

XII. Dead to Sin, Alive to God

March 1/2/3, 2016

Romans 6:1-14

Aim: To live in righteousness through our union in Christ, knowing that we have been transferred out of the realm of sin and death and are no longer under the penalty and power of sin.

Paul showed us that we need justification (1:18-3:20). Then he showed us how to be justified (3:21-4:25). He has begun to describe the wonderful results of justification (5:1-11), and has explained the entrance into the world of both sin and salvation (5:12-21). He will now, in chapters 6 and 7, speak of the tragic reality that, even though we are alive in Christ, all too often we live as though we were still dead.

At this point in the epistle Paul begins a new development in his teaching about salvation and its practical effect on those who are saved. After extensive discussions of man's sin and of his redemption through Christ, he now moves to the subject of the believer's holiness—the life of righteousness that God demands of and provides for His children, the life of obedience to His Word lived in the power of His Spirit.

Paul uses the language of 'realm transfer' to show how inconceivable is the suggestion that a believer should 'remain in sin' in order to accentuate grace. We Christians have been taken out from under the tyranny of sin in a transfer so radical and decisive that the language of death and new life can be used of it.

A. Dead to Sin (Romans 6:1-10)

1. The Objection (6:1-2)

a) *The Question (6:1)*

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

(1) Moo

'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.' Who, might we ask, is putting such a question to Paul? Particularly if these questions reflect a 'diatribe' style whose locus is in the debate, Paul may be quoting an opponent of his – perhaps a Jew, or Judaizer. However, Paul's question-and-answer style in Romans is pedagogical rather than polemical in orientation. Because of this, and because he is obviously concerned throughout the chapter not just with intellectual objections to his view but with the obedience and lifestyle of Christians, it is better to think that Paul himself poses this question in order to draw out the implications of the Christian's experience of grace. Undoubtedly, as 3:8 indicates, detractors of Paul's gospel were criticizing him on just this point; and it has historically been the case that critics of Christianity have objected that free grace undercuts morality. In light of the negative reference to the law in 5:20b, we can imagine this question being raised by a Jew: 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

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which sin can truly be defeated. While, therefore, the objection was one that Paul must have heard from opponents of the gospel, he himself raises it here in order to show Christians that the gospel of grace, properly interpreted, leads not to licentiousness but to righteousness (now understood as godly living).

(2) Hughes

One of the dangers of preaching salvation by grace alone is that it can be interpreted as license to do whatever one wishes. The Apostle Paul was well aware of this tendency (cp. 3:8), so when he said in 5:20b, ‘But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,’ he knew the worst would be made of it by some. He knew that a pernicious logic would be applied: ‘Well, if sin brings more grace, let’s sin!’ A famous historical instance of such thought comes from the Russian monk Rasputin, who dominated the Romanov family in their final years. Rasputin taught that salvation came through repeated experiences of sin and repentance. He argued that because those who sin more require more forgiveness, those who sin with abandon will as they repent experience greater joy; therefore, it is the believer’s duty to sin. Today, this thinking is very common among those who wish to justify their sexual lifestyles. So when Paul said, ‘But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,’ he could sense the inevitable question coming and went ahead and voiced it himself.

(3) Sproul

At the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, Luther was charged with antinomianism. The Roman Catholic Church feared that people would take the doctrine of *sola fide* justification by faith alone as a license for sin. The Reformers reminded their friends in the Roman Catholic Church that Paul addresses this question in Romans 6. Luther responded to the charge by explaining that we are justified by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone. Every time the gospel is preached, the demon of antinomianism knocks at the door and says that if we are justified by faith, then works do not count, and if works do not count then works do not matter. No work we do will ever contribute to our justification; in that sense our works do not count. However, that is not the same thing as saying they do not matter, because we are justified *unto* good works. We are not justified by our sanctification, but we are justified *unto* sanctification. The fruit of true faith, the fruit of true justification, will always be conformity to the image of Christ. That is what Paul is beginning to spell out for us. The Reformation view, the biblical view, is justification + works = faith. The works are there, but they are on the other side of the equation. The antinomian formula is justification – works = faith, which is the heresy that Paul abhors here at the beginning of Romans 6.

The gospel teaches us that if we have true faith in Jesus Christ, works of obedience are not only inevitable but immediate, because a justified person is a changed person. Justification is the fruit of faith, and faith is the fruit of regeneration. We cannot have saving faith unless the Holy Spirit has changed the disposition of our souls. Therefore, only the regenerate have faith. All the regenerate are changed. I am grateful to John MacArthur for his indefatigable labor in correcting the biblical error of the ‘Carnal Christian.’ We cannot receive Christ as Savior without at the same time bending our knees to His lordship. This does not mean we believe we are perfect, but it does mean that at the moment we believe, we are changed. Our lives are turned around, and the beginning of the process of sanctification has taken place. Justification does not produce the fullness of sanctification, but it initiates it immediately.

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(4) MacArthur

As he frequently does, Paul anticipates the major objections of his critics. The typical religious Jew of that day could not comprehend pleasing God apart from strict adherence to the Mosaic and rabbinic law. To them, conformity to such law was the embodiment of godliness. Paul also knew that, at the opposite extreme, some readers would misinterpret his assertion that ‘where sin increased, grace abounded all the more’ (5:20). They would foolishly accuse him of teaching that sin itself glorifies God by causing His grace to increase. If that were true, they reasoned, then men not only are free to sin but are *obligated* to sin in order to enable God to expand His grace. That is exactly the perverted interpretation taught by the infamous Rasputin, religious advisor to the ruling Romanov family of Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He taught and exemplified the antinomian view of salvation through repeated experiences of sin and false repentance. He believed that the more you sin, the more God gives you grace. So the more you sin with abandon, the more you give God the opportunity to glorify Himself. Rasputin declared that if you are simply an ordinary sinner, you are not giving God an opportunity to show His glory, so you need to be an *extraordinary* sinner. Legalistic Jews would charge the apostle with just that sort of antinomianism, of contradicting the laws of God and advocating moral and spiritual license to do as one pleases—presumably justified on the grounds that such living actually glorifies God. Those opponents had an especially hard time accepting the idea of salvation on the basis of faith alone, apart from any works.

Here Paul deals a deathblow to that kind of antinomianism, yet he does so without yielding an inch of ground to those who would deny that God’s grace is sufficient for salvation. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the apostle avoided the extreme of legalism on the one hand and of libertinism on the other. He would neither abandon God’s grace to accommodate the legalists nor abandon God’s righteousness to accommodate the libertines. As Scripture makes plain, a saving relationship with God is inextricably linked to holy living, and a holy life is lived by the power of God working in and through the heart of the true believer. In God’s redemptive act in a person’s heart, true holiness is as much a gift of God as is the new birth and the spiritual life it brings. The life that is not basically marked by holiness has no claim to salvation. It is that cardinal gospel truth that Paul forcefully defends in Romans 6-7.

Epimenō (‘to continue’) carries the idea of habitual persistence. It was something used of a person’s purposely living in a certain place and of making it his permanent residence. Paul was not speaking of a believer’s occasional falling into sin, as every Christian does at times because of the weakness and imperfection of the flesh. He was speaking of intentional, willful sinning as an established pattern of life. Before salvation, sin *cannot* be anything but the established way of life, because sin at best taints everything the unredeemed person does. But the believer, who has a new life and is indwelt by God’s own Spirit, has no excuse to continue habitually in sin. Can he then possibly live in the same submissive relationship to sin that he had before salvation? Put in theological terms, can justification truly exist apart from sanctification? Can a person receive a new life and continue in his old way of living? Does the divine transaction of redemption have no continuing and sustaining power in those who are redeemed?

b) *The Response (6:2)*

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

Mē genoito is literally and accurately translated ‘May it never be,’ and it was the strongest idiom of repudiation in New Testament Greek. It is used some fourteen times in Paul’s letters alone,

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including 10 times in Romans. It carries the sense of outrage that an idea of this kind could ever be thought of as true. The very suggestion that sin could in any conceivable way please and glorify God was abhorrent to Paul. At this point he does not respond with reasoned argument but with a brief and arresting rhetorical question: ‘How shall we who died to sin still live in it?’ The person who is alive in Christ has ‘died to sin,’ and it is inconceivably and self-contradictory to propose that a believer can henceforth ‘live in’ the sin from which he was delivered by death.

With his familiar ‘By no means!’ Paul emphatically denies that the Christian should sin in order to secure more grace, and explains himself in a rhetorical question. The Christian’s death ‘to sin’ is the main point of Romans 6. But what does this death ‘to sin’ mean? The idea is of a decisive separation from sin. This separation could be a separation from the penalty due because of sin, but the context demonstrates that Paul is talking not about the penalty, but the power of sin (cp. vv. 6a, 14a). It is better, then, to view the separation as a separation from the ‘rule’ or ‘realm’ of sin, sin being personified, as throughout this chapter, as a power that rules over the person outside of Christ. When did this ‘death to sin’ take place? One could argue that the Christian died to sin, when, on Golgotha, he or she died with Christ. But v. 3 connects death to sin specifically with baptism. Thus, it is better to think of the ‘death to sin’ as occurring in conjunction with the believer’s (conversion)-baptism.

Paul has no use for even the slightest intimation that grace encourages sin. In fact, he finishes verse 2 with a question to the contrary: ‘How can we who died to sin still live in it?’ The remainder of the chapter goes on to substantiate his position. Verses 3-14 answer the question, how do those of us who are under grace live without being characterized by sin? How are we to live lives of victory?

Is ‘living in sin’ a possibility to be avoided, or an impossibility to be recognized? ‘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. Sin’s power is broken for the believer, and this *must* be evident in practice (see also James 2:14-26). Yet the nature of Christian existence is such that the believer can, at times, live in a way that is inconsistent with the reality of what God has made him in Christ. It is not sin, but the believer, who has ‘died,’ and sin, as Wesley puts it, ‘remains’ even though it does not ‘reign.’ 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.

By simple reason it must be admitted that the person who has died to one kind of life cannot still live in it. The apostle Paul was not speaking of the present state of the believer as daily dying to sin but the past act (*apothnēskō*, second aorist active) of being dead to sin. Paul is saying it is impossible for a Christian to remain in a constant state of sinfulness. The act is in this sense once and for all. The idea that a Christian can continue to live habitually in sin not only is unbiblical but irrational. Paul goes on to declare with unequivocation that a genuinely justified life both is and will *continue to be* a sanctified life. For the purposes of systematic theology and to make God’s work of redemption somewhat more comprehensible to finite human minds, we often speak of sanctification as following justification. There is, of course, a sense in which it does, in that justification involves what is often called a forensic, or legal, declaration of righteousness that is immediate, complete, and eternal. But justification and sanctification are

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not separate stages in salvation; rather, they are different aspects of the unbroken continuum of God's divine work of redemption in a believer's life by which He not only declares a person righteous but recreates him to become righteous. Holiness is as much a work of God in the believer as any other element of redemption. When a person is redeemed, God not only declares him righteous, but also begins to develop Christ's righteousness in him. Thus salvation is not merely a legal transaction, but results inevitably in a miracle of transformation. There is therefore simply no such thing as justification without sanctification. There is no such thing as divine life without divine living. Salvation is not only a transaction but a transformation, not only forensic but actual. And so the phrase 'died to sin' expresses the fundamental premise of this entire chapter in Romans, the rest of which is essentially an elaboration of the cardinal reality. It is impossible to be alive in Christ and also still be alive to sin.

Here again Paul speaks of death and life. We have been reconciled to God by Christ's death, and we shall be saved by His life (5:10). We were dead, but now we're alive. Adam sinned, and humanity died; but then Christ died, and because He died, we who have believed in Him are now alive. There is a living humanity. We are dead to sin but alive to Christ. But "How," Paul asks, "shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer herein?" Surely Paul must have been weeping as he asked this, and we should weep too. If we're alive to Christ, we should be dead to sin. Yet tragically, we often live as though we were dead to Christ and alive to sin. In chapter 6 Paul deals specifically with the problem of sin in the believer's life.

2. The Explanation (6:3-10)

a) *United with Christ in Baptism (6:3-5)*

This (most likely) is Paul's commentary on a baptismal catechism and it is one of his most finely crafted statements. Notice, first, his allusion to the *death, burial, and resurrection* of Christ. Then, second, we have his strong statement of purpose signaled by 'in order that ... just as ... so to.' That purpose is expressed as 'walking in newness of life' and is amplified in verses 21-22. In other words, this catechetical teaching about Christ is not 'out there,' remote, distant, and at 'arm's length' as it were, merely a matter for the intellect. Rather (as Paul will say in the next verse), believers are actually 'united with' Christ in His burial, death, and resurrection.

Paul says that if we are believers, if we have received the grace of justification, baptism is a reminder of our union in the death and burial of Christ. We are not only baptized into His death and burial, but also we are baptized into His resurrection. All these things are part of what is being communicated graphically with the sign of baptism.

(1) United in Death (6:3-4a)

(a) *Baptism (6:3)*

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

(i) Water Baptism

By introducing this teaching with the phrase 'or are you ignorant,' Paul signifies that what he is saying has a basis in what the Roman Christians already know about baptism and Christian experience. Paul's reference is to the Roman Christians' water baptism as their outward initiation into Christian existence. By the date of Romans, 'baptize' had become almost a

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technical expression for the rite of Christian initiation by water, and this is surely the meaning the Roman Christians would have given the word. Thus, Paul argues that Christian baptism, by joining the believer with Christ Jesus, also joins him or her with the death of Christ.

The early church conceived of faith, the gift of the Spirit, and water baptism as components of one unified experience – ‘conversion-initiation.’ Just as faith is always assumed to lead to baptism, so baptism always assumes faith for its validity. In vv. 3-4, then, we can assume that baptism stands for the whole conversion-initiation experience, presupposing faith and the gift of the Spirit. We must assume from the fact that faith is emblazoned in every chapter of Romans while baptism is mentioned in only two verses that genuine faith, even if it has not been ‘sealed’ in baptism, is sufficient for salvation.

Baptism is not what saves us, but in our baptism God gives us a tangible sign of His promise of redemption. All the processes that are wrought through the redeeming work of Christ are contained in that sign. Baptism is a sign of our being regenerated by the Holy Spirit. It does not effect regeneration, but it is a sign of it. It is the sign of God’s promise that all who believe will, in fact, be justified. It is a sign of our sanctification. It is the sign of our being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of our glorification. It is a sign of our identification with Christ. We are in Christ and He is our champion.

(ii) Spiritual Identification

Verse 2 tells us that we have died to sin, and verse 3 tells us when this death occurred. It occurred at the moment when we accepted Christ and were baptized by His Holy Spirit ‘into His death.’ This undoubtedly refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, rather than water baptism. It seems very plain in both this passage and in 1 Cor. 12:13 that Paul is speaking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit that occurs for all true Christians at the moment they accept Christ as Savior. Paul will state very strongly in 8:9 that all who have truly accepted Jesus as Savior are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. If we haven’t been baptized by and are not now indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we are not truly Christians.

The overall emphasis of verses 4-5 is upon our profound identity with Christ. Baptism bears with it the idea of *identification*, especially when it is linked to a person’s name. For instance, 1 Corinthians 10:2 tells us that the Israelites were ‘baptized into Moses’—referring not to water baptism but to the fact that they became united with him as never before as they recognized his leadership and their dependence on him. So it is with Christ. When we were baptized into Him (Mt. 28:19), we achieved a profound identification.

This particular use of *baptizō* (‘to be baptized’) refers to the introduction or placing of a person or thing into a new environment or into union with something else so as to alter its condition or its relationship to its previous environment or condition. In his first letter to Corinth, Paul spoke of Israel’s being baptized into Moses (1 Cor. 10:2), symbolizing the people’s identity or solidarity with Moses. All Christians, in a similar but infinitely more profound and permanent way, ‘have been baptized into Christ Jesus,’ thus permanently being immersed into Him, so as to be made one with Him. Many people interpret Paul’s argument in Romans 6:3-10 as referring to water baptism. However, Paul is simply using the physical analogy of water baptism to teach the spiritual reality of the believer’s union with Christ. Water baptism is the outward identification of an inward reality—faith in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. Paul was not advocating salvation by water baptism; that would have contradicted everything he had just said about salvation by grace and not works in Romans 3-5, which has no mention of water baptism.

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Water baptism was a public symbol of faith in God. The Roman believers were well aware of the symbol of baptism. When Paul says ‘do you not know,’ he is in effect saying, ‘Are you ignorant of the meaning of your own baptism? Have you forgotten what your baptism symbolized?’ They were unaware that water baptism symbolizes the spiritual reality of being immersed into Jesus Christ. The tragedy is that many mistake the symbol of water baptism as the means of salvation rather than the demonstration of it. To turn a symbol into the reality is to eliminate the reality, which in this case is salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

(b) *Burial (6:4a)*

⁴*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death...*

‘Burial with Christ’ is a description of the participation of the believer in Christ’s own burial, a participation that is mediated by baptism. But what is the exact nature, or time, of this believer’s being ‘buried with Christ’? Baptism is not the place or the time at which we are buried with Christ, but the instrument (*dia*) through which we are buried with Him. Our dying, being buried, and being resurrected with Christ are experiences that transfer us from the old age to the new. But the transition from old age to new, while applied to individuals at their conversion, has been accomplished through the redemptive work of Christ on Good Friday and Easter.

In this text Paul tells us that not only are our sins imputed to Christ in His death on the cross, the benefits of His resurrection transferred to us, and the benefits of His righteousness imputed to us by legal transaction but also there is a real spiritual union with our Savior. In a spiritual sense we died with Him on Calvary. When He went to the cross, He went not for Himself but for His sheep. It was our sin that He was carrying in His death, so when He died, He did not simply die for us; we, by virtue of this spiritual union, died with Him.

(2) United in Resurrection (6:4b-5)

(a) *Walk in Newness of Life (6:4b)*

...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.

All Christians not only are identified with Christ (through baptism) but are identified with Him specifically in His death and resurrection. This truth is far too wondrous for us to understand fully, but the basic and obvious reality of it is that we died with Christ in order that we might have life through Him and live like Him. Again Paul emphasizes not so much the immortality but the impossibility of our continuing to live the way we did before we were saved. By trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior, we were, by an unfathomable divine miracle, taken back 2,000 years, as it were, and made to participate in our Savior’s death and to be buried with Him, burial being the proof of death. The purpose of that divine act of bringing us through death (which paid the penalty for our sin) and resurrection with Christ was to enable us henceforth to ‘walk in newness of life.’ ‘Newness’ translates *kairos*, which refers to newness of quality and character, not *neos*, which refers merely to newness in point of time. Just as sin characterized our old life, so our righteousness now characterizes our new life.

The main point of verse 4 is not our being with Christ, or baptism, but the new life to which these events lead. It is the purpose of our burial with Christ that ‘we might walk in newness of life.’ ‘Newness of life’ is a life empowered by the realities of the new age – including especially God’s Spirit (Rom. 7:6) – and a life that should reflect the values of that new age. In other

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words, Paul grounds the believer's present participation in life in the spiritual power of Christ's resurrection. Christians, then, are both empowered and summoned to live a new kind of life by virtue of their participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Many people seem to view the Christian life as some sort of gloomy struggle. It's as though the deaths of 6:2-4a were the end of the matter. Certainly there are the deaths, but the deaths are for a purpose. We don't just die in order to die. There is no asceticism here. We die in order to love – and not just in the future life, mind you, but in this present life as well.

(b) *A Resurrection Like His (6:5)*

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.*

Verse 5 affirms what has been implied in v. 4b; the participation of the believer in the resurrection of Christ. We may paraphrase v. 5a as follows: 'We (at "conversion-initiation") were united with the death of Christ in its redemptive-historical significance, and are now, thus, in the state of "conformity" to *that death*.'

The word 'united' (*symphytoi*, 'grown together') pictures a branch bound to another—they are grafted together. That describes our union with Christ. The Scripture boldly affirms this in a number of places (e.g., Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13). Our spiritual history began at the cross. We were there in the sense that in God's sight we were joined to Him who actually suffered on it. The time element should not disturb us, because if we sinned in Adam, it is equally possible to have died to sin with Christ.

The specific emphasis of verses 3-5 is that we are so profoundly identified with Christ's death and resurrection that we actually did die with Him and truly were raised with Him, so that we now share in His resurrection life. Again the Scriptures attest to this (e.g., Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Col. 3:1). Whereas before we had only a solidarity with Adam's sin, now that has been broken and we have a solidarity with Christ, the Second Adam, in His death and resurrection. We need to know and count on this if we are to experience victory over sin.

The 'but also introducing the second part of the verse (v. 5b) stresses the certainty that our union with 'the form of Christ's death' will mean union with the form of Christ's resurrection. But what are we to make of the future verb 'we will be'? Paul is referring to the physical resurrection of believers 'with Christ' (cp. 2 Cor. 4:14) – to that time when God will transform our earthly bodies. This does not mean, however, that all allusions to the present are eliminated. For, even as union with the 'form' of Christ's death at baptism-conversion works forward to the moral life, so the union with the 'form' of Christ's resurrection at death or the parousia works backward. It is in this sense that the believer can be said to have been 'raised with Christ' and to be living in the power of that resurrected life.

This is the language of certain hope. Paul is saying that in baptism believers are joined to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and will one day themselves be raised bodily. How can Paul be so confident? For one reason only. It is because Christ has truly died, been buried, and raised alive, therefore those who belong to Him can look forward to their resurrection.

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b) United with Christ through Death (6:6-7)

Verses 6-7 restate and elaborate the meaning of the believer's death with Christ, taught in vv. 4a and 5a. Verses 8-10, then, focus on the relationship between death with Christ and life with Him that is the substance of the other part of these verses (4b, 5b).

(1) Crucified with Christ (6:6a)

⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing...

(a) *'Crucified With Him'*

The verb 'crucified with' picks up and brings to a climax the 'death' side of the 'union with Christ' motif of vv. 3-5. Like 'buried with Him' in v. 4 and 'united with the form of His death' in v. 5, 'crucified with Christ' refers not to our own burial and death but to our participation in Christ's crucifixion. What is meant is not the believer's duty to put away sin, but the act of God, whereby, in response to our faith, He considers us to have died the same death Christ died. The believer who is 'crucified with Christ' is as definitely and finally 'dead' as a result of this action as was Christ Himself after His crucifixion. Of course, we must remember what this death means. This is no more a physical, or ontological death than is our burial with Christ (v. 4) or our 'dying to sin' (v. 2). Paul's language throughout is forensic or positional; by God's act, we have been placed in a new position. This position is real, for what exists in God's sight is surely (ultimately) real, and it carries definite consequences for day-to-day living. But it is status, or power structure, that Paul is talking about here. Just as Christ's crucifixion mean 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 (v. 6b), the law (6:14; 7:4), and death (8:1-11).

The next principle Paul stresses is that the old sinful self has been killed. 'You should be well aware,' he was saying, 'that in Christ you are not the same people you were before salvation. You have new life, a new heart, a new spiritual strength, a new hope, and countless other new things that had no part in your former life.' When Christ redeemed us, 'our old self was crucified,' that is, put to death and destroyed. Crucifixion does not simply produce extreme suffering; it produces death. To be crucified is to die. The old self of every believer was crucified with his Lord, or else he has not been saved. There is no such thing as a true Christian who has not died with Christ.

(b) *'Our Old Self'*

Paul does not claim that 'we' have been crucified with Christ; it is 'our old man' who has been so definitively put to death. There has been considerable misunderstanding of this phrase, which, with its counterpart 'the new man,' occurs also in Eph. 4:22-24 and Col. 3:9-11 (cp. also Eph. 2:15; 4:13). The assumption that the 'old man' and 'new man' refer to parts, or natures, of a person is incorrect. Rather, they designate the person as a whole, considered in relation to the corporate structure to which he or she belongs. 'Old man' and 'new man' are not, then, ontological, but relational or positional in orientation. They do not, at least in the first place, speak of a change in nature, but of a change in relationship. 'Our old man' is not our Adamic, or sin 'nature' that is judged and dethroned on the cross, and to which is added in the believer another 'nature,' the 'new man.' Rather, the 'old man' is what we were 'in Adam' – the 'man' of the old age, who lives under the tyranny of sin and death.

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‘Old’ does not translate *archaios*, which simply refers to chronological age, but rather *palios*, which refers to something that is completely worn out and useless, fit only for the scrap heap. For all practical purposes it is destroyed. When comparing Scripture with Scripture, it becomes clear that the ‘old self’ to which Paul refers in Romans 6 is none other than the unregenerate, in-Adam man described in chapter 5, the person who is apart from divine redemption and the new life it brings.

Paul identifies our ‘old man’ (*palaios ... anthrōpos*) with our ‘body of sin.’ What does he mean? Most likely he is thinking once more about Adam ‘in whom we all sinned’ and through whose sin Death entered the human race (5:12). Paul speaks of Sin in the singular and in personal terms, as if it were a malevolent king. In other words, Sin dominates our lives and motivates and gives direction to everything we do, including even our most apparently self-less acts. The miseries of the human race result from the accumulation and multiplication of Sin’s rule over individuals. Paul is reminding them that Sin’s kingly rule begun under Adam and came to an end when Christ, the Last Adam, was crucified. In addition to dying *for* the sins of believers He also died *to* terminate Sin’s domination in their lives.

Behind this contrast between ‘old man’ and ‘new man’ is the contrast between Adam and Christ, the ‘first man’ and the ‘last’ (1 Cor. 15:45; cp. Rom. 5:15). 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.’ In other words, these phrases denote the solidarity of people with the ‘heads’ of the two contrasting ages of salvation history. It is only by interpreting ‘old man’ and ‘new man’ in this manner that we are able to integrate two apparently conflicting viewpoints in Paul. On the one hand, this verse and Col. 3:9-11 make clear that the believer has ceased to be the ‘old man’ and has become ‘new man.’ On the other hand, Paul in Eph. 4:22-24 commands Christians to ‘put off the old man’ and ‘put on the new man.’ If these phrases look at the person as one who belongs to the old age or the new, respectively, then the conflict is easily resolved. For Paul makes it clear that the believer has been transferred from the old age of sin and death to the new age of righteousness and life (6:6 and Col. 3:9-11), just as he indicates that the ‘powers’ of that old age continue to influence the believer and must be continually resisted – hence the imperatives of Eph. 4:22-24. 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; cp. Gal. 6:15) – and the culmination of the 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.

(c) ‘The Body of Sin’

This participation of our old man in the crucifixion of Christ has the purpose of ‘rendering powerless the body of sin.’ The ‘body’ to which Paul refers is naturally often understood to refer to the physical body. But Paul also uses the word *soma* to refer to the whole person, with an emphasis on that person’s interaction with the world. This interpretation seems to fit this verse well. What must be ‘rendered impotent’ if *I* am to be freed from sin’ (v. 6b) is not just my physical body but myself in all my sin-prone faculties. There is little evidence that Paul conceived of the physical body as the source or reigning seat of sin. Paul chooses *soma* to connote the person as the instrument of contact with the world. Here, then, Paul wants to say that our capacities to interact with the world around us have been rescued from the domination of sin.

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The phrase ‘might be’ does not here carry the idea of possibility but is simply an idiomatic way of stating an already existing fact. In other words, our historical death to sin at the cross in Christ results in our sin being ‘done away with.’ *Katargeō* (‘done away with’) literally means ‘to render inoperative or invalid,’ to make something ineffective by removing its power of control. Those truths are so nearly synonymous that verse 6 is almost a tautology. Sin that is dead (crucified) is obviously done away with. Paul states the truth in those two different ways in order to make his point more understandable and to remove any possible ambiguity.

(2) Set Free from Sin (6:6b-7)

...so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Paul’s point 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 of v. 6: ‘that we should no longer serve sin.’

The believer’s slavery under sin has already been broken by Christ and is henceforth a thing of the past. The immediate context of ‘should no longer be slaves of sin’ carries the more precise—and extremely significant—meaning that believers *can* ‘no longer be slaves of sin.’ Paul does not teach that a Christian is no longer *capable* of committing sin, but that he no longer is under the compulsion and tyranny of sin, nor will he dutifully and solely obey sin as he formerly did. For all genuine Christians, *slavery* to sin no longer exists.

Verse 7 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.’ His purpose, then, is not to prove v. 6 but to illustrate his theological point by reference to a general truth.

c) *United with Christ for Life (6:8-10)*

The fourth principle is that Christ’s one death to sin brought not only the death of sin but the death of death for those who, by faith, have died with Him. These three verses are essentially a summary of what Paul has just been teaching about the believer’s death to sin and his new life in Christ. He also stresses the permanence of that awesome and glorious truth.

In verses 4-7, Paul’s focus was on baptism into the death and burial of Christ. In verses 8-10, however, he turns to reflect on being united in baptism with Christ in His resurrection. Verses 8-10 symmetrically balance verses 4-7. The one plunged into the waters of baptism does not remain there but rises to the surface and emerges up from the water. He died and was buried but is now alive, never to die again.

(1) Our Union in Christ’s Death and Resurrection (6:8)

⁸Now 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. He does this in order to draw out the significance of that connection as seen in the light of the nature of Christ’s own death and resurrection (vv. 9-10). The future life of

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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.

The assurance that 'we shall also live with Him' obviously applies to the believer's ultimate and eternal presence with Christ in heaven. But the context, which focuses on holy living, strongly suggests that Paul is here speaking primarily about our living 'with Him' in righteousness in this present life.

(2) The Nature of Christ's Death and Resurrection (6:9-10)

(a) *Death No Longer Has Dominion (6:9)*

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

The faith that we will share Christ's resurrection is grounded in what we know. 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). As such, His resurrection spelled the beginning of the new age of redemption, in which sin and death are being vanquished (cp. 1:4). But Paul's focus in verse 8 is on the significance of Christ's resurrection for Christ Himself. Christ's resurrection means that *He* 'no longer' dies; 'death no longer has lordship over *Him*.' This language shows again that Paul is viewing matters from the perspective of the two ages of salvation history. Christ, in coming to earth incarnate, came under the influence of the powers of the old age: sin (cp. v. 10), the law (cp. Gal. 4:4), and death. Because of this Paul can say that Christ is no longer under the lordship of death.

Death did not have dominion over Christ for very long. He was vulnerable to death only because of the imputation of sin, but after He paid the price for our sin, death became powerless. The dominion of death was gone.

The point is that, because *we* have died and been raised with Christ (vv. 3-5), we, too, shall 'never die again. The sin that made us subject to death is no longer master over us, just as it 'no longer is master over Him.' It also can never be our executioner.

(b) *Died to Sin (6:10a)*

¹⁰*For the death he died he died to sin, once for all...*

What is striking about this verse is that Paul uses the same language to describe Christ's relationship to sin as he has done to describe the Christian's: dying 'to sin.' While 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. When these salvation-historical perspectives are given their due place, we are able to give 'die to sin' the same meaning here as it had v. 2: a separation or freedom from the rule of sin. And this transfer into a new state was for Christ final

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and definitive: ‘once for all.’ The finality of Christ’s separation from the power of sin shows why death can no longer rule over Him – for is not death the product of sin (Rom. 6:23)?

Verse 10 is the climax of this section of chapter 6. Because sin is the penalty of sin (6:23), to break the mastery of sin is to break the mastery of death. Two extremely important truths in verse 10 should be emphasized. The first is that Christ ‘died to sin.’ Having lived a perfectly sinless life during His incarnation, Christ obviously never had the same relationship to sin that every other human being has. He not only was never mastered by sin but never committed a sin of the least sort. How then, we wonder, could *He* have ‘died to sin’? It seems that Paul means two things in declaring that ‘Christ died to sin.’ First, He died to the *penalty* of sin by taking upon Himself the sins of the whole world. He met sin’s legal demand for all mankind who would trust in Him. By their faith in Him, empowered by His divine and limitless grace, believers have forensically died to sin. Second, Christ died to the *power* of sin, forever breaking its power over those who belong to God through their faith in His Son. It was perhaps the twin truth that believers die both to the penalty as well as to the power of sin that Augustus Toplady had in mind in the beautiful line from his great hymn *Rock of Ages* – ‘Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power’ (alternate, ‘Be of sin the double cure, save from wrath and make me pure’).

The second crucial emphasis in verse 10 is that Christ ‘died to sin, once for all.’ He achieved a victory that will never need repeating, a profound truth that the writer of Hebrews stresses again and again (7:26-27; 9:12, 28; 10:10; cp. 1 Pe. 3:18). Christ died to end Sin’s dominion ‘once for all’ (*ephapax*). Death is the ‘last enemy,’ but Christ has defeated him.

Paul emphasizes that when Christ died, He died ‘once for all.’ This is a technical term used repeatedly in the book of Hebrews to emphasize the finality of Christ’s work. Paul made this emphasis because the believer must have full confidence that the Captain of his salvation will never again come under the power of sin and death.

(c) *Living to God (6:10b)*

...but the life he lives he lives to God.

Jesus died once for all, but now He continues to live ‘unto God.’ He died, not just to die, but to be alive to God. Likewise, our calling as Christians is never primarily a negative thing. The basic Christian call is a positive thing.

Alive from the dead, Christ ‘lives to God,’ that is, the Man Christ Jesus is freed forever from Sin’s potential mastery over Him in death. Henceforth, He is subject only to the rule of God. Never again will He contemplate the rule of Death, as He did in the Garden of Gethsemane. For never again must He die for our sins. His work for us is ‘finished’ (Jn. 19:30). But the same now holds true for those who are united to the risen Christ by faith/baptism. By His resurrection for us Christ has destroyed Death. Thus Paul exhorts his original hearers, and every Christian reader since, to ‘reckon’ or ‘work out’ that, similar to Christ, they are now free from Sin’s lordship demonstrated in death, both biological and eternal. Rather, Christians must understand that they are even now ‘alive in Christ Jesus to God.’

As he has done throughout the passage, Paul sees death as the gateway to life; thus Christ, having died to sin, ‘lives to God.’ The life Christ now lives, He lives for the glory of God. Paul does not imply that Christ ever lived without seeking the will and glory of God first of all. But His resurrection has given Him new power to carry out God’s will and purpose. And the main

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reason Paul mentions Christ's 'living to God' is to set up the comparison between Christ and the Christian that he will draw in v. 11.

In looking at vv. 3-10, we must know two things: First, we must know something of our immense identity (solidarity) with Christ. Though we cannot fully understand it, we actually did die with Him and were resurrected with him in the historical events. Second, this shared death and resurrection means that the dominance of sin has been broken and we are freed from sin.

B. Alive to God (Romans 6:11-14)

1. Consider Your Union with Christ (6:11)

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

The first two words, 'even so,' are crucial to Paul's explanation, referring back to the truths he has just given in the first ten verses of the chapter. The idea is, 'You must *know and fully believe* what I have just said, or else what I am about to say will make no sense.'

The introductory words, 'in the same way also,' indicate that Paul is now drawing a comparison – a comparison between the death and life of Christ and the attitude Christians are to adopt toward themselves. But Paul also states in this verse a summarizing inference from the teaching of the paragraph as a whole. 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 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.' Paul uses a present imperative, urging us constantly to view ourselves in this light. In union with Christ we *have been made* dead to sin and alive to God; it remains for us to appropriate (v. 11) and apply (vv. 12-13) what God has done for us.

If Christians have a new holy disposition and sin's control has truly been broken, why are we still so strongly tempted, and why do we so often succumb? Paul's answer follows, 'Consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.' In its literal sense, *logizomai* ('consider') means simply to count or number something. Paul was not speaking of a psychological mind game, by which we keep affirming something over and over until we are convinced against our better judgment or even against reality that it is true. We know we are 'dead to sin' and 'alive to God in Christ Jesus' because God's Word declares it to be so. In other words, those are truths of faith and they must be affirmed in faith.

The word translated 'consider yourselves' or 'reckon' is one of the most important words in Romans. Paul uses it nineteen times in the letter, and if one does not know what it means he or she will not understand Romans. It is a commercial term that means 'to impute to one's account.' The idea is, we are to reflect on our position in Christ. Then we are to set two things to our account: 1) we are 'dead to sin'; and 2) we are 'alive to God in Christ Jesus.' Reflecting upon our identification with Christ curbs our sinning. This reckoning to our account is something we are constantly to do, as the present tense of the verb indicates.

Now, if we are honest at all, we cry out within ourselves, 'But how?' The last phrase of verse 11 is our shout of hallelujah: 'Through Jesus Christ our Lord!' It is always 'through Jesus Christ our Lord.' The Bible never says that we can live perfectly in this life; but neither, on the other

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hand, does it ever suggest that we have to be bound with the chains of our sinful past. There is a power that breaks those chains, and it is the power of the shed blood. It is the power of the living Christ. Jesus died, but He is alive. His work is finished. He is the living Christ.

You'll remember that work *reckon* from our discussion of Abraham in chapter 4. Reckoning has to do with faith. By faith, we are called to reckon, or consider, ourselves dead to sin but alive to God. Our sense of being alive to God does not depend on the reality of our coming physical resurrection, although Paul has indeed said much about this wonderful reality. Our aliveness to God is deeper than this. Even deeper than the reality of our coming resurrection is the reality that Jesus, having died once for all, now lives to God. ON the basis of this wonderful reality, we are by faith to reckon ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God in this present life.

The last phrase of the verse reminds us that this new state is possible only in union with Christ: we are alive to God only 'in Christ Jesus.' Being 'dead to sin' and 'alive to God' is a state achieved only in union with Christ, who Himself died to sin and is alive to God. In this context, 'in Christ' must be seen in light of the persistent 'with Christ' language of vv. 4-10. Both phrases connote that the believer has experienced what has taken place with our representative, Christ. While the 'with' language is more suitable to actions (dying, being buried, being raised), the 'in' language fits better the continuing relationship of 'deadness' to sin and 'aliveness' to God of which this verse speaks. Only 'in relation to,' 'as joined to,' Christ – by faith – can the new life of victory over sin become a reality.

There are many important and practical results of our considering ourselves 'dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.' First, we can have confidence in the midst of temptation, knowing that with sin's tyranny broken we *can* successfully resist in God's power (1 Cor. 10:13). Second, we have confidence that we cannot sin our way out of God's grace. Just as we have been saved by God's power alone, we are kept by His power alone (Jn. 10:27-29). Third, when we truly consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ, we have confidence in the face of death (Jn. 11:25-26; cp. Heb. 2:14). Fourth, we know that, regardless of what happens to us in this life, no matter how disastrous it may be, God will use it not only for His glory but also for our blessing (Rom. 8:28). All of these things, and many more, are true because we are 'alive to God in Christ Jesus.'

2. Live Out Your Union with Christ (6:12-14)

a) Prohibitions (6:12-13)

(1) Do Not Let Sin Reign (6:12)

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

The first prohibition – 'do not let sin reign' – is matched by the promise at the end of this small unit of verses that 'sin will not have lordship over you' (v. 14a). Without this promise, which recapitulates a main emphasis of vv. 1-11, the imperative would be futile. One may as well tell a drowning person simply to swim to shore as tell a person who is under sin's mastery not to let sin reign. Having urged Christians (on the basis of vv. 1-10) 'constantly to consider' themselves as dead to sin (v. 11), he now commands them to make it their practice never to let sin hold sway over them.

Because of the incomprehensible truths about his relationship to God that the believer knows with his mind and feels deeply committed to in his heart, he is therefore able to exercise his will

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successfully against sin and, by God's power prevent its reign in his mortal body. Sin is personified by Paul as a dethroned but still powerful monarch who is determined to reign in the believer's life just as he did before salvation. The apostle's admonition to believers, therefore, is for them to 'not let sin reign,' because it now has no right to reign. It now has no power to control a believer unless the believer chooses to obey its lusts.

Paul is not saying that you are ever going to be perfect in this life: but there's an overwhelming difference between failing to be perfect, and letting sin reign in your life. First of all, there's a difference between temptation and sin. Jesus 'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (Heb. 4:15). It is possible to be tempted without falling. Temptation is not sin. We can be tempted without sinning. Secondly, there is a difference between not being perfect in this present life and letting sin rule your life. Paul is saying, don't let sin be king in your mortal body. Notice the emphasis on the physical body, as we saw in verse 6.

Specifically, Paul urges his readers not to let sin reign 'in your mortal body.' 'Body' (*soma*) 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. 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 mortal body' is, then, the believer's form of existence in this world, which still has part in 'this age.'

Because a believer is a new creature in Christ, his immortal soul is forever beyond sin's reach. The only remaining beachhead where sin can attack a Christian is in his 'mortal body.' One day that body will be glorified and forever be out of sin's reach, but in the meanwhile it is still mortal, that is, subject to corruption and death. It still has sinful lusts—because the brain and the thinking processes are part of the mortal body—and Satan uses those lusts to lure God's people back into sin in whatever ways he can.

Paul can use 'passions' with a neutral meaning (cp. Phil.1:23; 1 Th. 2:17), but here the word refers to desires that are in conflict with the will of God. If 'body' has the general meaning we have suggested, these 'passions' would include not only the physical lusts and appetites but also those desires that reside in the mind and will: the desire to have our own way, the desire to possess what other people have (cp. 7:7-8), the desire to have dominance over others.

(2) Do Not Present Your Members to Sin (6:13a)

¹³*Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness...*

Paul has moved from the general 'you' (v. 11) to the more definite 'body' (v. 12) to the even more definite 'members.' If 'body' in v. 12 means 'person in contact with the world' in stead of 'physical body,' then 'members' also will mean 'natural capacities' rather than limbs, or parts, of the body. The prohibition 'do not present' is, like 'do not let sin reign' in v. 12, in the present tense; and, as in v. 12, Paul is probably suggesting that this prohibition is one that remains in force throughout the Christian life. Now that we understand ourselves to be 'dead to sin, alive to God' (v. 11), we must constantly avoid using our abilities and resources in the service of sin. The words Paul chooses here fit well with his focus throughout this passage on the concepts of

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rulership and domination. Our natural capacities are ‘weapons’ that we are not to ‘offer in service’ to the tyrant sin.

Paul does not warn about sin reigning in our souls or our spirits, but only about its reigning in our bodies, because that is the only place in a Christian where sin can operate. It is obvious that sin *can* reign in our bodies, else Paul’s admonition would be pointless. But it is also obvious that sin does not *have* to reign there, or the warning would be equally pointless.

b) Positive Commands (6:13b-c)

(1) Present Yourself to God (6:13b)

...but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life...

The renunciation of our service to sin is to be followed immediately by our enlisting in the service of a new master: God. Matching the negative ‘do not present your members for sin’ is the positive ‘present yourselves to God.’ As Paul will make clear in vv. 16ff., there can be no ‘neutral’ position between service of God and service of sin. By characterizing those whom he commands ‘as those alive from the dead,’ Paul reminds us that this presenting of ourselves to God can take place only because of the new state we find ourselves in as a result of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection (see v. 11).

(2) Present Your Members to God (6:13c)

...and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

The words *instruments* is the Greek word for ‘arms’ or ‘weapons.’ Don’t yield yourselves as ‘arms of unrighteousness’ to sin, but yield yourselves and your members as arms or weapons of righteousness to God. When you and I let sin reign in our mortal body, when we yield ourselves to the devil, he uses us with saber-like sharpness in his battle against God. There are some things we do as Christians that may seem morally neutral, but in most of the choices we make we are either yielding to the power of Christ or we are letting sin reign in our mortal body as we yield ourselves to the devil.

What we are to offer to God are ‘your members as weapons of righteousness.’ The ‘members’ that were once used as ‘weapons’ in the service of sin and for unrighteous purposes are now to be used as weapons in God’s service, for righteous purposes. ‘Righteousness,’ used here for the first time since 5:21, probably does not have a forensic meaning (status of righteousness) but a moral meaning: behavior pleasing to God.

Here is the answer to the question prompted by the previous verse, that is, how does one reject Sin’s rule in the body? The baptized believer, as delivered from Death by the resurrection of Christ, is to make critical decisions about his or her ‘members,’ that is, the ‘members’ of the body. Such ‘members’ are capable of being ‘instruments’ either of ‘wickedness’ or ‘righteousness.’ To do so is by this exercise of the will based on the informed mind that I repudiate Sin’s practical rule in my life. Pastorally speaking, it is recognized that such teaching is not easy to fulfill. But there is forgiveness for failure, and there is strength from God to move forward.

c) Promise (6:14)

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

Paul says the whole person has been raised from spiritual death and is called to a new kind of slavery. He continues this metaphor of slavery when he calls us to be slaves of righteousness—

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not servants of Satan, but servants of Christ. That is the difference between the old life and the new life. Verse 14 is a promise. The phrase is written in the indicative, not the imperative. Earlier it was written in the imperative: ‘Do not let sin reign’ (v. 12). Now Paul is writing in the indicative. He is describing our state of affairs now. Sin’s dominion is gone. It is history. We cannot be brought back again into absolute bondage to sin as we once were.

In verse 14, Paul changes from admonition to declaration, offering assuring words. ‘Law’ cannot break either sin’s penalty or its power. It can only rebuke, restrain, condemn. The Christian is no longer under the condemnation of God’s law but is now under the redeeming power of His grace. It is in the power of that grace that the Lord calls him to live.

‘Sin’ is again personified as power. These words are to be understood as a promise that is valid for every believer at the present time: ‘sin shall certainly not be your Lord – now or ever!’ 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.’

This promise is confirmed by the assurance that ‘you are not under law but under grace.’ That the law is so suddenly brought onto the scene at the end of this paragraph reveals the extent to which Paul’s presentation of his gospel in this letter never moves too far from the salvation-historical question of Old Covenant and New, Jew and Gentile. ‘Under law’ is another way of characterizing ‘the old realm.’ This explains why Paul can make release from the law a reason for the Christian’s freedom from the power of sin: as he has repeatedly stated, the Mosaic law has had a definite sin-producing and sin-intensifying function: it has brought ‘knowledge of sin’ (3:20), ‘wrath’ (4:15), ‘transgression’ (5:13-14), and an increase in the severity of sin (5:20). The law, as Paul puts it in 1 Cor. 15:56 is ‘the power of sin.’ To be ‘under law’ is to be subject to the constraining and sin-strengthening regime of the old age; to be ‘under grace’ is to be subject to the new age in which freedom from the power of sin is available. The paragraph that began with the question ‘Should we remain in sin in order that grace may increase?’ ends with the glad tidings that we are under grace in order that sin might be overcome.

Romans 6 is the classic biblical text on the importance of relating the ‘indicative’ of what God has done for us with the ‘imperative’ of what we are to do. Paul stresses that we must actualize in daily experience the freedom from sin’s lordship (cp. v. 14a) that is ours ‘in Christ Jesus.’ State is to become reality: we are ‘to become what we are.’ Paul makes it clear, by the sequence in this paragraph, that we can live a holy life only as we appropriate the benefits of our union with Christ. But he also makes it clear, because there *is* a sequence, that living the holy life is distinct from (but not separate from) what we have attained by our union with Christ and that holiness of life can be stifled if we fail continually to appropriate and put to work the new life God has given us.

For next time: Read Romans 6:15-23.