

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
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Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer
I'm dead to sin and alive to God

—Romans 6:1-11

It's a common criticism of the Christian message, going all the way back to when the apostles were spreading the gospel. It's a criticism of the Christian message of forgiveness; sometimes it even turns into outright mockery of the Christian message of forgiveness. The criticism goes like this: "If you're forgiven, if God freely forgives you, then why not just sin all you want? You're forgiven anyway. What's to keep you from sinning?" How do you respond to that? What answer do you give to criticism like that?

It's a common challenge of living and working with fellow Christians. What do I say to motivate them to do not what I want them to do, but what God wants them to be doing? This is an issue facing moms and dads as they interact with their children every single day. I mean, first there's teaching children what to do and how to behave. "Keep your hands and feet to yourself. Don't hit or bite. Share. Don't take what is not yours. Use your mouth to say what is good and shows love." As they grow up, the teaching continues. "Get your work done. Don't be lazy. Build people up with your words in ways that benefit them, don't just cruelly tear people down. Stay away from evil, stick to the good." All that teaching by itself takes time and energy over the long haul. But then there's the whole added dimension of motivating them to do what you are teaching them to do. I mean, the child learns not to steal, but how do you motivate him or her to share? The young person learns not to drag other people down with words, but how do you motivate him or her to speak up when someone else needs to hear truth and love? It becomes not a question of knowledge, but a matter of motivation. How do you properly motivate your children, your students, the people under your supervision and care?

The same applies in an even more personal way to every one of us. What about when my own Christian life is slumping? I'm returning to the same bad habits. I don't care about other people like I should. I'm irritable and impatient. Some days my prayer life seems non-existent. Sometimes I'm not even curious about what the Word of God has to say. I know none of that is right. But I'm forgiven anyway, aren't I? Am I? In the end, doesn't that make God look better when he has more of me to forgive?

Ah, yes. The slumping Christian. The Christian eager to motivate others. The Christian facing the world's criticism. Every one of those Christians—and maybe, just maybe, one, two, or all three of them describe you—every one of them is facing a temptation. You know what that temptation is? The temptation to push aside the true saving grace of God in Christ and replace it with something else that is not the true saving grace of God in Christ. So how do you motivate yourself to live as a Christian? How do you motivate the people in your life to live as Christians? How do you answer the world's criticism of the Christian message of forgiveness?

You take your eyes, ears, and heart to Romans chapter 6, that's what you do. *We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? We died to sin. We have nothing more to do with it. We have no relationship with it. No connection to it. We have no obligation to it whatsoever. That is what the apostle Paul tells us as Christians. Then he asks us a question that asks us whether we have completely forgotten a most important part of our Christian existence. Or don't you know [are you ignorant] that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* Baptized into Christ, we were baptized into this death.

The death of Christ means everything to us. This letter, this letter of Paul to the Christians in Rome, teaches us a ton about the death of Christ.

Christ's death was a redemption. A price was paid to set others free. Christ paid a price to set others free from sin and death. Christ paid a price to give other people righteousness and life.

Christ's death was a demonstration of God's justice. God's just punishing of people's sins. God's just forgiving of people's sins because a death penalty was sentenced on Christ and paid by Christ.

Christ's death was a substitution. He died for our sins. He was handed over to death. Not because he had done anything wrong. He had no sin in him. No, he was handed over to death because we sinned. When

Christ was raised from the dead three days later, God was announcing to all of us that he forgives us. Christ's death was a substitution death that counted for us.

Christ's death was a demonstration of God's love. You want to know how greatly God loves us? Ungodly sinners that we were, powerless to do anything about our condition, Christ died for us. He did not die for righteous or good people. Christ died for sinners like us. That is God's love.

Christ's death is our justification. His blood, shed on the cross, justifies us. It does not justify what we have done wrong; it justifies us from what we have done wrong. His blood brings us forgiveness right now. It also saves us from God's wrath to come. When God comes to punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their sins, the blood of Christ will be pleading for all of us who have believed in Christ, and we will be saved from the wrath of God.

Christ's death was a reconciliation. There was a huge separation between us and God. The problem was not God. Nor was the problem God's commandments. We were the problem. We were the enemy. We were God's enemies, and God was angry with us because in our sinful minds we were hostile to him. But Christ with his death changed all that by establishing a new relationship for us with God based on forgiveness and justification.

Christ's death was an act of obedience. After living an obedient life to God and to God's commandments, Christ obeyed God's will to save us and gave his life. His entire obedience, including his death, brings justification, forgiveness, and righteousness as a gift to us all.

Christ's death was once and for all. He dealt with sin just one time. All the sin of everyone else was dumped on him, and removed it all in one day on the cross. He said it was finished, and that was that. It looked like death had a hold on him, as his dead body was laid to rest and a stone was sealed over his grave. But it was not to be. Death had no mastery over him. God the Father's majesty and glory raised Christ from the dead. Christ lives, and he is never ever going to die for sin again. He has nothing more to do with my sin or your sin or anybody else's sin. He is freed from it all.

Christ's death means everything to us. This is what we were baptized into! Notice, *we were baptized*, the Bible says. We were passive recipients. When it comes to baptism, we weren't doing something for ourselves, and we weren't doing anything for God. When we were baptized, God was doing awesome for us. At our one baptism, God connected us forever with Christ and his death and his resurrection. Through our baptism, all that Christ's death accomplished for us became our own. That simple act of applying water to us in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit poured all these blessings into our life—redemption, righteousness, forgiveness, salvation, reconciliation with God, the whole lot!

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. Now let's talk Christian living. For dying to sin and living a Christian life Paul takes us back to baptism. The motivation and the strength for living the Christian life come from our baptism. Understand that if you turn baptism into a person's act of devotion to God, into a person's commitment of choice to follow Jesus, the basis for your Christian life suddenly becomes your devotion, your commitment, and your choice. It really becomes the flimsy foundation of you instead of the firm foundation of Christ. The truth is, our baptism is a gift of God that connected us to Christ. *The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.*

Christ is permanently done with sin. As a person baptized into Christ, so are you. So am I. *Count yourselves this way*, God says. The key to living the Christian life is learning to say: I'm dead to sin, I'm alive to God, I'm baptized into Christ. It's not a Jedi mind trick I use on myself or my kids or you or anybody else. It's the mindset that our God has taught us to have: I'm dead to sin, I'm alive to God, I'm baptized into Christ.

So what do I do when my Christian life is slumping? When the old man in me, that inborn old self dominated by sin and death, seems to be shoving his way back into my life with all of his same old bad habits and some new bad habits to boot? What do you do when that is happening to you? Well, you take a good look at the cross. You remind yourself that Christ is not there anymore, thank God. And you remind yourself that the old man, your old self, still is hanging on the cross, thank God. *We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no*

longer be slaves to sin. Don't let your old self down from the cross. Keep it pinned up there where it belongs. It deserves to be dead, and you've got a newness of life to walk in now. I'm dead to sin. I'm alive to God. I'm baptized into Christ.

So how do you properly motivate your children, your students, your fellow Christians to do what God wants them to be doing? You tell them about Christ. You tell them about Christ's death. You live and breathe the message of God's love and forgiveness in Christ, and you gently, patiently, and consistently spread that life and breath into the lives of your children, your students, and your fellow Christians. You teach them to say, just like you have learned to say, "I'm dead to sin, I'm alive to God, I'm baptized into Christ."

Finally, there's that common criticism of your God's forgiveness: "If you're forgiven by God anyway, why not sin all you want? What's to keep you from sinning?" While in your mind you now know what an ignorant question that is, you gently and respectfully speak the truth in love, and you say, "Sin? Why would I want to sin? I'm dead to sin, I'm alive to God. I am baptized into Christ." Amen.