

FREE

All who accept the gospel find freedom from the guilt of sin.

ROMANS 6:1-14

FIRST THOUGHTS

We usually think of freedom in terms of being free to do things. We like the idea of doing whatever we want, whenever we want. We appreciate being free to speak, free to work, free to worship, and free to disagree. But freedom has another side—the freedom not to act. Paul wanted the Romans to understand this side of freedom. Our freedom in Christ means we don't have to live in guilt, and we don't have to live in bondage to sin.

(In PSG, p. 51) **What are some things you can do because you're a Christian? What are some things that you have the power to avoid because you're a Christian?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 6:1–7:25

Paul ended the previous chapter with the observation that although the coming of the law increased the trespass, “where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more” (Rom. 5:20). Did such a teaching encourage immorality? Paul answered this question with a series of rhetorical questions, each answered with a resounding “Absolutely not!”

The first question dealt with the misinformed conclusion that greater grace could be obtained by continuing to sin (6:1). Paul demonstrated the absurdity of a believer who had died to sin actually living in sin. Using baptism as an illustration, Paul reminded believers that when they were saved, they had died to sin and had been buried with Christ. Paul ended this section by urging believers not to obey the desires of sin.

A second question also related to sin in the lives of those who are under grace (6:15). Paul reminded believers that in the past they were slaves to sin, but in Christ they were now slaves to righteousness. As slaves to sin they had once offered themselves to impurity and lawlessness, which produced death as its fruit. Now that they were slaves to God, freed from sin, their fruit was sanctification that leads to eternal life. Sin earned them death, but God's free gift was eternal life in Christ.

As ones who knew the law, Paul expected believers to know that the law had power only over those who were alive (7:1). Marriage laws applied to a woman only while her husband was still alive; if he died, she was freed from those laws and could remarry without being an adulteress. In the same way, since we belong to Christ who died and was raised from the dead, we have been released from the law. Our death to sin in Christ has freed us “so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law” (7:6).

The third question seemed a logical conclusion since believers are under grace and not law: “Is the law sin?” (7:7). Once again, Paul answered with a resounding “Absolutely not!” The problem was not with the law but with sin that used the commandment to produce death. Paul concluded, “So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” (7:12).

That conclusion led to the last question: “Did what is good become death to me?” (7:13). The problem lay in the battle between Paul’s desire to do good and the sinful flesh that warred within him. Paul’s dilemma caused him to cry out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:24-25). Paul knew “there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (8:1).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

DEAD TO SIN (ROM. 6:1-7)

VERSES 1-2

¹ What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? ² Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Earlier in his letter, Paul had broached the topic of the relationship between sin and grace. Some opponents had falsely accused him of encouraging people to sin as a means of accomplishing good. Paul concluded, “Their condemnation is deserved!” (Rom. 3:8). In the closing verses of chapter 5, Paul once again raised the issue: “The law came along to multiply the trespass. But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more” (5:20). The same accusation raised in 3:8 could be raised against Paul once more. Was Paul encouraging a life of sin as a way to multiply grace? Stated another way, does not grace without law undercut morality? In Romans 3:8, Paul had simply dismissed the charge against him as absurd. Here Paul addressed the issue directly by means of a series of questions, demonstrating the flaw in his opponent’s logic.

Absolutely not was the answer to Paul’s question in 6:1. Paul followed with two more questions designed to explain his answer. First, believers cannot continue to live in sin because they have *died to sin*. The phrase *died to sin* indicates a decisive, final break with sin and ties the believer’s death to sin to Christ’s death on the cross. Paul may have intended the phrase *died to sin* to refer to sin’s penalty paid at the cross; however, given the commands in 6:12-14, death to sin probably referred to the death of sin’s rule or power in the believers’ lives. Because of Christ’s death on the cross, sin no longer rules in believers’ bodies. It makes no sense for believers who have died to sin to live in that sin to which they have died.

VERSES 3-4

³ Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴

Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.

With the second question, Paul drew believers back to their baptismal experience. The question, *Or are you unaware*, indicates Paul was bringing up information about baptism that the believers should already know. Believers who have been *baptized into Christ Jesus* have also been *baptized into his death*. Some Bible teachers have argued that Paul used the word *baptized* figuratively, perhaps to refer to baptism into the Spirit. Although Paul could use the word figuratively (1 Cor. 10:2), he usually had the Christian rite of water baptism in mind, as is the case here. Paul used similar vocabulary in writing to the Galatians: “For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ” (Gal. 3:27). The act of water baptism was a sign to the church and to the world that the participant recognized the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross and had joined in union with Christ and His fate. For a believer to be baptized *into Christ Jesus* meant that the believer had also been baptized into His death.

Paul next turned to the implications of our being baptized into Christ's death: *we were buried with him*. Our burial with Christ is *by baptism into death*. Paul made no mention in this verse of the role of faith in baptism, although the letter as a whole makes very clear the necessity of faith (Rom. 1:16-17). Paul's point here was not to explain the nature and meaning of baptism but to use baptism as an illustration of the absurdity of believers willfully living in sin, a point he made clear in the last half of this verse.

The purpose of our being buried with Christ is that we might walk in a new kind of life. Christ died, was buried, and was raised up *by the glory of the Father*. Since we have died and been buried with Christ through baptism, we can live changed lives. The phrase *just as ... so we too* indicates the similarity between the two events; just as Jesus' resurrection was *by the glory of the Father*, our ability to live changed lives is empowered by the same glorious Father.

VERSES 5-7

⁵ For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, ⁷ since a person who has died is freed from sin.

Paul's reason for confidence that believers can live changed lives is our union with Christ. He made the point above that through baptism believers had been buried with Christ into death. Since that is true, Paul was confident that believers would also be united with Christ's resurrection. Here Paul used the phrases *in the likeness of his death* and *in the likeness of his resurrection*. The same language is used elsewhere to refer to idols that resemble human beings (1:23) and locust that resembled horses (Rev. 9:7). He also used the word to describe something more than superficial similarity. He used it to describe Jesus' humanity (Phil. 2:7), probably indicating Jesus as fully God and fully man. He also used the word to describe Jesus as bearing our sinful flesh: "by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering" (Rom. 8:3). We share in the death of Jesus, and we also share in His glory (8:17).

Appeal was once again made to the prior knowledge of the Roman Christians: *For we know*. Paul reminded them they had been *crucified with Christ*. He expressed the same idea in his letter to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). The phrase *old self* refers to the believer's whole person before Christ. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul spoke of the old self as a "former way of life," which is laid aside so that the "new self, the one created according to God's likeness" might be put on (Eph. 4:22-24). For that *old self* to be laid aside, it must be crucified with Christ on the cross.

The crucifixion of the old self made powerless *the body ruled by sin*. Paul's point was not that the physical body is inherently sinful but that before Christ our bodies were under the control of sin. Believers whose old selves have been crucified with Christ are no longer *enslaved to sin*. The Greek word translated *rendered powerless* can refer to power that has been negated or made ineffective or to someone or something that has come to an end or ceased to exist. Sin's power over us was broken at the cross.

Since we have died to sin by our union with Christ's death, how should we respond to those who treat sin as though it is no big deal?

ALIVE IN CHRIST (ROM. 6:8-11)

VERSES 8-9

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him, ⁹ because we know that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again. Death no longer rules over him.

Paul had already demonstrated that believers have died with Christ (6:4-6). Now he would draw out the implication of that fact: *we believe that we will also live with him*. The future tense *we will also live* has been interpreted in one of two ways. Some Bible teachers have suggested that the future tense expresses logical progression: dying with Christ logically comes before living with Christ. In this case, Paul would have been talking about the new life in Christ that believers experience now. Others have suggested that the future tense should be interpreted as referring to a future action. In that case, Paul would be pointing to the life that believers will experience when Jesus returns and God's kingdom is fully established. The two choices are not mutually exclusive.

For the third time in this chapter (vv. 3,6,9) Paul grounded what he wrote in the prior knowledge of the community (*we know that*). Here, it was the knowledge that Christ's resurrection was unique. The Bible contains several accounts of people who died and were restored to life (1 Kings 17:17-24; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:1-44). In each case those brought back to life died again. Not so with Jesus. Paul wrote that *Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again*. Jesus' death on the cross broke the power of death. His death and resurrection anticipate the final resurrection of believers and God's ultimate victory over death (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

VERSES 10-11

¹⁰ For the death he died, he died to sin once for all time; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The reason death no longer rules over Jesus is because *he died to sin once for all time*. Paul began this chapter with a reminder that believers had died to sin (Rom. 6:2). Their death to sin was possible because of Jesus' once-for-all death. The single Greek word translated "once for all time" is found three times in Hebrews, each time referring to Jesus' death. The writer of Hebrews said it this way: "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time" (Heb. 10:10).

In verse 11 Paul drew a comparison between Jesus' situation and that of the Roman Christians. Jesus' once-for-all death was markedly different from that of believers. Yet His death was the reason they also had died to sin. Their faith commitment to Christ had been expressed in their baptism, and now Paul urged them to consider themselves what they already were—*dead to sin*. The Greek word translated *consider* was a mathematical term that could mean to evaluate something as the result of a calculation. The word also could mean to give careful thought to a matter or to hold a particular position or point of view.

Paul was asking the Roman believers to rethink their status. Since they had died to sin and were *alive to God in Christ Jesus*, the possibility of remaining in sin so grace might increase (Rom. 6:1) was obviously absurd.

How will considering ourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ affect our daily lives? Can you think of specific examples?

TOOLS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (ROM. 6:12-14)

VERSES 12-13

¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. ¹³ And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness.

Paul brought to practical conclusion his discussion of sin and death by issuing two prohibitions and a command. These challenges urge believers to be what they actually are: dead to sin and alive in Christ. First, we are not to

allow sin to exercise authority over us. The phrase *mortal body* refers to our physical bodies. The body itself is not sinful. However, we are subject to the temptations common to the world in which we live.

We are to refuse to allow sin to exercise authority in our lives—to obey sin’s desires. These desires would include, but are not limited to, physical appetites and lusts that go beyond basic human needs (for example, gluttony or sexual lust). They would also include the desire for power, greediness, and pride, to name a few.

The same verb is used in both the second prohibition and the command, first stating what believers ought not to do, followed by what believers ought to do. The Greek word translated *offer* means to put something at someone’s disposal. The word could also be used as a technical term for presenting a sacrifice. Jesus used the word to remind Peter that, if Jesus requested it, the Father would have provided Him with legions of angels (Matt. 26:53). Paul also used the word to describe believers’ presenting themselves to God as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1).

Here believers are challenged not to present any of their parts *to sin as weapons for unrighteousness*. The Greek word translated *parts* usually refers to individual parts of one’s body, but it can also refer to individual members of a larger group. Paul moved from the “mortal body” (6:12) to parts of the body, probably referring to the various functions of the body. The word translated *weapons* can refer to any type of tool or instrument, though the word frequently refers to an instrument used in military combat (John 18:3). It is also used figuratively of weapons in spiritual combat (2 Cor. 10:4).

The negative and positive commands in verse 13 are largely parallel. The believer is to allow no part of himself to be available to sin as a weapon of wickedness but is to offer every part of his being as a weapon of righteousness for God. The apostle was not urging believers’ passive refusal to allow sin control over their lives; rather, Paul was urging them to actively use their whole selves as weapons of righteousness in the battle against sin.

Before anything else, believers are to *offer themselves to God*, who alone will ensure the victory. They are to do this in their status as those who have died to sin and are now alive in Christ.

In what practical ways can we offer our bodies as weapons in the fight for righteousness?

VERSE 14

¹⁴ For sin will not rule over you, because you are not under the law but under grace.

Paul ended this section with the declaration that *sin will not rule over you*. The future tense probably indicates a once-for-all promise: sin will not rule over you now, or any other time. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, sin does not have the right or the power to rule over the believer. The reason for Paul’s bold statement is that believers *are not under the law but under grace*. What the law demanded is now achieved through grace.

KEY DOCTRINE

Baptism

Baptism is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus (Col. 3:12).

BIBLE SKILL

Use a concordance and Bible dictionary to learn more about a feature of Israel’s religious life.

Use a Bible concordance to find references in Scripture to “baptize” and “baptism.” Make a list of when baptism was administered and under what circumstances. What can you learn about the purpose and practice of baptism from your list? How do your findings help you interpret Romans 6:3-4?

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “InSites: Baptism: Its Origin and Practice” in the Spring 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.