

Romans 6

By: Charles Stanley

From: On the Epistle to the Romans

This, then, is the question, if grace has abounded over sins and sin — over all our iniquities which we have committed, and over the sin we have inherited, and where sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded — is it true, then, that abounding grace leads to continuance in the practice of sin? From that day to this, the rejecters of the gospel have always said it is so. If you are completely justified, not by your own works, but in and by the subsisting, unchanging righteousness of God in Jesus Christ our Lord raised from the dead — then that implies you hold that you may be careless, and indeed may practice sin!

Now what says the Holy Spirit by the apostle as to this? “What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” Far be the thought; “How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?” Here, then, is that principle of deliverance from sin so greatly ridiculed — deliverance from sin by death. Neither shall we find any other deliverance from sin in the word of God. For centuries, many sincere souls sought deliverance by fastings, and seclusion in monasteries. Many sincere souls now seek it by efforts after a false perfection of the flesh. But here is the full truth of God — deliverance from sin by death.

Only Mark, it is not the future death of our bodies, should we die, but this—“How shall we **THAT ARE DEAD** to sin live any longer therein?” What does this mean, “we that are dead to sin”? Do you say, “It may mean those who have attained to perfection?” Is there such a thought? No, in order to show how assuredly this applies to all Christians, the apostle says, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (vs. 3). So that he is careful to show that this principle of deliverance from sin by

death applies to all who have been truly baptized unto the death of Christ. Nothing could be more plain, and yet nothing is less known. It ought surely to be well understood, for the apostle says, “Know ye not?”

Do you understand, reader, this great practical truth of deliverance from sin? Do you say, as an authorized teacher said to us a few days ago? “We are all sinners, and unfit for heaven; we must seek in every way to improve our sinful nature; but I fear it will never, in this world, be quite fit for heaven.” Fit for heaven! Is a corpse fit for heaven? It is dead, it is too loathsome for heaven or earth. It must be buried. Do you bury it, to make it suddenly, or gradually, perfect? It is a mass of corruption; there is no life in it, not a particle, nor can there be, until the putting forth of the power of God in resurrection.

Is it not so as to our whole moral being? Our neighbor, sincere as he is, is spending his life in seeking to improve himself — the flesh, by sacraments and ritual, he fears he will never be able to do it so as to be fit for heaven. How blind to that which even his baptism should teach him. The fact is, we do not believe God, that we are as bad as He says we are; so bad, so vile, so loathsome, so offensive, so dead to all that is good, in the flesh as children of Adam. Have you ever said, “I am only fit to be buried out of sight. Yes, bury me, bury *me* out of sight. I am not fit for heaven, I am not fit for earth. Oh, bury me out of the sight of God, and out of my own sight”? Here is water, said the eunuch, what doth hinder?

Note well, then, the deliverance from sin is not the improvement of self, or an evil nature—the flesh, but “we **ARE** buried with Him by baptism into death.” We are not baptized unto the work of the Spirit in us, but unto His death, who died for us, and rose again. The *death*, then, that delivers from sin is not a death unto sin we attain to, but the death of Christ on the cross, and our identification with it—“buried with Him.” And you will notice, there is no thought of baptism communicating life. Baptism is unto death, and life in the risen Christ is beyond it. For Christ not only died,

was actually dead, but He is “raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.” How glorious the new creation! Christ, the beginning of that new creation, raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. “Even so we should walk in newness of life.” Not only old things are passed away, and all become new, but we are in that new creation by the glory of the Father. “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.” The resurrection side of this subject is brought out more fully in Colossians 2, only here let us note, that baptism unto His death is the chief point to show what all Christians should know — the truth of deliverance by death.

Verse 6: “Knowing this, that our old man is [or, has been] crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed [annulled], that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed [or, justified] from sin.” Now the question is this: Is the old man crucified when the believer attains to perfection, as it is called—that then the old nature ceases to exist, or is all turned good? There is no thought in this text of its being a state peculiar to some Christians, and not the state of others. It is the very truth of our Christian position. Knowing this that our old man has been crucified. WHEN? In our experience? That is not the thought here, but, “has been crucified with Him.” Surely that was on the cross. Not only He, in infinite love, bore our sins on the cross, but our old man was fully judged there too. It is indeed made good to our souls’ experience when we become *identified* with this crucified Jesus, of which baptism is a figure.

Are we thus identified with the death of Jesus? Not the improvement or restoration of our old nature, but can we look back to the cross, and say There I was crucified with Christ? All that of which I might boast had to be crucified. Most assuredly this was so, that the body of sin might be annulled, made powerless; for a dead man is powerless, or he would not be dead.

We have seen how God justifies His people from their sins by the blood of Jesus. Now we see how He justifies them from sin, the root, or

nature. “For he that is dead is justified from sin” (margin). Sins are forgiven, and now sin cannot be imputed to him that is dead, he is justified from sin.

But there would be no power for a holy life in merely being dead to sin. What true power is we shall find when we reach Romans 8:2; only we must carefully notice, that we are as truly identified with Christ risen, or more so, than we were identified with Him in death.

Verses 8-10: “Now, if we be dead with Christ we believe that we shall also live with Him.” The one follows the other. And this forever. “Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God.” He has nothing more to say to sin, or sin to Him; He was here once, and bore its utmost curse; He was made sin, or a sin-offering. What sin? His own? He had none. Sin, our sin, has nothing more to say to Him, or He to it. It is all gone from the sight of God. He who was once under it, even unto death, now lives to God. Oh, precious, soul-sustaining truth! And sin can have no more to say to Him, and no more to say to us. Once identified with Him in death — yes, more than identified, alive in Him for evermore. Oh, my soul, do you not believe God?

Verse 11: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Jesus Christ our Lord.” Is it, then, that the old nature, or sin, is eradicated, dead? Does it no longer exist in the believer? There is no such thought here. If it were really so, really dead, we should have no need to reckon it so. Did you ever hear that a corpse was reckoned dead? We are so identified with Christ that God wishes us to reckon ourselves dead with Him, and alive in Him. He wishes us to treat the old nature as if it were dead unto sin, and we alive in Christ risen from the dead; only, as we said, the latter ever goes beyond the former. For if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (the word “through,” in this verse 11, should be “in”). We have peace with God, as to our sins, through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. But

God, who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ, has also raised us up in Him; so that we are alive unto God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Now, nothing suits Satan's purpose more than to set all this aside; both the finished work of Christ, by which we are justified from our sins—our identification with His death unto sin, and also the work of God, in raising us up IN Christ, and thus delivering us from sin, alive unto God. Yes, instead of the plain truth of this scripture, deliverance from sin has been held out as a future attainment of the believer, attained only by some. This is the root of self-righteous perfection in the flesh.

Just what God says to us in these verses gives the only principle of deliverance from sin. All other methods are mere deception. But you say, "I find my old nature is not dead as to fact." Just so; but you are to reckon yourself dead unto sin, and alive unto God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Much that follows we shall find to be the unfolding of this all-important principle. It will affect every step of our walk in this world. How ought we to walk to show our identification with a crucified Christ? Yes, we are crucified with Him. You may know many who walk as if they were dead to the things of God and His Christ, and fully alive to the world that crucified Jesus. May God use these solemn truths in sanctifying power to our souls!

Verse 12: "Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." Far be the thought that ye should practice sin, that grace may abound. To live in sin is the very opposite of death to sin, as seen above; dead with Christ, as professed in baptism, is surely not to live in sin. And now, also, alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord. "Let not, therefore, sin reign in your mortal body." He does not say sin no longer exists. He does not say you are to reckon it extirpated. If an enemy no longer existed in a country, there would be no need to say, Do not let that enemy reign.

Neither could you say, "that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof," if there were no sinful lusts to subdue and to resist. But we are not to yield our members as instruments of

unrighteousness unto sin, "but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead." Yes, the very principle of a holy walk is our death with Christ, and our being alive unto God. It is not for a moment to attain unto this state; but, reckoning ourselves thus dead, and alive again, we are so to walk. Conflict is clearly recognized, but there is DELIVERANCE.

Verse 14: "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under law, but under grace." Thus, having life in Christ, we can now look at sin, at our old sinful self, as an enemy, but an enemy that shall not have dominion. What a deliverance this is! To one that knows the utter vileness of the old nature, no words can sufficiently express the greatness of deliverance from the reign of sin. There may be sudden temptation—yes, failure—but sin shall not have dominion—it shall not reign. But why shall not sin reign? "For ye are not under the law, but under grace." The whole history of Christendom, and the history of every individual believer, proves the truth of this statement, and also its opposite. Just in proportion as the free favor of God, through Christ Jesus, is known and enjoyed, is the deliverance from the slavery of sin, and we can live a holy life. The law can give no power to those under it, but can only curse them.

The moment you make the favor of God to be conditional, whether it be concerning the law of Moses, or the precepts of the gospel, you begin at the wrong end, and will soon find nothing but misery and doubt. You will say, I do not keep the commands of God as I ought; or, I do not love Christ as I ought; am I a Christian at all? Now, is all that law, or grace? Clearly it is law. And the word says, sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under that principle, but under grace. There surely can be no holiness of life, unless the heart be perfectly free, in the unbounded, free, unconditional favor of God. Has He taken me up, an ungodly sinner, who deserved Hell? Has He, in pure, unmerited love, given His Son to die for our sins? Has He raised Him from the dead for our justification? Has He given us eternal

redemption through His blood? Have we thus peace with God, according to all that God is? Are we identified with Christ in all the merit of His death; and more, alive in Him to God? And all this absolute, free grace, the grace of Him who changes not? And now I am alive to God, I can reckon myself, my old man, dead. And thus I am delivered from myself, to live to God. And all unchanging grace to me, then I am not on the ground of law, or conditions for life, or salvation, or deliverance, but absolutely under grace, free and eternal. Oh, now I am free to serve the Lord, in real separation from, and abhorrence of, evil. Oh, glorious truth! sin shall not have dominion.

No doubt, dear young believer, many will tell you that such doctrine as that will lead you to sin as your old nature likes. “What, then? shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace?” God forbid, or, far be the thought. They who talk so have never known what the grace of God is, or what true liberty is—not liberty to sin, but liberty from sin. Mark, these words are not to such as are trying to experience that they *are* dead to sin, or dead with Christ, and alive to God. They have made the profession in baptism that they are dead and buried with Christ, identified with Him in death. They reckon themselves dead unto sin, and thus are justified from sin, and alive to God. Oh, wondrous, almost forgotten, truth! Death to sin—the only deliverance from sin.

But what deliverance would there be without life in Christ to God? How can you walk in newness of life, if you have not got newness of life? If your old nature were placed under law, then, surely, sin would have dominion. But because God has given you a new life — and that His free gift — and now placed you in His own unchanging, boundless grace, “What, then, shall we sin [that is, practice sin] because we are not under law, but under grace?” Far be the thought.

We are quite sure all who would put you under law, have never yet truly known what the grace of God is. And do not forget that all this shows the connection there is between grace and

practical holiness, or righteousness of walk. This is clear in the next verse.

Verse 16: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” Once we were the slaves of sin—“without strength.” Sin, as a slave-owner, was complete master. We have been redeemed freely from that condition, and delivered, by the death of Jesus, from that old master. It was then sin unto death. Which master do we obey, sin unto death, or obedience unto righteousness? Are we alive to God, that we should obey the old slave-master, sin? Is *that* the purpose of the grace of God? Far from it, Now, can you apply verse 17 to yourself? Can you, with thankfulness, own the full truth, “that ye were the slaves of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you?” Now, do not shirk this point.

A slave is compelled to do what his owner bids him. He has no power to resist him, though he may hate the thing, he cannot refuse to do it. Have you known this awful slavery of sin? Had sin the mastery? Did you do the things you hated, and had you no power to escape that cruel master? God be thanked, we can own it was so; and, God be thanked, He met us there. And what is that form of doctrine to which we were delivered? Was it not death with Jesus, as our baptism typified? Have you obeyed it? Identification with Christ in death, and in Him alive from the dead. Then the answer is this:

Verse 18: “Being, then, made free from sin, ye became the servants [or, slaves] of righteousness.” Yes, this is how you changed masters, through death, from sin, to righteousness; and all this in perfect grace. While under sin, free from righteousness; now servants of righteousness, and free from the slavery of sin. Yes, sin and righteousness are looked at as two masters. The Christian is perfectly free from the old tyrant. “So now yield your members servants to righteousness, unto holiness.”

It is quite true man used the very law which God gave to prove his guilt, to set up his own self-righteousness. And others may abuse the grace of God as license to sin. Yet it is most clear, that the object the Holy Spirit has in unfolding these truths of infinite grace, is, that we may, as alive to God, yield our members servants to righteousness, unto holiness.

Verse 20: “For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are ashamed? For the end of those things is death.” Yes, that was our condition — slaves of sin. And, oh, how deep the shame upon us in all the terrible fruits of that slavery. But what a change!

Verse 22: “But now, being made free from sin [that is, from the slavery, not from conflict], and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”

We must carefully note, there is no thought here, either of improvement of the sinful nature, or of perfection of that nature. No, death is not improvement. But the greatest of all mistakes about this chapter, is, to suppose that freedom from sin is a matter of attainment. It is by death — the death of Christ — and that is

not our attainment. And reckoning ourselves dead with Him is not attainment.

It is not then by serving God that we become free from sin; that would be human merit. Is it not the exact opposite? Read the words carefully: “But now, being made free from sin, and become the servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness.” Thus every Christian is made free from sin, and “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (vs. 18). It does not say, Ye became the servants of righteousness, and then ye were made free from sin. There can be no true fruit unto holiness until we are made free from sin. These great truths will occupy us, if the Lord will, in chapter 7. In the meantime these are true, solemn facts! “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, in Jesus Christ our Lord.” What a gift! Oh, how few believe this! We have no hand in meriting this, or it would not be the gift of God.

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