



# MAIN COMMENTARIES ON 'ROMANS'

## Chapter 6

In Romans 5:20 St. Paul makes an incredible statement: "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." This point should give everyone tremendous hope: no matter how great your sins may be, the grace of God is still greater. It is always possible to turn away from sin and to God.

Unfortunately, however, some took such a teaching to mean that they were now free to engage in sin. For example, some members of the church in Corinth believed they were free from all elements of the Law - including moral behavior - because they were liberated by Christ (see 1 Corinthians 5-6). An early group called the Nicolaitans, St. Irenaeus of Lyon writes in the second century, led "lives of unrestrained indulgence." Some people even believed that they should engage in sin precisely so that they would receive more grace (see Romans 3:8).

St. Paul responds to this misunderstanding of the Gospel by asking, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not" (Romans 6:1-2)! It would be ludicrous for Christians to continue in sin, he says, because we have died to sin (6:2). Blessed Augustine explains this point:

*Here Paul makes the point that past sins have been forgiven and that in this pardon grace so superabounded that earlier sins were remitted as well. Thus whoever tries to increase sin in order to feel an increase of grace does not understand that he is behaving in such a way that grace can do nothing in him. For the work of grace is that we should die to sin.*

You might have a question at this point: since you are obviously alive, how can you have died to sin? The answer is in verse three: you were baptized into Christ's death when you were baptized into Him. Romans 6:3-14 is one of the most significant statements about Holy Baptism in the New Testament, and understanding St. Paul's teaching on Holy Baptism will help you in your struggle with sin and help you better appreciate the significance of *your* baptism.

St. Paul starts his discussion on Holy Baptism by stating that we "were baptized into Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:3). This means that Holy Baptism isn't simply a ritual bath or washing: it is the beginning of a new and deep union with Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). Because we are baptized into Christ, we are also baptized into His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). This experience is not merely similar to Christ's, or a reenactment of Christ's death and resurrection: it is a true union with Christ in everything He has done for us. Fr. Lawrence Farley teaches,

*The thought is not of being buried just as Christ was, but of being buried along with Him and of sharing His burial. That is, through baptism we share the fullness and extremity of His death. We do not just experience and share a near-death experience, or the beginning of His dying. Rather, we fully share all the reality of His death...This is crucial, for to share His death means also to share His inevitable*

*Resurrection...As we share His death, we also share the triumph over it which He experienced through the glory and power of the Father when He was raised from the dead.*

This real experience enables us to live in righteousness rather than sin (Romans 6:6-7). St. Cyril of Alexandria writes in the fifth century, "As we have been buried, so we must rise with Christ in a spiritual sense. For if to be buried together with Christ means dying to sin, then it is clear that rising with Him means living in righteousness." St. Cyril also writes:

*Now we have to break down the power of sin within us by mortifying our earthly members...As we have died a death like His, so shall we also be conformed to His resurrection, because we shall live in Christ. It is true that the flesh will come to life again, but still we shall live in another way, by dedicating our souls to Him and by being transformed into holiness and a kind of glorious life in the Holy Spirit.*

St. Paul uses an interesting phrase - "old man" (Romans 6:6). St. Gennadios, a fifth century patriarch of Constantinople, teaches, "Our old self (or old man) refers to our perishable and passing bodies." St. Cyril of Alexandria agrees, saying, "Paul says that our earthly body is the body of sin and our old man, because it has inherited the necessity of corruption from the old Adam...Moreover, because of its weakness it has contracted a love for wickedness, and thus sin appears in the flesh as a congenital defect." This "old man" dies in baptism; we now can "walk in newness of life" in union with Christ (6:4).

Since we have been buried and resurrected with Christ in Holy Baptism, how should we live? St. Paul answers that we should "reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:11). This answer is important, not only because it reminds us that we are blessed to be alive in Christ, but also because it reminds us that we should "reckon" ourselves to be dead to sin, meaning that sin is still alive within us. St. John Chrysostom states, "Complete freedom from sin is not a reality as yet...We are told to live for God in Jesus Christ our Lord and to lay hold of every virtue, having Jesus as our ally in the struggle." We should therefore not let sin control us, but we should instead offer our bodies and lives to God as instruments of righteousness (6:13). St. John further explains that this is the only proper response of thankfulness for the tremendous gift of grace given to us by God:

*For consider, he says what you were, and what you have been made. What then were you? Dead and ruined by a destruction which could not from any quarter be repaired...And what have you been made? Alive with immortal life. And by Whom? By the all-powerful God. You ought therefore to marshal yourselves under Him with as much cheerful readiness, as men would who had been made alive from being dead.*

After repeating that God's grace is not an excuse for sin (Romans 6:15), St. Paul asks, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" It is impossible to serve two masters (as Jesus points out when discussing God and money in Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13) - each person will ultimately choose to be a slave to sin, or to God. Every Christian faces a decision similar to that expressed by Righteous Joshua, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

St. Paul uses the analogy of slavery to reinforce the seriousness of our situation: before we accepted and obeyed the Gospel we were completely enslaved by our sinful desires and activities (Romans 6:17); as Christ states, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). Now that Christ has freed us from this slavery, however, we must now be slaves of righteousness (6:18). St. Paul explains, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). In his first epistle the Holy Apostle Peter emphasizes this point: "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1:14-16).

Pay attention to St. Paul's statement, "You obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Romans 6:17). This doctrine is the teaching of the Church; Fr. Lawrence Farley explains that at the time this was a basic creedal statement, followed by a moral commentary explaining how to live according to the creed. The fourth century Christian Ambrosiaster emphasizes that we "commit ourselves to God and His Church voluntarily so that our confession of faith might find expression in the judgment of our mind." This means two things. First, it means that each of us must fully *choose* to follow God - we must be obedient "from the heart." Secondly, we can only be committed to the teachings of the Church if we are *knowledgeable* about those teachings. We are called to learn and to study the Word of God and to actively participate in and support education in the Church.

Some people reject the idea of serving God - they want complete freedom without any Higher Authority dictating how they should behave. St. Paul, however, asks why anyone would want this type of so-called freedom. Sinful "freedom" results only in thoughts and behavior of which we are ashamed, and inevitably results ultimately in death (Romans 6:21, 23). By being a slave to God and righteousness, in contrast, Christians have the fruit of holiness and the promise of everlasting life in union with God (6:22-23).