

ROMANS 6:1–11. (EHV)

What shall we say then? Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase? Absolutely not! We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer? Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, to make our sinful body powerless, so that we would not continue to serve sin. For the person who has died has been declared free from sin. And since we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he will never die again. Death no longer has control over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once and for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way also consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

One of the things that Lutherans and Protestants in general have sometimes struggled to articulate is why good works are important and where we get the strength and motivation to do them, if we are saved by grace alone and not by works. I can remember a time in my life when I thought good works were essentially nothing more than the polite thing to do. If my friend saved my life and then wanted me to come over and help clean his house or rake his lawn, I should do it, right? After all, he saved my life; it would be rude not to. In the same way, I thought we Christians should do good works because God has saved our lives eternally. We should therefore do the things he wants us to do; it would be rude not to.

While showing gratitude is certainly an aspect of the Christian life, the apostle Paul tells us here it's much more than that. And he tells us it's much more than that because of baptism.

1. United with Christ in Baptism—United with His Death

Paul has been writing some of his finest work on the subject of being saved by God's grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, completely apart from works, in the chapters leading up to this. In Chapter 3 we have his famous words: "We conclude that a person is justified"—that is, declared innocent of sin and saved eternally—"by faith without the works of the law." In Chapter 4, he tells us that the blessings we receive from God are not like pay credited for work; God's righteousness is credited as a gift to the person who believes that God justifies the ungodly in Christ. In Chapter 5, Paul wrote: "Just as one trespass led to a verdict of condemnation for all people, so also one righteous verdict led to life-giving justification for all people. For just as through the disobedience of one man the man became sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will become righteous."

So we're justified without the works of the law. We're justified as a gift, received through faith. We're justified not through our own obedience, but through the obedience of one man, Jesus Christ.

So...it kind of seems like we can go on sinning, right? In fact, it kind of seems like we could view our sinning as a sort of virtue, since the more we sin, the more we get to emphasize

God's grace, right? "What shall we say then? Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase?" If I sin once and am forgiven, God is gracious. But if I sin twice and am forgiven, God is twice as gracious, right? And how gracious is God if I really pile the sins on?

But Paul won't let us go there. "Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase? Absolutely not!" he says. And why not? He doesn't say we shouldn't keep on sinning because it would be rude or because we wouldn't be showing sufficient gratitude. He says this: "We died to sin. How can we go on living in it any longer?" Which prompts the question: When did we die to sin?

And it is this unspoken question which then occupies Paul for the first part of this chapter. The short answer is that we died to sin when we were baptized. And the reason we died to sin when we were baptized is because, in being baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, God united us with Christ's death and resurrection.

The reason we typically only wash the head with water in baptism in the Lutheran Church is partially as a statement to those who say baptizing in any way but immersion or dunking is a sin or is an invalid baptism. If there were not a sizable contingent of people calling themselves Christians in this country who insisted on immersion as the only valid way to baptize, we might very well immerse those being baptized, as many early Christians did, though they didn't do so always.

It's clear that Paul was at least familiar with baptism by immersion, and knew that at least some of his hearers in Rome were too, because he uses this imagery of burial. Just as a person being baptized by immersion is dunked or buried under the water, Paul says that at the same time another burial is taking place. "We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death." No matter how your baptismal water was applied, you experienced a burial in your baptism. When you or just a part of you went under the water, your soul was being joined to Christ and his death, so that it's like you were undergoing death with him.

On the one hand, that means that you are now free from sin's guilt. Paul says later that "the person who has died," namely Christ, "has been declared free from sin." Christ bore all sin in his death and he paid for all sin in his death, so once he died, he was done with sin, declared free from it forever. And since we were buried with him into his death in our baptism, that means we are free from sin, too. Charges of sin and the guilt of sin cannot stick to us. We died to sin with Christ.

Think about that. God knew all the sins you would commit before you were baptized, sins of disobedience, rebellion, lawlessness, greed, slander, sexual immorality, the pursuit of sensual pleasure, harm to yourself or to others, you name it. He knew all of them before Christ went to the cross. He had to know them, or could not have laid on his Son the iniquity of us all and his Son could not have paid and atoned for all our sins. So even when you sin after you are baptized—and that should not happen intentionally or willingly, as we are going to talk about more, but nevertheless, even when you sin after you are baptized—that sin is one that Christ already bore and paid for by his blood. And since you were buried with Christ into his death in your baptism, by virtue of your baptism in Jesus's name, that sin cannot stick to you or be charged to your account. It has to roll off of you, like water off a duck's back. Baptism in effect sucks it back in time to Good Friday, where it dissolves and dissipates in the blood of Christ.

2. United with Christ in Baptism—United with His Resurrection

But that's not the primary point Paul is making here. Otherwise we would be right back to his question at the beginning of the chapter: "Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase?" If all of our sins were washed away in our baptism, because baptism joined us Christ's death where he already paid and atoned for all of them, then we shouldn't care about sin, right? We shouldn't need to give any thought to doing what is right, right? But Paul already told us that wasn't the case.

No, the main point Paul wants to stress about our baptism here is that we were not just united with Christ in his death, but that we were also united with him in his resurrection. "We were...buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, to make our sinful body powerless, so that we would not continue to serve sin. For the person who has died [namely Christ] has been declared free from sin. And since we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he will never die again. Death no longer has control over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once and for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way also consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Having bore all of our sins, having in effect become the greatest sinner of all by effectively becoming all sinners all at once, and having paid and atoned for all of our sins, Christ is now done with sin forever. Death now has no control over him and he lives to God.

And when we were buried with him into his death, our old self, our sinful self, was crucified with him, and when we were united with his resurrection, only a new person, what we call our new man, came out of the grave with Christ. Our sinful body was rendered powerless, so that we would not continue to serve sin. We were freed not only from sin's charges and guilt, but also from sin's power. This was in fact why Jesus himself was baptized, to receive the Holy Spirit's power to resist the devil and his temptations and to serve God, not sin.

So you see that we don't serve God and do good works just to be polite to him, just to say thank you to him for saving our lives. We serve God and do good works *because that is who we are now*. That is the new identity and existence God has given us. Having been baptized into Christ, having been given faith in Christ, we are new people, done with sin, with hearts desiring to serve God, with our old selves crucified, with our sinful bodies rendered powerless.

This, too, is an article of faith, because if someone were to follow you around with a video camera, recording every second of your lives, this mastery over sin isn't what they would capture. I think that's why Paul says here, "*Consider* yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus," because it often doesn't look that way. But he doesn't say "consider" because he just wants us to pretend that it's true; it is, in fact, true.

Without going into detail, friends, let me share that, just like every other Christian, there are sins I have struggled with in the past and that I continue to struggle with now. With some of them, progress has been made through the sharing of those sins and struggles with fellow pastors, receiving from them the same forgiveness I received in my baptism and encouragement to do better. You could look at the fact that I have had that struggle and continue that struggle to

this day and say, “See, baptism doesn’t do anything.” But I would say the opposite: The fact that my sins made me feel guilty, the fact that I eventually sought the help of fellow Christians and pastors, the fact that I am able to live in the freedom and joy of the forgiveness of those sins, and the fact that I have made any progress in fighting against those sins and living a godly life shows the mastery over sin I was given in my baptism, the mastery over sin I have in Christ. If I wasn’t baptized, if I didn’t have that mastery, I wouldn’t have sought help, or if I did, I would have done it only to serve myself, not God, and so I would have just exchanged one set of sins for another set.

I don’t know if we share this truth enough with Christians struggling with sinful addictions. This truth isn’t necessarily going to make those struggles with addiction go away just like that, but it does give those Christians the weapon of truth they need to fight their addiction in a godly way. If you are baptized and believe in Christ, nothing that a human can be addicted to has mastery over you. You have the power in Christ to say no to the devil, no to temptation, no to sin. You have the power to say yes to God, yes to godliness, yes to righteousness. You have been united with the death and resurrection of Christ himself! Your sinful self is crucified! Your sinful body is rendered powerless! And if that’s true of sinful addictions, if that’s true of the strongest temptations, then it’s also true of so-called ordinary, run-of-the-mill temptations and sins.

Shall we keep on sinning so that grace may increase? Absolutely not! We have been baptized. We died to sin. We now walk in a new life. We are alive to God in Christ Jesus. We are free from sin’s charges and guilt. We are free from sin’s power. This is why we put our baptismal font front and center in our sanctuary, so that it is a focal point of worship every Sunday. This is why we put it where you have to go past it when you come for Communion. It reminds us all that that sin cannot condemn us, and that sin cannot control us. May God strengthen us to live in our baptismal grace all the days of our life, until the new life we were given in our baptism is truly seen for what it is when we are taken to our Savior’s side in heaven. Amen.