Lesson 59 at StudyRomans.org

Romans 6:7

> **Romans 6:7** — For one who has died has been set free from sin.

At what point can we say that we have been set free from sin?

Doesn't this verse answer that question? And isn't the answer when we died? "For one who has died has been set free from sin." We are set free from sin when we die.

And what death is this? Didn't verse 4 answer that question? "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death." And how many times and in how many ways has Paul told us that same thing in Romans 6? We are saved at the moment of our baptism, and not a moment before. And that baptism that saves us is water baptism — the one baptism commanded in Matthew 28, the one baptism we then see in Acts 8, and the one baptism of Ephesians 4.

Next, let's look at the phrase "set free" in verse 7. Paul mentioned slavery at the end of verse 6, and Paul is still talking about slavery here in verse 7. And what Paul says here is based on a simple fact of life about human slavery — if I am a slave, then I am set free from that slavery when I die.

Prior to my death, the slave-master has complete power and dominion over me. But after my death, the slave-master no longer has any power or any dominion over me. I am set free from that slavery and from that slave-master at the moment of my death, and not a moment before.

And the same is true when it comes to my relationship with sin. That is what Paul is saying here. Prior to my death to sin, I was under the dominion of sin. But after my death to sin, I was set free from the slavery of sin, from the power of sin, and from the dominion of sin. I was set free from that slavery at the moment of my death, and not a moment before. And that death happened at my baptism "into death" (verse 4).

And, yes, the key word here is **death**. Death is what releases a slave from his slavery. A slave who has become sick is still a slave. A slave who has become weak is still a slave. A slave who has been wounded is still a slave. A slave who is getting old and who is wasting away is still a slave. But a slave who has died is no longer a slave. He was set free from that slavery at the moment of his death, and not a moment before.

Romans 6:8

> **Romans 6:8** — Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

We have already talked about what it means to have died with Christ, and we have already talked about when that happens. We share in the death of Christ at the moment of our baptism. That is when we are united with him in a death like his.

But what does Paul mean when he says that "we believe that we will also live with him"? Is Paul talking about our final resurrection on the last great day when Jesus returns to claim his own?

Let's start by looking at the grammar. The verb tense here is future — Paul says that we **will** live with him. And so, many tell us that Paul must be focused here on our still future resurrection at the end of time. And maybe he is, but maybe he is not.

This future tense in verse 8 might be what is sometimes called a "logical future tense" that simply describes some event that is future to some other event that precedes it. If you do X, then Y will (future tense) happen. "If you speed, you will get a speeding ticket." But if I have already sped, then I might have already gotten a ticket (despite the future tense in that statement).

If that is what we see here, then what Paul is telling us is that our new life with Christ is a consequence of our baptism into Christ. That is, Paul is just saying "if this has happened, then we believe that will also happen."

But if that is what Paul is saying here, then what does it mean to live with Christ? Is living with Christ something we can begin to experience immediately after our baptism? We know that we will live with Christ in heaven for all eternity, but is there some sense in which we live with Christ right here and right now?

Yes, there is. In fact, as we have seen here in Romans 6, there is a sense in which our life with Christ begins as soon as we come up out of the water of baptism, where we share in the resurrection of Christ. Paul also describes that life with Christ elsewhere.

> **Colossians 2:12-13** — Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who

> raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **God made alive together with him,** having forgiven us all our trespasses,

> **Galatians 2:20** — I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, **but Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

> **Colossians 3:1-4** — If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, **and your life is hidden with Christ in God**. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

> **Ephesians 2:4-6** — But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ** — by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and **seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus**.

And that may be what Paul is saying here. It certainly fits well with the context, but I do have a question about that view — why did Paul say "we believe"? "Now if we have died with Christ, **we believe** that we will also live with him."

Paul could have said, "Now if we have died with Christ, we will also live with him." But Paul did not say that. Instead, Paul said, "Now if we have died with Christ, **we believe that** we will also live with him." Why did Paul add that phrase "we believe"?

If I tell you that I believe that some event will happen, the natural interpretation is that the event has not yet happened. I **believe** it will rain tomorrow, but I **know** it rained yesterday.

And notice the difference between what Paul says here in verse 8 and what Paul said in verse 6 and what Paul will say in the next verse. Here in verse 8, Paul says, "we believe," but in verses 6 and 9 Paul says, "we know" — both times in reference to a past event.

We can't push too far on this difference between knowing and believing. Our future life with Christ is also something that Paul knew, but his use of different words here is suggestive. And what it suggests to me is that verse 8 is looking at a future event — something that hasn't happened yet, but something that Paul believes will happen. And we do see a similar statement from Paul elsewhere.

> **2 Corinthians 4:13-14** — Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "**I believed**, and so I spoke," **we also believe**, and so we also speak, **knowing** that he who raised the Lord Jesus **will raise us also with Jesus** and bring us with you into his presence.

So where are we on this question? Where we are is that the context is pointing us in one direction, and the verb tense is pointing us in another direction. If we look at the context, we find a resurrection that happened at our baptism. But if we look at verse 8, we find Paul reminding us of what we believe about a seemingly future resurrection.

How do we choose between those two options? I think the choice is simple — the text rules over the context. The context helps us interpret the text, but the context cannot replace the text. And what the

text says is that "we believe that we will also live with him." In my opinion, that belief is our belief that we will be raised from the dead to live with Christ for all eternity in heaven.

But why then does Paul suddenly jump from the time of our baptism to the end of time? And how does this discussion about the end of time relate to Paul's answer to the question in verse 1 — "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"

Again, I think the answer is simple. Paul's response to that question in verse 1 is centered around our baptism, but Paul is looking at our baptism from three different time frames.

- In verse 2, Paul tells us that, **prior to our baptism**, we were living in sin. That was the life of "our old self" in verse 6.
- In verses 4-5, Paul tells us what happened **at our baptism**. We were buried, and we were raised. We were united with him in a death like his, and we were united with him in a resurrection like his.
- In verses 4 and 6, Paul also told us what happens **after our baptism**. We walk in newness of life. We are no longer enslaved to sin.

I think that here in verse 8 Paul is simply telling us something else about what happens after our baptism — we will live with Christ eternally.

Yes, we live with Christ now in a sense — and Paul has already talked about that life in verse 4. But I think Paul in verse 8 is focused on

our life with Christ in heaven after the end of time. And that, too, is something that comes after our baptism.

And, as for how that fact answers the objection in verse 1, could there be any better answer to the objection in verse 1? Should we keep on sinning? God forbid! You are going to live with Jesus forever! How could anyone who is going to live with Jesus forever want to keep living in sin?

Romans 6:9

> **Romans 6:9** — We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

Think for a moment about the resurrections that we read about in the Bible: the young boy raised by Elijah, the young boy raised by Elisha, the son of the widow of Nain, Jairus' daughter, Lazarus, Dorcas, Eutychus, and some others.

They all died and were raised from the dead by God. What else did they all have in common? They all died again. They all died the first time, and then later they all died a second time after being raised from the dead.

After being raised from the dead by Jesus, Lazarus died again and was once again placed in a tomb — and there in that tomb Lazarus remains to this day until the final day comes when Lazarus will once again hear the command of Christ to come forth out of that tomb. But that day has not yet come, and so Lazarus is still in that tomb.

But the resurrection of Christ is completely different. Jesus died once and only once. Jesus was raised from the dead by God to never again experience death. Jesus will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him. Here is how Paul describes that elsewhere:

> **1 Corinthians 15:20** — But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

What does it mean that Jesus is the **firstfruits** of those who have died? It does not mean that Jesus was the first person to ever be raised from the dead. Instead, it means that Jesus was the first person to ever be raised from the dead never to die again. And it means that, like the firstfruits of harvest, his resurrection anticipates and guarantees our own resurrection never to die again. One day we, too, will be raised from the dead never to die again — but Jesus did that first.

Death no longer has dominion over him. Does death still have dominion over us?

If this death were spiritual death, then the answer would be no. Paul will tell us in verse 13 that we have been brought from death to life, and Paul has already told us that we are walking in newness of life.

But I don't see how the death here in verse 9 could be spiritual death. This death in verse 9 is the death that Jesus died, and that death was physical death. Jesus died physically, and Jesus was raised physically never to die physically again. Physical death no longer has dominion over him.

> **Acts 2:23-24** — This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified

> and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

That death is physical death by crucifixion. Physical death no longer has dominion over him. And, as for spiritual death, that type of death never had dominion over Christ because Jesus never committed any sin.

And, yes, I know that we sometimes talk about God turning his back on Jesus at the cross and forsaking Jesus at the cross, but I think when we do that we are often going beyond what the Bible says on that subject.

Yes, Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 from the cross — "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But that verse quoted by Jesus is just the first verse of a much longer psalm — and that psalm is focused almost entirely on the crucifixion of Christ, even describing such a death in detail long before that method of execution was invented. And what do we find if we keep reading that psalm? Here is what the Psalmist says at the end of that psalm: "For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and **he has not hidden his face from him**, but has heard, when he cried to him" (verse 24). And note that of the seven sayings of Jesus from the cross, three of them are directly addressed to God the Father, including this one from Psalm 22.

And remember how Paul describes the death of Jesus on the cross:

> **Ephesians 5:2** — And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

And remember what Jesus said about his death on that cross:

> **John 16:32** — Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.

Did God forsake Jesus on the cross? Did God turn his back on Jesus at the cross? Some say yes, but I do not think that is what the Bible teaches about the death of Christ. As for what did happen on the cross when the one who knew no sin was made to be sin for our sake (2 Corinthians 5:21), I think that much has not been revealed to us in God's word. And, in my opinion, I don't think we should speculate about that. I think it is much better for us to stick very closely to the language of the Bible.

The Bible teaches that Jesus physically died on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for sin. And so I think the death here in verse 9 is physical death. Physical death no longer has dominion over him.

But what about us? Does physical death still have dominion over us now that we have been saved? I think it does, at least in one sense.

We know that **sin** no longer has dominion over us after we have been saved. But **death** still has dominion over us in the sense that we all still have that upcoming appointment with death (Hebrews 9:27).

But after we have been raised from the dead on the last day never to die again, then death will no longer have dominion over us because we will be raised from the dead never to die again. Paul gives us a wonderful description of that elsewhere:

> **1 Corinthians 15:53-55** — For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put

> on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

But there is also a sense in which physical death no longer has dominion over us. Yes, Christians remain subject to physical death, but Christians need not be afraid of physical death.

> **Hebrews 2:14-15** — Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

We have talked about this before. Jesus dethroned death at the cross and now Jesus reigns as king, but death remains as a rebellious enemy of the king. And that rebellious enemy will be the last enemy destroyed on the last day.

> **1 Corinthians 15:24-26** — Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

And so, we are under the dominion of physical death in the sense that we will all eventually die, but we are not under the dominion of physical death in the sense that physical death is something we should fear. Jesus has conquered physical death, and one day Jesus will destroy physical death.

Before we leave verse 9, let's look at the Handout for Lesson 59. That Handout shows seven different Greek verbs that Paul uses in his letters to describe the action of reigning or ruling. We see one of those verbs here in verse 9 describing the dominion of death.

And one interesting thing to note from the Handout is that our English translation often replaces a Greek verb with an English noun. Romans 14:9, for example, replaces the same verb that we see here in verse 9 with the noun "Lord." And we see that same thing twice in 1 Timothy 6:15 with the phrase "King of kings and Lord of lords." That phrase is literally "the King of those that reign, and Lord of those that exercise lordship," but I have to admit that "King of kings and Lord of lords" has a much better ring to it!

But, back to verse 9, why is Paul telling us this? How is this a response to the question in verse 1? Let's keep reading so that Paul can explain.

Romans 6:10

> **Romans 6:10** — For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

Paul is still answering the question in verse 1. Earlier, Paul gave one reason why we cannot continue in sin — **we** died to sin. And now, in verses 9-10, Paul is giving us another reason why we cannot continue in sin — **Jesus** died to sin.

We died to sin, and Jesus also died to sin. We know what it means that we died to sin — Paul has already told us that. We were once enslaved to sin, but that slavery ended when we died to sin. But Jesus

"committed no sin" (1 Peter 2:22), and so what does Paul mean when he says that Jesus died to sin?

Paul answers that question with what he says next: "once for all." Jesus died to sin, once for all. Jesus died to sin for me and for you.

Yes, Jesus died to sin, but that sin was my sin and that sin was your sin. The death of Christ was a one-time event (he died once) for the sins of the whole world (he died once for all). And, of course, there are many parallel passages in the Bible that tell us the same thing.

> **Isaiah 53:5** — But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

> **2 Corinthians 5:21** — For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

> **Hebrews 9:27-28** — And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

> **Hebrews 10:12** — But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

But how is this an answer to the question in verse 1? Simple. Jesus' death to sin was a one-time event that dealt with the problem of sin. Likewise, our death to sin at our baptism is a one-time event that deals with the problem of sin.

And so how can we continue in sin? If we are following the steps of Christ, how can we ever want to go back and live in sin after the problem of sin has been dealt with? That problem is over and done — why would we ever want to act otherwise by continuing in sin?

And Paul continues: "But the life he lives he lives to God." What does that mean? It means the same thing that we just saw — how can we continue in sin if we are following the steps of Christ? After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus returned to the right hand of God the Father in heaven. The life he lives he lives to God the Father.

And what about us? We need to live the same kind of life. We need to follow the example of Christ. We need to live a life that pleases God and that honors God and that glorifies God. And none of that is true if we are continuing in sin.

Think back for a moment to that question in verse 1 that Paul is still answering. The thought there is that we should just sin more and more so that grace may abound more and more, and of course more and more grace just means that God gets more and more glory for having given us more and more grace.

Paul is demolishing that horrible idea. Jesus dealt with sin and then returned to the right hand of God the Father in heaven. Elsewhere Paul tells us that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). Our life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). How then can anyone possibly think that they are honoring and glorifying God by sinning more and more so that grace may abound? As Paul has already said, God forbid!

If we are following the steps of Christ, then we want to be more and more like Christ. And the only way to become more and more like Jesus is to sin less and less. Jesus never sinned, and he is our perfect example. We are not following that perfect example if we are sinning more and more.

If we are walking in newness of life, then we want to glorify and honor and please God more and more. And the only way to glorify and honor and please God more and more is to sin less and less.

Romans 6:11

> **Romans 6:11** — So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Jesus died physically to deal with the problem of sin. His perfect sacrifice is what keeps us from experiencing the wrath of God (Romans 5:9). Jesus died on the cross once for all — he gave his life for us. He died to sin because of our sin. But death could not hold him, and now he is alive to God the Father, never to die again. He laid down his life, and he took it up again.

> **John 10:17** — For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

That is how Jesus died to sin and lives to God. And verse 11 says that we should consider ourselves as likewise being dead to sin and alive to God. But the only way we can ever be that way is because Jesus is that way. That is why Paul adds that final phrase, "in Christ Jesus." We are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God **in Christ Jesus**. And how do we become "in Christ Jesus"? Look again at verse 3 — we have all "been baptized into Christ Jesus."

Now, of course, we did not die for the sins of others as Jesus did, but we did die to sin. Jesus died on the cross to deal with the problem of sin, and we died in the watery grave of baptism to deal with the problem of sin — not based on what we did, but based on what Jesus did for us. We are cleansed by the blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5), and that cleansing occurs at our baptism (Acts 22:16). That is why we must consider ourselves dead to sin.

But we must also consider ourselves alive to God in Christ Jesus. Just as Jesus was raised to be alive with God the Father, so we too are raised from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life. After we are cleansed by the blood of Christ by being baptized into Christ, then we are alive to God in Christ Jesus.

And let's not lose sight of why Paul is saying this. He is answering the question in verse 1 — "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" That is, are we to wallow in sin so that God will have the opportunity to show off his grace? The answer is God forbid! And Paul is giving us yet another reason why that is the answer.

Jesus died on the cross to deal with the problem of sin. He died on the cross because of our sin. And then Jesus was raised from the dead to live to God the Father.

And we have done the same thing. We died to sin at our baptism just as surely as Jesus died to sin on the cross. And we were raised to live to God at our baptism, just as surely as Jesus was raised from the grave to live to God. How then could we possibly want to continue in sin? How could we possibly think that God wants us to continue in sin?

- Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **God forbid! Look at the cross!**
- Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **God forbid! Look at the empty tomb!**
- Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **God forbid! Look at what happened at your baptism!**

Paul is answering that objection in verse 1 with reason after reason why we must not continue in sin. And Paul is not finished telling us that.

Romans 6:12

> **Romans 6:12** — Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

What is the logical consequence of all that Paul has told us? Is it that we should sin more and more as Paul's enemies were saying? No, it is the opposite. The logical consequence of what Paul has told us is that we should sin, not more and more, but less and less.

We are now dead to sin. We are now no longer enslaved to sin. The old man has died and is no longer under the dominion of the slave-master. We have been set free from sin.

So why then would anyone ever want to go back and live under that old slave-master again? Why would anyone want to go back to that old life of slavery and bondage? We have escaped! We are free! Why would we ever turn around and go back?

But is that even possible? Is it possible to go back into slavery after becoming a new creation? Yes, it is. We can escape and then go back into slavery. Just like the Israelites in the wilderness wanted to do, we can escape from slavery and then go back into slavery. Peter tells us all about it.

> **2 Peter 2:19-22** — They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after **they have escaped** the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, **they are again entangled** in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

Peter says that "they have escaped," but that "they are again entangled." He could not have told us any more clearly that it is possible to lose your salvation after you have become a new creation. Even then we retain our freedom of choice, and that means that even then we can choose to turn our back on Christ and walk away from him.

And woe to those who do that! Their last state has become worse for them than the first — and that is saying a lot given what we know about the first state of those who have never obeyed the gospel of Christ.