

SIN, LAW AND GRACE IN ROMANS 6-8

A Thematic Study

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I. LIFE IN SIN

A. Apart from Christ all people live in bondage to sin

1. Life apart from Christ is depicted as a life in bondage to sin (6:16,17,20). Sin dominates and controls people as though it were itself a personal, living force. In such a condition they are not free, but slaves to sin.
2. Under sin's slavery, people yield themselves to wickedness. Drawn along and deceived by sin, they offer the members of their bodies in the service of sin to perform all kinds of wickedness. In such a state, they are free from the control of righteousness – righteousness has no place in their lives (6:19,20).

B. In this condition, the law only strengthens and excites the power of sin in people

1. The law has the effect of stirring sin to greater life in people who do not know Christ. In forbidding wrong and demanding right, it actually arouses sinful passions within our bodies (7:5). Sin may itself seem to be dead – to be inactive, asleep. But with the coming of the law, it springs to life, inflaming passions and producing fresh works that lead to death (7:8-12).
2. This is not to suggest the law itself is evil or an instrument of death (7:7,13). On the contrary, it is holy and righteous and good (7:12). Without the law we would never know what sin is. Through it – this good and spiritual commandment of God – we come to see how exceedingly sinful sin really is (7:7,13). It is not through any fault in the law itself that it produces this effect. It was in itself intended to bring life (7:10). Yet, through the weakness of sinful nature it is powerless to deliver people from sin and the condemnation and death that come from sin (8:3). The problem is that though the law is spiritual – a proper and fitting agent to minister the grace of the Spirit – we by nature are totally “unspiritual” – totally unfitted to the life of the Spirit (7:14). In us, that is, in our sinful nature, there is nothing good (7:18).

C. The inevitable outcome of this state is death

1. It is impossible for those enslaved to sin to please God (8:8). Their minds are set on the things that the sinful nature desires, not what God desires (8:5). Since the sinful nature is hostile to God, and has nothing of good in it, those controlled by it cannot please God (8:7). They do not submit to his commandments, nor indeed can they do so. Instead, they abandon themselves to shameful impurity and acts of ever-increasing wickedness (6:19).
2. Life under the domination of the sinful nature consequently leads to death (6:16). There is nothing at all of benefit in such a lifestyle (6:21) because the wages of sin are death (6:23).

II. SIN AND THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

A. God has acted in Christ to deal with sin in sinful man

1. What the law could not do because of the weakness of sinful human nature, God has done in his own Son. He sent him in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering (8:3). In this way – through his sacrificial death – he actually condemned sin in sinful man (8:3). In Christ he has actually executed the sentence of his righteous law on sin in man. Christ's death, in other words, is a death unto sin (6:10).
2. The Lord Jesus did not remain dead, however. Death has no mastery over him (6:9). He was raised from it through the glory of God (6:4) and he now lives unto God (6:10). He can never die again; his death to sin was a death that was once for all (6:10). He has finally and fully met the demands of God's righteous law in regard to the sin of man.

B. Those who are in Christ actually share in his death and resurrection

1. Those who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into his death and burial (6:3,4). To be united with Christ means to be united in all that he has accomplished. That means those in him have died with him, been buried with him, and have been raised to live a new life to God with him (6:2-4). Though at this point they have not come to share in the likeness of his resurrection, they most certainly will - just as certainly as they have now come to share in his death (6:5).
2. As a result, they have actually died to sin through the body of Christ (6:2,11). What happened to him has happened to them. As he died to sin, those in him have died to sin. As he is forever finished with sin – in terms of its consequences and demands – those in him are finished with sin (6:2).

C. This results in deliverance from slavery to sin and the law

1. Those who have died with Christ have been set free from sin (6:7,18,22). Their old self was crucified with him in order that their body of sin might be rendered powerless, or done away with, so that they might no longer be slaves of sin (6:6). It no longer exercises dominion over them (6:14). They are no longer helpless under its powerful urges, and no longer under the sentence of condemnation and death associated with it.
2. Similarly, those in Christ have been set free from the law (7:6). They are no longer under its jurisdiction, as it were, but under the new order or reign of the grace of God in Christ (6:14). Law only has control or authority over a person only as long as they are alive (7:1). Once they have died, they are freed from the law. Those who have died in Christ have died to the law in his him (7:4). As a result, they are no longer bound to live under its written code. Instead, they live a new life according to the Spirit (7:6).

III. THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

A. Those who are in Christ live according to the Spirit rather than the sinful nature

1. As many as are in Christ have his Spirit. If anyone does not have the Spirit, he does not have Christ (8:9). And if they have the Spirit, they are controlled by the Spirit – under his domination and rule – rather than by the sinful nature (8:9). The Spirit leads them, and through the Spirit are able put to death the misdeeds of the body (8:13,14).
2. As they live according to the Spirit, those in Christ to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law (8:4). The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets them free from the law of sin and death (8:2). Their minds are set upon what the Spirit desires, not, as in their former state, what the sinful nature desires (8:5). Controlled by the Spirit, they enjoy life and peace (8:6).

B. This does not mean they are free from conflict however

1. Though freed from the domination of the body of sin, those in Christ are not freed from its existence (8:13). While their spirits are alive because of righteousness, their bodies remain in death until given life by the indwelling Spirit (8:10,11).
2. Consequently, those in Christ experience inner struggle. They find within them one law in their minds – a law that loves and desires the will of God – but see another at work in their bodies (7:21-25). When they want to do what is good, they find sin right with them, causing them to do evil (7:21). They delight in the law of God in their minds, but find themselves taken prisoner to do evil by the law of sin in their bodies (7:22,23). They know it is not they themselves that want this; it is sin in them that makes them do it (7:17,20). This makes them wretched and leads them to cry out for deliverance from the body of death – a deliverance that they find in the Lord Jesus (7:24,25).

C. It calls them to a life of conscious surrender

1. Those in Christ cannot contemplate continuing to live in sin. Having died to sin they cannot live in it any longer. They have no obligation at all toward it (6:2). They refuse to let it reign any longer in their mortal bodies so they obey its desires (6:12). They count themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (6:11). Having been set free from sin, they now live to obedience, righteousness and holiness instead of in impurity and wickedness (6:17,18).

Having been set free from the law, they serve a new master – the Spirit – in order to bring fruit to God (7:6).

2. They consciously devote all they have to God. As those who have been brought from death to life they offer the parts of their body to him as instruments of righteousness (6:13,19). Whereas once they offered themselves as slaves of sin, they are now slaves of obedience leading to righteousness, holiness and eternal life (6:21,22).

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