

A Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans [6]

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Chapter 6:1-23: New Life in Christ

Verses 1-14: Walk in the newness of life: Paul says that the reign of grace has been initiated in Jesus Christ that humans access through faith. In grace, sin lost its power to enslave humanity. The working of grace is to free humans through a process of repentance [metanoia] to live in Christ a transformed life. Humanity was, as if, under siege before Christ's coming, a stage of sin and hopelessness in death. Paul refers to baptism as a radical new beginning for Christian, a dying and rising experience in Christ. Redeemed state is an awareness that one lives not in the realm of sin but grace. Baptism is sharing in Christ's resurrection and it initiates a Christian into life of grace, to a raised-up life! Dying to sin is a process, what grace has to do in us. Life of grace is a continual offering of oneself to God.

Paul says that the dominion of sin ends in death and death's power over humans is broken by Christ's death and resurrection. The redeemed humanity's vocation is to identify with Christ and end the identification with 'old man of sin'. Christian experience of being dead to sin is a movement from disconnected existence to relational being with God; it is to be buried with Christ to sin [violence] to live a compassionate existence. Paul uses the word 'flesh' [body] to indicate human deeds that lack the spiritual dimension of grace. To be in Christ is to sacramentally participate in his death and resurrection, 'if we died with Christ, we will be raised with Christ'. In Christ's death and resurrection the reign of death [formerly reign of death in Adam] ends and the reign of life begins [in Christ, the new Adam]. Death can be seen as either in relation to living in sin or living in Christ. Christian faith is about being in Christ now and eternally through a process of dying to sin.

Verses 15-23: From slavery of sin to obedience in grace: 'What shall we say? Persist in sin, that grace might increase'? No! Power of sin is a reality in human beings, however the greater power of grace extended to all [gift] alone can break sin's dominion. In Christ, an invitation to grace remains constant for the sinner. Paul says that he speaks in human terms to explain human's slavery to sin and the new reality in Christ, 'enslavement' to God, to grace! Slavery to sin is a thing of the past; freedom from sin is the dynamic power of grace, the baptized receive. Reign of sin is a hopeless end [death] and reign of grace is hope-filled life leading to eternity. Paul acknowledges the possibility of letting sin rule human interactions and encourages Christians to live the spiritual reality of being died with Christ, knowing that you are in Christ and moving in him. Life of grace, for Paul, is 'obedience from the heart', meaning it is relational, a mutual indwelling between believer and Christ. A Christian needs constant reclaiming of life in Christ through obedience of the heart [or living the commandment of love].

In this chapter, Paul explains the spiritual/mystical dimension of life in Christ. The old Adam, person before faith in Christ, goes through a dying in Christ, the new Adam Christ is now reflected in the baptized. Purpose of grace is always renewal, to abolish sin and conform human will to God's purposes. Grace-filled Christian has the power to break the cycle of evil. Transforming the human nature to God's glory has already happened in Christ's resurrection;

glorified humanity of Christ reigns the new creation. Paul's theological analysis of life in Christ has a pastoral note: Christ broke human's subjection to sin; now the focus is not on sin but on the promise of obedience to Christ made in baptism, to grace or to be alive to God, living life of the heart!

Father Jose