile); and (2) as a type of the NT church comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles. That is, he uses it synonymously with “the people of God” who is one outwardly, and **true circumcision** is not something visible in the flesh. ²⁹ On the contrary, a person is a **Jew** (covenant member) who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter.” ***Notice how he uses the word circumcision—the external symbol pointed to an internal work of inward consecration of the heart.***

Gal 5:6 “For in Christ Jesus **neither** circumcision nor uncircumcision **accomplishes anything**; what matters is faith working through love.”

Gal 6:15 “For both circumcision and uncircumcision **mean nothing**; what matters instead is a new creation.” As we said last week, if you have been born anew by the Holy Spirit then God’s future project of new creation has begun in you.

Phil 3:3 “For we are ‘the **circumcision**,’ the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, boast in Christ Jesus, and do not put confidence in the flesh” The new “badge of membership” isn’t the physical sign of circumcision—it’s the believer who, with justifying faith has received the Lord Jesus and been regenerated/born anew by the Holy Spirit of God.

So, what does all this have to do with Baptism? The key passage is...

Col 2:9–13 “For the entire fullness of God’s nature dwells bodily in Christ, ¹⁰ and you have been filled by him, who is the head over every ruler and authority. ¹¹ You were also circumcised in him with ***a circumcision not done with hands***, by putting off the body of flesh, in ***the circumcision of Christ***, ¹² when you were ***buried with him in baptism*** (here we plainly see that Paul intends to link OT circumcision with NT rite of baptism) in which you were also ***raised with him through faith*** in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses.”

Summary

- Physical circumcision pointed toward a day when God, in a new covenant, would consecrate his people inwardly by the Spirit.
- Presently, in the New Covenant, physical circumcision doesn't count, is of no value.
- New Covenant believers have undergone a circumcision of the heart—an inward sanctification and renewal of the Spirit and by faith.
- This inward “circumcision of the heart” is equated with our Spiritual baptism in Christ—which water baptism signifies.

So let's go back to Romans 6...

Rom 6:4 “Therefore ***we were buried with him by baptism into death***, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.

But we must understand that...

- **Water Baptism is a public confession of faith in obedience to Christ.** Col 2:12 “buried with him in baptism, *in which you were also raised with him **through faith** in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*” Who's faith? **Your faith.** Not your grandparent's faith, not your parents' faith—*yours*.
Gal 3:7 “You know, then, ***that those who have faith, these are Abraham's sons.***” Who are the “children of Abraham” that is “the children of faith?” The sons of Abraham are those who have faith. Of the 12 accounts of people being baptized in the NT *all of them are old enough to believe and repent.*

This is why we practice believer's baptism in the church, and not infant baptism. So, as the covenant sign of membership in God's family in Christ, baptism is not identical to circumcision in all respects. Understand that the symbol of baptism has one clear similarity, and yet is dissimilar in several ways.

In Acts 10, Peter is given a vision to take the Gospel to Cornelius, a Roman Centurion who is a believer in the Jewish God. As he's sharing the Gospel the Holy Spirit falls and they all are saved and filled with God's empowering presence. Peter and his Jewish entourage are astonished that God has poured out the gift of his Spirit on Gentiles by faith. Acts 10:47–48 “Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ He commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Baptism is a public profession of an inward transformation.

Application of the passage today:

How often do we consider ourselves dead to temptation? Death is the freeing principle from our contract with sin, our previous arrangement under Adam. We have a new arrangement in Christ.

If you have not been baptized in water, you need to be. Baptism is not an option it's an ordinance—believers are to openly declare their faith in Jesus because baptism dramatizes the inner transformation of the heart. It proclaims our death to sin in Christ and our intention to live before this body in faith and repentance.

If you have children who are at an age where they think they want to be baptized, teach them the gospel, lead them to confession and repentance, and make sure they can articulate the good news of Jesus and what it has done in their lives. Sign up for the upcoming baptism class and go through that material—we'll have a free book for you that will help explain the good news.