

Sunday 28th June 2020

Life and Death in Christ

Readings for today:

Genesis 22:1-14 and Psalm 13

Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10:40-42

At the beginning of chapter 6 of Romans, Paul suggests that in baptism we die to Christ, as if we were baptised into his death; we also rise with him to a new life. Paul here is using the image of total immersion baptism: as the new Christian goes under the water it is like a death, and when they come out of the water again it is as if coming into a new life. Today we might say that when we give our lives to Christ, our lives change: in a way we die to our previous life; we no longer want to please ourselves, but we want to put our old life behind us. We begin to live a new life: a life that is pleasing to God. In effect, we die to sin, and rise to a new life in Christ – sharing his resurrection life.

Paul explains that we are now no longer under the law (he is referring to the Law of Moses, beginning with the Ten Commandments), but under grace. God has forgiven us our sins. Does this mean that God will forgive us whatever we do? Shall we go on sinning all the more so that's God's grace may be shown all the more? William Neil in his One Volume Bible Commentary says *'It (the Law) shows up sin for what it is, and without it we should not recognise that we are in fact sinners. But it also stimulates our desire to sin, in that forbidden things become doubly attractive.'*

But obviously becoming a Christian is not about sinning all the more to increase God's grace. As Christians, we respond to God's love, and I think William Barclay¹ sums it up best: *'We are no longer regarding God as the stern judge; we are regarding him as the lover of the souls of men (sic).'* He further suggests *'At best, the law restrains a man through fear; but love redeems him by inspiring him to be better than his best.'* It is God's love that changes us, and *our inspiration comes not from the fear of what God will do to us, but from the inspiration of what God has done for us.*

Another thing: God does not want us to give our lives to him without knowing what we are doing. In Paul's time and for many years after, a would-be Christian went through sometimes years of instruction as a catechumen before he was baptised at Easter after even more intense training during Lent. Christianity is not a once-off event and feel good for ever after religion. It is a journey to sanctification that takes our whole lives, often beginning with infant baptism, but not ending there! It is a journey of becoming what God wants us to be.

God's grace is a free gift us – not earned, and never deserved, but offered to us freely. We should grasp it as something precious, and something that will inspire to grow ever closer to Jesus.

Paul ends his chapter quite significantly: *'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'* (v23)

Bill and Jill Cairns

1 The Daily Study Bible: The letter to the Romans