

Freedom

BELIEVERS ARE FREED FROM THE POWER OF SIN.

I have been part of Southern Baptist churches from the cradle roll to the present day. Every church where I was a member had a baptistry, and baptism was a prominent part of their services. Persons joined the church either by profession of faith and baptism or by letter (affirming their conversion and baptism elsewhere). I can't count the number of times I heard the pastor proclaim over a person, "Buried with Christ in baptism, raised to newness of life."

Outsiders might look at baptism simply as a curious ritual marking the admission of a person into membership in a church. Even some recent converts seem to think of baptism as optional—something they might do one day. I have never understood that kind of thinking. The meaning of baptism seems too obvious and its importance too great for it to be diminished in that way. As a result, I have always appreciated churches that emphasize baptism and regularly teach people what it means.

I know that sometimes the things we do routinely can lose some of their luster. And I suppose it is understandable that baptism can suffer that fate if a church is not careful. A few years ago, during the COVID outbreak, our church began meeting in an open-air pavilion and moved a baptistry into a central, always-visible place where we met. Baptisms always began with church members surrounding the baptistry and giving personal testimonies regarding the person being baptized. Some recalled the person's journey to faith. Some vowed to support the new believer's journey. Changing how we conducted a baptism helped people see it with fresh eyes.

In today's Scripture passage, Paul expressed surprise that a people who celebrated baptisms would not seem to understand the truths that the act teaches. A past dominated by sin and alienation from God was over. Grace, repentance, and faith had put an end to it. A new life had begun, and baptism publicly celebrated it. Understanding what baptism symbolizes provides a launching pad for a person's Christian journey. The points Paul made for the Roman believers are vitally important. Let's listen in.

Romans 6:1-14

Acts and Paul's letters make it clear that the apostle engaged in frequent debate with unbelieving Jews. By the time he wrote Romans, he had probably heard all the objections and counter arguments imaginable. He knew the Scriptures to reference and the arguments to use in support of the gospel story.

Romans gives us a window into Paul's hard-earned, Spirit-led teachings regarding Jesus. Using the diatribe method, Paul presented truth and then imagined the questions and counterarguments some in his audience would have had. No doubt leaning on his past experiences, Paul introduced his opponents' likely concerns and arguments in the form of questions. By posing and answering these questions himself, he sought to advance his teachings about Jesus while removing barriers to the gospel before his opponents could even raise them.

 ▶ EXPLORE THE TEXT ◀

Dead to Sin (Rom. 6:1-7)

All have sinned and earned the wrath of a just God. Reconciliation with God comes not through law keeping or doing good, but by the grace of God alone through faith in His Son, Jesus, who died and rose from the dead for the forgiveness of sin for all who believe.

VERSE 1

What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply?

What should we say then? introduces questions that people logically could have asked after hearing Paul's teachings about sin, law, and grace (Rom. 1:18-5:17), teachings that he had just summarized succinctly (5:18-21). **Should we continue** translates a Greek word meaning to remain or to abide in a state. The question implies that the gospel Paul was teaching led to the conclusion that to **continue in sin** would result in God extending additional grace to sinners. And if God's glory is seen in

the grace He grants, then continued sin would lead to more glory for God. So, does Paul's gospel logically teach that converts should persist in sin **so that grace may multiply** (or "increase," NASB, NIV)?

VERSE 2

Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Paul answered this question with one of the strongest negatives possible in Greek, **Absolutely not!** Directing his question to believers who still must have been struggling to understand the gospel, he asked, **How can we who died to sin still live in it?**

We who died to sin highlights one of the central truths shaping believers. Paul used a pronoun for *who* that implies membership in a class or category of persons. Born-again persons, dead-to-sin persons, could not by their very new nature comfortably continue living a sinful lifestyle. By the power of God's grace through faith, people previously dead *in sin* are now dead *to sin* (Rom. 6:11; Eph. 2:1-10).

Given what has happened to the believer in Christ—the spiritual transformation, the reception of the Spirit, and the new relationship with God (2 Cor. 5:17)—how could anyone think that grace means the believer can embrace sin as their preferred lifestyle (*still live in it*)? Believers struggle at times to do what is right, loving, and good. But sin is no longer the default or comfortable behavior. Believers are not kept in line by the law; rather, their life choices are shaped by their new nature in Christ.

VERSE 3

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

Baptism by immersion gave expression to a person's repentance, but it also focused on the work of Jesus as the one who gave it both meaning and power (Acts 2:38; 3:19). Baptism does not change anyone, but the relationship it symbolizes does. The person **baptized into Christ Jesus** was at the same time **baptized into his death**. It symbolizes death to the old way of life.

VERSE 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.

Being **buried with him by baptism into death** is not the end of the process. Believers in baptism are symbolically buried **in order that . . . we too may walk in newness of life**. In other words, the symbolic act of baptism gives expression to a very real transformation in the life of the believer. *Death* is followed by a new *life*.

In Christ, believers die to sin—they have repented of it, turned away from it, and have had it forgiven by grace through faith in Jesus. At the same time, followers of Jesus begin a new life, which cannot be a continuation of their sinful existence. Not because they are keeping the law, but because they are new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), obedient to His commands, and empowered and guided by His Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25). Grace leads to new life, and it is that very transition that brings glory to God.

VERSE 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.

Baptism also symbolizes the union of the believer with Christ. Paul started his statement with the kind of **if** clause that is assumed true (“since”). Given the fact that believers **have been united with him [Christ] in the likeness of his death**, then logically the same must be true **in the likeness of his resurrection**.

The word Paul used for *united* was sometimes used to describe the grafting of a limb into a tree. It implies a close association in which one thing is not just identified with the other, but the two previously separate elements grow together so that they are intrinsically connected. Thus, the believer comes to share the *likeness* of Christ—a term used not just of common appearance, but also of common experience.

Christ’s death and resurrection marked an ending of His earthly life and the beginning of a distinctly different *resurrection* life. Similarly, believers should understand that their union with Christ is the beginning of a new life. A life that has as its impulse and its goal growth toward “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14, ESV). This is the natural result of becoming united with Christ. Believers are changed, with the result that they cannot comfortably continue to live in sin. Nor do they live as law-keepers trying to earn God’s forgiveness and favor. Rather their new life results in living as committed Christ-followers, as a people united with Him to the extent that they grow in *likeness* to Him.

VERSES 6-7

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, since a person who has died is freed from sin.

Paul continued to drive his point home with yet another image—that of the old self versus the new self. The **old self** refers to the life people lived before their encounter with Christ. The *old self* is characterized by futility of mind and darkened understanding, alienation from God, and spiritual ignorance. Understandably, such separation from God and hardness of heart lead to “the practice of every kind of impurity” (Eph. 4:17-24).

Those in Christ “take off” their “old self” and “put on the new self” which is “created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth” (Eph. 4:20-24). The *old self* **was crucified with** Christ and thus crucified to the world (Gal. 6:14). No longer bound by the power of sin to the old life, the believer is freed to live directed by the presence, example, and power of Jesus (2:20). In this way, **the body ruled by sin** (the old self) was **rendered powerless**.

In Christ, the body of sin should no longer dominate the believer’s behavior (vv. 19-20). Its power is broken so that the believer **may no longer be enslaved to sin**. Sin separated the sinner from God. Sin destined the sinner for wrath. Sin led to more sin compounding the sinner’s guilt. Salvation frees the believer from the bonds of sin. Once believers are **freed from sin** they are free to grow in Christlikeness.

Believers live as they do as result of their liberation from the sin that previously separated them from God and as an expression of their new nature as followers of Jesus. They now live a new life, not out of obligation to a system of laws but as an outgrowth of their relationship with the living Christ.



Explore Further

Read “Baptism” on pages 170–172 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. According to the article, what is the definition of baptism and what is its meaning? How would you explain the meaning and importance of baptism to a new believer?

Alive in Christ (Rom. 6:8-11)

Baptism signifies the death of the believer to his or her old way of life. It gives public expression to repentance. Baptism provides a picture of the fact that in our commitment to Jesus, we die to the sin that characterized our past lives. But this is only the beginning of our story in Christ.

VERSE 8

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

The word Paul used for **if**, once again, expresses a condition that is assumed true. The believer, as they represented in his or her baptism, has **died with Christ**. But the believer's death with Christ is not mere symbolism. It conveys a spiritual and eternal reality. For those who believe, Christ's death removes the sin and guilt that has separated them from God. It rescues them from the wrath of God. Those previously dead in sin have all of their sins forgiven (Col. 2:13). By paying the price of sin, Christ broke the power of sin—its ability to condemn and control the sinner.

Freed from the penalty and power of sin, the believer is free to live in relationship with God. So, since the Christian has died to sin with Christ, **we believe that we will also live with him**. This is the reality and conviction that shapes the believer's present and future. *We will also live with him* looks forward to being with Christ in the eternal kingdom of God. But it is also true of our immediate, earthly future.

Believers who have died with Christ, live with Him now and will live with Him for as many tomorrows as God gives them in this life. Just as death with Christ is not merely symbolic, neither is life with Christ. Believers are no longer separated from the Father by their sin, so their walk with Him and His influence in their lives is immediate and real. Thus, the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the life of the Christian provides guidance for godly living. And while believers must continue to battle against the influence of the world, they do not do so alone, but in the power of the Spirit (Eph. 5:15-21; Gal. 5:22-25).

VERSE 9

because we know that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again. Death no longer rules over him.

Because we know again reminds readers that Christians should know the truths Paul was pointing out. And while these are theological truths,

they also carry practical, real-world implications. What believers know should also have an impact on how they act.

Believers know that Christ has **been raised from the dead**. The fact of the resurrection had a powerful meaning for Paul. Before becoming a Christian, Paul persecuted the church. Clearly, he did not believe Jesus was the Son of God and Messiah. The event that turned a persecutor of the church into an apostle of the Lord was an encounter that proved to him that Jesus had risen (Acts 9).

Jesus's resurrection proves that death has no claim and no power over Him. Jesus, Paul pointed out, **will not die again**. Death through the power of sin reigned over humanity from the time of Adam onward (Rom. 5:14). Jesus's resurrection and elevation as Lord of all (Phil. 2:9-11) proved His conquest of sin and death, so **death no longer rules**, neither **over him** nor over those for whom He died.

VERSE 10

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

Jesus **died to sin once for all time** may have meant that Jesus *died to sin* in that death removed Him from our fallen world with its influences and temptations (Heb. 4:15). Or Jesus *died to sin* in that He died rather than sin by betraying the Father's will for Him (Matt. 4:1-11; 26:36-56). Or it may stress Christ's sinless death moved Him past the domain of sin/death into a realm which neither of these inhabit.

Whichever precise point Paul intended, the act produced a permanent result. Jesus's work achieved victory over the dominion of sin and death **once for all time**. His work achieved all that was needed, so it need never be repeated. Beyond His death to sin came resurrection life. Jesus's earthly ministry was conducted in the realm of sin and focused on defeating the power of sin. But regarding **the life he lives** post-resurrection **he lives to God**. Certainly, Jesus lived in service to the Father throughout His earthly ministry. But with that mission completed, His resurrection life is conducted in the realm of God's glory.

VERSE 11

So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Those who live in union with Christ share in His death and resurrection, just as baptism depicts. In Christ, believers too have victory over sin.

No longer bound by sin, they are free to live in unhindered relationship to God. This is the believer's spiritual state as the result of faith in Jesus.

However, believers do not yet live in the fully realized kingdom of God. They still abide in a fallen world that tries to drag them back into their old lives. As a result, Paul found it necessary to urge his readers to **consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus**. Paul's term *consider* means to take something into account, and/or arrive at a considered conviction.

As believers, we are freed from sin and free to live in relationship with God. By the power of God, this is our true spiritual condition. But in a fallen world, as we await the future transformation of the world, we must continually remind ourselves of this fact and daily choose to live as the children of God that we are—dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.



Explore Further

How does the reality of being dead to sin but alive to God play out in your daily life? Are there any specific sins that continue to plague you that you need to consider yourself dead to? Pray to God for the power to resist temptations to such sins and that by the indwelling Holy Spirit you will be able to fight and overcome such sins through the power He gives you to live in newness of life.

Instruments of Righteousness (Rom. 6:12-14)

The work of Christ has defeated sin and death. Those united with Him through faith share in His victory. Removing the sin and guilt that stands as a barrier between the sinner and God allows a person to live in relationship with God. Embracing this truth should mark the beginning of a transformed life.

VERSE 12

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires.

Therefore refers back to the theological truth that Christ has defeated sin and death, and His victory allows the believer to live in relationship

with God. How, then, should believers respond? To begin with, they must realize that in Christ they have the power to renounce the sin typical of the world and of their former lives.

Do not let sin reign is an imperative, implying believers have a choice to refuse to allow sin to rule over them. The command is given regarding the Christian's life **in your mortal body**. The focus on the *mortal body* serves two purposes. First, it recognizes that the believer's transformation is not yet complete. He or she is free spiritually to live to God yet continues to live in a fallen world as a fallible creature. The normal Christian life as a result is not one of complete perfection at conversion but one of facing temptation and struggle while growing in godliness. Reference to mortal existence also reminds the believer that his or her condition is temporary. Ultimately, Christ's victory assures us that our eternal future is secure—this mortal body must put on immortality as part of the eternal kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50-55). At the same time, the mention of the mortal bodies reminds the reader that sin's temptations and the illusory benefits of it are temporary too.

Believers, therefore, must constantly guard against reverting back into the pattern of our sinful past. We still live in the mortal body where sin reigned, but now we must guard against the temptation to **obey its desires**. The *desires* ("passions," ESV; "lusts," KJV) remain. But in Christ, believers have the ability to turn away from them and live as children of God. We may not always be able to resist, but we must not and need not allow sin to *reign* in our lives.

VERSE 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.

Since Christ has broken sin's power to reign, believers now have the power to choose how they will live. But as believers continue for a time to exist in a fallen world and mortal bodies, they will be tempted to revert back to old sinful patterns and practices. So, Paul admonished the church that as people **alive from the dead** they must offer themselves not **to sin** but **to God**.

Believers who are now alive in Christ must **not offer any parts** of themselves *to sin*. *Parts* translates the same word used for various members of a person's body. The use of the term here expresses the connection between sin and a person's mortal, earthly existence. Though still

in the body, believers must not use the parts of their bodies as **weapons for unrighteousness**. The term *weapon* outside of a military context can refer to any sort of tool.

The fact that believers still live in their mortal body must not become an excuse for enabling and justifying unrighteous behavior. Though still mortal, in Christ believers are dead to sin and alive to God. Therefore, the focus of their mortal existence should consistently be on pleasing God. Their bodies should be considered *weapons* (“instruments,” ESV, NASB) for the doing of **righteousness**. Paul will return to this point later, urging believers to *offer* (present) their bodies “as a living sacrifice” to God and be transformed into people who know and do the will of God (12:1-2).

VERSE 14

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

Believers must not serve sin because **sin will not rule over you**. Paul’s statement expresses both a promise and a command. Through Christ, the dominion of sin has been broken. It will not determine the Christian’s future, and it ought not shape his or her present either. Believers are redeemed children of God. That is the relationship that determines who they are and therefore should shape how they behave.

Christians live **under grace**, alive to God. By *grace* through faith in Christ they are new creatures, empowered by the Spirit, guided by love, taught by the words and example of Jesus. They are raised to new life through their union with Christ. Their destiny is not determined by how well they keep the law. Nor is fear of the law the motivating factor in their behavior. Believers do not live as those **under the law**, but as a new people guided by an intimate and transforming relationship with the One who gave the law. Let us live, therefore, as persons who love and serve God.



Explore Further

Read the article “Sin” on pages 1477–1479 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What does it look like to be ruled by sin? How should a person’s life change when the reign of sin is broken and replaced by a relationship with God through Christ?
