

Prayer

Your grace, Lord Jesus, is beyond our understanding, and we praise You for the fact that it reaches every part of human life. You offer love, healing, help, salvation and the hope of eternal life; and by grace, You freely offer them all. So may we who receive Your gracious gifts return our thanks to You with grateful hearts, and may we be content to trust Your promises and make them ours. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Today, speak your prayers to the Lord out loud, not to make God hear, but to make sure you are clear and precise in what you are saying to Him.

On-going prayers

- **Pray about waste in our world.** Ask the Lord to help us use energy well and treasure it as His gift, and a resource to bless all human life
- Give thanks to God for all who do voluntary work for people who are disadvantaged
- Pray about the rising tensions in the Middle East

Meditation

I glory in everything You do for me, Lord Jesus.

You give me courage to endure life's struggles,
To refuse to be conquered by trouble.

You give me a heart to watch out for the needy,
Despite all my selfish inclinations.

You give me strength to stand firm in my faith ,
And apply what I believe to what I do.

You give me love when my heart is sorely tested;
The ability to forgive when offended:

You give me the power to rise above the ordinary;
To do what is greater, the best for Your glory!

You give me real hope and a vision for the future
Your wondrous return in Your Kingdom!

I glory in You, Lord Jesus, for You do Your will through me.

Bible passage - Romans 6:1-11

¹ What shall we say then? Should we keep on sinning so that there will be more grace? ² Absolutely not! We have died to sin, so how can we continue to live in it? ³ Are you ignorant of the fact that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Through baptism we were buried together with Him as dead, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too should live a new life.

⁵ For if we share in what it means to die a death like His, we will certainly share in a resurrection like His. ⁶ We know that our previous human nature was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we should be enslaved to sin no more. ⁷ For whoever has died is released from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will go on to live with Him, ⁹ and we know that Christ has been raised from the dead and will never die again, so death no longer has any power over Him. ¹⁰ So when He died, He died to

sin once and for all time, but now He lives, He lives for God. ¹¹ In the same way, you also must think of yourselves as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Bible Study

Review

In this inspiring passage, Paul explains what it really means to be a Christian. So far, much of his letter has described what God has done to save people from sin, and Paul has explained that this salvation must be accessed by faith in Jesus. But merely giving assent to these beliefs is not enough, for we are called to identify with Christ both in His death and in His life, and this is done through baptism. God longs for us to live a life that is 'dead to sin' and 'alive to God in Christ Jesus' (6:11).

In Paul's day just as today, people were content to play with religious ideas, as if it was possible to find the truth by reason and debate rather than by submission to the one, true God. So when Paul taught that God's grace was always increasing to cover all the sins of humanity (see 5:20), some people twisted the idea to suggest that people should sin more and more so that God could show more and more grace! Tragically, this is what lies behind his comment, '*what shall we say then? Should we keep on sinning so that there will be more grace?*' (6:1, see also 3:8) Paul rejects such flights of fancy, but the accusation forces him to start him describing the true Christian life, in which such manipulation of the sacred truths of salvation is inconceivable.

In order to make his points, Paul uses the idea of baptism. Up to now, the emphasis of his letter has been on what Christ has done in dying for us (5:8), and in giving us new life (5:18,20). Now in chapter 6, Paul describes baptism as the right response to this. Belief must result in action, for it is one thing to say 'yes I believe', but it is another to demonstrate this belief in action, and God wants us to identify with Jesus and take the step of becoming His disciples. Jesus Himself makes this clear in His great commission, '*Make disciples of all nations, baptise them ... and teach them to obey*' (Matt 28:19,20).

So how does baptism help us understand true faith? To be baptised means to have the human sinful nature 'destroyed', or as Paul dramatically says in verse 6, '*crucified*'. Because of this, it is meaningless even to think about continuing to sin, or to entertain the idea that we might do God a favour by sinning more so that He can show more grace (6:1,2)! Paul says '*if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will go on to live with Him*' (6:8) and in this way, he explains that baptism is a celebration not just of what God has done in Christ to save us, but a commissioning of the Christian to live the new life of Christ. Moreover, by definition, this new life can have nothing to do with sin. Those who have undergone baptism will not want to have any part of sin.

For centuries, part of the basic teaching about baptism has centred around this passage of Scripture. The act of immersion in water symbolises 'dying in Christ', and coming up from it symbolises 'rising to new life'. We must remember however that Paul's teaching uses baptism to explain how the Christian leaves sin behind and takes on the new life, but is not intended to be a complete analysis of the meaning of baptism. Scripture has much more to say elsewhere about baptism, becoming a Christian and the work of the Holy Spirit, as found in John 3, for example.

We all know that after Christians are baptised they often have difficulties with sins that creep back into life. But we must remember baptism itself does not cleanse. God alone deals with sin and grants new life by His grace; and God alone knows whether the human heart is set on Him and against sin, or whether it is inwardly set in rebellion against all grace. He knows the truth. But to show Him our intentions and walk His pathways, we accept baptism and identify with Christ's death and resurrection; we say death to sin and 'yes' to the new life in Christ.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- What does Paul say about sin in this passage?
- What does Paul say about baptism in this passage?
- The practice of baptism today.

Going Deeper

Paul's uncompromising stance on sin and the Christian life is fascinating because it reveals a great deal about baptism, but clearly, the purpose of the passage is not to describe baptism as such, it is the illustration

to his argument. As we continue the study, we look at baptism more fully. However, we will also have to be very careful. For although Paul is clear that sin must be rejected by a believer, we will find that later in his letter, Paul acknowledges that in this life, a disciple will struggle with sin despite faith, because of the fallen nature of the world (6:15f., 7:13f.).

What does Paul say about sin in this passage?

When Paul was speaking and writing in the first century AD, he was addressing people who generally felt that the best way to deal with sin was to live according to good moral codes, or as the Jews would put it, the Law. Frankly, it is little different today. For example, the general secular 'mantra' of how a decent society works goes something like this; 'everyone can and should have the liberty to do what they want providing they do not hurt anyone else or cut across their liberties', and such societies work by having a set of laws agreed by governments which lay down the ground rules for what may be considered good and bad behaviour which is enforced by the law and the legal system. Notice how dealing with sin ends up being a matter of 'law'! It is when Western people go to other countries in the world that they realise their own assumptions about right and wrong are not as universal as they might think!

In this passage, Paul sets about explaining how a person who has 'peace with God' (5:1) through faith in Jesus Christ has been changed by that faith so that sin is dealt with in a different way. Paul tells those who think that continued sinning is reasonable, that the life of a true disciple of Jesus has been changed completely, and sin does not figure as an option; it is not something that a Christian wants to do, 'we have died to sin, so how can we continue to live in it!' (6:2). Much of Paul's discussion of baptism is characterised by pairs of words 'dying' and 'rising', or 'death' and 'life', which explain the nature of the transformation of the human soul that takes place when we submit to Christ's authority. The end result is that a disciple has a 'new life' (6:4) which is characterised by liberation from the power of sin (6:9); note, Paul does not say that sin does not happen, but the transformed believer has a means to deal with it because of the presence of Jesus Christ and His work of salvation.

It is most unhelpful when some Christians imply from this Scripture that the believer should be visibly free from all appearance of sin. Paul does not indicate anything like this. He is fully aware that the Christian lives in a world of sin and will be personally tainted by that sin in some way. But what he says in this passage implies that as soon as a Christian discovers that they are compromised by some sin, then they should submit it to the Lord, and in that way, whatever sin it is, it is dealt with by Christ and has no power over us to separate us from the love of God.

What does Paul say about baptism in this passage?

Firstly, Paul does not tell us what we would like to know, which is at what age people should be baptised, how it should be done, whether they should be trained in the Christian faith before being baptised, or be baptised immediately upon confession of faith (with training afterwards). Neither is it easy to connect it with other powerful statements in other parts of Scripture, which say strongly that the only real baptism for a believer is a spiritual baptism of the heart (e.g. John 1:33, Acts 1:5; 19:3f.)! If Paul was deliberately setting out to describe baptism and its importance as the 'rite' of Christian initiation, then he would have introduced and explained it as such, but he did not, because he was answering a question about sin. For this reason, we should never pretend that this passage gives us a definitive theology of baptism. It is not what Paul is intending to describe here.

What it does tell us is that baptism was, for Paul, certainly a 'spiritual' immersion in the death of Christ and His resurrection. It was common practice in the first part of the first century for baptism to be by dipping a person wholly in water, as John appears to have done in the river Jordan (Matt 3:11), and this immersion was therefore a symbol of the spiritual immersion (see 6:3). Paul is not too concerned about accuracy with his metaphors, however, for at one point he says 'when we were baptised into His death we were buried with Him' (6:4), and burial does not sit easily with the visual symbolism of baptism by water! What Paul does, however, is to attach to the basic idea of dying and rising some of the real events that happened to Jesus; crucifixion (6:6), burial (6:4) and resurrection (6:5).

For each time Paul talks about 'dying' or 'death', he goes on to talk about 'living' and 'new life'. For Paul, when a believer was immersed in water and drawn up again, faith in Christ was met by the grace of God in the granting of new life (6:4,8), sharing in the resurrection glory of the presence of God (6:5), and freedom from slavery to sin and the power of sin (6:6,7,9). These are all the great benefits of being a disciple and professing faith in Jesus; but Paul goes further. In the last two verses of our passage, the words of the text imply strongly that the believer takes part not just in their own 'new life', but in God's 'new life'. Speaking of Jesus first, Paul says; 'and now He lives, He lives to God. In the same way, you also must think of yourselves as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.' (6:10,11). This new life is therefore the privilege of the presence of God, and this is why baptism is so important, for to live in the presence of God is to do what Adam could not, because of his sin. Christ has enabled us to have a restored relationship with God, and this is expressed within the symbolism of baptism.

The practice of baptism today

Whatever practices of baptism you advocate, it cannot be baptism unless through it, the individual expresses faith in Jesus Christ and comes to enjoy the presence of God. I know very well that the Christian church is split in two about this very issue. Some insist that baptism can only be performed on an adult who makes this statement of faith, and many also insist that it is done by total immersion, according to their own form of ancient traditional practice. Others are equally adamant that baptism should be available for the whole Christian family, and in which a child is baptised on the conditional promises of the parents and the prevenient grace of God who guide those who are committed to His care (followed logically by the individual's own confession of faith by way of 'confirmation').

The theology of baptism in Romans 6 applies equally well to the practice of adult baptism (by immersion) and to the full confirmation of baptismal confession which most churches call 'confirmation'. No water is mentioned in Romans 6, it is assumed, and neither does Paul address the complex issue of the status before God of a child born of Christian parents. All of us who have either been baptised as an adult or who have confirmed our faith in Jesus at confirmation, rejoice in the spiritual truth of the new life in Christ that we now possess and the fact that we have been freed from the power of sin. It is up to us to live this new life according to the faith we profess.

Application

It is my personal observation that because of the misuse of baptism, many people in our churches today are unclear about their life in Christ. It is all too clear that many baptised Christians struggle with sin and do not know how to deal with it, and this is true whether we are talking about people who were baptised as infants and later 'confirmed', or those who were baptised as adults.

The focus of our attention should therefore not be on baptism itself or how it is done, but on what it means; and this is probably why, by the grace of God, we cannot find in Scripture a definitive statement about it or a full description of it. God has told us to baptise, and in some parts of Scripture we find out something about why, and little else! Here, for example, the description of baptism is part of Paul's argument about dealing with sin, and this is what we should pay attention to. Through faith in Jesus Christ and through our baptism, we have all that is necessary to fight against evil and sin in our own lives, which should be the new life of Christ, lived in the presence of God. If someone claims to be a Christian and does not know what it means to know the presence of God through Jesus, or does not know how sin can be dealt with in their lives, then somewhere, something has gone wrong. It may be that people have not been taught the faith properly, but it may equally well be because some people wish to come to church because they always have, and they are resistant to the total commitment implied by what Scripture says about baptism.

The best way for any of us to fight sin is to work with our Lord to identify and deal with it wherever we find it in our lives. We should be able to find that by reflecting on our baptism and what this means, we can reconnect with the presence of God and the power of His Spirit in our lives. This will help us on our journey, and as we seek to live victoriously over all the works of the enemy.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group what you learn about sin from this passage of Scripture, and what you can do about it.
2. Discuss in your group what you learn about baptism in this passage of Scripture. Can you find other scriptures that also talk about baptism?
3. What sins remain major problems in society today, and why? What can be done about this?

Personal comments by author

Are you a supporter of infant baptism or of adult baptism? Whichever it is, you must surely be a supporter of being victorious over sin! Paul writes as if the purpose of baptism is to enable us to embrace the full benefits of our faith in Jesus, and live the 'new life', which includes victory over sin. Is that how you see your own baptism, and is that how you see sin? It is worth pursuing these questions because the biggest battles we face whilst on earth are those against sin, and we need to know how to live in victory!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Have a look through some newspapers and study the articles. What personal and social sins are evident in what you read? How does the world deal with these sins, and what does the church offer? How can our offer of help to deal with the sins of the world be made effective today?*
 - *Pray for all who struggle with the idea of baptism, and who have remained un-baptised, though apparently members of the church. If you know any such people, pray for them, and seek the opportunity to talk with them about the meaning of being baptised.*
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Final Prayer

Almighty God, when we are faint-hearted, lift us up. Lift up our hearts so that we may perceive Your will, lift up our minds so that we may understand Your Word, lift up our strength so that we may be courageous in deed, and lift up our voices so that we may praise Your Name. Lift us up, and raise us to Your glorious throne, almighty God: ALLELUIA!
