

## Romans 6:1-23

### Introduction

Having just claimed that the Mosaic Law is ineffective in diminishing sin and, in fact, increases it, Paul now addresses how one covenanted to God through Christ overcomes sin and obeys God. He uses the rhetorical device of probing questions as if they were delivered from one who still believes in the effectiveness of the Mosaic Law to squelch sin. These questions appear in 6:1, 15: 7:7, 13. Paul's "answer" in each case begins with "Absolutely not!" and then states the principle that undermines the question's assumptions. It is not necessary to conclude that the questioner is hostile to Paul's view; the questions may very well represent legitimate concerns from one who does not quite understand yet.

In chapters 6-8 the words "sin," "death," "law," and "flesh" come up repeatedly. These negative factors continue to be a part of the reality of life even though Jesus' death and resurrection has overcome the world of sin and death. How are believers to deal with the reality of those negative forces that continue to exist? In the next three chapters Paul deals with this question. The negative force that takes center stage in chapter 6 is sin. The divine remedy is seen in the reality that baptism with Christ is an experience of death to sin (6:1-14), and in that coming to faith is a change of masters (6:15-23).

### Dead to Sin: 6:1-14

The diatribe style continues to play a role, although a less significant role in this section. Verse one is either a perceived objection or legitimate question to what Paul had said in 5:20-21. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." So, "Should we continue to sin in order that grace may abound? Just as God remained faithful when Israel was unfaithful (3:7-8), won't God's grace continue to overcome sin if we continue to live in the world of Adam, if we continue to sin?" As Paul admitted in 5:1-5, Christ-followers suffer because their lives clash against a world in which sin and death continue to be realities (the world of Adam). "What does it really mean when you (Paul) say that Jesus' death and resurrection has brought in the reign of grace and life?" Life experience seems to say that sin and death still reign. If, as Paul said in 5:20-21, law cannot counter sin and grace supersedes sin, should it be concluded that Christ-followers are to live in ways that fit in with the old world of Adam for now? This is not about individual sins a person might commit, but is a discussion of the overall attitude Christians are to have toward a world where sin still remains very prominent.

The answer is of course, "Absolutely, positively not!" You belong to the new world characterized by Christ, so live accordingly. This is about status or place in which Christ-followers live. To continue to live in the old world allowing sin to dominate one's life would be like a Floridian moving to the South Pole and wearing his/her shorts and t-shirts. It just does not make any sense. Where we live dictates behavior. The logical question then is, "How does that work Paul?"

The answer is found in Jesus and the believer's relationship to Jesus. Baptism is not the main subject of this section. Paul took their experience and current understanding of baptism and applied it to his discussion of old world in Adam and new

world in Christ. Beginning in verse four, Paul used a series of compound words to describe the relationship believers have with Christ. Those words are “bury *with*” (v. 4), “crucified *with*” (v. 6), and “live *with*” (v. 8). These all show the communality that believers should understand they have with Jesus. In contrast, it declares the end of relationship between believers and the values of the world of Adam, the world dominated by sin. See 2 Cor. 5:14-15.

Baptism is pictured as a uniting with Jesus’ death, which pictures a moving from the old world of Adam dominated by sin to the new world of Christ where grace and life reign. Jesus was never under the domination of sin in the sense that it led him to sin, but while in human form He lived in the sphere dominated by sin. It was this world under the dominion of sin that brought about his death. In death, Jesus was released from the sphere dominated by sin. Sin will never again do to Jesus what it did on the cross. Sin no longer has power over Him in any sense. Such is the world in which Christ-followers are called to live, with their lives being united with the death of Jesus, no longer allowing sin to have dominion or to have control over their lives. Christ-followers are to view themselves as dead in terms of their relationship with the power of sin and live accordingly.

The word “if,” as most translations read in the beginning of verse 5, should be understood as “since.” It is a statement of surety rather than a statement of doubt. The word translated “united with” in verse 5 carries the image of the growing together of a wound or fusing of the broken ends of a bond” (Dunn, pg. 316). Paul called what has occurred in the life of a believer knitting together with the *likeness* or *similarity* of Jesus’ death. “What the believer has been ‘fused/knit together with’ is the reality of Christ’s epoch-ending, sin’s -domination-breaking death, in its outworking in the here and now, Christ’s death to the extent that it can be experienced and is effective within the still enduring epoch of Adam” (Dunn. pg. 317).

This is not about the individual behaviors that Paul calls “of the flesh.” The discussion is about Sin as the force or power that dominated the age of Adam. Sin is to no longer be that which characterizes the life of the believer. The values of the age of Adam are no longer to be the values of believers. This is “not just that Jesus modeled an act to be repeated. Jesus is the pioneer who has opened the way for others to follow” (Talbert, pg. 165). The power of the resurrection is already at work in the lives of believers. The NEB translates the end of verse 4, “so also we might set our feet upon the new path of life.”

Death was not the final word. Resurrection is the final word. God continues to bring about His purposes for the world beyond the grave. Just as sin no longer has any destructive power over Jesus, death has no power over Him. He will never die again. The resurrection of Jesus is the impetus for believers to live in a different world, one no longer dominated by sin and death. “So that as Christ was raised from the dead ... we might walk in newness of life.” Having been united with Jesus in death, the believer looks with certainty (v. 5b) to the time when he/she will be one with Jesus in resurrection. Jesus lives and His existence is given totally to the glory of the Father (“he lives to God”). We, having died to sin should now consider ourselves alive to serve God.

The conclusion (vv. 12-14) is that the believer should not let Sin and its passions dominate his/her life. Verse 13 may be more intense than the common translation of

“instruments of wickedness” - instruments of righteousness.” The phrases may be more correctly translated “weapons of wickedness” - “weapons of righteousness.” The believer still lives in a world that is still dominated by Sin. Having been released from sin’s ownership of them, believers are to fight against sin’s desire to use their lives in destructive ways that promote its power. Rather, their lives are to be weapons for righteousness. As will be discussed in the following verses, there is an ongoing struggle against being divided in one’s loyalties. Believers are called to “fight with the sustained discipline of a gladiator fighting for his/her life to avoid that happening” (Dunn, pg. 350). Paul will say more later in this letter about the real power that enables believers in their struggle to not succumb sin.

Verse 14 introduces the next section. Sin no longer has the dominant say over a believer’s life because they are no longer under law but under grace. Paul reminded them again that the law was used by sin to gain its dominion over them. What God did through Jesus took them out from under the demands of law and placed them in the realm of grace.

### **Enslaved To God: 6:15-23**

As did the opening verses of this chapter, Paul proposed a follow-up objection or question to what he had just said about not being under law. For a Jew, the removal of law as a tool to combat sin left nothing to battle sin. This surely opens the floodgates, in the mind of a Torah-focused person, to uninhibited sin. Paul’s gospel seems to be encouraging sin.

The answer again is, “Absolutely, positively no!” Paul pulled a page out of their own lives to make his point. There is a good chance that most of the church in Rome was made up of slaves or freedmen (former slaves). Some were slaves due to military conquest. Others sold themselves into slavery in order to support their family. Regardless of how someone in Rome had become a slave, they certainly understood the concept of loyalty in this context. Slaves were to be totally loyal to their masters. It would have been treacherous for a slave of one master to give his/her allegiance to another master.

People are slaves to something. The notion that humanity has complete freedom is not reality. There is always something that has power over our lives. If sin continues to dominate your life, you are a slave to sin. The result of loyalty to sin is death, because death is the natural consequence of sin. Paul’s readers had once been under the reign of sin.

But the church in Rome had been released from the reign of sin. They had given their heart to the “form of teaching.” Although Paul does not here go into detail in describing the “form of teaching,” he is no doubt talking about the gospel. They had committed themselves to the One who died to sin and was raised because of God’s faithfulness to His covenant.

The common translation of verse 17 seems to fall short of giving its intended meaning. This verse is describing the transfer of ownership from that of being a slave to sin to becoming an obedient slave to Christ. The idea of “have become obedient from the heart” combines divine initiative and human response. Ezekiel 36:26-27 talks of God putting a new heart and new spirit within His people. There is also an acknowledgment here of a person yielding to the divine initiative (“you have become).

In the phrase “this form of teaching” Paul uses the word *tupos* which is almost always used by Paul to speak of a person as an example of conduct (Phil 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:7). It was used of Adam in 5:14 as a *type* of one to come (Jesus). Jesus’ faithfulness is a pattern for life in the Kingdom of God. The phrase “to which” might best be seen as a personal reference, thus translated “to whom.” This would then be referring to Jesus, the antitype to Adam. The word, “entrusted” might better be translated “handed over” or “delivered.” Handed over is in the passive tense indicating an action done to or for someone. Another aspect of this verse is the word *didache* or *teaching*. In 16:17, Paul will warn the church in Rome against the Nationalistic Jewish Teacher type who opposes the teaching about Jesus and his faithfulness. Paul discussed the relationship of obedience to Torah and the heart in 2:13-16, 25-29. Paul is making the point that they have not been released from sin by obeying the teaching of the Law, but from yielding their heart to the working of God in their lives. Putting all this together leads to this paraphrase, “Thanks be to God that though you were slaves to Sin through obedience to Torah, God handed you over to Christ and you yielded whole hearted obedience, being conformed to the imprint of Jesus which you were taught.” For more insight into this verse see Dunn, pp. 343-44, 353-4.

In verse 20, sin and righteousness are seen as opposing powers. When living in the world of Adam and under the reign of sin, righteousness had no sway over how life was lived. Verse 21 literally reads, “What fruit did you have (while slaves of sin).” As the sentence continues, those were things that they are now ashamed of having been the dominating factor in their lives. Not only have they come to understand that their former life was shameful, they have come to understand that death was the outcome of that way of life. In contrast to death being the fruit of a life under the reign of sin, the fruit of living under the lordship of Jesus is sanctification or holiness. The word translated “sanctification” speaks of the character of God and of the life that characterizes those whose allegiance is given to God. Paul ended this section with a repetition of what he has said. Living under the reign of sin pays out the wages of death. But God has given a free gift (no wages earned) and that is eternal life in Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

Paul envisioned his readers having difficulty understanding some of the aspects of the gospel. Some thought grace meant it did not matter how one lives. Others thought believing Mosaic Law played a role in sin’s domination of humanity removed any restraint over the influence of sin. These views are not unlike many views today. Some extreme views of Calvinism teach that once a person has made a confession of faith the life that follows has no effect on their relationship with God. People can purposely engage in the most horrific sin imaginable and it have no impact on their relationship with God. Other people believe being right with God is all about knowing everything right and doing everything right. The only deterrent to sin is preaching hell, fire, and damnation.

Paul’s response is that it is all about where one lives. To live under the dominion of sin produces the fruit of death. Those who have come to trust in the love and faithfulness of God need to understand that in baptism they were joined to Christ’s death, which was a death to sin. They are no longer to see their lives as characterized by the world of Adam’s domination. They are to see their lives as being characterized

by that of Jesus. This is a life in which God and holiness are the dominate factors, rather than Sin.

As much as people like to think that they are free, it is only an illusion. All people serve some master. It may be sin and their own selfish passion. Living under that master produces the fruit of death. The alternative is to live under the lordship of God and Jesus. The fruit of that choice is life. One's general conduct of life identifies the master of that individual.

