

Main Idea: If we’re going to win the war against sin, we need to know two things, according to Romans 6:1-7.

The Context: Romans answers three questions about God’s righteousness for us...

1. Who needs it? (chapters 1-3a)
 2. How do we get it? (chapters 3b-5)
 3. What difference does it make? (chapters 6-8)
- I. We need to know our identification (1-4).
- A. In Christ, we have died to sin (1-3).
 1. In the legal sense, we died to sin when Christ died.
 2. In the personal sense, we died to sin when we received Christ.
 3. In the moral sense, we die to sin daily.
 4. In the ultimate sense, we will die to sin when we actually die.
 - B. In Christ, we have been raised to new life (4).
- II. We need to know the implications (5-7).
- A. In Christ, we can live a new life (5).
 1. You won’t experience new life if you don’t know Christ.
 2. You won’t experience new life if you don’t know God’s design for the Christian life.
 3. You won’t experience new life if you don’t live in light of what you know.
 - B. In Christ, our old man was crucified (6).
 1. We will not be sinless.
 2. We have the power to sin less.
 - C. In Christ, we can be set free from sin (7).
- The Bottom Line: In Christ, we have the power to change.

We are in a war. The battlefield is within us. The enemy is *sin*.

If we’ll be honest about it, some of us are not doing so well. Oh, we may have acknowledged Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, but we’re having trouble with the implications. It sure doesn’t feel like He’s the Lord of our lives. Something else is controlling us.

If you can relate, I want you to know there is hope. The victorious Christian life isn’t just for some “elite” group somewhere. God intends for all His people to be overcomers. There is victory at the cross. We can change.

But how? God gives us the answer in Romans 6, the text that will be our focus of study this month in a series entitled, “*Slaves to Sin No Longer*.” Let’s set the backdrop.

The Context: Romans answers three questions about God’s righteousness for us...

Romans is the Cadillac of Paul’s letters. He wrote the epistle to the Christians living in the capital city of the Roman Empire around the year A.D. 57. His purpose in writing was to prepare the believers for an upcoming visit he hoped to make to see them (1:10-11). Apparently, he had never been to Rome before, and had not met the Christians to whom he was writing.

In Romans, Paul explains the essential foundation stones of the Christian life. The first eleven chapters deal with doctrinal issues, namely, what God has done to provide righteousness for an unrighteous world. The final five chapters deal with duty, namely how Christians should live in light of what God has done.

We won’t take time to do an exhaustive study of Romans 1-5, but if we are to grasp Romans 6, we need to put it into context. Romans answers three questions about God’s righteousness for us.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

1. *Who needs it?* The answer according to Romans 1-3a is, everyone does. All people are sinners under the wrath of God. “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men... (1:18).”

All people are born as sinners under God's wrath. In chapter 1 we learn that the heathen is under God's wrath. In chapter 2, we discover that both the humanist and the Hebrew are as well. All are born unrighteous and under the severe sentence of a holy God. We need what we do not have, *righteousness*.

2. *How do we get it?* That's the question Paul addresses in chapters 3b-5.

For starters, here's how we *don't* get righteousness. It's not by keeping the Law. The Law could not save us (3:21). The Law is good, for it reveals the character and will of God, but the Law can't save anyone. It can't produce the righteousness we need, as 3:21 makes clear, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known.”

How then do we get righteousness? If it's not by what we do, how then? According to Romans, it's by grace (5:21). And that's what the gospel is all about.

Righteousness must be received, it can't be earned. That's why Paul wrote in the theme verses of the letter (1:16-17), “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.”

We are not saved by what we do, but by what God did. God extended His grace toward us in Christ Jesus. So Paul could conclude chapter 5 with these words (5:20-21), “The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Who needs righteousness? Everyone does. How do we get it? We can't earn it, but must receive it. And on the basis of His grace, God gives it to those who place their faith in His Son and His work on the cross. Romans addresses a third question...

3. *What difference does it make?* If we do nothing to attain God's righteousness, and if it's given to us on the basis of God's grace, does it really matter how we live? Or to put it another way, if I am saved, can I live however I want? Certainly not, but why not? That's the question Paul addresses in chapters 6-8.

Perhaps you're thinking, “I do want to live for God. I don't want to keep sinning, but that's my problem. I keep struggling with sin. What needs to happen in my life if I'm going to *win this war with personal sin?*” That's what we're going to find out in our study of Romans 6.

And victorious Christian living begins right here. It starts with *knowing*. What must we know to win the war against personal sin? We'll find out today by examining verses 1-7.

But *knowing* must lead to *doing*. Yes, we need to *do* some things to win this war against sin, as we'll see next time in verses 8-14. And lest you're thinking, “But can people really change?” the answer is, “Absolutely!”—as we'll discover in week #3 by considering verses 15-18. We'll conclude our series in week #4 by looking at some “Incentives for Holy Living” which the Scriptures give us in verses 19-24.

Once again, winning the battle begins with *knowing*. There are two subjects we must know well if we're going to win the war against sin.

I. We need to know our identification (1-4).

As Christians, we have an identity. To appreciate our new identity we need to define some terms.

The first five chapters of Romans deal with *justification*. Romans 6-8 deal with *sanctification*. Justification is righteousness imputed (put to my account), while sanctification is righteousness imparted (made a part of my life).¹ Justification is the foundation upon which sanctification rests.

J. Vernon McGee simplifies the distinction, "Justification is an act; sanctification is a work. Justification took place the moment you trusted Christ--you were declared righteous; the guilt was removed. Then God began a work in you that will continue throughout your life. I believe in instantaneous salvation, but sanctification is a lifelong process. In other words, justification is the means; sanctification is the end. Justification is for us; sanctification is in us. Justification declares the sinner righteous; sanctification makes the sinner righteous. Justification removes the guilt and penalty of sin; sanctification removes the growth and power of sin."²

Now as we move into chapter 6, remember that Paul's talking about sanctification, not justification. We need to know our identification. What is true of us if we have been justified? Notice two realities in verses 1-4.

A. In Christ, we have died to sin (1-3). Verse 1, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" As a brilliant lawyer, Paul poses two potent rhetorical questions. Why? The questions are designed to keep his readers from drawing wrong conclusions about what he has just said. If God's grace is so great, and if our acceptance before God depends entirely on His grace and not our works, then we can live however we please, can't we? Wrong.

Do you know what that attitude represents? A generation ago, the German pastor and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined a term for it. He called it "cheap grace." What is cheap grace? It's the flippant attitude that says, "I've been forgiven and I will go on being forgiven whatever I do, so I can do whatever I wish in my life."³

What is the problem with cheap grace? I've talked with non-Christians who see the problem. They've told me, "I'm not going to be a Christian if I'm not serious about living it. There are too many hypocrites who profess one thing, but live something entirely different." What does the Bible have to say about cheap grace?

Listen to Paul's answer in verse 2, "By no means!" [KJV, "God forbid!"] The words are a strong objection--"No way!"

But why not? Why is it unacceptable for a Christian to live in sin? Verse 2 tells us, "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" What is true of us if we are in Christ? We are dead to sin.

To drive home the point, Paul asks another question in verse 3, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" *Don't you know?* Paul says. Do you know the reason some people flounder and fail in their Christian experience? Here it is. They lack knowledge. They don't know better.

What do we need to know if we are to prosper as Christians? We need to grasp our identification with Christ. In Christ, we have died to sin. What does that mean? Some use this verse and others like it to teach perfectionism, that a Christian will never sin.

¹ Wiersbe, p. 531.

² J. Vernon McGee, p. 103.

³ Briscoe, p. 130.

Such teaching misses the fact that there are actually four different senses in which we have died to sin.⁴

1. *In the legal sense, we died to sin when Christ died.* Two thousand years ago when Christ died, we too died. In God's eyes, it was as if we were there on the cross. Christ made a decision to take our sin upon Himself when He hung on the tree (2 Cor 5:21). In this legal (positional) sense, we died to sin when our Representative, Jesus Christ, died.

By the way, as verse 4 indicates, the same goes for His resurrection. When He rose again to new life on the third day, in God's mind, so did we (see Col 3:1).

2. *In the personal sense, we died to sin when we received Christ.* When as an eleven year old boy, I knelt next to my pastor in his study, confessed that I was a sinner and received Christ as my Savior and Lord, I died to sin. As far as our omniscient God was concerned, I died to sin legally 20 centuries ago when Christ died, but in the personal sense, I died to sin when I received Christ. That was the day the Spirit of God applied to my life what Christ had done. I became a new person (2 Cor 5:17).

3. *In the moral sense, we die to sin daily.* Here's where passages that tell us to "put to death" the flesh enter (like Col 3:5, "Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature"). We see the same here in Romans 6:11, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin." And in verse 12, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body." And in verse 13, "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin."

Here's a question for you. If we have already died to sin, why does Paul give us these commands to "put to death" sin? It's because what is true in the legal sense—we have died to sin—must be realized in the moral sense. We need to learn to live in light of what God says is true of us in the legal sense. Ephesians 4 puts it this way—we must put off the old man, and put on the new. Will the battle ever end? Yes...

4. *In the ultimate sense, we will die to sin when we actually die.* Our struggle with sin will end the day we breath our last breath, and enter the presence of our Lord.

A few years ago I had a graveside service for a man who had no church or family. As I stood there looking at the vault containing his casket in the ground, one thing was for sure. Before me was the body of a man who was no longer sinning. A dead body does not sin. It sins when it's alive. I do not know the spiritual condition of that man, but this I know. There are only two places for our sins. Either they were on Christ when He died 2000 years ago—because we have trusted Him as our Savior—or they are on us, and judgment is ahead. There is no third place for our sins.

May I ask you something. Where are your sins? Can you say with confidence that Christ died for *your* sins?

There is a second reality relating to our identification with Christ which we see in verse 4. The first was that in Christ, we have died to sin. Here's the second.

B. In Christ, we have been raised to new life (4). "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." What does that say about the identification of a believer? If we are in Christ, we have been *raised to new life*.

In verse 3, Paul says we were "baptized" into Jesus' death, and now in verse 4 he relates that we were buried with Him by "baptism" into death. What does he mean? The Greek word has two basic meanings. Literally, baptize means to dip or immerse. But

⁴ Cranfield, pp. 128-9.

figuratively, it means "to be identified with." For example, 1 Corinthians 10:2 says this of the Israelites, "They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." Is Paul saying the Israelites got wet in the Red Sea? Were they immersed? No, when they crossed the dry ground, they were "identified with" their leader, Moses.

In which sense is Paul using the term baptism in Romans 6, literal or figurative? There is difference of opinion on this matter of interpretation, but I think that the apostle had *both* in mind. It's through water baptism that a person is publicly identified with Christ.

Though it may sound strange to us, Paul's readers, particularly the Jews, could grasp this. In that day, when a Gentile wanted to become a Jewish proselyte, he had to go through the rite of baptism. The candidate changed his old clothes, and got completely in the water. While in the water, he gave testimony to his confession of faith. Once he emerged from the water, in the eyes of the Jewish people, he was regarded as a new man.

The same was true in Christian baptism. Baptism was a serious matter in the first century. When a person was baptized, he was giving public testimony that he was turning from his old life and giving allegiance to Christ in his new life. He was identifying with Christ.

That's the point in Romans 6. In Christ, a believer has died to sin and been raised to new life. That is his identification.

If a cocaine addict dies, he is no longer tempted by cocaine. Why not? Because his body is dead to all physical senses. He can't see the drug, smell it, or desire it. He's dead. In Christ, we have died to sin. Sin does not have the same hold on us it once had. But there's more. In Christ, we've been raised to new life.

It was the second quarter of the basketball game, and the home team was getting trounced 35-17. The starting point guard wasn't getting the job done. He kept missing shots, throwing passes out of bounds, and ignoring the coach's instructions. Guess what the coach did. He put in a substitute. And when the new floor general entered the game, things changed. He turned the tide. He hit his shots. He made the right passes. He did what the coach asked him to do. And the team won the game.

In the game of life, we were losing big time. We needed help. We needed a sub to enter the game. And God sent us His Son, the perfect substitute. The key to getting right with God is Christ's substitution. But it doesn't stop there. The key to *living* right before God is also Christ's substitution.

This truth can transform your life. The key to the Christian life is to learn to live in light of the work of Christ. Every day I must affirm these truths: When Christ died, I died. When He was buried, I was buried. When He was raised, I was raised and given the potential for new life! John Stott draws this conclusion, "A Christian is not merely a justified believer. He is someone who has entered into a vital personal union with Jesus Christ."⁵ That's right.

Are you identified with Christ? You say, "How can I know if I am?" To identify with Christ you must repent of your sin and trust in Him.

What about baptism? Baptism will not save you, but it is vital as a step of obedience. Here's why. When you enter the water, you are saying, "I am identified with Christ. I have died to sin, and have been made alive." If you have never been baptized and you are

⁵ Stott, p. 34.

a Christian, you need to be. Why? First of all, to obey Jesus (Mt 28:20), and secondly to let the world know of your identification with Christ.

If we're going to win the war against sin we need to know two subjects well. The first, according to verses 1-4, is our identification. Here's the second.

II. We need to know the implications (5-7).

While I was growing up, for several years my father was a High School principal. That occupation affected my identity in some interesting ways. When it came to athletic events, for instance, that identity was my ticket to a free pass inside. That identity also had something to do with what was expected of me in the area of behavior. There are implications related to a person's identification.

The same holds true for the Christian life. In light of our identification with Christ, there are some clear implications. Paul highlights three in verses 5-7.

A. In Christ, we can live a new life (5). “If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.”

What's this saying? If we have experienced the benefits of Christ's death, namely justification, we certainly are entitled to experience the benefit of His resurrection, namely sanctification. Simply put, we have the potential in Christ to live a new life!

Is that true, or is Paul just teasing us? Can we really live a *new life*? Yes, it's true. Why then don't some people? Why are some church-goers paralyzed by old habits they just can't seem to shake? I want to suggest three possibilities. You won't experience *new life* if any of these is true.

1. *You won't experience new life if you don't know Christ.* Religion can't give you the kind of new life we're talking about. Only a relationship with Christ can do that. Some people don't change because of a fundamental problem. They don't know Christ.

2. *You won't experience new life if you don't know God's design for the Christian life.* There are a lot of unbiblical notions these days about the “successful” Christian life. Here are two common errors being promoted.

One is what I'll call the “holy zap” mentality. “Let go and let God,” is the counsel given. The reason you still struggle with sin is that *you* keep getting in the way. You need to surrender your life to God. And so you walk an aisle and “rededicate” your life. You get a “zap” from God. You do okay for awhile—until the zap wears off—and then you have to repeat the process. Another walk down a church aisle, another rededication, another zap. That's how sanctification works, according to this view, one emotional high after another.

Another unbiblical view of the Christian life suggests that sanctification is an event subsequent to justification. In other words, you get saved and then at a later time, probably during a crisis, life-changing experience, you get “sanctified.” Once sanctified, you stop struggling with sin and start overcoming it.

Both of these views fail to see that according to the Bible sanctification involves a process, not just an event. And until you learn what the Bible says about God's design for the Christian life, you won't experience new life. A third possibility...

3. *You won't experience new life if you don't live in light of what you know.* It's true. You can know Christ and the truth about the Christian life, and still live a defeated life. There's nothing magical about *knowing* truth. We must *appropriate* truth. We must do it, and if we do we will experience new life.

Yes, in Christ we can live a new life. That's implication #1. Here's a second...

B. In Christ, our old man was crucified (6). “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”

This raises the question, “Just what is this ‘old self?’” The KJV refers to it as the “old man.” But what is it? It refers to what we were in Adam, our old identity—the old ego.⁶

Actually, Paul helps us understand what the “old self” is by using another phrase in the next clause. “For we know that our *old self* was crucified with him so that the *body of sin* might be done away with.” Apparently, the “old man” is either identical with or closely related to the “body of sin.”

Now, the body itself is not sinful, but neutral. Scripture is clear that sin comes from where? Not the body, but from the heart, the inner life (Mk 7:21). The problem is that the body becomes the vehicle of sin. It's what our heart commands to do its bidding. The heart works through the eye to lust after a woman, through the hand to shoplift, and through the tongue to spew forth bitter words on our neighbor.

Is there hope? Yes! If we are in Christ, what has happened to the “old man?” It was “crucified” with Christ. And what happened to the “body of sin”? Paul says it was “done away with” [KJV, “destroyed”]. The term means to render inoperative, to make of no effect. Don't miss the strong words here. The old man was killed at the cross. The body of sin was rendered inoperative at Calvary. Legally, that is.

Why do I say legally? Because though we have died to sin in one sense, we still battle with sin in another, don't we? Both are true. On the one hand, the Bible says the old man has been crucified (Rom 5:6), but on the other hand, we read exhortations like the one in Ephesians 4:22 that tell us to put off the old man.

What does that mean practically? Two things.

1. *We will not be sinless.* Not in this life. John says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).” We will not be sinless this side of heaven. We must battle with sin day by day, and hour by hour. On the one hand, yes, the old man was nailed to the cross, but on the other hand, he keeps raising his ugly head. We will not be sinless in this life. Having said that, we must hasten to affirm the following.

2. *We have the power to sin less.* Why is that? Because of our identification with Christ. We have resurrection power available to us. Before we were justified, we didn't. We sinned because it was our nature to sin. We were powerless NOT to sin. But in Christ, that changed. Now in Him we have the capacity to say no to sin and do right. We have the power to sin less. Which brings us to implication #3.

C. In Christ, we can be set free from sin (7). “Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.” Here's the KJV rendering, “For he that is dead is freed from sin.” Again Paul isn't talking about sinless perfection. Everett Harrison explains, “What he does present here is not the impossibility of committing a single sin, but the impossibility of continuing in a life dominated by sin.”⁷ That's it. In Christ, we can be set free from sin—by the grace of God.

Grace is wonderful, isn't it? Haldor Lillenas penned the familiar words, “Wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all my sin; How shall my tongue describe it, where shall its

⁶ As Wiersbe suggests.

⁷ Harrison, p. 68.

praise begin? Taking away my burden, setting my spirit free, for the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.”

Julia Johnston pondered the subject, “Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt! Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured--there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt. Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that will pardon and cleanse within, grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sin!”

Yes, God's grace is great! By God's grace, we can live a new life. Our old man was crucified. We can be set free from sin. Those are the implications of our identification.

Now we come to the nitty gritty. Do you see this happening in your life?

Is there any sinful habit in your life that is enslaving you? Perhaps it's profanity, or maybe it's nicotine, or pornography, or laziness. Is there any activity in your life that Jesus wouldn't do? You may be thinking, “Yes there is, but I've struggled with this sinful habit for years. Is there hope for real change?”

The answer is absolutely *yes*. How does it happen? How can the old patterns of sinful behavior be broken in our lives? It starts with *knowing*. We must know Christ and the truth about the Christian life. If you want to win the war with sin, you must affirm the truth of God's Word.

We must be identified with Christ. There is hope for change *only for those* who have been justified. Yet it doesn't stop there. Once justified, we must learn to live in light of our identification with Christ. That's sanctification.

The bottom line is this...

The Bottom Line: In Christ, we have the power to change.

We'll learn more about the process involved in changing next time.

Communion: Let's come to the Lord's Table together to remember the Person and work that makes victory over sin a reality.