

ROMANS 6 – A STUDY ON GOD’S EMPOWERING OF BELIEVERS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST TO OVERCOME SIN

(CP Ro 6:1-23) The central truth of Romans 6 is that sin no longer has a hold on Christians - God has delivered them from its power. But many Christians are failing in their endeavours to live out a victorious Christian life over sin that would glorify God because they either do not know or they do not understand this truth. Their present experience is the same as what Paul described as his experience under sin's power in Romans 7. What is not clear to them though is that what Paul describes in Romans 7 is his **preconversion** experience of sin's power **under the law**, not his **post-conversion** experience **under grace** (CP Ro 7:4-25). Paul was demonstrating in these passages the insufficiency of the law to redeem man **apart** from grace, not the insufficiency of the gospel of grace. It is most important to be clear on this point because a great many Christians struggling with sin erroneously believe that what Paul was describing here was an on-going experience for him over which he had no control even after he came to Christ, and they fear it will be the same for them too. Their argument is that if Paul could not overcome sin then how can they. But that is not what Paul is teaching at all. He is simply summing up in Romans 7 the central truth of Romans 6: that God through Christ has set Christians free from sin and death (CP Ro 8:1-2). This is the normal Christian life under the full provision of the gospel of grace which can be appropriated by every Christian. The key to a victorious holy life in Christ for Christians struggling with sin is to recognise as Romans 6 teaches, that sinning is a choice Christians make themselves. It is not something they have no control over. Christians can, and must, say no to sin (CP Mk 7:20-23).

Throughout Romans 6 Paul is teaching us how God has delivered us from sin's power. Before we came to Christ we had to obey the behests of sin, but now we are in Christ, God has broken the power of sin over our lives and we no longer have to yield to it (CP 2Cor 5:17; 1Jn 3:9, 5:18). Those who accept Christ are made a new creation that belongs to the totally new world of God in which the Holy Spirit rules (CP Ro 8:14; Ga 5:25; Eph 2:10). The emphasis of Paul's teaching in Romans 6 is on man's obedience to God and God's way of delivering man from sin. This is a teaching on how Christians are to live - not what kind of life to live, but by what method to live it. At their new birth believers are made partakers of the divine nature, causing them to hate sin and love holiness (CP Eph 4:17-24; 2Pe 1:3-4). This produces in believers the desire to do God's will (CP 1Co 3:9; 6:19-20; Eph 4:19-22; Php 2:12-13). If this desire is not manifest in a believer then the believer must seriously question whether he or she is born again and saved (CP 2Co 13:5; 1Jn 2:3-6). The true believer has died to sin.

It should be noted here that Romans 6 consists of two questions and their answers. The first question is **Verse 1** and the second question is **Verse 15**. We will study them later on in the lesson (CP V1-2). To commence his teaching here Paul challenges the erroneous idea underlying the first question in VI that believers can continue in sin and yet retain their salvation because of God's grace, and in the verses that follow Paul goes on to teach that the freedom created by grace leads not to

licence, but to obedience. Obedience honours God's boundless love and responds to that love in the freedom which grace creates. Paul stresses the fact that a true believer is identified by his death to sin so we must also never yield our members to the "it is alright, we can do it now and repent later" mentality of some professing Christians. That could easily become a pathway to hell because every time you do that it becomes easier to do and soon becomes a way of life. Whoever sees in grace a pretext to sin is simply showing contempt for Christ who died for sin (CP 2Pe 2:20-22). This scripture in its context may be referring to false teachers, but it is nonetheless applicable to all who after having known the truth departs from it and goes back into sin.

(CP V3-5) A great many Christians believe that Paul is referring to water baptism here but that is not so. This baptism is spiritual: the baptism of believers **into Christ** by the Holy Spirit at their conversion to Christ. This is when they are born again spiritually and the power of sin over their lives is broken. That is the "newness of life" Paul refers to in V4. It speaks of the new life imparted by the Holy Spirit at their new birth which is a motivating energy, providing both the desire and the power for believers to live a godly life in Christ. It does not refer to **what** kind of a life believers are to live before the world as their Christian testimony, but **how** to live that life in the power of the resurrected Christ, and that is the theme of Paul's teaching throughout Romans 6 and many other scriptures (CP Ga 2:20; 3:26-27; Col 3:1-11). We need to know these scriptures in order to keep them in their proper perspective.

Being baptized into Christ is the basis for the believer's power to live a godly life in Christ and be saved (CP 1Co 12:12-14). Here the church is called "Christ" and is compared to a human body with its many members. This shows how the church is constituted. It teaches us how the Holy Spirit unites us with Jesus as members of His church when we are converted to Christ. It was when we surrendered our life to Christ that we identified with His death, burial and resurrection. It is not when we are baptized in water (CP Eph 4:1-6). This is another scripture many Christians believe refers to water baptism also, but it too refers to the baptism of believers into Christ and into His body, the church. Paul illustrates for us here the sevenfold spiritual unity of God and man: one body - the church; one Holy Spirit; one hope of our calling; one Lord; one faith; one baptism, and one God. In VI-3 Paul exhorts the church to be unified in the Spirit because, as he points out in V4-6, there is only one body in Christ, and we were all baptized into that one body, which is the church (CP Col 2:8-13).

Again this refers to the baptism of believers into Christ. All these scriptures bear witness to what Ro 6:3-5 teaches and clearly it has nothing whatever to do with water baptism, which in God's eternal purpose is quite adequately explained for us elsewhere in scripture (CP 1Pe 3:18-21). This explains fully the significance of water baptism in God's eternal purpose. It is the visible and tangible testimony of our faith in the resurrected Christ and the salvation we are given as a result of that

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faith. But it cannot, and does not save us, whereas the spiritual baptism referred to in Ro 6:3-5 does. When repentant sinners are baptized into Christ the power of sin over their lives is broken, and they need never yield to its power again. Paul stresses this fact as he exhorts us to be totally separated from sin in order to live a completely new resurrected life in Christ. Through Christ God’s resurrection power flows in us, and thus we are able to live holy, righteous lives.

(CP V6-10) The *old man* – our old sin nature – has been put to death, crucified with Christ, and the "body of sin" – the power of sin over us – has been broken. Henceforth we must not allow the *old man* to reassert itself in the life we now live in Christ (CP Mt 11:12). Mt 11:12 expresses the earnestness every believer must have in getting rid of sin and walking in obedience to God’s word. This typifies the force required to take hold of the kingdom and is presented as the life task of every New Testament Christian (CP Ro 8:1-13; Ga 2:20; Eph 4:17-32; Col 3:1-10). If we have truly died with Christ then our *old man* cannot reassert itself in our new life (CP Ga 5:16-26). V17 here is one of the most misunderstood scriptures in Christendom. It has been taught as referring to constant warfare between the flesh and the spirit, making one a victim of the flesh and helpless to live right, but that is not what Paul is teaching at all. Of course it does describe the condition of anyone who is walking in the flesh, but it does not refer to the normal life of a Christian in grace, living and walking in the spirit, which is evident from V16, 18, 22-25 and numerous other scriptures.

(CP V11) Although Christ was sinless He suffered and died for sin. In His death He died to its influence, and in His resurrection He triumphed over its power. We are united to Christ in His death and resurrection and likewise are freed from its power. So as Christ died for sin once for all and dies no more, we should die to sin once for all and live evermore unto God (CP He 10:10-14; 1Pe 2:24). The cross and resurrection of Jesus have broken the power of sin and now we can choose not to sin.

(CP V12-14) Here sin is depicted as a ruler able to dominate and control a person’s life, but it can only rule when it is obeyed. It has been destroyed. Christ has broken its power, but it is up to believers to continually resist its efforts to regain control over them. They can do this by denying the lusts of the flesh (CP Ro 8:12-13; Jas 4:1-4; 1Jn 2:15-17); refusing to place any members of their body at the disposal of sin (CP Psa 19:13; Psa 101:1-7; Mt 5:29-30); presenting their whole personalities as slaves to God, and righteousness (CP Ro 6:13, 19; 12:1-2). It is the believer’s responsibility to obey these teachings - God has provided the empowering through Christ. The same faculties that yield to sin and commit unholy acts can yield to God and commit holy acts (CP Ro 6:17-18, 22; 1Jn 1:7; 2:29). When the believer resists sin’s demands, no matter how strong the temptation is, no sin is possible. No force at all can change our will if it is yielded to God (CP Jas 4:7-10). In Ro 6:14 Paul stresses that we are not under the law that

demands obedience but gives us no power to obey. We are under grace which has empowered us and indeed guarantees us the ultimate triumph (CP Ro 5:20-21; 8:37; 2Co 9:8; 10:3-5; Ga 5:16-18).

We should note here that there is no sin in being tempted. The sin is in yielding to temptation (CP Jas 1:13-16). This teaches us that temptation is the arousal of man’s own evil thoughts and desires which leads him to becoming trapped in sin when he succumbs to them (CP 2Sam 11:1-27). Notice the sequence of events that led to David’s sin here. It is the same as Jas 1:13-16 teaches: David became trapped in sin by succumbing to his own evil thoughts and desires. He was drawn away of his own lust, and enticed, which led to adultery, murder, and then a cover-up.

In our exposition of V1 in this study we said that whoever sees in grace a pretext for sinning is simply showing contempt for Christ, because that is how God sees it (CP 2Sam 12:9). David was guilty of "despising the commandment of the Lord". By doing what he did David treated God with contempt, the same as New Testament Christians who sin treat Jesus with contempt. This applies to all forms of sin - not only adultery, but any believer who has committed adultery is disqualified from any leadership position in the church (CP 1Ti 3:1-2). The word *blameless* means one who has nothing which an adversary could seize upon with which to base a charge. It does not mean that one has to be perfect, but one against whom no evil charge can be proved; one not open to censure.

Believers must manifest the highest example of perseverance in godliness, faithfulness and purity in the face of temptation, and loyalty and love toward Christ and the gospel (CP 1Ti 4:12, 15). A believer who has committed adultery cannot be regarded as "blameless", that is "without reproach". Scriptures teach that any believer who commits adultery shall not have his reproach - disgrace, shame - wiped away. The guilt of adultery can be forgiven by repentance but its disgrace, shame, remains (CP Pr 6:32-33). David’s reproach was never wiped away, God forgave him and he was restored to fellowship with God, but the effects of his sin continued throughout the remainder of his life and family history. He was at war all his life; his own household rose up against him; his son usurped his throne; his wives committed adultery with his son; he was banished from his own country; four of his sons died; he was deserted by his own people, and betrayed by his own friends. He even contracted venereal disease (CP 2Sam Ch 11-18; 1Ki Ch 1-2 and Psa 38 and 51). We need to know this teaching. It is for our admonition too (CP 1Co 10:1-11).

Believers can be redeemed and partake of God’s grace, yet still be rejected by God. Paul uses the history of God’s judgement of the Israelites in the Old Testament as a clear warning to New Testament believers against reverting to sin. The Israelites thought they could enter into sin and still be saved because they were God’s elect – just as we are – but God condemned them, just as He will condemn us if we do the same. Anyone who believes

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their salvation is secure while living a life of carnal self-gratification must surely realise from Paul's teaching here that they too will come under God's condemnation (CP He 10:26-31). Of course God will always forgive us if we repent and confess our sin but it is quite clear from scripture that if we continue in sin it eventually becomes impossible to be renewed again to repentance (CP He 6:4-6).

If we yield to sin it is because we have failed to resist our own sinful desires. God has adequately provided us with grace to overcome temptations and resist sinning, and we can overcome if we are resolute in our desire to obey God and depend on His faithfulness and enabling power through Christ (CP 1Co 10:12-13). The way of escape that God will provide for us is not a way out of temptation, but the way to endure it without succumbing to sin, as Jesus did for our example (CP Mt 4:1-11). Knowing God's word and speaking it out over our circumstances is the key to enduring temptation without succumbing to sin. God will honour that word (CP 2Th 3:3). God's power has given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness (CP 2Pe 1:3); the grace of God (CP Eph 2:8-10; Tit 2:11-14); the blood of Jesus (CP Eph 2:13; 1Pe 2:24); the word of God (CP Eph 6:17; 2Ti 3:16-17); the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit (CP 2Cor 10:3-5; Tit 3:5-6; 1Pe 1:5), and the heavenly intercession of Jesus all bring sufficient power for believers to overcome sin and the spiritual forces of wickedness (CP Eph 6:10-18; He 7:25).

In light of the teaching thus far, we might ask at this point why is there any need for Paul to keep exhorting us not to yield again to sin if its power over us has been broken. The answer is that even though our will is now yielded to the things of God, it still has a certain bent at times to the doing of evil, which is the result of the inclination it had toward evil before grace did its work. The habits formed by years of sin must be overcome, and the only way to do this is to form new habits of the will by keeping the choices we make in line with God's word. The divine nature imparted to us will keep our choices in line with God's word as we yield to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but we must ever be on the alert lest those habits formed by years of making the wrong choices lead us again to render obedience to our old master, the devil. As we establish new habits of choice, gradually our new wills are bent more and more in the direction of good, and it becomes increasingly easier to do right and increasingly harder to do wrong (CP Eph 2:1-3).

This concludes the first part of this lesson and completes Paul's answer to the first question in Ro 6:1, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Paul answered this question in V2-14 by showing that since God has broken sin's power over them it is not possible for believers to sustain the same relationship **habitually** to the evil nature which they were able to sustain **before** they were saved; because they are now aware that God has broken the power of sin's hold over them. (**Habitually** means something done constantly, by habit (CP V15)). This is the second question Paul asks in Ro 6. It is answered through

V16-23. The question of sin here is quite different to the question of sin in V1. In V1 *sin* is from the Greek word **harmartia** which describes proneness to sin or sinful desire or propensity. It refers to our old sin nature – or our *old man* (CP V2, 6, 12, 14; also Jn 8:34 and He 3:12-13). In V15 (Ro 6) the word *sin* is from the Greek word **hamatano**, which means to miss a mark on the way; to sin occasionally; to sin a sin. It refers to occasional, infrequent acts of sin (CP Mt 27:4; Jn 5:4; 1Jn 5:16, 18). The question that Paul has to answer in Ro 6:15 is that since the doctrine of grace which he expounded in V2-14 teaches the impossibility of a life of **habitual** sin on the part of a Christian, is there any allowance made for an **occasional** act of sin? Paul's answer to such a question is "God forbid" - perish the thought - the same answer he gave to the first question in V1. Then he goes on to teach us how a child of God does not make provision for even occasional acts of sin because he has transferred his allegiance from one master to another since grace has wrought its inward change in his heart.

(CP V16) The whole of what the Bible teaches is encapsulated in this verse: that obedience to God means everlasting life and disobedience means death. This is the gospel of salvation in one verse. The eternal destiny of every living soul is determined by whom they choose to obey. Paul affirms here that even though Christians are under grace it is still their responsibility to resist sin and obey God. We can yield to sin and go to hell or we can obey God unto everlasting life with Jesus. We cannot serve sin and Satan and expect to rule and reign with Christ in eternity. No man can be a servant of sin and Satan, and a servant of righteousness and Christ at the same time (CP Mt 6:22-24; Jn 8:31-35). *Sin* in Jn 8:34 is **harmartia**, our old sin nature – the *old man* (CP Lu 11:23-26).

Jesus makes it quite clear here that the Christian walk is not a neutral zone. There are no passive spectators in God's plan of redemption. If we are not totally consecrated to the service of God and completely yielded to the authority of Jesus we are none of His. Every born again believer is designated by God to be a soldier in the army of the Lord. We are fighting either on the side of Christ and righteousness or we are on the side of the devil and the ungodly, and unless after our conversion to Christ we quickly fill the void in our lives left by sin with the righteousness of God our old sin nature will reassert itself and we will actually be worse off than when we were before we got saved. The only safety from sin and Satan is to be totally consecrated to the service of God and completely yielded to the authority of Jesus. Anything less will cost us our place in the kingdom. Believers, who are not actively involved in opposition to Satan and the evil of this world, have in reality set themselves against Christ. That is what Jesus means in V23 when He asserts that "he that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." Jesus here is clearly condemning any attempt at compromise with unrighteousness or only partial obedience to Him. It is all or nothing as far as Christ is concerned.

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(CP V17-18) Our old relationship to sin and our new relationship to God is contrasted here. Paul reminds us that we were once servants of sin but have been set free from its power over us because we obeyed the very gospel truths he is expounding here. We were changed and converted by them and the change has wrought in us an obedience to God that originates in the depth of our heart. We are now wholeheartedly in accord with God because of our union with Jesus. We have switched our allegiance from the unrighteousness of the devil to the righteousness of God.

(CP V19-20) Paul exhorts believers to continue yielding their bodily members to righteousness and holiness even as we previously yielded them to sin and uncleanness. The same parts of our body once used for impurity are now to be used for holiness. Now that we have been baptized into Christ we must follow after holiness or forfeit the kingdom of God (CP 2Co 7:1; He 12:12-15). Paul impresses upon us in Ro 6:19 the weakness in our natural self but if it were not possible to overcome that weakness in the resurrected power of Christ then his exhortation to do so would be meaningless. In V20 Paul restates the fact that a man cannot be a sinner and a saint

at the same time.

(CP V21-23): These passages summarise the transition from sin to salvation. They sum up our Christian walk entirely: the fruit we produce proves our spiritual state and determines our eternal destiny, so we need to always be clear in our minds about the power within us that enables us to live a victorious, holy life in Christ that glorifies God (CP 1Jn 2:13-17; Rev 22:11). If it were not possible to overcome evil John would have no occasion to write 1Jn 2:13-17 and neither would Rev 2:11 have been recorded for us. As the title of this lesson indicates, Romans 6 is a study on human responsibility and divine enablement, and we either acknowledge our responsibility to God and act on His enabling power through Christ in us to live a victorious holy life, or we will fail of His grace. Many believers who are drawn away and enticed to sin by their own lusts blame the devil, but God does not. He holds us all personally responsible for whatever we do (CP Pr 4:23; Jer 17:9; Mk 7:21-23). These scriptures make it perfectly clear that sin originates with us. We are solely responsible for it thus it is imperative to know the truths of Romans 6 and allow them to henceforth direct our Christian walk.