

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**Romans 6:1-14** *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup> We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup> For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. <sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

“Wanted, Dead or Alive!” We’ve all seen them portrayed in movies and other media, the posters with that phrase were a common feature in western towns of the late 1800’s. Large rewards were offered for the most sought-after bandits of the old west, men like Jesse James, Billy the Kid, and Butch Cassidy. Outlaws who had been involved in murder, robbery, or other heinous crimes were sought by lawmen and bounty-hunters alike. And as for the worst of these criminals, the authorities often didn’t care whether they were captured alive, or brought in lifeless and tied across a saddle. That gave rise to the phrase, “Wanted, Dead or Alive!”

Such a phrase presupposes that those are the only two choices, of course. That every human being is either on or the other. It’s one of the most basic facts of existence, because of course you can’t be both dead and alive at the same time—or can you? Interestingly, the Bible says that you can be! Scripture’s version, of course, has nothing to do with outlaws or the wild west.

But in the text I just read to you, the Apostle Paul says that the condition of being dead and alive does exist; and it exists in only one class of people: Christians. It’s a condition brought about by one of God’s most gracious gifts to sinners: that’s the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Now, if you haven’t thought much about your baptism lately—if your baptism seems to you like nothing more than a nice ceremony that took place many years ago—in fact, if you’re not thinking about your baptism every day of your life—then you’re missing out on a tremendous source of comfort and encouragement. This morning, we’ll be considering the theme:

## **Baptism Makes You Dead and Alive**

- I. A baptized person is dead to the service of sin.
- II. A baptized person is alive to the service of God.

In the chapter just before our text, Paul has just gotten done talking about the grace of God. God forgives sins freely, as a gift, for Jesus' sake. That's what grace is, and it's a wonderful thing. There's only one problem. Sooner or later, someone's going to take it one step farther and say, *"Well, if God's grace is so wonderful, then why shouldn't I go out and sin as much as I possibly can? Then the grace of God will be poured out even more abundantly!"* From our text, it looks like there were people in the congregation at Rome who were doing that very thing. They were allowing sin to govern their lives. They were using the members of their bodies, not to serve God, but to serve their own fleshly lusts.

What about you? Have you got that same sort of problem? Maybe you've never thought, "If I sin, then the grace of God can be poured out even more abundantly," but perhaps you've caught yourself thinking, "Well, I know that what I'm about to do is wrong—but God will forgive me," and then you've gone ahead and done it anyway. Have you lashed out at your spouse or your children, gossiped about your neighbor, indulged in sinful pleasures that you knew were wrong—all the while thinking in the back of your mind, "God will forgive me anyway!"? Beware of that mindset. God's grace is not a license to sin freely. If anyone goes on living that kind of life, Paul says, then they don't understand what it means to be a Christian. In fact, for a believer, it's simply impossible to go on callously living in sin. As Paul says, ***"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"***

The bad news is that sin is a dominating thing. Sin is always trying to tempt you, trying to make you guilty, and trying to make that guilt stick. The good news is that you have been baptized! And that means that you are dead to sin. Dead to the guilt of sin, dead to the domination of sin, and dead to the service of sin.

Our text says, ***"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"*** What does it mean to be "baptized into the death" of Jesus? It sounds a little strange, but it's actually a wonderful thing. Baptism connects you with the person into whose name you were baptized; everything he has or has done becomes your in baptism. And you've been baptized into the Son of God! And that means you get all the benefits from His death on the cross. As He suffered through those long, dark hours, He was paying the price for the sins of all mankind. And when He died, the payment was complete. And here's the point: your baptism connects you to His death. Through baptism, you personally have been "redeemed, restored, and forgiven." Because you were baptized, you can be absolutely certain that all of your sins also were nailed to that cross. Your guilt also was completely done away with. Your name also now stands written in God's Book of Life! After all, Paul writes elsewhere, ***"The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died."*** (2 Corinthians 5:14)

How frequently concerned Christians have confessed to me, "Pastor, I've just sinned so much. It's so hard to believe that I am really forgiven." If anyone expresses the same to you, the question you can follow-up with is: "Haven't you been baptized yet?" Because if you have, then the guilt of your sin is gone, covered by the blood of Christ. Either that's the case, or God is a liar, because God promises us right here in black and white: ***"All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death."*** You think your sins are great? Have no fear. Paul just finished stating at the end of the previous chapter, ***"Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."*** (Romans 5:20)

Baptism connects you to Jesus' death and frees you from your sin's guilt. That means your sins no longer have the power to throw you into hell. But your baptism does something else as well: it also frees you from sin's domination. In other words, sin no longer has the power to *control* your life, either! Paul writes, ***"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin."***

I'll give you a picture to illustrate what this means. Back in ancient times, a king would often defend himself by building a walled city. He'd construct a large stone wall surrounding his capital, sometimes the wall was 30-50 feet tall or even taller. In addition, at the center of the town he'd build a much higher stone tower called a citadel. The citadel acted as the king's headquarters, the place he ruled from, and also the place into which he could retreat if those outer walls were ever broken through by his enemies.

Well, imagine yourself as a walled city. The parts of your physical body are the outer walls, and your heart is the citadel. Now, by nature, sin was the evil king who ruled in the citadel of your heart from the moment of your conception. But then you were baptized into Christ Jesus, and that evil tyrant of sin was cast out! Now the Lord Jesus is sitting on the throne. He rules in the citadel of your heart. You see, that's what baptism does: it makes you dead to the service of sin.

Sadly, that doesn't mean that the tyrant sin has given up the fight. He's lost the citadel, but he can still attack the walls. He'll come after your bodily members. He'll tempt your mind to give in to lustful thoughts, to anger, and to pride. He'll tempt you to give your body to fornication and uncleanness. He'll tempt you to gratify your body with self-indulgence and sinful pleasures. He'll keep attacking those walls, and all the time, he's looking to regain the citadel of your heart!

How can we resist these attacks of sin? Again, Paul directs us to the example of Jesus. Yes, Jesus died; but He didn't stay dead. He rose from the grave on the third day to a new, triumphant life. Paul tells us that, like Christ, we baptized Christians have died to sin. But that's not all. Because baptism makes us dead *and* alive! We are alive to the service of God.

We can now live a new kind of life, too. That new life starts with the way we think about ourselves. Our text says, ***"Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."*** Think of yourselves in this way, Paul says. Now, if you look at the original Greek, you'll see that's not an encouragement, and it's not a suggestion. It's an outright command. Essentially, Paul is saying, "From now on, this is how you are to view yourself. From now on, consider it a settled fact that you are dead to sin and alive to God, having eyes that are dead to sinful sights, ears that are dead to sinful sounds, and a heart that is dead to the pleasures of this present evil world.

Paul goes on to say, ***"Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness."*** Your baptism makes you alive to the service of God. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit takes you out of the sphere of the unbelieving world and places you into the much smaller, very elite sphere of Christ. So now it's time for you to demonstrate that by the way you live. In chapter 12, Paul writes, ***"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."*** (Romans 12:1 NKJV)

Where can you get the power to live a truly Christian life? It's not by simply trying harder. It's the power of the Holy Spirit, working through the Word and the Sacraments, that has put saving faith in your heart. And that saving faith always produces fruit. How can you bring forth the fruits of that faith in your life? By serving the Lord with your bodily members. You can serve Him with your lips by sharing the Good News about Jesus with people you know and meet. You can serve Him with your hands by volunteering for the work that needs to be done in our congregation. Helping with Sunday School. Helping with cleaning. Helping with our various outreach projects. You can serve the Lord with your wallet by supporting the work of the Gospel. You married couples can serve Him by showing tender love and consideration for one another. You young adults can serve Him with your bodies by keeping yourselves chaste until marriage. You children can serve Him by respecting your parents and superiors. You men can serve Him with your wisdom by attending our voters' meetings and helping with the running of the congregation.

And these are just a few examples. There are many more that could be given. I'm sure you can think of a lot more ways in which you, personally, can ***“present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.”*** After everything that God has done for you, I think you'll agree with Paul that this is our ***“reasonable service.”***

I'm not sure if you've heard of the name Philip Melancthon before. He was probably the second-most important figure of the Lutheran Reformation, after Martin Luther himself. He wrote many of the Scripture-based documents that are part of our Lutheran confession. It's interesting that one of Melancthon's favorite Bible passages was this last verse in our text, ***“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”*** This verse, he said, is the sweetest comfort a Christian could ever have. Because, it is not a command. It is not a wish, or a hope, or even a prayer. It's a promise. Sin shall not have dominion over you!

The Lord is saying to every baptized Christian, “Have no fear. Sin shall not be your master—I've made sure of that! For I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; You are mine.” (cf. Isaiah 43:1) The Day is approaching when you will be completely delivered from sin. Until then, remember your baptism: that holy sacrament that made you dead and alive at the same time—dead to the service of sin and alive to the service of God. May Christ ever be the Master in the citadel of your heart. Amen.

***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.