

The Great Emancipation

Romans 6:1-14

The following news article appeared in the Kansas City Times on March 11, 1974. The dateline is Manila, Philippines and the title of the article is, "Soldier Surrenders After 30 Years:"

Japanese Lt. Hiroo Onoda, a World War II holdout for nearly 30 years, emerged from the Philippine jungles yesterday (this was nearly 28 years ago). He told Japanese newsmen he had not come out before because "I had not received the order."

Onoda, who turned 52 yesterday, met with searchers briefly and then returned to his hideout to retrieve his Samurai sword. In a formal act of surrender, he presented the sword to Maj. Gen. Jose Rancudo, commander of the Philippine air force. Officials said they expected Onoda to be flown today to Manila.

"I am sorry I have disturbed you for so long a time," he told his elder brother, Toshiro, 62, who was part of the search party. A Philippine news agency said Toshiro placed his hands on his long-lost brother's shoulders and told him, "You did well." In Tokyo, Onoda's parents, in their 80's, burst into tears when they learned their son had been found.

Onoda's last order was to keep up guerrilla warfare . . . and word had never reached him that the war was over.¹

In many ways, Onoda's bravery and commitment is to be commended. On the other hand, there is something quite tragic and pathetic about the whole situation. Here is a man who, for 30 years, was fighting a war that was already over. He did not **know** that an armistice had been signed and that he could come out of the jungles of guerilla warfare. What a pity and what a loss!

And yet in many ways, Lt. Onoda's experience typifies the perspective of many of us as believers. We find ourselves in the "jungles" of habitual sin, overwhelmed with temptation, and we're fighting the bloody battles of hand-to-hand combat against the world, the flesh and the devil in our own strength. And we consistently lose, because we do not **know** that our commander-in-chief has already won a great victory, given you and me a whole new identity, enabling us to fight from a position of procured victory rather than defeat.

Now the key to experiencing this victory is found right here in this most important chapter of Romans 6. And this passage is so important that we have decided to settle down and "camp" here for several weeks in order to grapple with these truths of our emancipation – i.e. our liberation – in Jesus Christ from the power of sin.

Paul begins this chapter with a rhetorical question found in verse 1: "*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*" It is important to understand that all Paul says in the verses to follow up to verse 15 is in response to this question. And the question has to do with **habitual** sin in the believers life: "Shall we go on sinning...?" Paul asks.

As we saw in our last study of this passage, Paul's response is first emotional – “By no means!” “What a ghastly thought!” – but then quite logical: “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”

Paul speaks here succinctly and with clarity. And in doing so he underscores three essential ingredients of this process we frequently call “sanctification,” i.e. growth in Christ likeness. First, we must **know** the facts (vv 1-10). Second, we must **consider** the facts to be true (v 11). And finally, we must **present** our bodies to God (vv 12-14).

I. **KNOW THE FACTS (1-10)**

A. **The Principle of our death to sin: separation (1-4).**

First, a quick review of what we have already seen in verses 1-4. We first saw that victory in overcoming habitual sin begins, not with **doing** something, but with **knowing** something. In fact, this is emphasized no less than three times in the first 10 verses of chapter 6 (vv. 3, 6, 9).

The first thing that we are to **know** is what we can call the **principle** of our death to sin in verses 1-4. Paul states it clearly in verse 2: “We died to sin.” For many, this is a novel thought. We all as believers know that **Christ died for our sin**, but how many are aware that **we died with Christ to sin**? Admittedly, your response may be one of amazement: “Me, dead to sin!? Never! I’m jealous, impatient, contentious, and immoral, lustful, proud, materialistic and selfish. Why I feel very alive to sin!” Or as the old hymn writer put it: “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.”

But Paul makes it clear that the first step to victory over habitual sin is not our personal **feelings** but the biblical **facts**. And the fact is that we died to sin. The word “death” or a form of it is found 14 times in the first 11 verses of this chapter, so it’s obviously crucial to our understanding. Paul is talking here about the **principle** of our death to sin, which is separation from sin’s penalty and power (cf. Rom. 7:1-4). Death means **separation** and we who are in Christ have been **separated** from the penalty and power of sin in our lives. We have been taken out of the realm, rule and reign of death and placed into the realm, rule and reign of grace.

How did this “separation” take place? Paul tells us in the next two verses as he paints for us a graphic **picture** of our death to sin. Now this picture that Paul paints includes two images which are intimately and inseparably related: first our **baptism** into Christ (v 3) and then our **burial** with Christ (v 4).

It is highly debated as to whether Paul is speaking in verse 3 of our water baptism or our Spirit baptism. Personally, the two are so often interrelated in Scripture that it is difficult to distinguish between them. And even if Paul is thinking primarily of our water baptism, I’m sure that he is thinking of what that act symbolizes rather than the act itself. Paul refers to this in 1 Cor. 12:13:

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one Body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Whenever I read this verse I'm reminded of the story I often tell in our 101 class. A young pastor was performing his first baptismal service. He had served communion before, but never had he baptized anyone. In the nervousness of the moment, he totally forgot the baptismal formula: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." In the confusion and tension of the moment, his mind darted back to the recent communion service. And as he placed the candidate under water he exclaimed in good King James English, "Drink ye all of it!"

Now this pastor may not have realized the significance of what he said. It's a pity that the one being baptized had to guzzle down so much water. But prior to his water baptism he had experienced another baptism in which he also drank – not of water but of God's Spirit. According to 1 Cor. 12:13 this took place when he was "baptized" or "placed into" Christ at the moment of believing. At this point, we were brought out of "sin country" and brought into "God's country."

But there's another image that Paul uses as he paints this picture of our death to sin; it is the image of *burial* in verse 4. Our water baptism, which is an image of our Spirit baptism, depicts the fact that we were identified with Christ not only in his death, but also in his burial. The significance is this: we who are "in Christ" have been so effectually shut out from the penalty and power of sin as those in the grave are shut out from life!

A second thing we are to know, beyond the fact that we have been baptized into Christ's death, burial and resurrection, is that – more specifically – we have been crucified with Christ (vv 5-7). Paul moves now from the *principle* of our death to sin (i.e. separation from the penalty and power of sin) to the *process* of our death to sin (i.e. crucifixion with Christ).

B. The Process of our death to sin: crucifixion (5-7).

Here Paul here tells us just how this surgical separation from sin actually took place (vv 6, 7):

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now we could camp on this verse for the next year, but allow me to focus on two very important terms in particular. The first is what Paul here terms the "*old self*" according to the NIV translation. There are many who interpret this term to refer to our "old nature" – as if you and I as believers are glorified "schizophrenics" with an old nature and a new nature. This line of reasoning goes something like this.

"I as a believer am a person with two natures: the old nature (sometimes also called the 'flesh' or the 'old man') and the new nature (sometimes called the 'new man' or the 'spiritual man'). This 'old nature' and 'new nature' define my essential personhood, the 'real me.' In other words, I am little more than a 'forgiven sinner.' And as a 'forgiven sinner' I am victorious in overcoming habitual sin in my life to the degree that I feed my new nature and put to death my old nature."

How does this perspective work itself out when you and I are confronted with temptation? Some years ago, while we were living in France, my wife caught me watching

something on TV that was totally inappropriate for a believer. It was, quite frankly, a program that was inciting me to lust. At that point, my line of reasoning was something like this:

“This program is inciting me to lust. Maybe I better turn it off. After all, what if someone catches me watching this show? I don’t want to turn it off, but I dare not risk being caught! And goodness, God is watching me! And more than that, I know the Holy Spirit has given me the power to turn off this program ... and after all, I want to please the Lord. But maybe, just a few more minutes of engaging my curious mind. Oh, this is such a struggle between my old nature and my new nature!”

I personally believe that this type of approach to handling temptation totally misses the point of what Paul is saying in these verses. In fact, no where does Paul use the word “nature” or “self” in these verses, as if you and I as believers are in essence a “divided house” separated into the “old nature” and the “new nature.” Rather, Paul uses the word “man” which in the immediate context of Romans 5 refers to one of the only two important men in history, Adam or Christ, as well as in a corporate sense to all of humanity that stands in relation to either the one or the other.

For example, turn with me to Romans 5. In verse 12 we read:

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man...”

We find the same word again in 5:19 –

“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”

You see, there are only two men of any real importance in history: Adam and Christ. And all of humanity stands in relation to either one or the other. The “many” in 5:19 who stand as sinners in relationship to Adam together comprise what the Bible terms the “old man.” And believe me, this “old man” is decrepit, characterized by death, condemnation and the natural inability to say no to sin. On the other hand, the “many” in 5:19 who stand as righteous in relationship to Christ together comprise the “new man” who is characterized life, justification and the supernatural ability to say no to sin.

When Christ was crucified, our old man was there! That is, our relation to Adam, sin and death was definitively broken. That is what Paul means in Galatians 2:20 when he says, *“I am crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* In other words, the “old man” of Romans 6 is the “I” of Galatians 2:20 who no longer lives.

This change from the old man to the new man is like a North Korean citizen becoming an American citizen. North Korea may try to conscript the former Korean or levy taxes, but ***there is no obligation***. This man may still have an Korean accent, but he is now a full-fledged US citizen in the process of taking on US customs.

For this reason we are never told in Scripture to “crucify the old man” (cf. Gal. 5:24 where in the NIV “sinful nature” is best translated “flesh”). And to the degree that we try we will be ineffective in our battle against sin. Why? Because it is something that has already and definitively been accomplished for the believer. Furthermore, it is passive – “our old man *was*

crucified.” We cannot do this ourselves. We cannot in our own power bring about this supernatural transferal from the realm of the “old man” to the realm of the “new man.”

Now admittedly there are a couple of passages that talk about “putting off the old man” and “putting on the new man.” Take for example Ephesians 4:22-24:

“that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” (NKJV)

Another example is found in Colossians 3: 9-10:

“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him...” (NKJV)

But when these passages are carefully studied we see that Paul is talking about putting off a *lifestyle* associated with the old man and putting on a *lifestyle* that is associated with the new man. For example, the NKJV puts it well in Ephesians 4:22 *“That you put off, concerning your former conduct...”* In other words, the “old man” has already been definitively disposed of at the cross and at the point of conversion for the believer. It remains not to deal with the characteristics of that old lifestyle that are no longer in keeping with our new identity in Christ.

But Paul goes further. He tells us the purpose of this crucifixion and, in doing so, Paul moves from a past, positional truth to a present, experiential reality. He says in the end of verse 6:

*“so that the **body of sin** might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”*

Now this is the second term of importance in these verses. If the “*old man*” refers to our previous connection to Adam and the lost humanity of which Adam is the head, then what is the “*body of sin*” mentioned here in verse 6? We will deal with this in greater depth as we move into Romans 7, but for now we can define the “body of sin” as the “flesh,” a term that is used no less than ten times in Romans 7-8 (and unfortunately is translated by the NIV as “sinful nature”). The “body of sin” then refers to our physical bodies (including our mind, emotions and will), not because the body is inherently sinful, but because it is so easily dominated and controlled by sin. This “body of sin” or the “flesh” refers to sin working through the members of our body. Sin cannot lie without a human tongue or steal without human hands.

But notice what Paul says about this “body of sin.” He says that “the old man was crucified so that the body of sin *might be done away with.*” Actually, the word that Paul uses here is sometimes translated “destroyed.” That is how it is translated in Hebrews 2:14 – *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-that is, the devil- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”*

But we know that the devil will never be totally “destroyed.” Rather, Christ’s work on the cross has “paralyzed” Satan, or “rendered him ineffective.” The term means to “render powerless,” “to pull the teeth out of,” or “to declaw.” And so we can paraphrase the latter part of verse 6 to read like this: “*in order that the sinful tendencies which so often seem to control our human bodies might be rendered powerless.*”

But it is important to realize that the whole clause states the **purpose** of what proceeds, and not the inevitable **result** – “*in order that.*” Paul wants us to know that sin can be potentially, progressively rendered ineffective, powerless in our lives. And the reason? Because through crucifixion with Christ we have experienced separation from the old man and the accompanying penalty and power of sin.

Let me illustrate. During the Civil War days, it was legal for a man who wanted to stay out of the army of the North to pay someone else to fulfill his draft obligation. There was a Mr. Pratt who paid a Mr. White to serve in his place. Mr. White was killed in action. But then Mr. Pratt was redrafted. He took the agreement into the draft board and told them that the second draft was invalid because, in effect, he died in Mr. White, who went to war in his place.

In very much the same way, we as believers have an identification with Christ in his death to sin! Our connection with Adam and sin was broken when Christ died for us and when we died with Christ. We are entirely new people! When proof of death is presented, further claims against the dead man cannot be prosecuted. And so, Paul tells us in verse 7: “*For he who has died is freed from sin.*”

That is why, in verses 8-10, Paul moves on to the **promise** of our death to sin; it is best summed up as resurrection life with Christ.

C. The Promise of our death to sin: **resurrection** (8-10).

What Paul tells us in these verses has already been emphasized in verse 4 “*we too may live a new life*” and in verse 5 “*we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*” In fact, the term “united with him” was used in the first century of trees planted together in the same bed and which *grow* together as one. In other words, if we have this kind of intimate, inseparable union with Christ in his death, we will certainly share in his resurrection life. How can we be so sure? Because of two truths that are underscored in vv. 8-10. First, there is the **finality** of Christ’s death: “*the death that he died, he died to sin once for all.*” But secondly, there is the **victory** of Christ’s death: “*death no longer has mastery over him.*” And since you and I have been united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, we share in the finality and victory of Christ’s defeat of sin.

Up to this point, Paul has not told us to **do** anything. The focus has been upon what we are to **know**. We are to know that, through our identification with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection, you and I have a new identity. Our former connection to the old man – his sin, death, condemnation, and total inability to say no to sin – came to a screeching halt at the cross. And now we have a new identity, for we are part of the “new man” in vital union with the resurrected Christ. But now in verse 11 Paul gives us the next step in this process called “sanctification.”

II. **CONSIDER THE FACTS TO BE TRUE (11).**

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Here we have the first command in the entire epistle. Up to this point, Paul has focused on what we are to know. But now he goes a step further. Knowing the principle, the process and the promise of our death to sin, we are now to consider all of this to be true. When Paul says “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” he means “cement it in your minds as true.” And there is both a negative and positive aspect to this:

A. I must consider myself dead to sin.

As a result of the Civil War slavery was officially abolished in the United States. But did that have an immediate effect on all the slaves? No, many slaves, young and old, though given their freedom, found it hard to realize in their daily experience. They had heard the declaration of freedom, they understood it cognitively, but when their master came near, they grew fearful and began to wonder if they were going to be sold. The law had changed, their status had changed, but it took many of these slaves a very long time to realize their freedom. In the same way, Paul is saying, “Don’t go on considering yourself a slave to sin! For that is no longer your identity.” But more positively...

B. I must consider myself alive to God.

Now how does this perspective play itself out when we are confronted by temptation? Let’s take the same scenario that I mentioned earlier. You are watching television and something comes on the screen which incites you lust. Here’s the response of one who knows that they are now dead to sin but alive to God:

What I am seeing is inciting me to lust. But this is not my true identity. That life is past; new things have come. As part of the “new man” I am no longer under any obligation to sin. I consider my new identity in Christ to be true and will not offer my eyes and heart as instruments to sin but will offer the parts of my body to God as instruments of righteousness. I will act in accordance with my true identity in Christ by turning off this program and focusing upon those things that bring glory to God.

The challenge for you and me is this: each time sin attempts to re-draft us into its service, we must appeal to the surgery that was performed at the cross and which brought us out of the old man and into the new man.

It is like holding a book flat on your open hand. As long as your hand is under the book gravity cannot make that book fall. This is not to say that gravity has lost its power or that it no longer exists. Paul never said that sin died. He did say that you and I – as believers – have died to sin. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is like the hand and the gravity is like the power of sin at work through the flesh. As long as we allow the Holy Spirit to hold us up, by counting as true our death to sin and resurrection with Jesus Christ, sin has no power to pull us down. And this is precisely what we are commanded to do in verse 11.

Now the word “therefore” in verse 12 tells us that we are coming to the main point of the passage. Not only are we to *know* something and *consider* these facts as true, but we are to *do* something. We are to ...

III. PRESENT YOUR BODIES TO GOD (12-14)

As for the command of verse 11, this command has both a negative and positive aspect. First,

A. We must stop offering the parts of our body to sin (12-13a).

Listen to what Paul says in verses 12-13:

“Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. [In other words...] Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness...”

Believer, there are two situations in which Paul’s command in these verses would make no sense at all. First, if our capacity to sin had been totally eradicated, then Paul’s exhortation is meaningless. Remember, we died to sin, but sin did not die. Rather it is very much alive, seeking to work through the parts of our body to accomplish its pernicious and deceitful ways.

On the other hand, if you and I have not been in reality freed from the power of sin, Paul’s command is also meaningless. To say to a slave who has not been emancipated, “Do not behave like a slave,” makes no sense at all! But we have been freed from the penalty and power of sin, therefore stop offering the parts of your body to sin. Rather,

B. We must offer the parts of our body as instruments of righteousness to God (13b -14).

In effect, Paul is saying: “Take each part of your body, remove it from service to sin and instead present it to God for his service and glory.” What habitual sin are you struggling with? And what part of your body does it effect? Your mind? Your hands? Your feet? Your emotions? Your sexual drive? Your tongue? Whatever it is, we are called to offer up to God our entire body including each specific part.

Maybe you can pray a prayer like this:

Lord, you know the trouble that I have with my tongue. I am tempted to curse, to exaggerate, to complain, and to gossip. I know that such use of my tongue is not in keeping with my new identity in Christ. I take my tongue and I offer it up to you. Help me today to use it as an instrument of truth, of blessing and of praise.

Conclusion

For thirty years Lt. Onoda was ignorant of the fact that the emperor of Japan had been defeated and had signed an unconditional surrender. Two thousand years ago our leader, Jesus

Christ, conquered sin and death. But too many believers are living in absolute ignorance of the implications of that victory. It is time for us to awake, know the facts of our new identity in Christ, consider these facts to be true and begin to live in light of this by offering our bodies to God.

ⁱ Michael P. Andrus “Dead Men Don’t Sin,” sermon on Romans 6:1-14, First Evangelical Free Church, St. Louis, MO. March 12, 1995.