

*“Welcome One Another
Just as Christ Has Welcomed You”*

Diocese of West Texas, Fall 2009

Study and Reflection Session 5

Walking in Newness of Life

(Rom 6:1-23)

The Passage: New Revised Standard Version Translation

NRSV Romans 6:1 What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For whoever has died is freed from sin. 8 But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as

instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

15 What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, 18 and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A Translation for Study, with Commentary

Romans 6:1 What then are we to say? Should we remain in Sin in order that God's power for newness of life [*charis*] may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to Sin go on living in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore, we were buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we, too, might walk in newness of life.

Paul now answers the logical question that one might ask from the preceding chapter 5: if God's power for newness of life (charis) comes into the world to

conquer the power of Sin and death, why not continue submitting to the ways of Sin so God's power might abound even more? Paul's answer is clear, although it may surprise many of us who think that forgiveness is God's primary way of dealing with Sin. But the words "forgive" and "forgiveness" (and, for that matter, "repentance") do not belong to Paul's theological vocabulary. Instead, according to Paul, God's answer to the power of Sin is to put human beings into an entirely new, justified relationship with God. For Paul, God's power does not enter the world time after time for the purpose of conferring divine forgiveness for unfaithful actions. Instead, God's power enters the world time after time to bring newness of life to the individuals and communities who follow Christ's pattern of faithfulness in daily life.

According to Paul, God has accepted Christ's death as an atoning sacrifice once for all people (3:21-31). Humankind is thereby, once and for all time, put in right relationship with God. The next move belongs to each human to claim this new, justified relationship with God by symbolically "dying" to Sin through baptism "into" Christ's death. This metaphorical "death" with Christ frees a person from Sin's lordship in their lives and reorients them to serve God through the lordship of Christ. In baptism a person changes direction. They now turn away from Sin and submit to the power of God that is at work through those who follow Jesus Christ, the one who has shown us a new way to "walk" in the world. In Paul's day, "walking" (halakhah in Hebrew) was a Jewish term for one's moral pattern. Thus, says Paul, the baptized now "walk in newness of life" as God empowers them to act in ways that reflect the "faithfulness of Jesus Christ" in their own daily lives.

5 For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will also be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of Sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to Sin. 7 For whoever has died has been justified from Sin. 8 But if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; Death no longer lords over him. 10 The death he died, he died to Sin, once for all; and the life

he lives, he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to Sin and living to God in Christ Jesus.

This new orientation to God in Christ requires each believer to “consider” (logizomai) themselves dead to Sin and living to God in Christ Jesus. We have encountered this verb logizomai earlier and noted it was an accounting term we translated as “account” or “reckon.” Here, Paul observes that this process of dying to Sin and living to God requires us to use our imaginations. Unlike Christ, we have not literally “died” and been “resurrected” from the dead. So, we must “consider” (or, “account” or “reckon”) ourselves as dead to the power of Sin and living to God “in Christ Jesus.” We must imagine what it looks like to live the pattern of Christ’s faithfulness in the contexts of our daily lives.

Stated another way, Paul understands “Sin” as a power at work in the world. It brings death (metaphorical and literal) rather than life. As we saw in 5:21, Sin, like death (5:14, 17), “reigns over” (or “rules over” or “lords over”) people who live within Sin’s sphere of influence. Through actions that are not Christ-like, we turn Sin’s destructive power loose in the world. When we do, Sin “reigns over” our bodies. Thus, we bring death and destruction on others and ourselves (remember 1:18-32). Through baptism “into Christ’s death,” however, we intentionally submit to the influence and power of God at work in Christ. As we “walk in newness of life” by acting in Christ-like ways, God’s power brings newness of life into the world.

12 Therefore, do not let Sin reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey the body’s passions. 13 No longer present your members to Sin as instruments of injustice, but present yourselves to God as living from among the dead, and present your members [to God] as instruments of justice [dikaiosynē]. 14 For Sin will not reign over you, for you are not under Torah but under that power of God for newness of life [charis].

15 What then? Should we sin because we are not under Torah but under the power of God for newness of life [charis]? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient

slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, whether of Sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to justice? 17 But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of Sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were turned over, 18 and that you, having been freed from Sin, have become slaves of justice. 19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to justice for holiness.

20 For when you were slaves of Sin, you were free in regard to justice. 21 So, what fruit did you have then from the things of which you now are ashamed? The result of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been freed from Sin and enslaved to God, the fruit you have is holiness. The result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of Sin is death, but the experience of God's power for newness of life [*charisma*] is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Consequently, Paul encourages his followers not to let Sin "reign" in their earthly bodies. Instead, he urges us to "present" ourselves to God and become instruments of God's justice in the world. As long as we are seeking to live a Christ-like life, Sin will not be able to "reign" in our bodies.

What Paul means is this: we present our bodies to God, as living from the dead, by taking actions that illustrate the pattern of the "faithfulness of Jesus Christ" in our daily lives. By doing so, we become instruments of God's justice in the world. These faithful actions bear fruit as they mediate God's life-giving power to others. The consequence of "walking in newness of life" – i.e. living a Christ-like life – is what Paul calls "holiness" or the "sanctification" of life. Holiness is about acting in ways that are pleasing to God.

Notice that Paul says the experience of God's power for newness of life (charisma) is "eternal life in Christ Jesus." This is not about what happens after one dies a physical death. The experience of God's power that brings new life is a present

reality for people who live Christ-like lives. These experiences of God's life-giving power ground our hope that life "in Christ" is present now and continues forever.

Questions for Reflection

1. Paul says we are not under Torah "but under the power of God for newness of life" (vv. 14-15). Can you tell a story about a time in the last week when God's power brought new life to a seemingly hopeless situation? How did that affect your confidence in God's faithfulness? Did the experience of God's power affect your own faithfulness going forward?
2. Can you tell a story about a time in the last week when you experienced Sin as an active power that "reigned over" you in a particular situation? Did that experience prove destructive to you or others? Be specific.
3. Where does Sin continue to tempt you? Do you have any particular discipline that allows you to "consider yourself dead to Sin and living to God in Christ Jesus" so that Sin does not reign over you? If so, please describe it. How does being part of a Christian community support you in this imaginative process?
4. Do you have a discipline for determining whether your actions are bearing fruit? If so, please describe it. If not, why not?