

Chapter Five

Dying to Live

[\(Romans 6\)](#)

During a court session, an attorney will often rise to his feet and say, “Your Honor, I object!” Some of the Roman Christians must have felt like objecting as they heard Paul’s letter being read, and Paul seemed to anticipate their thinking. In Romans 6—8 Paul defended his doctrine of justification by faith. He anticipated three objections: (1) “If God’s grace abounds when we sin, then let’s continue sinning so we might experience more grace” (Rom. 6:1–14); (2) “If we are no longer under the law, then we are free to live as we please” (Rom. 6:15—7:6); and (3) “You have made God’s law sinful” (Rom. 7:7–25).

These objections prove that the readers understood neither law nor grace. They were going to extremes: legalism on the one hand and license on the other. So as Paul defended justification he also explained sanctification. He told how we can live lives of victory (Rom. 6), liberty (Rom. 7), and security (Rom. 8). He explained our relationship to the flesh, the law, and the Holy Spirit. In Romans 6, Paul gave three instructions for attaining victory over sin.

1. Know (6:1–10)

The repetition of the word *know* in Romans 6:3, 6, and 9 indicates that Paul wanted us to understand a basic doctrine. Christian living depends on Christian learning; duty is always founded on doctrine. If Satan can keep a Christian ignorant, he can keep him impotent.

The basic truth Paul was teaching is the believer’s identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. Just as we are identified with Adam in sin and condemnation, so we are now identified with Christ in righteousness and justification. At Romans 5:12, Paul made a transition from discussing “sins” to discussing “sin”—from the actions to the principle, from the fruit to the root. Jesus Christ not only died for our sins, but He also died unto sin, and we died with Him. Perhaps a chart will explain the contrasts better.

Romans 3:21—5:21

Romans 6—8

Substitution: He died for me

Identification: I died with Him

He died *for* my sins
He paid sin's penalty
Justification:
 righteousness

He died *unto* sin
He broke sin's power
Sanctification:
 righteousness

In other words, justification by faith is not simply a legal matter between me and God; it is a living relationship. It is “a justification which brings life” (Rom. 5:18, literal translation). I am in Christ and identified with Him. Therefore, whatever happened to Christ has happened to me. When He died, I died. When He arose, I arose in Him. I am now seated with Him in the heavenlies (see Eph. 2:1–10; Col. 3:1–3). Because of this living union with Christ, the believer has a totally new relationship to sin.

The believer is dead to sin (vv. 2–5). Paul's illustration is baptism. The Greek word has two basic meanings: (1) a literal meaning—to dip or immerse; and (2) a figurative meaning—to be identified with. An example of the latter would be 1 Corinthians 10:2: “And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” The nation of Israel was identified with Moses as their leader when they crossed the Red Sea.

It appears that Paul had both the literal and the figurative in mind in this paragraph, for he used the readers' experience of water baptism to remind them of their identification with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. To be “baptized into Jesus Christ” (Rom. 6:3) is the same as “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). There is a difference between water baptism and the baptism of the Spirit (John 1:33). When a sinner trusts Christ, he is immediately born into the family of God and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. A good illustration of this is the household of Cornelius when they heard Peter preach (Acts 10:34–48). When these people believed in Christ, they immediately received the Holy Spirit. After that, they were baptized. Peter's words, “Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” gave to them the promise that they needed. They believed—and they were saved.

Historians agree that the mode of baptism in the early church was immersion. The believer was “buried” in the water and brought up again as a picture of death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism by immersion (which is the illustration Paul is using in Rom. 6) pictures the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. It is an outward symbol of an inward experience. Paul is not saying that their immersion in water put them “into Jesus Christ,” for that was accomplished by the Spirit when they believed. Their immersion was a picture of what the Spirit did: The Holy Spirit identified them with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

This means that the believer has a new relationship to sin. He is “dead to sin.” “I am crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20). If a drunk dies, he can no longer be tempted by alcohol because his body is dead to all physical senses. He cannot see the alcohol, smell it, taste it, or desire it. In Jesus Christ we have died to sin so that we no longer want to “continue in sin.” But we are not only dead to sin; we are also alive in Christ. We have been raised from the dead and now walk in the power of His resurrection. We walk in “newness of life” because we share His life. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live” (Gal. 2:20).

This tremendous spiritual truth is illustrated in the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11). When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days, so there was no question about his death. By the power of His word (“Lazarus, come forth!”) Jesus raised His friend from the dead. But when Lazarus appeared at the door of the tomb, he was wrapped in graveclothes. So Jesus commanded, “Loose him, and let him go!” He had been raised to “walk in newness of life.” In John 12, Lazarus was seated with Christ at the table, in fellowship with Him. Dead—raised from the dead—set free to walk in newness of life—seated with Christ: All of these facts illustrate the spiritual truths of our identification with Christ as given in Ephesians 2:1–10.

Too many Christians are “betweeners”: They live between Egypt and Canaan, saved but never satisfied; or they live between Good Friday and Easter, believing in the cross but not entering into the power and glory of the resurrection. Romans 6:5 indicates that our union with Christ assures our future resurrection should we die. But Romans 6:4 teaches that we share His resurrection power today. “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above ... For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1, 3 NIV).

It is clear, then, that the believer cannot deliberately live in sin since he has a new relationship to sin because of his identification with Christ. The believer has died to the old life; he has been raised to enjoy a new life. The believer does not want to go back into sin any more than Lazarus wanted to go back into the tomb dressed again in his graveclothes! Then Paul introduced a second fact.

The believer should not serve sin (vv. 6–10). Sin is a terrible master, and it finds a willing servant in the human body. The body is not sinful; the body is neutral. It can be controlled either by sin or by God. But man’s fallen nature, which is not changed at conversion, gives sin a beachhead from which it can attack and then control. Paul expressed the problem: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom. 7:18).

A tremendous fact is introduced here: The old man (the old ego, self) was

crucified with Christ so that the body need not be controlled by sin. The word *destroyed* in Romans 6:6 does not mean annihilated; it means “rendered inactive, made of no effect.” The same Greek word is translated “loosed” in Romans 7:2. If a woman’s husband dies, she is “loosed” from the law of her husband and is free to marry again. There is a change in relationship. The law is still there, but it has no authority over the woman because her husband is dead.

Sin wants to be our master. It finds a foothold in the old nature, and through the old nature seeks to control the members of the body. But in Jesus Christ, we died to sin, and the old nature was crucified so that the old life is rendered inoperative. Paul was not describing an experience; he was stating a fact. The practical experience was to come later. It is a fact of history that Jesus Christ died on the cross. It is also a fact of history that the believer died with Him, and “he that is dead is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:7). Not “free to sin” as Paul’s accusers falsely stated, but “freed from sin.”

Sin and death have no dominion over Christ. We are “in Christ”; therefore, sin and death have no dominion over us. Jesus Christ not only died “for sin,” but He also died “unto sin.” That is, He not only paid the penalty for sin, but He broke the power of sin. This idea of dominion takes us back to Romans 5:12–21, where Paul dealt with the “reigns” of sin, death, and grace. Through Christ we “reign in life” (Rom. 5:17) so that sin no longer controls our lives.

The big question now is, “I believe the facts of history, but how do I make this work in daily experience?” This leads to Paul’s second instruction.

2. Reckon (6:11)

In some parts of the United States, “to reckon” means “to think” or “to guess.” “I reckon” is also the equivalent of “I suppose.” But none of these popular meanings can apply to this verse. The word *reckon* is a translation of a Greek word that is used forty-one times in the New Testament—nineteen times in Romans alone. It appears in Romans 4, where it is translated as “count, reckon, impute.” It means “to take into account, to calculate, to estimate.” The word *impute*—“to put to one’s account”—is perhaps the best translation.

To *reckon* also means “to put to one’s account.” It simply means to believe that what God says in His Word is really true in your life.

Paul didn’t tell his readers to *feel* as if they were dead to sin, or even to *understand* it fully, but to *act* on God’s Word and claim it for themselves. Reckoning is a matter of faith that issues in action. It is like endorsing a check: If we really believe that the money is in the checking account, we will sign our name and collect the money. Reckoning is not claiming a promise but acting on a fact. God does not command us to become dead to sin. He tells us that we *are*

dead to sin and alive unto God and then commands us to act on it. Even if we do not act on it, the facts are still true.

Paul's first instruction ("know") centered in the *mind*, and this second instruction ("reckon") focuses on the *heart*. His third instruction touches the *will*.

3. Yield (6:12–23)

The word *yield* is found five times in this section (Rom. 6:13, 16, 19) and means "to place at one's disposal, to present, to offer as a sacrifice." According to Romans 12:1, the believer's body should be presented to the Lord as "a living sacrifice" for His glory. The Old Testament sacrifices were dead sacrifices. The Lord may ask some of us to die for Him, but He asks all of us to *live* for Him.

How we are to yield (vv. 12–13). This is an act of the will based on the knowledge we have of what Christ has done for us. It is an intelligent act—not the impulsive decision of the moment based on some emotional stirring. It is important to notice the tenses of the verbs in these verses. A literal translation is "Do not constantly allow sin to reign in your mortal body so that you are constantly obeying its lusts. Neither constantly yield your members of your body as weapons [or tools] of unrighteousness to sin; but once and for all yield yourselves to God." That once-and-for-all surrender is described in Romans 12:1.

There must be in the believer's life that final and complete surrender of the body to Jesus Christ. This does not mean there will be no further steps of surrender, because there will be. The longer we walk with Christ, the deeper the fellowship must become. But there can be no subsequent steps without that first step. The tense of the verb in Romans 12:1 corresponds with that in Romans 6:13—a once-and-for-all yielding to the Lord. To be sure, we daily surrender afresh to Him, but even that is based on a final and complete surrender.

Why does the Lord want your body? To begin with, the believer's body is God's temple, and He wants to use it for His glory (1 Cor. 6:19–20; Phil. 1:20–21). But Paul wrote that the body is also God's tool and God's weapon (Rom. 6:13). God wants to use the members of the body as tools for building His kingdom and weapons for fighting His enemies.

The Bible tells of people who permitted God to take and use their bodies for the fulfilling of His purposes. God used the rod in Moses' hand and conquered Egypt. He used the sling in David's hand to defeat the Philistines. He used the mouths and tongues of the prophets. Paul's dedicated feet carried him from city to city as he proclaimed the gospel. The apostle John's eyes saw visions of the future, his ears heard God's message, and his fingers wrote it all down in a book that we can read.

But you can also read in the Bible accounts of the members of the body being used for sinful purposes. David's eyes looked on his neighbor's wife; his mind plotted a wicked scheme; his hand signed a cowardly order for the woman's husband to be killed. As you read Psalm 51, you see that his whole body was affected by sin: his eyes (Ps. 51:3), mind (Ps. 51:6), ears (Ps. 51:8), heart (Ps. 51:10), and lips and mouth (Ps. 51:14–15). No wonder he prayed for a *thorough* cleansing (Ps. 51:2)!

Why we are to yield (vv. 14–23). Three words summarize the reasons for our yielding: *favor* (Rom. 6:14–15), *freedom* (Rom. 6:16–20), and *fruit* (Rom. 6:21–23).

Favor (vv. 14–15). It is because of God's grace that we yield ourselves to Him. Paul has proved that we are not saved by the law and that we do not live under the law. The fact that we are saved by grace does not give us an excuse to sin, but it does give us a reason to obey. Sin and law go together. "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56). Since we are not under law, but under grace, sin is robbed of its strength.

Freedom (vv. 16–20). The illustration of the master and servant is obvious. Whatever you yield to becomes your master. Before you were saved, you were the slave of sin. Now that you belong to Christ, you are freed from that old slavery and made the servant of Christ. Romans 6:19 suggests that the Christian ought to be as enthusiastic in yielding to the Lord as he was in yielding to sin. A friend once said to me, "I want to be as good a saint as I was a sinner!" I knew what he meant because in his unconverted days he was almost "the chief of sinners."

The unsaved person is free—free *from* righteousness (Rom. 6:20). But his bondage to sin only leads him deeper into slavery so that it becomes harder and harder to do what is right. The Prodigal Son is an example of this (Luke 15:11–24). When he was at home, he decided he wanted his freedom, so he left home to find himself and enjoy himself. But his rebellion only led him deeper into slavery. He was the slave of wrong desires, then the slave of wrong deeds, and finally he became a literal slave when he took care of the pigs. He wanted to find himself, but he lost himself! What he thought was freedom turned out to be the worst kind of slavery. It was only when he returned home and *yielded to his father* that he found true freedom.

Fruit (vv. 21–23). If you serve a master, you can expect to receive wages. Sin pays wages—death! God also pays wages—holiness and everlasting life. In the old life, we produced fruit that made us ashamed. In the new life in Christ, we produce fruit that glorifies God and brings joy to our lives. We usually apply Romans 6:23 to the lost, and certainly it does apply, but it also has a warning for

the saved. (After all, it was written to Christians.) “There is a sin not unto death” (1 John 5:17). “For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep” (1 Cor. 11:30 NASB). Samson, for example, would not yield himself to God, but preferred to yield to the lusts of the flesh, and the result was death (Judg. 16). If the believer refuses to surrender his body to the Lord but uses its members for sinful purposes, then he is in danger of being disciplined by the Father, and this could mean death. (See Heb. 12:5–11; note the end of verse 9 in particular.)

These three instructions need to be heeded each day that we live. *Know* that you have been crucified with Christ and are dead to sin. *Reckon* this fact to be true in your own life. *Yield* your body to the Lord to be used for His glory.

Now that you *know* these truths, *reckon* them to be true in your life, and then *yield* yourself to God.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are three objections to the doctrine of justification by faith? How would you answer each of these objections?

2. Why is justification considered a living relationship?

3. What does Wiersbe mean when he describes some Christians as “betweeners”?

4. What is the meaning of baptism?

5. What should be the believer’s relationship to sin? What does this look like in your own life?

6. How would you distinguish between the words *know*, *reckon*, and *yield* as ways to attain victory over sin?

7. How can we yield ourselves or present ourselves to God?

8. Why does God want our bodies? How might knowing this change how you live your daily life?

9. What might happen if we refuse to surrender our bodies to the Lord?

10. How are the words *favor* (vv. 14–15), *freedom* (vv. 16–20), and *fruit* (vv. 21–23) related to yielding?