

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 6:1-7

Lesson #12

Introduction

It is with great joy and anticipation that we now move into chapter 6 of Paul's epistle to the Romans. Chapter six marks the end of Paul's previous point about justification by faith alone and moves into the results of that justification. These next two chapters have long been a point of contention among those who read and interpret the scriptures. Whole denominations have developed along the various lines of interpretation. The cause for this diversity can usually be traced back to one single issue. And that issue is concerning just how sin actually affects and how it relates to human beings, both before and after justification. In these next two chapters Paul is going to say that we have died to sin and now we walk in newness of life, verses 4 & 5. In verses 6 & 17 he says that we have been freed from sin and made slaves of righteousness. These are wonderful words to hear, and make us want to leap for joy, but as is so often the case, there's another side to the issue. Immediately after the wonderful news of chapter six, there is the distressing revelation of chapter seven, where Paul himself says that he is of flesh, and is sold into bondage to sin, and he still occasionally practices the same old sin that he now hates with his heart and mind but can't escape from it.

So how do we interpret this apparent contradiction? If we have died to sin then how can it still be a problem to us? Dead people don't have any problem with sin, so why do we, if in fact we've really died to it? There's no wonder that there's confusion over this issue. Either the scriptures are a big collection of fairy tales, with no real meaning, or there has to be some explanation for this apparent contradiction, and blindly denying that there actually is any apparent contradiction is simply burying our heads in the sand and hoping it will go away. But for those of us who trust the authenticity and authority of scriptures, we have every confidence that there's a logical and understandable answer to our dilemma. And in fact, a careful reading of these two chapters makes everything clear to those who are willing to spend the time to gain the understanding.

First and foremost in unraveling this mystery is the realization that sin relates to, and directly affects man, in two different and distinct ways. One of them is how it relates to our thinking; meaning our mind, our emotion, and our will. It is in this manner that we most clearly recognize the effects of sin in our lives. But this isn't the only way that sin affects man, in fact it isn't even necessarily the primary way. Sin affects man both experimentally, (or experientially as we now say) and it affects man judicially, meaning legally. We can't see or feel the legal aspect, so we tend to ignore it, but legal ownership of something is at the very root of its final disposition. For instance, You might have lived your whole life in one house, and raised your children in that house, and had countless wonderful experiences, and maybe even some tragedies, in that house, but you can't leave it to your children when you pass away unless you legally own that house. And ownership is determined by judicial process, not by experiences. Somewhere there is a legal document called a title deed with a name on it, and whoever's name is on that deed is the rightful owner. It might be said that we ourselves are like that house, we've had countless experiences of a lifetime in these bodies of ours, but when we're gone we ultimately belong to whomever holds the title deed of ownership of our souls. Just because we can't see this document doesn't mean that it doesn't exist or that it isn't legally binding.

When Paul speaks of sin in these next two chapters, it is absolutely imperative to understand what particular element or perspective he's addressing. Is he speaking of the judicial or the experiential aspect, and is he talking about the spiritual or the fleshly element of our composition? Mixing these up will yield very different conclusions from the exact same verses. When Paul says that we are dead to sin, does he mean that sin no longer tempts us to disobey God's commandments? If that's what he means then we have only two possible options, either he is dead wrong, or we aren't really a Christian. If we think that he means that we have died to sin experientially, in every perceivable respect, then we are at a total loss as to how to deal with this, because we know that sin has not ceased its merciless taunting of our mind's. To claim that it has is absurd and we all know that. But if Paul means that we have died to sin judicially, and as such we are now free to be purchased by another owner, then this makes perfect sense. And if he means that our former love for sin in our heart's and mind's has been put to death, we wholeheartedly agree with this also. But there is yet another aspect of sin that we all know is still present and very much alive, what about that part? Why does Paul say that we've died to sin if he

knows full well that sin still has a very real influence in our lives? Because the damage that sin has caused has more than one aspect, and as such Paul addresses those aspects separately. Some are immediate and some take time to come to completion. Some are experiential and some are more judicial in nature. The judicial elements are immediate, like the signing of a contract, but the experiential take some time to work out and happen progressively, because as human beings, made up of body and soul, visible and invisible components, our invisible components are in some manner attached to our physical components, so our mind and emotion and will is not separate from our bodies and the influence that it has over our thinking and desires. We are an invisible spirit incarcerated within a body of fallen and condemned flesh that still awaits the final release of this damaging union. Paul is going to explain all of this in these next two chapters.

The judicial, that is the legal aspect is immediate and total and binding, but the experiential is not so, it follows much more slowly. And add to this the complex nature of the human creature and the whole process is even more difficult to unravel. For instance, we are complex beings composed of mind and body, and these two components are inexorably and organically bonded together in a manner that we just don't understand. These two components act both independently and jointly upon us to compose the whole of our being. How we think, and what we like and dislike are the result of the total interaction of our components. Some parts we control, some parts we do not. We have to understand this as the starting point for what God does to us and within us in that act of redemption and regeneration. Just as our fall into sin was a two part process, in the same manner our redemption is a two part process. There is that which happens to the mind (the soul and spirit and will) and there is that which happens to the tangible body. And these two do not happen at the same time. The mental, or spiritual, portion is the first half, and the redemption of the body is the second, and these are separated by a substantial time difference. When God told Adam and Eve that on the day that they ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they would surely die, what happened? Did they die on that day? You see how important it is to understand the background context? No, Adam and Eve did not physically die on that day, Adam lived for 930 years before his body died. So was God mistaken in His pronouncement? Did it take God 900 years to make good on His threat? Or was God speaking of Adam in both aspects of his existence, his physical body and his invisible soul? We who know scriptures understand this latter to be the case. Adam's spirit was rendered dead immediately, on that very day, as evidenced by his behaviors whereby he was afraid of God and tried to hide from Him, but his physical body didn't follow for many centuries.

And so it is with those who are the redeemed of God through Jesus Christ. We are **spiritually** reborn, regenerated, restored to life immediately, but our physical bodies are not. In fact they will never be restored, but rather replaced with new spiritual bodies that are like Christ's resurrected body. This will happen as foretold in 1Cor 15:50-53; Phi 3:21; 1Jn 3:2 and several other places including Romans 8:23 where Paul says that we eagerly await this future redemption of our physical bodies to match our reborn souls. This is yet a **future happening** even for genuine Christians. In the meantime we continue to live in this world as spiritually reborn creatures that are organically bonded to dying flesh bodies destined for destruction. That's why we get new ones. We cannot change our physical bodies any more than we can change our body temperature or heart rate, or our likes and dislikes. The understanding that the fall of man was a two part process, both judicial and experiential, involving both our soul's and our bodies, is essential to understanding the redemption of man as a two part process, involving those same components, but encompassing a substantial time differential as well.

These flesh and blood bodies that we live in are not intended to ever be redeemed or repaired, or made pure and holy, they are destined to die. Sin has forever destroyed this flesh portion of humanity. Paul said to the Corinthians that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. (1Co 15:50) And this was his introduction to the subsequent verses about receiving a new incorruptible body that was undefiled and eternal. (vv. 51-53) If we think that these physical bodies that we live in can be brought under absolute subjection to our own will, then we find ourselves trying to redeem that which God has rejected and abandoned. This is an impossible task, and is not by any means what the scriptures teach. If God has chosen to replace our physical bodies because He considers them defiled beyond acceptance, then how do we get the idea that we can do this job ourselves? Every Christian will know and achieve perfect righteousness as a gift of God through Jesus Christ, and by the work of the Holy Spirit, but definitely **Not** while residing in these physical bodies. We are organically fused to a sinful substance (our flesh) that forms an integral part of our present composition, and some of that substance is under our control and some of it is not. Some of it is, some of it is not. As long as we live in these flesh bodies, our mind's will be under relentless assault to take actions that gratify the flesh, and sanctification and spiritual

maturity is that lifelong process of learning to say No to those desires and Yes to the righteous commandments of God. No one will ever win this struggle entirely while they are alive on this earth, it will only be fulfilled by Christ at His glorious return and our glorified bodies. It is absolutely imperative to understand these things to make proper sense of Paul's statements in chapters six and seven. With this, let's proceed on to our lesson. The title of this lesson is:

Dead to Sin but Alive to God

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

Romans 6:1-7 (NASB)

Verses 1-3:

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

After a lengthy explanation of justification being by faith alone, through Christ alone, Paul addresses what is an obvious question that arises by this teaching. If justification is not by works, meaning not by our actions, then does that mean that it doesn't matter what we do, as long as we say that we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died for our sins? Is that what Paul was teaching? It certainly is what some professing Christians claim they believe. I've heard this concept expressed as radical grace. But Paul immediately puts that idea to rest with his rhetorical question, *Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?* which he answers anyway, with the response *May it never be!* There were some who took this idea to the extreme, and argued that the more we sin the more God's grace was exhibited, so sinning was actually displaying God's grace. Obviously such thinking was not coming from a heart that was dead to sin and alive to God. This is the sentiment of a heart that still wants to sin, and hopes to find a loophole to justify it.

Paul then asks the question *How shall we who died to sin still live in it?* Now we begin to see the application of some of the principles of our introductory discussion. Paul says that we have died to sin. What does that mean? Well, as we discussed in our introduction, there are two very distinct parts to this term as Paul is using it here. There is that part that is experiential, meaning how it affects us in our immediate thoughts and behaviors; and there is also the judicial, which is entirely about the legal ownership and authority over us. We can't see this part, but it's at least as important as the experiential, if not more so. Whomever it is who owns us has the final say about our ultimate destination. Now we don't think anybody owns us, but the scriptures teach otherwise. There are no free agents, every human being is either the property of God or the property of Satan. And all issues of ownership, and transfers of that ownership, by necessity involve life and death, because these two owners themselves represent life and death. From an ownership perspective, to be alive to one requires being dead to the other, no joint ownerships are tolerated by either of these two parties.

Concerning the experiential part of having died to sin, lets see if we can make sense of it. After all, we are still alive, and we haven't been brought back to life like Lazarus out of his grave, so in what sense does Paul mean that we have died to sin? Here we have to understand that we are multi-part creatures, and Paul is addressing our spiritual component, not our physical flesh. Our flesh hasn't died and it hasn't been redeemed or regenerated. It is our mind; our heart and soul and spirit that have died to sin, but our flesh is still very much alive to sin, and still loves it just the same as it always has. We don't control that aspect, we can't make our flesh love God and hate sin, but God has made our spirit alive again, and that component of our being has been reborn, and regenerated, and made to love righteousness. That component of our being cannot still live in comfortable union with the desires that our flesh still maintains. Paul asks how shall that portion still live in such behaviors? The answer is, it cannot continue to live in peaceful harmony with the sinful desires of the flesh, but nevertheless, at the very same time, neither can it escape from the influences that the flesh still has upon it by virtue of that mysterious organic connection of these two component parts of our being.

But in spite of the obvious conflict, we are aware that there has been a change. Our whole mindset has been altered. That which we used to love and desire is no longer appealing in our mind's, it is literally dead. We don't feel comfortable with those things anymore, and we're actually ashamed of ourselves for having practiced them so freely and casually. We feel as though we have, mentally at least, died to the desires for those former things, and have been baptized into Jesus Christ by virtue of His death on our behalf. The death experientially is referring to that former mindset that loved sin and despised righteousness, that old mindset, that "old self" as Paul says in verse 6, has literally been put to death with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It really is gone, and we can experience this clearly in our new thinking and attitudes and affections. (Our new self) Without this death there can be no subsequent change of behaviors or affections or desires. One must either love sin and hate righteousness, or love righteousness and hate sin, because these two principles are complete opposites and are directly opposed to each other. They are mutually exclusive.

Someone may ask, but wait a minute, I do love God and His righteousness, but I still have this troubling desire to sin, so how can these be mutually exclusive? This question, that probably many of us have had, reflects the confusion that exists between our new heart and our old flesh nature. The issue of life and death, from the mental or spiritual aspect, is concerning what we love and appreciate in our innermost being, irrespective of what our flesh component might desire. Again, it is the mental, or spiritual component that has died, not the flesh, and that death was a death to the former innermost heart's desires that were sinful. If this has happened, then you have died to sin and are alive to God, regardless of what your dying flesh still tries to tempt you to do. Has your innermost love of sin died?

If we ever loved the pleasures of sin, and the scriptures declare that we did, then that love of sin must die before we can ever become lovers of righteousness, and this is precisely what has happened to every man and woman who has been justified and redeemed by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. In our minds, in our spiritual components, there has been a death to a form of thinking that leads to eternal destruction, so that we could legally become the property of a new Owner. If anyone can still comfortably live in perpetual disobedience to God, justifying every sin with an endless stream of excuses, then there has been no death to sin in that person, no baptism into Jesus Christ, and no transfer of legal ownership. It is our mental (spiritual) death to sin that authenticates our faith in that invisible legal redemption, and our hope for the glorification which is to come. Since we can't see the actual title deed, God gives us the clear and indisputable experiential evidence to assure our minds and to comfort our hearts.

For clarification let's add that the flesh, that has not died, still has a very dangerous and persuasive connection to our new minds by virtue of its ability to tempt us to choose to gratify those fleshly desires. Scripturally, the term flesh is not just about the physical material alone, there is something mysterious about that connection between the physical and the mind that we can't quite grasp. The flesh is both the physical material and that mysterious portion that makes the connection to our mind and has the ability to sway or influence how it works and what it does. The flesh still responds to the same sinful pleasures, and they are indeed pleasurable to the flesh, even while they are simultaneously offensive to our minds. This creates a very unpleasant conflict that often causes us to question our status, because we don't always choose to follow our new mindset (our new spirit) but we all succumb on occasion to these temptations. So, we see that while the mind is dead to sin, the flesh is still very much alive, and thoroughly able to induce our minds to occasionally indulge in its pleasures. The true Christian hates it when this happens, sorely grieves for their weakness, and cries out to God for forgiveness and power to resist these assaults. A mind (spirit) that is dead to sin is not looking for a way to justify continued indulgence in it, it is looking for the day when it is released from its defiling influence in our us.

I hope we can all see that this does not describe a contradiction in the scriptures, but rather explains a raging conflict in the component parts of a fallen human being, who has been only partly redeemed thus far, and eagerly awaits the final fulfillment of that redemption that eliminates this nagging body of death (the flesh) to which we are temporarily connected. For the unredeemed this might be objectively understandable from a purely academic perspective, but for each and every truly redeemed Christian this is a subjective description of our very existence, this is the situation in which we live and work and raise our families each and every day of our lives, and we don't have to be persuaded of the truth of this, we already know it very well. I just want to make sure that we understand it as clearly as possible, so that we don't unduly suffer doubts about our faith, nor are we deceived by the many false evangelists who offer easy believeism solutions.

Now, just one more word on the judicial aspect before we move on. As practicing sinners, and lovers of it, we were the property of Satan, we were sold into slavery to him by our own nature and actions, but our death to sin, through our baptism into Christ's death, has legally released us from his ownership and authority, and now we can rightfully and legally become the children of God. Our death to sin, judicially, has both released us from its controlling power over us, and broken sin (and Satan's) legal ownership authority over our eternal destiny. But again, this is speaking entirely of our mental and spiritual component part. That part that remains after these bio-mechanical devices we call our bodies have worn out and expired.

Verse 4:

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

This verse also has both judicial and experiential implications. Judicially, we were the property of Satan because we were sinners under condemnation of death by the decree of God. The death of Jesus Christ, imputed to our account through faith, satisfied the debt of death that was owed to God the Father, thereby legally releasing us from Satan's ownership authority over us. Because Satan's power is death and death is the wages of sin (Rm 6:23) and it is our debt of sin that makes us Satan's property, legally. Once satisfied by death, Christ's death on our behalf, a transfer of ownership is legal and proper. And this is the judicial aspect of our death, symbolized by our baptism into Christ's death. Without this satisfaction of debt any transfer of ownership would be contrary to Law and subject to dispute. But Christ's death on our behalf completely and totally satisfies any and every requirement of the Law to make the transfer of ownership legal and proper. Furthermore, it is total and eternal immediate. Legally it is a done deal.

Now, experientially, the death of our old mindset that loved sin and despised righteousness has given us a whole new perspective on life. Our likes and dislikes are different, our innermost heart's desires are different (irrespective of our old flesh) and our whole life is new and different. How could it possibly not be different, this was Paul's point in the preceding verse. You can't die to sin and be born again to righteousness and there be no resultant visible effects. A judicial change of ownership has taken place and a whole new mindset (a new spirit) has been imputed into every new believer. The resultant change of behaviors was the whole purpose of that change of mindset, and the scriptures call this sanctification.

Sanctification is what happens when a human being has been redeemed by Jesus Christ and has died to the former love of sin. In this verse Paul calls it *walking in newness of life*. Newness of life is sanctification of life, it's both inward and outward, and it results experientially from our renewed mind that has been resurrected with Christ. And it happens because we now have the inward desire to obey God, from a new heart, whereas before we had the inward propensity and desires to live in a manner that was contrary to God. When our heart's (our mindset) was contrary to God we had no means at our disposal to even want to obey God, so we were powerless against sin, but our regenerated spirit (our renewed mind) now does have the desire to please God and live righteously, so we are no longer powerless against the sin that our flesh uses against us. Once we have the innermost desire to obey God we have a fighting chance to say no to the flesh. This is a brand new weapon of righteousness, and we have to learn how to use it effectively by lifelong practice, but it has freed us, experientially, from the bondage that sin formerly held over us. (Rm 6:17-18) This new resurrected life (spiritually resurrected, not physically) is the means, that we were formerly missing, to walk in newness of life. We have been freed judicially and we have been freed experientially (with some temporary limitations).

One last clarification, dying to sin does not mean that the flesh has stopped tempting us to sin, it means that in our deepest innermost part, (the mental or spiritual part) we really don't want to sin, and we find it most vile, and disgusting, and offensive, especially when we choose to do it anyway. And we will all do that, until the experiential portion of our redemption process has been completed also. (1Cor 15:50-53; Phi 1:6, 3:21; 1Jn 3:2; Rom 8:23)

In all of this discussion it seems that we've still overlooked one vital phrase. Paul says *through the glory of the Father*. We seem to find it so easy to overlook God's part in all of this. Does God have a stake in this whole thing? In today's vernacular - does He have a horse in this race? The pride of man is a relentless foe. We always tend to evaluate everything from the perspective of how it affects us. What does it have to do with me is the typical question? The absolute sovereignty and omnipotence of God are so readily overlooked. We humans are all here solely because we are a part

of a plan that involves the triune God. The scriptures say:

16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Col 1:16-17)

Anything and everything that we do or say must be viewed in the context of how it serves the purpose for which we were all created. We were made to behold and comprehend the glory of God, and to rightly worship Him for it. If we miss that then everything else is just wasted efforts. Everything that we've discussed, or ever will discuss must be laid against the background of how it serves to glorify God. And He gives us very good reasons to love Him, and worship Him, and give Him glory, and we must never let that understanding get lost in the background of our own petty existence. We are (that is we exist) because He decided that we would, and He made us for His own purposes and His own glorification. This is our eternal destiny and purpose of existence, and we were given tangible bodies and coherent mind's for the purpose of slowly and meticulously preparing us for that eternal privilege. It might be said that we are all currently attending worship school, where we are learning by diverse experiences why and how to do it right. Now for our next verses:

Verses 5-7:

5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

Verse 5 is yet another example of just how amazing the holy scriptures are. Simply by paying close attention to the verb tenses one can learn multitudes. Notice that Paul says *For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death*. Notice that this is rendered in the past tense, I'm speaking of our language, I don't know if Greek has another name, but the point is that it signifies an event that has already taken place. It's done. We have been united with Christ in the likeness of His death. It's done Paul says. The death of Christ Jesus has happened, and everything that it accomplished has been accomplished in full. Every certificate of death for every chosen believer, from past to future has been paid in full. It is done, remember those parting words of Jesus while still on the cross? Judicially it is done, and for those who have been regenerated, mentally (meaning spiritually) it is done. The innermost part of the mind, our desires and affections and whole point of view has been changed, the scripture calls this dying to sin, because it is this old mental attachment and attraction that made us slaves to sin experientially. How could we resist sin if sin is what we loved to do in the very depths of our heart's? That love for sin has to die before we can ever possibly become lovers of righteousness. And this has already happened also, if we understand that this is what Paul is talking about.

But now the amazing part, the next half of his sentence says *certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection*. Take notice that this is rendered in the tense that signifies a future coming event, not a past one. *If* we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, *then* we will, in the future, also be in the likeness of Him in His resurrection. The whole point of the Christian's life before their conversion was to establish a background context against which the remainder of their life will play out. To understand and appreciate freedom one must know the meaning of slavery. To understand the meaning and appreciate the value of redemption from slavery to sin, one must have been a slave of sin themselves, and this is exactly what God planned and how His whole process works. Everything that God does in the life of His chosen after their conversion is designed to bring them progressively through the process of sanctification and transformation into Christlikeness. (Rom 8:28-30)

It's difficult to understand how so many professing Christians, even whole denominations, actually believe that the whole point of God's plan is to see how many people can be saved from hell. To them everything starts and ends with evangelism. This is like taking one single step in a mile long walk and declaring with joy that you've finished the journey. Do you see how short this will leave you of the intended goal set by God? While evangelism is in fact the first step, there is, after that first step, the whole lifelong road of sanctification and transformation that lies before every child of God, which we are called to diligently pursue. God's plan is not simply about saving us from hell, it's about transforming us into the likeness of His Son so that He will be the first of many like brethren. (Rm 8:29) Much of professing Christianity takes the first step and then sits down to rest for the remainder of their lives. The only thing they think they're supposed to do is to try to persuade other people to also take that one step and sit down next to them. This is an apt description of contemporary Christianity, and it's for this reason that no one can tell the difference between the real Christians and the

imposters, because even the real Christians are so immature and carnal that they all look alike. The vast majority of those who call themselves Christians are not, they are what we call cultural Christians, but even many of the real Christians aren't taught that their purpose and mission is to pursue sanctification and transformation into Christlikeness. Most are taught that this is optional, just declare your belief in Jesus and everything is just fine. I hope I've made my point, so let's move on.

The *shall also be* portion of this sentence is what is the most exciting to those us who understand what it means. In the process of His eternal plan of creation for an eventual eternal kingdom, God designed this creation to be the schooling tool for His elect. The means by which He would teach them what they need to know and mold them into what He wants them to be when they're finished. And this sentence speaks of that finished product, that point when the sanctification and transformation process is brought to completion by the power that Christ has to conform all things to His liking. (Phi 1:6, 3:21) This is that new uncorrupted body that replaces these sin damaged bodies of flesh, so that the last vestige of sin is forever removed from every part of God's children, and then we will truly be in the likeness of Jesus Christ in His resurrection. (1Cor 15:50-54; 1Jn 3:2) But to get there, we must traverse the full path designed by God. We must go through the school of life, and experience the things that were designed to teach us what we need to know. It was not intended to be immediate or it would be so, just like one can't possibly go through earthly school in just one day. It is a slow and tedious process because that's what it's meant to be, because that's the only way that really works.

The scriptures speak of rewards, and it makes reference to the possibility of losing some of those rewards, speaking of Christians, because it's only those who could get rewards. While salvation itself cannot be lost, it appears that rewards are very much associated with how we lived our Christian lives. (1Co 3:10-15, 2Cor 5:10) For example, one may live in the United States no matter what their profession, but it's usually agreed that it's more desirable to be a professional person of some sort than a ditch digger or trash collector. Now both are honorable to be sure, and both are necessary, but there is a distinction isn't there, and one is generally preferred over the other. Many don't seem to understand that we will all have a purpose and a specific function in the eternal kingdom of God, we will not be sitting on a cloud playing a harp. What we eventually do, and what our position is forevermore, may very well be determined by how and what we do in this temporary school of life. This great country of ours has a need for doctors and a need for trash collectors, and we have both. Does heaven work in a similar fashion?

I don't know and neither do you, but scriptures give us very clear evidence that our futures are in some way affected by our present day actions and behaviors. If you're happy to be a trash collector in the kingdom of God then that's great, we'll need them, but if you aspire to more than that, then you must realize that the way to earn rewards (not salvation, rewards) is by diligently pursuing that difficult road of sanctification and transformation into Christlikeness. You can take one step and sit down, or you can get up every day and fight the good fight of faith, striving to become everything that our Lord Jesus died and rose again to make possible for us. But we only get one pass through life, and what we make of it will be judged by God at His rewards ceremony. This is a verse that speaks exclusively to genuine believers, it has no application to unbelievers, rewards are not in their future, something very different awaits them. Every believer needs to understand these things, and know what we are supposed to be doing, and what we are accomplishing or not accomplishing, every day of our lives, until we're finished with this school of life and graduation day arrives.

It's popular to hear someone say "well I don't care what I do in heaven, as long as I get in." That's like saying you don't care what you do with the rest of your life as long as you graduate from school. This may sound nice, but isn't the whole reason you were going to school so that you would acquire the knowledge to do something productive with the rest of your life when you finished? When compared with eternity, this lifetime of ours is but a fleeting second, but our whole eternal destiny is decided in this tiny fleeting period. Both salvation and sanctification are things that happen here and now but affect our eternal future. It's impossible, at this present time, to even comprehend the full scope of this verse that says *certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection*. The implications are beyond our comprehension, but we are told that what we're doing right here and now, every day, does in fact affect our eternal place and function then. He who has an ear let him hear.

In verse 6 Paul says: *knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.* Paul says that our “old self” was crucified with Jesus. The term “old self” is a good description of what has happened. When we say something about ourselves, what do we mean by that term? Actually it’s a very broad description that can mean any number of things, or even mean the entirety of who and what we are. We might be speaking of the mental portion or the physical portion or both, but in this sentence Paul is speaking of that portion that comprises our thinking and feelings. We call this many things, we call it our intellect, our ego, our mindset, and several other things, but Christians usually call this our spirit, because the scriptures call it that. The part of us that’s conscious and aware, and has feelings and beliefs.

The old self was affected by sin, and everything that the old self felt and believed was derived from an innate nature that was attracted to sin. The scriptures call this our flesh nature. Really it’s very hard to make a specific point of distinction between what is physical and what is mental. Where does our mind and our body meet, and how are they joined together? Difficult questions, because they’re so intricately intertwined that we don’t have any conscious knowledge or sensation of just where and how it’s all happening. But nevertheless, we all do know that we have a mind and we have a body, and they are different and distinct elements of our being, even if we can’t perceive where the connection between the two actually occurs. For instance, if you hurt your knee you can put your hand directly on the spot that hurts, but when Paul says that our old self has been crucified with Christ, we can’t take our hand and put it on the physical spot where that happened, but nevertheless, we are just as mentally aware of this as we are of the hurt knee. We can clearly sense both of them, even if we can’t physically touch both of them.

Paul says that this old self was crucified *in order that our body of sin might be done away with*. We know that our mind is the pilot and our bodies are the vehicle. Our bodies respond to the thoughts and intents of our minds. What we do with our bodies is determined by what our mind desires to do. The activities of the body that are sinful are such because the mind is directing the body to do those sinful things, and yet at the same time it is the body of flesh that is tempting the mind to make those choices in the first place. It is impossible for the body to stop doing sinful things and start doing righteous things unless the mind has been changed from the desire for sin to the desire for righteousness. As long as our “self” loves and desires sin, then our bodily actions will be sinful. The vehicle goes where the pilot steers. This verse says that the reason that the “old self” was crucified, meaning put to death, was so that the body of sin might be done away with.

The body that perpetually practices sin will be done away with, meaning it will cease from doing such things, if the mind that controls that body has been put to death and replaced with a “new self” that desires righteousness. In this way the body that is a slave to a mind that loves sin has been freed from that slavery, and is now capable of performing actions of righteousness. It is this process that brings righteousness from the invisible realm of the mind, out into the visible world of observable tangible practices. The body does as it’s told, so free the mind and the body is freed as well. And more than this, now righteousness can be seen and observed by others in the daily practices of those who have been converted. Righteousness becomes tangible, and observable, and effectual, rather than just conceptual, and God gets the glory.

We have been speaking experientially, but there is also the judicial element here as well. In the long term a new and perfect body can only be given to a new and perfect soul. (or spirit) Paying the debt of sin, and replacing the nature of sin with the nature of righteousness is a mandatory preparation for receiving the new and eternal bodily container for which we so eagerly await. Our death to sin has freed us, both judicially and experientially, from all obligations and all desires for sin forevermore, and we therefore live in constant and perpetual anticipation of the final fulfillment of that process, where we will be completely freed from the temptations of sin and made to be like Him, forever.

To Him be the glory, Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
Robert W. Andrews, Pastor
05/13/12