

Dead to Sin

Paul the apostle, who wrote much of the New Testament, issued many important exhortations to believers concerning holy and righteous living. Romans chapter six contains quite a few of these exhortations. Let us examine them now. Paul writes,

Rom 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

Rom 6:2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Rom 6:11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Rom 6:12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

Rom 6:13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Rom 6:14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Rom 6:15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

Rom 6:16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

Rom 6:19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

So Paul tells us that we are crucified with Christ, and that our old body of sin is destroyed. We are now new creatures in Christ Jesus:

2Co 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

When something passes away, it ceases to be. When our old man of sin passes away, it no longer lives. Just as when someone dies, and we say, “So and so has passed away,” so our old man of sin has died. Our flesh has been nailed to the cross with Jesus. But not our physical flesh, you see. For it is quite obvious that we are not all hanging on a tree at this present time. So if our flesh body has not been crucified with Christ, then exactly what flesh has been crucified?

Error has come to some in the Body of Christ as a result of misinterpreting the word *flesh* in various passages of scripture, particularly in Romans chapter 7. People have incorrectly applied the meaning of “flesh body” to this word in many of Paul’s passages, when in fact, he was not referring to his flesh body at all. But let us examine the Greek translations for the word *flesh*, so as to understand exactly what Paul was referring to when he used this term in Romans 7.

Thayers Greek Lexicon defines *flesh* in several ways. One is *the flesh and blood body*. Another meaning is *man’s human nature apart from God (or unregenerate)*, and therefore opposed to God as it is not a divine nature that is divinely influenced.

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flesh σάρξ *sarx*

Thayer Definition:

flesh (the soft substance of the living body, which covers the bones and is permeated with blood) of both man and beasts

the body

the body of a man

the sensuous nature of man, “the animal nature”

the flesh, denotes mere human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God.

The Vines Expository Dictionary expands on this definition of “human nature apart from God” by adding:

the weaker element in human nature, and,

the unregenerate state of men

We see then, that flesh can denote more than the human body and its anatomy. It denotes human frailties, and most importantly, the unregenerate state (or nature) of man apart from God.

Before coming to Christ, all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Because sin entered the world through Adam, and human beings do not possess God’s Holy Spirit inside of them, they lean toward selfishness, choosing to sin. They create a sinful nature. But when these same human beings surrender to Jesus Christ and accept his blood sacrifice

for their sins, they are then washed clean from sin and spiritually regenerated (made alive), for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23). When man sins, he dies (Ezekiel 18:20/Ephesians 2:5). When his sin is removed through the blood atonement of Jesus, he lives again (Revelation 1:5b/1Corinthians 15:22). Once he is regenerated and filled with the power of God's Holy Spirit, the Bible is clear that he now possesses a divine nature, meaning, *a godlike constitution or nature*. This is a nature that is empowered by God to make righteous choices.

2Pe 1:3 According to his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

2Pe 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The apostle Paul knew of this divine nature, and taught his followers that they should live after their new nature in Christ. As we previously read in Romans chapter 6, he exhorted them to yield all their members to God, as servants of righteousness unto holiness. He told them that they were crucified with Christ, and the body of sin was destroyed, that henceforth they should not serve sin.

So then, why do many in the church today teach that we cannot help but sin? They use Romans chapter 7 for a reference, claiming that even Paul himself could not “do the good that he wanted to do.” But what they fail to realize is that Paul was referring to his unregenerate state (or nature) before coming to Christ. Let's take a look at some of his statements in Romans 7 and examine them in light of Romans chapter 8, keeping in mind that when the original manuscripts of the Bible were written, they contained no chapter breaks. Man added the chapters and punctuation marks. Romans 6, 7 and 8 should all flow together as a unit, and I believe it is unfortunate that man tried to chop them up into sections of new subject matter by inserting chapters.

The first statement in Romans 7 that proves Paul was talking of his past life as a sinner (before accepting Christ) is:

Rom 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

“When we *were*” implies that we no longer are! It is past tense. But now, he makes another statement that appears to be present tense, which confuses people. He says,

Rom 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

“I *am*” seems to suggest that he is currently in this condition. He goes on to say,

Rom 7:15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

Rom 7:16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

Rom 7:17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Rom 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

Rom 7:19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

Rom 7:20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Rom 7:21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

Rom 7:22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

Rom 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

The key here is to remember Paul's clarification in parenthesis, which he states in verse 18:

Rom 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.

Paul is telling us that “in his flesh” dwells no good thing. He is letting us know that this is a wretched state to be in, but that there is deliverance from being “in his flesh.”

Rom 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Rom 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

He continues on in chapter 8 by explaining that he is no longer “in his flesh” once he comes to Christ Jesus, but is now “in the Spirit.”

Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Rom 8:4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Rom 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Rom 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

It is clear that Paul includes himself in the “us” who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit in verse 4. He makes a distinction between those who now have the Spirit of God (Spirit filled believers) who are “in the Spirit,” vs. those who have not the Spirit of God, and are “in the flesh.”

Now, do you recall when Paul declared “I am carnal, sold under sin?” Listen to what he teaches about carnality once a person is in Christ Jesus and receives a new spiritual mindset.

Rom 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Rom 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

Rom 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Rom 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

He associates the carnal mind with being “in the flesh.” He tells us that the carnal (natural, unregenerate) mind is opposed to God. It cannot be subject to the law of God. That is why when Paul was in this state prior to his conversion to Christ, he could not do the good that he wanted to do under the law. He knew the law was good, but he could not do all that it said. When Christ delivered him from sin and death, he received a new nature (a regenerate, spiritual mind that could now “walk after the Spirit.”)

Rom 8:11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

Rom 8:12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

Rom 8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

Rom 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

“If you live after the flesh, you shall die.” This is a very clear indication that Paul did not walk after the flesh any longer, and that we also should not walk after the flesh, or else we will die (spiritually). We know the wages of sin is death. And just as Jesus was raised up from death by the Holy Spirit, so those who accept the atoning blood of Jesus Christ will also be raised up from spiritual death. Consequently, the indwelling Holy Spirit will mortify (put to death) the deeds of the flesh (the sinful habits that the old, unregenerate mind/nature carried out). *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* Jesus commanded his followers, after their spiritual regeneration (born again experience), to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, who is the power from on High (Luke 24:49/Acts 1:4,5,8/Acts 2:1-18). This indwelling of the Spirit would cause them to be victorious as they walked in the Spirit, were led by the Spirit, and as a result, did not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Gal 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

Gal 5:17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Gal 5:18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Gal 5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

Gal 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Dead to sin, but alive unto Christ. This is the way Jesus intended it to be when he gave his life on the cross for us.

Rom 6:11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So Paul was not a double minded hypocrite when he told us we are dead to sin in Romans 6, but then talked of not being able to overcome sin in Romans 7. In chapter 7 of Romans, Paul was merely looking back on his life as an unregenerate sinner who had a guilty conscience tainted with sin. Though he was a pharisee, he had still fallen short of the law and required the blood sacrifice of animals to cover his sins. But the blood of bulls and goats could never take away his sins and regenerate him. It could never perfect him (Hebrews 10:1-4) Only Christ could do that, and he did when he shed his blood at Calvary (Hebrews 9:14/10:22). As a result, the New Testament saint now has a new and better covenant. Once his sins are completely removed (the conscience is purged) God the Holy Spirit can then live

inside him, writing the law of God on his heart and helping him to keep the law through the power and promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Why then, does 1John 1:8 seem to imply that we all sin and/or have sin in us? It reads:

1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

We must discern the context of this scripture by examining the chapter or chapters in entirety. When we read this scripture in accordance with the other passages of scripture, we can ascertain that the apostle John is referring to people who claim they are in right standing with God when they are in a state of sin. John gives a good reference point for us to start with:

1Jn 1:5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

1Jn 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

If we say we have fellowship with God but are walking in darkness, we lie. In order to have fellowship with God, then, one must be walking in light rather than in darkness (sin). The apostle urges us to “walk” as Christ walked. Since we know Christ walked sinless, we are expected to follow his example and also walk in the light of obedience/righteousness/holiness.

1Jn 2:6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

In 1John chapters 2 and 3, believers are instructed not to sin.

1Jn 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1Jn 3:6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

1Jn 3:7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

1Jn 3:8 He that committeth {works/practices} sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

1Jn 3:9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit {work/practice} sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

It would be doubleminded for John to exhort believers not to sin if they all have sin in them and/or

cannot help but sin. Furthermore, John also presents believers with a “litmus test” to tell whether or not they really know God.

1Jn 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

1Jn 2:4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

This does not mean that a born again believer in Christ can never sin again, but rather, that he is commanded *not* to sin. He must exercise his free will to live in holiness and practice righteousness. He is not to take the covenant and the name of his God in vain by counting the blood wherewith he was sanctified as a license to sin!

But then, why do the Old Testament scriptures say that all men sin?

1Ki 8:46 If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy...

Psa 53:2 God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God.

Psa 53:3 Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Again, this goes back to man's unregenerate nature apart from God. Man did not have God's Spirit living inside of him, and therefore leaned toward selfishness (sin) due to the environment (world) around him, i.e., the temptations from Satan, self and others. So all chose to sin. All created a sinful nature. Before converting to Christ, there was no man that did good and sinned not.

Now that we acknowledge these important facts, we can go back and discover exactly who John was describing in 1John 1:8 when he said “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Understand, first of all, that when John uses the pronoun “we,” he means it only as a general term for those claiming to be believers, and is in no way implying that he has sin in him at that moment. Rather, he includes himself only inasmuch that if he were in a state of sin and darkness at any point in his Christian walk and yet denied that he was in sin, he then would be lumped into this category. But in this particular scripture, John is referring to religious hypocrites such as those in our churches today, who claim they are holy by the blood of Jesus, but yet walk in sin/darkness/disobedience. They cover up their sin. They deny the very reason Christ came, which was not only to cleanse us from sin, but also to enable us to walk in sin-free obedience to his commands. John confronts these liars in their sinful hypocrisy by telling them they are deceiving themselves when they say they have no sin. Then he continues,

1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1Jn 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

It is only when the believer confesses his sins that he can be cleansed from them. It is only when the believer acknowledges/admits that he has sinned that he can be made righteous. Otherwise, he is a liar, and the word of God is not in him.

1Jn 2:4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1Jn 2:5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby

know we that we are in him.

Using the same reasoning, John goes on to talk about the religious hypocrite who claims to know God and walk in the light, yet hates his brother (or neighbor), and so actually walks in darkness:

1Jn 2:9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

1Jn 2:11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

1Jn 3:10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

1Jn 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

1Jn 3:15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

The apostles Paul and John, along with other New Testament writers, teach us that we are able to overcome sin. We are dead to sin. We do not have to commit (or practice) sin. How then, shall we continue to believe otherwise when the multitude of biblical evidence is against us? We must never believe it is acceptable to sin. We must never believe that we cannot help but sin. For then, we seek to make God a liar and His holy Word untrue.

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