

The Unconverted “Believer” (21) The Christian’s Struggle with Sin

Throughout this series that we have entitled “The Unconverted ‘Believer’”, we have shown the ease in which people can wrongly think that they are true Christians when they are still under God’s condemnation of their sin. They are yet unconverted, but they think that they are “saved.” We have also asserted that the number of those who are Christian-in-name-only may be quite large and that there may be many nominal Christians who are regular attendees and even members of local churches. In our efforts to distinguish these false Christians from true Christians, we have set forth the significant and remarkable characteristics that are only present in the hearts and lives of those who have been truly born again (regenerated) by the Holy Spirit. A true Christian is a transformed person, having passed from spiritual death into spiritual life. The Holy Scriptures set forth the life of the Christian to be a supernatural endeavor that only those who are truly in Christ can attain and maintain. But in our efforts in making this known, it is an easy matter for a true Christian to doubt his salvation when he does not feel that his heart and actions have achieved the standard of new life that characterizes true Christians. This is particularly the case with those Christians who may struggle with sin. Perhaps their sin is of an egregious nature. Or perhaps their sin has persisted in spite of all of their desires and efforts to repent of their sin and to live righteously. The result is that these Christians are plagued with doubts regarding their standing before the Lord. And although it may be true that many nominal Christians struggle in this way because they have not experienced the new birth by the Holy Spirit, there are true Christians who doubt themselves because their struggle with sin has only resulted in continual defeat and failure. And then when you consider the activity of the deceiver and accuser of the brethren, as well as the errant thinking that may characterize these true Christians, the problem of doubting their salvation is understandable; nevertheless, it is very unfortunate and needless. I hope that we may remove some of these unnecessary and ungrounded fears through a better understanding of what the Word of God teaches us about the spiritual identity of Christians, our attitude and understanding of our struggle with sin, and the way forward in which the Word of God directs us.

In order to address these matters, I would like us to consider the message and lessons of Paul’s epistle to the Christians in the church at Rome, particularly the teaching set forth in Romans 6. Here is this chapter from the New King James Version.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ²Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? ¹⁷But God be thanked that

though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

²⁰For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²²But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Earlier in this epistle the apostle had set forth the blessed doctrine of God's justifying sinners through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. He first had set forth the universal guiltiness and helplessness of all mankind to save themselves from sin and prepare themselves for the future judgment of the world (Rom. 1, 2 & 3). God has done this through His holy law that He has established as the rule of life for the entire human race. God, by having given His law, made known to sinners the serious consequences of their sin as well as their utter helplessness to remedy their sinful condition. Paul declared that it was impossible for anyone to achieve and acquire the righteousness that God's law required of all mankind in order to escape their condemnation when standing before Him in judgment. But thankfully God had provided a righteousness for sinners apart from law keeping. He would grant the free and full forgiveness of sins and the gift of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to any and all who embraced Him as their Lord and Savior. We read of this in Romans 3:21ff.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation¹ by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed², ²⁶to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

But after the apostle had set forth the foundational doctrine of the sinner's justification by God through faith alone, he began to set forth the grace of God in the believer's sanctification through life with view to fully inheriting eternal life in his future glorification. As we have stressed very strongly and frequently, the salvation that God has promised in Jesus Christ is much more than our initial justification—the forgiveness of our sins and the imputed gift of Christ's righteousness. God has purposed to sanctify all those whom He justifies. Our sanctification is as essential to salvation as our justification. What is sanctification? Sanctification has been defined as in the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647):

Question 35. What is sanctification?

Answer. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

Toward the end of Romans 5 the apostle declared that it was God's purpose to sanctify His people. He purposed that His grace would reign in their lives unto their full inheritance of eternal life. Paul wrote:

¹ Propitiation: sacrificial atonement; mercy seat.

² Paul meant by the expression, "because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed", that God had overlooked the sins of the Old Testament believers even though Christ had not yet died on His cross to pay for their sins.

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, ²¹so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:20f)

God has purposed that His people would live righteously. He then set forth what we read in Romans 6 as the way that a Christian is to understand his identity as having new life in Christ and that he is to purpose to order his Christian life defeating sin and living in righteousness. **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) had set forth Paul's message in the opening verses of Romans 6.

The apostle having at large asserted, opened, and proved, the great doctrine of justification by faith, for fear lest any should suck poison out of that sweet flower, and turn that grace of God into wantonness and licentiousness, he, with a like zeal, copiousness of expression, and cogency of argument, presses the absolute necessity of sanctification and a holy life, as the inseparable fruit and companion of justification; for, wherever Jesus Christ is made of God unto any soul righteousness, He is made of God unto that soul sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). The water and the blood came streaming together out of the pierced side of the dying Jesus.³ And what God hath thus joined together let not us dare to put asunder.

In short, the message of Romans 6 may be described as “the triumph of grace over the power of sin.”⁴

In addressing the delivering power of God's grace in a Christian, Paul first declared the believer's...

I. Freedom from sin's tyranny (6:1-14)

Paul argued in this section of his epistle that the Lord has set the Christian free from his former life of bondage to sin. Through his union with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection, the Christian experienced a transfer of ownership and domination. Whereas before his conversion, sin had been his master while he was under the (unmediated) law of God, now grace was his master, in that he was now a slave unto righteousness.

A. Those who are justified through faith cannot continue in sin (6:1-4)

The apostle Paul had posited an objection that some of his detractors might falsely conclude from what he had previously written: “If God is greatly glorified in showing forth His great grace in the presence of great sin, why not sin more egregiously so that God can receive greater glory?” Paul vehemently repudiated such an idea. He reasoned, “*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ²Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*” (6:1, 2) Here is a description of Paul's argument in this chapter:

In every age there have been those who have denounced the doctrine of justification by faith on the ground that it logically leads to sin.⁵ “If all the believer's sins have already been paid for, if he has already been credited with perfect righteousness, if his good works will not help save him—if all this is true,” ask the opponents, “then why worry about sin? Why try to do good? Why strive to live a righteous life?” Romans 6 answers all such objections showing that the truly justified sinner will take no such attitude. He will not sin that grace may abound (v. 1), nor will he sin because he is under grace and not under law (v. 14). On the contrary, the gospel method of salvation by grace leads to true obedience—it inevitably results in good works! But the justified sinner's obedience results from love, not fear; his good works are performed out of gratitude for God's free gift of salvation, not in the hope that these works will help save

³ What Matthew Henry meant by “water and blood” from the side of Jesus is that the “blood” addressed His atonement for our sin and that the “water” was His intent to cleanse (deliver) us of our sin.

⁴ Thomas Schreiner, **Romans** (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 298.

⁵ This has always been the false reasoning of Roman Catholicism against the biblical (Protestant) doctrine of justification.

him. As we shall see in this chapter, justification by faith leads the believer, not to a life of sin, but to a life of grateful obedience.⁶

Paul made the declaration that through the believer's union with Christ in His death, that believer died with respect to his sin. This is not a statement of how the believer feels or thinks about himself. Nor is it a command for the believer to cease from sin, which will come later. Paul was describing a historical event that occurred in every Christian. Paul declared that these Christians had died to sin through their union with Jesus Christ in His death on His cross. "They are viewed by God *as if* they themselves *died* in the *death of Christ* and suffered the full penalty of sin's guilt. Sin can no longer make any legal claim on them; thus they are dead to it—free from its condemnation."⁷

Paul tied this reality to the event of baptism to which they had submitted upon their conversion. He wrote in **verse 3**, "***Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?***" Paul then reasoned with them that their baptism set before them their privilege and responsibility no longer to walk in sin but to live in righteousness. He wrote in **verse 4**, "***Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.***" It is clear that God saves us not only from the penalty of sin, but that in our conversion He purposed to deliver us from the power of sin to which we were formerly subject, but from which we are now delivered. We are not to live in sin, but in righteousness. Justification and sanctification are distinct, but one cannot exist apart from the other. All who are justified by God are being sanctified by God.

Paul writes of baptism as a very significant turning point for the one who has come to Christ. Baptism would have been understood as taking place upon conversion. Often in the New Testament record baptism was administered at the same time one came to faith in Christ and exercised repentance from sin. **Thomas Schreiner** showed this close association of baptism with conversion:

The reference to baptism is introduced as a designation for those who are believers in Christ. Since unbaptized Christians were virtually nonexistent, to refer to those who were baptized is another way of describing those who are Christians, those who have put their faith in Christ. Thus Paul is saying here that *all Christians* have participated in the death and burial of Christ for all Christians had received baptism.⁸

In addition Schreiner wrote:

For Paul baptism, faith, reception of the Spirit, repentance, and confession of Christ are one complex of events that all occur at conversion. Paul refers to believers as baptized because unbaptized Christians would be an anomaly.⁹

B. Our union with Christ was not only in His death, thereby breaking His people free from their bondage to sin, but it was also in His resurrection to enable us to live in righteousness (6:5-11)

In **verses 5** through **11** Paul reasons why it is possible for Christians to live lives of righteousness.

⁵For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰For the death

⁶ David N. Steele, and Curtis C. Thomas, **Romans; an Interpretive Outline** (Presbyterian and Reformed Publications, 1977), p. 45.

⁷ Ibid, p. 46.

⁸ Schreiner, **Romans**, p. 306.

⁹ Ibid, p. 310.

that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The believer's union with Christ in His death brought an end to his life characterized by sin, in that before he was a slave to sin. But in the believer's union with Christ in His resurrection the believer is assured that he will walk in newness of life, that is, he will live according to righteousness.

Romans 6:6 reads, "*knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*" Paul was telling his readers that their life before conversion came to an end. "'Our old man' is the old self or ego, the unregenerate man in his entirety in contrast with the new man as the regenerate man in his entirety."¹⁰ Because of the believer's union with Jesus Christ in His death, his former self as an unbelieving sinner had died. The reason that God caused this union of the believer's former life to have died with Christ was to make it possible for his "body of sin" to be delivered from the power of sin. "The body of sin" is a reference to the physical body. The physical body with its senses is the vehicle through which sin is manifested. That old man, that person you were before you were converted, had once controlled your body of sin. But because your old man was crucified with Christ, the new man that God made of you may then lead your body hereafter not to be a slave of sin. Paul personified sin, setting it forth as a cruel slave master. We may experience deliverance from the power of sin because of our union with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection.

Verse 7 is a summary statement, which declares the truth of verse 6. "*For one who has died has been set free from sin.*" A dead man is no longer subject to a former master. The one who died with Christ, his old man has died with respect to sin. Because of this truth, we should have confidence that we will live in righteousness before Christ. This is the meaning of **verse 8**: "*Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.*"

Verses 9 through 11 shows how our knowledge of our union with Jesus Christ should give us faith and confidence and should lead us to live for Christ.

⁹"We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Because of this historic truth and reality of Jesus' death and resurrection, and due to our union with Him in His experience, we are to identify ourselves with Him, and live accordingly. Paul is not saying that we are now continually dying and being raised. He is saying that the one decisive historical event of Jesus dying and rising, and we with Him, shapes our present existence and our understanding of our identity as Christians.

Now the first 10 verses of Romans 6 are instructional; Paul was declaring the spiritual truth of the believer's union with His Savior in His death upon the cross and His resurrection from the dead. But then we come to Romans 6:11, which is a command. "*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Here in Romans 6:11, we find the first stated *command* thus far in this epistle. Everything that Paul had written from chapter one, verse one, through Romans 6:10, contains Paul's straightforward declaration of historical and spiritual facts. And although Paul has implied earlier in many places that Christians ought to behave in a Christian manner, *this is the first occasion in which he issued a direct command to respond to his teaching*. It is worded a little differently in other translations, but the force of the command is conveyed in each one.

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

NKJV: "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

KJV: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

NIV: "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

NASV: "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

¹⁰ Murray, **Romans**, p. 219.

This first command of this epistle, after following nearly 6 chapters of explanatory text, underscores the truth that *Christian living is largely a function of the will exercised in response to the understanding of our mind*. The order in which God communicates His will to us is first through the doctrine or teaching of His Word, which is then followed with the application. Here the Word of God tells us that we are to understand and embrace our identity as Christians, who have new life in Christ. Now if you fail to understand and accept this reality, if you fail to obey Romans 6:11, you would continue to understand your identity—who you are—as a sinner under God’s law and thereby thinking that you are hopelessly condemned by that law. If you have turned from your sin and have believed on Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior, you are to regard yourself as such, and that your former identity, your former way that you viewed yourself out side of Christ, had come to an end when you believed upon the Lord Jesus.

There are many true Christians who sadly have doubts about themselves and the way that God views them and how they view themselves, because they have failed or refused to obey the command of Romans 6:11. These Christians struggle with assurance of salvation because they have failed to affirm the spiritual truth that they are new Christians in Christ, as they continue to identify themselves with their life in sin as it was before coming to Christ. Again, this is a reality not because you feel that it is so, not because there is any evidence in your life that suggests this or from which you can derive confidence. It is an act of faith in that you choose to believe what God has said about you. There was a time when you turned from your sin, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, you confessed that faith in your baptism, and in so doing you signaled a break with who you were before and who you are now as a Christian in union with Jesus Christ.

But when a Christian fails to understand this truth or fails to embrace it in faith, he will tend to default to a way of engaging sin as one under the law rather than under grace. John Owen wrote about the futile efforts of an unconverted man to fight against sin. But this may also describe a true Christian who has failed to understand and appropriate what is disclosed in Romans 6. Here is Owen’s description of a miserable unconverted man trying to fight against his sin, but we would say that it may sound much like a true Christian who is not thinking rightly regarding his true identity in Christ.

And, indeed, I might here bewail the endless, foolish labour of poor souls, who, being convinced of sin, and not able to stand against the power of their convictions, do set themselves, by innumerable perplexing ways and duties, to keep down sin, but, being strangers to the Spirit of God, all in vain. They combat without victory, have war without peace, and are in slavery all their days. They spend their strength for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which profiteth not.

This is the saddest warfare that any poor creature can be engaged in. A soul under the power of conviction from the law is pressed to fight against sin, but hath no strength for the combat. They cannot but fight, and they can never conquer; they are like men thrust on the sword of their enemies on purpose to be slain. The law drives them on, and sin beats them back. Sometimes they think, indeed, that they have foiled sin, when they have only raised a dust that they see not; that is, they distemper their natural affections of fear, sorrow, and anguish, which makes them believe that sin is conquered when it is not touched. By that time they are cold, they must do battle again; and the lust which they thought to be slain appears to have had no wound.

And if the case be so sad with them who do labour and strive, and yet enter not into the kingdom, what is their condition who despise all this; who are perpetually under the power and dominion of sin, and love to have it so; and are troubled at nothing, but that they cannot make sufficient provision for the flesh, to fulfil they lusts thereof?¹¹

C. An exhortation not to live for sin but to live righteously (6:12-14)

We next read of Paul’s application of the truth of the Christian’s identity in Jesus Christ.

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being

¹¹ William H. Goold, ed. **The Works of John Owen**, vol. 6 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967, orig. 1850-53), p. 20.

alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

We emphasized that with Romans 6:11 we have the first imperative (command) that Paul expressed in this epistle. But having given a command in verse 11, he continued to issue three more successive commands, one in verse 12, and two commands in verse 13. There are four commands in all in these few verses.

The first command was *positively* expressed in that we have a command of *what we are to do*. Again verse 11 reads, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Then the next two commands are expressed *negatively*; that is, these commands are of *what we are not to do*. The second command is in verse 12, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.” The third command is in verse 13a, which also speaks negatively, “And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin...” And then fourth, Paul gave the positive command in verse 13b “...but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

And so, just as verse 11, **verse 12** contains a command. “*Do not let sin therefore reign in your body, to obey its passions.*” This is a command to us that we purpose to live consistent with who we are—dead to sin and alive unto God. Whereas verse 11 had to do with our *self-identity*, verse 12 has to do with our *activity*. Sin is set before us as a power that would control us if we do not actively resist it and refuse to allow it to have control over us. We have been delivered from the dominion of sin through the death of Christ; therefore, do not let it reign over you as a Christian.

Now it should be pointed out that Paul does not here give the means or manner of defeating sin. He will do so later in his epistle. Here he is simply commanding Christians that they are to be actively resisting sin from having dominion over their lives. Later in Romans 8 he explained that this must be done through the Holy Spirit, but here he was pressing upon Christians to live according to who they are in Christ.

Verse 13 is more specific as to the arena in which we are not to allow sin to control us. “*Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*” “Your members” have to do with your physical body as well as the aspects of your soul including the mind, the affections, and one’s will. He is essentially saying to his readers, “Sin no longer has mastery over you; therefore, do not let it have mastery over you.” Become who you are and who you are becoming in Christ.¹² He was commanding his readers to live so as to be consistent with who they are in Christ.

We then read **verse 14** the explanation for verse 13, “*For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*” This follows the pattern that Paul commonly uses. He introduces a word or theme only to explain the matter fully at a later point. Here he states the truth: *The believer is not under law but under grace.* He will soon begin to tell his readers what this means for who they are and how they should live.

Let us consider a few words of application. There are several principles respecting the believer’s *sanctification* that we may glean from these verses. *First, sin is not dead in Christians, even in the most mature and pious Christians, but rather is something always to be struggled against.*¹³ We will always be fighting against sin that dwells within us. You may gain victory over some sins now and then, but sin will always be a problem that you will be struggling against through this life. The fact is that every one of us have sin that indwells us that we need to engage and resist.

¹² Schreiner makes a good point: “The adage ‘become what you are’ has commonly been employed to set forth the relationship between the indicative and the imperative. This designation is not fully satisfactory, for believers still await the day of resurrection and the completion of redemption (8:22-25). Such a maxim falls prey to over realized eschatology, suggesting that believers already possess all that they need in Christ. The correlation between the indicative and the imperative is instead more dynamic. A better maxim is ‘become who you are becoming.’ Thereby the necessity of carrying out the imperative is preserved.” Thomas Schreiner, **Romans** (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 321.

¹³ I am indebted to the comments of James Montgomery Boice who identified these principles in his expository commentary on Romans. James M. Boice, **Romans, vol. 2, The Reign of Grace, Romans 5:1-8:39** (Baker Books, 1992), pp. 682ff.

*Second, sin's hold on us is in or through our bodies.*¹⁴ This is what Paul is implying when he said, *"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions"* (Rom. 6:12). Sin is manifested through our physical senses as well as through our thoughts of our minds. Paul was not saying that sin was presently reigning in the lives of these Christians at Rome and that they were supposed to stop sin from reigning in their lives. No, Paul had already declared that sin no longer reigns in the Christian (cf. Rom. 5:21).

It is only because sin does not reign that it can be said, "Therefore let not sin reign"... And so in this case the sequence is: sin does not have the dominion; therefore do not let it reign. Deliverance from the dominion of sin is both the basis of and the incentive to the fulfillment of the exhortation, "Let not sin reign."¹⁵

Third, as Christians, we can now offer the parts of our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. This is the major emphasis of these verses. You can choose to use your body as either a means to bring about God's approval through living in obedience, or a means to commit sinful acts which are displeasing to God.

But here is a very important point that I wish to stress before us. There may be the Christian who has serious doubts about his salvation for he does not see the measure or level of victory over sin in his life that he thinks is enough to confirm his claim to be a true Christian. He has fought long and hard against his sin, maybe a particular sin, but has only met with defeat. He concludes, therefore, and I would say, wrongly, that he could not be a true Christian. He says to himself,

"Here in Romans 6:14 the Word of God declares forthrightly that sin shall not have dominion over the Christian. But sin has dominion over me, therefore, I must not be a recipient of God's saving grace."

But I would argue that this is a wrong conclusion to draw based on Romans 6:12. This verse is not a statement of the present reality in every Christian's life. In other words, it does not say, "For sin *has* no dominion over you presently, for you are not under law but under grace." The verb of this verse is in the future tense. It is a promise, not a fully realized present experience. God has promised that you will not be dominated by sin, for His grace will see to it that the power of sin will be broken and subdued in your life. Now granted, you are a Christian and you have sin that overwhelms you and conquers you all too often. You succumb to it and in spite of all of your desires and efforts, its dominance does not seem to be shaken. But we may assure you based on the promise of God, that sin will not ultimately have dominion over you. You will subdue it and escape its power, for the means that God has provided for you will give you victory.

Now again, Paul does here not give the means by which the Christian may defeat sin in his life. He does that in Romans 8. Here he sought to establish the foundational truths of the Christians self-identity and set forth the promise and basis of assurance that the one whom God has justified, He will sanctify.

II. The consequences of your choice to sin or to obey (6:15-23)

We will not go into detail regarding the final verses other than to read them and emphasize that Paul was arguing that the grace of sanctification must be and will be present in the life experience of every true Christian. You must humble yourself before the Lord and surrender your mind and body to be instruments for God's service and not for sin.

¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? ¹⁷But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I speak in human

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 683.

¹⁵ John Murray, **Romans** (Eerdmans, 1959), p. 227.

terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

Lastly, Paul concluded this section of his epistle by declaring that there are two outcomes at the end of this life—eternal damnation or eternal life (6:20-23). The outcome of sinful living is eternal damnation. But the outcome of a life ordered according to righteousness will be the reception of God's gift of eternal life after this life is completed.

²⁰For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²²But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Conclusion:

We may conclude by asking a question. Why would the Lord not bring immediate victory to every one of His people in defeating the sins with which they struggle? Why has He not answered your prayers to give you complete deliverance from that sin or sins that continually plagues your conscience and disheartens your soul? It is clear that He is capable of doing so. Why does He not do so? We may look to the Old Testament to illustrate His dealings with His people by considering His people, Israel, and the manner in which He enabled them to conquer and subdue their enemies in the Promised Land.

We understand that the Lord superintended all of the historical events of the Old Testament record to provide instruction and motivation for us, New Testament Christians. Paul wrote of the Old Testament record: "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). Now it is a common understanding among us to view the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt as portraying our salvation from sin. Jesus Christ was our Passover Lamb that secured our deliverance from bondage to sin and set us free. "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). Israel's passage through the Red Sea in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage is an Old Testament type of our baptism. We read in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 these words:

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ²all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

Moreover, the journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land is frequently shown to illustrate the Christian life as we are in a pilgrimage to our heavenly Canaan. And the final passage through the Jordan River is often seen as the Christian experiencing physical death upon his entrance into that promised eternal rest. Our hymnology expresses all of these ideas and many more. But there are others who show forth Israel's entrance into Canaan and its defeat of its enemies and eventual full occupation of the Promised Land in some ways to serve as a type of the life of Christians in this fallen world. Just as Israel entered its Promised Land, so we entered into a state of salvation. But just as Israel was to wage warfare to gain the inheritance that God had promised, we are to wage spiritual warfare against the sins that are before us, conquering them one by one until we are free to live before our Lord and serve Him in peace and righteousness. Charles Spurgeon thought that the entrance of Israel into Canaan and having to conquer its enemies was a more clear portrayal of the nature of the Christian life than was Israel in its wilderness existence. But let us briefly consider this Old Testament imagery.

God has called us to wage warfare against our sins, a war from which God has promised that we will come off the victors. God enabled His people to engage and overcome all who opposed them and who had sought to defeat them. As the people of God trusted the Lord and followed His instruction, no foe could withstand them. God fought on their behalf. When they did falter in their faith or failure to maintain their

holy standing before the Lord, they suffered failure and defeat. But thankfully God restored them upon their repentance and renewed faith and He directed them and blessed them until the day that most of their enemies had been subdued. But they had not been completely victorious or had not fully subdued their enemies. God purposed for some of their foes to continue in spite of Israel's efforts. But in allowing this God was preserving His people from other potential threats to their existence. This is what the Lord said through Moses when He promised His people that He would give them victory in the Promised Land

“If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’—¹⁸you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: ¹⁹the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which the LORD your God brought you out. So shall the LORD your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. ²⁰Moreover the LORD your God will send the hornet among them until those who are left, who hide themselves from you, are destroyed. ²¹You shall not be terrified of them; for the LORD your God, the great and awesome God, is among you. ²²***And the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you.*** ²³But the LORD your God will deliver them over to you, and will inflict defeat upon them until they are destroyed. (Deut. 7:17-23)

By way of application, God has called us to do battle against our sins, defeating them one by one, subduing them throughout life until He calls us into His presence. But if He were to give us a quick and total victory over all of those sins that trouble us, other issues would surface of perhaps greater danger to the well-being of our souls. I suspect that if we were not troubled by our sins, several unfortunate results would occur. We would probably become quite proud and self-righteous, and come to look down upon others who did not rise to our level of righteousness. We would also be impoverished for not having learned to trust our Lord to enable us to engage, persist in battle, until we overcome our enemies bringing glory to Him and humble gratefulness to us. We would not experience the mercy and grace of our Lord if we had no great threats to us or challenges before us.

God has promised us, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). May He enable each of us to go forth in faith in the strength and confidence of His promise. Let us use the means that He has given us to wage holy warfare against all of our sins, particularly the sin(s) that so easily ensnares us (Heb. 12:1f). We know that through His grace we will come off the field of battle as the victors.

Matthew Henry

on Sanctification

For the first, we may hence observe the nature of sanctification, what it is, and wherein it consists. In general it has two things in it, mortification and vivification--dying to sin and living to righteousness, elsewhere expressed by putting off the old man and putting on the new, ceasing to do evil and learning to do well.

1. **Mortification**, putting off the old man; several ways this is expressed.

(1) We must *live no longer in sin* (v. 2), we must not be as we have been nor do as we have done. The time past of our life must suffice (1 Pet. 4:3). Though there are none that live without sin, yet, blessed be God, there are those that do not live in sin, do not live in it as their element, do not make a trade of it: this is to be sanctified.

(2) *The body of sin must be destroyed* (v. 6). The corruption that dwelleth in us is the body of sin, consisting of many parts and members, as a body. This is the root to which the axe must be laid. We must not only cease from the acts of sin (this may be done through the influence of outward restraints, or other inducements), but we must get the vicious habits and inclinations weakened and destroyed; not only cast away the idols of iniquity out of the heart.--*That henceforth we should not serve sin*. The actual transgression is certainly in a great measure prevented by the crucifying and killing of the original corruption. Destroy the body of sin, and then, though there should be Canaanites remaining in the land, yet the Israelites will not be slaves to them. It is the body of sin that sways the sceptre, wields the iron rod; destroy this, and the yoke is broken. The destruction of Eglon the tyrant is the deliverance of oppressed Israel from the Moabites.

(3) *We must be dead indeed unto sin* (v. 11). As the death of the oppressor is a release, so much more is the death of the oppressed (Job 3:17f). Death brings a writ of ease to the weary. Thus must we be dead to sin, obey it, observe it, regard it, fulfil its will no more than he that is dead doth his *quandam* task-masters--be as indifference to the pleasures and delights of sin as a man that is dying is to his former diversions. He that is dead is separated from his former company, converse, business, enjoyments, employments, is not what he was, does not what he did, has not what he had. Death makes a mighty change; such a change doth sanctification make in the soul, it cuts off all correspondence with sin.

(4) *Sin must not reign in our mortal bodies that we should obey it* (v. 12). Though sin may remain as an outlaw, though it may oppress as a tyrant, yet let it not reign as a king. Let it not make laws, nor preside in councils, nor command the militia; let it not be uppermost in the soul, so that we should obey it. Though we may be sometimes overtaken and overcome by it, yet let us never be obedient to it in the lusts thereof; let not sinful lusts be a law to you, to which you would yield a consenting obedience. *In the lusts thereof--en tais epithymiais autou*. It refers to the body, not to sin. Sin lies very much in the gratifying of the body, and humouring that. And there is a reason implied in the phrase *your mortal body*; because it is a mortal body, and hastening apace to the dust, therefore let not sin reign in it. It was sin that made our bodies mortal, and therefore do not yield obedience to such an enemy.

(5) We must not *yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness* (v. 13). The members of the body are made use of by the corrupt nature as tools, by which the wills of the flesh are fulfilled; but we must not consent to that abuse. The members of the body are fearfully and wonderfully made; it is a pity they should be the devil's tools of *unrighteousness unto sin*, instruments of the sinful actions, according to the sinful dispositions. Unrighteousness is unto sin; the sinful acts confirm and strengthen the sinful habits; one sin begets another; it is like the letting forth of water, therefore leave it before it be meddled with. The members of the body may perhaps, through the prevalency of temptation, be forced to be instruments of sin; but do not yield them to be so, do not consent to it. This is one branch of sanctification, the mortification of sin.

2. **Vivification**, or living to righteousness; and what is that?

(1) It is to *walk in newness of life* (v. 4). Newness of life supposes newness of heart, for out of the heart are the issues of life, and there is no way to make the stream sweet but by making the spring so. Walking, in scripture, is put for the course and tenor of the conversation, which must be new. Walk by new rules, towards new ends, from new principles. Make a new choice of the way. Choose new paths to walk in, new leaders to walk after, new companions to walk with. Old things should pass away, and all things become new. The man is what he was not, does what he did not.

(2) It is to be *alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord* (v. 11). To converse with God, to have a regard to him, a delight in him, a concern for him, the soul upon all occasions carried out towards him as towards an agreeable object, in which it takes a complacency: this is to be alive to God. The love of God reigning in the heart is the life of the soul towards God. *Anima est ubi amat, non ubi animat--The soul is where it loves, rather than where it lives.* It is to have the affections and desires alive towards God. Or, *living* (our live in the flesh) *unto God*, to his honour and glory as our end, by his word and will as our rule--in all our ways to acknowledge him, and to have our eyes ever towards him; this is to live unto God.--*Through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Christ is our spiritual life; there is no living to God but through him. He is the Mediator; there can be no comfortable receivings from God, nor acceptable regards to God, but in and through Jesus Christ; no intercourse between sinful souls and a holy God, but by the mediation of the Lord Jesus. Through Christ as the author and maintainer of this life; through Christ as the head from whom we receive vital influence; through Christ as the root by which we derive sap and nourishment, and so live. In living to God, Christ is all in all.

(3) It is to *yield ourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead* (v. 13). The very life and being of holiness lie in the dedication of ourselves to the Lord, giving our own selves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5). “Yield yourselves to him, not only as the conquered yields to the conqueror, because he can stand it out no longer; but as the wife yields herself to her husband, to whom her desire is, as the scholar yields himself to the teacher, the apprentice to his master, to be taught and ruled by him. Not yield your estates to him, but yield yourselves; nothing less than your whole selves;” *parastesate eautous--accommodate vos ipsos Deo--accommodate yourselves to God*; so Tremellius, from the Syriac. “Not only submit to him, but comply with him; not only present yourselves to him once for all, but be always ready to serve him. Yield yourselves to him as wax to the seal, to take any impression, to be, and have, and do, what he pleases.” When Paul said, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* (Acts 9:6) he was then yielded to God. *As those that are alive from the dead.* To yield a dead carcass to a living God is not to please him, but to mock him: “Yield yourselves as those that are alive and good for something, a *living sacrifice*” (Rom. 12:1). The surest evidence of our spiritual life is the dedication of ourselves to God. It becomes those that are alive from the dead (it may be understood of a death in law), that are justified and delivered from death, to give themselves to him that hath so redeemed them.

(4) It is to yield *our members as instruments of righteousness to God*. The members of our bodies, when withdrawn from the service of sin, are not to lie idle, but to be made use of in the service of God. When the strong man armed is dispossessed, let him whose right it is divide the spoils. Though the powers and faculties of the soul be the immediate subjects of holiness and righteousness, yet the members of the body are to be instruments; the body must be always ready to serve the soul in the service of God. Thus (v. 19), “*Yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.* Let them be under the conduct and at the command of the righteous law of God, and that principle of inherent righteousness which the Spirit, as sanctifier, plants in the soul.” *Righteousness unto holiness*, which intimates growth, and progress, and ground obtained. As every sinful act confirms the sinful habit, and makes the nature more and more prone to sin (hence the members of a natural man are here said to be servants to *iniquity unto iniquity*--one sin makes the heart more disposed for another), so every gracious act confirms the gracious habit: serving righteousness is unto holiness; one duty fits us for another; and the more we do the more we may do for God. Or serving righteousness, *eis hagasmon--as an evidence of sanctification.*

The Reformed teaching vs. Keswick teaching on Sanctification On Romans 6:6

In Romans 6:6 Paul tells us the spiritual reality that our union with Jesus Christ has brought to our spiritual state. *“We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”* Paul uses some terms in his discussion of the believer’s sanctification, which are very important for us to define rightly. The English Standard Version (ESV) has the term, “old self”, to describe what resulted from our union with Christ in His death. The King James Version translation reads, “Knowing this, that our *old man* is crucified with Him.” What was Paul intending by this term?

Some, even many, have wrongly interpreted this term by saying that our “old man” means that our “sinful nature” was crucified, or put to death, through our union with Jesus Christ.¹⁶ They taught that in order to become sanctified, win victory over sin, you had to accept in faith the truth that your sinful nature had actually died. And so, if you believe that this actually occurred, then through this “faith” the power of God would be given to you and you would be enabled by God’s grace to say “no” to temptation to sin. In effect the teaching is that if you can convince yourself through faith that your sinful nature has actually died, then the power of God would transform your life.

There has been considerable misunderstanding of this phrase [i.e. “our old self/man was crucified with Him”] w, which, with its counterpart “the new man,” occurs also in Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:9-11 (cf. also Ephesians 2:15 and 4:13). Many popular discussions of Paul’s doctrine of the Christian life argue, or assume, that Paul distinguishes with these phrases between two parts or “natures” of a person. With this interpretation as the premise, it is then debated where the “old nature” is replaced with the “new nature” at conversion, or whether the “new nature” is added to the “old nature.” But the assumption that “old man” and “new man” refers to parts, or natures, of a person is incorrect. Rather, they designate the person as a whole, considered in relation to the corporate structure to which he or she belongs. “Old man” and “new man” are not, then, ontological, but relational or positional in orientation. They do not, at least in the first place, speak of a change of nature, but a change of relationship. “Our old man” is not our Adamic, or sin “nature that is judged and dethroned on the cross, and to which is added in the believer another “nature,” “the new man.” Rather, the “old man” is what we were “in Adam”—the “man” of the old age, who lives under the tyranny of sin and death. As J. R. W. Stott puts it, “what was crucified with Christ was not part of me called my old nature, but the whole of me as I was before I was converted.”¹⁷

This errant view of sanctification has been known as the *Keswick view of sanctification*. Although few are aware of its origin, it is a view about sanctification--receiving God’s grace for living--which is probably held by most evangelicals. I held this view for years. The teaching has been around since about 1875. It began and was popularized in Bible conferences that were held annually at Keswick, England, from which it derived its name. The teaching is also sometimes referred to as “Victorious-life teaching,” or “The Deeper Life” or “The Higher Christian Life.” It is held by many but is popularized by some more than others: It is the view that is put forward by **Campus Crusade’s** little tract, *“How to Live the Spirit-Filled Life.”* Its principle argument is as follows: based on Romans 6:1-14 it is argued that a “person can be a true Christian but with an unsundered life, but through a crisis of surrender the victorious life might begin for such a defeated Christian.”¹⁸ This theory of sanctification involves three essential points (also taken from above book):

¹⁶ For example, this was the teaching of J. Vernon McGee. “Coming to know this, that our old man (Adamic nature, our old self—old nature) was crucified with Him (Christ), that the body (Greek *soma*) meaning corpse) of sin might be paralyzed (cancelled, nullified), that henceforth we should not be a slave to sin.” J. Vernon McGee, **Reasoning Through Romans**, part 1 (Thru the Bible Books), p. 98.

¹⁷ Douglas J. Moo, **The Epistle to the Romans** (Eerdmans, 1996), pp, 373f.

¹⁸ Henry Boardman, **The “Higher Life” Doctrine of Sanctification, Tried by the Word of God** (Sprinkle Publications, 1996, orig. 1877), p. ii.

1. A Christian can truly be justified but still under sin's dominion. What is needed is a second work of grace in which self is taken off the throne of one's heart and Christ is enthroned.

2. Through certain steps, a Christian may enter into this place of victorious Christian living.

(a) The believer must consciously reckon himself to be dead unto sin (Rom. 6). You have to *believe* this before you can *experience* it.

(b) The believer must consciously rely on Christ rather than himself to defeat temptation and sin and prompt righteousness.

(c) He must "believe" in Christ's resurrection power in order to spiritually receive this power.

3. A Christian must cease to exert all personal effort, and trust Christ alone to do work in him. Any effort to keep God's commands or any inclination of duty or responsibility to do so is to be avoided, for that is self-effort, and doomed to failure. Thus, *the Christian is to be passive*. If the Christian tries to resist directly the urges to sin, he will fail. Things like commands and practical instruction are counter-productive, for we do not have the ability to do the things God commands us; the life we lead must be by faith: It is He who lives His life through us." "Let go and let God." "Rest" in Him. "Let Him take over."

To show us how pervasive this kind of teaching is among evangelicals and why it is not biblical, I would like us to consider an extended description of the historical development of this teaching that **J. I. Packer** rehearsed in his book, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*. In this book he described the danger of being out of balance and out of step with what the Scriptures each regarding the power of the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Spirit in human lives, first taught with emphasis by seventeenth-century Puritans, became a matter of debate among Evangelicals in the eighteenth century, when John Wesley began to teach that the Spirit will root sin out of men's hearts entirely in his life. This was the "scriptural holiness" that Wesley believed God had raised up Methodism to spread. Non-Wesleyans recoiled, seeing the claim as unbiblical and delusive, and they constantly warned their constituencies against it. By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the pendulum of reaction was thought to have swung too far; and many felt, rightly or wrongly, that anti perfectionist zeal had left Christians simply unaware that God has power to deliver from sinful practices, to energize a calmly triumphant righteousness, and to give piercing efficacy to preachers' utterances. Quite suddenly the theme of power in human lives caught as the topic for sermons, books, and informal discussion groups ("conversation meetings" as they were called) on both side of the Atlantic. What was said by Phoebe Palmer, Asa Mahan, Robert Pearsall Smith, and Hannah Whitehall Smith, Evan Hopkins, Andrew Murray, R. A. Torrey, Charles G. Trumbull, Robert C. Mcquilkin, F. B. Meyer, H. C. G. Moule, and others who spent their strength proclaiming the "secret" (their word) of power for believers was hailed as virtually a new revelation, which indeed the teachers themselves took it to be. A new evangelical movement was off and running.

The "secret" of what was sometimes called the Higher or Victorious Life has been most fully institutionalized in England's annual Keswick Convention week. There to this day there operates, like a jazz band's "head" arrangement, an agreed understanding that Monday's theme is sin, Tuesday's is Christ who saves from sin, Wednesday's is consecration, Thursday's is life in the Spirit, and Friday's is empowered service by the sanctified, especially in missions. A Keswick periodical was launched in 1874, called *The Christian's Pathway of Power*. After five years it changed its name to *The Life of Faith*, but this did not mean any change of character; faith is the pathway of power according to Keswick. Keswick's influence has been worldwide. "Keswicks" crop up all over the English speaking world. "Keswick teaching has come to be regarded as one of the most potent spiritual forces in recent Church history."¹⁹ Preachers "of Keswick type," specializing in convention addresses about power, have become a distinct evangelical ministerial species, alongside evangelists, Bible teachers, and speakers on prophetic subjects. Thus institutionalized and with its supporting constituency of those who appreciate Keswick ethos—

¹⁹ Steven Barabas, **So Great Salvation** (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1952), p. v.

equable, cheerful, controlled, fastidious, very congenial to the middle class—the Keswick message of power for sanctity and service is plainly here to stay for some time yet...

Yet pleasure in today's power talk cannot be unmixed. For experience shows that when the power theme is made central to our thinking about the Spirit and is not anchored in a deeper view of the Spirit's ministry with a different center, unhappy disfigurements soon creep in. What sort of disfigurements? Well, take the following for starters. Pietistic concentration of interest on the felt ups and downs of the soul as it seeks power over this and then tends to produce an egoistic, introverted cast of mind that becomes indifferent to community concerns and social needs. The Spirit's work tends to be spoken of man centeredly, as if God's power is something made available for us to switch on and *use* (a frequent, telltale Keswick word) by a technique of thought and will for which *consecration and faith* is the approved name. Also, the idea gets around that God's power works in us automatically so far as we let it do so, so that in effect we regulate it by the degree of our consecration and faith at any one time. Another notion popping up is that inner passivity, waiting for God's power to carry us along, is a required state of the heart ("let go and let God," as the too popular slogan has it). Then, too, in evangelizing, it is almost conventional in certain circles to offer "power for living" to the spiritual needy as a resource that, apparently, they will be privileged to harness and control once they have committed themselves to Christ.

But all this sounds more like an adaption of yoga than like biblical Christianity. To start with, it blurs the distinction between manipulating divine power at one's will (which is magic, exemplified by Simon Magus [Acts 8:18-24]) and experiencing it as one obeys God's will (which is religion, exemplified by Paul [2 Corinthians 12:9, 10]). Furthermore, it is not realistic. Evangelists' talk regularly implies that, once we become Christians, God's power in us will immediately cancel out defects of character and make our whole lives plain sailing. This however is so unbiblical as to be positively dishonest. Certainly sometimes God works wonders of sudden deliverance from this or that weakness at conversion, just as at he sometimes does at other times; but every Christian's life is a constant fight against the pressures and pulls of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and his battle for Christ likeness (that is, habits of wisdom, devotion, love, and righteousness) is as grueling as it is unending. To suggest otherwise when evangelizing is a kind of confidence trick. Again Keswick talk regularly encourages us to expect at once too much and not enough—full freedom from the down drag of sin on a moment-by-moment basis (too much), yet without any progressive loosening of the grip of sin on our hearts at motivational level (not enough). This is bad theology, and is psychologically and unspiritually unreal into the bargain.²⁰

J. I. Packer himself had held this Keswick view of sanctification when he was a younger man. He attributes reading a book on sanctification which showed him his error and directed him to biblical truth. This was the classic work on the biblical teaching of sanctification. It is the book entitled *Holiness*, written by **J. C. Ryle**, originally published in 1877. Ryle wrote the book to counter and correct the Keswick teaching of sanctification that was becoming popularized at that time. It remains one of the best books available that sets forth the Bible's teaching about the believer's sanctification. Ryle began to address the problem by posing a series of questions to the reader that, if pondered in the light of Scripture, would show the Keswick view of sanctification to be in error. Here are the questions that Ryle posed:

(1) I ask, in the first place, whether it is wise to speak of faith as the one thing needful, and the only thing required, as many seem to do now-a-days in handling the doctrine of sanctification? - Is it wise to proclaim in so bald, naked, and unqualified a way as many do, that the holiness of converted people is by faith only, and not at all by personal exertion? Is it according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it.

(2) I ask, in the second place, whether it is wise to make so little as some appear to do, comparatively, of the many practical exhortations to holiness in daily life which are to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the latter part of most of St. Paul's epistles? Is it according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it.

(3) I ask, in the third place, whether it is wise to use vague language about perfection, and to press on Christians a standard of holiness, as attainable in this world for which there is no warrant to be shown either in Scripture or experience? I doubt it.

²⁰ J. I. Packer, **Keep in Step with the Spirit** (Intervarsity Press, 1984), pp. 24-27.

(4) In the fourth place, is it wise to assert so positively and violently, as many do, that the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans does not describe the experience of the advanced saint, but the experience of the unregenerate man, or of the weak and un-established believer? I doubt it.

(5) In the fifth place, is it wise to use the language which is often used in the present day about the doctrine of "Christ in us"? I doubt it.

Is not this doctrine often exalted to a position which it does not occupy in Scripture? I am afraid that it is. That the true believer is one with Christ and Christ in him, no careful reader of the New Testament will think of denying for a moment. There is, no doubt, a mystical union between Christ and the believer. With Him we died, with Him we were buried, with Him we rose again, with Him we sit in heavenly places. We have five plain texts where we are distinctly taught that Christ is "in us." (Rom. viii. 10; Gal. ii. 20; iv. 19; Eph. iii. 17; Col. iii. 11.) But we must be careful that we understand what we mean by the expression. That "Christ dwells in our hearts by faith," and carries on His inward work by His Spirit, is clear and plain. But if we mean to say that beside, and over, and above this there is some mysterious indwelling of Christ in a believer, we must be careful what we are about. Unless we take care, we shall find ourselves ignoring the work of the Holy Ghost. We shall be forgetting that in the Divine economy of man's salvation election is the special work of God the Father - atonement, mediation, and intercession, the special work of God the Son - and sanctification, the special work of God the Holy Ghost. We shall be forgetting that our Lord said, when He went away, that He would send us another Comforter, who should "abide with us" for ever, and, as it were, take His place. (John xiv. 16.) In short, under the idea that we are honouring Christ, we shall find that we are dishonouring His special and peculiar gift - the Holy Ghost. Christ, no doubt, as God, is everywhere - in our hearts, in heaven, in the place where two or three are met together in His name.

But we really must remember that Christ, as our risen Head and High Priest, is specially at God's right hand interceding for us until He comes the second time; and that Christ carries on His work in the hearts of His people by the special work of His Spirit, whom He promised to send when He left the world. (John xv. 26.) A comparison of the ninth and tenth verses of the eighth chapter of Romans seems to me to show this plainly. It convinces me that "Christ in us" means Christ in us "by His Spirit." Above all, the words of St. John are most distinct and express: "Hereby we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us." (1 John iii. 24.)

In saying all this, I hope no one will misunderstand me. I do not say that the expression, "Christ in us" is unscriptural. But I do say that I see great danger of giving an extravagant and unscriptural importance to the idea contained in the expression; and I do fear that many use it now-a-days without exactly knowing what they mean, and unwittingly, perhaps, dishonour the mighty work of the Holy Ghost. If any readers think that I am needlessly scrupulous about the point, I recommend to their notice a curious book by Samuel Rutherford (author of the well-known letters), called "The Spiritual Antichrist." They will there see that two centuries ago the wildest heresies arose out of an extravagant teaching of this very doctrine of the "indwelling of Christ" in believers. They will find that Saltmarsh, and Dell, and Towne, and other false teachers, against whom good Samuel Rutherford contended, began with strange notions of "Christ in us," and then proceeded to build on the doctrine antinomianism, and fanaticism of the worst description and vilest tendency. They maintained that the separate, personal life of the believer was so completely gone, that it was Christ living in him who repented, and believed, and acted! The root of this huge error was a forced and unscriptural interpretation of such texts as "I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. ii. 20.) And the natural result of it was that many of the unhappy followers of this school came to the comfortable conclusion that believers were not responsible, whatever they might do! Believers, forsooth, were dead and buried; and only Christ lived in them, and undertook everything for them! The ultimate consequence was, that some thought they might sit still in a carnal security, their personal accountableness being entirely gone, and might commit any kind of sin without fear! Let us never forget that truth, distorted and exaggerated, can become the mother of the most dangerous heresies. When we speak of "Christ being in us," let us take care to explain what we mean. I fear some neglect this in the present day.

(6) In the sixth place, is it wise to draw such a deep, wide, and distinct line of separation between conversion and consecration [in other words, between justification and sanctification so as to sever them from one another--

Lars], or the higher life, so called, as many do draw in the present day? Is this according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it.

(7) In the seventh and last place, is it wise to teach believers that they ought not to think so much of fighting and struggling against sin, but ought rather to "yield themselves to God" and be passive in the hands of Christ? Is this according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it.

It is a simple fact that the expression "yield yourselves" is only to be found in one place in the New Testament, as a duty urged upon believers. That place is in the sixth chapter of Romans, and there within six verses the expression occurs five times. (See Rom. vi. 13-19.) But even there the word will not bear the sense of "placing ourselves passively in the hands of another." Any Greek student can tell us that the sense is rather that of actively "presenting" ourselves for use, employment, and service. (See Rom. xii. 1.) The expression therefore stands alone. But, on the other hand, it would not be difficult to point out at least twenty-five or thirty distinct passages in the Epistles where believers are plainly taught to use active personal exertion, and are addressed as responsible for doing energetically what Christ would have them do, and are not told to "yield themselves" up as passive agents and sit still, but to arise and work. A holy violence, a conflict, a warfare, a fight, a soldier's life, a wrestling, are spoken of as characteristic of the true Christian. The account of "the armour of God" in the sixth chapter of Ephesians, one might think, settles the question. Again, it would be easy to show that the doctrine of sanctification without personal exertion, by simply "yielding ourselves to God," is precisely the doctrine of the antinomian fanatics in the seventeenth century (to whom I have referred already, described in Rutherford's *Spiritual Antichrist*), and that the tendency of it is evil in the extreme. Again, it would be easy to show that the doctrine is utterly subversive of the whole teaching of such tried and approved books as *Pilgrim's Progress*, and that if we receive it we cannot do better than put Bunyan's old book in the fire! If Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* simply yielded himself to God, and never fought, or struggled, or wrestled, I have read the famous allegory in vain. But the plain truth is, that men will persist in confounding two things that differ - that is, justification and sanctification. In justification the word to be addressed to man is believe - only believe; in sanctification the word must be "watch, pray, and fight." What God has divided let us not mingle and confuse.²¹

Ryle's method of introducing his subject is very effective. By asking these questions and explaining their implications, he was able to erode the presumptive and uncritical belief of his readers. He set them to thinking and thereby doubting whether their position was true to all of Scripture. Essentially he moved the reader by his book's introduction to become teachable regarding the matter of the believer's sanctification.

²¹ J. C. Ryle, **Holiness** (Charles Nolan Publishers, 2001, orig. 1877), pp. xvii-xxviii.