

Romans 6: Dead to sin, alive to God

In Chapter 5, Paul began to describe the tremendous changes introduced by Jesus when he died on the cross and rose again from the dead – the breakthrough in history that came when the ‘second Adam’ came to undo, by means of his death and resurrection, what the first Adam did to us in the Garden of Eden. In Chapters 6 and 7 Paul interrupts his argument to deal with two very practical questions: in Chapter 6, he deals with the question, ‘What about the sins of believers?’ In Chapter 7, he takes up the question, ‘What about the Ten Commandments and their demands upon us?’ Then, in Chapter 8, Paul picks up his argument again and continues to describe the privileges that come as a result of believing in Jesus...

Dead to sin, alive in Christ (Romans 6 v 1 to 14)

The whole truth of this chapter is set out in verses 1 and 2, and particularly the key phrase: we “died to sin”. The rest of the chapter is simply an explanation of what Paul means by that phrase. Notice that it is not ‘we will die to sin’ or ‘we should die to sin’ or even ‘we are in the process of dying to sin’ – this is the Greek aorist tense: ‘we died (once and for all) to sin’...

- What is the answer to Paul’s question in verse 1? What reasons does Paul give? Why are Christians not to continue in sin (v 2)? What happens when we are baptized into Christ (v 3 to 7)?
- Trick question: when did we die to sin? (There are two ‘correct’ answers...)
- Verses 11 to 13 contain four commands – two negative and two positive. What are they, and what is their significance, given that this is the very first time in Romans that Paul actually asks his readers to do something? How should we present the members of our bodies (v 13)? Why?
- Why will sin no longer have dominion over us (v 14)? How can we live a life of victory over sin?

“All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus” (v 3) – the Greek word for ‘baptize’ means ‘immerse’ or ‘overwhelm’. The Bible uses this idea in several ways: when a person is baptized in water, they are immersed or covered with water; when they are baptized with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3 v 11; Acts 1 v 5), they are immersed or covered with the Spirit. Here, Paul refers to being ‘immersed’ or ‘covered over’ in Jesus.

“We were buried... with him... as Christ was raised from the dead... we too might walk in newness of life” (v 4) – Paul builds on the idea of going under water as a picture of being buried, and coming up from the water as a picture of rising from the dead. Paul’s point is clear: something dramatic and life changing has happened in the life of the believer. You cannot die and rise again without it changing your life. The believer experiences a real – albeit spiritual – death and resurrection with Jesus Christ. “United with him” (v 5) – this union is both in Jesus’ death and in his resurrection. Paul expressed a similar idea for his own life in Philippians 3 v 10, 11. In place of the “old self” (v 6), God gives the believer a ‘new self’ (Ephesians 4 v 14; Colossians 3 v 10) – a self that is instinctively obedient and pleasing to God.

“Consider yourselves dead to sin” (v 11) – the Greek word translated ‘consider’ is λογίζεσθε (*logizesthe*), which is a financial accounting term, and can mean ‘reckon’ or ‘count as’ or ‘take account of’. Paul tells us to ‘count ourselves as’ dead to sin. God does not call us to ‘crucify’ the old self, but instead to count ourselves as already dead because of our identification with Jesus’ death on the cross. See Galatians 2 v 20.

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body” (v 12) – this can only be said to the Christian believer, to the one whose ‘old self’ has been crucified with Christ, and who has been given ‘newness of life’ in Christ. Only the person set free from sin can be told, “Let not sin reign.” In Jesus, we are truly set free and can obey the inclinations of the new self – which wants to please God and honour him.

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“Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness” v 13) – this is the first key to walking in the freedom Jesus won for us. Your members are the parts of your body – ears, lips, eyes, hands, mind, and so forth. The idea is very practical: ‘You have eyes. Do not put them in the service of sin. You have ears. Do not put them in the service of sin...’ “But present yourselves to God” – this is the second key to walking in the freedom Jesus won for us. We present ourselves to God as being alive from the dead.

“Since you are not under law but under grace” – this is the path, the means, by which we can live in this freedom. It will never happen in a legalistic, performance oriented Christian life. It will only happen as we live under grace. Law clearly defines God’s standards, and shows us where we fall short of them. But the law cannot give the freedom from sin that grace provides. Remember that ‘grace reigns through righteousness’ (Romans 5 v 21). Grace, not law, provides the freedom and the power to live victoriously over sin.

Paul has now answered his question in verse 1: “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” Why don’t we just continue in habitual sin? Because when we are saved, when our sins are forgiven, and God’s grace is extended to us, we are radically changed. The old self is dead: the new self lives. Once we are dead to sin, it is unthinkable to continue our former practice of sin. Once the caterpillar has become a butterfly, that butterfly has no business crawling around on trees and leaves, behaving like a caterpillar!

Slaves to righteousness (Romans 6 v 15 to 23)

In verse 15 Paul poses the second question: “Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Paul’s answer is three-fold: “By no means!” First, sin makes you a slave (v 16 to 19); second, sin will make you ashamed (v 20, 21); and finally, sin results in death (v 21, 23)...

- What two masters are contrasted? What kinds of service do they demand, and with what results? Whose slave are you? What is necessary to become free from sin (v 17, 18)?
- What is the result of presenting our members as “slaves of righteousness” (v 19)?
- What three steps are described, which eventually lead to eternal life (v 22)?
- What is the just payment for our sin? But what does God give us in Christ (v 23)? What is the difference between wages and a gift?

“Set free from sin” (v 18) – this means that we never *have* to sin again. Though sin is inevitable until our bodies are resurrected in glory, God did not design a system by which we *must* sin. Sinless perfection in this life is an illusion. 1 John 1 v 8 makes this clear: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Yet we know that in the power of Jesus we can resist the *next* temptation – and that is what Jesus wants us to be concerned with...

Answering his question from v 15, Paul makes it very clear: as believers, we have a change of ownership. The Christ-follower must fight against even occasional sin, because we need to work for and work under our new master: it is not appropriate for us to work for our old master. “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v 23) – when we work for sin, our wages are death. When we serve God we get no pay, but he freely gives us the best gift imaginable – eternal life in Jesus!

Prayer – Lord, thank you again for these wonderful, awe-inspiring truths. Thank you that as Jesus was raised from death by your power and glory, we can walk in newness of life. Thank you that sin will no longer have dominion over us, since we are not under law but under grace. Thank you that now that we have been set free from sin and have become your slaves, the fruit we bear leads to sanctification and eternal life. We give you humble thanks for these wonderful truths, in Jesus’ name, Amen.