Romans 6:1-14 - Learning to count

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[0:00] Let's turn to Romans 6 on page 1132.! Okay, dead to sin, alive in Christ. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sin so that grace may increase? By no means.

We are those who have died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was risen from the dead, through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.
Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that, since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over him.
[1:27] The death he died, he died to sin once and for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.
For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. Amen.
Thanks so much, Jamal, for reading for us. Keep that Bible open in front of you.
We're going to be working our way through that passage, and I'm going to pray for us as we come to God's word. Let me pray. Father, we do want to ask for your help this morning. We do want to pray that you would be present with us by your spirit at work through your word in our hearts.
Lord, if this is just me imparting information from my brain into the brain of other people, that is a totally wasted task. Lord, what we want to do is hear from you in your word.
[2:43] We want you to be at work transforming us and changing us and moulding us into Christ-likeness. So be at work for the sake of your glory. As we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, I want you to imagine as we start that you are 17 years old and you are studying for your A-levels. For some of you, that is going to take more imagination than others, as it was such a long time ago.
But for others of you, it might be your present situation. And there is your sweating it out in the library doing your maths homework. A stranger walks up to you and presents you with four A-star A-level certificates.
It's totally legit. They've got your name on the top of them. They're embossed with the examiner's stamp. They are yours for you to have right now, 17 in the library, not sat a single exam yet.
A gift of kindness to you. A perfect set of exam results. It's amazing. It is utterly mind-blowing. You call your friends.
[3:55] You say, look what I've got. I've got four A-star A-level certificates. I have got my grades already. I've not sat an exam, but I am already qualified. It's amazing. You hug the stranger.

You put a post on Instagram to be a little bit smug. And then the dust starts to settle. And then you sort of think, well, this is brilliant. But what now?
What do I do now? Am I supposed to keep going to my lessons? Do I still try and get my head around differentiation, which I've never really understood? Am I going to still hand in homework and continue to get E's and U's, which I've been getting all along?

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Am I going to put any effort into my English coursework or into my philosophy essay? Now, Romans 6 is basically that question asked by a Christian.
Not about their A-levels, but about faith in Christ. Justification by faith, remember, is similar to the receipt of those exam grades ahead of the exams.
[4:57] Justification by faith, which Paul has been talking about all the way through Romans so far, has been seen to be this verdict of not guilty for judgment day held in the present now by the Christian.

It's the personal declaration by God through the merits of Jesus Christ and his cross that an individual is righteous before him. It's a declaration that they've received not by their own works. They didn't earn it. They don't deserve it in that way. They haven't received it either by an emotional experience or by intellectual pursuit that's kind of figured it out. No, they've received it by faith.
An empty hand, the kind of newborn cry of, I believe, of someone who's been born again. And so they have nothing to fear. Glory awaits them.
They're in Christ, not in Adam, as we were thinking about last week. And Romans 6 verse 1 says, that is brilliant, but what now? What now? Have a look down at verse 1. Let me read it to you.
[5:55] What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? I think it's worth saying that I don't think Paul is imagining someone mocking justification by faith there.

It's not I don't think that they believe justification by faith to be ridiculous because, you know, well, it doesn't teach people what to do. Rather, I think it's the genuine question of a Christian.
This is brilliant. I've got a verdict of judgment day. It's in my possession now. That is fantastic. I know I'm glory bound, but I know too that I'm not perfect. I know that I'm saved by grace, not by my works.
But what am I going to work at? What are my works going to look like? You know, I know that I still struggle with sin. And I know I receive grace and mercy. But is that it?
I sin. God gives more grace. I sin some more. God gives some more grace. Is that the Christian life? And if that's the Christian life, what's the point? Let me suggest that if you've never asked the question like that, it's possible that you've never really understood justification by faith or maybe not experienced it because it is the obvious question.
[7:05] Think about it. If salvation is not by your works. It's been really clear, hasn't it? You don't earn salvation from God by what you do. Well, then, if that's true, then what is the point of your works?

Is there any point in trying to be holy if I know that my salvation is not dependent on it? It's worth saying, I think, as well, that lots of Christians go terribly wrong here.
Some Christians go wrong by saying, no, of course, it doesn't matter at all. There's a kind of Christian liberalism, which basically says, you know, don't worry too much. You're saved. And it's difficult, right?
And it's difficult to be different from the world. So just go with the flow. Just follow everybody else. Just make your life essentially indistinguishable from anybody around you because it doesn't matter anyway because you're going to be saved.
You know you're going to be saved because you've got the verdict already. Maybe that's you this morning. Maybe you call yourself a Christian, but really there's very little impact on the life that you live.
[8:05] Now, Paul is not suggesting that. That is by no means the Christian life. That's not the life of justification by faith. But nor is he suggesting what lots of other Christians end up with, which is something like salvation by grace and living by works.

So justification by faith. Yeah, that's a good way for the Christian life to start. But, you know, you're going to need some rules to live by. And you're going to have to live by those rules because if you don't live by those rules, God might remove justification from you.
Saved by grace and kept by works. It's essentially like going, OK, here are the four A-star A-level certificates, but you better show to me that you deserve them. And if you don't show me that you deserve them, I'm coming back and I'm taking them away from you.
Now, lots of Christians teach something like that. That is essentially the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. But it's not Paul's understanding. By no means, he says.
Now, as you look at the passage, you'll see that Paul is very slow to say anything really more than by no means. In fact, you have to read all the way through the passage to verse 11 until you get a

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direct answer to the question, what now?
[9:16] And verse 11 contains the very first instruction in the whole book of Romans. This is the very first imperative, the first do this. It's there in verse 11. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Here is what we're to do. We're not to sin and not think it matters, nor are we to be held hostage by rules. Instead, he says, you're to learn to count. Not as in like one, two, three.
I'm sure you've all got that mastered. But rather as in consider. As in reckon yourself. See yourself as. And what is it that you are to reckon yourself or consider yourself as?
Well, we are to see that we are dead to sin and alive to God. I'm going to pause here just for a moment and slow down a little bit just to make sure that we've got this.
This is really, I think, the most important concept that we're going to try and deal with this morning. This is what Paul wants you to understand. He wants you to know that how you live the Christian life or knowing how to live the Christian life is directly connected to your willingness or ability to or desire to reflect on what happened to make you a Christian.
[10:30] Right. How to live the Christian life is a direct relationship to how you became a Christian. The ongoing quality of your Christian life, your sense of joy and purpose in knowing what you're about as a Christian depends on your repeated, not just one time, but a repeated grasp of the magnitude of the change that happened when you came to Christ.

As we put it with the kids, knowing what to do comes from knowing who you are. This is crucial, right? Notice that Christian living starts not so much with good moral actions.
Christian living starts with good Christian truth. Told yourself over and over, bit by bit, as you begin to grasp what God in Christ has done for you.
So you learn to count, right? Number one, I died. Number two, I will live. Okay, ready? Number one, I died. Brilliant, praise the Lord. Number two, I will live.
Great. Right, we're going to see those things. And every time I do that, you can repeat it. Just remind me that you are actually listening and are counting those things. Okay, firstly, number one. Great. This is Paul's radical description of the Christian life.
[11:42] It's not just that the Christian has been born again. We'll come to that in a moment. But the starting point is that an old life dies. Now notice just how dominant that theme is. Look down at your passage.

Let me read these out to you. Verse two, we are those who have died to sin. Verse three, we were baptized into his death.
Verse four, we were buried with him. Verse five, we have been united with him in a death like his. Verse six, our old self was crucified.
Verse eight, we died with Christ. Here it is then. Becoming a Christian is, says Paul, dying with Christ. So that the old live for yourself, glory be to me, self-interested you, that you, if you're a Christian this morning, that you is dead.
Because it died with Christ on the cross. What we'll discover when we get to Romans seven next year is that in a sense, we are still carrying around this dead man until Christ returns.
[12:47] This isn't a claim to Christian perfectionism. But still the fundamental shift has happened. The break with the old man has happened as faith in Christ involves killing the old you.

So just notice the tense of all of those died and deaths and baptized. You have died. You were baptized. You were buried. You have been united. Was crucified.
Perhaps we can go to the 17 year old receiving the A-level results as a gift. And I warn you this morning that we are going to push that to its absolute maximum. Right.
Perhaps you knew as you received those four A-star A-level grades that you were cruising for ease and use. You maybe know what that feels like. Right. You know that desperation where you know that you're going to fail.
Right. That in your own strength, you're about to crash and burn. But what's happening here is that at the moment of receiving the four A-star A-level grades, at that same moment, the stranger, by some kind of means that you don't really understand, is reaching deep inside of you and killing the you that would get the E's and the U's.
[13:55] Obviously, it's absolutely impossible, isn't it, in exam terms. But in Christian theology, that is essential. These two things are indivisible. You cannot separate them. To put it theologically, you can't have faith that receives justification without also having regeneration to new life.

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And you can't have regeneration to new life without also experiencing the death of your old life in Christ. All of those things, you can distinguish them from one another. The death of the old life, the resurrection to a new life, the receipt of righteousness by faith from Christ.
But you cannot separate them out and have one without another because they all come in union with the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why Paul talks about baptism here.
This is what baptism symbolizes, our union with Christ. We are entering down into the water where you cannot breathe.
And then you rise up to gasp air again. It's like going down into death and coming up to new life. Our sins are washed away at the same time as we die in Christ and are resurrected to new life in him.
[15:06] Perhaps you're not a Christian this morning and you're thinking about what is a Christian. You know, I've heard people talk about it. You know, people talk about Jesus dying for them.

Maybe that's a Christian. Now, in a way, that is that's absolutely right, isn't it? But the picture here is richer than Jesus dying for them in some kind of abstract way. Actually, what's happening here is that Paul is saying, because by faith we are united with Jesus, the old self-interested, self-glorifying, Steve-obsessed self died with Christ.
It's not so much that Jesus just died for me, but that he took me with him and I died in him. Crucified with him. Now, in the rest of the chapter, which we're going to pick up in the new year, Paul will go on to explain the significance of this death.
But he hints at it here in verses 6 and 7. Let me read verses 6 and 7 to you. Look down at them. For we know that our old self was crucified with him, so that, here it is, the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.
Here it is. Death is essential to the Christian life because death is liberation, he says. Sin ruled us. We were captives to Adam, slaves to sin, bound by our own desires, and death liberates us from slavery as the slave dies and the free man lives.
[16:37] And says Paul, Christian living starts by counting that to be true. Thinking of yourself as dead. Counting. One. See, I knew you'd miss it.

One. I died. Two. I will live. So let's consider number two. I will live. Again, just scan through the passage with me. Let me read the verses to you. Verse 4.
We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
Verse 5. For we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. Verse 8.
Now, if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. Now, it's worth noting, isn't it, that although the death was in the past tense, the life is in the future tense. So there is a sense in which we both have and don't have this life.
[17:36] We are spiritually made alive by the Spirit, but we are not yet possessors of the resurrection body like the Lord Jesus. So verse 5. We will be resurrected to a resurrection like Jesus, but we haven't quite yet got there.

But still, verse 11, we are to count ourselves in the present as alive. So we are to see ourselves in light of our future. We are to reckon with our death in Christ and the new spiritual life that is ours in part and promised to us in a physical resurrection like Christ's.
Come back to the 17-year-old. I think this might be the last time. What we are going to see, it's not just that they are given a set of four A-star A-level grades, nor is it just that somehow the stranger reached into them and killed off the E and U grade deserving us, but that in addition to that, they receive a new life, the life of the kind of student who would get A-stars.
Not so that they get them immediately or that they earn them immediately. They still struggle. You know, they still can't quite get their heads around differentiation. They still make spelling errors in their English essay.
But one day, all those things will be gone because you see the old E and U deserving you is now dead and a new spirit is alive in you, growing and flourishing.
[18:59] A spirit that wants to work. A spirit that wants to do well. A spirit that's capable of learning and growing. A spirit that wants to spell rightly. A spirit that's hungry for learning. And so with the Christian, you're alive, regenerated by the spirit, which means you have a new life, a life the glory of which you are yet to see.

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You will see one day. And the quality and joy and glory of your Christian life now depends on your willingness to remind yourself, to count yourself over and over again, dead and alive.
Dead in Christ and will be alive in him. So the Christian has new desires, don't they? New ambitions to feed. New loves to pursue. New moral commitments to live by.
Commitments that wouldn't come from your old nature. It would never have been capable of them. These are new. They're selfless, not selfish. They're focused on others. They're focused on Christ.
And the Christian finds they have this new hunger, an inexplicable desire for God's word. A new desire to pray. A new longing to sing God's praises with his people. A new hunger to meet with his people.
[20:09] Not because they're working for anything, but because there's a new life bubbling away inside of them that is there spiritually and will one day be theirs physically. My first ministry job, I worked for a student organisation that worked with Christian unions and I was doing a patch in the Midlands.

So I had Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Worcester, Cheltenham was my little patch. And we had this appointment to go and meet your new teammates. And I went and I met with my boss.
And I said to Vanessa, who was with me at the time, that can't be my boss. Because I was at school with him and he wasn't a Christian. And it turned out it was him.
He'd become a Christian at university and had just devoured the scriptures and grown and flourished as a Christian. And he was now leading a team in UCCF and I hadn't even seen him since school days.
Because there's this new hunger, this new desire to learn and grow and be fed. It's not explained by you trying to tame this old nature, but by a new spiritual life flourishing and bubbling away.
[21:19] One, I died. Two, I will live. Now really helpfully, Paul doesn't leave it there and gives you some practical outworkings of that. So if you take a look down at verses 11 to 14, you'll see them there.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, he says, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.
Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.
For sin shall no longer be your master because you are not under the law, but under grace. Here it is then, because you died and because you are alive and you are counting those things, therefore you are not to let sin reign.
You are not to offer yourself to sin as an instrument for wickedness. You have been liberated from sin. So why would you go back to sin and say, hey sin, use me as whatever way you'd like to?
[22:22] Of course you're not going to say that. You have been liberated. You are free. So it's not so much just that you shouldn't sin, nor is it that you're not going to feel tempted to sin. It's not even that you won't, as a Christian, still sometimes fall into sin.

Rather, the point is that you don't have to sin. It's not who you are anymore. You're no longer under that rule. You have been liberated. You have died to self-interest.
It's not what you do anymore. It's an illustration that was given by an old London preacher who's long since with the Lord, so I'm sure he won't mind me stealing it. But he said that imagine two fields alongside each other, and down the middle of the field is a road separating these two fields.
And the field on the left is run by a tyrant. He's shouting orders and issuing brutal commands. The field is full of muck and mess, yet the people seem mostly unaware of it.
And the field on the right is full of rich grass. It's run by a kindly shepherd who leads on to life and joy. Now, he says that in becoming a Christian, it is like being moved from the field on the left to the field on the right.
[23:37] We are moved from death to life, from the dominion of sin to the dominion of Christ. We have been plucked from here and put down here. Now, the thing is, in this field, running parallel with that field, you can still hear the voice of the tyrant.

He's ranting in the field on the left. And you might even find yourself, by habit or by ignorance, following some of his commands. But what should be super clear from the illustration is, you don't have to, because you're no longer resident in the place where he rules.

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That's the point. And as loudly as he shouts, and as appealing as some of his suggestions might be, the truth of the matter is, you don't have to listen to him, because he has no power over you. And that's the point here. In the face of temptation, when I feel the draw to offer my body as an instrument of wickedness, I remember to count. One, I died.
Two, I will live. This is no longer who I am. This is not what I do. These desires are dead to me. I will seek to please the Lord. I will offer myself to him, verse 13, as an instrument of righteousness.
[24:48] Here I am, Lord. I belong to you. You have purchased me by your grace. You have liberated me from sin. Now, Lord, do with me whatever you will, Lord. Energize me for whatever task you want to give me.

Equip me with what I need to know. Every part of me is yours. My work, my family, my singleness, my money, my poverty, my time, my lack of time. All of this belongs to you, Lord, because I died and I will live.
As we finish, let me just suggest to you three areas that this might land for us practically. I want to show you, if I can, why understanding this link between dead and alive and Christian living is so important to us.
Let me just draw attention to three quick applications. The first is about our witness, right? Our witness. I would guess that most people in our city, if you ask them on the bus, right?
What do you think a Christian is? I think they'll probably say something to you like, a Christian is a good person. A Christian believes that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell, or some version of that.
[25:55] Now, let me ask you why they believe that. Why do they believe that? Well, let me suggest that one reason could be that that's how Christians around them live and speak.

Their Christian friends and neighbors do not explain, or cannot explain, or do not understand the link between free justification and holy living. And because they don't understand it in some kind of weird and twisted way, the desire for holy living points to their own righteousness and not to the Lord Jesus's.
But that shouldn't be. Holy living starts by receiving a new life by the Spirit, dying and rising, and it flows from there.
It's energized by that. That is what's on offer in the gospel. That's what we should be talking about. That's what we should be explaining. Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. This is not me. I've been totally changed by Jesus.
The things that I did want, I no longer want. This is not me being better than you. This is me being changed by Jesus. This is his life in me, bubbling out from me. There's a new spirit in me.
[27:04] And so, listen, unbelieving friends, please don't feel like you have to clean your life up before you come to church. Please don't do that. Please don't feel any obligation to do that, because you know what?

God has got that covered. When you get there, when you hear the good news about Jesus and the forgiveness that is yours in him, that you can receive by faith in him, he will sort your life out. Don't you worry.
He will give you a new spirit and energize you for a new life. Secondly, though, it's essential for our perseverance. I think if you don't see this link between dying and living in the Christian life, you will end up either exhausting yourself with a version of the Christian life where you end up giving up, growing bitter and letting yourself down, or you'll end up not really taking holy living at all seriously, and it won't make any difference to you.
The gospel will just not make any impact on your life. But Paul's telling you here, isn't he, that the definitive work has been done, right? The break with sin has been made.
Death no longer holds a stick over the risen Christ. He died to sin once for all. And so for us, there is a sense in which it is impossible for you to go back on this. The old life is dead.
[28:16] We cannot but change, right? Because we are being made alive. As the book of Romans carries on, it basically suggests that there are essentially, I guess, two tasks that the Christian is given in the light of all of this.

Don't make it really simple. If you jump over a page in your Bibles to chapter 8, verse 13, if you turn to it, let me read it to you. Chapter 8, verse 13. We are going to get here eventually, but you know, it's nearly Christmas and our Christmas Sunday series starts next week.

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It should have started this week, but I was desperate to preach Romans 6 this morning, so it didn't. So we're going to start it next week and we're going to come back to Romans in the new year. But Romans chapter 8, verse 13 says this, For if you live according to the flesh, that's the old sinful nature, you will die.
But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. Here then are basically the two tasks of Christian living. One, put to death the misdeeds of the body.
The old word that used for that was mortification, like killing the dead you, right? That Jesus has killed you off, right? That you have died with him.
[29:26] But still you carry around that old sinful nature. And your task now is to mortify it, to keep killing the dead nature. It cut off its supply, says Paul, basically.

Don't feed the lusts and temptations of the old you of the world. And the second task is essentially called vivification, right? That's feeding a new life.
So we kill a dead life by mortification and we encourage a new life by vivification. Because notice in that verse, it's by the Spirit that we kill the old nature.
In other words, it's a new life that is doing the work of putting to death the old life. And that new life needs what it has to flourish. It needs to hear God's Word. It needs to listen to God's Word being read and preached and taught.
It needs the food of Christian fellowship, regular, rich and deep. It needs the energy of praying together. It needs to allow to breathe the fresh air of Christian worship. It needs exercise in the sharing of the gospel.
[30:25] And those are all things that we can do. Because God has enabled us to do them. We can put to death the sinful nature. And we can vivify, energize, enliven our new nature by what God has given us.

Which means that the Christian life can be a life of joy. Joy. Brothers and sisters, the Christian life is possible. Joyful. Right?
And the Christian life is joyful. Because it's empowered by the Spirit who gives this new life. I'm not saying that you won't stumble and fall. I'm not saying that you won't struggle with sin.
You will. I do. We do suffer. We will one day die. But all the way along, we have the confidence that the essential work has been done.
I will live and not die. What God has started, he will finish. That battle with sin that's hard and it's bloody. It will be won one day. Change and growth is possible in the Christian life.
[31:27] You are not stuck where you are. You don't have to repeat the dying over and over again. It's been done in Christ. It's happened. And God will make you into the person that you already are by justification, by faith.

What joy. What hope is ours in him. Let me pray. And then we'll come and share the Lord's Supper together. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, thank you so much that in Christ we died and in Christ we will live.
Thank you that the separation of our old nature has been done. We have been liberated from sin. And though we still struggle, though we still stumble and we still fall, yet we have great confidence that one day we will be with you, enjoying resurrection bodies and eternal life with you.
Oh, Lord, keep us going until that day, we pray. Keep us persevering. Keep us joyful. Energize us by your spirit, we ask, as we pray in Jesus' name.
Amen.

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