

Woodland Baptist Church
February 28, 2018
Romans 6:1-23, “Dead to Sin”

INTRODUCTION

Paul has shown how God’s gracious act in Christ, when appropriated by faith, puts people into a new relationship with God and assures them that they will be saved from wrath in the last day. **What has this to do with life in this present age? Anything?** Everything, Paul asserts in Rom. 6. Christ’s death “on our behalf” (cf. 5:6–8) frees us not only from the penalty of sin but from the power of sin also. Justification—acquittal from the guilt of sin—and sanctification—deliverance from “sinning”—must never be confused, but neither can they be separated.¹

Subduing the power of sin is the topic of Rom. 6. The chapter is thus permeated with the imagery of slavery, mastery, and freedom: those crucified with Christ should no longer “serve” sin (v. 6), should not let sin “rule” them because they have been “set free” from sin and been “enslaved” to God, or to righteousness (vv. 17–22): sin no longer “rules over” the believer (v. 14a).

The ultimate basis for Paul’s appeal in this chapter is not what happened when we were baptized, but what happened when Christ died and rose again. That death of his to sin is also our death to sin (vv. 2, 6, 9–10); and that resurrection of his to new life, in which we will “participate” in the future (vv. 5b and 8b), is even now working to enable us to “walk in newness of life” (vv. 4b, 11).

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

“What, then, shall we say?” takes us back to the lively question-and-answer style that Paul has employed earlier in the letter (cf. 3:1–9, 27–31; 4:1–12). Rather than being part of a longer question (as in 4:1), “What, then, shall we say?” here stands independently, introducing a second question: “Should we remain in sin in order that grace might increase?” This question is raised in response to Paul’s assertion in 5:20b that “where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more.”²

If the law does not have the authority to quell sin, how can grace do it? Will not the “reign of grace” simply encourage sinning without the law to curb it? In response, essentially, Paul argues that the law could never curb sinning; and the reign of grace, far from encouraging sin, is the only means by which sin can truly be defeated.

2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

¹ Moo, D. J. (1996). *The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 350). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

² *Ibid*

What does this death to sin mean? It means a separation from the “rule” or “realm” of sin, which is a power that rules over the person outside of Christ. **When did this death take place?** In conjunction with the believer’s conversion/baptism. **What does it mean to live in sin?** Living in sin” is best taken as describing a “lifestyle” of sin—a habitual practice of sin, such that one’s life could be said to be characterized by that sin rather than by the righteousness God requires. Such habitual sin, “remaining in sin” (v. 1), “living in sin” (v. 2), is not possible, as a constant situation, for the one who has truly experienced the transfer out from under the domain, or tyranny, of sin. Therefore, while “living in sin” is incompatible with Christian existence and impossible for the Christian as a constant condition, it remains a real threat. It is this threat that Paul warns us about in v. 2.³

3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

By the date of Romans, “baptize” had become almost a technical expression for the rite of Christian initiation by water, and this is surely the meaning the Roman Christians would have given the word. **But why does Paul qualify baptism with the phrase “into Christ Jesus?”** We are baptized into “union with Christ.” The closest parallel to the language here is Gal. 3:27, which strongly suggests a spatial sense: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.” Second, being “buried with Christ in baptism” (v. 4a) is a conclusion (“therefore”) drawn from v. 3.

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.

This clause raises three interrelated and controversial issues: **why has Paul introduced the image of burial, what is the meaning of the Christian’s being “with” Christ, and how does baptism mediate this being with Christ?**

“Burial with Christ” is a description of the participation of the believer in Christ’s own burial, a participation that is mediated by baptism.

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.

With most interpreters, then, I take it that Paul is referring to the physical resurrection of believers “with Christ” (cf. 2 Cor. 4:14)—to that time when God will transform our earthly bodies, “making them conformed to the body of his [Christ’s] glory.” Perhaps, then, as our union with Christ’s death cannot be fixed to any one moment, so we should view our union with Christ’s resurrection as similarly atemporal. But, while the spiritual effects of resurrection are felt

³ Moo, D. J. (1996). *The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 350). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

now, we must not commit the mistake of some in the early church (cf. 2 Tim. 2:18) and spiritualize the resurrection. We await a real, physical resurrection, and this physicality destroys the parallel at this point with our “dying with Christ.” The futurity of our resurrection reminds us that complete victory over sin will be won only in that day; until then, we live under the imperative of making the life of Jesus manifest in the way we live (cf. 2 Cor. 4:10).

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.

Paul is summarizing: “We know this: that our old man was crucified with Christ, so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, with the purpose that we should no longer serve sin.” Just as Christ’s crucifixion meant his release from the realm of sin (6:10), the law (Gal. 4:4) and death (v. 9; Phil. 2:7–8), so our crucifixion with Christ means our release from the realm of sin (this verse), the law (6:14; 7:4), and death (8:1–11). Behind the contrast between “old man” and “new man” is the contrast between Adam and Christ, the “first man” and the “last” (1 Cor. 15:45; cf. Rom. 5:15, “the one man Jesus Christ”). Those, then, who are “in Adam” belong to and exist as “the old man”; those who are “in Christ” belong to and exist as “the new man.

At the heart of the contrast between “old man” and “new man” is the eschatological tension between the inauguration of the new age in the life of the believer—he or she belongs to the “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17)—and the culmination of that new age in “glorification with Christ” (8:17). What we were “in Adam” is no more; but, until heaven, the temptation to live in Adam always remains.

Paul’s point, then, is that the real, though forensic, inclusion of the believer with Christ in his crucifixion means that our solidarity with, and dominance by, Adam, through whom we are bound to the nexus of sin and death, has ended. And the purpose of this was that the body as a helpless tool of sin might be definitively defeated. What this means for the Christian life, though inherent in what Paul has already said, is spelled out in the concluding clause: “that we should no longer serve sin.”⁴

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.

This verse explains the connection between death (“crucified with Christ”) and freedom from sin (“no longer serve sin”) that is the main point of v. 6. Paul is citing a general maxim, to the effect that “death severs the hold of sin on a person.” Paul’s readers may have been familiar with similar sayings, known to us from the rabbinic writings. His purpose, then, is not to prove v. 6 but to illustrate his theological point by reference to a general truth.

⁴ Moo, D. J. (1996). *The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 350). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Paul now reiterates the tie between dying with Christ and being raised with Christ that he established in v. 5. Paul's point, and the fact that this "life with Christ" is an object of belief ("we believe") also fits better with a reference to what we have been promised than with what we already possess. But this future life of resurrection casts its shadow into the believer's present experience, and it is clear from the sequel that Paul wants us to see the present implications of this promise of future resurrection life.

9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

Unlike Lazarus's "resurrection" (better, "revivification"), which did not spare him from another physical death, Christ's resurrection meant a decisive and final break with death and all its power. For his resurrection was the anticipation of the general resurrection—he is the "first fruits" of those that rise (1 Cor. 15:23). Just as the general resurrection will bring "death" to an end (Rev. 20:11–15), so Christ's resurrection ends the power of death over himself, as well as anticipating the defeat of death in all those who belong to him. So, as those who are identified with Christ, we can be confident of sharing in that defeat of death when we "live with him" (v. 8b).

10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

The immediate purpose of this verse is to furnish further proof for the last statement of v. 9—"death no longer has lordship over him." Despite the similarity in language, many think that the concepts must be different; for Christ, being sinless, had no need to be freed from sin, as Christians do. Therefore, Christ's death must be "to sin" in the sense that "He affected sin by his dying," for in his death he bore the penalty of the sins of others.

While, however, it is true that Christ did not need to be freed from sin's power in the same way that we need to be, a close parallel between the situation of Christ and of the Christian can be maintained if we remember that Paul is continuing to speak of sin as a "ruling power." Just as death once had "authority" over Christ because of his full identification with sinful people in the "old age," so that other ruling power of the old age, sin, could be said to have had "authority" over Christ. As a "man of the old age," he was subject to the power of sin—with the critical difference that he never succumbed to its power and actually sinned.⁵

11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

As the death Christ died was a death "to sin" (v. 10), so Christians who have died with Christ (vv. 4a, 5a, 6, 8a) must now regard themselves as being those who are "dead to sin." And

⁵ Moo, D. J. (1996). *The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 350). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

as Christ's "once-for-all" death led on to resurrection and new life "in God's service" (vv. 4b, 9–10), so Christians who participate in that resurrection life (vv. 4b, 5b, 8b) must regard themselves as those who are "alive to God.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its 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.

Specifically, Paul urges his readers not to let sin reign "in your mortal body." "Body" (*sōma*) may be the physical body; but it is probably, as in 6:6, the whole person, viewed in terms of the person's interaction with the world. As Nygren puts it, "the arena of the battle is in the world." The battle is a spiritual one, but it is fought, and won or lost, in the daily decisions the believer makes about how to use his body. In characterizing the body as "mortal," Paul is reminding us that the same body that has been severed from its servitude to sin (6:6) is nevertheless a body that still participates in the weakness, suffering, and dissolution of this age. Until we are fully "redeemed" (8:23) and "put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53), we will continue to be subject to the influences of this age; and the believer must not let these influences hold sway. The Christian is no longer "body of sin" (6:6) or "body of death" (7:24), but he or she is still "mortal body."

14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

After the imperatives of vv. 11–13, this short paragraph concludes with a return to the indicative. To put a stop to the reign of sin—to stop engaging in those sins that have too often become so habitual that we cannot imagine not doing them—is a daunting responsibility. We feel that we must fail. But Paul then reminds us of just what we have become in Jesus Christ: "dead to sin, alive to God." There has already taken place in the life of the believer a "change of lordship" (Paul could hardly use the verb *kyrieuō* without thinking of the real *kyrios* of the Christian), and it is in the assurance of the continuance of this new state that the believer can go forth boldly and confidently to wage war against sin.⁶

⁶ Moo, D. J. (1996). *The Epistle to the Romans* (p. 350). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.