
Know Who You Are!

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Notes

Paul anticipates that kind of distortion at the beginning of chapter 6: **What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?** How does he answer it? **By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?** (verses 1, 2). Such an idea is utterly unthinkable for anybody with a Christian heart and a Christian mind.

I would say that one of the greatest problems in evangelical Christianity today is the pervasive influence of what we call 'Antinomianism'. Antinomianism says, 'I am saved by faith, therefore I never have to be concerned in the slightest about obeying the law.' Antinomianism says that the commandments of God have no binding influence on my conscience. That is not just a distortion of Christianity, it is a fundamental denial of Christianity. Yet this notion is commonplace in Christian circles.

Good works that follow from your conversion will not count for your justification, but if they are not there, it proves that faith is not there either. Your works don't give you salvation; the work of Jesus gives you salvation. But if you do not have works in your Christian life, you are not a Christian; you have never been redeemed; you have never trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Antinomianism is the very thing Paul says is utterly unthinkable for a true believer: **By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?**

When he says that we are dead to sin, does this mean that we don't sin at all? Of course not. He makes it clear in chapter 7 that the Christian is not free from the battle with sin. But the death sentence has been pronounced upon my old nature. I have been crucified with Jesus Christ, representatively. In God's sight my evil nature is dead. My sin was put to death on the cross of Jesus Christ and my sins were paid for. I was released from the bondage to sin.

Identification with Christ

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? (verse 3). Here Paul speaks of baptism in a somewhat mysterious way. He says that if we were baptised, then whatever else baptism signified for us, one of the crucial elements of the symbolism of baptism is that it marks our identification with the death of Jesus.

Paul is not saying that the very act of baptism automatically gives us all the benefits of Christ's atonement. We know that, just as in the Old Testament many people were circumcised and never became believers, there are multitudes of people in this world today who were baptised but who have never been regenerated. Paul is not saying that baptism automatically conveys the benefits of the death of Christ.

Paul tells us to go back to the beginning of our Christian lives, to go back to the marks of our baptism, and to remind ourselves what baptism signifies. My baptism signifies my identification with Jesus' death on the cross, and that I am mystically crucified with Christ. I identify with that act; I put my personal trust in the act of Christ on the cross, and as Christ was taken down from the cross and buried in the ground, so I, in terms of my old nature, am put to death and buried.

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (verse 4). Paul extends the analogy. Jesus died, he was buried, he was raised again. Our old lives have been crucified with Christ, they have been put to death. When we embrace Christ in justifying faith, we put to death the old man, the old life, the old corrupt human nature. It is dead and buried. Just as Christ came out of the tomb with a new power of life, a resurrected life, so the Christian, once he is reborn and justified by faith, is to show evidence of new life, because a new power for life has been imparted to him by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Again, Paul extends the image in verse 5: **If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.** How can we as Christians identify with his death and not identify with his resurrection? How can we identify with Christ's death on the cross by faith and then continue to live as if nothing has happened, as if there is no new power, as if there is no resurrected life within our souls?

Paul says in verse 6: **For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with.** The old self, the old corrupt human nature, has been crucified with Christ. The purpose of redemption was that the old might be destroyed. Paul uses a phrase here—'that the body of sin might be done away with'—that is very difficult to understand. We are not entirely sure what Paul had in mind when he spoke in this way. One interesting theory that scholars have suggested concerns punishments that

were used occasionally in the ancient world for those who were guilty of murder. A somewhat barbaric form of this punishment was for the convicted murderer to be sentenced to have the rotting corpse of his victim tied to his own back, so wherever he went he was reminded of the loathsome act that he had committed. He walked around with a dead human body attached to his own back reminding him of his criminal transgression. Some have said that this is what Paul had in mind by the phrase 'body of sin'. We carry the foul-smelling, corrupt old man that is still clinging to us, but in our sanctification we are to be set free from the power of that corpse.

To what end? **that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin** (verse 7). We have experienced the greatest exodus that is possible to human beings: we have been freed from sin.

Does this mean that the real test of being Christians is whether or not we ever sin again? In chapter 7 Paul makes it very clear that the old man still has a residual effect in our lives and Christians, in fact, continue to sin. How then can he say that we are dead to sin and that we are now freed from sin?

We are freed from the dominion of sin in our lives. We still sin, and we still sin wilfully but a Christian can never say that he had to sin. God has said that every time we face a temptation he has given us a way to escape (1 Cor. 10:13). We can't say, 'The Devil made me do it' or 'My fallen nature made me do it'. We may surrender to the lusts of our fallen nature, but we do have the power within us to resist.

However, as believers we face multitudes of opportunities and occasions for sin. Every waking moment we are deciding between righteousness and unrighteousness, between godliness and ungodliness. Given the strength of the power of sin that still resides within us, along with the astronomical number of opportunities that we have to sin, it is inevitable that sooner or later, and most often it is sooner, we do succumb to sin. But if we take each temptation in isolation from all of the rest, and consider them one at a time, we can never at any given moment look at a particular temptation and say, 'We didn't have the power or the grace to resist that sin.' The power is there; the grace is there. We may grow weary in well-doing and succumb to sin inevitably, but never by necessity.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (verse 8). We shall live for ever with him. But again, Paul is not so much concerned to give us assurance of our eternal life, as to speak about living with Christ in the present. Christ is raised; Christ is alive now; Christ's power of life is alive in us now. Since we identify with his cross in justification, then we must also identify with his life right now.

For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him (verse 9). Christ does not have to die any more. That is why Protestantism repudiated the idea of a re-creation of the death of Christ in the Mass.

That is why Protestant crosses are empty; there is no crucified Jesus on them. Christ is alive.

Paul says we are to follow that example: **The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus** (verses 10, 11). Notice the word 'count', that is, think of yourselves in this way. Paul is making here a very simple deduction. If God reckons you dead in Jesus Christ, if God accounts your sins to be dead on the cross, then you also ought to reckon yourself to be dead. Paul is not asking us to do anything toward ourselves that God has not first done for us. We are to consider that our old life is dead. Put it away, it's over, it's done. It died once and for all. You can't go back.¹

One of the dangers of preaching salvation by grace alone is that it can be interpreted as license to do whatever one wishes. The Apostle Paul was well aware of this tendency, as we saw in 3:8 where he mentioned that some were slanderously reporting that he and his followers were saying, "Let us do evil that good may result." Because of this type of misrepresentation, Paul was always on guard when he made a strong statement about grace. So when he said in 5:20b, "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more," he knew the worst would be made of it by some. He knew that a pernicious logic would be applied: "Well, if sin brings more grace, let's sin! Whoopie!" He also knew such thinking was not only logical to some minds, it was also natural because sin is enjoyable "for a short time" (Hebrews 11:25). He knew, too, that sinning could even be twisted into a religious duty, because it provides an opportunity for God to give his grace and love and thus glorify himself. Even people who have claimed to be Christians have thought this!

The church in Corinth had this problem, for when Paul insisted that an incestuous couple be excommunicated, there were some who saw nothing wrong with the incest, thinking it was an excellent display of Christian liberty (cf. 1 Corinthians 5).

A famous historical instance of such thought comes from the Russian monk Rasputin, who dominated the Romanov family in their final years. Rasputin taught that salvation came through repeated experiences of sin and repentance. He argued that because those who sin more require more forgiveness, those who sin with abandon will as they repent experience greater joy; therefore, it is the believer's duty to sin. At times this type of thinking has been intellectualized, as in the last century in James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Today this thinking is very common among those who

¹ Sproul, R. C. (1994). *The Gospel of God: An Exposition of Romans* (pp. 109–114). Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications.

wish to justify their sexual lifestyles. I have actually had such rationalizations seriously presented to me as if they were based on the Bible.

So when Paul said, "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more," he could sense the inevitable question coming and went ahead and voiced it himself: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (v. 1). His answer was: "By no means!" (v. 2a) ("May it never be," NASB; "Of course not!," TLB; "God forbid," KJV; "No, no!," NEB; "What a ghastly thought!" *Phillips*). Paul has no use for even the slightest intimation that grace encourages sin. In fact, he finishes verse 2 with a question to the contrary: "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" The remainder of the chapter goes on to substantiate his position.

Verses 3–14 answer the question, How do those of us who are under grace live without being characterized by sin? How are we to live lives of victory? Paul answers logically. First, by *understanding* the nature of our identification with Christ (vv. 2–10). Second, by *accepting* our identification with Christ as true (v. 11). Third, by *yielding* to the Christ with whom we are so wonderfully identified (vv. 12, 13).

THE NATURE OF OUR IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST (vv. 2–10)

For Paul, what a believer understands is terribly important. Paul was convinced that Christian living depends on Christian learning, that duty follows doctrine. Therefore, it is natural that he attempts to increase our knowledge. The key word in verses 3 through 10 is "know," which occurs three times: "Or don't you know ..." (v. 3), "For we know ..." (v. 6), and "For we know ..." (v. 9). Above all, Paul wants us to know or understand the nature of our union with Christ.

To help us, he employs the powerful metaphor of baptism. For Paul, a believer's being baptized symbolizes wondrous realities. Ron Ritchie, a pastor on the West Coast, experienced a beautiful illustration of this when he was conducting a baptism service in the Pacific Ocean.

A woman came up to him and asked him to baptize her 9-year-old daughter. Ron was reluctant to do so without finding out whether the girl really understood what was happening, so he began to question her and to teach her about the reality behind the water baptism. He was gesturing as he talked to her, and noticed the shadow of his hand as it fell on the sand. So he said to the little girl, "Do you see the shadow of my hand on the sand? Now that is just the shadow; the hand is the real thing. And when you came to Jesus, when you believed in Jesus, that was the real baptism. You were joined to him, and what happened to him happened to you. Jesus was alive; then he died, was buried, and then he arose from the dead. And that is what happened to you when you believed in

him.” He pointed to the shadow on the sand and said, “When you go down in the water and are raised up again, that is a picture of what has already happened.” The girl immediately caught on and said, “Yes, that is what I want to do because Jesus has come into my life.”

Baptism is the shadow of what happened to us when we met Christ. Keeping that in mind, let us examine verses 3–5:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

The overall emphasis of these verses is upon our profound identity with Christ. Baptism bears with it the idea of *identification*, especially when it is linked to a person's name. For instance, 1 Corinthians 10:2 tells us that the Israelites were “baptized into Moses”—referring not to water baptism, but to the fact that they became united with him as never before as they recognized his leadership and their dependence on him. So it is with Christ. When we were baptized into him (Matthew 28:19), we achieved a profound identification.

Our text further emphasizes this identity in verse 5 which uses a botanical term in saying we have become “united with him.” The word “united” (Greek: *symphytoi*, “grown together”) pictures a branch bound to another—they are grafted together. That describes our union with Christ. The Scripture boldly affirms this in a number of places. Galatians 3:27 says, “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.” So close is our identification with Christ that we are, so to speak, robed with him. First Corinthians 12:13 adds: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body”—the Body of Christ. There could not be a more profound identity or union. To state our union concisely:

Our spiritual history began at the cross. We were there in the sense that in God's sight we were joined to Him who actually suffered on it. The time element should not disturb us, because if we sinned in Adam, it is equally possible to have died to sin with Christ.

This is our position. We do not have to be conscious of it any more than of our conscious participation in Adam's sin. It is a fact: we are identified with Christ.

The specific emphasis of verses 3–5 is that we are so profoundly identified with Christ's death and resurrection that we actually did die with him and truly were raised with him, so that we now share in his resurrection life. Again the Scriptures attest to this. Galatians 2:20 tells us: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

Galatians 6:14 says: "... the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Just as we died with him, we were also resurrected with him. "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). Whereas before we had only a solidarity with Adam's sin, now that has been broken and we have a solidarity with Christ, the Second Adam, in his death and resurrection. We need to know and count on this if we are to experience victory over sin.

What that means practically in life is this: as Christ did not serve sin, neither must we. Verses 6 and 7 go on:

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

The "old self" is the kind of person we were before our conversion. That self was crucified with Christ. "The body of sin"—the body as it was, a vehicle of sin—has been rendered inoperative. Paul concludes this explanation of our union and deliverance in verses 8–10:

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Paul emphasizes that when Christ died he died "once for all." This is a technical term used repeatedly in the book of Hebrews to emphasize the finality of Christ's work. Paul made this emphasis because the believer must have full confidence that the Captain of his salvation will never again come under the power of sin and death.

When we began this study we emphasized that in dealing with the problem of those who turn grace into license Paul would insist that the place to begin is our knowledge. We must know two things: First, we must know something of our immense identity (solidarity) with Christ. Though we cannot fully understand it, we actually did die with him and were resurrected with him in the historical events. Second, this shared death and resurrection means that the dominance of sin has been broken and we are freed from sin.

The argument that we should continue in sin because we are under grace is absolutely fallacious! The reverse is true. It is impossible to continue living unchanged when you become a Christian. In fact, I will put it even stronger: those who argue that grace allows a buffer for sin—that their sin will ultimately glorify God anyway—are revealing they are not under grace! They are not Christians, no matter how much they argue otherwise. When we have experienced solidarity with Christ, our lifestyle is affected, just as it was by our

solidarity with Adam. If one's life has not changed and if there is no impulse for further change toward Christ, he or she is very probably not a Christian.

We have considered the truth of Paul's argument in verses 3–10 about our union with Christ. How do we make this work? Now we come to the practical application of everything we have said, and it has to do with the second key word of the text, the word “count” or “consider” (NASB) in verse 11.

THE REALITY OF OUR IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST (v. 11)

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (v. 11). The word translated “count yourselves” or “reckon” (KJV) or “consider” (NASB) is one of the most important words in Romans. Paul uses it nineteen times in the letter, and if one does not know what it means he or she will not understand Romans. It is a commercial term which means “to impute to one's account.” The idea is, we are to reflect on our position in Christ. Then we are to set two things to our account: 1) We are “dead to sin.” And 2) we are “alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Have you ever taken the time to consider the fact that you participated in the events of the cross, that you died and and that you were resurrected with Christ? If not, why not do it right now. This is prevention theology. So much of our time is spent in corrective theology—what to do when we sin, as for example in 1 John 1:9 (“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”). This is good and necessary. But reflecting upon our identification with Christ is even better because it curbs our sinning. This reckoning to our account is something we are to constantly do, as the present tense of the verb indicates: “Keep on counting yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

So far Paul has told us what we must know about our union with Christ. Then he explained about the necessity of reckoning. Now he tells us we must act. Theory must produce action.²

² Hughes, R. K. (1991). [*Romans: righteousness from heaven*](#) (pp. 120–126). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.