

A Study in Romans

Chapter 6

In this chapter, Paul assures us that our new relationship with God has result in salvation from a broader perspective than God's wrath. Our new relationship doesn't merely put us on the tarmac waiting for take-off at Christ's return. He has saved us for today! We have been set free from the power of sin to live a changed life.

Dead to Sin

(Romans 6:1–4)¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

(1) "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"

Paul anticipates how his point in the previous verse (5:20) may be misunderstood. Some might feel like sin isn't an issue since the grace of God is freely available to all who believe. But sin is an inherent problem that is meant to be overcome, not indulged in.

(2) "died to sin"

Paul said that he died "daily" (1 Corinthians 15:31). But this does not seem to be the point here. He says that this death is "to sin," meaning that we are no longer attracted to it. We are walking dead men and women who no longer desire to live to the old sinful life, but in the new life of righteousness we have in Christ.

(3) "baptized"

Baptizo (Greek) means "to immerse in." But what kind of baptism is Paul referring to? Was he saying that believers have been "immersed" in Christ? Was he talking about being "baptized in the Spirit"? Neither of these fit the text. In other places, Paul uses the verb *baptizo* to refer to water baptism. It's noun form *baptisma* always has this meaning.

(1 Corinthians 1:14–15)¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized (*baptizo*) none of you except Crispus and Gaius,¹⁵ lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.

(Galatians 3:27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

(4) "baptism into death"

The physical action of baptism is symbolic of the believer's transfer from death to life. As Christ was buried in his grave, so the believer goes down into the water to symbolize his or her death to the old life. The problem with this interpretation is that Jesus did not die to a sinful life, for He was without sin.

(Hebrews 4:15) For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

There is more to baptism than being symbolic of our death to our former sinful life. Baptism stands for our whole conversion experience. Through baptism, we have been brought into union with Christ to receive the benefits of His redemptive work. What He has done to redeem us is now at work in us, thus giving us the ability to "live a new life."

(2 Corinthians 5:21) For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

(4) "Christ was raised from the dead ... we also should walk in the newness of life"

The new life we have in Christ is not merely a legal transaction or new declaration of status. We now live in the power of His grace that has the ability to transform our mind and heart and to continually deliver us from sin as we keep our trust in Him.

Crucified with Christ

(Romans 6:5–7)⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection,⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin.

The transition to the subject of life in the resurrected Christ happens in verse four, that we "should walk in the newness of life."

(5) "likeness of His death ... likeness of His resurrection"

As a follower of Christ, we not only participate in His death (having died to sin), but also in His resurrection (living a new life).

Likeness is not sameness. Christ was our example. He died and rose for us; in the same way we have died to the old life and have risen to a new life in Christ.

(6) "our old man was crucified with Him"

[Verses 6–7 speak to the death in Christ side of the equation.]

The “old man” is the one that is susceptible to being led by the flesh and its desires.

Dying to the old man once and for all is an incredibly difficult thing to do. After all, we still have sinful propensities. We need to be intentional about staying dead our former ways and not allow our sinful passions to come to life again.

Often in our battle with sin, we need to die harder rather than try harder.

(6) “no longer be slaves of sin”

We don’t have to be led by the desires of our sinful nature. In Christ, we are freed from SIN’s captivity and the sins that flow from it.

SIN → sins

The big *SIN* is our nature and its morally depraved propensities (desires). The *sins* in thoughts, words, and actions flow from SIN.

(7) “he who has died has been freed from sin”

But those who have died to SIN are freed from the desires to commit sins. As we live in Christ, we receive His nature, which brings life and freedom from the old way of living.

This doesn’t mean the old self cannot resurface. But when we keep our mind on Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to live out God’s will in and through us, we don’t have to worry about SIN taking us captive again.

Living in Christ

(Romans 6:8–11)⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.¹⁰ For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God.¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[Verses 8–11 speak to the life in Christ’s resurrection side of the equation.]

(8) “we shall also live with Him”

“If” is a big word that is loaded with possibilities. If we died with Christ, then it’s possible to live with Him. More than that, it is a natural occurrence. We cannot help but live with Christ when we have died with Him.

Living “with” Christ is living with His presence through the indwelling Holy Spirit. John addresses the same experience of living free from sin’s power when we have with us the presence of Christ by His Spirit.

(1 John 3:7–9)⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.⁸ He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.⁹ Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

(9–10) “Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more”

Since Christ did not have to die more than once, we don’t have to either. Once we have died to sin, we can remain alive in Christ from that day forward. Sins may occur, but SIN and its power never has to bring us into slavery again. We are set free forever!

This is why Paul says that “the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.”

(11) “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves”

Likewise means “in the same way.” As Christ died to sin once and for all, we can die to sin once and for all.

When Paul says “reckon,” he means that we are to consider or remember that we are dead to sin and alive to Christ. As long as we continually remind ourselves that we are dead to the “old man” and the sinful nature that resides in us, we are free to live for God.

Paul is not just being theological. He’s being practical in how we are to battle against the sinful nature we possess.

Which Law Reigns?

(Romans 6:12–14)¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.¹³ And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Paul concludes his focus on the freedom we have in Christ.

(12) “do not let sin reign”

To let something reign over you is to let it rule your life. Paul has already assured us that we are free from sin and its power because of what Christ has done for us. Yet we are reminded here that we must choose each day to remain in the righteousness of Christ by resisting temptation and the sin that our flesh is naturally still inclined to commit.

(Hebrews 12:1–2)¹ Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In verse 14 we read that sin shall not have dominion over us, meaning that sin does not reign. Yet he still commands us here not to let sin reign. How do we reconcile these ideas? First, the victory over sin that God has already won for us in Christ must be appropriated to us. In other words, we must believe and ask for that victory, which He promises to give freely. Second, putting away those sins we struggle with is no automatic process. It will not happen without our cooperation. We must give our will to Christ, which in turn will bring the promise of victory into actuality.

(In Heavenly Places, p. 27) The Spirit of God does not propose to do our part, either in the willing or the doing. ... As soon as we incline our will to harmonize with God’s will, the grace of Christ stands ready to cooperate with the human agent; but it will not be the substitute to do our work independent of our resolving and decidedly acting.

(13) “present your members”

There are two ways to “present” ourselves: 1) as *instruments* of unrighteousness to sin, or 2) *instruments* of righteousness to God.” Instruments are to be played. So, Paul is talking about the choice of dedicating your life to living a specific way. If you choose to do things you know are sinful, then you have given your members to Satan for his use. If you choose to do what is right, then you have given your members to God for His use. It is important to “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

Choosing whom we serve is an act of the will. We make our decision by giving our will to the use by another. In living for Christ, this is not a fight in human willpower, but handing over our will to Him—however weak it is—and letting Him work in us to both want to obey and to actually obey His word as a faithful disciple.

(Philippians 2:12–13)¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

(God's Amazing Grace, p. 209) Your part is to put your will on the side of Christ. When you yield your will to His, He immediately takes possession of you, and works in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. Your nature is brought under the control of His Spirit. Even your thoughts are subject to Him. If you cannot control your impulses, your emotions, as you may desire, you can control the will, and thus an entire change will be wrought in your life. When you yield up your will to Christ, your life is hid with Christ in God. It is allied to the power which is above all principalities and powers. You have a strength from God that holds you fast to His strength; and a new life, even the life of faith, is possible for you.

(14) “sin shall not have dominion over you”

When you are living by faith in Christ, sin loses its power. You no longer want to obey the desires of the old man/woman—your sinful nature and the cravings of the flesh. That power has been broken by Christ in His victory for you.

(1 John 5:2–4)² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

The life of faith in Christ Jesus has delivered you from the power of sin that once came so naturally to you.

[The terms “under law” and “under grace” are addressed in the next section.]

Slavery to Sin or Righteousness

(Romans 6:15–20)¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? ¹⁷ But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading* to *more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves of righteousness for holiness. ²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Paul's emphasis shifts slightly in verse 15. Where freedom was the dominant theme in verses 1–14, now slavery takes center stage. Paul uses this imagery to remind us of what we once were (“slaves to sin”) but now have become in Christ (“slaves to righteousness”).

(15) “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?”

This is the second time Paul addresses the question of continuing to sin after receiving a new life in Christ: “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Romans 6:1). Both times he answers, “Certainly not!”

The terms “under law” and “under grace” are commonly misunderstood by most Christians. Paul is not giving a dispensational argument between two covenants, the Jews under law and Christians under grace. It is clear in the Old Testament that God's people were saved by His grace through faith.

(Genesis 6:8) But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

(Genesis 15:6) And [Abram] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

(Exodus 33:16–17)¹⁶ For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who *are* upon the face of the earth.”¹⁷ So the Lord said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name.”

(Psalm 84:11) For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Over and over, the writer of Hebrews tells us that the Old Testament Patriarchs/Matriarchs lived “by faith” in God. Salvation has never been achieved by works.

IMPORTANT: There are three contexts in which Paul uses the word “law.”

The FIRST is not with a specific reference to any law, but to law as a principle. This is most likely the context Paul using in this passage. Law has cannot save anyone. That's not its purpose. Law reveals sin (Romans 3:20). Nor can law forgive sin or provide the power to overcome it. The sinner who seeks salvation by obedience to law will find only condemnation and enslavement to sin. Only the grace of God can save!

The SECOND is to describe the power under which we live. We live (“walk”) either according to the law of sin and death or the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

This is Paul's explicit statement in chapter eight:

(Romans 8:1–2)¹ *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

It is in this same context that Paul uses the term in the latter part of his letter to the Galatians:

(Galatians 5:16–18)¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The THIRD is in reference to the Law of Moses, specifically the rites and ceremonies that pointed to mankind's redemption in the Messiah who was to come.

(Galatians 3:23–25; 4:4–5)²³ But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ...⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

In this context, those under grace are those who no longer keep the ceremonial laws, but experience the fullness of grace by faith in Christ.

All three contexts eliminate any possibility that the Law of God or His Ten Commandments are no longer binding in the Christian life. When we walk in the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," we abide in Him and keep His commandments.

(1 John 3:24) Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus cannot be separated:

(Revelation 14:12) Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

(16) "to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey"

It's important to understand the differences between biblical slavery and American Slavery (by Matt Slick, *Minor Groups & Issues: Slavery*, Nov 11, 2019):

- A slave could voluntarily decide to stay as a slave (Deut 15:16–17).
- When a slave was freed, he was to receive gifts that enabled him to survive economically (Deut 15:14).
- A Hebrew slave could become free after six years of service (Ex 21:2; Deut 15:12), released during the year of Jubilee (Lev 25), by marriage of the master's son or if refused was then set free (Ex 21:7–11), due to injury (Ex 21:26–27), and by purchasing his own freedom (Lev 25:47).
- An escaped slave was not to be returned as was property (Deut 23:15–16).
- The slave was a member of the master's household (Lev 22:11).
- A slave could inherit property (Gen 15:2–3), be in control of entire households (Gen 24:2), and were sometimes trusted advisors (1 Sam 9:5–10).
- The treatment of slaves was not to be severe (Lev 25:43, 53).
- A master who punished his slave who then died, was to be punished himself possibly with death (Ex 21:20). Slaves were considered as a form property (Lev 25:46; Ex 21:32; Lev 25:39–42) but not in a strictest sense, since escaped slaves were not to be returned as was property (Deut 23:15–16).
- Kidnapping someone to make them a slave was prohibited (Amos 1:6) and was punishable by death (Deut 24:7; Ex 21:16).

NOTE: There is simply no biblical support for slavery as we know it today.

Masters require obedience from slaves. And a slave is under the authority someone other than themselves. Paul uses these two characteristics of slavery while expressing the need for everyone to voluntarily choose who they will serve.

(Joshua 24:15) ... “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Notice “how” we are to choose the Lord. We fear God by putting away anything that comes between you and God.

QUES: What are some of those idols/gods that are a barrier to serving the Lord?

(16) “sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness”

The contrasting opposites here are not sin and righteousness, which we would expect. Instead, Paul says we must choose to serve in “sin” or “obedience.” We cannot choose righteousness, but only to obey God and let Him bestow His righteousness to us.

There are two destinies in life. The choice we made as to whom we will serve determines our destiny. We can choose to keep sinning (our nature), which leads to death. Or we can choose to obey God, which leads to righteousness.

Paul issues imperatives throughout his letter. God commands us to act because obedience is not automatic just because we are saved in Christ. It's important to recognize that the grace of God that justified us continues to sanctify us (set apart and transform). Christ expects us to obey Him, yet obedience is the product of His grace. Self-help programs cannot accomplish for the Christian the spiritual transformation that Christ can accomplish within the mind and heart through the work of the Holy Spirit.

We must avoid both pits on the narrow path. On one side is *legalism*; the other side *antinomianism*. Legalism tries hard to obey without the grace of God; antinomianism (anti-law) doesn't try at all because the "magic" of conversion has taken over; the victorious Christian life is all about "letting go and letting God." Instead, Paul is calling upon every follower of Christ to unite his/her personal effort to follow Christ with a firm dependence upon His grace for success.

(17) "though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart"

The default choice is sin. We were born slaves to sin. Paul explains that those who choose obedience to God "were" slaves to sin—meaning that they were delivered from the power of sin when they heard and accepted Christ's offer of salvation.

People believe the gospel and accept Christ's offer of salvation by repenting of their sins. Paul refers to the act of belief as obeying from the heart.

Whether you live as free or as a slave to another person, Paul says:

(1 Corinthians 7:22–23) ²² For he who is called in the Lord *while* a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called *while* free is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

We are slaves not in the negative sense of the word, but as one who now belongs to Christ. All who choose Christ as their Lord were "bought at a price"—the precious blood of Christ. Paul can then conclude in verse 18 that "having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

(19) "so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness"

Paul ends this section by returning to the theme of “presenting.” As in previous verses, the act of presenting our members is a commitment to follow. We have dedicated ourselves to live by what our Lord and Master has taught us.

Our commitment to follow Christ requires decisions at every turn of life. With every temptation, we must choose to respond the way that Christ would have us respond.

(2 Corinthians 10:4–5)⁴ For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

(20) “when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness”

Non-Christians pride themselves on being free. They contrast their lives to Christians, who they believe have lost their human individuality by bowing to Christ. But Paul explains that their only “freedom” is from doing what is right and true.

The Fruit We Bear

(Romans 6:21–23)²¹ What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death.²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.²³ For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul again contrasts our pre-Christian past with our Christian present.

(21) “What fruit did you have...?”

We bear the fruit of the root and tree that we derive our nourishment from. The fruit of our decision to remain “free” from Christ causes sin that leads to death.

(22) “having been set free from sin...”

The Christian has been set free from sin and bears different “fruit.” The follower of Christ bears “fruit to holiness” and will live forever.

(23) “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life”

In the end, the Christian has been set free from sin and its “wages.” Wages are something that we receive as payment for our services. When you live a life committing sin, you have effectively earned its wages—death.

Notice that gift of eternal life is not earned. It cannot be called “wages.” Christ gives us eternal life because of what He did, not we ourselves.

The Welsh physician and preacher, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, refers to Paul’s three contrasts in this part of his letter:

1. The master that is served—sin versus God
2. The outcome of that service—death versus eternal life
3. How that outcome is reached—a “wage” earned versus a “gift” received.