

Romans 6: The two gospel realities that result in righteous living.

*¹⁹For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. ²⁰And law came in that the trespass might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, ²¹that just as sin reigned in death, likewise also, grace might reign through righteousness into eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. **6** ¹What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace might abound? ²May it never be!*

Near the end of chapter 5, Paul was extolling the superior effectiveness of grace over sin. He said, “*the grace of God and the gift overflowed unto the many*” (v15). He also said, “*the gift, arising out from many trespasses, resulted in justification*.” He portrayed this grace as something that arises to the occasion. The more trespasses, the more that grace abounds to overcome it. “*Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more*” (v.20).

Christians agree that because of the faithfulness of Christ even unto death on the cross, the gift of justification of sinners was procured for all who believe the gospel. When you explain this to a Muslim, he might become critical. Muslims consider God's laws to be the deterrent to sin. They think that to gain God's favor, people follow His **rules**.¹ Contrary to their religious inclination, the gift of grace relies on the righteousness that Christ procured. So, a Muslim might assume that since Jesus already paid in this way, Christians think they can sin as much as they **wish**.² This assumption harmonizes perfectly with Paul's rhetorical question, “*Shall we continue in sin that grace might abound.*” Paul's answer is, “No way man!!” (*May it never be.*)

I have been showing that the same grace that makes our reconciliation and justification possible, also overflows unto a righteous life. (*As many were made sinners through the disobedience of one man, likewise also, the many shall be made righteous through the obedience of the One.*) Besides the earned righteousness by Jesus (required for our justification), believers are accounted righteousness as they perform righteous acts of faith in His power. (Jesus alive in us> works wrought in God.) I have suggested that both of these things together save us in the day of Jesus Christ. (Without both, there will not be salvation.) If there are lingering questions about these things I have been saying, the next few verses of chapter 6 should put them to rest.

Beginning in chapter 6, Paul begins explaining how God's grace effects righteous living. Here Paul rehearses gospel truth that unleashes God's grace into our lives AS WE BELIEVE the truth. What follows represents reality as God defines it for the believer. To the extent we live in this reality, the grace of God will be abounding unto righteousness in our lives. This seems to be the thrust of Romans chapters 6 – 8 and in fact, the main purpose of the gospel. The gospel is God's power that propels Christians so that they endure unto the salvation that will be revealed in the last day. If we want to be there on that day, we must make it our aim to live in the gospel realities that Paul sets forth beginning in **Chapter 6**.³

The first Gospel reality Paul mentions: We have died to sin.

How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ³Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Jesus is our redeemer. With His own blood, He purchased us **back**⁴ for Himself. Now, Jesus our redeemer owns us outright. As those who are glad to have Him as our Redeemer, we have gladly relinquished ownership of our lives completely to Him. Romans 6:6 says that our old man was crucified that the body of sin might be abolished. Paul also put it this way, “*I am crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me*” (*Galatians 2:20*).

The question we must ask ourselves is this, “Am I one of ‘the redeemed’ or not?” If I am one of “the redeemed,” I should live as one of the redeemed. If I want to live as one of “the redeemed,” then I must live in the reality that I am no longer the one directing my life. My life now belongs to Jesus. From now on, He is the One living my life, not me. If that is the case, then “Christ-righteousness” will show up in my/our life. For example, if someone betrays us or falsely accuses us, we should not react negatively because we no longer have any rights. All of our rights have been relinquished to Jesus. So, if someone abuses us, that is not our concern. It is Jesus' concern. If we get slapped on one cheek, we should not retaliate or retain anger toward them because we have no right to take revenge. Instead, we should forgive them from the heart. And if the occasion demands it, we should turn and let the person slap the other cheek.

To show the implications of the phrase “died to sin,” I purposely provided a “difficult” example of what it means to live as one of “the redeemed.” Being a human being myself, I understand that this gospel reality is often difficult to live. I have noticed that my initial response to being abused is often to get angry. There is often an inward desire to retaliate instead of forgiving from the heart. So, I acknowledge that I fail often to live in the truth of this gospel reality. But that does not make this gospel reality any less real. It is a part of the gospel that God desires to produce in me.

Being faced with my failure to live in this reality can serve me depending on how I deal with my failures to appropriate this gospel reality. The inappropriate response is to take my failure lightly. Ignoring a gospel reality does not mean the gospel reality

¹ This is the same mindset as the typical Jew of Paul's day and it assumes that a person can earn favor with God by keeping His rules even though no person is able to keep the rules in his own power. (They continue to fail, over and over but they ignore that fact.)

² Unfortunately, Muslims assume that their reasoning is true because they observe so many professing Christians living ungodly lives.

³ Romans chapters 6 – 8 are every much a part of the gospel as Romans 1-5. Paul's message included it all.

⁴ At one time we belonged to the kingdom of darkness, sold under bondage of sin.

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does not exist or that God is indifferent as to whether or not I live in that gospel reality. Instead of shrugging it off or taking it lightly, I should confess my sin to God and cry out to Him for a greater measure of His Spirit so that I will be able to increasingly live in this gospel reality.

We must face the fact that this gospel reality is important to God. We must acknowledge that if we get angry when abused, we have ceased to trust God and have picked up the reins of our life again as if we are in charge. We have ceased to live as one of “the redeemed.” We have begun again to live according to the flesh (to satisfy its desires instead of Jesus’ desires). This should concern us because only the redeemed will inherit salvation in the day of Jesus. So, we want to see more and more of this reality being lived out and set our hearts and minds to seek that end.

In chapter 7, Paul explains that if we attempt to live this reality in our own power, we will utterly fail every time because the desire to do good may be present, but the actual doing of it is not within us (apart from Christ). In chapter 8, Paul says that if we live according to the flesh, we must die (perish). But if we are putting to death the misdeeds of the body (by the Spirit), we shall live. (See Romans 8:13.) This conveys the nature of what it means to live “in Christ.” It is a constant battle OF FAITH. Are we going to live in the realities of the gospel or just be Christian in name only? So, the implications of the phrase “we have died to sin” are huge! The life that God desires us to live is impossible by human standards. It goes against our flesh to turn the other cheek. Our flesh instinctively wants revenge. It takes the supernatural power of Christ to forgive from the heart when people abuse us.

Romans 6 conveys gospel realities that God intends to form in our lives. He is at work in us to bring it about. When we read Romans 6, we must acknowledge that though God intends us to live out those realities, they are impossible to live humanly speaking. (Jesus said, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing.”) Because these realities are impossible to live in our own power, they must be lived by the power of the Spirit, BY FAITH. Knowing we cannot accomplish these things, we cast ourselves upon the Lord and come as bankrupt beggars to the throne of grace all the time. Instead of being casual about it, we set our hearts and minds to DO THESE THINGS that can’t be done apart from Jesus. This forces us to live by faith. It is the nature of the life Jesus intends for us. It is the life of “the redeemed.” It is the life of “the righteous.” (The righteous shall live by faith— Romans 1:17.)

The second Gospel reality Paul mentions: We have been raised to resurrection life unto righteous living.

As one of “the redeemed,” I am dead to sin and therefore, no longer bound to serve it. But I am also alive to God so that actual righteousness might abound in my life. It is important to remember God’s chief purpose in sending His Son in the first place. It was not merely to make a way for our ransom to be paid through Christ’s death. It was to create an assembly of people who live holy, righteous lives that bring Him great glory. (See discussion on Romans 1:5.)

⁴Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we should also walk in newness of life. There are some commentators who insist that when speaking about resurrection here in chapter 6, Paul is referring to our future bodily resurrection. But verse 4 clearly tells us God’s purpose. We have been buried with Christ into His death and raised from the dead SO THAT we should walk in newness of life. If there is still any lingering question, read the rest of chapter 6 to learn what Paul had in mind by the phrase “newness of life.” This phrase describes a life in which sin no longer is in charge. Rather, it is a life in which actual, “lived” righteousness abounds.

These are the two spiritual realities that Paul discusses here in chapter 6. We are now a) dead to sin and we have b) been raised to resurrection life unto righteous living. To better understand these spiritual realities, it is helpful to consider God’s purposes for bringing them about:

- that we should no longer serve sin (v.6)
- that we should walk in newness of life (v.4)

The question at hand is this. Am I “in Christ” or not? The promise of glory is only for those who are “in Christ.” According to Romans 6:3-5, if I have been baptized into Christ, I am now united with Christ in His death and resurrection. These are spiritual realities that are true for all who are “in Christ.” (We know that Paul is talking about spiritual realities as opposed to water baptism because he uses terms such as “likeness of His death” and “likeness of His resurrection.”) Here in Romans 6, Paul teaches that if we believe ourselves to be one of those who are “in Christ,” then we should make it our aim to live **accordingly.**⁵

In order to live according to these realities, we must “reckon” these things to be true even when our experience at the moment might argue against them. We must understand that our relationship to sin and righteousness has changed. Now we must consider ourselves as forever dead to sin. To do this, we must first believe that sin is our mortal enemy which seeks to destroy us. We must learn to hate sin the way God hates it. We cannot compromise with it ever or we will suffer destruction that leads to perishing. (See Romans 8:13.) Just as our relationship to sin has changed, our relationship to righteousness has also changed. We must recognize that actual righteousness in our life now leads to eternal life and apart from “lived righteousness,” there is no eternal life waiting for us.

⁵ Contrary to some commentators, godly living described in Romans 6 is just as much a part of the gospel as the promise of justification. Some people emphasize justification and glorification and seem to diminish the essential nature of our works of faith. They seem to view a godly life as merely consistent with our justification, but not necessarily the direct result of justification. For example, according to one commentary,** chapter 5 teaches that justification by faith secures the final salvation of believers. According to this commentary, Romans chapter 6 merely teaches that justification by faith does not favor a sinful course of life. (In contrast, I am saying that it plays an active role in producing godly behavior.)

** Stifler, James M, DD, The Epistle to the Romans, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1997, p.5

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To the extent that you see that your relationship to sin and righteousness has changed, you will take them more seriously. Unless and until you embrace these things, Romans 6 – 8 will not impact you as God intends! Bondage to sin will characterize too much of your experience and lived righteousness will be hit and miss. In short, the light of Christ will only be dimly shining in you.

If you are truly in Christ, you will increasingly want to engage in the spiritual battle that must be waged to experience these realities in your life. As you do, you will increasingly understand and value the things that Paul teaches in Romans 6 -8.

How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ³Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we should also walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have become united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be abolished, that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

As I have already shown, Paul is clearly talking about spiritual realities that are true for all those who are “in Christ.” The verbs “baptized” and “buried” are in the passive voice which proves that someone else did them to us. We did not bury or baptize ourselves into Christ’s death. One could make a case that it was the Holy Spirit who baptized us into Christ. (See I Corinthians 12:13.) John the Baptist said that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. (See Matthew 3:11.) The most important point here is that through baptism, men or angels are not able to bring about these spiritual realities. We are not the ones who did it. God is the One who did this. And since He is the One who did it, who are we to doubt their reality in our life? It is our responsibility to believe these things and live as if they are true and brought about by none other than God Himself.

Though the baptism being spoken about is indeed spiritual, we do well to point out the significance of water baptism as it relates to these spiritual realities. Jesus indeed commanded that His disciples be baptized (with water). Though some may argue that sprinkling water on a person is a legitimate form of baptism, the meaning of the word *baptize* (to submerge), and the imagery here in Romans 6 both argue for submersion (dipping into). Spiritual baptism is the major reality being discussed in Romans 6. Water baptism pictures this spiritual reality best when a person is physically submerged into the water. When the person is dipped under the water, he is pictured as having been buried with Christ. When he is raised out of the water, he is pictured as having been raised with Christ. I recommend that unless physically prohibitive, people be baptized with submersion since it presents the clearest picture of what literally happened to them. (God put them into Christ’s death and resurrection through this spiritual baptism event.)

Since water baptism pictures this great spiritual reality, those being baptized should be taught about the impact of their spiritual baptism. We must do more than tell them that because they have been spiritually baptized into Christ, they are now in Christ “positionally.” While this is true if a person is truly in Christ, the person being baptized must be made to understand God’s ultimate purpose for the spiritual baptism. From now on, he is to consider himself literally dead to sin and therefore, no longer bound to serve it as his master. He must be taught that all those in Christ are made alive with Him so that their lives reflect the actual righteousness of Jesus’ life.

Unless a person understands these things, he should not be baptized! There are millions of baptized people walking around who are content to serve their old master (sin) and are not concerned about the production of actual righteousness in their lives. I suggest a large portion of them were never taught God’s ultimate purpose for sending His Son in the first place– to create a holy, righteous people for Himself. God intends for us to walk in newness of life.

³Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we should also walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have become united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be abolished, that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For the one who has died is freed from sin.

It was Paul’s desire for himself that he would know Christ, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to His death. (See Philippians 3:10.) From the context of Philippians 3:10, it is clear that Paul was speaking about these desires being fulfilled while he was still in his earthly body. From Philippians 3:9, we conclude that his being found in Christ (in the day of Christ) depended on the actual experience of these realities in this life. Only those who know Him will be found in Him. Only those who experience the power of His resurrection in this life will be found in Him. Only those who share in His sufferings and are being conformed to His death will be found in Him on that day. (See also Romans 8:17.)

There are moments and days that our experience does not mirror these realities. But God is at work continually in us so that we increasingly live in these **realities**.⁶ This is the ongoing process of sanctification. But if a person is living the same way that unbelievers live, there is no current evidence that he is “in Christ.” We know this because those who are in Christ have become united with Him in the likeness of His death and their lives increasingly appear to be in the likeness of His resurrection. (They appear more and more to be like Jesus.)

In Romans 6:6, Paul uses the term “old man.” This represents the person before becoming united with Christ in His death and resurrection. Back then, the person was an unbeliever and lived an autonomous, self-directed life just like all unbelievers live (no

⁶ Are you cooperating with Him?

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matter how religious they might appear). But if we are believers, we must believe the realities described in Romans 6 because it is gospel truth that pictures God's intended purposes for sending His Son in the first place. No matter how much or how little our life mirrors the realities of Romans 6, we must make it our goal to aggressively live and continue living in these realities.

One helpful remedy to a lackluster spiritual life is to reckon our "old man" as having been crucified already. We must understand that our "old man" (our former unbelieving self) was an abomination to God and headed for hell. To the extent that we see our old man still rearing his ugly head in us, we should be alarmed and want him out of our new life altogether. He does not belong here anymore. If we hope to be found in Christ on that day, we ought to be seeing less and less of him. It is advisable that we view our old man as an enemy who could deceive us and rob us ultimately of our eternal life. Only those who persevere to the end as they follow Christ will attain to the resurrection according to Philippians 3:8-14. If our old man is allowed to live through us until we die, we won't be there.

Reckoning our old man to be crucified is a cognitive act but one that we cannot accomplish by sheer determination. In Romans 7, Paul describes how sheer determination will fail every time. In Chapter 8, he tells us the only way for us to live in the realities of Romans 6. It must be done by the power of the Spirit. (Prayer is indispensable for this.)

When our old man is dead, sin has no more pull over us. Sin was appealing to us when we were unbelievers. The only way it can appeal to us now is if the old man is allowed to live. We must indeed reckon our old man to be crucified but as was previously said, we cannot do this by sheer determination. It is something we must do by faith and in reliance upon the Spirit. It can't be accomplished by the proud person. Only the humble will feel the weight of these things and cry out to God always to deliver him from that wretched old man who is content to feed at the dumpster of sin rather than feast on the bread of Life. But thanks be to God who has drawn us away from that smelly dumpster, washed us and seated us at His banquet table where love abounds. The more we feast at it, the more we learn to hate our old man and vigilantly put him to death over and over whenever he pops his ugly head back up.

Though we may struggle in our battle against our old man, it is comforting and strengthening to know that in reality, we have been set free from the bondage of sin. This is not the case for mere religious people. I often tell Muslims that as a Christian, I am no longer a slave to sin. I also tell them that they are slaves to sin no matter how religious they might appear. I explain that they do not have the power within themselves to obey God's laws (and nobody does). Even though they think they might be able to sway God by attempting to obey His rules, they are powerless to actually obey them from within. If they examine their lives, they should conclude that this is the case. But to agree with me about this would mean that their religion is powerless. They can only wish to please Him and never actually accomplish the type of righteous life that pleases Him.

On the other hand, though we do not deserve it, we have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection. And He has promised us glory as long as we follow Jesus to the end. The realities of Romans 6 are ours along with the sure promise of eternal life as long as we believe and continue to believe into Christ. (Those who believe and continue to believe into Christ remain faithful to Him firm unto the end.)

⁵For if we have become united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be abolished, that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For the one who has died is freed from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer rules over Him. ¹⁰For the death that He died, He died to sin once and for all. But the life He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹Even so, consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin and living to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Romans 6:8-10, Paul helps us further by likening our new life to the life of Christ. Assuming we believe these realities to be gospel truth (no matter how we might feel at this moment), then we know that we are in Christ. If our experience argues against us, we can always walk back to the cross and gaze upon it. From it, we know that God is showing us that He loves us deeply. From Jesus' invitation, we know that we are welcome always to come to Him and walk along side of Him, yoked side by side. So, we have every reason to cast all doubts to the side and stand firmly upon God's promises. We can proclaim again that since Christ has died and is alive right now, we have the authority to live unto Him. We know that this is His desire and that He promises to help all those who cast themselves upon His loving care. Why shouldn't we believe that those very traits that make Jesus so beautiful are the same traits that God desires to produce in us?

From Romans 6, it is clear that God desires to deliver us from the bondage of sin unto a Christ-like life. Just as Jesus died to sin once for all, I can live in this reality (as my reality). Just as Jesus is alive to God forevermore, I am indeed dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. If my "old man" ever rears his ugly head, I can kick him in the head and know that in Christ, I have deliverance from the bondage of sin. I can confidently pursue that deliverance (by faith) as fellow conqueror with Christ! Whenever I might fall on my face, I know that it is merely the old man rearing his ugly head. That is the time I can get right back up knowing that the deliverance is mine in Christ and ultimately, He will give me (the new man) the victory. So, what is the believing response to all this?...

*¹²So, don't let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. The logic here is simple. Since in Christ, you are dead to sin and alive to God, **don't** let sin reign in your mortal bodies and do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. And **do** present yourselves to God as*

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being alive from the dead and **do** present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. According to Romans 6:12, our natural mortal bodies crave things and if we are now in Christ, we are not to let our mortal bodies have their way. If unchecked, our mortal bodies will resume their autonomous, self-driven pursuits that lead toward sin and death. If we just hope for a deeper spiritual life while passively sitting back, letting our mortal bodies get their way, the outcome will always result in sin and death.

There are many books written on the subject of spiritual warfare. These two verses in Romans 6:12-13 give us a snapshot of the battle line and our Commander's marching orders. If we take Him seriously, we will aggressively engage in this battle and live eternally. If we sit back, assuming that this battle is not that important or that it is over, our mortal bodies will get the upper hand and lead us toward sin and death.

Do you want to end up in hell? If not, then **don't** let sin reign in your mortal bodies! **Don't** present your eyes, hands, or sexual organs as members of unrighteousness unto sin! Jesus said it in a more dramatic way. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you for it is more profitable to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be cast into hell! (See Matthew 5:29.) The sentiment of Jesus' saying is the same as Paul's command in Romans 6:12-13.

To be victorious in the spiritual battle for our souls, we must do more than follow these two negative commands (**don't**), we must also **do** something positive. Because we don't want to perish, we don't let sin reign in our mortal bodies to obey its lusts. Nor do we present our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. But because we cherish life with Jesus (positive), we **do** present ourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and our members to God as instruments of righteousness. If we are truly in Christ, we are different than we were when we were apart from Him (satisfied eating out of the dumpster of sin). Now, we increasingly hunger and thirst for righteousness. We thirst for the Living Waters (Jesus). Because we now cherish these things, we pursue them with all our might knowing that they are ours for the taking. (We are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.) Failures and impediments that arise will not deter us in our pursuit because the victory is promised to those who believe (and continue to believe) these things.

¹²So, don't let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not rule over you because you are not under law, but under grace! ¹⁵What then? Shall we sin? (Because we are not under law but under grace?) May it never be!

In Romans 6:12, Paul says something that some theologians have difficulty explaining. He says that we are not under law but under grace. They think it cannot possibly mean what it seems to say. Is Paul really saying that believers are not under law? This question is answered in the very next verse as well as the beginning of the next chapter. We should interpret Paul to mean exactly what these words say. We are not under law. It is only when we understand these words this way does the next verse make any sense. When we say that we are not under law, someone will undoubtedly ask, "Really? You are not under law? So, you can sin as much as you want since there are no rules governing you? What then will restrain your behavior if you are not under law?"

From Paul's combined writings, we know he is not promoting licentious living. Quite the opposite is true. In fact, in this very verse he says that sin shall not rule over you BECAUSE you are not under law, but under grace. Romans 6 clearly instructs us and warns us not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies. Evidently, in order to make way for victory over sin, a person must first be released from the jurisdiction of the law. "You also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ that you would be married to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God" (Romans 7:4). The law condemns. Whenever a person is attempting to earn favor with God by trying to keep the law, he will always be in a state of hopelessness because that very law is condemning him continually. All people are guilty of breaking God's laws. Not only have they broken them in their past, they will always fall short of keeping them (in their own power) because the ability to do so does not reside within them. As a result, condemnation will always be hanging over their head.

Anyone who is condemned has no hope whatsoever of standing before God as righteous (justified). All motivation to try and live godly is deflated since there is no hope of ever achieving a right standing with God since they are condemned as lawbreakers. The only way they will ever have hope of a righteous standing before God is if their condemnation is first removed completely.

The gospel includes the removal of all condemnation as a gift (grace) through the work of Jesus on the cross. Now, because he is no longer condemned, the believer is suddenly motivated by hope (expectation) of promised glorification for all who continue to follow Jesus. Not only is he energized by the promise of glorification, he is full of joy from God's acceptance of him as one of His beloved children! When trials come and his faith wanes, his motivation to endure remains strong. He does not turn away to his former way of living because only Jesus has the words of eternal life. (See John 6:68.) So, it is no wonder that sin will not gain the victory and take back control of his life because he is not under law with its continual condemnation. Rather, he is under grace that empowers him and motivates him to lay hold of the promised eternal life.

Unless a person is experiencing life under grace (as briefly described above), he won't understand these things. If a person is not under grace, all he knows is what it means to be under law. He thinks that his only way of gaining God's approval is by doing "works of law" (as the means to earn it).

When you tell such a person that, as a Christian, you are not under law but under grace, he might ask certain questions. ("Really? You are not under law? So, you can sin as much as you want since there are no rules governing you? What then will restrain your behavior if you are not under law?")

There are many people who claim to be Christian that continue to think that the law is some sort of restraining motivator for godly living. Now according to Psalm 19 and verses like II Timothy 3:16-17, we know that the law is important and gives light

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and understanding that teaches, rebukes and enlightens us about God's righteousness. We are wise to study it and learn it well! But we must not approach it in the same way as the natural religious man who seeks to gain God's approval by trying to keep the rules. Neither prior to conversion nor afterwards are we able to earn God's favor by doing works of law.

As Paul will teach beginning in chapter 7, we must discipline ourselves to live in a new way of reliance on the Spirit of God. Only as we do so will sin not be ruling over us. If we are truly following Jesus, we will increasingly hunger for righteousness and our motivation to live righteously will continue to increase.

Before going further, I feel compelled to say that the new way of living described here is something that must be continually learned through experience. An intellectual understanding of these things is merely the beginning. If you read commentaries (even like this one), you might get the impression that those who write them are experts at living in the new way by the Spirit. On behalf of all those who write commentaries, let me say that living in the new way does not come naturally. On the contrary, I think for the most part, we Christians are quite inept at it and have much to learn. So, don't assume anyone is an expert.

Stephen, the man mentioned in Acts chapter 6 and 7, is probably one of the better examples of someone who lived by the Spirit. While some people like Stephen may exist in these days, I have yet to meet anyone like him in my life. All that said, Romans 6 – 8 teaches that this Stephen-type of life is possible even for us today. If we yield ourselves completely over to God and continue to seek after it, we will indeed experience more and more of it. Paul holds out this hope for us as he continues in Romans 6:16-18.

¹⁶Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves as servants to obey, you are slaves to whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death or of obedience resulting in righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God, that though you were slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that form of teaching to which you were committed. ¹⁸And having been set free from sin, you became servants of righteousness. ¹⁹I speak in human terms on account of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as servants to impurity and to lawlessness leading into further lawlessness, so now, present your members as servants to righteousness, leading to sanctification. ²⁰For when you were servants of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹What fruit did you have then in those things for which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²²But now, having been freed from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end, everlasting life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul says that the life we experience (both now and afterwards) is predicated on our choice. We must choose to serve either sin or obedience. If we yield ourselves over to sin, the result is death. But if we yield ourselves over to obedience, the result is righteousness. Before going further, it might be helpful to show the relationship these words have with each other. Paul says that we are slaves to one thing or another and our experience will depend upon which master we serve as slaves. On the one side, we see that sin, impurity and lawlessness is grouped with death. On the other side, obedience is grouped with righteousness, sanctification and eternal life.

Either	Or
Sin (v.16)	Obedience (v.16)
Death (v.16)	Righteousness (v.16)
Impurity unto lawlessness (v.19)	Righteousness unto sanctification (v.19.)
Death (v.21)	Sanctification unto eternal life (v.22)

In order to be properly impacted by Paul's presentation in Romans 6:16-23, it is essential that we first understand what he meant by the words he used. I think most people reading this commentary already understand what he meant by the words, *sin*, *impurity*, *lawlessness*, and *obedience*. The word *righteousness* essentially means *that which is right in God's sight*. The word *sanctification* means *set apart from the rest* (or holy). The word *death* begs for some discussion.

The noun *death* is a translation of the Greek word *thanotos*. Depending upon the context, this word could mean a variety of things. But usually, it either means physical death or eternal separation from God. If we are not sure what Paul meant by it here in Romans 6, then we will not be properly impacted by what he said. What do you think he meant by the word "death?"

The context of Romans 6 suggests that while *thanotos* may include the idea of physical death, it also includes the idea of eternal separation from God. Jesus said that at the judgment, he will separate people into two groups and to one of the groups He will say, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." (See Matthew 7:23.) In Romans 2:8-9, Paul said that those who do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness will experience the wrath of God. In Romans 6:23, Paul contrasts this word "*thanotos*" with the words "eternal life." While it is true that everyone will experience physical death, not everyone will experience eternal separation from God. There will be some who experience the opposite— eternal life in God's presence. The greater context of the entire book of Romans and the immediate context here in chapter 6 demands that by the word "*thanotos*," Paul meant eternal separation from God, not just physical death. Only when you understand him this way will his instruction, warnings and imperatives here in Romans 6 impact you properly.

As I said previously, Romans 6 speaks about our spiritual warfare. We are in a battle for our eternal life. If your theology is telling you that you have nothing to be concerned about, you will not take this warfare with the sense of urgency it demands. (If this describes you, let me warn you that you have a gaping hole in your spiritual armor.) Remember that concerning the seriousness

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of this battle, Jesus used some very dramatic words. He said if one of your members causes you to stumble, cut it off because it is better to enter the Kingdom of heaven without it than to end up in hell because of it! (See Mark 9:47.) It should be noted that Jesus gave these warnings to believers (His Apostles) not long before He was crucified. This means that all Christians should take heed to these warnings as if their eternal wellbeing depends on it.

If your theology is telling you that you are all set with nothing to be concerned about, those warnings from Jesus will not have their intended impact on you, and Paul's words here in Romans 6 will also come across more as a suggestion than words that can help you attain to your resurrection and glorification. So, when reading Romans 6, please understand this, that which you choose to obey right now will determine where you spend **eternity!**⁷ So, take heed to Paul's instruction, imperatives and warning as if your eternal life depends on it.

In Romans 6:12, Paul said, *"Don't let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts.."* There is a parallel verse in Romans 8:13. *"If you are living according to the flesh you are about to die. But if you are putting to death the misdeeds of the body (by the Spirit), you will live."* I am calling your attention to it here because it confirms what I have been saying. This translation of Romans 8:13 is more literal than what you will find in most Bibles. I translate it this way because it more accurately conveys Paul's sense of urgency about this warfare. Notice the parallel with Romans 6:12. Both are warning us not to let our mortal bodies dictate the course of our lives. The flesh lusts and if it is allowed to dictate the course of our life, the result will always be sin which leads to not only physical death, but eternal separation from God. In Romans 8:13, Paul uses a combination of words to heighten the sense of urgency. He said that if we live according to the dictates of our flesh, we are about to die (perish). In other words, if your life is being dictated by your flesh, you should think of yourself as dangling over hell right now. You are about to perish! Wake up!

It is only those who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit who are no longer condemned. (See Romans 8:1.) Those who walk according to the Spirit are engaged in this spiritual war. They are actively putting to death the misdeeds of the body by the Spirit. They are not passively sitting back and relaxing. This is why Paul's instructions, imperatives and warnings here in chapter 6 are so strong. But Paul is hopeful that the Roman Christians share his sense of urgency about the warfare. ¹⁷*But thanks be to God, that though you were slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that form of teaching to which you were committed.* ¹⁸*And having been set free from sin, you became servants of righteousness.* Are you also committed to Paul's teaching here? Do you view yourself as someone who has been set free from sin? Do you consider yourself to be a wholehearted servant of righteousness? For the sake of your eternal wellbeing, I pray that you can answer yes to all three of these questions.

¹⁹*I speak in human terms on account of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as servants to impurity and to lawlessness leading into further lawlessness, so now, present your members as servants to righteousness, leading to sanctification.* ²⁰*For when you were servants of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.* ²¹*What fruit did you have then in those things for which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.* ²²*But now, having been freed from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end, everlasting life.* ²³*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord .*

Paul could have stopped at verse 18 but he continues to reason with the Roman Christians about this issue. Evidently, this was extremely important in Paul's mind. Again, he contrasts their former way of living with the new life to which they have been called. When they formerly minded the desires of the flesh, they inevitably yielded to its lusts which are always impure. The outcome is always sinful (lawless). According to Romans 1:22-32, God restrains evil and also lets His restraint loose on occasion. We know from Romans 13 that He ordains governments that provide some restraint. He also provides parents that usually provide some restraint. But the bent of the flesh is always toward lawlessness. So, unless God intervenes, every person who yields to the impure lusts of the flesh becomes increasingly lawless. As they do, they work hard at hiding their iniquity so as to appear less wicked.

Whenever a person walks according to the dictates of his flesh, he ceases to be concerned about righteousness. Any appearance of righteousness is merely a façade to divert attention away from his lawlessness. As long as a person's iniquity remains a secret, he is content to carry on his lawless behavior. When it becomes exposed, he might be embarrassed or even suffer some repercussions. But the risk does not outweigh the pleasure he derives from the immediate gratification of the flesh. So, even if he is caught, he typically will return to his lawless lifestyle. He has no regard for living righteously in his pursuit of pleasure. Paul teaches all of this in Romans 6:19-20.

In Romans 6:21, Paul reminds them of the misery of their former way of living (when they lived according to the dictates of their flesh). Those who are in Christ increasingly mind the things of the Spirit. The more they do, the more they cringe whenever they recall their former way of living. They are not like Lot's wife who looked back upon her life longing to return to that former lifestyle. No, those who walk according to the Spirit are increasingly ashamed of the things they use to do.

It is a good thing to look back on our former way of living if it makes us ashamed. This shame is a negative influence that God uses to make us all the more serious in our current pursuit of righteousness. The more shame we feel about the things we use to do, the more we thank God for the deliverance over sinful desires. The righteousness that God is now producing in our life flavors our new life. The impurity and lawlessness that we look back on with shame brings back the taste of death.

⁷ It won't matter that you prayed a sinner's prayer at some point in your life or if you give strong ascent to the Apostle's Creed.

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²²*But now, having been freed from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end, everlasting life.* ²³*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* We are again reminded that if we were to turn away from Jesus and return to our former manner of living, the expected end for us would be death and hell because the wages of sin is “*thanotos*” (physical death and separation from God.) So, we cherish all the more the righteousness that God is producing in our lives. This God-produced righteousness is increasingly setting us apart (sanctifying us). Without this setting apart characterized by actual righteous living, there is no eternal life. We are told to pursue sanctification because without it, no one will see the Lord. (See Hebrews 12:14.) But thanks be to God. Because of the gospel, we are invited to lay hold of eternal life and through it, we have been given the means to do so. In chapter 7 and 8, Paul explains those means in detail.