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Romans 6:1-11 “The Christian and Sin”

Intro. This morning we begin a new section of the book of Romans. Up to this point Paul has presented his teachings about justification, or how to be right with God. We have seen the need for justification in chapters 1-3, the means of justification in chapters 3-4, and the blessings of justification in chapter 5. Now in chapters 6-8, Paul instructs us about what should be the result of justification, and that is Christian sanctification. Here he tells us the theological basis for *living* right with God. Furthermore, in the context we see that justification must precede sanctification. Before you can live the Christian life, you must *become* a Christian by faith. In other words: You do not live right to get saved; you get saved so you *can* live right. That’s the starting point of living the Christian life.

At this point we will not talk about specific instructions about how a Christian is to live each day. That will come beginning in chap. 12. But for now, we will learn how it is possible for a person to live the Christian life. Three times, in vv.3, 6, & 9, Paul refers to certain truths that Christians should *know* (see also 5:3; 7:1, 14, 18; 8:28; 11:25; 14:14). Knowing right doctrine is foundational to right living. Learning God’s Word is indeed vital to Christian discipleship. In fact, before you can do anything you must first *learn* how to do it.

Let me illustrate this. In the sixth grade I began to learn to play the trombone. Let’s suppose I handed you my trombone and commanded you to play a song with beautiful tone quality and ability. The vast majority of you could not do it! First you must have the mental power to learn, good breath to blow into the instrument, lips for a good embouchure and a good ear for musical tones. Most of you have that. You would also have to learn where to position the slide to play the notes, beginning with the B-flat scale. [demonstrate] Oddly enough, as you go up the scale the slide position for some of the same notes change when an octave higher! Then in time, with enough practice, you could learn to play the trombone beautifully. In the same way, God does not simply command you to live the Christian life. First, He must save you and give you life. Then He can give you the doctrinal understanding you need as well as the ability to obey Him. Then, in time, you can learn to obey Him consistently. So in order to live the Christian life successfully you need to learn the doctrinal foundation for living the Christian life.

If you are not yet a Christian, perhaps one thing holding you back is that you just cannot see yourself living the Christian life. If that is the case, I hope you will listen carefully. I will show you how it is indeed possible to live the Christian life. If you *are* saved, I hope you will listen and learn *how* you can live right as a Christian. First of all, I want to encourage you to:

I. REJECT A WRONG ATTITUDE TOWARD SIN

One aspect of living the Christian life is to avoid sin. So in the first part of v.1 Paul asks, “Are we to continue in sin...?” What does Paul mean by that statement? “Sin” is singular. You may recall that in chapter 5 Paul personified sin when he said in v.21, “sin reigned.” Here “sin” refers to the sin nature of a person, the Adamic nature, and not just to acts of sin. Then “continue” is from a

Greek word (*epimeno*) that can mean “to abide in someone’s home as a guest.”¹ It has in it the ideas of a friendly relationship. So to “continue in sin” is to gladly remain under its power and influence. If you continue in sin, then it is pretty clear that sin continues to reign over you. That must not be for a Christian!

We have all experienced the controlling power of sin within us. Those who lie have a hard time telling the truth. Many who have become involved in immorality have a hard time stopping it. Quite a few have trouble controlling their bad temper, and they keep saying and doing things in anger that hurt them and others.

There are quite a few professing Christians who have continued in sin even though they claim to be Christians. There is little change in their lifestyle. They are all too happy to find an excuse for continuing in sin. In the last of v.1 Paul refers to one excuse for sin. He says, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” We have to look in the context to see why Paul refers to this objection. One of the great statements of the grace of God is found in 5:20, “... where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” The gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of grace. Salvation is a gift provided by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. We do not earn forgiveness, but we are freely forgiven through our faith in Jesus Christ. But whenever Paul preached full and free salvation by grace alone, some objected that this allows people to live in sin that grace may abound even more. The argument goes something like this: the more we sin, the more forgiveness we receive by God’s grace. Therefore, let us sin that grace may abound, and God’s grace be praised all the more.

Long ago Rasputin taught and exemplified the doctrine of salvation through repeated experiences of sin, repentance and forgiveness. He held that, as those who sin most require most forgiveness, a sinner who continues to sin with abandon but then repents enjoys more of God’s forgiving grace than any ordinary sinner.

Sinful man just loves such excuses for sin. Mankind has been doing that since Adam and Eve made excuses for their sin in the Garden. Professing Christians who continue in sin do great harm to the cause of Christ. Opponents to the doctrine of salvation by free grace will always give examples of Christians “living in sin.” People are indeed quick to spot the hypocrites among us. Christian leaders who have been exposed for committing sexual abuse bring reproach upon Christ and His gospel. But shouldn’t we also give attention to the lives that have been made pure by the gospel of the grace of Christ? Shall we stop preaching the grace of God just because some people *pervert* God’s grace into an excuse for sin? No! The problem is not with the truth of God. The truth of God is a litmus paper which tests a *man*’s heart. That is why we are to proclaim the truth in every place and to all men, without thought of its effect.

In light of v.1 I ask you, “Have you continued in sin after you say you became a Christian? Does sin still “reign” in your life? If so, you need to question whether you are truly saved. Or perhaps you have just had a wrong and uninformed attitude toward sin. Should a Christian continue in sin that grace may abound? The answer is no. In fact, Paul’s answer in v.2 is an emotional one, “By no means!” or literally, “May it never be!” There is something terribly wrong with a Christian who continues in sin in the way I have described. So instead of making excuses for sin, we should reject such a wrong attitude toward sin.

Now, beginning in v.2 we see that we should:

¹ Acts 10:48; 15:34; Acts 21:4; 21:10; 28:12, 14; 1 Cor. 16:7-8; etc.

II. EMBRACE THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARD SIN

The first step in right action is right thinking. Here Paul gives several reasons why a Christian should not continue in sin. It is based on the true nature of a Christian (note “who” in v.2 is *hoitenes*, “who are of such nature.”) Paul is saying that anyone who argues like that shows that he has not begun to understand the true believer’s relationship both to sin and to Christ. When you truly become a Christian, you become one with Christ in several ways:

A. We Have Died to Sin – Paul says in v.2, “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” Likewise, in v.6 Paul describes this saying that “our old self was crucified.” What does Paul mean by those statements? It certainly does not mean that we are no longer tempted by sin. Yet such strong language certainly points to a decisive change in our state of being. “Our old self” refers to who we were in Adam, unregenerate sinners. Also, the (aorist) tenses here for “died” and “crucified” suggest that this took place at the moment of conversion. No man can crucify himself. This is something that God must do in you and for you. Now that we are “in Christ,” our tie to Adam has significantly changed.

The fact of having died to sin is the fundamental premise of the apostle’s thought. A Christian living in sin is not merely an inconsistency, but a contradiction in terms. It is to speak of a live dead man or a good bad man. If a man continues to live in sin, how can he be a true believer? The true believer does not want to go back into sin any more than Lazarus wanted to go back into the tomb dressed yet again in his grave clothes!

Notice the results of this death to sin: We are now free from the reign of sin. Paul raises an important question in v.2, “How can we who died to sin still live in it?” Then Paul explains in vv.6-7 why the true believer no longer lives in sin, “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin² might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved (Gk. *douleuo*) to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.” Death implies separation. When you die physically, your soul is separated from the body. When we die to sin, we are no longer bound to sin, but we have been set free from sin. God used His surgical knife to cut the believing sinner loose from his evil nature. Furthermore, the word translated “brought to nothing” (*katargeo*)³ in v.6 means “rendered inactive or powerless.” The same Greek word is translated “released” in Romans 7:2. If a woman’s husband dies, she is “released” from her marriage vows. He no longer has a say-so over her life. She is even free to marry again. There is a change in relationship. The law of marriage is still there, but it has no authority over the woman because her husband is dead. Even so, sin’s authority over us has been severed. Just as God’s redemption of Israel severed Pharaoh’s authority over God’s people, even so we are no longer slaves of sin as Paul says in the last of v.6.

In v.7 Paul gives an illustration of this freedom from sin. He says, “For one who has died has been set free from sin.” He is using the analogy of the kind of dismissal which a judge gives when a person charged with a crime has died. In the eyes of the law the charges against him are dropped. Sin has no further claim upon the person who has died. So since we have died to sin, sin no longer has authority over us.

² The expression “the body of sin” (genitive of possession) refers to the physical body possessed by or dominated and controlled by the sinful nature. The body is an integral part of a person’s being. Sin is a terrible master, and it finds a willing servant in the human body.

³ This verb is used 25 of its 26 times by Paul.

The theological basis for our death and freedom from sin is found in what Christ did for us on the cross. Paul said in v.10, “For the death he died he died to sin, once for all...” This does not mean that Christ was a sinner. Yet he did experience temptation (Mt. 4:1ff; Heb. 2:14-17). Though tempted in the Garden of Gethsemane to bypass the cross, He died to self and yielded fully to the will of God. Then having obeyed His Father, He died for our sins on the cross. Our Lord’s death not only paid the penalty of human sin, but it was used of God to break the power of indwelling sin in the believer’s life.

I want to illustrate the change in our relationship to sin that Christ has made possible. Imagine an unarmed American soldier standing helpless before a rifle aimed by the enemy. That was our position before Christ died for us. Our old sin nature had the power and we were the prisoner. But when Christ died for our sins, the rifle was knocked from the hands of our captor. Now he must stand with *his* hands raised, while the rifle points at him. He will tell us that our rifle is not loaded, that the bayonet is only made of rubber. He will challenge us to lay it aside and fight him with judo, of which he is master. But when we realize that the weapon of triumph has been put into *our* hands, that our captor is now our prisoner, we can have practical victory over sin. [Barnhouse, p. 95].

So I want you to understand that if you are a true Christian, you have died to sin, and sin no longer has power over you. Now you *can* resist temptation. You are no longer a servant of sin. You are free in Christ.

Death to sin is not the only reason we do not continue in sin. There is more. Being a Christian is not just a matter of saying “no” to sin. There is also a positive side to living the Christian life. So notice also:

B. We Have Been Given a New Life – Paul said in the last of v.4, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk [or live⁴] in newness of life.” The main theme of this section of Romans is that God wants His redeemed children to live resurrection lives *now*. People who are spiritually dead cannot live the Christian life. But those who have truly experienced new life in Christ *can* live the Christian life.

We need to understand that for the believer, the power of sin has been replaced by the same power that raised Christ from the dead. Now, through the power of our new life in Christ, we can conquer sin. The power of indwelling sin is great, but the resurrection power of Christ that dwells within us is greater! Based on v.10 I can say that just as Christ had the power to live for God, even so we have the same power within to live for God. The transformation of the Christian from sin to a life of righteousness ought to be as dramatic as the transformation of Jesus from death to resurrection life!

How is all this possible? How can we be set free from sin’s power, and live for God by His resurrection power? It is possible:

C. Because We Have Been United with Christ - Paul shows that a believer’s continuance in sin is a moral impossibility, because justification involves union with Christ. By our union with Christ His death counts as our death. His life is now our life. Ethical change is only possible because of our union with Christ. We are going to see that Paul refers to the believer’s union with Christ many times, in many different ways.

⁴ “Walk” can be translated, “begin to walk” (ingressive aorist). The word is frequently used in the Bible to denote one’s conduct.

The fact of our union with Christ in His death is stated and restated by Paul in 3 different verses. In v.6 he says, “We know that our old self was crucified with him” (cf. Gal. 2:20). Then in v.8 he says, “Now if we have died with Christ...” In v.4 he says, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death...”

When a Christian woman marries, she typically takes the name of her husband. Even so, when we are saved and baptized, we take the name of the Lord Jesus. We are the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:9). We are no longer Miss Worldling but we call ourselves *Christians* (Acts 11:26). In marriage the Bible says that the two become one. Even so, when you repent of sin and trust Christ as Savior, you become one with Him. You are forever identified with Him and are to honor His name.

Paul gives a number of illustrations of this union. In vv.3-4a we see baptism used as an illustration. Paul says that the believer has been “baptized [or immersed] into Christ Jesus.” When you trust in Christ as Savior, you become one with Christ, and you become part of His Body, the Church. Paul is probably not speaking directly of water baptism here in v.3. However, baptism symbolizes⁵ our union with Christ and is a significant public statement of our conversion from sin and self to our new life in Christ. In baptism we declare our union with Christ. When you are baptized, we bury you in the water, symbolizing that you have died to sin and its dominion over your life. You have been buried with Christ in baptism.⁶ Our identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in His burial is a very important truth,⁷ for it teaches that our sins have been buried and can never again be brought against us. By the way, have you been baptized? An unbaptized Christian is something of a contradiction.

We have also become united with Christ in His resurrection life, which is also symbolized by baptism when you are raised from the water. Paul says in v.5, “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.” The focus here is not the glorification of our bodies. He is talking about the fact that when you become a Christian, you share in the resurrection life of Christ *now*. This is clear from what Paul says in the last of v.4, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” It is participation in the resurrection life of Christ here and now. This “newness” (*kainotes*) of life is not new in time but a new kind of life.

Do you remember the story of Martha, and what she said after her brother Lazarus died? When Jesus arrived on the scene, she went out to meet Him. Then Jesus said to her in John 11:23, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha then said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” To which Jesus replied, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (NKJV). Then Jesus proceeded to demonstrate His power to give resurrection life in *this* life by raising Lazarus from the dead. Martha’s attitude is typical of millions of true believers. God had promised resurrection life and power for our activities in this present life. But we continue to regard triumph over sin as reserved for the future. Yet Paul shows that we can experience the power of Christ’s resurrection life now in this life! Of course, our

⁵ Barclay and Douglas Moo see Paul's reference to baptism as more than symbolic and at least border on saying that water baptism is an essential aspect of our identification with Christ. In fact, Moo points out that “we are not buried *as* Christ was buried; we are buried *with* Christ.... Paul presents water baptism here as the means by which we are brought into relationship with Christ” (p.203). Yet he rejects a sacramental view of baptism.

⁶ This is not a reference to a baptism by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) for as Ironside says, “the spirit does not baptize unto death...” (p.76).

⁷ In 1 Cor. 15:3-4 Paul states that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus are core historical facts of the gospel.

future resurrection life is also assured. Paul said in v.8, “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”⁸

In v.5 we see another illustration of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be⁹ united with him in a resurrection like his.” “United with”¹⁰ literally means “to grow or spring up together.” Paul sees our death and resurrection with Christ pictured by two plants springing up from the ground together. The word is also used of twins being born together.

On the coast of California there are great forests of redwoods, *sequoia sempervirens*, and the manner of their growth is unique. Two trees may grow year after year a few feet from each other. Finally, after fifty or a hundred years (as the tree rings prove), they touch, and the bark overlaps and fills out so that the two trees become one. Near Santa Cruz are two trees at an angle to each other. Contact between them has been made a hundred feet in the air, and from that point up they are one tree—a single top growing from two trunks. [Barnhouse, p. 86].

Even so, Paul speaks of a living, vital union of two individuals becoming one. Paul wants to emphasize how our lives are vitally linked with Christ’s life. Jesus Himself said in Jn. 14:19, “Because I live, you shall live also” (NKJV). When you believe in Christ, you share in His resurrection life. What a profound thought!

So we have seen that because we have become a part of the body of Christ, we share in both His death and life. There are too many people who want to share in the life of Christ, but they do not want to share in His death to sin. The two must go together. How can you be united with Jesus, the holy Son of God, and continue in sin?

Now, with that understanding of our death to sin and resurrection life by virtue of our union with Christ, Paul presses home one primary application. Based on our union with Christ, we see in v.11 the truth that we should not only have the right attitude toward sin, but also:

III. TAKE THE RIGHT ACTION

I have already referred to the fact that 3 times in this text Paul refers to the fact that believers know or need to know the truths that I have just shared with you. It’s one thing to know something; it’s altogether a different matter to act upon what you know. So the big question now is, “How do I make this work in daily experience?” How can we move from doctrine to practice? Well notice what Paul says in v.11, “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” It’s not enough for you to simply know that you are dead with Christ and alive with Christ. Paul says you must also “consider” that these truths apply to you as a Christian each and every day (present tense). The word translated “consider” (*logizomai*) also means to “acknowledge or take into account.” It refers to a mental calculation. We are to take what we have learned of our new position in Christ and exercise and apply that knowledge to our lives. This does not mean to pretend to be, but to recognize or judge yourselves *in fact* dead to sin and alive to God. It is to act upon these truths. We are to live consistently with who we are in Christ. So the next time temptation comes your way, you are to claim this truth that you have died to sin. It no longer has power over you. Instead, you have a new power from the resurrection life of Jesus within.

⁸ Though this is a future tense, even here Paul may have in mind our present resurrection life in union with Christ. Notice how the future tense is used in v.5.

⁹ “We shall be” in v.5 is not a predictive future so far as time is concerned, but that of a logical future. In other words, participation in Christ resurrection always follows participation in his death (Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12).

¹⁰ *phuo* “spring up” with the prefix *sun*, “with”, used only here in the New Testament.

After the Civil War a man went to Texas and settled on land which proved to contain great gushers of oil; he died leaving a tremendous estate but no children and no will. His lawyer sent papers to a lawyer in New York, asking him to look up the next of kin of his wealthy client. It was discovered that he had a sister who had lived in Philadelphia and that she had died and her only living heir was a grandson who turned out to be a beggar. The New York lawyer investigated and after considerable checking, he became convinced that the Philadelphia beggar was the rightful owner of the estate in Texas. This discovery was communicated to the attorney in Texas, who arranged for a considerable sum of money to be made available for the immediate use of the heir, who would eventually possess the entire estate. Though to everyone he looked like a poor man, what did he have to do to begin to enjoy the riches of his inheritance? Well as soon as the lawyer informed him of his good fortune, all he needed to do was to believe the good news, act upon it by claiming his riches, and stop living like a beggar, and start living according to his riches. [Illustration from Barnhouse, p.115].

Even so, the Lord Jesus Christ has died on the cross and by His death has prepared for us the riches of His grace (Eph. 1:7). He not only grants the grace of forgiveness but also power for living that can produce purity of life. So the next time you are tempted to sin, act upon the fact that you are dead to sin. Say to sin, "I am dead to sin; you have no power over me. I am alive in Christ and I have power *over you*." But the devil doesn't want you to know this truth or live by this truth. He wants you to sin and then excuse it by saying, "I just couldn't help myself." So I call upon every believer here to stop making excuses about sin, and just obey God's Word and consider yourself to be what God says you are in Christ: dead to sin, and alive to God. I also want you to have the attitude that you have died to sin regarding your desire. When sin tries to take you captive again through lust, remember that you died to sin when you repented and placed your faith in Jesus as your Savior. You should respond to lust the way a dead man responds!

Conclusion: The vast majority in my audience today would say that you are a Christian. Take a look at your life. Are you continuing to live in sin? Does sin continue to reign over you? Are you making excuses for continuing in sin? If so, it may mean that you have never truly been born again. If that is the case, you need to repent of sin and trust in Christ as your Savior. He can not only forgive you, but He can also set you free from sin. You can't live right in the eyes of God until you become a Christian.

On the other hand, if you have continued in sin, it may mean that you just haven't learned what Christ has done for you when you became one with Him. You have not only been forgiven. You also have died to sin. Now you are free from its control. You are also alive in Christ. The power of His resurrection life is now available to you. Now it is time to translate that knowledge into action and *live* like a Christian. Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God. Claim what you have in Christ. As Paul says in v.12, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies...."

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2022; Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1928); Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right:*

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