

062523 Sermon "Dying to Live" Romans 6:1-5

A young couple moved into a new neighborhood. The next morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman saw her neighbor hanging her wash to dry. "That laundry is not very clean," she said. "She doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap." Her husband looked on, but remained silent. Every time her neighbor hung her wash to dry, the young woman repeated her observations about the dirty laundry.

About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: "Look, she has learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this?"

The husband said, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

In fact, it wasn't that the neighbor's laundry was dirty, it was that the window of the house of the person watching it was dirty.

The book of Romans is very neatly divided into five sections. Of course, we will not cover all five of them today. However, I will briefly tell you where Romans 6 is located. The first part is about sin, which is how Paul concludes to his readers that Gentiles are in sin and Jews are in sin and that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Then he moved on to salvation in Romans 4 and 5. Salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone and is given to humankind because God is gracious. Then he moved on to sanctification in Romans 6. It really is about how God desires, those who have received Jesus to grow in Christ likeness.

Paul introduced the idea that "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" in Romans 5:20. He now wonders if someone might take this truth to imply that it doesn't matter if a Christian lives a life of sin, because God will always overcome greater sin with greater grace.

In the early part of the 20th century the Russian monk Gregory Rasputin taught and lived the idea of salvation through repeated experiences of sin and repentance. He believed that because those who sin the most require the most forgiveness, therefore a sinner who continues to sin without restraint enjoys more of God's grace than the ordinary sinner. Therefore, Rasputin lived in notorious sin and taught that this was the way to salvation. This is an extreme example of the idea behind Paul's question "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"

By no means! Or certainly not! For Paul, the idea that anyone might continue in sin that grace may abound is unthinkable. Paul establishes an important principle. When we are born again, when we have believed on Jesus for our salvation, our relationship with sin is permanently changed. We have died to sin.

You may say, pastor, what does 'died to sin' means? There were three men who were discussing about a quite dark subject. They say amongst themselves, what would I like people to say about me when I die? Not a very popular kind of a subject, but the three men were talking about it. And the first man says, well, I would like people to say that I was a good husband and a good father. The second man then says, well, when I die, I like people to say that I was very generous, very kind and I was involved in a lot of humanitarian work. But the third man says, when I die, I want people to say, look, he's moving.

Well, that would be quite something isn't it? because a dead man doesn't move. A dead man cannot respond, a dead man cannot hear, nor listen. Now, 'died to sin' doesn't mean you would never ever sin anymore. Actually, there are some people who believe that once you became a Christian, you would never ever sin.

It's a wrong understanding of what it means to be dead to sin. Paul is not saying that when you die to sin, there is no more possibility of sin. Because in Romans 7 he says there is a struggle in his life. It's the flesh that he still in him that makes him do what he doesn't want to do. So there is a distinct possibility of sinning. But what happens when Paul says we are dead to sin is that the power of sin is destroyed. The Bible doesn't say that "sin will not be present in us," because that will only be fulfilled when we are resurrected in glory. But it does promise that sin will not have dominion over us because of the great work Jesus did in us when we were born again.

Here Paul uses baptism as an example. Not everyone can remember the occasion of their baptism. I was baptized as an infant, so I can't remember my baptism. But we can all remember that we are baptized and be thankful for that. Baptism initiates people into the faith community and into a covenant relationship with God and God's people. For those who were baptized, remember your baptism and be thankful for that! The "remembering" is about recommitment.

Part of baptism's symbol is death and resurrection. Going into the water signifies dying to our old selves, and rising from the water our new life in Christ. Even when immersion is not the method used, we pray during the baptismal ritual, that, dying and being raised with Christ, we may share in his final victory.

When native converts of the island of Madagascar used to present themselves for baptism, it was often asked of them, "What first led you to think of becoming Christians?" The answer usually was that the changed conduct of others who had become Christians was what first arrested their attention.

"I knew this man to be a thief; that one was a drunkard; another was very cruel and unkind to his family. Now they are all changed. The thief is an honest man; the drunkard is sober and respectable; and the other is gentle and kind in his home. There must be something in a religion that can work such changes." The converts would say.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, remember your baptism and be thankful for that. Die to sin and walk in newness of life in Christ. Ask God's help and walk with God. Participate in the joy of God. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, with your family, with your business, with your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.