

## SECRETS TO LIVING FREE IN CHRIST – I

Romans 6:1-4

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“I just can’t help myself. That’s the way I’ve always been; that’s just the way I am and that’s the way I’ll always be! I guess they are right when they say, ‘You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.’ Besides, you know I can’t do any better than that. So what do you expect?”

Have you ever heard someone near you say things like these? Maybe even yourself? Those are the words of a defeated person. I’ve heard Christians and non-Christians alike say those things. In the past, I’ve even thought them myself. After trying really hard to stop a bad habit or activity that I knew was wrong, and after a series of failures, I wanted to give up. I found myself repeating hopeless words like, “Well, that’s just the way I am. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to change. Others are just going to have to accept me the way I am, bad habits and all.”

Robert McKee, in his excellent work *Search for Significance* wrote, “Too often, our self-image rests solely on an evaluation of our past behavior, being measured only through our memory. Day after day, year after year, we tend to build our personalities upon the rubble of yesterday’s personal disappointments.” (p. 102)

Robert McKee is correct. A person who repeats to himself/herself over and over again his past failures will pretty soon believe that they have become who he is and always will be. It’s as though his past has guaranteed that he is a failure. More often than not, how we see ourselves today is nothing more than a reflection or summation of our past thoughts of ourselves. If your past is filled with failure after failure in a particular area of your life, then you will give up hope of ever changing or being different. If your past has been filled with one success after another, then you are a success, a notch above the other poor suckers who live around you. Both mindset extremes are not only wrong, but are harmful to your health.

If we are ever going to find freedom from our bad habits, addictions, and sin patterns and enjoy new lives of freedom in Christ, we must let go of the old life, the ideas of who we were before we met Christ, and grab on to the only

correct view given to us by the all-knowing God who only speaks the truth. How we can grasp ahold of these truths is the subject of this next section of **Romans** that we begin looking at this morning.

For the next few weeks, we will learn the secrets of living a transformed life as a follower of Jesus. We will learn how to step out of our self-imposed jail cell called hopelessness and death, and how to step into the freedom that the apostle Paul writes about at the end of **Romans 5**, called “**reigning in life.**”

The primary secret to finding freedom in Christ is revealed to us in **Romans 6**. It is basically this: If you have committed your life to Jesus Christ, then you have a new start, a new life, a new beginning, and a new identity. Although you may look and feel the same, you are not the same person you once were. Hard as that is to grasp, it is true, according to what God’s Word teaches us in **2 Corinthians 5:17**. In that verse, writing to Christians, Paul declares definitively “**you are a new creation in Christ.**” A dramatic, invisible but very real and dynamic change has taken place in you, the implications of which are astounding as well as liberating.

Our portion of this text that we will be looking at this morning, **Romans 6:1-4**, is short but sweet. It builds upon this truth that Christians are no longer in Adam, but are in Christ. Our passage begins with a question. The Apostle Paul writes, “**What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?**” What does “**grace may abound**” mean, and why is Paul asking this question? In order to understand this verse, we must be able to grasp Paul’s meaning and intent for “**grace may abound.**” To do so we have to go back to **Romans 5:20**, where Paul first mentions this idea of grace abounding. There we read, “**The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.**” We learned last time that God gave us his Law to help us see that on our own, we could not live up to or successfully obey His simple laws. And because we could not live up to God’s laws and thus could not fix ourselves, we were forced to admit that we could not make ourselves presentable to God. The more we tried to earn God’s approval by proving we were good enough by obeying his simple laws, the more we failed at every turn. And the more we failed, the more God’s grace had to abound to forgive, accept, and reconcile people. That’s what this expression “**grace may abound**” refers to.

Understanding this, I have a question for you: Is it a good or bad thing for God's grace to abound? That's a good thing! Well, shouldn't we do what we can to help God get good press for His Grace? Shouldn't we do all that we can to make more grace abound? Some would think so. Paul totally disagrees with this path of reasoning, and that's why he asks this question. Paul already knows the answer, because he has seen what horrible results are produced by such faulty reasoning. In fact, the town from which he writes this letter, the city of Corinth, was a perfect example. The Christians in Corinth were living in such sin that the non-Christians could see no difference between them and themselves. So, why would a non-Christian need the gospel? Furthermore, with ongoing sin, as we saw last week, death reigned among the believers. The Christians lived with more than normal conflict among themselves; broken marriages and enslavement to various sins ran rampant throughout the church. As a result, lives lived on the basis of this reasoning led to others mocking the gospel. Jesus didn't save us so that we would reign in death today, but that we would enjoy reigning in life.

Hence, Paul uses the first four verses of **Romans 6** to address this errant reasoning and its faulty conclusions so that the Romans and we won't fall into the Corinthian's trap. He wants the Romans and all Christians in future who read his letter to fully experience the truth of reigning in Christ and living a life of purpose, fulfillment, excitement, and one free from the enslavement of sin while living as a citizen in the midst of a sin-filled and evil tempting world. Paul wants Christians to experience the joy of conquering self-destructive habits. He wants Christians who suffer many types of losses in this life to be able to rejoice and move on.

Now, let's reread **Romans 6:1** and see if it doesn't take on more meaning to us. Paul writes, "**What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?**" The word "**continue**" speaks of a habitual practice. Paul is not addressing the issue of the believer's occasional failure in temptation due to ambushes of the evil one. He is referring to intentional, willful, constant sinning as a routine of life, the continuing to do wrong and thinking, "Oh well, Jesus will forgive me."

To this, Paul answers his own question, "**By no means!**" Paul's statement here is very much an emotional eruption. Paul could not be more emphatically negative in his answer to his own question. To even raise this

question was repulsive to Paul's heart. He is grieved to even have to deal with this matter.

He continues with another question that he hopes will lead to a more logical and correct conclusion. He asks, "**How can we who died to sin still live in it?**" When Paul speaks of our having "**died to sin,**" he does not mean that it is impossible for a Christian to sin. The rest of scripture teaches us that Christians can and do sin. But what he is saying here is that it is not normal for a Christian to continue living a life dominated by sin. Being dead to sin means that sin has no power to control or to reign over the Christian's life.

As soon as some hear what I just said, I know that there is bound to be someone who is responding in their thoughts with similar words to what I once cried out to God with in the midst of my own battle with sin. Words like, "Wait a minute Paul. If I am so dog gone dead to sin, then why are my thoughts so controlled by envy or jealousy or bitterness or anger or greed or discontentment? Why is it, that as hard as I try to cease from some particular sinful behavior, I can't do it? Lord, sin feels like it is very alive in me, not dead!"

Years ago, I took great comfort from something I learned from Dr. Neil Anderson. In his book, *A Way of Escape*, he describes one Christian's struggle with lust. This individual came to Neil for advice when he was at his wits end. He was filled with shame for his inability to control his lustful thought life. He said, "Neil, if I am so dead to sin, why can't I stop carrying out my sexual fantasies which I know are wrong? How does one die to sin?"

Anderson correctly responded, "The answer is, 'You don't die to sin!'" You see friends, this text is not teaching that you can die to sin or that it is up to you to put sin to death. So what does this verse say? It merely states a fact that you are already, in the past tense, dead to sin. You can still sin, but sin no longer is alive in the sense that it has the authority to control your life.

Please note that these words are a statement of fact that you are to believe. This is not an instruction for you to do something or a command for you to obey. It is a stated truth, "**you died to sin.**" It is a truth that is simply to be believed and accepted. This is something that has already been accomplished for you by Jesus Christ. You are simply to accept the fact that He has put to

death sin's power and authority over you in the control center of your being, your spirit.

Allow me to remind you of what we learned last week. The first circle in our chart describes what life was like for Adam and Eve before the Fall. They were alive to God in body, soul and spirit. As we noted, your soul is that immaterial part of your being that can be best referred to in our English language as your personality. It is made up of your tendencies and abilities, whether you are an introvert, extrovert, artist, athlete, or countless factors and combinations. Your personality is affected by the environment in which you were reared. But the key to your being, the thing that makes you different from animals, is that you have a spirit given to you at birth. Animals have eternal souls, but no spirit. In the beginning, God's spirit was united as part of our spirit. This made us spiritually alive and able to carry on a personal relationship with God.

But in the second circle, sin came into the world and changed our lives. Our spirits died. God, along with His power, was removed from our spirit, the very control center of our being. His power, the driving force of our lives, was replaced with another force. It is what the Bible calls the "**flesh.**" We tend to be driven by sin and a desire to live independently from God, as if He doesn't even exist.

As a result of our spirits being controlled by the flesh, our soul died in the sense that selfishness took over, and as a result, our relationship with others has moved from the ability to live in harmony to living in conflict. Shortly after the Fall in **Genesis 3**, Cain killed Abel, the first murder in **Genesis 4**. Because our souls experienced a death of sorts, inside we felt loneliness, defeat, depression, shame, guilt, hopelessness, and meaninglessness. We have wandered through life wondering what our purpose is.

All of this going on in the immaterial part of our being has had a drastic effect on our physical being: death, disease, and deterioration. Last week we learned that this state is what Paul describes our life to have been "**in Adam**" and in the "**reign of death.**"

But then we saw last time that as Christians we have a new life "**in Christ.**" When Christ came into our lives, our spirits came to life. We were born

again. We became a new creation in our spirit, which joined with the spirit of Jesus Christ will eventually over time produce an entirely new person of us. As Christ's spirit in us is allowed to control our lives, our souls will be transformed. And one day when Jesus comes or when we die, whichever comes first, we will experience the finished glorified product of our lives, a glorified body.

In our passage, we are told that if you are a Christian, you are dead to sin. Sin no longer has the authority to master or control your life, because your spirit has been united and reconciled to God, with all of the power given to your spirit that resurrected Jesus Christ from the dead. Now you have authority and power to control sin in your life. You may allow sin to take place or even to have control over the rest of your being, but it clearly has no right or authority or power over you to do so. You have to give yourself over to the enslavement of sin. If you don't want to knowingly sin, you don't have to. How this is to be lived out in our lives today, Paul will begin to explain in the rest of our text and more fully in our verses for next week.

For now, let's move on to the next sentence in our passage, **verse 3**, which begins Paul's explanation of how it is that we are dead to sin. Paul asks, **"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"**

Notice that Paul's question doesn't begin by asking us about something we do. He asks, **"Do you not know?"** Living life to the fullest and letting Christ reign does not begin with what you do, but with what you know. It is out of what you know and believe to be true that you live your life. Three times between **verses 3-9**, Paul tells us that there is something we must **"know"** if we are going to reign in life, if we are going to find control over the enslavement of sin. If we are going to live as people who are alive in Christ and no longer controlled by sin, then first and foremost we must know something important. We need to get a few things straight in our thinking.

One principle we can take away from Paul's writings in **Romans 6** is that life was never meant to be lived based on your feelings. Feelings are good and important. But they can vacillate with the weather or an illness or an unexpected event. To base your life on your feelings causes you to live aboard a rollercoaster of constantly changing emotions. Living life based on

how you feel will lead to mental and emotional instability and even physical self-destructive tendencies.

On the other hand, what you believe or know to be true will eventually help to control your feelings. That's why Paul begins with a question about what you know. From this, we have two more principles: Life is meant to be lived based on truth, and you can know the truth. Also, that which will set you free from sin's control will be the truth that you believe, not the emotions you feel.

Furthermore, in this world built on rampant relativism, it is important for us to know where to find a reliable source for truth. When it comes to wanting to know God and how to reign in life, there is only one major source of truth, and that is God's Word. Hence, here is a third principle: Believing the Word of God doesn't make it true; His Word is true, whether one believes it or not. Therefore, you must believe what the Bible says to be true, even if your emotions don't want to cooperate at first, if you want to reign in life and find control over the enslavement of sin.

Allow me to illustrate how we allow our emotions to dictate what we believe and thus live, rather than what we believe dictating how we feel and live. Imagine a young cadet who has just graduated from the police academy in a large metropolitan city like New York. His first day on the job, he is given the assignment of directing traffic on one of the busiest and most dangerous intersections in the city. There he stands on the corner, dressed in his neatly pressed uniform with his shiny new whistle in his hand, watching all of those cars and trucks racing back and forth at the intersection. He feels a little nervous and starts to question his ability to do his job of directing traffic at this intersection during rush hour. He questions whether or not people will follow his instructions. Yesterday, before he graduated from the police academy, the drivers wouldn't have given him the time of day. Why should they obey him today? He doesn't feel any different today than he did yesterday before graduation, so why should they obey his orders?

To be safe, he does not start blowing his whistle as he steps off the curb, with hand raised high in a signal declaring them to stop and follow his direction. Instead, he stands on the corner, fully dressed in his uniform and blows his whistle and tries to direct traffic from there. And guess what? Nobody pays any attention to him. The drivers don't even see him! As a result of their

response to him, this young police officer becomes convinced that his feelings are right. Nothing has changed since his graduation. There is nothing different about him today than yesterday. Hence, he has no business risking his life by standing out there in the middle of the street directing traffic.

Moments later, a veteran of the police force, his captain, happens by to see how his new recruit is doing and is shocked. So he walks up to the new officer and says, “What are you doing?” The young officer says, “I’m trying to direct traffic, but no one is obeying my signals!” At which point the captain pulls out his whistle, proceeds to blow on it, all the while raising his right hand for the traffic to stop, and he marches toward the center of the intersection. All the traffic stops. He then motions for the young officer to come out into the center of the street. Then he says, “Look son, I don’t care who you were yesterday, or what you feel today. Today, you ARE a police officer. You are the law, and they will obey you because you are wearing this badge of authority that says the entire NY police force stands behind you. Now, believe the truth and start directing traffic!”

At that point, the captain leaves the scene and the new officer motions for the traffic to continue and sure enough it does. His new authority, his identity as a police officer, took hold because he accepted it as true.

Sadly, most of us believers do not know or accept the authority and power we possess over sin. We feel that because we had no authority or power over sin before we were saved, then we must not have any now. But that is a lie. The truth is, whereas once sin could control us, now sin has no authority to do so unless we choose to let that happen by ignoring the truth or refusing to set our minds to search out truth. Obviously, if you know truth, hopefully you would take the next step to apply it, to act upon what you know to be true. To do otherwise would be foolish.

Let’s go back to **verse 3**, to a truth that is elementary for a Christian to know if he wants to reign and live the abundant life Jesus promised, even though he lives in an upside-down world. Paul writes, “**Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?**” What in the world does this mean?

This is the first time in **Romans** that baptism is mentioned. Paul is not speaking about water baptism, but about a spiritual baptism or spiritual identification with Jesus Christ. The term baptism was used in the first century to describe the dipping of a light-colored garment into a dye that was, let's say red. Once the fabric was dipped into the red dye, it would be changed in its identity from the original color to the color of the dye. This process, the changing a color or the changing of the identity of the cloth, is what the term baptism refers to.

Paul is saying that when Christ died for us on the cross, our identity was dipped into the same scene of Christ's death and resurrection. When Jesus died in our place on the cross, we were baptized into his death. What this means is that in His death He became a self-righteous hypocrite, a thief, a liar, an alcoholic, a porn addict, a meth addict, and even a mass murder. He became the very worst of us. He took the punishment for our sin. Although we didn't feel any of this pain when we trusted Christ, it is because He had already taken on the pain for us. In addition, the moment we put our trust in Jesus death on the cross for our sins, our past lives were identified or baptized into His death.

That means that our old lives (our spirit's condition) governed by our relationship to Adam and sin's control died with Christ on the cross. And with that, a significant instant transformation occurred in our spirits. The old nature, the old man, died or ceased to exist. We can't go back to resurrect it. The old man in Adam is gone forever.

Furthermore, when we were baptized into Christ's resurrection, meaning His new resurrected life, we now have a new life to be lived in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Someone else has dubbed this as the greatest yet most unfair exchange in history. He got the worst of us, and we got the best of him. He got our punishment and we got Him as our eternal inheritance. We were given the resurrection life and authority and power of Jesus Christ to be reconciled to God in our spirits. In other words, we have entered into, been identified with, and baptized into an entirely new life in Christ. In this life, Jesus Christ has come into us, our spirits, the control center of our beings, so that we now have supernatural power and authority to live our new lives free from the enslavement of sin. I am not saying we will never be capable of sinning. We will sin, but we don't have to become enslaved to sin.

But before we can experience the resurrection power driven new life, we must know about it, believe it, and put our confidence in Christ's power to transform and free us from our previous enslavement.

Or, we can choose to do what many Christians do. We can remain ignorant, not wanting to mine God's Word for the gold nuggets of truth. We can ignore the truth of who we now are in Christ. We can choose to believe we are sinners and dabble with sin and quickly become enslaved to it again. And if we do this, we will stay enslaved until we repent and agree with God that we were being stupid and choose to live as a saint, a set apart one, a beloved child of God, the person God says we really are, a born again follower of Christ.

Paul addresses this possibility of Christians returning to sin's enslavement and the foolishness of doing so later in this chapter, beginning with **verse 15**. And in **verse 4** he makes a reference to this possibility when he writes, "**We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory [power] of the Father, we too might walk [with this same supernatural power] in newness of life.**" By using the word "**might**" Paul suggests that we have a choice: believe the truth and live as in Christ and enjoy newness of life, or ignore or reject the truth of who we are in Christ and experience enslavement to sin.

I like Paul's use of the expression "**walk in the newness of life.**" It reminds me of a house in our old neighborhood in New Jersey. Shortly after we moved in, the owners of the house across the street moved out and allowed other relatives to move in. The new inhabitants parked their cars all over the front lawn, ruining the yard. They didn't water the flowers or shrubs, so much of what was alive when they moved in died. With the harsh winters of New Jersey, it didn't take long before paint started chipping off the sides of the house. And with all of the traffic going in and out, pretty soon the porch started to sag. Basically, the house was a mess.

Then something interesting happened. The previous owners died and the house was purchased by new owners. These residents planted a lawn, repaired the porch, poured a new concrete driveway, repainted the entire house, put on a new roof and planted flowers. The transformation was amazing. Why? Because the house had new owners dwelling in it and taking control.

Imagine your body being a typical house that was run down. The previous owner was Adam. When the “Adam” died and left this house, Jesus, the new owner, took possession and came to live within, allowing the house to take on the characteristics of its new owner. The old owner has no right or authority over the house.

Similarly, when we submit to the will of the new owner of our house, Jesus, and put our trust in Him to empower us to live as who we are in Christ, His holy ones, our lives change. We don’t try to change our lives, we change because we recognize and live for and with our new owner. And because we do, He transforms our lives. We cannot go on sinning as though we have no control over sinful desires, because that would not reflect the chief resident, Jesus. We are a new home with a new owner who has the authority and will to transform our lives.

Here is a question: as a follower of Jesus Christ, do you believe you have a new life? Do you believe you have a new owner who has the authority and power to change your life? If so, then from this point forward, who do you choose to live for, the old owner or the new?

Let’s stop here. I realize that this is rather abrupt. I would like to encourage you to do two things this week in preparation for worship next Sunday. First, read and reread **verses 1-14** several times, thinking through and asking yourself questions of what you have read. Secondly, review the points that we have learned this morning. You will get much more out of the Word next week if you do.

