

Romans: Comment and Commentary

“Therefore, accept one another,
just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God (15:7).”

Parenthesis: This verse seems to summarize the book.

“Accept one another:” the purpose of the book (12-15)

“Just as Christ accepted us:” the foundation of the exhortation (1-11)

- I. Prologue, 1:1-17
- II. The Universality of Human Sinfulness, 1:18-3:20
- III. The Universality of Divine Righteousness for the Jew and Gentile: Justification, 3:21-4:25
- IV. The Assurance of God’s Righteousness: Sanctification
(Deliverance from the Power of Sin), 5:1-8:39
 - A. The Fruit of God’s Righteousness: Surety, 5:1-11
 - B. The Basis of Surety: The Triumph of Christ, 5:12-21
 - C. The Consequence of Surety: Deliverance from Sin through Union with Christ, 6:1-14
If the law was given to reveal sin and point to the Savior, what is the believers’ relation now to the law? Grace not only forgives sin; it delivers from sinning.

Three views have circulated on this issue. First, antinomians (literally, “those who suppose that the law is not for the Christian,” argue that believers are free from the law. Second, perfectionists argue that Christians can reach a state where they no longer sin in this life. Third, gradualists argue that sin continues in believers, but they are no longer slaves to it. The power of sin has been broken, referring to its universal hold or grip on the saint.

This section answers a question posed in v. 1: “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? Since the law was given to magnify sin, so that grace may super abound, why not sin?”

In fact, two questions (vv. 1, 15) divide the chapter. 6:1-14 deals with the new relationship to God through union in Christ; it is a judicial union (believers have been reckoned into Christ’s death and resurrection). Here the verbal tenses are present indicating an ongoing lifestyle. 6:15-23 describes a new principle of life, enslavement to Christ. It is a moral union. Here the tenses are such that indicate individual acts of sin rather than a lifestyle. 7:1-6 speaks of freedom from the law as illustrated by a marital union.

Another way to think through chapters 6-7 is that Paul affirms our deliverance from sin by using three metaphors: baptism in Christ (6:1-14), enslavement to Christ (6:15-23), and marriage with Christ (7:1-6).

Parenthesis: The tenses of sanctification

Often the Bible presents a doctrine relative to the past, present, and future, each distinctive yet forming a complete picture. In a judicial, legal sense by divine decree, not experientially at a point in time, we were declared righteous in God's sight; we have been sanctified positionally, separated as holy unto God. That is our STANDING before the Lord (how He sees us, not as we are) and it will not change. Presently, however, meaning our STATE (how we are), we are in the process of being sanctified. The gap between what we shall be and what we are is being narrowed. In the future, when we are translated out of this life, we shall be transformed completely so that our STANDING will be an experiential actuality. We who have been sanctified (Standing) are being sanctified (STATE), but someday we shall be sanctified totally (an actuality).

1. The divine reckoning: the metaphor of Baptism, vv. 1-10

F.F. Bruce's summary (*Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*) of the meaning of the metaphor is perhaps helpful as we approach this chapter. "The baptism of Christians constituted the frontier between their old unregenerate existence and their new life in Christ: it marked their death to the old order, so that for a baptized Christian to go on in sin was as preposterous as it would be for an emancipated slave to remain in bondage to his former owner (cf. Rom. 6:1-4, 15-23) or for a widow to remain subject to 'the law of her husband.'"

a. An inference, v. 1

The opening question is an inference drawn from 5:20-21. Paul poses questions for pedagogical value to extend his teaching, not for polemical value. Because we are no longer "in Adam," it is shockingly incompatible to live as if we were. Our change to "in Christ" has brought us from death to life!

b. The answers, vv. 2-3

The answer is bold, "God forbid." It follows an elaboration in the form of a question. Christ's death has brought about believers' death in Him. "Death to sin" is an event, not a state. Language cannot do justice to the meaning of the past tense "died." While it is true that a person who died is dead, the verb tense here looks at a definite act in the past. Believers' death is not to sin's presence, but to its power. Believers died to sin's universal power in their lives, not to sin's existence in their lives. Their "death" to sin is in a legal sense, not a physical sense. Freedom *from* sin is not freedom *to* sin. It cannot mean that believers have died to sin's presence in their lives for these reasons.

Christ "died to sin" (v. 10). Christ did not become insensitive to sin. If so, it would imply at one time He was sensitive to it. If believers have literally died to sin in a physical sense, Paul's exhortation to deal with sin would not make sense (v. 12).

Parenthesis: Death, Believers, and Sin

I think that we have heard people explaining our death to sin in a disturbing manner in that if we have died to sin, as the Bible says, why do you and I struggle so. Simply stated a death has occurred, but what is its nature considering our struggles, the many warnings found in the Bible, and the plain statements of I John 1: 8 and 10. We have died to sin in the sense that its universal presence has been destroyed, not its presence (which awaits our translation to God's eternal presence). To say it another way: Though the universal grip of sin over us has been demolished, the remnants of sin's once universal reign remain in all of us.

Before we were saved, our lives were an unmitigated jungle of trees, vines, and weeds. These "trees, vines, and weeds" represent our sinfulness; there were no exceptions to the tangled mess of our lives. The Bible describes our pre-conversion good deeds less than commendably. The "forest" of our lives looks different now that we have come to the Savior. Despite lives still twisted with many "trees and weeds," there are areas in all our lives that are alive to the Spirit of God. There are marvelous "clearings" in our forest; trees have been uprooted!

Parenthesis: The meaning of "death to sin"

Often in the Holy Scriptures concepts have a verbal tense orientation (past, present, and future meanings). This is also the case with the concept of our death to sin. When a person comes to Christ the penalty of sin is removed (we died to the penalty of sin, but it does not mean we have died to its presence and power); that is a past, consummated reality. However, in what sense have we died to sin presently? It is to the necessity of sinning. We have died to the absolute power of sin; victory over sin through yielding to God's priorities in our daily experience is possible, though not totally so. In the future, in the resurrection when we are all changed, we will be delivered from the presence of sin forever.

Believers' death to sin is a death through identity with Christ and union with Him. They have been spiritually united with Christ in His accomplishments through faith. Believers have died to the guilt of sin, not the power of sin.

"Live in it" describes sin as a habitual practice or lifestyle that includes a positive, even boastful, attitude. This cannot be true of the regenerate.

Verse 3 begins with "or" in the original text. Paul argues for the validity of the believer's death by an appeal to baptism. It provides a second reason why Christians are not libertines. They have been "baptized" into Christ.

Does "baptism" refer to water or Spirit? It means both, since one had to embrace the faith and be water baptized before entering a church as a member. In the New Testament, if water baptism is meant, the element of water is mentioned with it. In the earliest churches, the pattern emerged that the two baptisms occurred at the same time. Believers came to baptism to be saved and

join the fellowship of the saints. So here it means to enter union with Christ. As in earlier times, the ancient people of God were “baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea” (1 Cor. 10:2). The ancient people identified with Moses’ leadership; believers enter through allegiance to Christ.

“United with Him” (v. 5) is a parallel to “baptism” (v. 3).

“As many of us as” may imply some, but not all. In Gal 3:27, Paul uses the same expression, and it clearly means all.

c. The explanation, vv. 4-10

1) An inference, v. 4

The “therefore” introduces an inference. If believers have been united with Him in death, then it follows that they were united to Him in His burial and resurrection.

What does “burial” signify? It is the means whereby believers died to the old life, not the place (“through”). The best explanation is that “burial with Christ” is a description of the participation of the believer in Christ’s own burial, a participation that is mediated by baptism. Baptism is not the place or time of death to sin, but the instrument. Believers’ “death” occurred at Calvary in Christ, not in baptism (v. 10).

“Like” introduces an analogy. Through union in Christ, believers share His death to sin’s condemning power and freedom from death, “a resurrection,” to a new quality of life in Him. One has said, “Our baptism was sort of a funeral.”

“Newness of life” is the newness that consists in life; it suggests a new quality of life.

2) A corroborative statement, v. 5

The “if” introduces what is called a first-class condition, a fact, and could be translated “since we...” The “for” introduces a corollary. Union in death implies union in the resurrection life, the new life.

It is interesting that the Greek prefix “with” (signifying participation in) occurs five times in this paragraph emphasizing our unity in Christ.

“buried with,” v. 4

“united with,” v. 5

“crucified with,” v. 6

“died with,” v. 8

“live with,” v. 9

3) The reasons, vv. 6-10

The “old man,” all that believers were in Adam, has died. We have been freed from sin in the sense of its penalty and its universality (v. 7). The old life

has come to an end and a new life has begun. Believers have been placed in or identified with the great “Second Adam.”

a) The old self was crucified with Christ, vv. 6-7

The tense of the verb, “has died,” indicates a past action caused by God with continuing results.

b) Believers will live with Christ, vv. 8-10

The “if” indicates another first-class condition meaning that it is a fact and can be rendered “since.” In v. 5 we died with Christ and here we live with Christ. The future tense, “we shall live” (v. 8), does not refer exclusively to the future resurrection state, but to the certainty of participation in the resurrection life in Christ here and now.

2. The believer’s reckoning, v. 11

This paragraph divides into two parts: the fact of union through the metaphor of baptism (vv. 1-10) and the practical implication of that new union (vv. 11-14).

Being in the present tense, the word, “reckon,” refers to an attitude of faith, not a specific act. This verse is the hinge of the paragraph. It summons believers to regard themselves in the way that Paul has described in verses 2-10: as dead to sin and alive to God. They are not commanded to become dead to sin and alive to God; these are assumed in redemption itself; they are presupposed truisms.

3. The believer’s yielding, vv. 12-13

The “therefore” indicates an inference from faith-reckoning. The old life has ended, and believers are to live a yielded life. It literary means to stop an act that is ongoing.

Verse 13 is in a tense that looks at yielding as an event, as “reigning” in the previous verse. “Do not present” (v. 13) is parallel to “do not let sin reign” (v. 12). The matter is to be settled decisively. It is an event that has occurred for every believer but requires a circumstance-by-circumstance reminder and conformity.

If “mortal body” (v. 12) means the physical, then “members” (v. 13) refers to bodily parts such as eyes, hands, and feet.

4. The believer’s promise, v. 14

The “for” gives the reason for yielding. Believers have been delivered from the guilt of past sins and the power of sin has been diminished. The law only condemns; grace enlivens! Law and grace are viewed as powers or realms. In this case, “law” means law as a principle or law in general terms as commandments. What is in view here is not the Mosaic code per se.

Parenthesis: What can law do?

- *Command and demand.*
- *Pronounce approval and blessing for conformity.*
- *Pronounce condemnation for the least infraction.*
- *Expose and convict.*
- *Excite and incite nonconformity.*

What can the law not do?

- *It cannot justify a person who has violated it.*
- *It can do nothing to relieve the penalty of transgression.*

D. The Means of Deliverance, Enslavement to Righteousness, 6:15-23

As stated above, two questions frame the chapter (vv. 1, 15). The question in verse 1 is stated in the present tense suggesting continuance in sinful activity. The answer is a decisive negative. Believers have died to sin. They are not free to go on sinning because of their new identity. Here the tense is undefined, envisioning sin as a single act. In 6:1-14 the analogy was to baptism; here it is to enslavement. Believers are both free and slave, free from sin and slaves to righteous living. The emphasis in the first paragraph is upon what God has done; here it is upon what the believer's response has become, enslavement to a new master. The first is God-ward and passive in nature ("we were baptized"); the second is active and "us-ward" (believers turned from sin to God). The question is not whether one will have a master, but which master one will serve. Serving sin leads to death; serving God leads to life.

1. The questions, v. 15a

Is a sin here and there permissible since we are not under law? In 6:1 the question was about sinning to magnify grace, by breaking the law, an inference drawn from 5:20 (grace is not a license to sin); here it is a question dealing with the Christian's requirement to resist individual acts of sin because of grace. The first is more general (the notion of freedom to sin); there the emphasis is upon individual sins and our responsibility to it.

2. The answers, vv. 15b-20

Parenthesis: The notion of freedom

It is abundantly clear that all people can make choices having the freedom to do so. However, no human can create the object that they choose. Adam fell from righteousness, and we with him, when he chose an action that is perceived as good that was presented to him. He valued the offer of Satan more than He did the person and integrity of God Himself. Adam did not lose the ability to choose when he sinned; he lost the ability to choose godly objects (these were lost to him, and he was expelled from God's presence). His freedom atrophied; since self was his object and all that was left for him was selfishness inspired by the great deceiver. When God redeems a person, they freely choose Him because He has first appeared as beautiful and delightful. Freedom to choose the highest object of delight is true for all people. However, some people never have a more beautiful object than the glitter of lies, and the lore of false promises.

a. The first, v.15b

The answer is a blunt rejection of the idea.

b. The second, v. 16

The answer here is the idea of incompatibility. It is either obeying the law and failing or yielding to Christ. There is no middle ground (cf. Matt. 6:24, 7:18).

Also, Roman slavery must not be thought of as only involuntary (of those captured in war and the like); there was such a thing as voluntary slavery. People unable to support themselves offered themselves as slaves simply to be fed and clothed. Surrender leads to slavery, but sometimes to great personal benefit! It depends upon the master we choose!

c. The third, vv. 17-22

1) A new enslavement, vv. 17-18

The believer has been given a new owner and is the Lord's slave, a benevolent master. "From the heart" indicates that a believer has a new indwelling principle or nature. This is a most unusual description of conversion; believers have turned from one kind of slavery to another, one master to another, one end to another.

The word "form" or "mold" indicates that the believer receives a definite moral standard to which they must yield obedience. They must conform to divine rules.

"Which was delivered to you" (in some translations) should be "to which you were delivered." Believers were delivered from one master to another.

Verse 18 makes it plain that deliverance from slavery is unto a holy walk before God. The tense of the verb ("having been freed") tells us several things: first, the passive voice makes it clear that the emancipation was a work done for us, not one we did. Second, it tells us that it was an event that occurred in the past with continuing results. We have been and are being delivered from the penalty of sin in justification and the tyranny of sin in progressive sanctification.

2) The weakness of the metaphor, v. 19-20

What is found in v. 19 is almost a parenthetical statement, but the end of the verse is a repetition of v. 16. The goal of justification is sanctification.

Parenthesis: The tenses of sanctification

As stated previously, concepts like justification and sanctification pose multiple time-facets or orientations. First, we have been sanctified, separated upon to God and holiness; we call this positional sanctification. It is completed in the mind of God, though not in our experience. Second, we are being sanctified meaning we are progressively being brought into conformity to divine holiness; this is a continuous process in this life and will end incomplete. Finally, we shall be sanctified completely, perfectly, and experientially in the final day, the day of the consummation of time to dwell in the presence of God forever. Sanctification is a gift, a promise, and a fact!

This verse states the opposite of the previous verse. "For (v. 20)" states a reason for believers' slavery when they once yielded to sin. Slavery is not an

altogether accurate or appropriate metaphor of the Christian life (“I speak in human terms”). It does serve to set forth the totality of Christian commitment to God.

- 3) The contrastive benefits of the new enslavement, vv. 21-22
The old enslavement brought only death, the new only life.

<u>Status</u>	<u>Result</u>
(Then) “slaves to “sin”	shame v .21
“free from righteousness”	death

(Now) “free from sin”eternal life, v. 22
“slaves to God” sanctification

- 4) The principle summarized, v. 23

This verse is a summary of the entire chapter. The choices are sin and death or grace and eternal life. Slavery to sin pays negative dividends, slavery to Christ only positive benefits. The terms “wages” has reference to the pay of soldiers for their service; it could easily be translated “payoff.”

Though this verse is often used in explaining the state of lostness in witnessing, its focus is for Christians. The old obedience brought death, the new life has brought freedom. Freedom from sin and submission to righteousness leads to sanctification, which ends in eternal life.

Applications:

1. When you think about it, there is a sense that we have not “died” to sin. Certainly, we have not died to the presence of sin though its grip has been diminished and is no longer universal. There are areas under certain circumstances in which we have gained a mastery, learned a few lessons, and, most importantly, desire to live out a new set of priorities rather than the pleasures of sinning. We have “died” to the penalty of sin, Christ bearing its shame and paying the debt that was due to the infinitely holy God of heaven. We can rejoice in our partial victory we enjoy daily and every day for the complete victory over the penalty for sin.
2. When the apostle indicates that we have died with Christ what does he mean? If our passage were 3:21-4:25 or 5:11-21 he would have used the term in reference to the dire penalty of sin meaning liability to judgment. Here death is used in another sense. It means that we who have received a free justification from God because of Christ have undergone a radical change of priorities. We have died to the old “man” associated with our previous “in Adam” state to new one “in Christ.” How have your priorities changed practically since you were met by the Savior of the world?
3. How does an understanding that the death that we have experienced in Christ to sin has not ended our struggles, our failures, help you to understand the inconsistency of your walk in Christ? Sin has been demolished in its universal grip but has not been eradicated. You and I struggle with the remnants of sin’s once-universal grip. The darkest of days are over, but shadows remain. The forest of “trees weeds, and vines” is still there, but there are clearings in our forest, areas where “trees, weeds, and vines” have been uprooted.

4. There is a good side with the struggle that we all have with the remnants of sin in our lives. That we struggle with sin suggests that we have been translated through Christ's death from its total ruin and placed in a new kingdom where sin only partially grips us. This is a ground of our assurance that we are His. The thought of total victory over sin is no evidence that we are God's children (such is evidence we are suffering from delusion and deception, living in fantasy); struggle with it is a ground of assurance when the object of our struggle is our failure to please the God who loves us. Assurance of salvation is not found in how well we are doing so much as it is found in what we do when we are not doing well; that is, when we turn to God for forgiveness and redirection. That we struggle with sin suggests that we have been translated through Christ's death from its total ruin and placed in a new kingdom where sin only partially grips us. This is a ground of our assurance that we are His.
5. Rectitude of life does not lead to salvation; it is the fruit of salvation. We died with Christ at Calvary to sin's penalty, and we have been united in His resurrected life through baptism (through our identification with Christ). Baptism does not unite to Christ; identity with His death at Calvary does. Baptism has to do with sanctification, not salvation. Our identification "in Christ" means that we have been given not only His life (spiritual) but also graced with a new orientation reflected in values and priorities.
6. Our passage has wonderful instruction when it comes to following our new master as His slaves; it tells us how to do it. First, we must "know" certain facts concerning our relation and union with Christ; sin no longer has mastery over us because we have been joined to Christ (vv. 3-10). Second, we are to "reckon," embrace as true, the implications of unity in Christ (v. 11). Third, we are "to present" ourselves to God in dedication and submission to pursue His righteousness (vv. 12-14). And fourth, we are to "obey," practically live out what we have come to know at the implicational level (vv. 15-23). Each of these verbs have the force of a command; each is active voice meaning something that we should do constantly.
7. People seem to have a strange view of freedom. Freedom is not the ability to do what we want; it is the ability to make godly choices. The issue is not choices; it is the kind of choices. Freedom is the ability to maintain our uprightness as human beings. This was lost "in Adam" and has been regained in Christ by Christ for us. Why do we think unbelievers have more freedom than we? Is it because we might have a distorted definition of freedom? Do you envy the freedom of others and think you are not free? Freedom is the ability to maintain moral uprightness. God is most free because He is most righteous. The ability to sin does not establish our freedom; it has and does destroy it.