

EXEGETICAL NOTES

ROMANS 6:1-14

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Considerable confusion about the Christian life prevails in many circles today. Believers are uncertain about how to appropriate for their daily walk the victory won by Jesus Christ on the cross and in his resurrection. Many are searching for a magic "key" which will open for them a life constantly filled with victory over sin. And more than one book purports to have discovered this "key."

Romans 6:1-14 presents no single such key; but it is one of the most important texts in the New Testament on the subject of the Christian life. As so often, the apostle Paul beautifully combines deep theological discussion with practical incentive to the holy life—a combination which reminds us that theology is always to have its practical implications and that our practice must never be severed from theology. The immediate occasion for this passage is found in Rom 5:20b: "where sin increased grace abounded all the more." Well, then, Paul presents a hypothetical objector as asking, "Are we to continue in sin that grace might abound?" If sin produces more grace, should we not be remaining (*ἐπιμένωμεν*—a present tense) in sin so as to gain as much grace as possible? Such a question arises naturally from Paul's strong assertion earlier in Romans that justification can be attained only on the basis of faith. No doubt Paul, in the course of long missionary experience, more than once had to answer exactly this objection: does not the doctrine of justification by faith undercut morality? Does it *really* make any difference what a person so justified *does*? After all, it is my faith, not my behavior that ultimately matters.

Such a rending asunder of faith and "works" Paul will not allow. *Μὴ γένοιτο* ("By no means") Paul responds, "How can we who died to sin (*ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ*) still live in it?" (v 2). This response is interesting. Paul does not, initially, *command* the Roman Christians to put off sin. Rather he avers that there is something fundamentally inconsistent about a person who has died to sin living in it any longer. The remainder of the text is an exposition of the meaning of this "death to sin" and its implications.

- v 3—Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? v 4—We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. v 5—For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. v 6—We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the

sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

ἡ ἀγνοεῖτε implies that the Roman Christians were aware of some of what Paul was about to say—perhaps they knew of the significance of baptism but had not drawn out some of its implications. One of these implications, Paul asserts, is that baptism into Jesus Christ involves baptism into his death. Thus, it seems, Paul explains the *believer's* death to sin by associating him with *Jesus's* death. Baptism εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν may be short for baptism εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (“into the name of Christ Jesus”—cf. Acts 8:16; 19:5 and the interchange of εἰς and εἰς τὸ ὄνομα in John 3:18), but it is better in this context to give the construction a more directly *spatial* interpretation: into union with Christ Jesus.

Verse four is intended as a clarification (οὖν) of the concept of our association with Jesus in his death (v 3b). In the first of the *συν*-compounds that come to dominate this text (cf. also vv 5, 6 and 8), Paul asserts that “we” (Paul, the Roman Christians and, by extension, all Christians) have been buried with Christ. “The baptism which is unto death” is the instrument (διὰ) by which this is accomplished; the article with βαπτίσματος is probably intended to “refer back” to the mention of baptism in v 3. The purpose clause which follows (ὅνα) contains a comparison between (ὡσπερ) Christ’s resurrection and the believer’s walk in a “new life” (καυνότητι ζωῆς—I take the construction to be a qualitative one, with a Semitic-type reversal of the “*nomens*”). In some manner, then, our being baptized with Christ has the purpose of enabling us to lead a new kind of life in the age of redemption which has dawned (cf. the use of καυνότης in Rom 7:6). Christ’s resurrection, we should note, is accomplished through “the glory of the Father,” glory (δόξα) being a reference to the power which manifests God’s glory (cf. John 11:40, where Jesus tells Martha that she will see God’s glory in the raising of her brother from the dead).

But something has been omitted in v 4. How do we proceed from Christ’s resurrection to the believer’s new life? Verse 5 furnishes the link between these two things: participation in Christ’s death involves also participation with Christ in his resurrection. In other words, we are able to lead a qualitatively new life because we have been raised with Christ—a doctrine that comes to clear expression also in Eph 2:16 and Col 2:12 and 3:1. But is not Rom 6:5 distinct from these texts? Both Ephesians and Colossians state that our being raised with Christ is *past*; our present text, however, uses a *future* tense (ἐσόμεθα) of this event. Although it is possible that the reference here is to the eschatological future, or to the moral life, the flow of the text suggests that we should view ἐσόμεθα as a “logical” future—union with Christ in his resurrection follows logically and inevitably upon union with him in death. The translation given above supplies *σὺμφυτοι τῷ ὁμοιώματι* (“partakers in the likeness”) after ἀλλὰ καὶ (“but also”) and understands τῷ ὁμοιώματι as an associative dative (“partakers in or with”)—decisions supported by the majority of commentators. Far less agreement exists on the precise meaning to be assigned to ὁμοίωμα. Some take it to mean “copy” and see a reference to baptism as the “copy” of Christ’s death and resurrection. Others, however, translate “form,” in the sense of a real and direct identity. This “form” is then held to be either baptism, in a sacramental sense (Christ’s death and resurrection being really present in baptism) or the actual, historical death and resurrection. A decision

on these alternatives is best postponed until we have considered v 6.

This verse is to be seen as a summary of vv 3-5, with *γωνώσκοντες* treated as a circumstantial participle and *τοῦτο* taken prospectively (see the NIV translation, as well as the RSV quoted above). Again, we find an assertion of our sharing in one of the central redemptive events in the life of Christ—crucifixion. At this point, we must consider what Paul means by this language associating believers with Christ's death (v 3), burial (v 4) and resurrection (vv 4b-5). One explanation which has been quite popular in evangelical circles is that Paul is using baptism to symbolize our death to sin and new life with God and that Paul presents these as in some manner analogous to Christ's death and resurrection. However, his language is stronger than this. Believers do not just undergo an experience "like" Christ's; they actually participate *with* him in these events. A second interpretation focuses also on baptism and stresses the reality of our identification with Christ by viewing baptism as a sacrament in which Christ's death and resurrection are present. This notion, however, is essentially foreign to Paul's theology and stands in clear contradiction to his concentration on faith earlier in this same letter. How, then, are we to explain our union with Christ? Romans 5 may furnish a clue. Verses 12-21 of this chapter present Adam and Christ as the two inclusive "heads" of humanity. In Adam all sin (v 12; cf. v 19); in Christ "all" (probably all the elect) are made righteous (vv 18-19). This understanding of Adam and Christ as representatives who "incorporate" all who belong to them such that what they experience all belonging to them experience, is not an isolated concept in Paul, but one that comes to expression in a number of texts (1 Corinthians 15; 2 Cor 5:14; Eph 2:15-16; 2:6; Col 2:11-13; 3:1-4) and which is a fundamental "framework" within which Paul expresses his theology. In Romans 6, then, this framework would suggest that Paul means us to understand that when Christ died, was buried and was resurrected, we were *with him*. In other words, our identification with Christ must be placed back to the time when God was through Christ securing the salvation of all who belong to him. Viewed in this way, our identification with Christ is to be understood in *forensic* terms—God provides for our salvation *by viewing us as in Christ*; much as he has viewed all men as being in Adam. We therefore guard against the unbiblical notion of a "crucifixion" in which believers are individually and totally separated from the "old nature" characteristic of this age.

Reference to the "old nature" brings us back to the text and to the reference in v 6 to *ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος* ("our old man"). This term has frequently been taken to refer to a *part of* each believer which is either destroyed or conquered at conversion. But pauline categories encourage us to consider this as a corporate term. The term occurs twice elsewhere in Paul: Eph 4:22 and Col 3:9, in both of which cases it is contrasted with *ὁ καινὸς ἄνθρωπος* ("the new man"). This term is clearly implied to be a corporate one in Col 3:10-11, because Paul asserts that religious, national and social distinctions are not relevant in this "man." Similarly, Eph 2:15 asserts that God has made "one new man" (*ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον*) out of Gentiles and Jews. When we recall that Christ himself is called "the second man" in contrast to Adam, the "first man" (1 Cor 15:47), we are well on the way to showing that "the old man" is a term which describes *mankind in Adam*. "Our old man" would thus refer to the believer in so far as he belongs to Adam, the head of the "old age" domi-

nated by sin and death. Putting the first clause of v 6 together, then, we arrive at the paraphrase: "What we were as members of Adam's people has been judged when we in God's sight died with Christ."

The purpose of this judgment is expressed in the second clause of v 6—"in order that the body of sin might be *καταργηθῆ*." The verb *καταργέω* can mean either "destroy" (RSV) or "render powerless or impotent" (cf. NIV). Pauline usage decisively favors the latter. The "body of sin" which is rendered powerless is variously explained, but it is best to view it as a more individualizing description of the old man—the physical body dominated by sin. The ultimate purpose of all this (*τοῦ δουλέω* could also express result or apposition), the "bottom line," is that we should no longer serve sin (v 6c).

Before leaving this paragraph, two other issues of broad import remain to be considered. First, why does Paul set forth baptism as an important intermediary (cf. *διὰ* in v 4) in this identification with Christ? While the baptism in this text has been taken to be Spirit-baptism, the use of the noun *βάπτισμα* in v 4 as well as Paul's general usage suggest that the reference is to be water baptism. But does water baptism exclude reference to Spirit-baptism and the accompanying faith response to Christ? Probably not. There is considerable evidence that faith, the gift of the Spirit and water baptism were closely associated elements of the single "conversion-initiation" experience of the believer. In the present passage, then, Paul is to be viewed as referring to conversion with one (external) element of that experience, and one which focused on the identification with Christ so important here (cf. Gal 3:27). Thus, our identification with Christ in the central redemptive events is appropriated by means of conversion.

Finally, we return to the statement with which Paul has begun this discussion—death to sin. Clearly Paul cannot mean by this *insensitivity* to sin; the illustration of the corpse which cannot be moved by any earthly delights goes too far, for it makes nonsense of Paul's frequent imperatives, in which a turning away from sin is commanded (see vv 12-13 in our own text). In light of the stress on slavery in v 6 and in vv 15-23, "death to sin" should be taken to mean *freedom from the mastery of sin*. This is exactly the idea expressed in v 14a, almost a summary of the passage: "Sin shall not have mastery over you."

v7—For he who has died is freed from sin. v 8—But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. v 9—For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. v 10—The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. v 11—So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

This paragraph reiterates and expands upon our identification with Christ with respect to death and resurrection. V 7 is transitional, giving a reason for (*γάρ*, "for") our freedom from sin in v 6 and repeating the idea of death to sin. The verb *δεδικαίωται* is translated "freed from" in RSV (see above), a meaning the word can have on occasion (Sir 26:29; Acts 13:39[?]), but in light of Pauline usage it should be translated "justified from." Still, the use of *ἀπό* after *δικαίω* is unparalleled in Paul, so we should probably also see the idea of "freed from obligation to."

Verse 8 repeats the idea of v 5; again, we would view the future *συζήσομεν* as a logical future. Verse 9 provides the reason for the confidence expressed in the last part of v 8: it is because we know (treating *εἰδότες* as a causal parti-

ciple dependent on πιστεύομεν [“we believe”]) that Christ’s resurrection guarantees his permanent victory over death that we can be absolutely confident about the victory we have by participating in that resurrection.

Verse 10 continues this line of thought by providing a further characterization of Christ’s death. “The death he died” (understanding δ in both occurrences as an “accusative of content”) was a $\epsilon\phi\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\acute{\alpha}\xi$ (“once for all”) death to sin; “the life he lives” is a life lived “for” or “with respect to” God. This is the only place in the New Testament where Christ’s death is presented as a death “to sin” ($\tau\eta\ \acute{\alpha}\mu\alpha\rho\tau\iota\alpha$), and in the light of the parallel drawn to the *believer’s* death to sin (v 11), must have some reference to Christ’s severance from the power of sin. Indeed, this would seem to be the meaning. For Christ, though sinless, was nevertheless in his earthly life subject to the power of sin, in the sense that he entered the arena in which Satan holds the mastery. His death, the victorious conclusion of a life lived in utter dependence on the Father, released him from the influence of sin; his resurrection ushered in that “spiritual” existence (cf. 1 Cor 15:45-47) in which Christ lives *in glory for* the glory of the Father. Therefore, in v 11, believers who participate in Christ’s death and resurrection are to “continually reckon themselves” ($\lambda\omicron\gamma\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon$, a present imperative) as, like Christ, dead to sin and alive to God. This constant reminding ourselves of “who we are” is necessary because, although we have experienced the *forensic*, judicial “resurrection with Christ,” severing our objective servitude of sin, we still await the day when our bodies will experience the transformation from “humility” to “glory” (Phil 3:21). In other words, our identification with Christ is to be perceived as part and parcel of the “already—not yet” inaugurated eschatology which characterizes the New Testament. Any concentration on the “already” to the exclusion of the “not yet” (what some would call “over-realized eschatology”) falls prey to some sort of perfectionism or “entire sanctification” which implicitly ignores our need for a final transformation to fit us for heavenly life. On the other hand, a concentration on the “not yet” to the exclusion of the “already” leads quickly to a “moralism” in which what *we* do rather than what *God* has done becomes pre-eminent. Paul encourages us to look back to the cross and realize the decisive transfer from the tyranny of sin which we experienced in Christ; but he also appeals to us to translate that judicial *fact* into day to day reality. This appeal is continued in vv 12-14.

v 12—Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. v 13—Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. v 14—For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

The “therefore” ($\omicron\upsilon\nu$) of v 12 indicates the sense in which these prohibitions and commands are built upon the theological insights of vv 1-11. “Let not sin reign” ($\mu\eta\ \dots\ \beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\tau\omega$) is a prohibition in the present tense, probably suggesting that believers, once in Christ, are to *stop* allowing sin to reign. Although obvious, it should be pointed out again that such a prohibition is nonsensical if the believer’s identification with Christ by faith effects a total transformation of the will. “Our mortal bodies” in which sin is not to reign may refer to the *physical* body or to the whole person as subject to sin. Perhaps the former, in light of “members” in v 13, is to be preferred. The result which can be avoided

when we refuse to let sin have the dominance is the obedience to the body's "passions" (used in a negative sense, as often in the New Testament).

Verse 13 contains contrasting imperatives, employing the same verb. The believer is commanded to *stop* "presenting" (*παριστάνετε*—a present imperative again) his members (the various parts of the "body of v 12) as "instruments" (or perhaps "weapons") in the service of sin. This prohibition is a more detailed reiteration of v 12. The positive command is to "present" ourselves to God. The aorist *παροστήσατε* is frequently taken as a command to make this presentation of ourselves as a "once-for-all" dedication. This idea the aorist can, of course, express—but it need not indicate this, and only the context can enable us to determine what kind of action the aorist is intended to convey. In conjunction with the prohibition in the present tense ("stop presenting"), an "ingressive" idea is probably best—as you *stop* presenting yourselves to sin, *begin* presenting yourselves to God. Such a transition may take place many times in the life of the believer (although Paul would no doubt hope that only one such committal would be necessary). In appealing to believers to make this "presentation," Paul reminds believers that they are those who have been brought from death to life (cf. v 11). Further, he characterizes our "members" as "instruments dedicated to producing righteousness" in contrast to the earlier description of the members as "instruments dedicated to unrighteousness" (the genitives in both expressions being taken as objective). (*δικαιοσύνη*, "righteousness," is clearly here more than simply forensic; behavior is also involved.)

As we have seen, the first clause of v 14 is a summary of the "death to sin" theme of vv 1-11—sin (viewed here, as often in this text as a "power") will not "lord it over" (*κυριεύσει*) us. The future tense is employed not because this liberation is only future to the Christian, but because Paul wants to affirm that this liberty will characterize these Roman Christians in all their relationships throughout their lives. The final clause in the text introduces a different theme; one which Paul will pick up and expand upon in chap 7: "You are not under law (*ὑπὸ νόμον*) but under grace (*ὑπὸ χάριτι*)." Some view this as an assertion that believers are no longer under the *condemnation* pronounced by the law; others that believers are no longer bound to the law as a means of salvation. But it is quite unlikely that Paul believed people had *ever* been bound to the law as a means of salvation; and Paul clearly means more than release from the condemnation of the law, as the following discussion about *behavior* demonstrates. Probably, then, Paul uses these two terms in order to contrast two "ages" in redemptive history—the age in which, while grace was by no means absent, the mosaic law was central, and the age in which people are "released from the law" (cf. 7:4) and in which grace dominates (compare John 1:17). This contrast between the "two ages" is an important component in Paul's theological approach and undergirds the contrast between Adam and Christ which we have seen earlier in the text. Adam is the representative head of the old age, in which sin and death (and the law; see the explanation in 7:7-12) dominate; Christ is the representative head of the new age, in which life and grace dominate. The believer belongs to the new age—but is still subject to the powers of the old age in this life. Thus Paul combines in Rom 6:1-14 assertions about our new status in Christ with imperatives to encourage us to transform the existing components of our life in accordance with this new status. May God grant us the power through his Spirit to accomplish just that.