

Raised with Christ: Newness of Life
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The theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is the righteousness of God. Human nature errs in two opposite directions: **un**righteousness (listed in 1:18ff) and **self**-righteousness (Romans 2:1ff). "The Parable of the Prodigal Son" describes not just the son who sinned prodigiously (enormously) but also describes the elder son who was full of contempt for his lost brother. Jesus said about both the Gentiles and the hypocrites, "*Don't be like them!*" (see Matthew 6:5-8). Don't be "unrighteous" (breaking the Law) and don't be "self-righteous" (trying to save yourself by following the Law). Instead, Romans 3:21-26 stresses the love, acceptance and forgiveness of God through His truly righteous son, Jesus. We have all sinned. We are all guilty. We cannot save ourselves. We are only saved because Jesus died for our sins and rose again. That means His crucifixion was not in vain. His resurrection means we have forgiveness, meaning and purpose in this life, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the companionship of His church and eternal life.

There are appropriate ways to respond when someone gives us a gift. Paul encourages us not to trifle with God's grace but to apply it to our lives. The old has gone, the new has come. Live in that way—with the newness of life in Christ. Do not give into sin. We don't have to sin. We can let the life of Jesus live in us.

APPLICATION: Where are you on the unrighteous / self-righteous spectrum? What is your area of struggle in your walk with the Lord? How are you finding grace to overcome it? Baptism gives us a picture of burying the old life and being raised to newness of life. Do you believe Jesus has broken the power of sin in your life? How are you helping others find victory in Jesus, too?

Romans 6:1-14

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹

We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

(Repeat the drawing used last week: Incarnation, Crucifixion, Burial, Resurrection, Witness and Return. Make the central point: The message of Jesus isn't about what He taught – it was about who He is. Our message is Jesus Himself. We have no other message than the person of Jesus.

What IS Jesus like?

Magnetic. He drew people from all walks of life. People left their jobs to follow Him. He was attractive – don't know what He looked like, but people wanted to follow Him. He had to be fun to be around. We've turned Him into some weird, mystical, esoteric goof-ball with blue eyes, blonde hair and an English accent.

Intelligent. Brilliant. He had a sharp mind and knew just what to say at the right time to the right person. I heard someone say that maybe we've missed it believing that Jesus was a carpenter during those "silent years" after He confounded the teachers in the Temple. The thought is that maybe He was in rabbinic school in Jerusalem and that He was a Pharisee. That would explain why He was continually admonishing the Pharisees – He was one of them. He learned from their strengths and knew their limitations.

The Prince of **Peace**. When surrounded by the multitudes with nothing to eat, the disciples were perplexed. Not Jesus. He knew Who He was and that He had incredible resources. After the Feeding of the 5,000, the disciples got into a boat and were in the Sea of Galilee when a great storm came up. They stressed. Not Jesus. He was calm. He rebuked the wind by saying, "Peace!" He told people repeatedly: "Peace." When the disciples didn't get it, He didn't get angry with them. When they abandoned Him at the cross, He didn't sulk or hold it against them. He forgave them.

A man of **purpose**. He knew who He was and what He was supposed to do. He was a man on a mission. He summed up His mission in his words about the Jewish tax collector, Zacchaeus, who was a Jew living like a Gentile helping the Romans pay for their occupation of Israel: *And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation*

has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Luke 19:9-10

He **prayed**. It was his habit to go to worship. He memorized scripture. He often slipped away to pray. He prayed for clarity. He prayed when He selected His disciples. He prayed after great victories. He let Peter, James and John see Him pray on the mountain when He was transfigured. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and knew the end was near. He prayed while He was on the cross for His enemies who were crucified Him.

He loved people who were sinners. He loved the forgotten, neglected, lost sheep of Israel and He loved the Gentiles. He loved His enemies – he loved the thief on the cross. He loved the rich young ruler who chose not to follow Him. He loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus. He loved His disciples (John, in particular 😊). He says Jesus loved him 5x – of course, only in John's gospel). *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love."* He told us to love one another. He told us to love our enemies. He told us if we love Him, we will keep His commandments. God is love. Jesus is love. The Holy Spirit is love. Perfect love casts out fear. Maybe that's how Jesus cast demons out – with love.

What if, for one day, Jesus became you? For 24 hours, Jesus woke up in your bed, put on your clothes, lives in your house and lives your day? Your family is the same. If single, He is single. If married, He is married. If you have kids, He has kids. Your neighbors are His neighbors. Your work is His work. You have the same schedule. Your boss is His boss. Your employees are His employees. Your health is His health. Nothing in your life is different, other than He is living in you. What would be different in your life?

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Cor 5:16-21

Paul is concerned that Christians who have **received** grace fail to **grow** in grace. God loves and accepts us just as we are. God's love is different than the love we usually have for others. We love others based on performance – our love

increases with performance and decreases with mistakes. Not so with God's love. However, the Lord doesn't want us to stay where we are.

Likewise, Jesus is within us. We have a great power, too, given by the Holy Spirit. How we respond to God's grace is important. We can make a difference. Being a Christian is far more than going to heaven. It is about letting Jesus have more control of our lives.

Fiorello LaGuardia was the legendary mayor of NYC during the worst days of the Great Depression and all of WW2. He was called "The Little Flower" by adoring New Yorkers bc he was only 5'2." He always wore a carnation on his lapel. He was a colorful character who would ride the NYC fire trucks, raid speakeasies with the NYPD, take entire orphanages to NYY games. Whenever the NY papers were on strike, he'd go on the radio and read Sunday funnies to the kids. One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, he turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. He dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Soon, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told him that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick and her 2 grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a bad neighborhood, Your Honor. She's got to be punished to teach others around here a lesson." LaGuardia turned to the woman and said, "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions - \$10 or 30 days in jail." As he pronounced the sentence. He was already reaching into his pocket and tossed it into his famous sombrero saying, "Here is the \$10 fine, which I now pay; and furthermore, I'm going to fine everyone in this courtroom 50 cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so her grandchildren can eat. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day, the NYC newspapers reported the \$47.50 was turned over to the bewildered old lady, including 50 cents paid by the red-faced grocery store owner, while some 70 petty criminals, people with traffic violations & NYC policeman, each of whom had just paid 50 cents for the privilege of doing so, gave the mayor a standing ovation." What an extraordinary moment of grace for all present in that courtroom. God's grace operates at a profound level in the life of a loving person.

What am I asking you to do? Love Jesus. Follow Jesus. Help Others Follow Jesus. He is the key to life, here and now and eternally. There is a key to following Him – but the benefits far outweigh the costs.

How do I do this? Give your life to Him today. Surrender. Don't worry about perfection. Join us. We are not perfect. Uphold your commitment to Jesus by your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.