

(2) Dead to sin in Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Romans chapter 6, page 1135. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means.

How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now, if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died, he died to sin, once for all. But the life he lives, he lives to God. So you must also consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal bodies to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means. Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness. But thanks be to God that you, who were once slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, leading to sanctification. When you were slaves of sin, you were freed in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time, from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thank you, Simon, for reading those verses to us, and please do keep your Bibles open there on page 1135 as we look at Romans chapter 6. Today we'll actually just be focusing in on verses 1 to 14.

[3 : 4 6] And you may like to turn to the back of the service sheet where you'll see an area where you can take notes, write questions. I know I overwhelmed you with notes and points last week, so I thought I'd go easy on you. I do have a diagram I want to refer to later. Now let's pray for us, and then we can kick off.

Father God, we do thank you so much for the truth contained in your word. Thank you that as we read your Bible, you teach us the truth about yourself, the truth about ourselves, and the truth about all the wonderful things you've done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we ask that you would teach us some of these truths this morning, help us to believe them, and to live in light of them.

We ask it for Jesus's sake. Amen. I'm not sure what you made of verse 11 when it was just read out to us by Simon.

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

It's quite a statement, isn't it? I wonder how you reacted to it. Consider yourselves dead to sin.

[5 : 25] Well, I'll tell you what my reaction was when I first came across this verse. Dead to sin? What on earth do you mean dead to sin? I feel very much alive to sin. Every day I have to battle against sin. Every day I feel sin seductive.

Every day I find myself needing to confess my sins to God. Dead to sin? I mean, you're right. And yet, there it is. In verse 11.

Right before our eyes, the word of God telling us, commanding us, you must consider yourselves dead to sin. So what's going on?

How do we make sense of this? Well, that's what I want us to do over the course of the next 25 minutes or so, to make sense of what it means for Paul to say to us, if a Christian today, if we believe in Jesus Christ, that we are dead to sin.

And let me say up front that I think there are some big tricky truths in this passage. At times, it felt like my head was burning up, trying to get my sort of grasp of what Paul is saying here.

[6 : 41] So you might find it hard work. I also appreciate that this might be just brand new to some of you, or some of what I say today may be different to what you've heard or been taught before.

So please, do store up your questions. Do ask them at the end. That all said, I do believe these 14 verses have some really exciting truths in them.

Properly understood, the fact that we are dead to sin in Christ has just wonderful, wonderful implications in the way we view our relationship to sin, and in our daily battle with sin.

Now, if you were away last week over the bank holiday, we started a new series, as Bruce said, entitled Life in Christ. Four Sundays, helping us to understand the life-changing implications of our union with Christ.

So, last week we saw that the Bible speaks of us being in Christ, and Christ being in us. Christians are deeply, intimately connected with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 51] Saw this picture of like a head and a body, like a vine and a branch, like a husband and wife. We are united to Jesus by faith. And we saw last week, because of our union with Christ, one of the wonderful implications is that we are free from all condemnation.

All of God's anger at our sin is reckoned to Jesus. All of Christ's perfect, sinless righteousness is credited, reckoned to us.

There's no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. We are free forever from the penalty of sin. Well, this week we're going to see that not only are we free from the penalty of sin, but because of our union with Christ, we are also free from the power of sin.

That's what I think Paul means when he says, consider yourselves dead to sin. What I want to convince you of this morning, that in Christ, we are also dead to the ruling, enslaving power of sin.

So where before, outside of Christ, we could not but sin. We were trapped, we were enslaved, we always did what sin said.

[9 : 11] Now in Christ, we can say no. We can live differently. Not saying we can live perfectly, not saying we can live sinlessly.

We can live differently. Because this slavery to sin has been broken. We're dead to the power of sin.

Now, I hope we can see that just from skimming over the verses and the context of the verses, that we can see that it is this idea of enslaving the power, the slavery to sin that Paul has in mind here.

So, from verse 21, as Paul just finishes the previous section, we read, this is verse 21 of chapter 5, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness.

And sin is described here as this sort of ruling power, reigning in death, enslaving all people by nature. Now, I'll flick forward to the end of verse 6.

[10 : 24] We know that our old self is crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. End of verse 9, speaking here of the Lord Jesus, who we are united to.

Death no longer has dominion over him. Verse 12, Let not sin therefore reign, rule, enslave you in your mortal bodies.

Verse 14, For sin will have no dominion over you, no ruling authority, no controlling influence. And you've heard Simon read out the rest of the section 15 to 23, again, talking about slavery, mastery, slavery to sin.

And so just on a sort of surface level, we can see that the main issue on the table here that Paul is addressing is slavery to sin, the enslaving power of sin.

Now, this is important because I think it protects us from two false traps. The first trap is to think that when Paul says, you died to sin, he means you're completely free from sin in your life.

[11 : 48] That sinless perfection is a reality, or sinless perfection is a possibility over time. But as we've just said, it's not what Paul's talking about here.

He's talking about freedom from the slavery of sin, not freedom from the presence of sin. And there's a big difference between the two, as we'll see shortly. And of course, if it were possible for us to be completely free from sin in this life, there would be no need for Paul, in verses 12 and 13, to tell us to not let sin reign in our bodies, to not present our members to sin.

The Bible is quite clear. We will always have sin in our lives, in our hearts, in this life. Sin is just totally pervasive. Sin in our sleep, we sin in our unconscious.

Sometimes in the confession here, we say, Lord, we've sinned in ignorance, in weakness or in deliberate fault. Sending all the time and not even knowing about it. Sin is pervasive. We're never going to rid it from our life.

And that's why the apostle John says in his first letter, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. We can never, not even for a nanosecond, be without sin.

[13 : 05] We say we can, we've heard someone say they can, the Bible says, the truth is not in them. It was Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher who said, I've only met a perfect man once and he was a perfect nuisance.

So whatever you hear me saying today, don't hear me say, you can eradicate sin in your life. That's trap number one, sinless perfection.

The second trap is to think that when Paul says you died to sin, he only means you died to the penalty of sin. Now, a few of us here might have heard this before.

You might think that this morning. But again, I think there are several problems with this view. On top of the fact that the context is about the power of sin, not the penalty of sin. So for example, if we're merely dead to the penalty of sin, again, going to verses 12 and 13, what good is it for Paul to command us, as he does, to stop letting sin reign in your mortal bodies?

It just doesn't matter that the penalty of sin has been removed. If we're still enslaved to it, verses 12 and 13, they're like some sort of sick joke. It's like saying to a heroin addict who's run up a load of debt, fines, prison sentence, and you say to him, look, I've dealt with your fines, I've dealt with your debt, I've dealt with the prison sentence, therefore stop taking heroin.

[14 : 30] And the addict would be like, I can't. I'm enslaved to this drug. I mean, don't get me wrong, it's great, you've paid for my debt, great, you've paid for my fines. I'm still addicted to the heroin. That's the problem.

I can't stop. Also, if dying to sin refers only to the penalty of sin, it turns Paul's answer in verse 2 to be no answer at all.

So the reason this question comes up in verse 1 is because Paul has been teaching in the previous section that we are free from the penalty of sin.

No condemnation, what we saw last week. And it's because of this teaching that there's no penalty for our sin, we're free from that, that then he asks, well, shall we continue in sin and do what we like? So it doesn't matter.

No consequences. Penalty's taken. Penalty's taken. To which Paul's answer now comes, if it's died to the penalty of sin, by no means. You died to the penalty of sin. Yeah, yeah, I know I died to the penalty of sin.

[15 : 34] You just said that. I'm asking, can I continue in sin because of it? No, we died to the penalty of sin. And just goes around in circles, not answering the question. Doesn't make sense. And if you think about the heroin addict example from before, if Paul were to say, how can we who died to the penalty of sin still live in it?

Well, the answer is, well, quite easily. Stronger than that, if we're still enslaved to sin, if we can't say no, actually we won't have to stop living in it. Now, what I want us to say is the only way we can walk in the newness of life of verse 4, the only way we can not let sin reign in our mortal bodies, as Paul commands us in verse 12, the only way we can live differently on this earth, as the Bible repeatedly tells us, the only way we can do it is if we're freed from our slavery to sin, if we're free to say no.

It can't be that Paul means that we died only to the penalty of sin. It just does not make sense. of the verses or the context. But it does make sense if Paul means he died to the power of sin, the power of sin that enslaves us.

The power of sin has been broken if we've been released from the bondage of sin. Then we are able now to say no. We're able to live for God. Whereas before, enslaved to sin, we couldn't.

No way to do it. But now we are able to live in God's ways. Again, not perfectly, not sinlessly, but differently from before.

[17 : 18] Those are two traps that we can avoid falling into simply by realizing that Paul is talking about this theory of slavery to sin. Sin is a ruling power, a power that enslaves us.

But, needs to answer a few more questions. How did it come about that we die to sin? What does it mean precisely to be no longer enslaved to sin? Well, let's get back to the verses.

Verse 3, let me read that to you. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

So Paul is saying that we died to sin when Jesus died. He's referring again to our union with Christ. That's what he means by baptized here.

All of us have been baptized into Jesus, that is, believe in Jesus, put our trust in him, united to him. We also died with him. We united to Jesus in his death.

[18 : 20] As we say, if we're together, we're united with him. When Jesus dies, we die. The moment we became Christian, that's when we died to this enslaving power of sin. Verse 4, we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

So just as we died with Christ, so we also rose with Christ to new life. And we were raised, says Paul, verse 4, so that we might too have this newness of life.

Lives no longer enslaved to sin. Lives where we can say no to sin. Lives of godliness. Lives lived to the glory of God. Lives that are different to before when we were outside of Christ.

You see, everything God has done for us is designed to bring us out of our sinful ways. Because of our union with Christ, we're in a position now where it is possible to say no to sin, to fight sin, to fight back, to walk in this newness of life.

The whole purpose of grace was to release us from sin. So, to answer his question from verse 1, of course grace doesn't encourage us to sin. Encourage us to godliness, to walk in newness of life now.

[19 : 45] And then perfect life in heaven. And why would we want to act like slaves again? If we've died to our slavery to sin, well, in one sense, we can never go back to that.

It's impossible. Of course we can't continue living as a slave to sin. We've died to being a slave. We've been rescued from slavery. And in practice, surely any slave who is set free would not choose to continue to live in the slave quarters or continuing obeying their old masters every whim.

No, the slave can say no now. He can live differently. This is what Paul's saying about us as Christians. This is what it means to be no longer enslaved to sin.

Now, I know that's dense stuff, but let me go for this diagram. Put this up here.

Whether this is helpful or not, I don't know. But what I'm trying to show here is that all of us, from the moment we were born, conceived in our mum's womb, at time naught, all of us were born in or under the reign of sin.

[20 : 56] And you're thinking of sin here as a ruling power, controlling authority. It means that when we were born, we were born into slavery, slaves to sin. We couldn't but sin.

We were controlled by the ruling power of sin, and we always did what sin said. Our whole life was under its ruling influence, and there was nothing we could do about it. We could not break free.

This is what life is like without Christ. But, when we turn to Christ, when we put our trust in him, when we united to him, all that changed. Because in Christ, we died to the reign, the kingdom of sin.

In Christ, we came alive to the reign of grace. That's the point of the arrow. In Christ, Christ has moved from one world to the other. In him, we've moved as well. In other words, through our union with Christ, now we're dead to the sin's ruling, enslaving power.

It's not saying we're never going to sin again, because of course you can sin now as a Christian, but it's saying you're no longer ruled uncontrollably by sin. Now we can fight back against it, because we're under grace.

[22 : 05] You see, before we had, before we were Christians, we had no real idea about our sin, did we? But now God exposed our sin in our lives, helps us to fight back. Before, we couldn't stop sinning, but now God's grace enables us, Titus 2, to say no to sin, to ungodliness.

Before our whole life was enslaved to sin's bidding, there was no hope for change, but now there is real hope for change, because God's grace is at work in us. Grace rules over us.

Grace is more powerful than sin, ruling over us. He's transforming us into the likeness of Christ. And can you see from this diagram as well, that because we died to sin, as Paul puts it, it's a real death he's referring to here.

It means sin will never rule over us in this uncontrollable way ever again. We're completely dead to the enslaving rule and reign of sin. We will not be slaves to sin again.

We're in that right box now. We're under grace. We can never go back. And it's why Paul says so confidently at the end of the section, verse 14, for sin, verse 14, for sin will have no dominion over you.

[23 : 15] Since you're not under law, but under grace. It's not a command. It's a fact. A fact of history. The enslaving, ruling power of sin has been broken forever.

What the law couldn't do in restraining sin or encouraging godliness, grace can. We're free from our slavery to sin. Oh, is that wonderful?

I totally lost you. Yes, sin still exists. Yes, the devil still exists. Yes, we were battled with sin until our deathbed. All I'm saying is we're no longer enslaved to it.

If you think that you can grow as a Christian, if you think that the spirit can bear fruit in your life, you're thinking God's grace can transform you. This is what I'm saying. I'm saying this is why. Because Christ has broken the enslaving power.

There's a new power at work in our lives. Grace, not sin. And God can change us now. This is what Paul means when he says we died to sin.

[24 : 17] Now, as I said, I hope we can see how wonderful this truth is for us. It's wonderful because I think it gives us a right perspective for fighting sin in the Christian life. As we said earlier, we'll always be tempted to fall into one of two traps.

Either we will expect to be sinless in this life, in which case we'll find ourselves constantly discouraged, probably wanting to give up because, as we said, none of us can ever come close to being sinless. It might even lead us to doubting our salvation, wondering whether we're really Christian because we're not experiencing this totally victorious life.

On the other extreme, if we think it's just penalty of sin that's paid for, that he's talking about here, well, we'll expect no progress in the Christian life. We'll see all these exhortations in the New Testament to be holy, to walk in newness of life, and conclude that it's just God having a bit of a laugh, really.

Just completely unattainable ideals. They'll only be true in heaven, and therefore, well, I'll give up striving, fighting sin now. Might even think that fighting sin doesn't matter.

I mean, we can't do anything about it anyway. We're enslaved, still. Now, imagine it's this one of the two traps that we attempted to fall in here, thinking we can expect no progress, giving up, striving to fight sin now, which is why we need to remember this truth that we've seen this morning, that we've died to the power of sin, as well as its penalty.

[25 : 52] And it's this marvelous truth that will keep us falling into one of the two traps. Because whilst it does remind us that we'll never be free from sin on this earth, which will protect us from being discouraged, yet at the same time, we can expect progress in the Christian life.

God's grace is at work in us, so we'd walk in the newness of life, which will protect us from giving up in the fight. These verses, they tell us we're under grace now, grace now rules.

God's grace is powerfully at work in you. Every day, he's chipping away at your sin. Every day, he's bearing the Spirit's fruit. Every day, he's transforming you into the likeness of Christ.

And one day, we'll certainly be like Christ in the new heavens and the new earth. This is what God's doing in our life. We died with Christ and we rose with Christ so that we might walk in newness of life.

Dick Lucas, the guy who was preaching here a couple of weeks ago, used to describe the Christian life as a stock market curve sort of going up and going down. But over time, there is progress and there is change.

[26 : 55] And even though we'll never get near heaven, sorry, never perfection, there's perfection. There is growth and there is change. I suppose that example doesn't really work now, given the credit crunch, but you see my points. And I think it's grasping this that helps us raise just what an amazing motivation it is to fight sin.

If you're anything like me, then so often you'll feel tempted to give up in the battle with sin. just feel there's just no way we can fight these certain repetitive, ongoing sins.

We'll all have areas of our life where we feel enslaved, where we feel defeated, where it feels like all we can do is give in. The lure feels too great, the attraction feels too strong.

And what Paul's saying to us here is just look up a little bit from the emotions, look up how you're feeling, and realize you are dead to sin in Christ. You are dead to slavery to sin.

We may feel enslaved, Paul says we're not. Like we said last week, you might feel that you feel guilty even when you've confessed sins to God, but the Bible says there's no condemnation in Christ. You might feel that we're enslaved to sin, the Bible says you're not enslaved to sin anymore.

[28 : 08] Sin no longer has its controlling influence over us. Grace and our rules, we can walk in newness of life.

So if you are feeling weary from the battle, please don't give up. Keep fighting. Take encouragement from these verses. Likewise with the devil, when the devil tempts you to give up, when it just feels too hard and too hopeless, fight back with this truth of who you are in Christ, what God has done for you in Christ by being united with him.

See Christ dying to sin, see Christ risen to new life, see him dealt with the realm of sin, the power of sin and see you in him. That's why it's so important that we do indeed need to, as we began today, reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God.

Fighting sin in the Christian life, it always starts with realising who we are in Christ, what God has done for us. I'm not sure if you knew this, but verse 11 is the first command in the letter to the Romans.

And the command is this, just consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. That's the command, consider. No more, no less, reckon what is true of you. Often we're so keen to get on and do stuff for God, but the Bible is clear, you can't do anything for God until you first of all realise what God has done for you.

[29 : 30] That's of course why verse 11 comes before the command in verses 12 to 13. It's only because we realise we're dead to sin's enslaving power, that we are alive to God, that grace is now in us, that Paul's able to say, let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies.

Without verse 11, I mean, as we said before, the command is as good as telling a man with no legs to get up and walk, it's impossible. But it's only because God has freed us from the slavery to sin, that he's able to say to us, don't let sin enslave you.

I've healed your legs, get up and walk. So we see, it's the grace of God at work in our lives. The grace of God that enables God to say to us, now look, be who you are.

Reckon what is true of you in Christ and live it out. We can be so quick sometimes I think to tell people to live godly lives, to stop sinning.

But Paul does not do that. The Bible never just tells us to live godly lives, rather always tells us first about who we are in Christ, what God has done for us. That there is no condemnation, that we're free from sin slavery, that God grace rules over us, a new power at work.

[30 : 48] Then and only then does it say now live in light of it. That's why the first step in the fight against it is always to consider who we are in Christ.

Dead to sin, alive to God. And next week we'll continue to think about what that means, how we do that in practice, how we live these lies, this newness of life. So let's meditate on these truths this week and take heart for our daily battle with sin.

Let's pray together. Father God, we do thank you so much indeed for what you've done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, not only freeing us from the penalty of sin, but freeing us from the power of sin, the sin that we were enslaved to and we couldn't say no to.

We praise you that now your grace rules over us, you are at work in us, that we might now walk in newness of life.

And so we pray, Father God, that you would reckon or help us to reckon this truth about us. We really struggle to believe this, we can't believe, it's difficult to be true, but pray you give us faith. Faith to believe that we truly are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus and then live in light of this wonderful truth.

[32 : 11] We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.