

ARE YOU DEAD TO SIN?

Romans 6:1-14



This cartoon expresses how many of us feel about Romans 6:2, where Paul says that we “died to sin.” We would have to admit, “I don’t *feel* very dead to sin!” Maybe there have been a few times when I’ve felt kind of faint towards it. But, *dead*? No way!

As we come to Romans 6, Paul will say repeatedly in a variety of ways that in Christ we died to sin. Paul stresses this because it is crucial to the process of our sanctification. Yet it’s difficult to understand because we don’t feel very dead to sin! In fact, most of us rarely feel kind of faint!

“Well, I haven’t actually died to sin,
but I did feel kind of faint once.”

God’s salvation plan includes both delivering us from the penalty of sin *and* delivering us from the practice of sin. Deliverance from the penalty of sin we call *justification*. Deliverance from the practice of sin we call *sanctification*.

In Romans 1-4 Paul focuses on *justification* – those who rely upon the blood of Jesus are forgiven all their sins and declared righteous by God. They are justified and delivered from the penalty of sin.

In Romans 5-8 Paul focuses on *sanctification* – through obeying the Word and Spirit believers progressively become like Christ. Sanctification is a lifelong process. It does not proceed primarily by behavior modification. It proceeds primarily through the renewing of our minds.

Romans 5:12-21 is an example of renewing our minds. Paul emphasizes that we are no longer in Adam but in Christ. We are no longer sinners ruled by death. We are the justified alive to God and standing in His grace. This is our new reality in Christ. This we are to believe and live.

Paul concluded chapter five saying:

Romans 5:20–21 (ESV)

20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, **21** so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In Romans 6:1 Paul anticipates the abuse of God’s grace.

Romans 6:1 (ESV)

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

IN CHRIST WE DIED TO THE POWER OF SIN OVER US (6:1-4)

What Paul essentially said in 5:20-21 is that we can’t out sin God’s grace. If God’s grace covers all our sin, why bother being good? That is a crass way of expressing the way some Christians relate to God. “I’m saved by grace through faith. All my sin is forgiven. I’m going to heaven when I die. Just so long as I don’t commit a felony or do anything really stupid, I can do what I want.”

That attitude, which is prevalent, really bothers some Christians so they change the Gospel and add conditions such as repentance or threats such as loss of salvation to keep Christians on the “straight and narrow”. But Paul doesn’t do that nor should we.

Truth is, God’s grace can be abused.

Paul challenges this mindset not by threatening that grace does not abound where sin increases, but that such a mindset is completely contrary to who we are in Christ.

Romans 6:2-4 (ESV)

2 *By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* **3** *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* **4** *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

As a Christian, continuing to live in sin is completely contrary to who we are in Christ. We have died with Christ and as a result we have died to sin.

So what does this mean? We just saw (5:12-21) that all people are identified either with Adam under the reign of sin and death, or with Christ under the reign of grace through righteousness. There are no other categories: Either you are in Adam or in Christ. We all enter this world in Adam. His sin was imputed to us. But when we trust in Christ, we are transferred from Adam’s headship to Christ’s headship.

So Paul means that if you are in Christ, when He died on the cross, you died in Him. It is *not* something that you *feel*, but rather a *fact* that is true of you because God declares it to be true. If Christ our Head died, we who are His body died with Him. This is our new status or position before God. Since Christ died to sin (6:10) and we are now in Him, we died to sin. Sin’s power over us was broken. As a result we ought not live in sin as a way of life.

Water baptism pictures our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Paul is not teaching that baptism saves us. He is referring to the spiritual reality that takes place at salvation, which water baptism symbolizes. When people in that day trusted in Jesus Christ, they were immediately water baptized. The concept of an unbaptized believer would have been foreign to the early church. Paul assumes that all of the Christians in Rome had been baptized. In modern evangelicalism, we’ve wrongly replaced baptism with walking the aisle. But if you have believed in Christ as your Savior, you should be water baptized to profess your faith.

Water baptism pictures our *union* with Christ. To be baptized into Christ’s death means to be totally identified with Christ in His death. When He died to sin, conquering its power, we who believe in Him died to sin and its power. Going under the water pictures dying with Christ to sin and its power. Rising out of the water pictures our rising with Christ to new life.

Christians should not continue to live in sin as a way of life because it is contrary to who we are in Christ. In Christ we died to the power of sin over us and we rose to live a new life.

This truth is so important, Paul pounds it home in verses 5-11.

IN CHRIST WE ROSE TO LIVE A NEW LIFE (6:5-11)

Romans 6:5-11 (ESV)

5 *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.* **6** *We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.* **7** *For one who has died has been set free from sin.* **8** *Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.* **9** *We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.* **10** *For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.* **11** *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Paul’s overall point is this: in Christ, sin’s power over us has been broken. As believers we were united with Christ in His death so that we would no longer be slaves to sin, as we were before we came to Christ. Christ’s death and resurrection completely and finally conquered sin and death.

Interestingly, Paul's first command in Romans is verse 11: *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* Just as Jesus died once for all to sin, so you should count yourselves in Him to be done with sin. Just as Jesus rose from the dead to live for God so you should count yourselves in Him to be risen to a new life to be lived for God.

Consider is in the present tense and means, *to keep on counting it to be true.* You don't count it to be true because you *feel* dead to sin and alive to God, but rather because God says it is true. And the truest thing about you is not what you feel, but what God declares to be true. Victory over sin begins with your mind, how you think.

This isn't just a mind game, where you tell yourself over and over that it's true until it actually becomes true. Paul isn't saying to deny reality by thinking positive thoughts. He isn't saying, "Visualize yourself as being dead to sin and then you'll act that way." Rather, he is saying, "This is the *fact* of who God has made you in Christ. You are no longer in Adam, alive to sin, but dead towards God. Rather, you are now in Christ, dead to sin and alive to God. Think on that truth. As you think, so you will act. So consider it over and over as often as you face temptation."

When she was young, Victoria, the future queen of England, was shielded from that fact so that the knowledge of it would not spoil her. When her teacher finally did let her discover for herself that she would one day rule as queen, Victoria's response was, "Then I will be good!" Her life from that point was controlled by her future position. She would be the queen, so she acted as a queen should act.¹

In the same way, the fact that we are united with Christ in His death to sin and His resurrection to new life should cause us to proclaim, "Then I will be holy." Counting our union with Christ in His death and resurrection to be true is the key to overcoming sin.

Sanctification proceeds primarily by the renewing of the mind. But the renewed mind should then result in concrete actions and changes in our lives. Paul instructs us to take action against sin in verses 12-14.

IN CHRIST WE SAY "NO" TO SIN AND "YES" TO GOD (6:12-14)

Romans 6:12-14 (ESV)

12 *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

In Romans 6:1-11, Paul has instructed our minds as to our union with Christ in His death to sin and resurrection to life. Now in verses 12-14 Paul instructs our wills. He is saying, "Stop sinning and start obeying," but this appeal to the will rests on the knowledge of who we are in Christ. Now that we know, we need to act.

Paul doesn't say, "Just let go and let God." Rather, to stop sinning we must take aggressive action to deny sin's attempt to rule our lives.

The story is told of a young man who professed to be a Christian, but he was enslaved to some sin. He had been to many counselors, and they spent hours trying to help him analyze his past and trying various techniques, but nothing had worked. He shared this tale of woe with a campus worker and finally asked, "What do you think I should do?" The campus worker replied, "I think you should stop doing it." The young man was stunned. He said, "In all these years, no one told me to stop sinning." He didn't realize that that was an option!

In other letters Paul commands us to "Flee immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18); "Flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14) and "Flee from youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). Fleeing is the opposite of hanging out with sin. Fleeing is not presenting the members of our bodies to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. If movies tempt you to sin in thought or deed, stop going to movies. If porn on the Internet tempts you, either put some big fences up so that you don't go near the edge or flee the Internet. This isn't rocket science!

¹ (Adapted from Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich* [Victor Books], pp. 13-14.)

On the positive side we need to continually give ourselves to God as His servants and use our bodies and energy to serve God. This is a continual action on our part. We need to choose to put God's Word in front of our eyes and mind on a regular, consistent basis. We need to put God's Word and truth into our ears through audio sermons and Christian music. We need to use our hands and feet to serve God by serving people and serving the church family.

If we will do these things, God makes a promise that sin will no longer dominate our lives. Verse 14 says:

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

If we will say no to sin and yes to God, God promises sin will no longer have dominion over us. We will experience this victory, not by becoming legalistic, but by living in God's grace. Remember that we now stand in grace and have unlimited access to God and His grace to help us. As we draw on God's strength and provision to stand against temptation, we will overcome sin. And even when we fall, God's grace frees us from condemnation, motivates us by God's undeserved love, and empowers us by His Spirit, whom He freely gives to all who trust in Christ.

CONCLUSION

The concept of being dead to sin and alive to God in Christ is difficult to comprehend and apply. But it's true because God declares it. We will continue to think about these truths in the passages ahead, but here are three applications based on this text:

1) *Do not presume on God's grace as permission to sin.* Many Christians stupidly think, "I can go ahead and sin and just get forgiven. After all, I'm under grace." That is stupid because it ignores the nature of sin to dominate and bring death. God's grace does not mean that He is tolerant of your sin. God disciplines those He loves.

2) *If you have trusted Christ, make a distinct break with your past life and declare it publicly in baptism.* Becoming a Christian means burning all your bridges to your past life of sin. If you have drugs in your possession, destroy them. If you have alcohol and you are tempted to get drunk, pour it down the drain. If Internet porn is a problem, get some system of accountability or stop using the Internet. Follow the example of the new believers in Ephesus, who burned 50,000 days' wages worth of magic books (Acts 19:19). And then confess your new faith in water baptism.

3) *Meditate often on your union with Christ and what it means.* You are now in Christ. Think about it and act accordingly. Think about the slaves who were freed by President Lincoln during the Civil War. His Emancipation Proclamation declared them to be free. Many of the older slaves had not known any other life. They were born slaves and had lived all their lives under a cruel master. But now they "died" to slavery. They were declared free. But they didn't *feel* free. When they saw their old master coming, they may have shook in fear and even obeyed him if he gave them a command. But they didn't have to obey him. His power over them was broken. They did not have to live under his tyranny. They could walk in newness of life.

Even so, in Christ you died to sin. You no longer have to live under its power. You don't have to obey it. You have been raised up in Christ so that you now can walk in newness of life. Think often about your new position in Him. Our union with Christ in His death and resurrection is the foundation for separation from sin and walking in newness of life.²

² Indebted to Steven J. Cole for his studies in Romans from which much of this study is drawn.