

II. SALVATION—THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED (3:21–8:39)

A. Justification—declared righteous in Christ (3:21–5:21)

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1. The fact of our dying and rising with Christ (6:1-10)
2. Affirming these facts true concerning ourselves (6:11-12)
3. Present yourselves as alive from the dead (6:13-14).
4. Freedom from sin's slavery (6:15-23)
5. Freedom from the law (7:1-25)

6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

6:16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

In 6:1 Paul had asked that if men are declared righteous by faith alone then won't some people conclude that they can continue in sin? Won't they see grace as a license to sin? Now in verse 15 he almost repeats the same idea but asks if not being under the law results in greater disobedience,

Paul draws an analogy from slavery to answer.

Those who give themselves over to another as a slave are under their master's influence. This is true both in the physical and the spiritual realm. The one who serves sin is a slave to sin for he is under its power. "He cannot free himself from its dominion. He may hate his bondage; his reason and conscience may protest against it; his will may resist it; but he is still constrained to obedience." (Hodge, 207) Jesus said, "He who commits sin is a slave to sin" (Jn. 8:34; Lk. 16:13).

What is true of sin is true of the law. If we are under the dominion of the law we will be condemned as transgressors. Paul had said in Romans 2:12, "all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law." We need to be freed from both sin and the law and be joined to Christ.

The one who is joined with Christ has been made obedient to God, and becomes a slave to obedience. But unlike slavery to sin, slavery to God benefits the slave for it leads to life instead of death.

**6:17 “But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted”
6:18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.**

Though Paul’s main intent is to show that believers cannot live in sin if God is their Master, he gives thanks that they have been freed from the bondage they once experienced (through the union with Christ’s death as he has previously explained). They were freed because they wholeheartedly obeyed from the heart.

The “form of teaching” they were entrusted with is most likely the gospel, or more specifically, the doctrine of justification by faith. And the result is that they “have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (cf. Jn. 8:36).”

6:19 “I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.”

The idea of servitude to a master was common knowledge (Paul says he is speaking in “human terms” – 6:19a), and Paul used this, not because they were unable to understand the spiritual analogy intellectually, but because they needed such an analogy due to their weakness (6:19b). Before the believers in Rome were Christians, they were involved in immorality. In that state, they knew that the more they sinned, the more they were inclined to sin. That is, every time they chose to sin, it resulted in ever-increasing slavery to sin and more sinful acts. Just as they had yielded themselves as slaves to sin, so now they are to offer themselves to God, resulting in ever-increasing righteousness, that is, resulting in sanctification (holiness).

**6:20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.
6:21 Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.
6:22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.**

The Christian is not free from sin to set his own path and standard of behavior. He simply exchanges one form of slavery for another.

Verses 20 and 21 confirm what Paul has just said in verses 18 and 19. When sin is our master, righteousness has no influence in our life (we were free in regard to righteousness). What benefit do we receive from sinning? The answer is none! Service to sin leads to death (6:21b). However, now that the believer is no longer subject to the will of sin, he is free to reap holiness that results in eternal life (Ro. 6:22).

6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The reason that sin results in death is that sin deserves death. Death is the fair wage for sin; it is what sin “earns” as compensation. As it would be unfair for the master to withhold wages, so it

would be unfair for sin not to receive what is due. In contrast to a wage that is earned, holiness, which is a gift from God, receives a much greater reward - eternal life.

5. Freedom from the law (7:1-25)

Tom Schreiner (Romans, 345) does a great job summarizing Romans 7:1-6. The following is paraphrased.

Romans 7:1-6 is specifically related to 6:15–23, and is a continuation of the argument that started there. In 6:15-23 Paul rejected the idea that believers can continue in sin since they are no longer under the law. In 7:1-6 he takes the argument a step further, and contends that sin rules over those you are under the law. Verse 1 states the principle that the law rules over a person as long as he or she lives. Verses 2 and 3 illustrate that principle by appealing to the wife's responsibility under the law. She should stay married to her husband as long as he lives. Only if he dies is she free from the law of the marriage bond. In verses 4-6 the conclusion is drawn from verses 1-3. Believers have died to the law through the death of Christ. They have been liberated from the law and are now married to Jesus Christ. God's purpose in wedding believers to Christ is to produce good fruit in their lives.

7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

7:2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.

7:3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

The first verse in chapter 7 is the key to the chapter, namely, that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives. Although chapter 7 is related to chapter 6 the words, "do you not know" signal a discrete section change.

In verse 1 the word translated as "has jurisdiction" is the word κυριεύω (kurieuo) in Greek, and is the verbal form of the word "lord" (κύριος - kurios). The law has lordship over a person as long as they live. It is his ruler. The same word was used of the lordship of death and sin in 6:9 and 14.

The authority of the law has binding force while one is under it, but it is not permanent. This is seen in marriage (7:2-3). The law states that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive (cf. I Cor. 7:39; Matt. 19:3-9). This is proven by the fact that if she marries another man while her husband is alive, she is called an adulteress (7:3). However, if her husband dies she is free to remarry. This could not happen unless death nullified the law of marriage.

7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Verse 4 provides the conclusion drawn from verses 1-3 and gives the spiritual application to us. Although Paul now speaks of "our death" instead of the husband's death, his point is the same -

death releases us from obligation to the law. Just as death freed the woman to remarry, so our union to the death of Christ frees us from the law (Ro. 6:1ff; Gal. 2:19), making it possible to be joined to Him.

The believer's death is due to our union with Christ; we were made to die through the body of Christ. When we believed, we were incorporated into Him so that His experiences are ours. We died when He did, and our death freed us from the dominion of the law, allowing us to be joined to Him.

Someone might think that death to the law would result in license to sin, but Paul also says that we are joined to Christ. This guarantees that we will bear fruit for God (Jn. 15:1ff.).

The necessity of freedom from the law and the consequences of freedom from the law follow.

7:5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

7:6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

The "for" at the beginning of verse 5 explains verse 4 in more detail. "Why is it the believers need to die to the law? Because according to verse 5, the law in the unregenerate does not produce righteousness. Indeed, the passions of sin are actually stimulated through the law, with the result that death is pronounced upon such evil doers. Verse 6 functions as a contrast to verse 5. Believers are no longer in the flesh but have been released from the power of the law and have died to its dominion over their lives. As a consequence they are no longer under the letter of the law which produces only disobedience. Now they have the Holy Spirit and live a new life of holiness" (Schreiner, 345-246).

The flesh, as it is used here, is our human nature directed by our sinfulness. When we were enemies of God and alienated from Him ("in the flesh"), the law only aroused our sinful desires which resulted in us bearing fruit that led to death. Sin is so insidious in nature that it even works through that which is good to achieve its purposes (7:13).

As long as we were bound to the law, there was no possibility of release from our bondage to sin and the consequent condemnation. It is, therefore, *necessary* to be freed from the law if we are to live. Freedom came when Christ died and we were united with Him in His death (7:4).

The law, like our position in Adam (see discussion on chapters 5 and 6), belong to the old era. We have died both to our relationship to Adam and to the law. We are free from the law's rule over us (see notes ending with Romans 6:14). The *consequence* of our death to the law is that we are no longer in servitude to it but can serve "in the newness of the Spirit." That is, the believer now serves the living Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) instead of being forced to try to submit to a list of rules that offer no power to obey them.

NOTES:

The following is primarily taken from The Collected Writings of John Murray, Vol 2, Systematic Theology, although I have added some comments and paraphrased some of Murray's thoughts.

“When we speak of sanctification we generally think of it as that process by which the believer is gradually transformed in heart, mind, will, and conduct, and conformed more and more to the will of God into the image of Christ, until at death the disembodied spirit is made perfect in holiness, and at the resurrection his body likewise will be conformed to the likeness of the body of Christ’s glory. It is biblical to apply the term “sanctification” to this process of transformation and conformation. But it is a fact too frequently overlooked that in the New Testament the most characteristic terms that refer to sanctification are used, not of a process, but of a once-for-all definitive act” (Murray, 277).

No passage in the New Testament is more instructive of this than Romans 6:7-7:6.

When Paul says that we died to sin (6:2), He is using the language of that phenomenon with which all are familiar, the event of death. When a person dies he is no longer active in the sphere or realm or relation in reference to which he has died. His connection with that realm has been dissolved; he has no longer en rapport with life there; it is no longer the sphere of his activity. . .

In accord with this analogy, the person who lives in sin or to sin, lives and acts in the realm of sin – it is the sphere of life and activity. And the person who died to sin no longer lives in that sphere. His tie with it has been broken, and he has been translated into another realm. . . This is the decisive cleavage that the apostle has in view; it is the foundation upon which rests his whole conception of the believer’s life, and it is a cleavage, a breach, a translation as really and decisively true in the sphere of moral and religious relationship as in the ordinary experience of death. There is a once-for-all definitive and irreversible breach with the realm in which sin reigns and unto death (Murray, 279).

“The antitheses which the apostle institutes in this passage serve to point up the decisive breach which this change involves.

Death in sin means:

1. the service of sin as bondservants (6: 6, 16, 17, 20)
2. sin reigns in the mortal bodies (6:12)
3. obedience is rendered to the lusts of sin (6:12)
4. we present our members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness (6:13, 19)
5. we are free in respect to righteousness (6:20)
6. sin has dominion over us (6:14)
7. we are under the law (6:14).

Death to sin means:

1. that the old self has been crucified (we are regenerated; 6:6)
2. the body of sin is made inoperative (6:6)
3. we are free from sin – sin is no longer our master (6:7)
4. we are alive to God and live to Him (6:10,11)
5. sin no longer reigns in our mortal body and does not lord over us (6:12, 14)

6. we present ourselves to God and our members as instruments of righteousness to God, so that we are servants of righteousness unto holiness (6:13, 19)
7. we are under the reign of grace (6:14)
8. we render obedience from the heart due to the pattern of Christian teaching (6:17)
9. the fruit is unto holiness and the end, everlasting life (6:22).

“This sustained contrast witnesses to the decisive change. There is no possibility of toning down the antithesis; it appears all along the line of the varying aspects from which life and action are to be viewed. . . This means that there is a decisive and definitive breach with the power and service of sin in the case of everyone who has come under the control of the provision of grace” (Murray, 280).

Romans 6:8-11 clearly expresses the definitive nature of our death to sin by making an analogy to Christ’s death.

“Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Just as Jesus’ death was final, and sin is no longer master over Him (that is, sin which exercises its dominion in death no longer had mastery over Jesus; He conquered death through resurrection), and the life He lives He lives to God forever, so we are to consider our death and life to sin.

“We see, therefore, that the decisive and definitive breach with sin that occurs at the inception of Christian life is one necessitated by the fact that the death of Christ was decisive and definitive. It is just because we cannot allow for any reversal or repetition of Christ’s death on the tree that we cannot allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer has died to sin and no longer lives under its dominion. Sin no longer lords it over him. To equivocate here is to assail the definitiveness of Christ’s death. Likewise the decisive and definitive entrance upon newness of life in the case of every believer is required by the fact that the resurrection of Christ was decisive and definitive. As we cannot allow for any reversal or repetition of the resurrection, so we cannot allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer is a new man, that the old man has been crucified, that the body of sin has been destroyed, and that, as a new man in Christ Jesus, he serves God in the newness which is none other than that of the Holy Spirit of whom he has become the habitation and his body the temple” (Murray, 293).

Peter also says in 1 Peter 2:24, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” And again Peter writes, “Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God” (1 Pet. 4:1-2).

1 John 3:6-9 also expresses this radical break with our old selves in even more striking terminology.

“No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

“It might appear from the emphasis which is placed in the New Testament upon the definitive breach with sin and the newness of life in the Spirit which union with Christ entails, that no place remains for a process of mortification (subduing one’s sinful desires) and sanctification by which sin is more and more put to death and conformity to holiness progressively attained” (Murray, 294).

However, this is not the case.

First, we have already seen how Paul could not be teaching sinless perfection.

Peter is not teaching sinless perfection either. The statement in 1 Peter 4:1 more likely means that Jesus’ resolve to do what was right at all costs (1 Pet. 4:1a) demonstrated that His life was not dominated by sin, but by the will of God. We should have the same resolve, and thus demonstrate that our lives are no longer dominated by sin. In this case, “to cease from sin” doesn’t mean that we have achieved sinless perfection, but that sin is no longer the dominant force that drives our decisions. Elsewhere in 1 Peter it is clear that a battle against sin is still expected. A few examples will suffice:

- 1 Peter 1:14 “do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance”
- 1 Peter 2:1 “putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander”
- 1 Peter 2:11 “I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul”
- 1 Peter 2:16 “do not use your freedom as a covering for evil”

If the believer totally ceased from sin, such comments would be meaningless.

1 John is not teaching the possibility of perfectionism either. In 1 John 1:8 he expressly says, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” If he were only thinking of past sins there would be no reason to use the present tense verb. Then, in 1 John 2:1 he states, “I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” In 1 John 1:7 “the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin”, the word “Cleanses” is a present tense verb indicating a continuous action. If a believer ceases from sin why would a continuous cleansing be necessary? In 1 John 3:2 it says, “it has not appeared as yet what we will be.” What we shall be are sons who perfectly reflect the image of the Son! Anything short of that is not sinless perfection and it is clear that that condition has not yet been manifested. 1 John 3:3 says, “everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” Again, John sees a need for self-

purification. Lastly, John implies that sin may be committed by a believing brother in 1 John 5:16. 1 John 3:6-9 do not contradict these verses. Although John uses different language than Paul, he is teaching the same doctrine; there is a decisive breach with who we were prior to becoming Christians. 1 John 3:6 (as translated in the ESV) reads, “no one who abides in Him keeps on sinning.” “Keeps on sinning” expresses the idea of the present tense verb well. The thought is that those who are joined to Christ (abide in Him) do not continue on in a pattern of sin. Likewise, the ESV translates 1 John 3:8 as “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil.” Again, the idea is practicing the same patterns of behavior that were present in our unregenerate state. In Romans 6:1-2 Paul asked, “Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” His answer was, “May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Ro. 6:2). John would have said, “no one who abides in Him keeps on sinning . . . Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil” (1 John. 3:6, 8).

“In reference to mortification there are two passages in the New Testament which are particularly striking because of the context in which they appear. ‘But if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live’ (Ro. 8:13). ‘Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry’ (Col. 3:5). These two passages are the more instructive because they occur in contexts in which the once-for-all death to sin, and the translation thereby to the realm of new life in Christ are in the forefront. In Romans 6 the accent falls upon this definitive transition, and the pivotal consideration is ‘you died to sin.’ But in Romans 8:13 the apostle addresses believers and clearly intimates that their own agency is to be enlisted in putting to death the deeds of the body, a duty made all the more remarkable since he had already said that the body of sin had been destroyed (Ro. 6:6 [the believer is released from the dominion of sinful desires— not destroyed in the sense that sinful desires cease to exist- TK]). This activity is one that can be exercised only in the strength and grace of the Holy Spirit, and of that Paul takes account when he says, ‘by the Spirit.’ But it is an activity in which they as believers are to be engaged, and it consists in nothing less violent than that of putting to death. The context of Colossians 3:5 contains the same reflection upon the once-for-all death to sin by the death of Christ. ‘If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees?’ (Col. 2:20). ‘For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God’ (Col. 3:3). The exhortation, ‘Put to death therefore what is earthly in you’ (Col. 3:5), is one that arises from the categorical propositions which precede. It is clear, as in Romans 8:13, that the activity of the believer is enlisted in this process. The implication is, therefore, to the effect that, notwithstanding the definitive death to sin alluded to in Colossians 2:20; 3:3, the believer is not so delivered from sin in its lust and defilement but that he needs to be actively engaged in the business of the slaughterhouse with reference to his own sins. And just as the language used in reference to the definitive death to sin is that of passivity – ‘you died to sin, you died with Christ, you were put to death to the law’ (Ro. 6:2; Col.2:20; Ro. 7:4)- so now the terms are those of activity on the part of the believer himself. The exhortation of 2 Corinthians 7:1 – ‘having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God’ – is to the same effect. The assumption is that there is defilement of flesh and spirit and that we ourselves are to be actively engaged in cleansing ourselves from that defilement, just as on the more positive side we are to perfect holiness in the fear of God.” (Murray, 295-296).

This mortifying and cleansing process is concerned with sin and defilement still adhering to the believer, and it contemplates as its aim the removal of all defilement of flesh and spirit. Nothing

less than complete eradication of this sinfulness is compatible with the destination of the believer, namely, conformity to the image of God's Son. However, we shall not only be conformed into the image of the Son, but also into the image of the Father. John says in 1 John 3:3 that everyone who has this hope fixed on Him (the Father) purifies himself, just as He is pure.

But it is not only the cleansing from sin that the process of sanctification involves. The termination of sanctification is divine perfection. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says that "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." "Transformed" is the same term that is used with reference to Jesus' transfiguration (Matt. 17:2; Mk. 9:3). This is the passage that defines for us the method of progressive sanctification. Whether the thought is that we reflect the glory of the Lord Christ, or that we behold His glory, both thoughts are implied. If we reflect His glory it is because we behold it after the pattern of John's declaration, "we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14), and in beholding, we are being more and more transformed into His likeness. "The eyes of heart and mind become so fixed upon Him as the effulgence of the Father's glory and the express image of His being (Heb. 1:3), and therefore upon Him in His matchless glory, that we more and more take on the characters of His image from one degree of similitude to another, until finally we are completely transfigured" (Murray, 297).