

IT'S ALL ABOUT NEW LIFE

Romans 6:1-16, 22-23

At the same time, we are apprehensive of the unknown and fascinated by new things. We are a little cautious about moving to a new town or taking a new job but we get excited about a new car. How do people face the situation of a new life? Isn't this exactly what Christianity is all about – a new life? There are not many situations in the secular world that involves getting a new life. Sometimes major surgery can correct a significant medical problem and people get what they call a "new lease on life." It is still the same life they had before. The closest thing that comes to mind is what happens to a person who gets into the federal "witnesses' protection program." In this program a person is given a new name, a new identity, moved to a new location and all associations with the past are cut off. It is just as if the former person died and a new person suddenly appeared. Facing a new life situation creates real challenges and many people in those programs find it very difficult to adjust their *lifestyle* to their new *life*.

Adjusting a lifestyle to a new life is the essence of growing and maturing as a Christian. In the case of those in the witnesses' protection programs, they have not had any basic change in who they really are. These people are pretending to be someone else and they must maintain constant vigilance to not let their true character come out. The situation for a Christian is not the same in that, for those who have been born again, their basic character HAS changed and the demands and restraints that influenced the old character have no legitimate power over the new person.

You may have heard stories about some in the witnesses' protection program who assume a new identity and then get back into a life of crime in their new situation. They think that if they get caught doing something wrong that they won't go to jail because they are "in the program." This type of thinking is not the intent of the program but those who would abuse the protected situation they are in just see it as a reason to get involved in more and more crime since they feel as if they are immune. Paul found a similar kind of thinking among those who heard his message about the grace of God being more than sufficient to provide atonement for our sins. We see this question addressed in the sixth chapter of his letter to the Christians in Rome.

Living a New Identity – Rom 6:1-4

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? ² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:1-4 (NASB95)

In the last couple of verses of chapter five, Paul commented that the effects of God's grace exceeded the effects of sin so that death does not have to be the ultimate outcome for those who put their trust in God's provision for salvation. That does **not** mean that we have a license to sin or that we should continue in the old lifestyle we lived before we were born again of the Spirit of God. Some may have twisted the argument that Paul made and claimed that since grace was so much more powerful than sin and that God's grace was unlimited and could exceed our sin and guilt, then perhaps we should sin more so that there would be even more grace. That seems to be a silly argument; however, there are silly people in the world. Paul's response to this argument was an emphatic "God forbid!" Those who would make such a claim had missed the point of what salvation was all about.

Apparently, those who were raising such questions viewed salvation in terms of behavior

adjustment and did not grasp the idea that what is involved is a death and a new birth. “Old things have passed away and all things are new” as Paul wrote to the church at Corinth regarding those who are “in Christ.” Paul used the picture of water baptism to explain what being “in Christ” is about. As we look at these verses, let’s use the English word meaning of the term “baptize” so that we do not confuse the ritual of baptism with the reality of being immersed in Christ.

Verse three is telling us that if you have been immersed in Christ (that you are “in Christ”), then you have become a participant in His death – meaning that you (your old life) were crucified in His death. What do we do with someone who has died? We bury the body to remove it from the environment where life is happening. Burial is also a confirmation that death has occurred. In the same way that we died (being immersed) in Christ, we were buried with Him by virtue of the truth that we are immersed in Christ. Simply stated that since we are immersed in Him, then whatever happens to Him happens to us, also. In more conventional religious terms we would say that we are “baptized into His death and His burial.”

Let’s take this one step further. For practically every situation you can image, when we bury someone who has died, then that is the end of it. Does that apply to the situation that Paul is telling us about? The answer is “yes” and “no.” The “yes” portion of this answer applies to the old nature that was inherited from Adam. That “life” died and was buried and that is the end of it. The “no” portion of the answer comes about because a new life has been created. Just as God raised Jesus from death and He was alive, we are resurrected with a new life that has its source in God.

Paul used the picture of baptism to illustrate his point. This is a key passage for us in our understanding of what Christian baptism means. It is a dramatization or an outward visible sign of an inner spiritual reality. There are two things illustrated in the baptism picture: Burial and Resurrection. It is fairly obvious that the immersion in the water is illustrative of the burial of Christ and our being buried with Him. It is also fairly obvious that the coming up out of the water is illustrative of Christ’s being raised from death. There are two other things implied by the burial and resurrection. The burial implies that we are dead. How are we dead? We are dead to the things of the world. We are dead to self. We are dead in that we identify with Jesus in His death. The resurrection implies that we have a new life source – that we have a new kind of life and should, therefore, participate in a new way of living. As Paul put it we also should walk in newness of life.

Living with Christ – Rom 6:5-11

⁵For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:5-11 (NASB95)

If we look at the total picture, we see that Jesus did not stay dead. Therefore, we must not stop with just reckoning ourselves dead to sin and daily taking up our cross, we must also see ourselves as being alive as we identify with Jesus in His resurrection. The sequence is that we die to sin and live to God. So many times we try to hang on to the old lifestyles and the worldly way of doing things and then try to fit the new life in on top of everything else. This causes confusion and frustration in the life of the Christian. We cannot have it both ways. We must go by the way of the cross in order to experience the resurrection.

The benefits of the old self being dead is that all the demands and debts associated with this former life now are made to be of no effect or consequence. Paul used a picture related to the culture of that day that had some people who were slaves. The slave owner could require the slave to do work and perform certain tasks. If the slave died, then all the requirements and demands of the owner were of zero consequences. In a real sense, all humanity was in a condition of slavery to sin and one sure way out of that condition was by death. That is not a very satisfying solution unless the life can be replaced and this is the good news of what God has done for us in Christ.

Consider, for example, someone who lives in a state that has a state income tax. The only legitimate way he can avoid paying taxes on his earned income is to earn so little as to be exempt from taxes or to move to another state. If the person moved out of that state, then the former state authorities would have no right to collect taxes from him. The authorities might notice that they had not received their tax payment. They might then send that person a notice demanding payment of taxes. The letter would go to the person's former address and the Post Office would forward the letter to their new address. The person could simply send a reply to the tax collectors stating he was no longer a resident and that would settle the issue.

In a similar way, when we become Christians, the demands of sin on our lives are no longer valid. When the devil makes a demand on our lives we take care of it by realizing that we no longer live in that "state." We have become citizens of a new "state" that is free from the demands of sin and free to live as God intended His children to live.

Living as God Wants – Rom 6:12-14

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. Romans 6:12-14 (NASB95)

After we have reckoned ourselves to be dead indeed to sin but alive unto God in Christ, then the practical outcome of that reality is that sin can no longer control our physical bodies. We do not have to follow the enticements and temptations that come our way – in fact, we are specifically instructed to **not** let it happen.

D. A. Carson has noted in *The New Bible Commentary* that

Our identification with Christ in his death must be seized and acted upon if it is to become effective in subduing the power of sin in our lives. Thus Paul exhorts us to recognize who we now are in Christ (11) and to put that new identity into effect by dethroning sin in our daily behavior (12–13). This victory over sin is possible, Paul reminds us in a summary of verses 1–10, because *sin shall not be your master* (the future tense is used to stress that at no time will sin ever have domination over us again). For we are no longer *under law*—that is, under the regime of the Mosaic law in which sin ‘increased’ (5:20) and brought wrath (4:15)—but *under grace*—the new regime inaugurated by Christ in which ‘grace reigns through righteousness to bring eternal life.’

Is there any precedence that would suggest that after we have received justification through faith and the hope of the glory of God through God’s grace that we should have to DO something if (as D. A. Carson has written) “it is to become effective” over the power of sin in our lives? The primary example in scripture that is related to this is found in the Book of Joshua. God had delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery and had guided them through the wilderness and into the Promised Land and they discovered that there were battles to be fought and the inhabitant of the land dispossessed and removed BEFORE they would be able to enjoy and benefit from all that God had given them. We tend to forget we are engaged in a battle and we are not to surrender to the enemy. We are not to give up and yield any part of ourselves to

the enemy. On the other hand, we are to be completely and totally surrendered to God.

Living for a New Lord – Rom 6:15-16, 22-23

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! ¹⁶ Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

²² But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:15-16, 22-23 (NASB95)

This new way of living is possible because we are under grace and not under the law. Since we are dead to sin, then sin does not have dominion or power over us. We, as human beings cannot save ourselves, only God can do that and He has chosen the sacrificial death of His only begotten Son to be the way into this salvation. Just because we can do nothing to save ourselves does not give us a license to live just any way. The practical outworking of this salvation is that we are placed in a new realm or a new world of **righteousness** and **freedom** and **life**, rather than one of **sin** and **slavery** and **death**.

A person can be either a servant of righteousness or a servant of sin. We really don't have any other choices. Being a servant of righteousness has certain claims on our lives and being a servant of sin has a different set of claims. If we are serving sin, then the claims of righteousness have no effect on us. For example, a person living in Virginia does not have to buy a Tennessee license tag for his automobile; however, he does have to pay income tax to Virginia.

Paul asked a question that each person needs to consider: If we live according to the way of the world and live a life of sin, then what is the outcome (fruit) of such a life? The only conclusion is that the outcome is death! The obvious next question is this: If we are delivered from sin and become servants of God, then what is the outcome (fruit) of that life? The result is holiness that ends in eternal life. This is the choice that every person must make: "Will I choose death or will I choose life?" These two outcomes are decided by the choice of "Will I choose sin or will I choose righteousness." These are decided by the choice of "Will I choose the way of the world or will I choose Jesus." It's your life, and only you can make the choice.