

o8. Romans 6-7





## Romans 6:1-6

<sup>1</sup>What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? (Romans 5:20) By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into the Messiah Jesus were baptised into his death? 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, we too might walk in newness of life. 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. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might be no longer enslaved to sin.

Having been drawn by grace into communion with God through a sharing in Jesus' risen life, having welcomed this grace in faith, and having been initiated into the life of the Christian community through the sacramental action of baptism, how can we go on living in sin?



## Paul's teaching concerning baptism

Let us begin our reflection with the promise made by God through the prophet Ezekiel: 'I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances' (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

God promises to wash us clean from sin, to sanctify us through the gift of his Spirit, and to enable us, thereby, to live a life of obedience to God's will. Paul picks up Ezekiel's ideas in writing to the Corinthians: 'You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God' (1 Corinthians 6:11).



That baptism was understood as a cleansing in which past sin is washed away is expressed in the words spoken by Ananias to Paul on the occasion of Paul's own baptism: 'Get up, be baptised, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name' (Acts 22:16).

The baptismal water is a symbol of the life-giving Spirit. It is the Spirit of the risen Christ who washes, sanctifies and justifies. When a person calling on Jesus opens his/her heart in faith to welcome God's gift, the Spirit of God comes down upon that person as when Jesus himself was baptised.



Luke describes Jesus' baptism: 'When Jesus had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased' (Luke 3:21-22).

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: 'In the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit' (1 Corinthians 12:13).

There is more to baptism than being washed clean from sin: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (5:5). We are embraced by God's love and share the communion in love which is the life of the risen Christ. God says to each of us: 'You are my son/my daughter. You are the one I love. I delight in you.'



It is this gift of the Spirit which, in Paul's words, 'justifies' the baptised person. Just as 'our ancestors ... passed through the sea, and were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Corinthians 10:1-2), so those who pass through the waters of baptism are baptised into Christ. Redeemed from the land of slavery, we can walk free towards the Promised Land. This is Paul's focus in the passage before us. Sin should be a thing of the past, for now we can live a new life, the life of the risen Christ: 'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me' (Galatians 2:19-20).



We are graced now with this new life. We are a new creature: 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ' (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

Paul speaks of the baptised person being clothed in Christ: 'As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ' (Galatians 3:27).

The Spirit transforms, not only the heart, but every aspect of the human person as the one baptised into Christ is: 'being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Corinthians 3:18).



United with Christ in a love-communion with God, we have been released from slavery to sin. Going down into the baptismal waters is like going down into the grave with Jesus. He was raised up from the grave to the life of the resurrection. So it is for us who have come up out of the baptismal waters. We have been raised with Jesus to this new life. How can we go on living in sin?

When Paul speaks of Jesus' crucifixion and burial as a baptism he is echoing Jesus' own words: 'I have a baptism with which to be baptised, and what stress I am under until it is completed!' (Luke 12:50)

In believing the good news and in accepting to be baptised into the community of Jesus' disciples, we have welcomed the embrace of the crucified and risen Jesus and the new life of the Spirit which is Jesus' own life of communion with God. For Paul this means that 'the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world' (Galatians 6:14).



It is to be the same for all the baptised: ‘Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires’ (Galatians 5:24).

‘**We have been united to him in a death like his**’. The image is that of being grafted onto Christ, to grow now from the life of his Spirit that has been given to us. Paul sees baptism, like the passing through the Red Sea, as the end of one kind of existence (dominated by sin) and the beginning of another (grafted into Christ): ‘Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’ (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).



## Romans 6:7-11

For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with the Messiah, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that the Messiah being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God **in the Messiah Jesus**.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul speaks of 'the churches of Judea that are in the Messiah' (Galatians 1:22). He speaks of 'the freedom we have in the Messiah Jesus' (Galatians 2:4). What binds Christians together is that 'all of you are one in the Messiah Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). 'In the Messiah Jesus the only thing that counts is faith working through love' (Galatians 5:6).



Being in the Messiah Jesus is central also to Paul's letters to the Corinthians. In his first letter he addresses them as 'those who are sanctified in the Messiah Jesus' (1 Corinthians 1:2). He speaks of God as 'the source of your life in the Messiah Jesus' (1 Corinthians 1:30). 'In the Messiah Jesus I became your father through the gospel' (1 Corinthians 4:15). Paul speaks of the way he lives 'in the Messiah Jesus' (1 Corinthians 4:17) and concludes: 'My love be with all of you in the Messiah Jesus' (1 Corinthians 16:24).

Similarly in his second letter: 'in the Messiah we speak as persons of sincerity' (2 Corinthians 2:17); 'we are speaking in the Messiah before God' (2 Corinthians 12:19).



## Romans 6:12-14

Therefore do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 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. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

A Christian can choose to return to the slavery of sin (much as the Hebrews wanted to return to Egypt). Since, however, we have been released by God from sin's dominion, Paul exhorts us to use our bodies now as weapons in the fight against evil. We are reminded of Isaiah: 'Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins' (Isaiah 11:5). Baptised in Christ, we are no longer 'under the law', but we are 'under grace', so let us be obedient to the inspiration of grace and live a life of righteousness. Let God, not sin, be our lord.



## Romans 6:15-18

What then? Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! 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? 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, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

When they accepted baptism, they accepted the gospel, including the directions which they were given concerning how they were to live out their faith. They are to be ‘obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which they were entrusted’ (compare 1 Corinthians 11:2).



## Romans 6:19-23

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 rebellion, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death.

But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift (χάρισμα) of God is eternal life in the Messiah Jesus our Lord.



## Romans 7:1-6

Do you not know, brothers and sisters — for I am speaking to those who know the law — that the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime? Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of the Messiah, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.



## Romans 7:7-13

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I (Everyman without Jesus) would not have known sin (see 3:20). I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.



## Romans 7:14-23

For we know that the law is spiritual; but I (Everyman without Jesus) am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Though the law is ‘spiritual’ (πνευματικός), we human beings are ‘of the flesh’ (σάρκινός). Law was unable to break the domination exercised by sin over human beings.



## Romans 7:24-25

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus the Messiah our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Paul is not saying that the 'inmost self' is sinful. Paul is not speaking of his present experience as a Christian, or of the present experience of other Christians. He is describing the wretched state of mankind under sin's dominion. It is the psychological equivalent of the condition he described in 1:18 - 3:20. Those who have been made righteous by God through their sharing in the faith of Jesus are, thanks to God's grace, no longer under sin's dominion. We may sin at times, and we can turn back to a life of sin. But while we believe in him, we are '**under grace**' (6:14)