

## Romans 6:3-10 From death to resurrection life

### Introduction

Imagine you are planning a Golden (or one of the other notable ‘specials’) Wedding Anniversary, which a few people in the church over the years have been able to do. Would you feel the need to repeat all the activities that preceded the wedding all those years earlier? I have in mind things like marriage preparation classes or maybe the collection of items to ensure the marital home would at least have basic furnishings; and a selection of other activities routinely undertaken by many couples. ‘Of course not’ is the obvious reply we would give –circumstances have changed! Whereas fifty years earlier parents and grandparents may have joined the joyful celebrations, but at a golden wedding celebration, by contrast, there are often both children and grandchildren present two different generations. At one level it is salutary that a mere handful of people who attended the original wedding celebration will be alive to mark this new milestone, yet we acknowledge human mortality and recognise the inevitability of passing on and a younger generation rising up in turn to assume to places of those who have gone before them. It is rightly a cause for celebration for the couple and their friends and families because although more couples achieve this milestone it is still a minority of those who declared their commitment to one another in marriage who attain this goal. A comfortable majority attain 15-20 years of marriage, but it dips to between 30 and 40% of couples who attain 25 years of marriage. Maybe half that total for golden weddings and a similar drop again for diamond wedding celebrations, almost exclusively caused by the death of spouses for couples married for more than forty years. However, to answer my original question –of course not! The events of that notable past occasion are a landmark to be acknowledged and the promises made a guide to future conduct –or at least they should be! Paul the apostle here looks back at a different landmark in the lives of these Christians he has never met, but takes for granted that he can assume they share in this common Christian heritage. Let’s note what he has to say and how it fits in to the advice he gives to us on Christian living.

### 1. Looking Back (Romans 6:3-4)

**The significant step of believers’ baptism** <sup>3</sup>*Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?* <sup>4</sup>*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.* Can you remember your baptism service? Obviously if it was an infant baptism the response will be ‘no’ on age grounds. However, if a believers’ baptism then the vast majority of us will have some degree of recollection of the promises made and significance of the day. Scholars of the Early Church era are now almost universally in agreement that the first Christians experienced believers’ baptism, therefore, this is the ceremony Paul is alluding to here in Romans 6:3-4. It is noteworthy that despite never having visited Rome or met the majority of this congregation that he feels able to assume with confidence that he knows the forms of worship carried out in that congregation, here with reference to baptism. What does Paul understand with respect to the significance of this rite? He like other believers of that generation would have turned back to the teaching and life of Jesus, the head of the church. (a)**What it meant** It was first of all: **A personal choice inspired by the example of Jesus** Matthew 3:13-17: *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. <sup>14</sup>But John tried to deter Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptised by You, and do You come to me?’ <sup>15</sup>Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.’ Then John consented. <sup>16</sup>As soon as Jesus was baptised, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting*

on Him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' It was also **An act of obedience to the command of Jesus** Matthew 28:19-20: <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. **It was also a public witness by each new disciple of Jesus** Romans 10:9-10: *if you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.* <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Baptism was and is both an individual choice, but also a collective celebration of the goodness and grace of God by a local community of faith. In each subsequent generation there is a profound significance both for the individual Christian together with the wider congregation. (b) **What it means For the Church** A sign of fellowship expressed in promises shared and declarations of mutual commitment between members, especially with respect to newly baptised believers. Historically and biblically baptism was the means of entry into the membership of the local church. The form of words used varies from church to church but it is a covenant between the respective parties to support and encourage one another along the journey of faith. Each time a new person takes this step is an opportunity for each of us who have been on the Christian pathway a little or a lot longer to renew afresh our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are engaged in serving Christ as a covenanted community not as a random collection of individuals. The rediscovery of this truth in more recent decades is welcome in the face of an increasingly individualistic secular society. However, it is also very important (c) **What it means for the Individual Christian** It is, says Paul, **A symbol of consecration** (Romans 6:1-14). The explicit reference back to baptism is mentioned early on in this passage, but this whole section or possibly the whole of Romans 6 is grounded in the significance of the faith we professed in the waters of baptism. It is a visible symbol of our being united with Christ, of a determination to live a life pleasing to Him. It is a statement that the past chapter of our lives has been closed and a new one has begun. For many Christians it is viewed as a public declaration that instead of living for self it is an acknowledgement that Jesus has now become Lord of our lives. Paul's language is vivid and clear: ... *don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?* (Romans 6:3). The symbolism of going completely under the water is a marker of acknowledging an ending and a new beginning in the Christian pathway. In all of our lives as Christians there are pivotal moments when we either advance or regress in our faith. The moment of our baptism should be one of the former moments. It is a closing of the past, consciously undertaken, but equally it is an act of faith expressing our confidence in God to take care of our future. The God who raised Jesus from the dead can be trusted with my future. In Paul's words in Romans 6:4 it states: *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.* The resurrection of Jesus is not simply an event to rejoice in, though we should do so, rather it is a demonstration of the power of God that ought to inspire and encourage us to live in a God-honouring way. The Holy Spirit who enabled Jesus to accomplish the work to which the Father had called Him (Hebrews 9:14) can with the same divine resources equip and empower each of us in our ministry callings today. There are specific issues or circumstances that we can find discouraging or daunting in life; on other occasions we can falter and fail to live for God as we should. We can see obstacles in our pathway that appear insurmountable, but we serve the God of resurrection, that enables the Friday of Easter week to be 'Good' nor 'Bad' Friday. The devil may have done his worst, but God is on the throne. The evil one does his best to discourage and undermine our attempted steps of faith, but the God who loved us so much He gave Jesus for us will always be victorious. As Paul puts it later in Romans 8:31-32: *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* <sup>32</sup> He who did

*not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?* The idea that a person who professes faith in Christ can live without regard for how God would desire us to live is ridiculous, says Paul! We have an extraordinary holy calling, grounded in what Jesus did for us on the cross, with which we are identified through His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. We have this reference point looking back to constantly give us our bearings, but it is for a reason in order to go forward into the future with God on the pathway He has chosen for us, both individually and as a congregation.

## 2. **Looking Forward** (Romans 6:5-10)

In the light of the death and resurrection of our substitute and saviour who reconciled us to God, how will we respond to such an amazingly generous and gracious God? In Romans 6:5-10 the apostle gives us both a challenge and an encouragement. He provides a challenge to keep us from complacency and from failing to honour God as we should; on the other hand Paul also brings a word of encouragement because so many of us can be very conscious of our failures to honour God in our witness by word and deed. Our Lord and Saviour understands what we are going through at times. The words of the author of Hebrews 4:14-16 fit perfectly with this theme. *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet He did not sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

### (a) **Our constant challenge** (Romans 6:5-7)

<sup>5</sup> *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.* <sup>6</sup> *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – <sup>7</sup> because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.* By temperament many of us are acutely conscious of our imperfections, others less so, more inclined to note that 'the glass is half-full'! However the reality is that all of us are a work in progress. God has much work to do in transforming us to look like Jesus. In Romans 7 the apostle will go into detail about our struggles and the battles against sin. Here in Romans 6:6 Paul states three closely related clauses. Something happens in order that something else might happen so that a third thing may take place. The last of these three points indicates the outcome God envisages for us – our freedom from control by sinful desires and habits. This is the outcome on which he wants his readers and hearers to focus. The effort needed to live a godly life will be worth it because we can gain the mastery over our cravings and sinful desires and achieve a level of self-discipline that is both for our good and for the glory of God. What does Paul have in mind here in terms of the challenges that he expects these Roman Christians to face? He writes concerning *the body ruled by sin...* (v6); this vocabulary may not naturally be ours but it is evident that Paul is thinking of the necessity of control over our physical bodies. What kind of examples might he have given if he had been here in person and we could have asked him some questions?

(i) **Food and drink** All of us need to eat and drink each day for our good. Someone might theoretically decide to drink only coca-cola or whiskey and eat only pizza and sweets. This would not be a healthy and balanced diet! It is a constant challenge to know what is a balanced diet, especially with the number of additives included in the processed food we buy in the shops. Yet we do our best to eat healthily and with an appropriate balance of food items. We also need to eat an appropriate quantity of food. Eating too little or over indulgence is bad for our health, although it may take years before the consequences of over-eating or drinking become apparent. Why is it that a proportion of younger adults think that only by drinking to extremes can they have 'a good time' on a night out? The growing health

problems in our nation linked to diet suggest that the balance is not right for a proportion of the population.

(ii) Physical exercise Not everyone naturally likes physical exercise! Some people spend a lot of time in their work place in physical exertions so it is not so much of an issue for them, but for the majority of us living more sedentary lives at work and elsewhere require to walk or do some other simple exercises to keep reasonably fit.

(iii) Sleep Our bodies need a reasonable number of hours to regain health and strength for a new day. Many of us in demanding jobs in the western world can spend too much time ‘burning the midnight oil’ and being exhausted during the following day. It is a vicious cycle because when we are overtired we work more slowly and end up getting less effective work done. This is a hard one to rectify especially if a person has little control over their work hours. However, in more recent years reports have emerged of concerns of growing numbers of individuals sitting up well into the night using social media and then struggling to get up for school or work the next day. At the other end of the scale a proportion of the population maybe suffering from a lack of a sense of purpose to their lives spends too much time lying in bed when they could be more usefully engaged.

(iv) Behaviour Our glands and hormones are natural parts of our body that we need to function effectively as human beings. Yet do we have them under control? One flavour of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23 is *self-control*. The mastery of our emotions at times is a challenge. Under pressure some of us by temperament can find it too easy to have a negative emotional reaction; others by contrast may tolerate inappropriate behaviour; getting the balance of humility and meekness, together with a healthy sense of self-respect and self-worth can be hard. God has created us as sexual beings, male and female. In a society where increasingly all boundaries of right and wrong conduct in this area is being challenged, it is increasingly difficult for the younger people in our society to maintain the higher standards God desires in moral purity. The problem of pornography, especially internet-based sites accessed at home, is an issue to address for an alarmingly high number of people, especially men. Whatever the issue, if we find ourselves heading down the pathway of addiction to something, we need to get the help we need and the accountability structures in place to ensure we can be victorious over it. Natural desires for love and friendship, marriage and indeed the procreation of children are gifts from God, for example, yet the same desires can be corrupted into lust, infidelity and other vices.

Is it possible to be self-disciplined in all these areas of my life Paul? Yes, he says, – <sup>7</sup>*because anyone who has died has been set free from sin* (Romans 6:7). Set free from the controlling power of sin that is through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit we can be in control and responsible for the choices we make. In a Roman world where many of the ‘haves’ lived life to excess, at the expense often of the wellbeing of the ‘have-nots’, Paul was challenging these Christians in Italy to model a life of appropriate self-discipline, because they through God’s grace have the resources to make the right choices in line with God’s purposes for their life. Do you need that encouragement today? Do you need someone on the prayer team to pray with you over an issue you need to gain control over? One day in heaven we will be perfect, but in the meantime there will always be issues we struggle with, however, we need never despair because we can be victorious in and over our trials, even if it requires years to pass before we can overcome them.

**(b) Our constant encouragement (Romans 6:8-10)**

<sup>8</sup>*Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.* <sup>9</sup>*For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him.* <sup>10</sup>*The*

death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God. Alongside addressing the wide range of issues hinted at in the previous verses the apostle also wants to encourage us here. He is not speaking about our physical resurrection after this life here; he believes that with a passion and goes into some detail in his teaching in other letters. However, in this context Paul is speaking about something experienced in this life on earth. Philippians 3: 10-12 touches on this subject. <sup>10</sup>*I want to know Christ – yes, **to know the power of His resurrection** and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death,* <sup>11</sup>*and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.* <sup>12</sup>*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* In other words he is wanting to experience more of the power of God in order to become more like Jesus; so that by word and deed he might more effectively communicate the Gospel to people who need to hear and receive it for themselves. In Romans 1:16-17 Paul wrote: *For I am not ashamed of **the gospel**, because **it is the power of God** that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.* <sup>17</sup>*For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’* Sometimes as Evangelical Christians we lose our confidence in the Gospel and struggle to describe it in these terms. The reasons for it are often very simple. Friends and family members for whom we have prayed for years, yet they are no closer to committing their life to the Lord than a year ago or ten or twenty or however many years it has been. We engage in forms of outreach and see little if any fruit from our labours and can be tempted to give up. Paul comes to us and says be encouraged not by deluding yourself with ‘positive thinking’ but by regaining your confidence in the good news of the Gospel of God. If we grasp this point effectively it will strengthen our prayer life; it will also increase our sense of expectancy of God using us to speak an appropriate word to someone who needs to hear about Jesus. God does not want us to go around with long faces all the time muttering ‘things are bad’ affirming one another with ‘aye but they could be even worse’! There are bad things in the world and even the best of us mess up at times. But God wants us to lead lives equipped by His resurrection power, enabled by the resources of the Holy Spirit to be the best that we can be. Do you need to seek the spiritual assistance He offers to strengthen you to be the person God has called you to be?

Paul here has asked these Christians living in Rome to look back to the occasion of their baptisms and to the promises they had made, together with the sense of expectancy they had of God’s resources to equip them to serve Him in the future. Yet he doesn’t wish them to stay there with a past testimony; instead he invites them to look forward to the future God has planned out for them. He is frank and clear that there are constant challenges in each area of our lives and appropriate self-discipline is required to be successful. However, he wishes to highlight encouragements for us that we don’t do it in our strength alone. The power He used to raise Jesus from the dead is available to each of us in appropriate measure to accomplish all that God has entrusted to us to do. Therefore, whether at a personal or collective level as a congregation do we need to step out in faith in some venture that we had doubted due to our loss of confidence in the Gospel? May God enable each of us to have a fresh testimony of what the Lord has done for, in and through us in coming days, for Jesus’ sake, Amen.