

# May 1 Lesson 9 (NIV)

## FREEDOM FROM SIN

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Romans 6:1–14

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Romans 6:1–14

### ROMANS 6:1–14

<sup>1</sup> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? <sup>3</sup> Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—<sup>7</sup> because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

<sup>8</sup> Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup> For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. <sup>10</sup> The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

<sup>11</sup> In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup> Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

### KEY TEXT

*If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.—Romans 6:5*

## GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

Unit 3: Liberating Letters

LESSONS 9–13

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## HOW TO SAY IT

Chrestus*Crest*-us.

Claudius*Claw*-dee-us.

Colossians*Kuh-losh*-unz.

Corinthians*Ko-rin*-thee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

Ephesians*Ee-fee*-zhunz.

Gentile*Jen*-tile.

Suetonius*Soo-toe*-nee-us.

Thessalonians*Thess-uh-lo*-nee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

## Introduction

### A. Set Free

President Abraham Lincoln delivered the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. By this time, the Civil War had raged for nearly two years. According to the president’s decree, “All persons held as slaves ... are, and henceforward shall be free.” Of course, words without appropriate action—even the words of a president—cannot create change. The proclamation did

not immediately end slavery throughout the nation. This speech, however, did fan the flame of liberation, especially in the North. The Civil War ended in 1865 with a Union victory. The battle for freedom was long and bloody, but ultimately victorious.

We still experience echoes of slavery. Though freedom for slaves was declared, the long process of becoming equal citizens under the law is, in many ways, an ongoing struggle. The parallel is imperfect, but some similarities exist between the fight to end slavery in the United States and Jesus' sacrifice to end slavery the world over. The lesson today focuses not on the moment of victory, but, instead, the work that is still to be done in the aftermath.

## **B. Lesson Context**

The letter to the Roman church was probably written during Paul's long stay in Corinth (Acts 18:11), in about AD 58 in the midst of his third missionary journey. The church in Rome had been planted by other, unknown missionaries—possibly people who had been present to hear Peter at Pentecost (2:10). Beyond encouraging the believers there, Paul's letter also sought the Roman believers' support for a planned mission into Spain (Romans 15:23–28).

The nature of the church in Rome was influenced by an edict, issued by Emperor Claudius in about AD 49, that had forced Jews living in the city to leave (Acts 18:2). The Roman historian Suetonius tells us that Claudius “banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus,” the word Chrestus likely referring to Christ. This experience probably fostered a certain division within the Roman church between Gentile and Jewish believers, with each group contending that it had better claim on salvation in Christ than did the other (compare Romans 11:13–24).

The expulsion of Jews from Rome resulted in Gentile Christians being in the majority in the church there, if they had not been the majority already (Romans 1:5–6, 13). Their majority status seems to have continued even after the death of Claudius in AD 54 allowed Jews to return to the imperial city (compare Acts 18:2 with Romans 16:3–5a). Much of Paul's letter is therefore directed specifically to the Gentile believers there (11:13).

Paul used this letter as an opportunity to carefully explain the gospel (and his own teaching on it) to an audience who did not know him and had never heard him preach in person. As a result, this letter contains the most thorough and organized defense of Paul's preaching (Romans 2:16; 16:25). He argued that faith in Jesus is the only way to be justified before God. This justification comes by grace, through faith in Jesus, and not by obedience to the Old Testament law (3:21–26). Both Jew and Gentile are alike in sin, and both can be saved only through the redemption of Jesus (3:23–24). To confirm his point that God has always been concerned about faith, Paul used the example of Abraham. Abraham was declared righteous before God on the basis of his faith, not his obedience to the law (4:13).

In Romans 5 Paul again looked closely at the work of Jesus Christ. Adam was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27) but gave in to temptation (3:6). Through the sin of Adam, death came into the world (3:19; Romans 5:12). Jesus, however, has done what Adam could not. Jesus, God himself in the flesh, was sinless despite temptation (Hebrews 4:15). And his death and resurrection brought grace and life to the world (Romans 5:17). Now, in Romans 6, Paul turns to examine the practical effect of Jesus' work in our lives.

# I. Dead to Sin

## (ROMANS 6:1–5)

### A. Rhetorical Question (v. 1)

#### 1. What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

The two questions here are rhetorical (also see Romans 6:2, below). Instead of seeking an answer from the audience, Paul primed the reader for his answer to the question *Shall we go on sinning* (compare 3:8). We can see in the question this flow of logic: (1) Since forgiveness of sin is a sign of God's grace to us and (2) since grace is a good thing, then (3) why not sin all the more so that we may get more *grace* from God?

### B. Emphatic Answer (vv. 2–5)

#### 2. By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Paul is using a technique known as "reduction to the absurd." In this method, an argument is boiled down to a level at which supporting it seems crazy. Anyone who would argue that continuation of *sin* is a good thing because it results in more opportunities for God to forgive us has missed the point entirely! Do we think we are doing God a favor by increasing his grace business?

#### 3. Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Though we may read this as a rhetorical question, Paul's Roman audience had never heard him preach and so may not have been familiar with the concept of being *baptized into [Jesus'] death*. Baptism was commonly understood as a ritual washing away of sins, which John linked explicitly to genuine repentance (see Matthew 3:1–2, 6, 11a; Luke 3:3). This symbolism was not lost in emerging Christian understandings of baptism but deepened that understanding by tying baptism to faith in Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 19:1–5; 22:16; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21). Paul connected baptism to a personal identification of the believer with Christ (see Galatians 3:27).

Notice too that Paul appealed to baptism as a shared experience. The believer has not made a commitment to be carried out in a solitary way but, instead, in solidarity with others who have also taken on Christ. The body of Christ is made up of the many who call him Savior.

#### 4a. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death

*Therefore* draws a conclusion from Romans 6:2–3. *Baptism* is a fitting analogy for *death*. Churches have practiced baptism in various ways from early centuries, but it is worth noting that the burial analogy works best if we understand baptism as a full immersion of a person under water. As a dead body is *buried* in the ground, so we are lowered into the water of baptism to symbolize our death to sin. There is a sense of death when one is completely under the water, for normal sensory perceptions are suspended.

*Through* baptism we are brought into Christ so that his death becomes our death. Baptized persons put sin to death and bury it when they believe, repent, and are baptized (see Colossians 2:12).

**4b. in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

Jesus died, but he was *raised* to life by *the Father*. In the same way, our death in *Christ* is not the end but the means for having *new life*. At the point of conversion (symbolized here by baptism), the believer's old life of sin ends and a new life begins (Romans 8:6–7). God's *glory* that has given Jesus new life does the same for us (8:11).

**5. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.**

Just as a person goes into the water of baptism and is buried (*KJV*: “planted”) with Christ, so a seed is planted into the soil. In both cases, one expects new life to flourish. Our sharing in Christ's *resurrection* depends on our unity with his *death*. Christian baptism is a likeness of, or a demonstration or reenactment of, the central facts of the gospel message as defined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 (the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus). Baptism provides a wonderful opportunity to be like Jesus!

## II. Alive in Christ (ROMANS 6:6–14)

### A. Freedom from Sin (vv. 6–11)

**6–7. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.**

In the remainder of this chapter and in Romans 7–8, Paul continued to describe the ongoing battle in which Christians are engaged—a battle of which we all are keenly aware. As long as we live in this world, the fleshly part of us (*the body ruled by sin*) will be calling for attention; that will be the part of us through which Satan will work the hardest to capture our allegiance and erode our faith.

Here the apostle insists that we no longer take orders from *sin* or from its headquarters. He uses the term *our old self* to describe the individual under sin's rule (Ephesians 4:22). But now that we are new creatures in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17), we live under a new master, or by the “new self” (Ephesians 4:24). By joining with Christ, we no longer *be slaves to sin*. We are not free from temptation, but we are *free from sin* as the controlling factor in our lives. God has also given us his Holy Spirit to equip us for the battle, and the Spirit is stronger than Satan (1 John 4:4). Sin will continue to entice, but now it has met its match.

**8. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.**

In a sense, we've already begun to enjoy resurrection life (John 17:3), following our burial *with Christ* symbolized in baptism. But there is still much more to come. We haven't yet experienced the full resurrection and still experience the temptations of sin. But we hope—for full life and restoration in faith (Romans 8:29–30; see lesson 10). The sure fact of what Christ has already done for us by his own death and resurrection provides all the confidence we need in order to trust that our own resurrection will follow.

**9. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.**

Although other humans were raised from the dead (examples: 1 Kings 17:17–24; John 11:38–44), their new life was temporary; they died again. *Christ*, however, *was raised from the dead* once and for all, never to *die again*. The Christian faces death knowing that it is a beaten enemy because of Jesus' resurrection. Thus what is true of Jesus is true of the Christian: *death no longer has mastery over him*. With the death and resurrection of Christ, sin and death have been overturned and the new era has begun (Colossians 1:18).

**10. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.**

Jesus' singular sacrifice for our sin is sufficient for all time (Hebrews 9:24–28; 10:10). It never will be repeated. While Jesus' *death* was *to sin*, this doesn't mean that Christ ever sinned but, instead, that he submitted to death, which is the consequence of sin. But he now reigns at the right hand of the Father. His *life* is *to God*, as it was before he laid aside his glory to live among us (Ephesians 1:20; Philippians 2:6–8).

**11. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

Because of what Christ has accomplished, we are free from slavery to sin and given the freedom to choose obedience to God. This is the case even if we don't actually feel *dead to sin*. Because of our new identity *in Christ Jesus*, we can be *alive to God*, choosing his purposes over our former sinful preoccupations.

## **B. Freedom to Serve God (vv. 12–14)**

**12. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.**

Here in the first half of Romans, Paul personifies three spiritual realities as being tyrants; each has dominion as it reigns over us. All this is described with language derived from a king's reigning over his subjects or from a master's ruling over his slaves.

The first of these three is death, introduced as a reigning tyrant in Romans 5:14. The second is *sin*, explicitly seen as the reigning tyrant in the verse before us. The third is the law, spoken of extensively in chapters 2 and 3, but introduced fully as having "authority" in 7:1 (but see 6:14, below). These three oppress us in different ways. We fear death, we suffer because of sin, and we are judged inadequate by the law (see Romans 2:12).

Paul urged his readers not to allow the ominous spiritual tyrant of sin to exercise any sort of authority in their lives. Although we are dead to sin, we will continue to struggle against it. Paul was not talking about abstract sins of the intellect, but about real-world acts that involve our bodies. Such sins come from yielding to *evil desires*. The underlying Greek reflects language Paul used elsewhere when talking about sexual sins (Romans 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 4:5). Living under Christ's rule, however, we have been given a path to flee from sin and escape its clutches. Resisting sin is not passive. It requires effort (2 Timothy 2:22). We have been set free from sin, but we must also choose to abandon sinful thoughts and behaviors.

**13. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.**

This command builds on the previous verse, emphasizing that no part of our bodies should remain *an instrument of wickedness*. Our body is no longer Satan's possession. *Any part of yourself* refers to every member of the human body, such as hands or ears. This use is reflected in English in the word *dismember*, referring to cutting off an arm or leg. We are to use our eyes, our hands, our feet, our minds, and our mouths in ways that show we are people *who have been brought from death to life*. That does not simply mean avoiding wicked uses of those features; it also means putting them to work to serve, to bless, and to draw others to the righteous God. Every part of our bodies is to be used *as an instrument* for God's right purposes (Romans 12:1).

Christians live in the era between the moment that God dealt *sin* a deathblow through Jesus' death and resurrection and the day of the final victory that will occur at Jesus' return. During this interval, we are to live under God's authority, reflecting the *righteousness* that he requires of his people (Ephesians 4:24). We cannot live lives of divided loyalties, serving two masters. We must yield fully every aspect of ourselves to the service of God. We are not partly alive and partly dead. We are completely alive from the dead (2:5). In the new life, we serve only God in acts of righteousness.

**14. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.**

Paul returns to his language of *sin* as a tyrant, insisting again that it cannot be our *master*. The reason for this is found in the controlling rule by which we live. If we allow sin to dominate us, then we position ourselves to be subject to the law. Paul certainly had the Jewish law in mind here, but the application is broader if *under the law* is understood to mean "under the old realm." Paul has already argued that if we are under the law, then we are judged guilty (see Romans 3:19–20). Anyone who attempts to be righteous by rule keeping will fail (3:23). Law does not save; it points out sin. Obeying the law to the best of one's ability is an exercise of wisdom and will, but that does not provide the answer for mastering sin. If we allow sin to reign over us, we are putting ourselves right back into slavery, despite the freedom given to us by Christ.

Instead, we are to be ruled by *grace*. It is not about which law or set of rules we try to keep, but about which master we serve. Apart from grace, we cannot overcome sinful desire. By grace, death has been destroyed, sin's hold has been broken, and the law has been fulfilled through the perfect obedience of Jesus. Even when we avoid sinful behavior, we are mastered by sin if we are doing this in an attempt to earn favor with God (the way of law). If our motivation is to serve God, then righteous behavior will follow naturally.

## Conclusion

### A. Who Will You Serve?

With Jesus' resurrection we see that both the new era of resurrection life and the old era of sin and brokenness exist side by side until Christ's return. This time of both fulfillment of promises

and expectation of future perfection can be called the “Already/Not Yet.” This phrase captures the tension that exists in this age. Through faith in Jesus, believers have the beginnings of resurrection life in the Holy Spirit right now (Ephesians 1:13–14). This is our spiritual resurrection and new life in Christ (2:1, 6; Colossians 3:1). The fullness of this new life will come with the final resurrection from physical death. For the believer, new life is both present and future.

Our baptism has united us with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With his death, we are set free from slavery to sin. With his resurrection, we are given new life. However, we must make the choice of how we will live in this new freedom. We may continue to live in disobedience, becoming slaves to sin all over again. Or we may choose to live in righteousness, enjoying the new life Christ has purchased for us. Out of our knowledge of, and gratitude for, the grace of God, let us eagerly serve righteousness. It’s the best life now—and forever.

### **B. Prayer**

Father, thank you for your grace made clear to us through your Son. May we be encouraged and strengthened to live for you each day. We ask these things in the name of Jesus, by whose blood we have been set free and made new. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Let us live free from sin in the grace of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

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