



## Dead to Sin, Servants of Righteousness

### Lesson 8 | Romans 6:1-23

“Why do I keep sinning?” Have you ever wondered that? Many young (and some old) Christians have wrestled with this question. The Bible teaches that those who trust in Christ are justified, are now new creatures, and have been born again. If all of this is true, how could they keep sinning? Not only that, but why does sinning seem so easy and doing right seem so hard? Paul has been teaching that once we are saved, we now have peace with God, access to the Father, and have received reconciliation and God’s grace. But that’s not all – our salvation also means that we are now dead to sin. So what does it mean that we are dead to sin if we can still and often do sin?

***What do you think it means that believers are dead to sin? Why is the illustration of death used?***

The truth discussed here is critically important for two types of believers today. Some act as if sin isn’t that big a deal, expecting that God’s grace will cover everything and it will all be fine. They don’t like it when sin is preached against, or when people are called to repentance. “God will show grace” becomes a cover for “I want to live how I want” (Jude 4). Paul tackles such wrong thinking in the strongest possible terms. But some believers wrestled with why it is they keep sinning when they don’t want to. This lesson and the following lessons will lay out key truths that will help believers to have victory over sin.

***What spiritual damage is done by those who act as if their sin isn’t that important because God will cover it with grace?***

***What spiritual damage is done by those who keep sinning and seem unable to stop?***

### Recognize the Reality That You Are Dead to Sin (6:1-11)

Paul ends chapter five by reminding us that no matter how much we sin, God’s grace abounds more (5:20). But someone might worry that this teaching will lead to people thinking that sin is a good thing. After all, if my sin only shows God’s grace, why not just keep sinning? While that might seem logical at first, Paul launches into a discussion about how disastrous that line of thinking would be.

***Why might people think that God’s grace is an excuse to sin more?***

#### **We have been united with Christ’s death. (6:1-5)**

Throughout these verses Paul argues that when we are baptized we are declaring ourselves to be united with Christ in his death and resurrection. The physical act of going into the water and coming out represents a spiritual reality. Our baptism is a public demonstration that through our faith in Jesus we have chosen to

join Christ in His death so that we can be raised with Him in a resurrection. That death is a death to sin, so why would someone choose to go on sinning casually and carelessly if they are free from sin? That doesn't sound like the behavior of someone who is really dead from sin. Paul is answering the question of verse 1 by showing that people who have truly been saved have died to sin, and people who are dead to sin don't happily continue in the sin they died to.

What these verses claim is something so shocking we have a hard time believing that it is true. Many people read through this section and what they Paul is trying to say is that we must die to our sin. While Paul does talk the importance of killing sin (cf Colossians 3:5), that is *not* what he is saying here. Paul says we *are* dead to sin, not that we *need to* die to sin. Theologians will say this is an indicative (a statement of fact), not an imperative (a command to do something). In other words, all true believers are right now dead to sin.

***Why do you think many misread these verses to say that we need to die to sin, rather than that we are dead to sin?***

### **We have been freed from the power of sin. (6:6-8)**

What does it mean practically that believers have died to sin? Well, as Paul argued earlier that means they should not keep sinning. But it also means that the power of sin has been broken. Our old man, the part of us that had no choice but to sin, has been crucified so that sin's power over our body might be destroyed. Practically speaking, this means that believers never have to sin. Sin has no ultimate power over them. They might feel like they have no other choice, or like the pull of sin is just too much. But now that they have died with Christ, they are free from sin.

***If Christians are free from the power of sin, why do they still sin?***

Let's say that there is a landlord who comes around once a month demanding rent. He yells and threatens, and the law is on his side because he does own the property. But what if he defaults on his mortgage payment and the bank takes over? He can come and yell and threaten, and he might even frighten you into paying him. But you don't have to pay him, because his power over you has been broken. Similarly, sin may demand our obedience, but we now that our old man is dead we no longer must obey sin.<sup>1</sup>

### **We must consider these realities to be true. (6:9-11)**

Paul summarizes again what he has been teaching and then closes this section with an interesting command: "reckon yourselves reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." What Paul has been teaching is the reality of our new position in Christ. We died to sin, and are dead to sin. This means that sin has no power over us. Now Paul looks at believers and essentially says, "Believe this is true!"

***Why would people struggle to believe the reality that they are dead to sin?***

This is not the power of positive thinking. Many today in the world want to believe that if we think about something hard enough and want it bad enough, that will make it true. For example, if you believe that you are a courageous person or that you will marry the perfect person hard enough, those things will

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<sup>1</sup> This illustration is borrowed from a seminary professor.

come true. That's not what Paul is calling for. Rather, Paul wants believers to believe something because it is *true*.

***What difference would it make in a believer's life if they truly saw themselves as dead to sin?***

## **Live out the Reality That You Are Dead to Sin (6:12-23)**

After all Paul has said in the first 11 verses of this chapter, the statement in 6:12 is perhaps a little bit surprising. After clearly teaching Christians that they were dead to sin, he now tells them they must not let sin rule over them. But how can that be possible? Doesn't dead to sin mean that there is no chance of sinning? Apparently not. The power of sin is indeed broken, but believers must still choose to do right.

### **You must yield to God, not sin because you have a choice. (6:12-13)**

We are dead to sin, that is a fact. But we can still choose to sin or to choose to obey God. Paul here sets up a contrast of who we are going to yield to – the power of sin or the power of God. This means that there is a decision that everyone must make, and it's a decision we must make over and over again. The word Paul uses could be translated as "yield," "offer," or "present."

***Why do you think Paul talks specifically about us presenting our members [body parts] to God?***

***What does it look like to yield your members to God?***

Every day we must make the choice of who we are going to offer ourselves to. Will we follow God? Or will we follow our own sinful desires? Our minds and bodies will be tools making some kind of difference, whether good or bad. Every day we have the choice whether we will be instruments of God's righteousness or of sinful unrighteousness.

### **You must yield to God, not sin because whatever you serve is your master. (6:14-20)**

Once again, Paul says something that he realizes could be twisted and misconstrued. He ends 6:14 by saying that we are no longer under the law, but under grace. What he means by this will be more fully developed in chapter 7, where he talks a lot about the law. But even now Paul knows that some might understand such a statement to mean that we can do whatever we want. His response is that we can never "do what we want" because everyone is a slave of something or someone. If you sin, you are a servant of sin. If you obey God, you are a servant of God. There is no middle ground where you get to make the decisions. Everyone is a servant.

***Why is it that people do not want to be a servant of anyone?***

***How has slavery to sin been pushed as "freedom" and what has been the consequence?***

Throughout these verses we see the word "obey" or "obedience" show up several times. Sin's ultimate power over us has been broken. Yet if we choose to sin, we are allowing choosing to obey our old master and let him rule over us. In other words, you don't have to be a servant of sin now that you are in Christ, but you can be one if you really want to. Paul realizes some of this might be confusing and he's doing his best to simplify it (6:19). In the end, his summary is that you used to serve sin and were free from righteousness, but now you are a servant of righteousness and are free from sin. He concludes by asking who you'd rather be a servant of.

**You must yield to God, not sin because the consequences are severe. (6:21-23)**

What if someone decides they would rather just be a slave to sin? What if they are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, but then choose to live in sin anyway. Paul asks the Christians he is talking with what the outcome has been of their sinful lifestyle was. Then he gives the answer "The end of those things is death." When we yield to sin, when we choose to serve sin, it will always lead to death.

***Why do we doubt that sin always leads to death?***

Paul contrasts this with holiness and everlasting life for those who obey. People who live obedient lives to God will find great joy and will find life. We know that the Bible teaches this, yet we struggle to believe it. We tend to think in the moment that this particular occasion is the exception. At the heart of every sin we commit is a belief that in this instance sin will not really lead to death and obedience will not really lead to life.

***How can we train ourselves to believe what the Bible says about sin and death is right over our own thinking, as influenced by Satan and the world?***

This passage has some shocking statements. You are dead to sin! Sin has no power over you! What are we as sinful people supposed to do with this information? First, we must believe it. Then, we must yield ourselves and our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness, rather than tools of sin. We do this in part because we realize that no one is truly free, we are all slaves – either to God or to sin. And we do this because we realize the stakes. Our sin leads to death, and our obedience leads to life. Those who have been justified are dead to sin, and how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer in it?