

Romans 6:1-14

The Root of the New Life of the Justified Sinner

The new life of the justified sinner blossoms forth out of the communion with Christ, so that the root of the new life lies in the fellowship of faith with Christ. God not only gives Christ's righteousness (justification, that is, an acquittal from guilt and punishment, and a claim to eternal life), but also a new life (a life of righteousness, that is, a life in obedience to God's Word and law). (See Main Thoughts.)

A. Notes on the Text

Verse 1

"What shall we say, then?" That is, what follows from the foregoing? The question which follows now refers back to 5:20,21: when sin increases, grace will also have to increase to defeat the increase in sin. May we now reach the conclusion that we are to continue in sin so that grace may abound? In his apostolic office Paul has experienced that there are objections to the gospel he preaches. At certain places in his argumentation he pointedly formulates those objections, in order to deal with the issues in greater detail. The nature of most of the objections reminds us of the Jews and of Judaizers (who maintained that the law was the road to salvation; see the letter to the Galatians).¹ The letter, therefore, strongly bears the character of a dialogue with either Paul's opponents, or the readers. The conclusion, posed in the form of a question, is refuted in detail by the apostle. The refutation covers chapter 4:1-7:25, while the explanation is interrupted three times with other questions (6:15; 7:7,13). Only in 8:1 does Paul once again resume the train of thought of 5:1, and conclude it.

Verse 2

Paul forcefully rejects the wrong conclusion: "By no means!" Why not? The apostle does not argue: "You may not remain in sin, for you have to concentrate on sanctification (fight against sin and remove it from your life)." He does not begin by saying: "You have to...", but: "You are..." For something has happened to the believer, he who is justified for Christ's sake: he has died to sin, and so is dead to sin. There is a radical break with sin. There is a radical break and separation between the believer and sin. It follows that he can no longer live in the environment of sin.

This provokes two questions:

- (a) *when* and *how* have believers died to sin? and
- (b) are believers now without sin?

¹ *Ed. Note:* For this question-and-answer approach in Romans, see 2:3; 2:21-23; 2:26; 3:1,3; 3:5-9; 3:27-29; 3:31; 4:1,2,10. In chapter 6 also vv. 15,16 and 21. Later also: 7:1,7,13,24; 8:31-33,35; 9:14,19-23; 9:30,32; 10:6,7,14,15,18; 11:1,4,7,11,15,34,35

The first question is answered in 6:3-11, the second in 6:12-14 (and also further in chapter 7). Thus, v. 2 gives us the main thought, which will be examined more closely in what follows.

Verse 3

"Or don't you know": an appeal to the knowledge of faith of the believers, gained in the instruction given them following their baptism ("pre-confession class"). Verses 3ff. explain that the believers are included and reckoned in Christ as Mediator. In chapter 5 the rule was: "One *for* all" and "all *through* one," that is, all believers and their new lives are rooted and grounded in Christ.

Hence, when Christ died on Golgotha, the believers died with him; when he was raised in Joseph's garden, they were raised with him. The following applies to believers: crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20); died with him (Romans 6:8; 2 Timothy 2:11); buried with him (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12); raised with him (Ephesians 2:6; and Colossians 2:12 and 3:1); alive with him (Romans 6:8); and seated with him in heaven (Ephesians 2:6). Thus, "into Christ" (i.e. included and counted in him), means that quite a lot has already happened to believers. Their life is rooted in him; the basis for their lives lies in the hidden spiritual communion with Christ.

When reading what follows in Romans 6 and explaining it, we have to keep all this clearly before us.

Verse 4

Being "baptized into Christ Jesus" is being "baptized into his death": our baptism officially binds us to Christ, including, therefore, his death, as well as his burial (v. 4) and his resurrection (v. 8). (See Glossary #1.) Christ himself called his suffering and death also a baptism to be baptized with (Luke 12:50).

"Through baptism into death," namely the death of Christ. The objective (so that) of this is, that just as Christ is raised from the dead, we also will be raised to live a new life, a life in faith and love and obedience. The foundation, the root, the source of that new life lies in (the mediating work of) Christ.

Verse 5

This verse indicates the reason for the connection laid in v. 4 between Christ's resurrection and the new life of the believer. It is a difficult verse. I shall attempt, briefly and simply, to show the meaning.

"United": incorporated into Christ, implanted into him (cf. John 15:1ff). "United with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like His"[RSV]: our dying to sin and our being raised to newness of life resemble Christ's death and resurrection. The apostle speaks of "like" (similarity), not "identical to" (sameness). Christ's dying for sin and his resurrection to life were different from ours: Christ's were the acts of a mediator (atonement and

reconciliation) in which our death and resurrection were included (see above). For this reason the apostle does not write that we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection, but in a likeness thereof.²

Verse 6

This verse further explains what is meant by "in a death like His." [RSV] We know, from teaching and instruction in the faith according to the gospel, that our old self (we as sinful man, ruled by sin) was crucified with Christ; that is how our death was like Christ's death. (For "old" self, "old" nature, cf. Ephesians 4:22 and Colossians 3:9; for "new" self, "new" man, "new" nature, cf. Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 3:10; see also 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15). As my "old" self I am ruled by sin; as my "new" self I am ruled by God's Spirit in the grace of Christ. (See Glossary #22.)

The object of being crucified with Christ is to take away the power from this body of sin (i.e. our visible human existence enslaved by sin). "Power": the power of sin enslaves us, and this power was broken for us by Christ on the cross (in his death). The conclusion of the verse is now clear.

Verse 7

"Because anyone who has died," points to Christ, and to us as believers, for death removes man from sin. Sin loses its claim when man dies. Thus, the conclusion is short and clear: freed from sin.

Verses 8-10

Verse 8 explains further what sharing with Christ "in a resurrection like His" [RSV] (see v. 5 above) means. Fellowship with Christ also means receiving new life with him in the resurrection. "If" does not mean, "in the event that" but "because."

For we know from the gospel that Christ as man will never die again. He has fully conquered the power of death and he lives completely to God. In Christ, the believer has now also definitely been delivered from the dominion of sin and lives to God.

Verse 11

The believer may now draw a Scriptural conclusion for himself: I am dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. It is all founded in him and has happened in him. Hence, "...count yourselves". That is what it is about: as a believer you may see yourself as being dead to sin, etc. It is a self-assessment on the basis of Christ's work in which the believer was included. Also: Therefore, do not let sin reign..., etc. (v. 12).

² *Ed. Note:* The NIV appears to state that we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Is this an accurate understanding of the NIV? If so, how should this translation be understood?

Verses 12 and 13

On the basis of what has happened to the believer in communion with Christ, Paul can also command the believer to fight against sin, through Christ's victory over sin. This can and must be done! Do not now serve sin any longer, but serve God! The members of our mortal body: eye and ear, hand and foot, etc., may no longer be "instruments" (weapons, tools) to serve wickedness (cf. Matthew 18:8-9).

"Righteousness" means: the God-pleasing life, the doing of God's will. We must use our whole body in his service!

Verse 14

The believer is no longer under law, but under grace. "Under law" does not mean: under the law of the Lord as this law is kept by the believer out of thankfulness for salvation received (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 9 and 114), but the rigid Judaistic view of the service of God, which knows only of demands and commands: "Do this so you may live," without redemption in Christ. Hence, serving by works of the law.

It is possible to consider vv. 12-14 as belonging to the next few verses, because vv. 15-23 speak more extensively about the two kinds of service. However, they show that the believer is declared freed from sin (v. 7), but is not without sin; he must still fight against evil desires and the sin and weakness that remain (cf. the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper on this point). Discord remains in him (see further Romans 7). Hence, I consider these verses as belonging to the first part of chapter 6 (see notes on v. 2).

B. Main Thoughts

1. In the foregoing (chapters. 3-5), the apostle explained to us that God's righteousness (i.e. Christ's mediating work of atonement and reconciliation, accepted in true faith) justifies the sinner, that is, acquits him from guilt and punishment and grants him a claim to eternal life.

Now there are some in the church who feel that this justification is not yet the essence of what is important in the Christian life. Faith in Christ, who suffered, died and was raised to our justification, is not sufficient; there still must be, they say, an inner, mystical death. They teach that Christ must come to dwell in us and then his saving acts must be repeated in us. First Christ must be born in us. According to the German mystic Angelus Silezius, even if Christ were born in Bethlehem a thousand times, and not in your heart, you would still be lost. Willem de Mérode, a Dutch poet, said in a Christmas carol: "Child, this time come into our hearts... Be born in us now." They find support for their ideas in Romans 6:3ff.: "being united with Christ in His death and resurrection" [RSV] is supposedly the same as the mystical death and resurrection of Christ in our hearts. Mysticism maintains that the union with

Christ is not a matter of faith in God's Word, faith in Christ, but a direct working of God's Spirit (apart from the Word!) in heart and soul and mind.

2. This mystical idea must be rejected! We have already pointed out that our death and resurrection in Christ took place in the acts of salvation in his life as mediator. These acts happened once, only once; they cannot be repeated. Faith, love and obedience are the ways and means by which the Spirit of Christ unites us with the Saviour. That does not happen apart from the Word and the promises, although this does not exclude deep feelings and emotions (see Heidelberg Catechism, A. 20, 21, 53). To appeal to Romans 6 for a mystical union with Christ is incorrect.
3. The question asked by Paul: "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" is very similar to the one in Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24, Q. 64: Does this teaching [righteousness by faith alone] not make people careless and wicked?

The Roman Catholics used to address this accusation against the Reformed preaching of justification by faith alone. Against this Paul says: God's righteousness (Christ's atoning work) does not only include the justification of the sinner, but also a quickening to new life. True faith is the means to justification but also to rebirth (cf. Belgic Confession, Article 24). God renews the believer in Christ's image to obedience (see Heidelberg Catechism, A. 64, 86). Hence Christ is not only our justification, but also our sanctification. The Heidelberg Catechism often speaks of those together (see, e.g. A. 18, 60, 61).

Justification, sanctification and new life cannot be separated (Belgic Confession, 24; Heidelberg Catechism, A. 17, 37, 45, 70). Justification without sanctification is impossible in a new life; when living in sin (without fighting against sin), one can boast in the forgiveness of sin, but it is a lie; indeed, it is blaspheming grace.

Nor is there sanctification without justification: our best works are still defiled with sin and in need of cleansing (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 62).

4. In his first period Karl Barth³ wanted to have little to do with the sanctification of the life of the Christian. The righteous and the godless do not differ in their way of life, they are both sinners. The only difference is that the former hopes for forgiveness of sins, while the latter does not. Later, Barth changed his thinking. Rome lets justification become part of sanctification, by maintaining that justification of sin makes one righteous; it makes the sinner both righteous and holy (sanctified). Justification is then not being declared

³ *Ed. Note:* The first period of Karl Barth that the author refers to was before 1919, when he was committed to the liberal theology of the day. Later, after making a thorough study of the works of Luther and Calvin, he became somewhat more conservative in his outlook.

righteous, but a change in the sinner from wicked to holy. And so justification becomes sanctification, quickening, rebirth.

Our fathers have always differentiated between justification and sanctification, although they confessed according to the Scriptures that in the life of the believer both go together and cannot be separated (see Glossary #12 and #16).

In summary: in Romans 6:1-14 Scripture teaches us that the root of the new life lies in the union with Christ, or, put differently, that righteousness and new life go together (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 17).

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