



**“And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,”** Ephesians 4:24.

## **Cultivating the Christian Character**

**Lesson Aim:** To emphasize that although the believer is a new creature, spiritual nurture is requisite to true Christian character.

**L511. Date:** April 1964. **Text:** Romans 6:1-14.

**Topic:** Character: Of Believers; Ethics.

INTRODUCTION—A person was heard to remark, “If I really believed I could be saved by repentance and faith alone, receiving an eternal salvation which I could never lose, I would really live it up!” Such a statement is evidence of a gross misunderstanding of the teachings of the Scriptures concerning salvation and sanctification. It is also the error Satan has been putting in the minds of people for centuries. Romans 6, the lesson text for today's study, deals with the same idea.

“Justification by faith is incompatible with living in sin,” Paul declares. Rather than free salvation being conducive to a life of sinful indulgence, it has exactly the opposite effect upon the instructed believer. The justified believer has died and risen to new life in Christ. He cannot continue in the old life of sin because he now lives the life of Christ. Indeed, the life he lives after salvation is Christ living in him, Galatians 2:20. An entirely new order of things is introduced where grace reigns, through righteousness, in our Lord Jesus Christ, II Corinthians 5:17.

The justified man soon faces the question, “The past has been met in forgiveness, but what about the present?” Sin has been effaced and its guilt plagues no longer. Now it must be dealt with as it seeks dominion over our lives. It is no longer justification which is a matter of concern, but sanctification. The believer soon finds that just as the Gospel was sufficient to make wise unto salvation, so it also is adequate to procure the sanctification of man. **“As sin hath reigned unto death, even so might**

**grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord,”** Romans 5:21.

If this lesson inspires some reader to practice spiritual nurture in order to develop mature Christian character, it will have accomplished its aim.

## **EXPOSITION**

### **I. A QUESTION ANSWERED, 6:1-2.**

**“Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound,”** Romans 5:20b. This grand truth presented problems to early readers. If God's grace is always available where sin abounds, does this not give a license to sin? Does this not weaken the motives of a holy life? After all, if one continues in sin he will only obtain more grace. If justification is by grace alone without works, why break off sin? Why not continue in it? Through such reasoning human depravity finds occasion for sinning even in God's offer of redemption by grace without works. Some had slanderously reported that Paul taught, “Let us do evil that good may come,” Romans 3:8. How untrue this was is evidenced in the discussion which follows.

The question raised is, “Shall we continue to dwell permanently in sin so that God's grace will abound?” Paul's answer is, “God forbid!” The expression is the equivalent to: “Let it not be,” or, “Perish the thought,” or, “Do not mention such a thing.” The expression is commonly used of what is contrary to reverence or precluded by some acknowledged truth. Paul's answer shows the utter shamefulness of the question. It reveals the impious heart of the one who raises it. After all, it must be an evil heart which would turn grace into license for sin.

“How shall we who have already died in relation to sin live any longer therein?” Here is the impossibility of an inconsistent life. A person who has died physically cannot live longer in a physical body. How then can one who has died to sin live longer in the pursuits and dominion of sin? MacKnight has written, “A person's living in sin who is dead to it is evidently a contradiction in terms.” Not only is it a contradiction in terms, it is also a contradiction of one's profession to be a new creation in Christ where old things pass away and all things become new.

The unregenerate person may believe that the freeness of forgiveness by repentance and faith is conducive to sin. But the person who has been to the cross with Jesus and received redemption there, will know differently.

Griffith Thomas has well written, “The view of the Cross is thus widened to take in Sanctification as well as Justification, to deal with sinfulness as well as with sins, to apply to what we **are** as well as what we **do**; and Sanctification is shown to rest on the same foundation, and to proceed from the same source as Justification, namely, our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.”

## **II. A REMINDER GIVEN, 6:3-4.**

Asking the question of verse one expresses spiritual ignorance. When Christ died, believers died in Him; and, as dead men can do no sin, so union with Christ involves absolute deliverance from sin and continuance in it no more. Union with Christ in salvation means union in His death, burial, and resurrection. Not only the historical fact, but the spiritual power attendant in His sacrifice and triumph is available to the Christian.

This truth of identification with Christ is expressed in the ordinance of baptism. Baptism declares that we belong to Christ as our Master and are joined to Him as our Head. Baptism by immersion (which is the New Testament mode of baptism) pictures a burial and resurrection. Just so, it is a most appropriate symbol of breaking off all connection with the previous life and devoting ourselves to a new and pure life in Him.

When Jesus arose from the dead, He “took captivity captive” in an act of absolute victory. Therefore, those who through repentance and faith are redeemed have also gained the victory over captivity by sin. They walk in a “newness of life.” The Greek language has two words, both translated “new” in English. One means new in relation to time recently made. The other means new as to quality, of a different sort. It is the second adjective used in verse four. Paul says, “Our baptism with Christ was in view of His death and our own. Just as Christ arose from the grave with death having no more power over Him (verse 9), so we also are raised to a new kind of life in Him.” As believers share in the benefits of His death and resurrection, they likewise share in the life of the risen Christ. This is why “those who are dead to sin cannot live any longer therein.”

## **III. A CONSEQUENCE STATED, 6:5-7.**

Implied in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the complete change of believers. It is as if they had personally hung on the cross and suffered the crucifixion of the body of sin. Then, arising from the dead in a new kind of life, they are free from “the old man,” verse 6. This does not

mean the believer is freed from all temptations to sin. It rather means that sin is robbed of its power by the counteracting principle of union with Christ.

Like that Prodigal Son who left the husks and the hog pen to return to the well-furnished table of the Father's house, so the believer leaves the satisfaction of his desires in sin and finds them much better satisfied in Christ. After all, the believer has been vitally conjoined with Christ in death to sin and is equally united to Him in resurrection life. Almost as if there were two personalities in one body, so does the believer and Christ live and share all things. The body which belonged to and served sin is destroyed (its power cancelled) in redemption. Therefore, the body is no longer the slave, under the dominion, of sin.

**“He that is dead is freed from sin,”** verse 7. Death cancels all obligations and breaks all ties. Having died to sin in Christ, all our connection with sin was broken off. The bondage by which we were formerly held in sin is destroyed in union with Christ. Sin's condemning power can no longer be felt in the heart of the one justified. Suppose a man suffered a fatal automobile accident while driving at speeds excessive of the legal limit. Though everyone knew he was breaking the speed law, he could not be tried in a court. His death cancelled all claims of guilt which the law might charge against him. This is the glorious liberty enjoyed by the children of God! Now, those who have been absolved from sin ought not again to hold converse with it.

#### **IV. A CONVICTION EXPRESSED, 6:8-10.**

Death to sin liberates for a new life. This new life is the ethical participation in the new everlasting life of Christ. Being united to Him in the benefits of His death, believers also share in the victory of his resurrection life. Those who do not share in His death to sin cannot share His life. But those who have been recipients of the redeeming sacrifice of the cross live anew because Christ lives in them, Galatians 2:20.

Christ died that He might be forever superior to death. In exactly the same terminology believers die in Christ (in salvation) that they might be forever superior to sin. The death of Jesus Christ for sin was a “once-for-all-time” death. The life of Jesus Christ is an unending life with God. Having died unto sin, He is free from its temptations or persecutions. In exactly the same way, those who live in Christ had died likewise to sin and live eternally unto God. The reason believers are so confident that they will live with Christ is twofold. First, there is a personal experience of life and fellowship with Jesus today. Second, there is the proof that Christ's

resurrection made him superior to the world of sin and that he lives eternally with God. Upon the basis of these two truths, plus the fact that one has personally shared in a conversion experience through faith, the following command is issued.

## V. A COMMAND ISSUED, 6:11-13.

**“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”**

These three verses are the heart of Romans 6:1-14. All that has been said before has been leading to the call issued here. Just as Jesus died and arose to a life above the problems of sin which He had suffered as incarnate Man, so the believer gains victory in Jesus and must consider himself victor through Him.

Observe that Paul does not say sin is dead to the believer. He does not promise immunity from temptation. He does not assure one against backsliding. Instead, he reminds the believer that through the sacrifice of Jesus he has gained the victory over sin. Temptations will come but the believer does not have to submit to them. Knowing that he is dead to sin in Christ, he can look for the way of escape which God provides with every temptation, I Corinthians 10:13. In other words, Paul does not say the believer **cannot sin**, but that he **need not** sin because he has gained the victory in Christ Jesus.

Sin shall not reign in the body of the believer. God becomes his King and Christ his Master. It would be treason to submit to the dominion of sin. **“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?”** Romans 6:16. As he is not his own, having been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), the believer must submit himself to God. By so doing he will win the victory over Satan, James 3:7. It is this kind of allegiance to God which proves that we are really what we claim to be—children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Griffith Thomas writes, “In this world two claimants are continually seeking us—God and Satan; and, as the believer has entered into the kingdom of

Christ and is united to Him in death and life, he is to devote himself loyally to his Master, and to present every faculty for his Master's use and service in righteousness.”

This challenge is not easy of attainment. It requires faith, prayer, study, discipline, and diligent effort to conform to the image of Christ. The believer is not born “full grown” into the family of God. He is at first a babe in Christ who grows and develops over a period of time. This is why spiritual nurture (growth in grace) is requisite to true Christian character. It would be tragic if one born into the family of God failed to grow properly. He would become a malformed weakling. God gets little glory from such a life. Oh, Christian brother, make sure you are developing in the things of God!

## **VI. A PROMISE MADE, 6:14.**

**“Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”** In verses 1-11 the Apostle has shown what it means to be united to Christ; in verses 12 and 13 he has shown the consequences and made his appeal to the believer; and now in verse 14 he gives assurance of the Divine provision for the complete fulfillment of these exhortations. We may take it either as a promise, “Sin shall not” — or else as a Divine assurance, “Sin will not” have dominion over us.

Sin exercises a ruling power over him who submits. However, just as the Cross of Christ has separated us from the consequences of sin as transgression; it has separated us from the authority of sin as a master. Here is set out deliverance from penalty and deliverance from the power of sin. All that is lacking to have complete and eternal victory over sin is deliverance from its presence and that will come at the blessed day of resurrection!

The assurance of victory from sin’s dominion is here given as “a very sweet consolation” (Melanchthon) to the believer. Just as death no longer lords it over Christ (verse 9), so sin shall no longer lord it over the believer. Alvah Hovey writes on this passage, “It (sin) shall not be your master, for ye are not in bondage to the law, which is the power of sin (I Corinthians 15:56b), but ye are subject to grace, are under the control of grace. Grace not only washes away sins, but keeps us from sinning.” Blessed assurance!

After much wrestling, Paul cried out in dismay, **“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death,”** Romans 7:24. Then he answers the question, **“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord,”** 7:25. Christian brother, however burdened, tried, and tempted you may be today, God can give you victory. **God** gives the victory. God

**always** give the victory. God gives the victory **through our Lord Jesus Christ** (I Corinthians 15:57).

CONCLUSION—The human side of Christian holiness may be summarized in three expressions found in Romans 6:1-14. (1) **“Reckon”**—This is an attitude of faith in which we accept the victory that is ours in having died to sin and living the life of Christ in us. (2) **“Let not sin reign”**—Through oneness with Christ we are not for one moment to submit to the dominion of sin in our being. Our responsibility is to keep Christ as Lord and refuse to submit to sin. (3) **“Present”**—This is a once-for-all presentation of ourselves by deliberate choice so that we may be used of God and serve Him daily in righteousness and true holiness. This is to be the continual experience of every Christian. Though each believer is a new creation in Christ, the sanctification of true Christian character is possible only by spiritual growth. **“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen,”** II Peter 3:18.

#### Questions

1. Does salvation by grace encourage us to sin? Explain your answer.
2. How does the believer's death in Christ prohibit sin?
3. How does baptism picture deliverance from sin?
4. What does Romans 6:7 mean?
5. How do we share the victory of Christ's resurrection?
6. What does it mean to “reckon” yourself dead to sin and alive to God?
7. How does Romans 6:16 relate to this study?
8. What effect does our being under grace have upon our lives?
9. What does it mean to “present” our members to God?
10. How can one become strong in the Lord?