



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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Lesson 8

Romans 6:1-4, 12-23 Commentary New American Standard Bible

(Romans 6:1) What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?

In the previous chapters in his letter, Paul proved that through our faith in Jesus Christ and His death in our behalf we are justified by God as a matter of pure grace—we are declared to be right with God and made acceptable by God to live forever in God’s Kingdom. Furthermore, we are now reconciled to God; we are no longer God’s enemies but instead God’s friends and members of God’s family through our faith in Jesus Christ. In chapter 6, Paul turned to sanctification—to holy, loving, living through faith in Jesus Christ because we have been set apart by God to love and serve God and others. Rather than justification and reconciliation giving believers in Jesus an excuse to sin or continue living in sin or sin even more, being placed in a right and loving relationship with God gives believers good reasons to fight against sin and temptations—to live for God in the loving obedience exemplified and taught by Jesus Christ to His followers.

Remember what Jesus taught in John 14:21, 23, and 26, for in some measure His words describe the process and characteristics of sanctification that the Holy Spirit works within those who follow Jesus: “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them. Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” [See the *International Bible Study Commentary* on the Gospel of John regarding these verses and Jesus’ teaching: [Lesson 3](#) and [Lesson 4](#).]

(Romans 6:2) May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

When a person dies their spiritual body separates from their physical body. Those who sincerely place their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior separate themselves (and are separated by the Holy Spirit) from sin, from living in sin, and from practicing sin. They repent and trust in Jesus and the Holy Spirit to help them live holy and wholly for God. Repentance means more than feeling sorry for the sins you have committed.

Repentance means turning away from those sins and committing yourself to avoiding all sins. When your body dies, you cannot live in it any longer and as it decays you would not enjoy living in it. Likewise, when you turn to God in Jesus Christ in repentance and place your faith in Jesus Christ, you will not enjoy living in sin any longer—sin will have the stench of death and you will not want to abide in sin. You will turn to Jesus Christ and ask Him to help you live a holy and loving life, and He will hear your plea.

(Romans 6:3) Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

Though Paul had not yet been to Rome, he knew that baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit was part of the Gospel that Jesus had commanded His followers to preach and obey; therefore, he could give advice on how to avoid sin knowing that the Christians in Rome had been baptized (Matthew 28:18-20). Baptism followed repentance for sins and demonstrated to the Church and confirmed for the believing Christian that they were converted, had been given a new heart, and had dedicated themselves to a new way of living in obedience to their new Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Paul knew they had been taught about the Holy Spirit who would abide within them, teach them, and help them fight against sin and temptations (Acts 2:38).

(Romans 6:4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Baptism showed the Church that the new believer had chosen to so identify themselves with Jesus Christ that they considered themselves dead to sin or separated from sin. Paul wanted believers to know that when tempted to sin they could remind themselves that they had been baptized and buried with Christ; therefore, they were dead to sin and were able to live a new life. Because Christians were symbolically buried with Christ through baptism, they had good reasons to commit themselves to permanently living a new life apart from practicing sin. Furthermore, just as the power and glory of God had truly raised Jesus from the dead and given Him a resurrected and glorified human body, God had given them the power to choose to live a new life knowing that the glory and power of God (that was so mighty it overcame death and freed Jesus from His tomb) would empower and guide them to fight and win against sin and temptations. Though believers know they do not live in sinless perfection in this life, they know God wants them to live more closely to Him and fight against the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil with the resurrection power God offers them as they live a new life following Jesus. Having been baptized should not encourage believers to think that they can live in sin with impunity and a guarantee of forgiveness by God no matter what they do. Rather, their baptism should give Christians good reasons to believe they can overcome sins and temptations and glorify God with the power God will give them to live victoriously.

(Romans 6:12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

Paul argued that since Jesus Christ is the believer's Lord and Savior that the believer should let Jesus Christ reign over them as their King rather than let sin reign over their mortal body. Paul personified sin as a spiritual being, and the devil and demons are spiritual beings that also tempt us to sin. Believers can choose to obey the evil desires of sin and misuse their mortal bodies, or they can choose to obey Jesus Christ and use their mortal bodies in the service of God. Because human bodies are mortal, believers have a limited time on earth to serve Jesus Christ. Practicing sin is a destructive waste of time. Sanctification includes and involves making the right choices for the right reasons when loving God and others as God has commanded.

(Romans 6:13) and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Obviously, justification and reconciliation do not make the believer perfect in this life, but when believers know that they are justified and reconciled by grace through faith in Jesus Christ they will be inspired to love and live for God instead love and live for sin. They will set themselves apart for God and His holy use to grow in God's grace. When they are tempted to sin, they can remember these facts and resolve not to offer any part of themselves to do anything wicked. When tempted they can recommit themselves to God and prayerfully declare, "I have offered myself to God. Rather than be used as an instrument of wickedness, I offered myself to the service of God. God has given me life and a new life in Jesus Christ, and I offer every part of myself to God to promote righteousness. Oh God, guide me, direct me, empower me, and fill me with Your Spirit to do your will."

(Romans 6:14) For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Paul again personified sin as a personal power against us that will tempt us. But *Christ in us* is greater than sin or any ungodly spiritual power. Before we came to faith in Jesus Christ, sin was our master. Furthermore, Satan manipulated us and so influenced our emotions and thoughts that we chose sin and wickedness and suffered the consequences. When we came to trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, Jesus freed us from slavery to sin and Satan. When we were under the law, sin took advantage of us: sin used the law and misled us to think that we would enjoy activities that God's law forbade, perhaps because they were forbidden. When we were under the law, the law gave us no power to overcome sin and temptations. Because sin was our master, apart from Christ we were powerless to overcome sin. As followers of Jesus Christ, Jesus gives us the grace and power to overcome temptations and sins. Jesus Christ is our master and in the process of sanctification (the process of being made holy and more loving) we need to choose to follow Jesus instead of sin, which we once thought we enjoyed but now makes us feel shame and regret.

(Romans 6:15) What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

The Law of God (the commandments of God the Father and Jesus Christ) show us how God wants us to love God and others should we have any doubts about what is right and wrong regarding our thinking and behavior. For example, if you doubt whether stealing or murder is wrong, the Law of God will assure you that stealing and murder is wrong. Living with the power of God's grace in you does not give you permission to disobey the Law of God as revealed in the Bible. The Law of God (often called the Moral Law) is based on objective moral standards and truths that God has given us in the Bible so we can live according to the way God created us to live. The Law of God is revealed in nature and supremely in the Bible. God did not create us to live in sin, to disobey the Law of Love, or to believe and follow the teachings of the devil as Adam and Eve did. God's grace gives us the power to obey the Law of God, which is a Law of Love regarding how we are to love God and others. We are not under the Law in the sense that we look to the Law as our primary guide for life; rather, we look to Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life as our divine Guide for life. Remember Mark 9:7, when Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transformed and standing with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, God the Father told them, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" As followers of Jesus Christ, we listen to and follow Jesus. Knowing the teachings of Jesus Christ, with the leading and power of the Holy Spirit we pray and do what is lawful, loving, and right as we live in this world. If we are tempted to sin, as followers of Jesus we know what is right by His example and we have the teachings of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit to help us whenever we are tempted to do wrong. Therefore, by the grace of God, we will know and do what is loving and right in this world—even as Jesus did and would do.

(Romans 6:16) Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

A bond-servant has chosen to serve a master and his family for the rest of his life. The *New American Standard Bible* rightly translates Romans 1:1,

where Paul labels himself a *bond-servant of Jesus Christ*: “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.” We can choose to become a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, which leads to righteousness, or become a bond-servant of sin, which leads of death.

According to the Old Testament, a bond-servant is a special slave who with a special ceremony has dedicated himself to serving his master forever because he loves his master. In Deuteronomy 15:15-17, we read in the law of Moses, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today. It shall come about if he says to you, ‘I will not go out from you,’ because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you; then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also you shall do likewise to your maidservant.” Paul made a “bond-servant commitment” to Jesus Christ because he loved Jesus Christ who had saved him from sin and death, and because he wanted to serve Jesus Christ forever. If you will, as a follower of Jesus Christ your baptism can serve as a sign that you have chosen to live as a bond-slave of Jesus Christ because you love Jesus Christ and want to serve Jesus Christ.

Unhappily, some have chosen to become bond-slaves of sin by choosing to practice sin, which leads to death. They may not have known that by practicing a sin that they were increasingly becoming a slave to that sin and would eventually do far worse sins than when they first began, but until they repent or turn from their sin and turn to Jesus Christ as their Savior to free them from their slavery to sin, they will remain slaves of sin forever. Because Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, a follower of Jesus Christ truly needs to turn from the practice of all sins and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ to save them from all sins with the commitment to live for Jesus Christ in righteousness (in right living, in obedience) because they love God and others—and they want to love God and others more than they do. The Holy Spirit frees believers in Jesus Christ from slavery to sin, and He helps them make this type of bond-servant commitment to Jesus Christ, which leads to their sanctification as a real growing in grace in this life. Paul presented himself as a bond-slave to obey Jesus Christ that led to righteousness instead of to death. In the next verse, consider how Paul described the

wonderful good news of the Christian's deliverance from slavery to sin and to obeying Jesus Christ.

(Romans 6:17) But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,

Paul thanked God for the changed lives of those he wrote to in his letter. Believers should always praise God for their growth in grace and every victory over temptation and sin when they make the right choices. Because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and in the lives of believers as their risen Lord and Savior, God has freed Christians from slavery to sin. He has changed believers' hearts and cleansed them from sin, but Christians are also conscious of the fact that they chose to change their thinking and way of living and that the Holy Spirit deserved the praise for helping them do so. In the process of freeing those enslaved to sin, the Holy Spirit influences them to carefully consider the facts and the truth of God and choose to dedicate their lives to Jesus Christ and the truths they have learned from Jesus Christ and the apostles (these recorded truths became the Bible that Christians give their allegiance to as lovers of God and His Word). Christians are "obedient from the heart" to the teachings in the Bible, the Word of God written, because they love God the Father and Jesus Christ, their Lord and Savior, who have freed them from slavery to sin and who enable them to live for God and others out of a heartfelt love.

(Romans 6:18) and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

God has sanctified believers. God has set apart the followers of Jesus Christ for holy service and He has freed them from slavery to sin. They have become slaves of righteousness, of right living. God has freed believers from slavery to sin by grace through their faith in Jesus; therefore, Christians are under grace and have changed their allegiance to God and the teachings of Jesus Christ rather than continue to live in sin. The Bible sometimes states complex truths in ways that will help people understand what is important even with their human limitations (see Romans 6:19). When believers come to faith in Jesus Christ, they choose to become a slave to righteousness—

they choose to start doing what is right, what is consistent with their being right with God as He has declared them to be right (justified). Since God has declared believers right with Him, believers want (or should want) to live as people who are right with God (righteous). They want (or should want) to live in a close, loving, personal relationship with God rather than break that relationship by living in sin (they want to remain reconciled with God). They want to fulfill God's purpose for them on earth. They want to become more Christ-like each day (which describes part of the process of sanctification). They want to do the will of God on earth as the will of God is done in heaven. They want God's Kingdom to come. Because they love God and others, they want God's will to be done by them and others now and forever.

(Romans 6:19) I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

The Romans were very familiar with slavery. The Jews and the early Christians were familiar with slavery and with the concept of choosing to become a bond-slave. Remember, a bond slave was a person who voluntarily chose to be someone else's slave for life. For this reason, Paul called himself "a bond-slave of Jesus Christ." Choosing to do something impure can make someone a slave to impure habits and strongly influence them to do what is even more wicked. Sinners have become slaves to impurity, which leads to greater and greater iniquity, and they cannot free themselves; therefore, they need Jesus Christ to free them from their slavery to sin, which Jesus will do by grace through their faith in Jesus. Now, as Christians, Paul wanted repentant believers to offer themselves as slaves to righteousness—to doing what God wanted—which would lead them to holiness of life and true commitment to serving God rather than going back to choosing sinful ways and falling back into slavery to sin.

(Romans 6:20) For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Paul wanted believers to choose to obey their righteous God in everything. Before they believed in Jesus Christ, they were slaves to sin. They could not choose to consistently obey God or the law when tempted to sin. They obeyed God for selfish reasons. They remained self-centered slaves to unrighteousness. With the help of the Holy Spirit, Paul wanted Christians to voluntarily place themselves under the control of the righteousness of Christ which they could now do as His committed followers.

(Romans 6:21) Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.

Because Paul wanted believers to have good reasons that they could use to defeat tempters and temptations to sin, he wanted them to think back (when tempted to fall back into sin) on what they had gained from the sins they had committed in the past—they had gained nothing but shame and regret. As a matter of fact, as they came to know and love God in Christ more, they became more ashamed of their sins. Paul warned them that not only did they not gain anything of value from the sins they had committed, but practicing sin results in death, in separation from God. When tempted, they needed to remember these truths and turn to Jesus Christ for help.

(Romans 6:22) But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

As they choose to love God and live as God's bond-slave, Christians can live holy lives and more and more consistently live holy in love. As they live truly reconciled to God in Jesus Christ, they will increasingly do what is right whenever they are tempted. They will win victory after victory over temptations and sin with the help of their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. As a result, they will increasingly enjoy the benefits that flow from the eternal life Jesus Christ gives them and will give them fully in the future as He promised. Paul wanted all Christians to freely choose and see themselves as he saw himself, as a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, as one set apart to promote the good news of Jesus Christ in word and example. The advantage is greater and greater purity of thought and life—sanctification.

(Romans 6:23) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When people sin, there are consequences that Paul described as wages. Wages are what people deserve and earn from their working in someone's service. Once again Paul personified "sin," because of people's human limitations in understanding spiritual truths. Everyone deserves what they earn from serving sin. When Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior instead of sin, we do not receive the death we deserve for our sins; rather, we receive eternal life as the gift of God and all that eternal life implies—with benefits beyond description—beyond what we can understand. God will always give Christians infinite unearned blessings as free gifts. No one can make God their debtor by their behavior or their works of the law. But as followers of Jesus Christ, we can love and praise God from who all blessings flow!

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What might you say to someone who said, "It does not matter what I do, God will always forgive me"?
2. What are some of the ways Paul made sin seem like a person?
3. Did Paul making sin seem like a person help you better understand sin and your responsibility as a Christian? Explain your answer.
4. What should be the result when Christians offer themselves to God?
5. What results when Christians offer themselves as slaves of righteousness?

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