

Baptism – The Happiest Funeral Ever

I'm about to describe a funeral service to you unlike any other. You arrive at the graveside, and you see people happily chatting, talking, embracing. There is warmth and laughter in the air. No sad songs are sung, in fact, some rather joyful songs are sung. Then comes the moment when the dead person's body is lowered into the grave. Once this is done, everyone breaks into applause, and sounds of congratulations are heard. Does this sound strange and odd to you?

It ought to. But in fact, I've just described a baptism service to you. A baptism service is a funeral service and a baby tea all in one. Someone has died, and we recognise that. Someone has been born and we recognise that. The happiness in the air is because of the fact that the old one was not really one we want around, and the new one is precious.

Baptism is exactly that: it is a memorial service to celebrate what the gospel has done. Something has died, and something has been born. Baptism commemorates this. Baptism does not produce these things. A funeral doesn't kill a person, and a baby tea doesn't induce labour. We have these events because things have already happened – someone has died, and someone has been born.

When God puts these symbols in the church, it is because they are meant to be memorable – reminders for us of what God does for us at salvation, and how we ought to live. Sadly, over the years, several people we have baptised have returned to the world, forgetting that they publicly attended the funeral of their old nature, and publicly attended their own baby tea.

How do Christians keep living like the person their baptism speaks of? In this chapter of Romans, Paul wants to drive home the truth that this radical change, which takes place on the day of your salvation, must be remembered, reckoned and realised your whole life if you are to act as you really are. There are too many people who have been through the waters of baptism and live as if that day meant nothing. They have returned to their grave, and are putting on its rotten garments again. This chapter explains how you can avoid that.

Paul is going to explain how the free grace of salvation does not set us free to sin, but sets us free to serve God. He does this by following a very logical order: Remember your position, reckon it to be true, and report to your Master.

I. Remember Your Position

In verse 1, Paul introduces the issue: since you have been saved by free grace, are you free to sin more? If God's grace looks big because of the magnitude of how much He has forgiven us, maybe we should make it look even bigger by just living as we please? No, says Paul, you can't do that, because of your position.

Romans 6:2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

You must not do that, because you are are dead to sin. **Dead people can't continue in their former life.** Dead people cannot extend their life. A life of living in sin is no longer an option for you. Your position has changed.

What do you mean Paul?

Romans 6:3-4 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was

raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Paul says, when you trusted Christ, something happened to you, which you may or may not be aware of - you were immersed into His death. You were submerged into the death of Jesus. To be completely submerged and immersed in something is for it to cover you and enter you. All that Christ's death achieved is completely identified with you. You are free to walk in newness of life. You are free to walk away from sin and unto God.

And if you are in Jesus, and have been immersed into His death, then you are free to walk in newness of life. You have been identified not only with his death, but also with his resurrection.

Romans 6:5-7 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Paul is speaking in the past tense. This has already happened to you, This is already true of you, Christian.

Christians believe that several amazing things happened to them the moment they trusted Christ by faith. They believe they were forgiven all their sins. They believe they were made into children of God, and adopted into His family. They believe they were indwelt with the Spirit. They believe they were transferred from a kingdom of darkness into a kingdom of light. If you're a Christian then you already believe these things: that the day you trusted Christ, the Spirit took the past tense work of Christ and applied it to you with all its effects. Whether or not you felt any different, you were different. Your position in respect to God, heaven, hell, this world and other humans had radically changed.

In this chapter Paul is telling you that your position with respect to sin has forever changed. Being in Christ's death has freed you from the body of sin. The body of sin and the old man really refer to the same thing – the old, unregenerate self which used to be all you were, who you were. Now, the crucifixion of Jesus has cut the umbilical cord between you and the old man. His lingering influence can still be felt, because we still dwell in unredeemed flesh. But Jesus has brought a complete and effective separation between you and that old man. Jesus has disconnected the gears of your will from the engine of sin. It might be revving, but it does not have to drive you.

Your whole position has changed to be united with Christ. What is Christ's relationship to sin and to God?

*Romans 6:8-10 Now if we died with Christ, **we believe that we shall also live with Him,** ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*

In our discipleship series, we devote an entire book to studying your position in Christ. The reason we do this is that it is fundamental to the Christian life. Christianity is not a morality that says, act like this, and so you will become like this. Christianity says, by grace you are like this, now become like that by faith and obedience.

If you believe your position has changed, then you no longer feel compelled to keep to the old behaviour. If you're renting a flat, and the landlord comes at the same day of the month each month and demands the rent in cash, you have to pay him. But if a kind benefactor bought the flat, and put it in your name, you have no obligation to pay rent any more. If the landlord comes knocking, your

position is one who is dead to the old debt. You can pay if you want to, but you have no obligation to sin.

The first way to overcome a life lived in sin, is by remembering your position. This is why God has us celebrate not only baptism once in our lives, but the Lord's Supper frequently. These are reminders. Baptism says, I am in Christ. The Lord's Supper says, Christ is in me. By being present for the Lord's Supper, by hearing the gospel preached week after week, by reinforcing and reminding oneself of your changed position: this is the first way we live in newness of life.

So what should you do with this understanding of your new position?

II. Reckon It to Be True

Romans 6:11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To reckon is to count. It actually means to know that an amount is in the bank, and to take that into account. You count on it to be true, and make decisions. Paul says – this position I've just described for you – count it to be true of yourself. Count it true enough to act on, to bank on, to depend on.

What is another word for counting something to be true, even if we haven't seen it? What is another word for depending on the reality of something invisible? Faith. To reckon that this position is yours is to take it in faith. It is to believe it. Just as when you came to Christ, you counted it to be true that God would forgive you if you trusted entirely in Christ. That simple faith brought massive changes in your life.

So you must come to Christ, counting it to be true that you have already died with Christ and risen with Him, and that you are dead to sin's controlling power, and free to walk in newness of life.

There is an important difference between remembering and reckoning. You might know something, but not count on it. You might understand something but not act like it. The bridge between remembering your position in Christ, and then living like it, is this act of reckoning. Your knowledge and understanding becomes trust.

You know from the Bible that faith is what unlocks grace. Faith is the thing which God responds to with help. Taking God at His Word brings His faithful enablement to respond to life the right ways.

Unless you are committing fraud, when you use a card to pay for something, you do so because you reckon that amount of money is in your bank account. You are saying to the person you're paying, though I cannot see my money right now in hundred-rand notes, it is there. And because it's there, I count it to be true and purchase this.

Reckoning yourself to be dead to sin and alive to God is the same thing. You approach the things of sin and the things of God with that attitude. This sin may look tempting and enjoyable to me, but I know I have died to sin I'm going to count on that fact as I respond to this temptation. These things of God may not seem immediately attractive or interesting to me. But I'm going to reckon that I am alive to God, and so I will give my self to these things.

That really leads to Paul's third point. If you remember your position, and reckon it to be true, you will act on it with the third thing Paul has for us in this passage:

III. Report to Your Appropriate Master

Romans 6:12-13 ¹² ¶ Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³ And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, **but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.**

Romans 6:19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, **so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.**

Paul says, don't report for duty at sin's door. Don't make yourself available for sin and for sinful purposes. Don't be a tool for sin to work in you and through you. Rather, make yourself available, exclusively for God. Report for duty before Him.

Paul tells you why you should do this.

First, you're not under the law any more. *Romans 6:14* For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

The law, as chapter 7 shows, provokes sin in us before we have new hearts. The law, apart from enablement, actually stimulates our evil hearts and sends us into bondage. Instead, as a Christian, you now have the Holy Spirit's enablement. You can overcome sin. It is not a matter of keeping a code in your own willpower, but obeying a loving lord in His power.

That leads to his second reason. Whoever you choose to obey is your lord

Romans 6:16-18 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? ¹⁷ But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

You're serving someone at all times. You're presenting yourself, with all your senses, faculties, abilities for the use of something and someone. And to whomever you do that, the more often you do that, the greater the sense of lordship. Paul says, you were positionally slaves of sin before salvation. You're not positionally slaves of sin any more. So don't offer yourself up to your old master.

His third reason is that sin is a terrible master and God is a delightful master.

Romans 6:20 - 7:1 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sin brings shame and death. Which one of us does not look back and feel shame over some things. Did they look shameful at the time? No. That's the deceitfulness of sin. It does not seem shameful. It does not appear deadly. It is after the time that we feel so ashamed of it, so scarred, so wasted by it. On the other hand, yielding to the things of God, brings holiness. A life of purity, with all the joy, vitality, energy and clear-thinking that a clean conscience and Spirit-filled life brings.

Paul says report for duty to your New master, not to your old one.

It is as if Paul says, your CV has been completely re-done. Who you are, and what you are now fit to do is not what you used to be and do. So do not apply for those jobs which are not on your CV. A trained civil engineer should not apply to be a circus trapeze artist. So you, Christian, don't apply

for the job of lying, stealing, adultery, fornication. Don't send your CV to show interest in evil speaking, gossip, slander, evil thoughts, malice, sinful anger, foolishness. Don't tell the personnel agent you are even interested in envy, drunkenness, idolatry, covetousness, pride or wickedness. You're just not available to do those things, because it's not who you are.

Conversely tell the agent you are looking to work in the area of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Apply for the job of being self-controlled, persevering, godly, kind to your brothers. Go looking for work in what is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy.

Put simply, you report for and make yourself available for what you are – a slave of Christ, dead to the old life of sin, and alive to Christ.

What might be some ways that we report for duty towards sin, that we yield our members to unrighteousness? Let me give you four ways you might yield to unrighteousness.

1) By not fleeing from temptation, not taking God's way of escape. God tells us to flee from sin. (1 Cor 6:18; 1 Cor 10:14; 2 Tim 2:22). To flee is to run away. It is to get some distance between you and the temptation. If temptation comes, and you have a very clear way of getting away from it – switching it off, ending the conversation, turning away your eyes, walking out – and you do not take that way of escape, then we are reporting to sin, and giving it a chance with us.

2) By making provision to sin. Rom 13:14. If you give yourself space to sin, you probably will. If you leave room for sin, and provide it with the opportunity to happen it probably will. In Proverbs 7, we read of the young man who went by the way of the harlot's house – and she caught him. No surprise – there are many other routes he could have taken, but he made space for sin. Making provision to sin is giving temptation enough sunlight, water and air to grow until it is irresistible.

3) By stimulating sinful desires. Desires are things that are grown. There are certain places, and movies and TV programs, and songs, and activities that make the itch to sin seem irresistible. After you spend time with these things, your members want to be used for covetousness or pride, or envy, or fornication, or any of the works of the flesh.

4) By making friends with worldliness. James 4:4 tells us that friendship with the world is enmity with God. He is not telling us to hate people. We are to love our neighbours. But we should not make a friend of the world's values and desires and ambitions. The more closely a person is identified with those values, the less we will have in common with them. But if we seek close relationships with worldliness, we are reporting for service at the feet of sin.

Not fleeing from sin, making provision to sin, stimulating evil desires and making friends with worldliness is reporting for duty at sin's door. It is saying to sin, "Here am I! Use me!" But don't do that. Your position has changed. You are dead to these things. Reckon it to be so. Don't show up for work in these ways.

Let me give you four ways you can present yourself for righteousness:

1) By being often in the purifying Word of God. Ephesians 5:26 tells us that Jesus Christ seeks to grow His people and purify us by the washing of water by the word. A Christian who is often before the Word – when it is preached, and when alone, is yielding himself as an instrument of righteousness. If you soak yourself in Scripture, you are allowing every part of your inner being – goals, ambitions, priorities, aims, desires, hopes, fears be saturated with Scripture. You're taking

your new nature, the one that is alive to Christ, and feeding it what it grows on.

2) By building a thoughtlife that looks like Phil 4:8:

Philippians 4:8 ⁸ ¶ Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things.

The Christian who tracks his thoughts, and makes sure they are thinking on these kinds of things, is presenting Himself to be used for obedience. If your thoughts are continually going in these directions, how useful will you be at sinning? And in order to cultivate these kinds of thoughts, the Christians is going to be discerning in what he watches, and reads, and listens to and takes part in. Notice, these are all positive virtues. But to have these kinds of thoughts you've got to give your mind that kind of fuel.

3) By learning the art of childlike obedience:

Psalms 131:2 ² Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, Like a weaned child with his mother; Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

A child that trusts, obeys. If God has earned your trust, then learn the art of simply doing what God says. Often it will make sense later. Wisdom is justified of her children. Don't overcomplicate your life and look for all the ways this may or may not work out. The people who have been most greatly used of God have been those who took the greatest steps with the simplest faith. If you learn to obey with a simple, childlike heart, you are presenting yourself for obedience.

4) By surrounding yourself with wise people:

Proverbs 13:20 ²⁰ He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed.
1 Corinthians 15:33 ³³ Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

Do you spend time with those who love God? Not those who pretend they do, but are serving themselves. Do you know the difference by the effect they have on you? When you walk away from people who love God, the things of God seem nearer, clearer. Your desire to live more like Christ has grown. You are rejoicing in the Christ, and more determined to put off those old ways. But in the company of fools, discontent grows. Unbelief pops up here and there. Even, provocations to compromise and sin more. Don't be deceived. Who you enjoy spending time with is something of a mirror of who you are and who you are becoming.

This is how you walk in newness of life. You remember your position, and reckon it to be true. "I'm alive to the things of God. Therefore, I'm going to present my self before the Scriptures. I'm going to drink in those things which cause my thoughts to be pleasing to God. I'm going to obey what I know, simply. And I'm going to surround myself with wise people.

I do not know of a baptised believer who has done those four things and has returned to the grave clothes of the old life. God's Word is true. If you yield yourself to His things, they will increasingly dominate your life, and you'll walk like Christ.

Remember your new position. Reckon it to be true, whether you feel like it or not. Report for duty before the things of God. And your life will bring forth fruit for God.