

Chapter Three – Romans 6:1-10

Dead to Sin in Romans 6

1What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

4Therefore 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. 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, 6knowing 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; 7for he who has died is freed from sin.

8Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master 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.

How does Paul speak of the death of Christ in Romans 6? If the Galatian and Corinthian passages are great pieces of art, can we display them in the Romans 6 wing of Paul's gallery? Will they fit there and enhance the beauty of that room? Or, is Romans 6 different, a contrasting shade of color, or a different technique that clashes with the Galatian and Corinthian pieces?

I suppose that even though 2 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 2, passages with strikingly similar terminology to Romans 6, speak of Christ's death in substitutionary ways, Romans 6 still could have a different shade of meaning. Paul could be introducing a new topic or revealing a new application to Christ's death that he doesn't mention in other places. The question is, does he?

We will attempt to answer this question by looking at four points in the opening verses of Romans 6 – the death of Christ language, baptism, the phrase *once for all*, and the idea of death as master.

The Death of Christ Language in Romans 6

What strikes me first in Romans 6 is that Paul speaks of Christ's *death to sin* with little or no explanatory notes. Having spoken of Christ's death in his other writings as a substitutionary death, it would seem that if he is going to give it a new meaning, he would preface his death to sin statements with such an explanatory note.⁶¹ But he doesn't, instead, he employs already used

⁶¹ Such as, "Now, let me tell you what else He did on the cross."

language in Romans and takes for granted that his readers know he is talking about familiar themes. Previously, Paul made these statements about the death of Christ.

- We have been justified by grace through His redemption (3:24).
- God displayed Him publicly as a propitiation in His blood (3:25).
- He was delivered over for our transgressions and raised because of our justification (4:25).
- Christ died for the ungodly and sinners (5:6, 8).
- We have been justified by His blood (5:9).
- We have been reconciled through the death of His Son (5:10).

Redemption, propitiation, justification, and reconciliation – major biblical themes describing Christ’s accomplishment on the cross – are Paul’s words of choice in the early chapters of Romans. When he speaks of Christ’s death in Chapter 6, should we not assume he is talking in the same realm of substitution unless otherwise noted? No transition to another kind of death shows up. Paul speaks simply of His death (6:3, 5) and the death that He died (6:10).

In the immediately preceding context of 5:12-21 Paul contrasts Christ with Adam. Adam disobeyed and brought condemnation. Christ obeyed and brought justification. Adam brought the reign of death; Jesus brought the reign of grace to eternal life. In short, Christ reversed the devastation of Adam’s disobedience. But how did He do it? Paul explains it in 5:18-19.⁶²

¹⁸So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

To grasp the significance of these verses that help form the background to the death of Christ in chapter 6, let’s take a closer look at the contrast between Adam and Christ in 5:15-21. First, I will set the key phrases next to each other. Then, I will make several observations about the question before us about Romans 6.

⁶² Almost all commentators point out that Paul did not finish his thought in 5:12 but broke it off in 5:13-14 to handle a couple of side issues relating to sin and death before the Mosaic Law. Then in 5:15, he starts the Adam/Christ contrast and in 18-19 completes the thought he introduced in 5:12. Wright calls it “the key sentence...in which Paul at last says what he has been waiting to say for five verses.” *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, Volume X, *Romans*, N.T. Wright, p 528.

TABLE 2		
Adam		Christ
The transgression – by the transgression of the one the many died.	15 15 15	The free gift – by the grace of the One Man the grace of God and the gift by the grace abounded to the many.
The judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation.	16 16 16	The free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification.
By the transgression of the one death reigned through the one.	17 17	Through the one Jesus Christ those who receive ... the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign
Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all.	18 18	Through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all.
Through one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.	19 19	Through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.
Transgression increased.	20	Grace abounded.
Sin reigned in death.	21	Grace reigns through righteousness to life.

In 5:15, Paul emphasizes the nature of Adam’s and Christ’s actions. The nature of Adam’s action was transgression – the breaking of a known command or the crossing of a boundary. The essence of Christ’s action was grace. Adam broke God’s command, but Christ – the free gift mentioned in the opening phrase – offered Himself. Stott eloquently speaks of “this enormous disparity” between Adam’s “self-assertion” and Christ’s “self-sacrifice.”⁶³ Many commentators also point out the abundance of “gift” words in this verse⁶⁴ – “free gift” (*charisma*), grace (*charis*), and the gift (*dorea*) by that grace.

- *Free gift* – *charisma* – refers to Christ offering Himself in submission to the Father on the cross.
- The *grace* of God – *charis* – refers to the gracious disposition of God towards sinners.
- The *gift* – *dorea* – by the grace (*charis*) of the One Man refers to the status of righteousness conferred upon those who believe.⁶⁵

⁶³ “Paul has called Adam the type or prototype of Christ (14). But he has no sooner made this statement that he feels embarrassed by the anomaly, the impropriety, of what he has said. To be sure, there is a superficial similarity between them in that each is one man through whose one deed enormous numbers of people have been affected. But there indubitably the likeness between them ends. How can the Lord of glory be likened to the man of shame, the Savior to the sinner, the giver of life to the broker of death?” Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 154-155

⁶⁴ “This reiteration of emphasis upon grace is not redundancy but, in a manner characteristic of the apostle, an eloquent fullness and variety of expression to advertise the freeness from every angle of thought,” Murray, 193-94

⁶⁵ See Moo, 334-337 for a full explanation of the nuances of each Greek word in Paul’s sentence.

In 5:16, Paul emphasizes the immediate effects of Adam’s and Christ’s actions. Adam’s transgression caused a judgment (judicial decree) to arise. The judicial decree was condemnation. Paul contrasts the judgment arising with the free gift (of Christ offering Himself) arising which led to a different judicial decree – justification.

Paul makes one other contrast in 5:16 – one transgression / many transgressions. Adam’s one transgression led to condemnation to all. But the many transgressions of the world, including the ones that put Christ on the cross, led to justification! Stott points out, “The secular mind would have expected *many sins* to attract more judgment than one sin. But grace operates a different arithmetic.”⁶⁶

Stott then goes on to offer a famous quote from Charles Cranfield: “That one single misdeed should be answered by judgment. This is perfectly understandable. That the accumulated sins and guilt of all the ages should be answered by God’s free gift, this [is] the miracle of miracles, utterly beyond human comprehension!”⁶⁷

In 5:17, Paul emphasizes the ultimate effects of Adam’s and Christ’s actions. Adam’s transgression brought the reign of death. But Christ’s abundant grace brought the gift of righteousness (the verdict of justification) which means those who receive this abundant grace will reign. But Paul does not just make a one-to-one contrast. He uses the phrase “much more” and the word “abundance” to show how Christ’s work overwhelms the effects of Adam’s sin.⁶⁸

In 5:18-21, Paul uses the “just as ... even so” contrast to finish the thought he began in 5:12 where he spoke of Adam’s sin bringing death to the whole world – just as Adam ... even so Christ In 5:18, he reemphasizes the immediate results of Adam’s and Christ’s actions, in 5:19 he reemphasizes the nature of their acts, and in 5:20-21 he reemphasizes the ultimate effects of their courses of action.⁶⁹ When we look at Christ’s actions, we find these immediate and long-term effects:

⁶⁶ Stott, 155.

⁶⁷ Stott, 155.

⁶⁸ “The words *how much more*, together with the reference to God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness, alert us to expect a greater blessing. Even so, we are not prepared for what follows, namely that the recipients of God’s abundant grace will themselves reign in life. Formerly death was our king, and we were slaves under its totalitarian tyranny. What Christ has done for us is not just to exchange death’s kingdom for the much more gentle kingdom of life, while leaving us in the position of subjects. Instead, he delivers us from the rule of death so radically as to enable us to change places with it and rule over it, or reign in life,” Stott, 156.

⁶⁹ I am indebted to John Stott’s work, *The Message of Romans*, 155-156, where he identifies the three contrasts – the nature of their acts, the immediate results, and the ultimate results. Here is how they line up with one another.

5:15 speaks about	the nature of Adam’s and Christ’s actions	and is reemphasized in 5:19.
5:16 speaks about	the immediate consequences of Adam’s and Christ’s actions	and is reemphasized in 5:18.
5:17 speaks about	the ultimate effects of Adam’s and Christ’s actions	and is reemphasized in 5:20-21.

- 5:18 – Justification of life
- 5:19 – The many are made (constituted, given the status of⁷⁰) righteous
- 5:20 – Grace abounded
- 5:21 – Grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life

What is the purpose of this examination of Romans 5:12-21? Commentators and pastors, when trying to explain the meaning of Romans 6, frequently overlook these verses to provide insight for the interpretation of Romans 6! But these verses are the background to his thinking! What do these verses emphasize?

This immediate context to Paul's thoughts in Romans 6 and his fourteen contrasts between Adam and Christ in Table 1, speak at every point of Christ's work on the cross to rescue us from condemnation and to bring us into a justified position before God. If this is the background to Paul's thinking, why should we think Romans 6 is about anything else? When we add this to the several statements of His death in chapters 3:24-5:11 why would that death suddenly mean something other than His substitutionary death, especially if Paul does not explain it in any other terms or say He is introducing a new subject? Thus, when we find statements by Christian authors distinguishing the work of the Blood vs. the work of the Cross or statements that His death to sin is somehow different than His death for our *sins*, do we have any textual ground upon which to stand? When we hear that we have to find an extra meaning to the Cross, experience some inner death to a sinful nature within to get the upper hand over sin, or seek a "second blessing" to eradicate sin within, and when we hear that all of this comes from Romans 6, are we hearing from the word of God or listening to the words of man?

Paul says in 6:3 and 6:5 that we are baptized into *His death* and united in the likeness of *His death*. No other aspect of *His death* comes into view and Paul does not introduce any new meaning. The only new factor Paul introduces is to teach the Romans that *their* baptism into Christ was also a baptism into *His* death. This leads to our second point.

Our Baptism

Three times Paul mentions baptism, twice in 6:3 and once in 6:4.

³Or, do you not know that all of us who have been *baptized* into Christ Jesus have been *baptized* into His death? ⁴Therefore 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.

⁷⁰ "This making righteous however must be interpreted in the light of Paul's typical forensic categories. To be 'righteous' does not mean to be morally upright, but to be judged acquitted, cleared of all charges, in the heavenly judgment. Through Christ's obedient act, people become *really* righteous; but 'righteous' itself is a legal, not a moral, term in this context," Moo, 345.

I remember my pastor teaching through Romans 6 years ago when I was in high school. In his efforts to remain faithful to evangelical theology that one finds salvation by grace alone through faith alone with no works attached, and because he feared that some might construe baptism as a “work,” he valiantly proclaimed that Romans 6 did not contain one drop of water! He was fearful that by speaking of Christian baptism, he would be walking perilously close to the treacherous waters of baptismal regeneration apart from personal faith. He, therefore, proclaimed that Paul had Spirit-baptism in mind in this section.

This effort to remain true to justification by faith alone does not require one to force such a strained reading upon Paul’s text. John Stott points out that whenever a writer mentions baptism without any other modifier such as the Spirit or fire, water baptism is what the writer or speaker has in mind.⁷¹ Paul, therefore, was speaking of Christian baptism – the climax of a conversion process that began by responding with faith to the preaching of the Gospel and culminated in their public confession of Christ as Lord at their baptism. Lest any reader is confused at this point, Douglas Moo has offered the following helpful comment.

How, then, can we preserve the cruciality of faith at the same time as we do justice to the mediatorial role of baptism in this text? Here the suggestion of J. Dunn is helpful. He points out that the early church conceived of faith, the gift of the Spirit, and water baptism as components of one unified experience, which he calls “conversion-initiation.” Just as faith is always assumed to lead to baptism, so baptism always assumes faith for its validity. In vv.3-4, then, we can assume that baptism stands for the whole conversion-initiation experience, presupposing faith and the gift of the Spirit. What, we might ask, of the Christian who has not been baptized? While Paul never dealt with this question – and his first reaction would undoubtedly have been “Why hasn’t he been baptized?” – we must assume from the fact that faith is emblazoned in every chapter of Romans while baptism is mentioned in only two verses that genuine faith, even if it has not been “sealed” in baptism, is sufficient for salvation.⁷²

I agree and affirm that the passage is about Christian water baptism. At the climactic moment of the conversion process, when men and women confessed Jesus as Lord, they passed out of death into life, from the realm of the first man, Adam, with its sentence of condemnation to the realm of the Second Man, Jesus, with its sentence of justification. Sin used to reign in their lives. Now, grace reigns over them (5:21). If you look back at Table 1 contrasting Adam and Christ, you could say that one passes from the left column to the right column. Thankfully, a lot more than moving from one slot on a table to another is involved. Our status before God, conditioned at one time by our solidarity with Adam, has now changed. Now we find our status before God conditioned by our solidarity with Jesus Christ!

⁷¹ Stott, *Romans*, 173.

⁷² Moo, 366.

With this contrast fresh in his mind, Paul asks in 6:3, “Don’t you know this? Don’t you remember and know that when you confessed Christ as Lord and were baptized into Him, you were also baptized into His death? You were not only baptized into His death, you were also buried into that death which transferred you from the realm of Adam with its consequences to the realm of Christ with its benefits.

Why does Paul ask this question – *don’t you know*? He seems to think that because they recall one thing – their baptism into Christ – they should therefore know another thing – their baptism into Christ was a baptism into His death.

Perhaps Paul assumed that at, or before their baptism, they were instructed in this association. Or perhaps Paul assumed that they would naturally make the connection – if you come into union with Christ, this means that you come into union with all that He did for you – His death, burial, and resurrection.

It’s easy for us to make this association – having heard it times without number in sermons and baptism services, but for them, the association may not have been quite as easy. Young believers (not to mention us older ones!) often need reminding and reassurance. In addition, Dunn points out that in the ancient world the linking of baptism with death was not a natural one⁷³ and was most likely a Christian innovation going back to Jesus’ association of His death with baptism.⁷⁴

Dunn also points out that baptism would not necessarily be identified with burial as burials were not necessarily underground but above ground in tombs or caves. Thus, baptism by immersion would not provide a self-evident link with death unless they had been taught this.⁷⁵

But Paul wants to make sure they know this or call it to mind and asks *do you not know*? Dunn then shows that Paul wants to make sure they associate their union with Christ with His death. He states:

The new step Paul takes here is that of combining two strands of his own teaching which he had not hitherto linked – baptized into (union with) Christ (as in Gal 3:27 and 1 Cor 12:13)

⁷³ Baptism, instead, was more naturally related to cleansing which Christians also used as Ananias said to Paul, “Get up and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.” (Acts 22:16)

⁷⁴ “Jesus himself was remembered as having made the link (Mark 10:38-39; Luke 12:50), that is, explicitly using baptism as a metaphor for his own death, the imagery of death as an overwhelming torrent of destruction (Ps 69:2 [Aq 68:3]; Josephus, *War* 4.137). The *hagnoeite* therefore may refer implicitly to this tradition as something the Roman believers should know: Paul speaks of their being baptized to share Jesus’ death because Jesus before him had spoken of his own death as a “baptism” (cf. Cullmann, *Baptism*, 19-20; Robinson, *Wrestling*, 69; other bibliography in Halter, 530 n.25). If the Baptist had spoken of a baptism which all must undergo, and Jesus was remembered as having focused that baptism on himself then Paul here combines the two: all must be baptized with his baptism (see further Dunn, “Birth of a Metaphor”),” Dunn, 312.

⁷⁵ “This is the new or further teaching which Paul presumably wants to draw to their attention...Despite frequent assertions to the contrary ... baptism was not an obvious symbol for death ... The symbolism of cleansing was much more obvious; and since death did not necessarily mean burial under the surface of the earth (but typically in tombs and caves) the symbolism of immersion provided no self-evident link. The association of baptism and death is probably distinctively Christian.” Dunn 312

and dying with Christ (as in Gal 2:20 and 2 Cor 4:10-11). Whatever knowledge of these traditions Paul could assume on the part of his readers, he certainly points back to the Adam/Christ contrast of 5:12-21; they have died to sin (v2) because they have died with Christ and because Christ now lives beyond sin and death, a life which they can share.⁷⁶

What does all of this mean concerning our topic? By referring to the believers' baptism whereby they escaped condemnation and entered into justification and by linking it with the death of Christ, Paul cannot be talking about anything other than His substitutionary work and their identification with Christ who died for their sins. Paul, then, in this chapter is not referring to a secondary work of Christ in His death in which we mystically share to overcome sinful impulses.⁷⁷ When he speaks of our union with Christ in that death, he identifies it as our baptism/conversion. This is an event of justification, not sanctification.

But as with the other passages, it *leads to* sanctification. Paul gives a glimpse of this when he talks about our walking in the newness of life in 6:4. It is a subject he will address in 6:11-14 when he draws out the implications of our death and resurrection with Christ. He addresses it in 6:15-23 when he looks at it from the master/slave analogy, in 7:1-6 when he uses the husband/wife metaphor, and finally in 8:13ff in his full-blown exposition of life in the Spirit.

But for now, we are answering the question about the meaning of Christ's death in the opening verses of Romans 6. We have looked at the wider context of Romans 6 that points to it being a justification event, and we have looked at the baptism by which we participate in His death. Let's move to the third topic, the *once for all* language found in 6:10.

Once for All

If any verse could serve as a perfect lead-in to an additional meaning for Christ's death to sin, it is verse 10. Paul begins by saying, "For the death that He died" If he had wanted to give a meaning other than the substitutionary meaning to Christ's death, this would have been an ideal place to give such an additional meaning. For example, Paul could have said, "For the death that He died ... was a death that slew the Old Man within you to give you victory over those sinful desires." But he didn't say this or anything like it. Instead, he states, "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all."

Inside this concluding statement⁷⁸ is a remarkable and enlightening phrase – *once for all*. If you are an above-average Bible student or one who has heard sound, biblical teaching, this phrase will be familiar to you. We find it in several other New Testament passages – primarily in the book of Hebrews.

⁷⁶ Dunn, 312,313.

⁷⁷The Greek text is explicit. "We have been buried with Him through *the* baptism (*tou baptisματος*) into *the* death (*ton thanaton*)."

⁷⁸ This verse and 6:2 are like bookends. 6:2 says *we* died to sin. 6:10 says *He* died to sin and in between (6:3, 4, 5, 6, 8) Paul explains what His death to sin was about, and therefore, what our death to sin is about. 6:11, then begins the application of this theology.

[Christ] does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did *once for all* when He offered up Himself.

And not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place *once for all*, having obtained eternal redemption.

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*.⁷⁹

In the first passage (7:27), the author of Hebrews is contrasting the sacrificial ministry of Christ with that of the high priests under the Mosaic Law. They offered sacrifices for their sins and the sins of the people every day. But Christ did not have to offer a sacrifice for Himself because He was sinless. However, He did offer Himself for the people, and when He did it was *once for all*. Christ does not have to die every day or every year. His *once for all* death on the cross was enough to cover the sins of His people.

In the second passage (9:12), Christ entered *once for all* into the heavenly holy place. He entered through His blood and obtained eternal redemption. He doesn't have to enter every year like a high priest on the Day of Atonement and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. His blood was better than that of calves and goats. His blood was sufficient for our eternal redemption. He entered the heavenly holy place *once for all*.

In the third passage (10:10), the writer says Jesus offered His body *once for all* to sanctify⁸⁰ His people. He follows up this statement in 10:11-14 by emphasizing His one sacrifice for sins for all time.

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, *having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time*, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until his enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For *by one offering He has perfected for all time* those who are sanctified.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:10.

⁸⁰ In this book I have been contrasting justification (our once for all right standing with God) and sanctification (the process by which we become holy in our character and behavior). The New Testament writers, however, often use sanctification in a positional sense – we are *set apart* for God. This is one of those cases. Other verses which use sanctification in a positional sense are 1 Corinthians 1:2, 6:11; and Hebrews 2:11.

⁸¹ This terminology is also affirmed in Hebrews 9:26 – “*once* at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin...”; in 9:28 “Christ having been offered *once* to bear the sins of many...”; and in 1 Peter 3:18 – “For Christ also died for sins *once for all*, the just for the unjust...”

It is clear what the writer of Hebrews is talking about – the substitutionary work of Christ. His sacrifice is better than that of calves and goats. He obtained eternal redemption for us. He entered the heavenly holy place for us and set us apart to God. Nothing else has to be done. What Jesus did was sufficient to make us right with God.

This understanding of the work of Christ – made emphatic by the writer’s use of the *once for all* vocabulary – must guide our understanding of the death of Christ to sin *once for all* in Romans 6.⁸² If it means one thing in Hebrews, why would it mean something else in Romans 6, especially when these are the only uses of the phrase in the New Testament?

And we must not forget how Paul uses the once for all statement in Romans 6. He does not simply say that Christ died *for our sins* once for all, but that He died *to sin* once for all. This is our key phrase that many have so often misunderstood. But its use with the *once for all* terminology sheds light on its meaning. Christ dying to sin means He put away our sins by His substitutionary death on the cross. And if that is what it meant for Him, then that is what our death to sin must mean.

Finally, when Paul says that Christ is dead to sin, He does not mean that Christ is dead to sinful impulses within Him. After all, He had none.⁸³ Paul means that Christ no longer has to face its consequence – death – on our behalf. Or another way of putting this is, because of His *once for all* sacrifice, death is no longer master over Him.

Death is No Longer Master over Him

Romans 6:9 contains the final phrase that will help us determine what Paul is talking about in Romans 6 when He speaks of the death of Christ and our death with Him.

knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.

Christ has been raised! Christ never has to die again! What great news! But because Paul presents it as an accomplished fact, years after death lost its grip when He died and rose, we

⁸² Dodd, in his article “The Old Testament in the New,” makes the following observation. “If it can be shown that one particular sentence has been quoted in two or more writings of the New Testament, where we have no reason to suspect literary dependence of one writer on another, there is surely a fair presumption that the sentence had been recognized as having special significance for Christians at a date earlier than the first such quotation.” *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, edited by G.K. Beale, p. 170. Although Dodd is talking about Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, the principle would hold true for phrases found in the New Testament. Romans and Hebrews were written by two authors at two times to two groups. Their use of the same phrase – *once for all* – could indicate a pervasive use of the phrase in first century churches, or it could mean that Paul’s use became widespread so that the writer of Hebrews noticed it and used it to refer to the substitutionary death of Christ.

⁸³ To this idea Stott remarks, “What does verse 10 mean by saying ‘he died to sin, once for all’? It cannot mean He became unresponsive to it, because this would imply that He was formerly responsive to it. Was our Lord Jesus Christ at one time so alive to sin that He needed subsequently to die to it? And indeed was He so continuously alive to sin that He had to die to it decisively once and for all? Of course not. That would be intolerable,” *Men Made New*, 39.

overlook an unsettling truth – at one point death was master over Him. Compounding the oversight of this unsettling truth is the fact that we live centuries after the great event and perhaps years after we have received Him and lived in fellowship with Him. We have come to know Him as Sovereign Lord and a gracious Savior. To think that at one time something was master over Him is strange to our ears. Yet, this is what the text implies. If death is *no longer* master over Him, then at one time, death was master over Him.

It's strange to think of anything having mastery over Jesus. Sinful habits certainly did not. He lived a perfect life. Disease and demons did not. He healed the sick and cast out evil spirits with a word. The difficulties of life did not. He calmed the storms on the Sea of Galilee, raised people from the grave, and in His darkest moments in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross, He still displayed control, placed all His faith in His Father, laid down His life on His authority, and forgave His executioners. Nothing had mastery over Him, except, according to Paul's statement, death. How do we explain this?

Death was Jesus' master because Jesus voluntarily took the role of the substitute for our sins. Once Jesus took this role, He could take no other path than the one that led to death if He was to come out on the other side of death with our justification.

Jesus entered into this role at His birth. Paul tells us in Galatians 4:4 that Christ was born *of a woman* – emphasizing His full entrance into and participation in our humanity. Though He did not partake of our sinful nature, He did partake of human nature and voluntarily entered into the realm of Adam conditioned by his sin. But the realm of Adam has no way out of its predicament except through death. As Paul said in 5:12, *death spread to all men* and in 5:14, *death reigned*. Death became the master of every man, including the Perfect Man because He willingly accepted the role of the One who would bear death on behalf of all and reverse the effect of Adam's sin. Once He entered into this realm where death reigned, no way out existed except to let death have its way with Him, to let death be His master.

Paul says more in Galatians 4. He says that He was also born *under the Law*. To be born under the Law means one is born under the obligation to keep the Law and therefore under the curse of the Law if one does not keep it. And even though Christ never broke the Law, He came to bear the curse of the Law on our behalf.⁸⁴ Therefore, from His earthly beginning, even though He was no lawbreaker, the curse of the Law – death – hung over Him and would not depart from Him until He satisfied its demands.

Theologians have sometimes called this Recapitulation Theology where Jesus voluntarily re-enacted the life of the man Adam and the nation, Israel. Jesus walked the steps they walked. But whereas they failed, He succeeded. Adam was tempted at the beginning of his commission to rule creation and failed. Jesus was tempted at the beginning of His commission to inaugurate the kingdom and obeyed.⁸⁵ Israel was tested in the wilderness shortly after their passing through

⁸⁴ “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” Galatians 3:13.

⁸⁵ Thus, Paul contrasts Adam and Christ in Romans 5 and in 1 Corinthians 15. Christ becomes the last Adam (15:45) and the Second Man (15:47).

the waters of the Red Sea and failed. Jesus was tested in the wilderness after passing through the waters of baptism and succeeded.⁸⁶

Thus, Jesus entered this world with the full recognition of what His ministry would entail – reversing the judgment Adam brought into the world and the covenant curses on Israel. Where mankind disobeyed, He had to obey. Where Israel strayed, He had to stay faithful, and in doing so, He put Himself in a position to bear the judgment of Adam’s sin and the curses of the covenants His people violated. All fourteen contrasts between Adam and Christ laid out in Table I should now take on a richer significance. And the phrases in 5:18-19 – *through one act of righteousness* and *through the obedience of the One* – should become much more pointed.

Is this not why, when John tried to refuse Jesus from entering baptism, Jesus replied, “Permit it at this time, John, for in this way, we will fulfill all righteousness?”⁸⁷ Baptism was a symbol of cleansing for sin and something Jesus did not need. Yet, Jesus voluntarily submitted to this rite, identifying as the sinless one with those who were repenting of their sins. He began His ministry with the end in mind – total identification with sinners. What He began in the waters of baptism ended on the cross where He bore the curses of the covenant.⁸⁸ “Permit it at this time, John, for *in this way* we will fulfill all righteousness,” or, to put it in covenant language, “in this way we will fulfill the demands of the covenant and bring the covenant promises to our people.” In what way? In the way of voluntarily identifying with sinners, picking up a cross, denying self, obeying all the way to the cross, and letting death do its worst to Him.

There was no easy way out. Death, the consequence of sin, could rightfully demand that He give Himself up to death if He was going to take upon Himself the sins of the world. Death, therefore, can be said to have been His master for it would not allow any other way to redeem mankind.⁸⁹ Again, its mastery over Jesus was not due to His sins or weaknesses. He had none. But because He willingly took our sins upon Himself, He, therefore, had to suffer their consequence – death. There was no escaping it. He had to take in hand the cup He so earnestly prayed would pass away. He had to drink, in full, the cup of the wrath of God. Death rightly demanded that the Sin Bearer give up His life. Jesus could take no other route. He had to submit to the demands of death because of our sin.

Romans 6:9 is another way of drawing out the implications of Romans 5:12 – “through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin.” Death was the unwelcome intruder

⁸⁶ Many commentators have noted that Jesus defeated Satan by quoting Scripture from Deuteronomy where Israel was in the wilderness. See Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:13; 6:16.

⁸⁷ Matthew 3:15.

⁸⁸ Jesus referred to His death as a baptism – thus linking the two. See Luke 12:50.

⁸⁹ In personifying death and sin in this way, I hope no reader will make the mistake of thinking that death was a power working independently of God, sort of as a rival god. Man’s choice brought sin and death into the world, and they remain as powers subject to the sovereignty of God. He allows them to run their course and do their worst, but He overrules and reverses their destruction through Christ.

upon God’s creation, the uninvited partner that accompanied sin when Adam fell. It spread to all men (5:12), even over those who were unwittingly sinning and not rebelling against known commands (5:14). Twice in Chapter 5 (vv. 14 and 17), Paul stated that death *reigned*. Death was master over everyone. It touched and ended every life. Because Jesus entered this world of humanity where death was king and because He chose to bear the sins of humanity, He, therefore, subjected Himself to sin’s consequence – death. When Jesus chose this route and held fast to it, He allowed death to become His master and overpower Him on the cross.⁹⁰

But by His death, He satisfied death’s demands. He suffered the consequence of man’s sin and in paying for sin, death lost all rights to exercise mastery over Him. With sin paid for, Jesus could rise from the grave to immortal life. By stating that He died to sin once for all in 6:10, Paul affirms that His death was a sufficient payment for the sins of Adam’s race. He never has to die again (6:9) and death can no longer make any claims upon Him since the penalty for sin, now satisfied, can be laid to rest once for all, and destroyed. If the penalty for sin no longer exists, death, therefore, can no longer exert its mastery over Him.

Death to Sin in Romans 6

It’s time to bring all of this together. We have viewed four points in this chapter to determine the meaning of the death of Christ in Romans 6.

- The death of Christ terminology in the verses leading up to Romans 6, especially in 5:15-21
- Baptism/conversion as the key moment of identification with His death
- The *once for all* terminology of Hebrews and Romans 6
- The one-time mastery of death over Jesus which has now been broken

When we understand these four points as major markers in the path Paul walks in Romans 6, can there be any remaining doubt what *death to sin* in Romans 6:2 and 6:10 is about? Paul is not talking about a secondary aspect to the work of Christ that dealt with a supposed old sin nature. Instead, He is talking about the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross. His death to sin was to the penalty of sin as our sin-bearer – the same as in 2 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 2. And if His death to sin was to the penalty of sin, then our death to sin must be the same. This takes us back to a key premise in Chapter 2.

Whatever death to sin means, it can mean nothing more or nothing less than what it meant to Christ. We died to sin only because Christ died to sin.

⁹⁰ In his comments on 5:12, N.T. Wright says, “Sin and death, here personified, continue as ‘characters’ in Paul’s narrative through to chap. 8. In terms of his overall argument for assurance, they are the forces that must be defeated if the Christian is to be sure of eternal life... Paul imagines them as alien powers, given access to God’s world through the action of Adam. Once in, they had come to stay; staying, they seized royal power. Linked together as cause and effect, they now stride through their usurped domain, wreaking misery, decay, and corruption wherever they go. No one is exempt from their commanding authority” *Romans*, 525

Now, we can confidently answer the question of 6:1 – *Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?* Paul’s answer in 6:2 with our interpretation answers: *May it never be! How shall we who died to (the penalty of) sin still live in it?* In other words, with condemnation removed, it is foolish, illogical, and inconsistent to live a sinful life. To continue living in sin to get more grace would show a complete misunderstanding of why Christ died and what He accomplished on the cross to remove the judgment and the curses from us. It would show a complete failure to grasp the mastery of death and how that mastery has been broken and the reason for which we submitted to baptism – to be united with Him in His death so that we could be united with Him in His resurrection to walk in newness of life.⁹¹

“But wait!” some will state. “You have overlooked the key verse in Romans 6. What you have said is well and good, but you have failed to talk about 6:6 which speaks about our sin nature being crucified with Christ. Here, Paul speaks explicitly in co-crucifixion terms and says that our old self was crucified with Him with the result that the body of sin might be done away with leading to a further result – that we should be freed from sin’s slavery. This is where we learn that Christ’s death to sin has freed us from the power of sin’s impulses.” Here is the verse:

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; for he who has died is freed from sin.

Yes, this is the verse! It is the verse over which many scholars, students, and saints have puzzled, and, as I will show, upon which they have stumbled. Let’s continue our journey in the rough terrain of Romans 6, but rather than stumbling in our understanding or taking a path that leads to a dead end (no pun intended), we will discover that 6:6 and 6:7, when properly understood are talking about something very different from what most popular speakers say, but when properly understood they lead to the freedom in Christ we are searching for. In our next chapter, we will examine this question, “what is the ‘old man’ who was crucified?”

To continue with this research project, look for **Chapter Four: That Old Man!** to be released on August 16, 2021.

To purchase a copy of *Dead Men Rising* and *Dead Men Rising Study Guide*, go to [Shop | WGS Ministries](#).

⁹¹ Stott summarizes it well: “We died to sin [in the past]; how then shall we live in it [in the future]? It is not the literal impossibility of sin in the believers which Paul is declaring, but the moral incongruity of it. J.B. Phillips catches the point in his rendering: ‘We, who have died to sin – how could we live in sin any longer?’ Paul is drawing attention to the essential anomaly of living in sin when we have died to sin,” *Romans*, 169.