

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ROMANS

Living Under Grace (Romans 5-8)

iii. Dead to sin, Alive to Christ

Romans 6:1-14

Thomas Schreiner aptly describes this as 'one of the most complicated and controversial portions of Romans'. It has also been referred to, tongue in cheek, as a 'good Baptist chapter for a Presbyterian to preach on'.

I would argue that Paul is not referring to baptism in a sacramental sense i.e. water baptism. Rather he is using it as a metaphor for conversion and new life in Christ. "All of you who were baptised into Christ have been clothed with Christ through the new birth" (Gal 3:27). "Our ancestors were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and the sea" (1 Cor 10:1,2). Moses was their representative head into whom they were baptised. Someone has cheekily observed that the only people who got wet that day were the Egyptians who drowned in the sea! Moreover Mark 10:38 speaks of the impending baptism which Jesus must undergo i.e. his death and suffering on the cross.

Paul speaks of baptism as referring to our union with Christ in Rom 6. Having died with him and raised to new life by his resurrection, it is this union which enables us to die to sin. Martyn Lloyd Jones uses the analogy of two fields enclosed by high stone walls to illustrate this truth. Every person begins life in one of those fields, a field ruled over by Satan and sin. We have no chance of climbing over the walls and escaping this field on our own. But God in his grace, reaches down and sets us down in the adjacent field, a field ruled by Christ and by grace. A decisive change in our position has taken place. We are in a whole new relationship to sin. No longer do we have to listen to Satan's voice on the other side of the wall, as we follow Christ and listen to his voice.

Or consider a believer, 'John Jones, looking back on his long life, divided into two parts by his conversion, the old self John Jones before his conversion and the new self John Jones after his conversion. The old self and the new self (old man and new man) are not John Jones' two natures, rather two halves of his life separated by new birth. At conversion, signified in this sense as baptism, John Jones, the old self, died through union with Christ, the penalty of his sin borne. At the same time John Jones rose again from death, a new man to live a new life to God'.

Likewise for the Christian, our biography is written in two volumes. Volume one is the story of the old man, the old self, of me before conversion. Volume two is the story of the new man, the new self, of me after I was made a new creation in Christ.

John Stott reminds us, "We are simply called to 'reckon' this - not to pretend it, but to realize it. It is a fact. And we have to lay hold of it. We have to let our minds play upon these truths. We have to meditate upon them until we grasp them firmly. We have to keep saying to ourselves volume one has closed. You are now living in volume two. It is inconceivable that you should reopen volume one. It is not impossible, but it is inconceivable."

Celebrated American entomologist E.O. Wilson did his early research with ants. He described how ants communicate with each other through a series of pheromones, chemical 'words' they release to communicate different states like 'danger ahead', or 'I've found food' or 'I'm ready to mate' or even 'I'm dying so please throw me out the

nest'. Wilson decided to do an experiment to see what would happen if he sprayed some 'I'm dying' pheromones onto a healthy, alive ant. The result was somewhat amusing, but not for the ant mind you. The ant sprayed with the 'I'm dying' pheromone was immediately surrounded by other ants from the colony who picked him up and took him outside the nest to some kind of ant graveyard. The poor ant then walks back to the nest only to have the same routine endlessly repeated. The other ants smelled the death pheromone on him. Despite the fact that he was not really dead, they kept throwing him out of the nest.

Michael Bird reminds us that we need to constantly pour the pheromone of our new birth on our sin, so that our sin smells of death so we can bury it in the graveyard of our old self.

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