

Sam Storms  
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### **Dead to Sin and Alive to God Romans 6:1-14 (2)**

There quite simply is no more pressing, practical issue for every one of us than how to gain victory over the temptation and sin that we encounter each day of our lives. Those temptations are many and varied, ranging from pornography to deceitfulness to selfishness to theft to lying to lust to irrational outbursts of anger to adultery, jealous, envy, and so on. I'm sure if I provided you with an even more extensive list of the challenges we face every day, most if not all of you would at some point raise your hand and say, "Yeah, that's me. You nailed it. That's my struggle. That's my sin."

So, what is the answer, or is there one? What has God done to make it possible for us no longer to be "enslaved to sin" (v. 6)? We saw last week that not being "enslaved" to sin does not mean we attain sinless perfection in this life. That will only come about when Jesus returns and we receive our glorified bodies, minds, and souls. But Paul has been equally clear in Romans 6 that we can grow spiritually to such a degree that we no longer "continue" to "live" in sin (vv. 1-2).

I wish I could assure you that a day will eventually come during the course of your early life when you will no longer sin at all. But I can't. What I can tell you is that by God's empowering grace, because of our having been identified with Jesus, and through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, we no longer have to experience sin reigning over us, enslaving us, exerting dominion over us. And that is very, very good news!

The solution Paul describes in Romans 6:1-14 is not one that we ordinarily or instinctively understand and embrace. If you were to ask most people today how to respond to sinful temptation, they would often say: "Just say No!" But as all of us are aware, that's not as easy as it sounds. Paul's counsel is of a different sort.

The apostle says that the pathway to victory over sin begins with an understanding of who we are in and with Christ Jesus. This is the sort of language that makes no sense to non-Christians. But for us who follow Jesus, it is the key to daily victory over sin. All through Romans 6:1-14 Paul uses the language of being "in" Christ or in some manner identified "with" Christ. Look at it again with me:

We "have been baptized *into* Christ Jesus" (v. 3a).

We have been "baptized *into* his death" (v. 3b).

"We were buried therefore *with* him" (v. 4a).

We "have been *united with* him in a death like his" (v. 5a).

We will "certainly be *united with* him in a resurrection like his" (v. 5b).

"Our old self was crucified *with* him" (v. 6a).

"Now if we have died *with* Christ" (v. 8a).

"We believe that we will also live *with* him" (v. 8b).

So, what is to be our response to this truth? Paul says it in v. 11 – "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Look at that word: "consider." It could also be translated, "reckon," "think deeply about," "reflect upon," "give it full weight in your mind," "make it the focus of your thoughts."

In other words, if you ever hope to gain substantial victory over sin and discover the power to resist temptation you have to start with an understanding of the union and spiritual solidarity that God has established between you and Jesus when you first came to faith in him. This is quite the challenge for

people living in the western, industrialized, technologically driven, highly individualized world as we do. We don't typically think of experiencing some sort of spiritual unity with someone else, especially someone who no longer lives on the earth.

We often say, "Yeah, I can identify with that person." But what we mean by that is that we empathize with them. We understand a bit about what they are experiencing because we have to some degree experienced it ourselves. But that is not what Paul is talking about.

Let me reduce Paul's thought to a single sentence that I trust will make sense of his language in this paragraph. Simply put:

***"You must not go on living the life you used to live because you are no longer the person you used to be."***

*The Death of the "Old Man" (v. 6)*

Look at how Paul expresses this truth in v. 6. There he says that "our old self" or, more literally, "our old man" was crucified with Christ. Some have mistakenly thought that Paul's point is that before conversion we have an "old" man and after conversion we added to this a "new" man. The Christian, according to this view, is *both* an "old" man and a "new" man, something like a spiritual Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. At times, the "old" man is in control, and we sin. At other times, the "new" man is in control, and we obey. No. The "old" man is what you were before you became a Christian. It is you when you were unregenerate, dead in trespasses and sins.

I appreciate the way that John Stott explained this. Listen closely to his words:

"Our biography is written in two volumes. Volume one is the story of the old man, the old self, [the story] of me before my conversion. Volume two is the story of the new man, the new self, [the story] of me after I was made a new creation in Christ. Volume one of my biography ended with the judicial death of the old self. I was a sinner. I deserved to die. I did die. I received my deserts in my Substitute [Christ Jesus] with whom I have become one. Volume two of my biography opened with my resurrection. My old life having finished, a new life to God has begun" (49).

In other words, "our old self" does not refer to our lower self but our former self. It is the man or the person we used to be, the individual who was in Adam. "So what was crucified with Christ was not a part of us called our old nature, but the whole of us as we were in our pre-conversion state" (Stott, 176).

Perhaps an illustration will help us understand this. There is a story told about the great fifth century theologian, Aurelio Augustine. Before his conversion to faith in Christ he lived a rather sexually promiscuous, self-indulgent life. He lived with a mistress for several years. After he came to faith in Christ, his former mistress saw him on the street.

"Aurelio, Aurelio," she called out to him.  
But he continued walking, paying no heed to her, ignoring her calls.  
She runs to him, grabs him, and says: "Aurelio, what is the matter? It is I."  
To which Augustine replies: "The matter, dear lady, is that it is not I."

Was it Augustine? In one sense, yes. His former mistress had not been guilty of mistaking him for someone else. But in another sense, no. He was a new man. The old man, the old Augustine who had been enslaved by sin and had lived under its dominion and rule, had died. By faith he had become one with Jesus. By faith he had been raised with Christ. The new Augustine was alive to God. Although it would not have been impossible for him to have gone back to his sexually illicit relationship with his mistress, it would have been morally unthinkable.

Why? Because, as noted, Augustine could not go on living the life he used to live, because he was no longer the person he used to be! The “body of sin” that was “enslaved” to immoral lusts and behavior had been “brought to nothing” (v. 6). Again, in saying that this “body” that was formerly enslaved to sin has been “brought to nothing” or “abolished” does not mean that Augustine or I or you have been rendered incapable of sinning. We might wish that were true, but we know it isn’t. What Paul means is that we no longer have to sin. We are not under compulsion to sin. Sin is not entirely unavoidable. We are not enslaved to it, but now are empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve a new master, Jesus.

The verb translated “brought to nothing” does not mean to become extinct or non-existent. Sin is still very much alive in each of us. But it has been defeated and deprived of its ruling power. The dominion of sin in our lives has been broken, not in the sense that it is impossible for us any longer to sin, but in the sense that sin is no longer necessary. We now are dominated by a power that brings us victory over temptation.

Is it possible for me to live as if I were single and unmarried? Yes. It is not impossible. But when I feel that ring on the fourth finger of my left hand, the seal and symbol of my new life as a married man, the seal and symbol of my identification in covenant relationship with Ann, I am prompted to remember who I am. And in that remembrance, I am called to live accordingly.

So, if you ask me, “Can a born-again Christian live as though she were still enslaved to sin?” I would say, Yes, I suppose she can. But let her remember her baptism. Let her recall that she was baptized into Christ’s death, such that when Christ died, she died. Let her recall that when she was lifted out of the water she was raised with Christ to live a new life, as a new creation, a new person, with a new identity.

The point again is that we must labor in God’s grace to remind ourselves of who we now are. When the world, the flesh, and the Devil whisper in our ear, “Go ahead and yield to that temptation; God will forgive you,” we must respond in the words of Romans 6:2, “By no means! No way! How can I who died to sin still live in it?” Volume One is closed. The old man has died. Volume Two is now open. I am a new creation in Christ.

#### *Set Free from Sin (vv. 7-10)*

As Paul says in v. 7, “for one who has died has been set free from sin.” It is interesting that the verb translated “set free” is actually the verb used elsewhere in Romans to speak of being justified. Paul’s point is that the decisive break with the enslaving and reigning power of sin “is viewed after the analogy of the kind of dismissal which a judge gives when an arraigned person is justified. Sin has no further claim upon the person who is thus vindicated” (John Murray, 222).

But there is more. Because we have been identified with Christ in his death, we will also be one with him in the new life of his resurrection. But don’t misunderstand what Paul is saying. He isn’t referring here primarily to our bodily resurrection when Christ returns and we are glorified and transformed. That will certainly come to pass. But here he has in mind living in the present day as alive from spiritual death. To “live with him” (v. 8b) is to walk in the new power of a new life that we have today, because of our unity with him in his new life. We are “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (v. 11b) in the sense that we walk in new freedom, new joy, new power to overcome the allure of sin and temptation.

We know this because of what Paul said back in v. 4. There he said that “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” This new life that is ours, therefore, is primarily a reference to how we live now. Yes, we will be raised to newness of life when we get our glorified bodies, but now, in this present day, we are living in the power of a new life that is no longer enslaved to sin.

In Ephesians 2:1 Paul describes all of us, before our being born again, as “dead” in “trespasses and sins.” Of course, we were very much alive when it came to the commission of trespasses and sins. But Paul’s

point is that because of our being enslaved to trespasses and sins we were dead to God. We saw no beauty in him, nothing that we found appealing or glorious. But with the new birth and faith in Jesus we are now dead “to” trespasses and sins and alive “to” God.

Paul is talking about the opportunity you now have, today, to live a life free from sin, no longer enslaved to sin. He’s not talking about some small, isolated part of your life, the life you live, for example, on Sunday morning. He’s talking about the totality of your life: your work, your marriage, your relationships, your leisure, your time watching TV and surfing the internet, the movies you watch, the books you read, the music you listen to, how you spend your money, everything.

The phrase “body of sin” (v. 6b) should not be rendered “sinful body,” for that suggests the human physical frame is inherently contaminated or evil. Most likely it means “our sin-dominated body” in the sense that the body is conditioned and controlled by sin, “because sin uses our body for its own evil purposes, perverting our natural instincts, degrading sleepiness into sloth, hunger into greed, and sexual desire into lust” (Stott, 175).

#### *The Key to Holy Living is in the Mind (v. 11)*

Romans 6:11 is something of a summary statement. The verb “consider” has the sense of “to reckon.” It does not mean that we are to pretend or make believe. “It is not screwing up our faith to believe something we do not believe” (Stott, 49). Rather we are to reckon with the fact that in Christ we died to sin and that in Christ we are alive to God. Let your mind meditate on this truth. *The secret of holy living begins in the mind* (cf. vv. 3,6,8,11). Our minds are so to grasp the fact of our death and resurrection with Christ that the very idea of sinning would be abhorrent to us. “We are to recall, to ponder, to grasp, to register these truths until they are so integral to our mindset that a return to the old life is unthinkable” (Stott, 180).

Don’t ever think that simply because you have died with Christ in his death and been raised with Christ in his resurrection life that you automatically or mechanically will experience victory over sin. No. People often think of the Christian life as “letting go and letting God,” as if our battle with sin is a matter of passively yielding rather than actively killing it. You have to reckon and consider and think about this truth and let the reality of it exert a power over your choices. Note the same emphasis in v. 8 where Paul says that “we believe” that we will also live with Christ.

#### *Who Reigns? (vv. 12-13)*

Paul's language deserves our close attention. He personifies sin as if it were a king demanding to be obeyed. Do not let sin **"reign"** in your life as it seeks to establish itself over you as lord and ruler, compelling you to "obey its passions" (v. 12b). Sin seeks to co-opt your body, mind, spirit, will, affections, your eyes, ears, mouth, undoubtedly also your sexual organs, what Paul calls "your members" to accomplish its purposes. Paul's urgent plea is that you not make these "members" available to sin.

But the true King and Lord whose rule and reign you should happily embrace is God. Surrender your members to him so that he can make use of them to achieve righteousness. God, through Jesus Christ, purchased you, body, soul, mind, and spirit. You and I belong to him, so don't betray what is rightfully his by giving it away to his enemy. As someone once said, "Resist all contenders for the throne of your life" (Piper).

You may wonder, "How precisely does sin succeed in this battle for the allegiance of our souls?" I'll tell you how. It takes legitimate desires and passions and turns them for evil purposes.

Your desire for sex is good, but sin and Satan lie to you and say that you are free to satisfy that particular passion in any way you wish and with anyone who suits your fancy.

Your desire for food is good, but sin and Satan lie to you and say that you can therefore eat as much as you want whenever you want.

Your desire to make an impact in life is good, but sin and Satan lie to you and say that you can run roughshod over anyone who gets in your way and that you deserve to be praised as number one, better and more deserving than all others.

Your desire for rest and leisure is good, but sin and Satan lie to you and say that you don't need to work or to apply yourself energetically to the tasks that God has assigned you.

This is why we read these important statements elsewhere in the NT. I have in mind Paul's reference in Ephesians 4:22 to "deceitful desires." They are "deceitful" because they lie to you about the best and most satisfying way to enjoy life. The author of Hebrews talks about "the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25) because the happiness they bring doesn't last. Peter speaks of "the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:12).

These passions lie to us and lead us to believe that they will serve our souls for greater pleasure and satisfaction, when in fact they are out to destroy our souls. Here is how John Piper explained it:

“Sin takes our desires and makes liars out of them. They promise satisfaction and happiness, and they deliver cheap, fleeting, shallow stimulation that leaves us less content and less peaceful and less hopeful and more guilty, more restless, more discouraged, more enslaved. . . There is a war for the soul going on. Sin is fighting for the throne of your soul; it is using your desires as betrayers; and it is turning your members into weapons of unrighteousness.”

But let's be honest. This exhortation in vv. 12-13 seems burdensome. What hope do we have of success? The answer is found in v. 14.

#### *The Promise of Victory (v. 14)*

Paul's statement in v. 14 is not an imperative. It is not a veiled exhortation or a command that we do something. ***It is a statement of assured fact. It is a divine promise.*** Paul does not say, “***Don't*** let sin have dominion over you,” but rather, “Sin ***won't*** have dominion over you!”

Thus, v. 14a makes valid and relevant the commands of vv. 12-13 and provides the encouragement and incentive for their fulfillment. In other words, obedience to vv. 12-13 is achieved by the assurance that God's grace guarantees the realization of what is contemplated in the exhortations. *Sin* is here viewed as a power, and yet it will no more be our *lord*, for another has taken possession of us. We will never again be left helpless; we are now free and able (by God's Spirit) to fight.

As for the phrase, “for you are not under law but under grace” (v. 14b), two views are possible. But first, be it noted that this does not mean we as Christians are law-less, as if to suggest that there are no divine mandates or commands or principles or laws for us to obey. We are most assuredly under the law of Christ (see 1 Cor. 9:21).

Sadly, many who have embraced what is known as Hyper-Grace take hold of v. 14 and use it to justify the idea that since we are saved by grace, we don't have to obey God's laws in order to be sanctified. This is not true grace, but antinomianism, an aversion to divine commandments and biblical rules for life. We must avoid it at all costs.

As for the meaning of v. 14, one view is that Paul means we no longer live under law as a way of life. In other words, law-keeping is not the way we seek to relate to God, as if by our obedience we can put him in our debt and win favor and blessings from him.

Another view is that we are no longer under the Law of Moses as a code of conduct. There is a distinction between the old covenant of Moses and its laws and the new covenant of Jesus Christ and his laws. We see this glorious truth about the new covenant from several prophecies of it in the Old Testament.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they

broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:31-34).

"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek. 36:26-27; cf. 11:19-20).

"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20-21).

Under the law of Moses there were commands but no assurance or promise of power to fulfill them. But under the law of Christ, in the new covenant, whatever God commands he also supplies us with the power to fulfill and obey them. To sum up:

"To run and work the law commands,  
Yet gives me neither feet nor hands;  
But better news the gospel brings,  
It bids me fly and gives me wings!"

But I think there is even more to the idea of our being "under grace." It surely also means we are no longer under wrath, subject to God's judgment. Because God has done the greatest thing imaginable in giving his Son for us, he will now happily and easily give us whatever we need to resist sin and remain true to him in faith (Rom. 8:32).

So, contrary to what some have thought, being "under grace" does not mean we have no laws to obey or that we can now live any way we please. Being "under grace" does not give us a license or the freedom to sin. Being "under grace" means we now have been supplied the merciful and gracious power of the Spirit to obey the laws that Christ gives us.

But wait. How does being "under grace" guarantee that "sin will have no dominion" over us? It does so by supplying us with the power of the Holy Spirit to say No to sin and temptation. But more than that. Paul is assuming that you will embrace and draw strength from the fact that you are united with Christ in his death to sin and his new life. Your death and resurrection with Christ means that sin will not reign over you. Therefore, don't let it reign over you!

There is yet more. To be "under grace" also means that we are no longer subject to the paralyzing power of guilt and shame and condemnation. That is the good news that we will encounter in Romans 8:1 where Paul will declare that "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." To be "in" Christ is to live "under" his "grace" and favor. To be "under law" or subject to its dictates and liable to judgment because of our failure to obey it undermines our energy to resist sin and temptation. We feel hopeless to fight against sin and thus make no effort to change or make progress in obedience.

But knowing we are "in" Christ and thus "under" God's grace is profoundly encouraging. There is hope of victory! You don't have to live in the despair of defeat.

One final word of clarification is in order. When Paul says that “sin will have no dominion over you” he does not mean that we will live a perfectly sinless life. He does mean, however, that we can experience progressive victory over it. Our triumph over the reigning power of sin in our lives comes little by little, but it does come. We fight it from a place of grace, assured of victory to the extent that we continue to consider and reckon ourselves dead to it and alive to God.

Paul never says what our society says when it comes to our battle with sin. The world says: “Just say no,” and leaves it at that. But Paul’s advice is of a different order. He says, “Just say no, *because* that is who you are. You are united with the dying and rising Christ. Just say no, *because* you are under grace, not law. Just say no, *because* you are no longer enslaved to sin’s power but to God himself.”

### *Conclusion*

My final appeal is to those of you who feel stuck in some sin. You’ve lived in it for so long that it feels inextricably a part of who you are. But that is a lie. That is Satan deceiving you. Your identity is one who has died with Christ, been buried with Christ, and raised with Christ. So reckon it so. Consider it to be true. Believe it. And the next time sin comes knocking at the door of your heart, tell it that its power has been broken and that it no longer has authority to rule or reign your life.