

The Gospel According to Paul: Romans

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Treatise on Freedom from the Power of Sin (6:1-23)

Conversion Is Dying and Rising Again (6:1-11)

In the *Gospel According to Paul*, conversion to Christ is a dying to our old existence "in Adam" and a resurrection into new existence "in Christ." That this is the message of Paul here in these verses cannot be reasonably doubted. One need only follow the language of Paul here and look carefully for the imagery he so explicitly develops.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- ⁷because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ

Jesus.

The concepts Paul is working out of here would not have been new to his audience. Within the first century Mediterranean world, myths of the dying and rising gods were very popular. What Paul does with these concepts is distinctly different from what is done in Hellenistic mythology. It is as if he is saying to his readers that the concepts they had been grasping for in ancient mythology had become a reality in the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

The concept of a dying and rising god was a reality to Paul; he had been dramatically confronted with such a being. Paul had encountered such a "reality" on the Damascus Road in Palestine. Before that moment Jesus of Nazareth was a crucified messianic pretender in the thinking of Saul of Tarsus. The one who appeared to Saul identified himself as Jesus of Nazareth, a Crucified Messiah who had become a Risen Lord.

Paul uses the currency of realm; i.e., he takes concepts popular in the thinking of his audience or readers and fills those concepts with their actual fulfillment in the story of Jesus of Nazareth. What man desired to be true as reflected in their stories of their divine heroes, was revealed as a reality to Paul on the road to Damascus. He had been confronted by a person he knew had been crucified and buried, now before him alive, risen from the dead.

This dying and rising imagery Paul uses to describe what happens to one who is converted to Christ. In conversion to Christ, as taught by Paul, one dies to his old existence in Adam, buries that old existence in the waters of baptism, and rises from that grave of water a new creation in Christ. Because of this, sin no longer reigns in the life of the believer, grace has replaced sin as the ruling force of his existence. Because of this, one is freed from the power of sin.

Dying to Sin

The term "sin" (Greek - *hamartia*) appears in Romans forty-six times. Forty-one of these occurrences are in chapters 5-8. In thirty of these occurrences it is *hamartia* with the definite article (*he hamartia*), which is consistent with Paul's use of sin as a proper noun, as though it were an entity or living force. In reality, Paul speaks of sin as a power or force (i.e., the sin

/ the [power of] sin). Paul also uses *hamartia* in the sense of personal sin (i.e., individual actions which are manifestations of ones yielding to the power of sin). His is predominant usage of the term, however, is of *hamartia* as a malevolent power at work in the lives of men.. He portrays it as a “reigning force/power” (Rom 3:9; 5:21). Man can become enslaved to it (6:6-7, 16-18, 20, 22), fall under its power (3:9), live in it (6:2) and be destroyed and condemned to death by it (3:23; 5:8, 12, 17; 6:20-23).

In Rom 3:21-26 and 5:1-21, Paul told us what God had done to bring the reign of sin to an end and deliver his creation from its power. This was accomplished by nothing less than God himself entering into our world as one of us, in order to confront the power of sin and the forces behind that power. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, God entered into our existence, experienced our experience, even the experience of human death. He, then, arose out of death into new existence, an existence in which sin and death were powerless. Because his human existence was free of sin/*hamartia*, it was not possible that death could hold him (cf., Acts 2:23-24; 13:28-30; Heb 2:14-15; 4:14-15; Rev 1:17-18; 1 Cor 15:20-26). "Sin reigned in death," says Paul (Rom 5:21), thus giving death conquest over Christ in his crucifixion. But the resurrection of Christ brought an end to the reign of death for Christ.. If death is the result of sin, then the end of death is the end of sin for the one who has experienced death. According to Paul, this was the case with Jesus. His resurrection was the death of death for him.

What has all this to do with us? What Christ's death and resurrection did in freeing him from the satanic forces of sin and death, it will do for us also. His death and resurrection was a paradigm (an example or pattern) of how one escapes the satanic power of sin. He must die to the existence where that power reigns; i.e., existence "in Adam."

(2) Sin Is No Longer a Reigning Power in the Lives of Those Who Are "in Christ" (6:12-14)

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

These words reflect the same concepts as found in 5:20-21, "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." "Let not sin reign in you mortal body," Paul pleads (6:12), and in v 14 he insists, "sin shall not have dominion (lordship) over you." How so? Because "in Christ" one is in a realm of existence characterized by grace rather than sin (6:14). Grace, which Paul considers "the enabling power of goodness," is the reigning power of existence "in Christ" (5:2, 20-21; 2 Tim 2:1).

**(3) To Be Servants of Sin Is Death, to Be Servants
Of Righteousness Is Life (6:15-23)**

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. ¹⁹I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. ²⁰When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²²But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift (Greek - charisma) of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Throughout his letters, Paul sets the flesh and spirit in tension with one another (cf. Gal 5:16-26). Here is why. It is the spirit of man that has experienced recreation or renewal. The flesh (the human body) will be changed only at the time of our resurrection (1 Cor 15:35-56). Our earthly sojourn is a continuing struggle of the flesh against the spirit - the human flesh wars against the human spirit (adamic man against the new creation in Christ). That part of us which has experienced regeneration is the human spirit. That which is of Adam (the flesh) is yet of *adamah* (of the dirt or

clay) and it is in constant conflict with that part of us which desires to be one with God - the recreated spirit which came out of the waters of baptism renewed, recreated, or regenerated (Rom 6:2, 5).

Paul has been moving in and out of some very deep theological concepts. Theological musings, as grand as they may be, are useless, unless they become more than a matter of intellectual meanderings. That which is a matter of the mind must become a matter of life; i.e., it must be "lived out of" as well as "thought through." Here Paul shows us how this is done.

How does one who has been transferred from existence "in Adam" into existence "in Christ," live free from the power of sin? By presenting themselves as servants of obedience rather than servants of sin (vv 16-18). Service is not a theoretical concept; it is a way of living and behaving. Being made free from the power of sin does not mean that we are free to do as we please, unless what we please to do is the will of God. The Greek word Paul uses here (*doulos*) does not mean serving self; it means service that extends beyond the self.

To be a servant of sin most usually works itself out in ego centered activity (i.e., service centering in "the self"). The greatest means of access into our souls is through the human ego; and Satan uses this portal to our souls very effectively. There can be little doubt that ego-centeredness or selfishness is the greatest sin of the human race. All Satan had to do was suggest to man that if he listened to him he could become self exalted and equal with God, and thus came man's fall (Gen 3:4-5).

In verse 4, Paul says, "we were buried therefore with him baptism into death." What sense of death is under consideration here? Death is spoken of in different senses in ancient (and modern) literature. This is especially so of biblical literature. There is biological/physical death - violent death (usually associated with such terms as blood) and natural death (usually associated with sleep - Gen 5:5; 35:18; 25:7-11; Job 34:14-15). Death may be spoken of metaphorically/figuratively (i.e., of something that loses its force or power, or ceases to be active). Paul speaks of the Law being dead (Rom 7:8), that he dies daily for the church (1 Cor 15:31). James speaks of faith being dead (Jam 2:26). John speaks of the church at Sardis having a living name but being dead (Rev 3:1). There is also the expression "second death" in Rev (cf. 20:14; 21:8).

Then there is the uniquely biblical concept of spiritual death (i.e., a separation of the human spirit from the presence of God). This is the sense in which Paul speaks of man before conversion; he is dead in sin (Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:13; Rom 6:2, 11; 7:7).

It becomes very difficult in some passages to determine the exact sense of the term death. In what sense did Adam "die" in the day he transgressed (cf. Gen 2:17; 3:17-19)? One must remember that Adam lived to be 930 years old (Gen 5:5). In all these references to death, the intrinsic meaning of death is "the cessation or absence of life." The answer to the question raised earlier, "How does one die to sin?" is that one dies (ceases to live) to that existence in which the power of sin reigns; i.e., existence which centers in our "creatureliness" and the dust or clay from which we came - adamic existence.

Conclusion

Christ's death, according to Paul's argument in Rom 5 and 1 Cor 15:45ff, was a death to adamic existence (i.e., existence characterized by the power of sin and death). The "death to sin" of which Paul speaks here in these verses must be understood in these terms; it is a death that transfers us out of that realm of existence characterized by sin into a new realm of existence characterized by the absence of the power of sin. Paul contrasts these two realms in 1 Cor 15:22 as existence "in Adam" and existence "in Christ." That which characterizes the one realm is death that which characterizes the other is life: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22).

It appears that a transfer of existence is precisely what is going on in these verses (6:1-11). Our old man is crucified with Christ (v 6). What is this "old man?" It is our old adamic existence (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:1-3, 9; Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 5:17). The crucifixion of the "old man/adamic man" is called a putting off of the "body of sin" (v 6). As Paul argues in 1 Cor 15:35-56, that which remains of our old existence "in Adam" is our body of dust/clay - the flesh with its desires or passions. It is through our flesh that sin continues to struggle for our recapture.

In vv 10-11 Paul argues that the death Christ died he died to sin; if we have died with him (joined him in his death), we are also dead to sin; i.e., the reigning power of sin has no more dominion (*kurieuo* - to exercise lordship)

over us.

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