

From "Readings on Romans" by C. Crain. pp.53-70.

Having unfolded the character of the transcending triumph of grace over sin, the apostle is anxious that those who are participators in this triumph should be preserved from what is, alas, a common abuse of his doctrine.

Enemies of the doctrine of grace have sought to discredit it by charging it with making sin a necessity.

There are those who understand the doctrine to mean that it permits going on still in sin. Flagrant violations of holiness have been defended by the plea that it is allowable under grace to continue in sin—to indulge the lusts of the flesh. In many quarters it is taught that victory over sin is not to be counted on as long as we remain in our earthly life. It is said, "We have not yet received our sinless body, and as long as we have the old sinful body we must inevitably be subject to sin. It must have at least a certain measure of rule over us."

But the apostle will not allow those who are in Christ, those who live by and in Him, to entertain such unholy deductions from his doctrine of grace. When he says, "What shall *we say then*?" he is speaking as one of the numerous subjects of the reign of grace. He speaks as representing those, once among the victims of sin, whose hearts have been laid hold of by the grace which is by the one Man, Jesus Christ, and who have thus come to be of Him—sharers with Him in the life and blessing of which He is the Fountain-head. On their behalf, in their name, we may say, he asks, "Does the doctrine of grace allow one to go on still in sin? Do we take the view that grace abounding over sin implies that sin, or a measure of it, is justifiable as furnishing occasion for the triumph of grace?"

How indignantly the apostle refuses the thought! With what vigor and earnestness he denounces such a conception of his doctrine! The thought is intolerable. It is an unholy implication. It would destroy the true character of grace; it would rob it of the reality of its triumph; it would mean serious damage to souls, as it would vitally affect the state of their minds and the condition of their hearts. No! Such a view is to be wholly condemned. Those who are participators in the triumph over sin through Jesus Christ are to put the unholy thought far, far away. The authoritative apostolic declaration of the doctrine of grace demands it. Be it so that we still have our old sinful body, we can not allow that we must therefore sin more or less. That, indeed, would not be deliverance from the dominion of sin.

If it be said, "Our future deliverance is secure, but present deliverance is impossible," the answer is, That is not the apostle's teaching. He teaches and insists on a *present* deliverance from the dominion of sin. As our Lord in John 8:34 said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the

servant of sin." The doctrine of the apostle is the same. With him, being under grace and under sin is an impossibility. Those who are the subjects of grace should regard bondage to sin as incompatible with subjection to grace.

We come now to the apostle's discussion of the subject of present deliverance from the dominion of sin. We shall see that he divides his discussion into two parts. In the first he dwells on our title, or right, to be in present practical deliverance from sin's dominion; in the second he shows how deliverance is practically attained, and what it is found to be when practically reached.

Before we begin to follow the apostle's argument, let us remind ourselves that all men, as sprung from fallen Adam, are victims of sin and of death. Those laid hold of by grace, which is by Jesus Christ, have become His seed (Isa. 53:10). As thus sprung from Him, they are sharers in the eternal life which is in Him. This participation in eternal life in Christ Jesus is a blessing to be realized *now*, as well as in eternity. The subjects of grace have *now* the eternal life that is in Him. It is in that sense that they now live by and in Him. But living thus in connection with Him, i. e., as sprung *from* Him, they are *of* the position in which He is. They belong to *it*.

What then is His position? Here we must remember that Christ, in grace, once took our position under sin. He was not *personally* under it, but in grace entered into the position of being under sin in the behalf of those who were personally in that position. Having thus in grace taken the position, He died—death being the penalty of sin, and so the due of those in that position. It was a vicarious death; He could die in no other way. Having died thus atoningly in behalf of the victims of sin, in rising again He has taken up a new position, and is dead to the former position under sin, which in grace He had taken for those under sin.

Now, as we have already said, as sprung from Him we are of Him in His new position. We are of the position in which He is, and therefore dead to sin.

It is to this blessed fact that the apostle appeals in beginning his discussion as to our right to be practically delivered from the dominion of sin. His argument is this: Sin having had its reign over us to its legitimate end in death, and Christ having taken our place in subjection to it, we who have been laid hold of by His grace have passed out of that position from under sin. We are subjects of grace, and as such dead to sin. We have the right to be free practically from sin's power and rule. We have a positional deliverance which entitles us to live in happy subjection to grace, in the realization that sin's rights over us have all been annulled. We are freed

completely from every claim of sin upon us, even from its claim to the use of the old sinful body. What a perfect deliverance grace has thus provided for us!

Alas, how little it is understood! How difficult it is to lay hold of the true conception of what our deliverance is! How few are in reality entering into what the apostle means when he teaches, as he does here, that the subjects of grace—those who are in Christ—are dead to sin!

Some, in their inability to lay hold of the real import of the doctrine of being dead to sin, deny it altogether. They insist that the fact of our having still the old sinful body is the clearest proof that we are not yet dead to sin. Others, while they do not deny that the doctrine is taught, and that there is a certain ideal sense in which it is true, yet deny that it can be *practically* true. Others still modify the form of the words in which the doctrine is taught, and say, “We *ought* to be dead to sin.” In their teaching there is much exhortation to the effect that Christians should strive to *die* to sin. How forcefully sometimes we are exhorted to put the old man to death. But in all this teaching the true conception of what deliverance from sin is, being dead to sin, is lacking. The widespread misunderstanding of what being dead to sin is, shows how difficult it is for us to lay hold of it. Those who so zealously promulgate such teachings as we have referred to, in contradiction to the teaching of the apostle, will do well to weigh the incontestable argument of verses 3-7, in which the fact of our being positionally in the place of death to sin is clearly demonstrated. Let us now turn to it.

The apostle’s first appeal to prove that we are in the position of being dead to sin is the significance of baptism. Baptism is the badge of discipleship to the risen Lord Jesus Christ. What makes it a suitable badge of discipleship to Him is that, as Peter tells us (1Peter 3:21), it is a figure of salvation by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism being such a figure, shows that in our being baptized we were in figure put into the position of being dead with Christ. Furthermore, our being figuratively put into this position was in view to our living henceforth in a new life. But the new life our baptism calls for is one in the likeness of Christ’s life in resurrection. Plainly then our baptism, though it is a figure, witnesses to a position of death to sin. It declares that Christ has died to sin (having in grace put Himself under sin to do so), and that we are in figure identified with Him in His position of being dead to sin, to be identified with Him in the life He is living as risen.

Now what baptism witnesses to, the gospel declares to be true of us. As having heard and received “the word of the truth of the gospel,” we know that when Christ died, the old, fallen, sinful man was being judicially dealt with. We know that if One died in behalf of all men,

judicially all men have died (2Cor. 5:14, *Greek*). Having heard and received the word of truth, by which we have become new creatures in Christ, we know that our old man (the man connected with the old position in Adam) has been crucified—judicially put to death. His claims to the body have been annulled in his judicial death. The body, therefore, which once was in the power of the old man, now belongs to the new man; and though yet unredeemed, is no more for the use of sin.

Even though still in our old body, we are of Him who died and rose again, and our body, though still a sinful body, belongs to Him; and as belonging to Him, it is not under sin’s dominion. How manifestly we have title to be practically delivered from sin’s power and rule! We are, positionally, delivered. Though we have still the old sinful body, as being in Christ we cannot be charged with being sinful men. **We do not have to wait until we receive the redemption of the body to be in Christ. We are in Him now.** We are His seed now by His grace having laid hold of us. We are thus constituted righteous; **we are no more chargeable with our old state under sin than a dead body, a corpse, is.**

Clearly then is our position demonstrated to be Christ’s position of being dead to sin. But this implies and involves living with Him; and living with Him *now* not merely by and by. We shall surely live with Him when we get our redeemed bodies, but we have title to live with Him **now, while we are still in the old body.** He lives no more under sin’s dominion. He went under it once in grace, but by dying and rising again He lives in eternal deliverance from sin’s power. As subjects of grace—as being in Him—we are in the same sphere of life in which He is, where sin cannot enter. It is not simply that we have life in Him, but that we live with Him; and living with Him implies living in practical deliverance from sin’s dominion. The apostle is not yet ready, however, to take up the question of the practical deliverance. Other questions of serious moment must first be given attention to.

The reason why many never get far along in the road to deliverance from sin's power is because they fail to take the very first step. Having established beyond question that the subjects of grace have title to be practically delivered from the dominion of sin, the apostle now points out what is the first step in the road to deliverance. What is it?

It is taking the right standpoint from which to look at ourselves. Many who are in Christ do not think of themselves as in Him. They think of themselves as in Adam. They think of themselves as under sin, as necessarily so because of sin still dwelling in them. It is not true, however, that because we have still the sinful body, we are under sin. We are under sin as yielding to it,

as serving it, as yielding the members of the body to its use; but we are not under sin as being still in the old body. We are thinking wrongly when we think of ourselves as under sin because we have still the old body of sin.

Now, to think rightly of ourselves is the very first step toward deliverance from the service of sin. The apostle tells us in verse 11 how we should think of ourselves. He says, “Likewise reckon”—consider, think of— “Yourselves as *dead to sin* and *alive to God*.” **We are still in our earthly life, but as in Christ we are entitled to think of ourselves as if we had died and were risen from the dead. It is this right thought of our position that the apostle presses upon us here.**

Now another thing necessarily accompanies this right thinking of ourselves as if we were dead and risen. Viewing ourselves as connected with Christ in His position of having died to sin and living to God, we will consider that sin has no longer any title to the use of the mortal body. **We will not consent to its reigning there; we will refuse that its lusts should govern us. We will look upon the members of our body as belonging to God, as if they were members of the new body which we are yet to receive. We will hold them to be instruments of righteousness—not of sin.**

If now we take the apostle’s standpoint of looking at ourselves as being in Christ, as if we were thus dead and risen and living to God, we shall then regard sin’s title to our body as annulled, and that our Saviour-God has claims upon it, its members to be instruments of righteousness; and, as under these claims, there will be in us a purpose to have God’s rights to our body realized. We will be actuated by the thought that God’s title must be made good practically—that His title over us should be realized in practical life.

The formation in our minds of this purpose, the establishment in our souls of this aim to be practically attained, carries us on a good step on the road to a life of practical deliverance from the dominion of sin; but until this purpose is formed, and the aim becomes the absorbing desire of our soul, progress toward a practical life of liberty from sin’s power is impossible. Alas, how many are lacking here! They are content to drag on in weary bondage to sin with little or no purpose to be free from its rule.

May the Lord use the apostle’s exhortations in verses 11-13 to establish in the souls of all the subjects of His grace an insatiable desire to be practically delivered from sin’s power in its use of the body for any sinful purpose.

We have seen that the apostle teaches that the victims of sin, who have been laid hold of by the grace of Christ, who took their place under sin’s dominion, are now connected with Christ in the new position He has taken up

as risen from the dead. They are *of* Him. They live now—live by Him. Living by Him, they belong to Him, are in Him; and *with* Him are dead to sin, and have title to think of themselves from this point of view—as *in Christ*. It is their right to take the place of being of the risen Christ—to look at themselves from this standpoint.

Now it may be said, “From that standpoint it is true that those who are the subjects of this grace have title to be practically free from the service of sin, but title to deliverance from sin is one thing, and ability to use the title is quite a different one.” It will be said, “It is one thing to look at my mortal body and think of it as subject to the claims of Christ, and quite another thing to keep from activity the sin that dwells in it.” We are told, “It is quite right to regard our members as being instruments of righteousness and for the use and service of God, but it is another matter to hinder their being used as instruments of unrighteousness.”

We are thus reminded that there is a distinction to be made between *title* to be free from the service of sin and *ability* to make the title good practically.

To this distinction we readily agree; but before we discuss the question of the power by which we live practically to God, and where we find that power, there are other questions which must be looked at first. We must first inquire, Are there any necessary hindrances in the way of being practically delivered from the rule of sin? Are there limitations to which practical deliverance is possible, and beyond which it is impossible?

If we turn back to the preceding dispensations we readily see that there were then subjects of grace—men who lived in faith, in the light of the prophecies of the grace that has been brought to us (1Pet.1:10). They thus lived by the One of whom Adam was the figure, but they did not live in the abundance and fulness in which it is given to us to live (John 10:10). Life and incorruptibility were not then illuminated as they are now (2Tim. 1:10). They lived the life of faith under limitations. Again, they did not have the full measure of God’s estimate of sin as we have since the cross of Christ, and here we cannot fail to see a very great limitation which must very largely have affected their practical lives. Furthermore, the law, when it was given to Israel, must have been a very great limitation to the extent in which the life of faith could be practically maintained.

Here is a matter which requires careful consideration. It should be remembered that the law as a rule of life was given to Israel as a nation—to men in the flesh; and the children of faith were not separated from the rest of the nation; they were not exempted from the rule of life under which the *nation* was put. Being thus under the same rule of life as the rest of the nation, they were under restraints that made it impossible for them to take the place of

children with God. While they were children in reality, they could not be children practically (Gal. 4:1-7).

Now, the rule of life under which they were put, as being a part of the nation upon whom it was imposed, is the strength of sin (1 Cor. 15:56). It made the offense abound in them as well as in the test of the nation. Being thus under an order of dealing which stirred sin in the flesh into activity, they were continually in bondage through fear of death (Heb. 2:15). They could not be set free as long as that order of dealing with them stood. The law gave to sin an opportunity and advantage, and it was impossible for them to claim exemption from its penalty. They could never say sin did not have dominion over them.

Believers, then, under law, were under conditions of restraint—limitations which prevented the grace that had laid hold of them abounding in the fulness and abundance of its power. But Christ dead, risen and glorified, is the end of these conditions of restraint for believers. He is the end of the law for believers, whether it be for righteousness or for a rule of life. The subjects of divine grace are not under it *now*. This has been authoritatively declared, and with this declaration there has come also the assurance that “sin shall not have dominion over us” (ver. 14).

In the apostle’s statement, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under law, but under grace,” we learn there is no necessary hindrance to those who are of Christ being now practically free from the service, of sin. God is not now requiring His children to live by a rule which is the strength of sin. He has brought to a complete end, for believers, the whole system under which formerly He held them under restraint, and under which it was impossible to know and enjoy the complete measure of grace.

It is, then, the privilege of every child of God now to be practically delivered from the rule of sin. Deliverance from the dominion of sin is his present right. It is not to be thought of as an ideal, impossible of realization until the body is changed. It is to be maintained that the grace of God, which is by Jesus Christ, provides for all its present subjects not only eternal exemption from judgment, but also **present freedom from the service of sin**; and that God is not now imposing on them a rule of life that hinders their enjoyment of deliverance from sin’s power.

But the apostle’s assertion that the subjects of grace are not under law is often disputed. Many still maintain that the law is the Christian’s guide to living. But freedom from it as the rule of life is most unequivocally stated by the apostle. There is not the least ambiguity about his expression of it. He is speaking, too, as the exponent and representative of

Christianity [CHRIST]. His statement is authoritative. Nevertheless, it is not accepted as being the truth by many. There are many who refuse it with horror. They say it means license to sin. They tell us freedom from law as a rule of life means lawlessness, indulging in sin as much as one pleases.

But this is plainly a misconception of the apostle’s teaching. It is a thorough misunderstanding of the character of divine grace. No one really entering into that grace, in which Christ took the place of the victims of sin, could conceive of it as meaning license to sin, or think it necessary that the subjects of that grace should be under law as a rule of life to keep them from sinning.

That freedom from law means lawlessness, the apostle resents, and strenuously refuses. That it means license to sin is an intolerable thought to him. He exclaims most vigorously against it. All who submit to his authoritative statement of what the grace of God means, will join him in denouncing as a false conception the thought that freedom from the principle of law is liberty to indulge in sin—a thought to be put far away.

Having strongly denounced the idea as repulsive and intolerable, the apostle now proceeds, in ver. 16, to show what the misconception really means. To say, “If we are not under law, then let us sin as much as we like,” means **deliberately choosing to be the servants of sin**. To willingly indulge in sin is to make one’s self a voluntary servant of it. That should be self-evident. What is so manifest ought to expose the error underlying the statement that “because we are not under law, but under grace, therefore we may sin as much as we choose.” It is plainly wrong: it certainly is not apostolic teaching.

The apostle goes on to insist that it is not the form of teaching to which the subjects of grace have submitted themselves (ver. 17). They have received a different type of teaching altogether. They have surrendered themselves to a teaching of another character. Having received the apostolic teaching, that which he denounces as intolerable must be unholy and abhorrent to them.

Now, let us remark, the teaching that freedom from law as the rule of life means lawlessness, is not the teaching to which the Roman saints had given their adherence. Taking them as representatives of the saints of apostolic times, we may say, such teaching was not a part of the faith of those saints. It is therefore a teaching antagonistic to Christianity. Those who are seeking to introduce it into Christian teaching, who would make it a part of Christian instruction, are corrupting and subverting Christianity. It is therefore to be vigorously refused and strenuously opposed. The defenders of the apostolic faith must join with the apostle in refusing it, as a misconception of the character of Christianity, as unholy,

and intolerable.

But we must follow the apostle further. Having thanked God that the Roman saints were not adherents of such a false and unholy teaching, he tells them (ver. 18) that through the surrender of themselves to the right form of teaching, they were made free from sin, and are now the servants of righteousness. He then exhorts them to let righteousness have the use of their members even as formerly they had allowed sin to use them (ver. 19).

Then, next, he contrasts the fruit. He says, When you were free from righteousness you lived in unholiness. You are now ashamed of the unholy lives you lived as the servants of sin. You were on the road that leads to and ends in death. But now as servants of righteousness you are living in holiness and are on the road which leads to the final condition of life which is in prospect for all those who have become connected with the risen Christ.

We may now sum up the apostle's argument in the chapter: The grace that is by Jesus Christ has provided and secured, for those of whom it lays hold, a new position and condition of life in which they are entitled to be practically free from the service of sin. Though they are still in their old, mortal, sinful bodies, yet there is no necessary reason why these bodies should be under sin's power, or their members be yielded up to be used for sinful purposes. Christ, by whom we live, being the end of the law, both for righteousness or as rule of life, for those who have life in Him, we are not limited by what gives strength to the sin that dwells in us; hence there is full liberty for the life of Christ to manifest its power in using the body, though still mortal and sinful, to the glory of God.

This is what the grace of God confers on those who submit themselves to the grace of Christ in His one obedience unto death. We are granted the inestimable blessing of living unto God. This is eternal life indeed. May we submit ourselves more fully to the grace that has made it our portion.

But in spite of the plain and authoritative statement of the apostle, that we are not now under a rule of life that prevents our enjoying this liberty from sin's service, there are many who very mistakenly regard the principle of law as the only means by which a life of practical holiness can

be produced. Notwithstanding the apostle's unequivocal statement that we are *not* under law, they insist that law is the power for holiness. Evidently, some in the apostle's day maintained this. It was necessary for the apostle to take up the question of law to show the effect of it upon a believer who undertakes to make it the rule of life.

As we shall see, the question that is raised is, What is the power by which a believer lives a life of holiness and fruitfulness to God? Is it law that gives him strength to serve God, or is it Christ enjoyed by the power of the Spirit? Does the one who is in Christ find in the principle of law power to yield himself to God? Is it the principle of law that gives him ability to yield his members to righteousness? Is practical righteousness produced in those who are in Christ by walking after the law as a rule of life?

These are all serious, sober-minded questions. Every soul that the grace of Christ lays hold of sooner or later raises them. Finding themselves the objects of the love of God they cannot long enjoy that love as the Holy Spirit sheds it abroad in the heart without feeling themselves under the obligation to live to God. In their efforts to do so they find they need power to enable them to live to the honor and praise of God. We naturally suppose a life to the glory of God will result by making the law our rule of life. The supposition is an entire mistake. But the experience under the trial of it is necessary to manifest the mistake.

This experience is explained and interpreted in chap. 7. The explanation of this experience answers definitely and authoritatively the question, Can the law give the Christian power for a life of holiness and fruitfulness to God?

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Extracted by Ron Canner, August 3, 2005.

Notes in [brackets] mine.

Emphases marked by **bold** mine.

Italics his.

NOTE: While this "Dig Deeper" is longer than usual, I think it is worth the time and effort to read it all. Ron