



The Death that Brings Life

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #36

Romans 6:1-11

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April 17, 2016

Well, the devil hates the whole Bible, but if there are any chapters that the devil hates more than Romans 6-8, I don't know what they are. Because these are the chapters that describe how the salvation that God has accomplished in Christ, which we heard about in Romans 1-5, how that salvation is now experienced and enjoyed in the present life of the believer. The devil doesn't want us to enjoy our salvation, because miserable Christians don't do a very good job representing the gospel to a watching world. The devil would like to keep us miserable, but the Holy Spirit wants us to be free and He wants us to know the power, the liberty, the joy and the hope that we have as believers. I know of no chapters in the Bible that deal with this so deeply and so potently as Romans 6-8. I'm very much looking forward to resuming our Grace Reigns series, as well as beginning a new series of messages in these three great chapters.

Let's begin by reading Romans 6:1-11. God's Word is alive, powerful, sharper than a double-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12) and it reads us even as we are reading it. So let's read beginning at verse one of chapter six:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from

sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

(Romans 6:1-11)

Lord, thank You for communicating with us in a way that we can understand. Thank You for speaking to us these holy words. Though their depth is beyond our full comprehension, we thank You, Lord, that as we meditate on this Word day and night, its roots will go down deep into us and the good seed that is planted will bear fruit, resulting in holiness, life, joy and freedom. So I pray Lord—as I thank You again for the opportunity to preach Your Word to these dear people that You have purchased with the blood of Your Son—for fresh empowerment. I pray for clarity. I pray for compassion and love. I pray, Lord, that Your Word would go forth in power to change us. That little by little, day by day and moment by moment we would become increasingly like the One Who died and lives now for us. Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I imagine this week someone's probably asked you "What day were you born?" Just about any official form you fill out you have to put down your birthdate. I trust that none of you have forgotten that date. But I wonder how many of you have been asked this week, "When did you die?" Has anybody ever asked you that? When did you die? What would you think if someone asked you about your death date? I think you'd think they were a little bit weird and it would feel strange. But I want to talk to you about the day that you died. If you are in Jesus, you have already died. It is that day of your death that shapes the foundation of this passage that we've just read.

The apostle Paul begins with a question that he senses could be raised from where he ended up in Romans 5, that where sin increased, grace increased all the more. That grace was a greater supply than sin. That sin was no match for God's grace. So Paul imagines someone saying, "Well, if the increase of sin just means that God, in His grace, has more of an opportunity to shine, then why not go on sinning so that grace may abound?"

If it is true that a man like Conrad Dutch of Cambodia's killing fields— who committed some of the greatest atrocities known to humankind in the 20th century—could hear the gospel 20 years after those atrocities and repent of his sin, be forgiven of all his sin and be baptized as a believer, which he was according to reports, then what's the point of living a holy life? And if the gospel is that free, that gracious, then does that make the gospel immoral? Does it just encourage

people to go and live however they please? The apostle Paul answers that question decisively at the beginning of verse two: "*By no means!*" No way! Absolutely not! God forbid!

It's unthinkable that the gospel of grace would teach us to go on sinning so that we can magnify God's grace. And why is that unthinkable? Here's the main point: "*How can we who died to sin still live in it?*" We have died to sin, Paul says. And he then spends the next ten verses explaining what that means.

The first place Paul goes when he's trying to show us that the gospel of grace actually leads to a holy life is not to moral exhortations. "You want to live a holy life? Do this. Do that." No, that's not the first place Paul goes. The first place he goes is to lay a foundation. He gives us a standing place. He wants us to know what our identity is and who we are identified with, because unless we stand on this foundation, we cannot move one step forward in the pursuit of holiness. We will never make progress in the happy labor of sanctification until we understand this foundation. We have died to sin if we are in Christ. This only applies to those who have put their trust in Jesus, who belong to Him. This is a truth that we need to understand. Paul understands that it's not going to be easy for us to grasp this.

Verses 3-11 are pretty profound. Mike Bulmore calls this the deep end of the swimming pool. We're going to keep swimming here for a while. I'm not going to explain everything that is here; I'm just going to ask you to come swimming in the deep end with me for a while. No matter how long you've heard these truths, I'm asking the Holy Spirit to press them more deeply into our hearts today, to make them more real to us.

What does Paul mean when he says, "We died to sin"? First, we need to understand what he does not mean. He doesn't mean that believers in Jesus no longer have any desire to sin. Sometimes we hear this illustration and I think it's misleading. We are not dead to sin in the same way that a corpse is dead to external stimuli. Anyone who is honest and a Christian in this room will tell you, "Yes, I still feel the influence of sin. I still experience desires for that which is sinful." If you don't experience that or aren't aware of that experience, it could be that you are self-deceived or you are being dishonest.

Every believer still experiences temptation. We know what it is like to have sinful desires welling up in us. When you become a believer in Jesus, you don't stop struggling with sin. In fact, most believers will tell you that's where the struggle really begins. You don't wrestle against sin until you become a believer in Jesus. And then you enter into a lifelong battle.

So Paul is not saying that we no longer have any desire to sin. If he was saying that, verses 12-14 would make no sense. Why is he exhorting us to not let sin reign in our mortal

bodies, to make us obey its passions, if we have no desire for sin. Nor is Paul merely telling us that we ought to die to sin. Here, he says that we have died. The verb that he uses speaks of a completed, once-and-done action in the past. This isn't a continual process that Paul's speaking of here. There are other passages where he deals with mortification. Here he is speaking of a definitive reality that is true of every believer, not just some spiritually elite class. We, together, as believers, have died to sin. Here Paul is not merely restating the truth—precious and wonderful as it is—that we are no longer guilty of our sins, that sin cannot condemn us because we have been judged in Christ. That's a wonderful truth that Paul has been speaking of in chapter five, but that's probably not what Paul is restating here.

This study wants us to see how this wonderful truth—that we've been pardoned freely, that we've been justified, that we've been declared righteous—now leads to a new life of holiness, how once we have been justified, we want to live a life now that is free from sin. He is speaking to us of how the gospel changes us.

So what does Paul mean when he says that we died to sin in verse two? He means simply that we are no longer under the reign or dominion of sin. Look at verse 21 of chapter five: “...so that, as sin reigned in death...” Sin is not just something you do. It's a power that rules our lives and it reigns over us in death.

The results of sin are death. Look at 6:16:

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to (What?) death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

We see it again in verse 21. But what fruit were you getting at that time when you were still in sin, under sin's dominion?

But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is (What?) death.

And we see it once more in verse 23:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So, back to chapter five, verse 21. “...as sin reigned in death...” It's just like this ominous drumbeat. Sin is a cruel tyrant. Sin is an awful dictator. Sin reigns like a bully and it will lead you to death. And until you came to faith in Christ, you were always under the tyranny of that

cruel dictator. It's sobering. Death is sin's weapon of mass destruction. It's what it holds over us to keep us under its power. But once sin has killed us, it's used its last and greatest weapon. It can't do any more to us. Once sin has put us to death, what more can it do?

Paul says that's what's happened to believers. We have died. So now sin doesn't reign over our lives in death. Grace reigns through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. We are under a new Master now. We are now free to revolt, resist and rebel against sin's dictatorship. You don't have to listen to its commands anymore. You don't have to do whatever it tells you to do. Sin doesn't rule your life. You are in Christ. You died to sin. Sin has no authority over you. There's a new power ruling your life now.

Let me give you two other verses that speak to this.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

(Colossians 1:13-14)

We have been delivered from the domain, the dominion, the ruler of darkness and transferred into a new dominion, a new Kingdom—the Kingdom of His beloved Son. We've got a new Ruler now, a new King. There's a new power over our lives and it's a power that brings freedom from slavery and forgiveness of sins. Acts 26:18 says that God sends His gospel to people to do this:

[T]o open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

So what does all this mean? We have died to sin? We are no longer under its tyranny? We are no longer under its reign? We no longer have to obey its orders? We don't have to do what it says? It means, simply, you don't have to sin if you are a believer. You don't have to sin. You still do, but you don't have to. You are free in Christ. You don't have to sin anymore.

When did this death to sin happen?

That's where verses three through ten come in and what we discover when we look at these verses is that this happened, not when we were converted, but this actually happened 2,000 years ago when Jesus died on the cross. When you were converted, when you turned away from

your sin and trusted in Jesus, then the story of Jesus became your story. What He did on the cross, you were there with Him. When He rose from the dead, you were raised with Him. So this death to sin that Paul's talking about here is something that happened 2,000 years ago and if you are with me, you need a little explanation here. This is a little hard to comprehend. How does something that happened 2,000 years ago in history have a decisive change in my biography?

Paul uses the illustration of baptism in verse three. Just as physically we are immersed in water so that the water covers every part of us, Paul is saying spiritually we are united in Christ so that whatever happened to Jesus on the cross happened to us. What did Jesus do on the cross? Verse ten tells us, "*For the death he died, he died to sin...*" He paid the penalty that sin demanded in order to set His children free from sin's captivity. What happened to Jesus happened to us. He died; we died. He was raised; we were raised. He died, was buried, was raised. Jesus' death, Jesus' burial, Jesus' resurrection. We were united with Him in that. This is an amazing truth that cannot be comprehended easily. Hearing lectures on it is not going to make it sink in. It will help, but just knowing the truth doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to transform you. You've got to meditate. Some truths in the Bible will not affect you until you really meditate deeply on them.

Water baptism is a visible sign. I like the phrase 'a covenant seal.' We are united with Christ and what water baptism is sort of like the Israelites on their journey from Egypt into the Promised Land. How did they get there? They passed through the waters of judgment, through the Red Sea on dry land. And when they got over to the other side, what happened to their slave masters? They were drowned in the Red Sea. When they got to the east side of the Red Sea what did they see? Their captors were destroyed. Their captors had died.

Paul's telling us that, in baptism, that same drama is enacted, where we see that when Jesus died we passed through the waters of judgment with Him and when He was raised, we were raised to new life. The slave masters that held us captive were put to death and we died to their power over our lives. They can't bark out orders against us any longer. They no longer have the authority to rule our lives.

How have we died to sin?

Let's look a little more in depth at verses six and seven, because here Paul explains how we have died and in what sense we have died to sin. Sometimes it feels painfully alive. It's so hard for us to get ahold of this truth that we are dead to sin, because it feels so real and present in

our lives. So, in verses six and seven, Paul gives us three phrases—two in verse six, one in verse seven—that answer the question: In what sense have we died to sin?

Let's draw out these three phrases.

- Verse six; phrase number one: *“Our old self was crucified with him...”* We know that our old self was crucified with Him. Who is the old self? The old self is you before you turned to God and before you put your trust in Christ. It's you. Who you were in Adam, before you were born again, living independently of God. Not just some part of you. It's you, that old self, that old you that did not acknowledge God, that was living for yourself and your way was crucified. The same word that's used there is the word used of the two thieves on the cross on either side of Jesus. They were crucified. They died. Likewise, the old you has died. You were crucified with Christ. It's a reality.
- Verse six; phrase number two: *“...in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing...”* What is the body of sin? Paul is speaking of our bodies here, the life we live in our body. Our thoughts, our words, our motives, our actions. Before the old self was crucified, our physical bodies were like the stage on which the old self acted out our sinful desires. Our selfishness was played out on the stage of our physical lives and so our thoughts, words, affections, emotions and actions, all of them were under the control and under the dominion of sin. But when our old self was crucified, that situation and that condition of being controlled by sin ended. It was brought to nothing so that Paul says we would no longer be enslaved to sin. We're free now.
- Verse seven; one last phrase: *“For one who has died has been set free...”* Or if you have the ESV Study Bible, the footnote states, “Greek: ‘has been justified from sin...’” This connects us to what has just been said in verse six. We are no longer enslaved to sin and here's the reason why. One who has died has been set free or has been justified by sin. Paul is saying that we are no longer enslaved to sin, because we have been set free. We've been justified. The penalty for our sin has been paid. When we died with Christ, the penalty of our sin was paid in full. Our old self was crucified and put to death, and because the penalty has been paid in full, the enslaving power that sin had over our lives has been broken as well.

That's why, in Rock of Ages, we sing these words:

Be of sin the double cure
Cleanse me from its guilt and power...

[Augustus M. Toplady, 1776]

That's not something that we are waiting for God to do. That's something that's has already happened. We've been cleansed from the guilt and freed from the power of sin over our lives now, all through union with Christ. It's not easy for us to grasp this; it is the deep end of the pool.

I'll tell you what I do to try to let this truth sink into me, then I'm going to give you an illustration and then we are going to move to an application. So everyone just breathe for a minute, okay? I need to breathe for a minute; this is the second time that I've preached this sermon and I'm still getting this. You see, I can tell you these things, but telling you is different than it really transforming the way we live. God wants to have an effect on the way we live, but first He wants us to understand the reality. Here's what I do to try to live in this reality and I think it's making a difference in my life. I try to recite the following affirmations of faith every morning as a prayer and a reminder to myself:

- “Father, I thank You that I am accepted, because the guilt of my sin is covered by the righteousness of Christ. I'm accepted. Thank You that You have covered the guilt of my sin through the righteous work of Jesus on the cross.” I need to revel in that.
- “Thank You that I'm free from bondage to sin through the power of Jesus in my life. Sin no longer holds me under its control. I don't have to do what sin wants me to do today, Father. I'm free from that bondage. I'm no longer enslaved to sin.” Then I take the temptations and things that I'm struggling with to the Lord and thank Him that He has already freed me from them.
- “Thank You that I'm not alone, but I am accompanied by the Counselor, the Spirit of the Messiah. The Holy Spirit is with me and in me to empower and transform me. Thank You Holy Spirit. Fill me with Yourself. Cause Your fruit to ripen in my life.” Then I go through the Fruit of the Spirit.
- I end by saying, “Thank You Lord that I am in command. I am in authority now in Christ, with the freedom to resist and expel the powers of darkness.”

I got these from a book I read by Richard Loveless a long time ago. I go through these affirmations, because I need them to sink in to my heart. Then I say this creed that I first saw in Ruth Dougherty's house about 20 years ago. I affirm this almost every morning:

I believe in the name of the Son of God, therefore I am in Him, having redemption through His blood and life by His Spirit. He is in me and all fullness is in Him. To Him I belong, by purchase, conquest and self-surrender. He bought me and conquered me. I give myself fully and freely to Him. And to me, He belongs for all my hourly need. I am His and He is mine. There is no cloud between my Lord and me. There is no difficulty I'll order inward that He is not ready to meet in me today. The Lord is my keep. Thanks be to God!

These affirmations orient my mind and heart around these truths that Paul is talking about here in Romans 6. I encourage you to do something like that. Don't just read it. I'm not

here to just expound what the text means, because you'll walk away and think, "I heard a nice lecture on Romans 6" but it won't change much.

God intends for this truth to be the ground on which you stand, so that you can actively engage in the fight against sin and the pursuit of holiness with confidence. God intends this foundation to be life-changing, to be empowering to you.

Let me give an illustration which I heard from Mike Bulmore. I think this illustrates well what Paul is saying in verses 1-10.

Think of yourself as a wrestler. Sin is your opponent. It has you pinned down to the mat. You have no strength with which to resist. You are completely overpowered by sin. But then, in that position, flat on your back, because you've heard the gospel, you turn and you look at Christ and you see, "He died for me. He rose again to give me new life. When He died, the power of sin over my life was broken." And you believe in Jesus. What happens then? At that moment, when you put your faith in Jesus, that old self—over which sin had complete power—is gone, brought to nothing, brought to death. Now the new self is up on its feet. You're still in the wrestling ring. The battle is not over. Sin is still your opponent. It's still there. But you're up on your feet and sin no longer has dominion over you. Yes, it still has the ability to trip you up and it will, but sin cannot pin you down and overpower you any longer. It's unable to gain dominion over you. Its dominating power is broken and, as a result, you begin to experience more and more victory over sin as you believer and apply the truth that you have died to sin's dominion. You will see that the mastery of sin over your life is being released and is no longer holding you under its control. You will still sin, but you won't need to any longer. Its enslavement has been broken.

That's the way that it should be for Christians, because that's what's true. But that's not always the way it is.

What do I need to do now?

Let's close with one application from verse 11. How precious this verse is. How we need to cherish this verse. Verses 1-10 are all statements of facts—truths of what happened to you. But now in verse 11, God's Word says, "Here's how you must respond to this truth. This is a reality that you need to reckon with." Here's the response:

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

These amazing truths give us one application: Consider yourself dead to sin. That's not make-believe. God's not asking us to pretend something is true that isn't. He's not calling us to a

mind-game here, like we are trying to convince ourselves of something that, if we just speak it enough, somehow the make-believe might become reality. It's not When You Wish Upon a Star kind of thinking. Paul is saying, "Everything that I've told you in verses 1-10 is true. Now believe it. You need to consider yourselves dead to sin, because you really are, if you are in Christ."

Jerry Bridges writes:

It is important that we understand what Paul is saying here, because he is not telling us to do something, but to believe something. We are to believe that we are dead through Christ to both sin's penalty and its dominion, but it's not something that we make come true by believing it. We simply are dead to sin, whether we believe it or not. This is the Christian's identity. This is who we are in Christ. You don't try to become this. You are this in Christ. The old life of sin is finished and the new life of a justified sinner has begun—a life of holiness that leads to eternal life and brings glory to God.

So for a justified sinner who has been set free from both the penalty and power of sin to go back to living a life under the control of sin is like a prisoner whose sentence has been completed saying, "I want to go back and live in the prison." Or it's like the Israelites who passed through the Red Sea on dry land and upon arriving in the Promised Land, they say, "We want to go back to live under our slave masters in Egypt." Can you imagine anyone doing that? Well, in fact, the Israelites did do that, didn't they? They wanted to go back and so do we. We find sin luring us back.

If you visit the site of the old Berlin wall, there's a new visitors' center there called Checkpoint Charlie. You can read lots of stories of people who tried to climb up the east side of that wall and get over to the west side where there was freedom. You aren't going to find any stories of someone on the west side wanting to climb up and go over to the east side. Go back into bondage? It's unthinkable.

Paul is saying that the same thing is true of someone who has identified with Christ. It's unthinkable that you who have died to sin would want to put yourself under its enslaving power again. Jesus has set you free. Think about that particular struggle of sin that plagues your conscience today. In what area of your life are you fighting particularly hard right now against sin? Or what area have you given up on and just let rule over you? Anger? Resentment? Bitterness? Self-pity? Lust?

What would happen if you took that particular sin problem and really believed: "I don't have to do this. I don't have to live like this anymore. I don't have to be under the control of this

bitterness. I don't have to be so angry anymore. I don't have to indulge in pornography this week. I don't have to do that. Jesus set me free! I'm free from the dominion of sin!" What would happen if we truly believed in Christ that we do not have to sin? We are no longer slaves to sin. Believe this truth.

He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.

[O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing by Charles Wesley, 1739]

What if you truly believed that? What if you considered yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord?

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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