

Week Five: Romans 6:1–23

Key Verses

“Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection.” - Romans 6:4–5 (CSB)

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” - Romans 6:23

Key Principles

- God’s work in Christ (past and future) determines how we ought to live right now.
- God’s grace is not only pardon from sin’s guilt, but power to fight sin.
- Through our union with Christ, we are given grace that inspires us not to be lax with our sin but, instead, to go to war with it.

Read

God unites sinners to Christ in his death and resurrection by faith. Paul presents this precious truth in Romans 6. Paul comes to this truth as he deals with the objections that might arise from his teaching on God's grace. He has said that sinners are justified by grace alone, apart from works (Romans 4:4–6). But at this point, someone could find fault with God and his grace. If our justification is based on God's grace and not our works, can't we just keep sinning so that we experience more grace? In other words, does the gospel encourage unrighteousness? (6:1).

Paul answers emphatically, "Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (6:2–3). Paul means that since we are united to Christ in his death, we have died to sin, therefore, we cannot keep living in sin. (It's important to note that by "baptism," Paul is referring to their actual union with Christ at conversion, not water baptism. Water baptism is the outward sign of an already existing union with Christ).

Paul goes on to say, "For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection" (6:5, emphasis added). Notice the past tense of union with Christ in his death and the future tense of union with Christ in his resurrection. Believers live in the middle of these realities. God's work in Christ (past and future) determines how we ought to live right now. God's purpose in all this is clear: "so we too may walk in newness of life" (6:4b).

Now that's a lot of rich theology, but Pastor John Piper simply describes union in Christ this way:

It is the reality of all the ways that the Bible pictures our human connectedness to Christ, in which he is indispensable for every good that we enjoy. No saving good, no eternal good, no God-exalting good, no soul-satisfying good comes to us except as we are connected to Christ.¹

1 John Piper, *Ask Pastor John*, Desiring God, October 31, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-union-with-christ>

In other words, our union with Christ is both a past and future reality that is for our good and his glory, and it impacts how we live our lives today. This present impact is one of the reasons why our church is asking you to start praying for your One! It is our desire for all people to come to know the saving good, eternal good, and soul-satisfying good that comes from union with Christ.

Paul explains this union further in 6:6–11. God crucified our old self with Christ, but why? “[S]o that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died is freed from sin” (6:6b–7). In other words, God did this in order to free us from slavery to sin. Like Piper said above, this union isn’t to restrict us but, rather, to free us from bondage to sin and gift us with the great soul-satisfying good that comes from a union in Christ.

Notice the words Paul uses in this passage: “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11, emphasis added). Note that the word “consider” is the same word Paul used all through Romans 4 when God credits—or reckons—righteousness to sinners. However, here, it is us reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. Paul is inviting the Christians in Rome to actively embrace their union in Christ and to live lives that display their death-to-life transformations.

So, what exactly does freedom from sin look like? Notice what Paul says in verse 12, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires.” Sinful desires don’t just go away because of our union with Christ! If they did, Paul wouldn’t have mentioned the existence of sin in our lives, and he wouldn’t keep talking about our battle with sin throughout the next two chapters. So, the answer isn’t that we will never be tempted to sin again, but, rather, it’s that we don’t let sin reign in our lives. Paul says we turn from serving sin to serving God because “sin will not rule over you, because you are not under the law but under grace” (6:14). Sin will not be our master, because our righteousness is not based on law-keeping but on God’s gracious gift. God’s grace is not merely pardon from sin’s guilt but power to fight sin.

This brings up the second objection in Romans 6: “Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (6:15). Paul has the same answer, “Absolutely not!” The way you live shows which master you serve. There are only two ways to live—we either serve sin through unrighteousness or God through obedient righteousness (6:16). Paul thanks God for giving us a heart that wants to obey him instead of sin (6:17). We are freed from slavery to sin (6:18, 22), but that does not mean we are without a master. In being set free

from sin, we “have become enslaved to God” (6:22). God is an infinitely better Master than sin. Sin asks us to obey sinful desires and the wage it provides for obedience is death (6:23). God doesn’t provide wages but grants us a gift. And that gift “is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23).

Romans 6 is a treasure trove of precious truths and we’ve barely scratched the surface. Through Christ, we are given freedom from the penalty and power of sin, and one day we will be free from the presence of sin altogether. Through Christ, we are freed from obeying sinful desires and given a heart that longs to obey God. Through our union with Christ, we are given grace that inspires us not to be lax with our sin, but, instead, to go to war with it. These truths are not only life-changing, they are life-giving. We hope and pray that this week, you are in awe of a God who has made a way to be united with you through the work of Jesus Christ.

Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God’s righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul’s major points. Then, read Romans 6:1–23 in preparation for this week’s study.

Highlight

1. Circle all the verbs that show what God does in Romans 6:1–23 and underline all verbs that show what we are called to do.
2. Summarize Paul's point from Romans 6 in your own words. Try using a single sentence and compare with a few people in your group.
3. According to Romans 6:3–5, list the ways in which Paul says believers are united with Christ.
4. From Romans 6:15–23, list the ways in which Paul describes being under grace.

Explain

5. Romans 6:1 asks, "Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply?" Can you put the question into your own words? What answer, and what reason, does Paul give in verse 2?

6. From Romans 6:3–11, describe what's been done in the past and explain how that shapes the present and the future.

7. What does it look like to allow sin to reign in your body? Explain what it is like to not let sin reign in your body from verses 12–15?

8. According to Romans 6:1–23, what does it mean to be dead to sin and alive to God?

9. Explain the gospel using just verse 23.

Apply

10. Based on our study this week, how would you counsel someone who says, "I just couldn't help sinning in that way." Use specific examples and verses.

11. Describe a time when you were tempted to believe that following your own desires was real freedom while obeying God was joyless slavery. What can you do differently in those moments?

12. How can you regularly remind yourself of your union with Christ, that you are dead to sin and alive to God? In what situations do you find yourself needing these reminders the most?

13. What attitude do you normally have toward obeying God? Based on our study of this passage, how could it change?

Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home and together with your small group.

This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 6:1–23

Read 6:1–23.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- Adoration: Praise God for being a God of grace (6:1, 14), righteousness (6:13), sanctification (6:19), and eternal life (6:22).
- Confession: Ask God for mercy for the ways you have used his grace as a license to continue in sin (6:1). Confess to him all the ways you have obeyed the desires of sin and offered your body to sin (6:12–13).

- Thanksgiving: Thank God for uniting you to Christ in his death and resurrection (6:3– 5). Thank God that he has set you free from the slavery of sin and made you a slave of God (6:22). Praise God for giving you a new heart that desires to obey God and not sin (6:17). Thank him for the gift of Christ, in whom is eternal life (6:23).
- Supplication: Ask God to help you grow in your union and communion with Christ, that you would learn to know and enjoy Jesus more and more. Ask God for strength to “put to death the deeds of the body” by his Spirit (8:13). Ask him for faith and hope to believe that one day you will be raised like Christ in glory (6:5) and to give you the courage to share that hope with your One.

who's your **1**ONE?

Who's Your One? is about each of us leading one non-Christian to faith in Christ this year. Read back through your notes from this week's study on Romans 6:1–23. How would you share the truths of Romans 6:1–23 with someone who is not a Christian? What words and phrases would you use?

This week, pray for your One. Update your small group's prayer journal with specific prayer points and look for opportunities to build friendships, initiate to the spiritual, share the gospel, and help them make a decision.