

You Were There!

Delivered From the Kingdom of Sin – Part I

Romans 6:3-5

Introduction

Leadership Magazine reprinted part of the testimony of James Ryle, who now pastors a church in Texas. When James was two years old, his father was sent to prison. When he was seven, authorities placed him in an orphanage. At nineteen, he had a car wreck that killed one of his friends. He then sold drugs to raise money for his legal fees, but the law caught up to him. He was arrested, charged with a felony, and sent to prison.

While in prison, James accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior. After he had served his time, he went to school and eventually, began serving the Lord in full time ministry.

Years later, he sought out his father in an attempt to reconcile. When they got together, the conversation turned to prison life. James's father asked, "Which prison were you in?"

When James answered, his father was shocked. He then said, "When I was in prison, they used me as a welder to construct penitentiaries. I helped build that prison you were in."

Pastor Ryle concluded, "Imagine that, I was in the prison my father had built."

The first Adam built our prison of sin –

The Second Adam took our place on death row

In a way, this experience is true for every person on earth. We were all born imprisoned in sin. And, we all began life, incarcerated in a prison that was built by our father, Adam.

Paul has already declared, in Romans, chapter 5, verse 12, that,

... through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned

So, all of humanity are prisoners of darkness; bound in the dungeon cells of sin; incarcerated by the kingdom of darkness and sin. And, for every person, it is death row!

The kingdom of sin rewards its prisoners with the only currency it deals in – death. As Romans, chapter 6, verse 23a, tells us,

... the wages of sin is death ...

There is only one way out of that kingdom, and that is for someone to take your place on death row and die in your place.

The first Adam built the prison, but the Second Adam has purchased freedom for everyone who will trust in His execution on their behalf. And, because of Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, Paul can write in Romans, chapter 6, that believers are free! Paul repeats that believers are:

- ... *freed from sin* (verse 7);
- ... *freed from sin* ... (verse 18);
- ... *free in regard to righteousness* (verse 20);
- ... *freed from sin* ... (verse 22).

The believer has been delivered from the dark kingdom of sin by faith in Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote in Colossians, chapter 1, verse 13,

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son

Justification and Sanctification

As we begin to study through the next few chapters of Romans, you need to understand that there is a shift in Paul's perspective. Through chapter 5, the primary doctrine has been justification; but now, in chapter 6, Paul will begin to describe the doctrine of sanctification. So that you do not confuse these two doctrines, let me give several differences.

Justification	Sanctification
Deals with the penalty of sin;	Deals with the power of sin;
God declares the believer to be righteous in Christ;	God conforms the believer to live a righteous life through Christ;
Occurs in a moment of time, at salvation;	Is a lifetime process;
Has nothing to do with a believer's holy living.	Has everything to do with holy living.

Having finished his declaration of justification by faith alone, through the grace and effort of the Second Adam alone, the natural question is anticipated by Paul. The question is:

Since we did not have to earn our salvation by good works, and since even the worst of sinners can be saved, and since the more sinful a person is before coming to Christ, the greater the demonstration of God's grace toward them, then what is so bad about sin?

In other words, if we do not get saved by being good, and we cannot lose our salvation by being bad, why not be as bad as we want?

Since Paul anticipated this question, he now begins to answer the following questions related to sanctification:

- Can a believer live a lifestyle of sin?
- How does a believer relate and respond to sin?
- How does a believer live a holy life that pleases the Father who has delivered him from the kingdom of sin?

Can a Believer Live in Sin?

Paul begins to answer these questions by dealing with the first question, "Can a believer live in sin?"

Notice Romans, chapter 6, verses 1 and 2.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

The meaning of "we died to sin"

There are a number of views related to Paul's meaning of the words, "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" So, what did Paul mean when he said that "we died to sin"?

1. Some believe Paul meant that we died to the allurement of sin.
2. Others argue that Paul meant that we are supposed to die daily to sin.

Those who hold to this belief take Paul's words in I Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 31, out of context. In that verse, Paul said, "I die daily." From this, they say a believer needs to die every day in order to achieve spiritual victory. Paul, however, was referring to his willingness to die a physical death, for he wrote in the preceding verse, verse 30, that "we are in danger every hour."

Furthermore, Paul makes it very clear in Romans, chapter 6, that dying is not something we need to do, it is something that has already happened, "we died to sin."

3. Another view is that the believer's sin nature has been eradicated.

This view teaches that a person becomes perfected in righteousness. The problem, of course, is that so much of Paul's letter deals with the fact that, although we have died to sin, we are still prone to sin.

4. Another view teaches that Christians are supposed to simply renounce sin and therefore, die to it.
5. The interpretation that I believe to be correct and consistent with Paul's further writing, is that the believer has died to the reign of sin.

The believer has died to the reign of sin

Paul wrote in chapter 5, verse 21, that,

. . . as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In other words, we died to the dominion or power of sin.ⁱ

Death, by the way, does not mean extinction, it means separation. Hell is not a place where souls are extinguished, it is a place where souls are separated from God.

When Paul says, “we died to sin,” he does not mean sin ceases to exist. Death to sin means that we are separated from the power of sin. Being dead to sin means being set free from the reign or dominion of sin.ⁱⁱ

Paul says that sin “reigned in death.” The noun form of this Greek verb, “to reign,” can be translated “king or kingdom.” In other words, “For we have died to the ruling power of sin. We have been separated or delivered from the kingdom of sin.”

Now follow this – you got into the kingdom of sin by birth; you get out of the kingdom of sin by death. Paul is saying that deliverance from the kingdom of sin came because we died.

What in the world does Paul mean? Well, Paul will help us understand by taking us to two places: a graveyard and a vineyard.

Notice verse 3 of Romans, chapter 6.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

The meaning of “baptized”

The word that is repeated twice in this verse, is the key word “baptized.” However, this word is not translated, it is transliterated. In other words, English letters are put in the place of Greek letters so that the Greek word “baptizomai,” is given the English spelling, “baptized”. As a result, we still do not know its meaning. And, its meaning is absolutely critical to the understanding of this text.

The word “baptized” has both a literal and a figurative meaning. The literal meaning of “baptizomai” is, “to immerse”. Therefore, to literally baptize someone with water, you would need to immerse them. To not immerse them is to not have baptized them.

A different word; such as, “sprinkle” or “pour,” would have been used if immersion were not the meaning of baptized. And, there are Greek words for sprinkle and pour. And, they are never, ever used in any New Testament reference to a believer being baptized with water.

As a young seminary student, I was convinced that I could pour, sprinkle, or immerse a believer in water; it really did not matter which. Then I took my first semester of Greek exegesis and discovered the consistent use of this verb throughout every New Testament passage dealing with a believer being baptized in water. I remember going to the seminary library and pulling down stacks of lexicons, which are dictionaries that define Greek words. I looked up “baptizomai; bapto,” trying to find one of them that said it was something other than “to immerse,” and found none.

Lexicons, by the way, are non-denominational. There are no Baptist lexicons or Methodist lexicons. No, a Greek word means the same thing, no matter what church you belong to.

So, what do the Episcopalians and Methodists and Presbyterians do about this word? They choose to apply the word, not in its literal meaning, but only in its figurative meaning.

For the Greek word “baptizomai,” or “baptized” in English:

- the literal meaning is, “to immerse”;
- the figurative meaning is, “to identify with another,” which, in this case, is Jesus Christ.

So, these other churches put a little water on the forehead of a person and say that they are now identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We believe both the literal meaning and the figurative meaning should occur in the life of the believer. We literally immerse the believer into water, and thus, truly identify them with the literal death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The water becomes an analogy of the grave and a believer is buried into it and resurrected out of it. Any other way is to simply ignore the literal meaning of a wonderful word.

Now, there are those who would say that Paul is not talking about water baptism at all, but Spirit baptism. I believe that Paul is probably thinking of both, because both are related. Paul wrote in I Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 13a,

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . .

Spirit baptism is the baptism by the agency of the Holy Spirit where we are immersed into the body of Christ.

The language in that verse is very similar to Romans, chapter 6, verse 3, which says,

. . . all of us . . . have been baptized into Christ Jesus . . .

Immersion into the body of Christ happened at conversion, by the working of the Holy Spirit.

I have Charismatic friends who asks, “Have you been baptized by the Spirit?”

I answer, “Absolutely!”

And so should you!

It is impossible to be a believer and not have been baptized by the Spirit of God. The believer is literally immersed into the body of Christ. This immersion is not halfway – not just a leg or an arm – but all of the believer is immersed into the body.

Paul also has in mind that the reader’s experience of water baptism is to remind them of their identification with Christ. Again, the literal meaning is “immersion”; the figurative meaning is “identification”. I think Paul has that largely in mind as he continues in the next verse. Notice verse 4.

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Literal baptism by water is the perfect analogy to identification with Christ at His death, burial, and resurrection. Water baptism identifies the believer with:

- Christ’s death as he is put into the hands of another;
- Christ’s burial as he is placed under the water;
- Christ’s resurrection as he is pulled up out of the water by the power of another.

This was certainly not a new concept in Judaism. In fact, the rabbis taught that a Gentile who wanted to leave his pagan faith and convert to Judaism had to go through baptism. After baptism, he was considered “reborn”. The rabbis taught, “A proselyte who embraces Judaism, is like a newborn child.” They also held that if a child was born to a man after his baptism, the child was considered his first born, even if there were older children.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Greeks also would have understood the basic concept of baptism. Even before the time of Christ, they had developed the Mystery religions. These were false religions with kernels of truth interwoven into their rituals.

A Greek by the name of Apuleius, who went through a Mystery religion initiation, later wrote about

it. He said that he underwent a “voluntary death, and that thereby, he attained his spiritual birthday and was reborn.”

In the Phrygian Mystery religions, the initiate, after his baptism, was given milk to drink. This symbolized the fact that he was a newborn babe.

Ladies and gentlemen, when the apostle Paul described the idea of baptism, the concept had already been counterfeited by the enemy to become a mysterious path to salvation.

According to scripture, however, baptism by water is not the means of salvation, but simply the demonstration of salvation. Just as we were in Adam when he sinned, we were also in Christ when He died, was buried, and rose again. And, water baptism is the illustration of that wonderful identity we have in Christ.

The believer walks in newness of life

Paul goes on in the latter part of verse 4, to tell us that we have been raised,

. . . so we too might walk in newness of life.

This is not talking about a “new leaf,” but a new life. Literally, this means there is a new dynamic for living; a new purpose for life. The believer has not turned over a new leaf, he has been resurrected to a new way of life!

Warren Wiersbe wrote that this spiritual truth is illustrated in the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus in John, chapter 11. When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. By this time, there was no question about his death. Jesus, by the power of His Word (“Lazarus, come forth.”), raised His friend from the dead. But when Lazarus appeared at the door of the tomb, he was wrapped in grave clothes. So, Jesus commanded, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Lazarus had been raised to walk “in newness of life.”

In John, chapter 12, Lazarus was seated with Christ at the table, in fellowship with Him. The dead, raised from the dead and set free to walk in newness of life, seated with Christ – all of these facts illustrate the spiritual truths of our identification with Christ.^{iv}

Paul writes in Colossians, chapter 3, verses 1 and 3,

. . . if you have been raised with Christ, Keep seeking the things above . . . For you have

died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

The believer cannot live in sin, because of his identification with Christ. The believer has died to the old life and has been raised to a new principle of life; a new dynamic for living. The true believer does not want to go back into sin any more than Lazarus wanted to go back into the tomb dressed again in his grave clothes.^v

Too many good people are trying to live with the dynamic of life, but without entering into the life of Christ. They are turning over new leaves; they are trying all sorts of spiritual exercises trying to resuscitate their spiritual deadness. They do not need resuscitation; they need resurrection.

Turning over a new leaf is like putting make-up on a corpse. The make-up makes the corpse look more alive, even though it is still without life. It is also like gluing apples to the limbs of a dead apple tree. For a little while, the tree looks alive, as if sap is flowing through it, but all the while, the tree is really not alive.

That is the idea of Paul's next illustration. He moves from the graveyard to the vineyard. Notice verse 5.

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection

The word "united" comes from the Greek word, "sumphutos," which means, "to grow together". Paul has in mind the idea of a branch bound to another or grafted together. This describes our union with Christ.

In Galatians, chapter 3, verse 27, Paul wrote,

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

So close is our identification with Christ that we are, so to speak, robed with Him; we wear Christ. We walk around, in newness of life, robed in Christ.

So, what is so new about our lives?

- We have a new identity;
- We have a new destiny;
- We have a new master;
- We have a new purpose;
- We have a new heart;
- We have a new spirit;
- We have new battles;
- We have a new song;
- We are a new creation.

An old hymn asks the questions:

- "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"
And the answer is, "Yes!"
- "Were you there when they laid Him in a tomb?"
"Yes!"
- "Were you there when He rose up from the grave?"
"Yes!"

We can say with the apostle Paul, as he said in Galatians, chapter 2, verse 20,

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

We are:

- Imprisoned because of Adam;
- Delivered because of Christ!
- Incarcerated because of sin;
- Liberated because of the Savior!

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ⁱ James Montgomery Boice, Romans Volume 2, p. 651.

ⁱⁱ The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Victor Books, 1983), p. 461.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Barclay, The Letter to the Romans (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 84.

^{iv} Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Right (Chariot Victor Publishing, 1977), p. 63.

^v Ibid., p. 64.