

THE BELIEVER'S FREEDOM IN CHRIST FROM
THE SIN NATURE

- *by Dr. Renald E. Showers from the book "The New Nature."*
- ***Preliminary Considerations Concerning the Context***
- *The Meaning of the Word "Sin"*
- Paul uses the term "sin" a total of twenty-five times in Romans 6:1-7:13. One of these usages (6:15) refers to an act of sin. Most, if not all, of the other twenty-four usages, seem to refer to the sinful disposition or nature. 1

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- There are several reasons for this conclusion.
- Firstly, in Romans 6:12-13 Paul pictures sin as a reigning monarch to whom human subjects offer their bodies to fulfill the monarch's commanded acts.
- Thus, Paul is regarding sin, not as an act, but as a governing disposition which demands acts.

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- Secondly, in Romans 6:6, 14, 17, 20 Paul pictures sin as a master who orders slaves to act as the master desires.
- Again, Paul is regarding sin, not as an act, but as the thing which governs and orders acts.

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- Thirdly, in 7:7-8 Paul declares

that sin produced coveting (lust) of every kind in him.

- According to James 1:14-15 lust in turn gives birth to an act of sin.
- The joining of these passages indicates that Paul is not talking about an act of sin.
- Instead, he refers to the sinful disposition which prompts the chain reaction which produces the act of sin.

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- Earlier it was noted that, since fallen man's

disposition is one of enmity against God, it is correct to call that disposition "sin".

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- *The Personification of Sin*
- As Paul deals with the sinful disposition under the title of "sin" in Romans 6-7, he personifies it repeatedly. This personification has been recognized by numerous scholars. For example, Hamilton says that

"Paul calls this personified corrupt nature 'sin.'"2

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- The fact that Paul does personify sin does not mean that he regards the sin nature as being a person instead of a governing disposition.
- Instead, it means that he simply uses a figure of speech to make a difficult spiritual truth more understandable to his readers.
- Thus, in Romans 6:19, where Paul deals with one aspect of the personifications (the master-

slave relationship), he states that he is speaking in "human terms" because of the weakness of his readers' flesh.

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- Concerning Paul's statement Murray writes:
- "The dullness of our understanding makes it necessary that we be taught the truth in figures drawn from the sphere of our human relations."

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- *The Master-Slave Analogy*
- As Paul attempts to explain the relationship of human beings to sin and God, the instrument that he uses most frequently is the analogy of the master-slave relationship.
- In Romans 6:6, 16-20, 22 he asserts that people are slaves either to sin, impurity, and lawlessness or to righteousness, obedience, and God.
- In Romans 6:14 he refers to sin as a master.

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- Murray states concerning Paul's teaching:
- He describes the condition of unbelievers as slavery to sin and he also describes the state of believers as bondservice to righteousness.
- The institution of slavery, well-known to his readers, is the medium through which he expresses the truth.
- In using this analogy drawn from the sphere of human relations he speaks after the manner of

men.4

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- Since Paul uses the analogy of the master-slave relationship, it is necessary to examine what the terms "master" and "slave" meant in his day in order to understand what he is teaching.

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- The key idea in the word that Paul uses for "master" is that of a legal position of authority.
- Thus, when Paul speaks of a master in Romans 6, he is thinking of one who holds a legal position of authority over a slave.
- A legal position of authority gives the master the right to dominate or control every aspect of the slave's total being.

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- In Paul's day the key idea in the word that he uses for "slave" was this: the will of the slave is to be subject to the will of the master.
- "Alongside the will and commission of the [master] there is no place for one's own will or initiative."

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- Thus, when Paul speaks of a slave in Romans 6, he is thinking of one who has a position of subjection in which his will is not to be self-governing.
- This means that the slave is obligated to render complete obedience to the dictates of his master.

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- ***The Slavery of the Unregenerate Man***
- In Romans 6:6, 16-20 Paul teaches that the unregenerate man exists in a master-slave relationship with his sinful disposition.
- As he reminds the Roman Christians of what they were before they became saved, he says: "You were slaves of sin" (Romans 6:17, 20).

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- ***The Slavery of the Unregenerate Man***
- The sinful disposition gained the legal position of master over man as a result of man voluntarily committing himself to the service of sin at the time of the fall (Romans 6:16).
- Fallen man came into the subject position of a slave.

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- Because, as seen earlier,

man became confirmed in his sinful disposition through the fall, the position of master gained by that disposition is a lasting one.

- Unregenerate man is so thoroughly locked into the master-slave relationship with the sin nature that he is held in his position of slave as long as he lives in the unregenerate state.

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- The only thing that can end this master-slave relationship is death.
- Either the sinful disposition or the unregenerate man must die.

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- The key ideas in the terms "master" and "slave" which were noted earlier reveal several factors involved in this master-slave relationship.

- Firstly, as a master the sinful disposition holds the legal position of authority over the unregenerate man.

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- Secondly, because unregenerate man holds the position of slave under his sinful disposition, his will does not have the right to be self-governing.
- This means that unsaved man is obligated to render

complete obedience to the dictates of the sinful disposition.

- He has no choice but to do what it prompts him to do.

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- By virtue of this position it has the right to dominate and control every aspect of the unregenerate man's total being, including his body, mind, and will.
- As noted before, this control

of every part of fallen man's total nature by his sin nature is called "total depravity."

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- ***The Death of the Unregenerate Man***
- In Romans 6:1-13 Paul indicates that when an unregenerate man becomes a Christian he is identified with Jesus Christ.
- This involves identification with the death, burial, and

resurrection of Christ.

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- Concerning the first aspect of identification, Paul teaches that there is some sense in which the unregenerate man actually dies with Christ when that person becomes a Christian.
- One way in which Paul expresses this truth is as follows: "Knowing this, that

our old man was crucified with Him" (Romans 6:6, a literal translation).

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- *The Meaning of "Old Man"*
- Scholars disagree as to what Paul means by "old man."
- Some take the position that by "old man" Paul means the sinful disposition or old nature.
- For example, Erdman claims that Paul is teaching that "our old dispositions and appetites and evil desires have been put

to death." 8

- According to this view, in Romans 6:1-13 Paul is asserting that the Christian's sinful disposition has been crucified or has died with Christ.

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- Other scholars are convinced that by "old man" Paul means the unregenerate man or the person in his unregenerate state. Wuest says that "the old man here refers to that person the believer was before he was saved, totally depraved,

unregenerate, lacking the life of God." 9 According to this view, then, Paul is teaching that the unregenerate man or person has been crucified or has died with Christ.

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- The author is convinced of the second view for several reasons. Firstly, the whole context of Romans 6:1-13 talks about persons, not dispositions, having died. In Romans 6:2, 8 Paul says

that "we" died; in verse 7 he says that "he" died. A disposition is only one aspect of a person; it cannot be said that in reality it is a person.

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- Secondly, in Romans 6:7 Paul draws a distinction between the person who died and the sinful disposition. He declares that the person who died is freed from the sinful disposition.
- He thereby makes it clear that it is the person, not the disposition, that died.
- Thirdly, the view that says that it is

the sinful disposition that died with Christ distorts the concept of identification with Christ's death taught in this passage.

- When Christ died it was a person, not just a disposition, that died.
- Christ became a human being so that He could die as the substitute for human persons, not as the substitute for a sinful disposition.

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- Fourthly, when Paul applies his teaching (Romans 6:11), he exhorts Christians to reckon *themselves* to be dead.
- He does not tell them to reckon

their sinful dispositions to be dead.

- Certainly Paul would have exhorted the latter if their dispositions had been crucified.
- Fifthly, in Romans 6:2, 11 Paul declares that the believer has died to sin.
- He does not say that sin has died to the believer.

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- Sixthly, if the sinful disposition has been crucified with Christ, then that disposition is dead in the Christian.
- This would mean that the Christian has no struggle with sin. But Romans

7:14-25 indicates that the Christian does have a struggle with sin.

- In fact, Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5 teach that the sinful disposition is very much alive and active in the Christian.
- Seventhly, in a parallel passage (Galatians 2:20) Paul declares that it was he who was crucified with Christ.
- He does not say that his sinful disposition was crucified.

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- It should be concluded, then, that *the "old man" is the unregenerate man or the human person in his unregenerate*

state. As an old man, the unsaved person holds the position of slave under his sinful disposition.

- In light of this meaning of "old man," when Paul says that our old man was crucified with Christ, he is teaching that there is some sense in which the unregenerate person actually dies when he becomes a Christian.

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- *The Nature of the Death*
- This teaching of Paul

prompts an important question. In what sense does an unregenerate person die with Christ when he becomes a Christian? Certainly he does not die physically, for the person continues to have the same body after regeneration as before regeneration.

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- Again, he does not die metaphysically, for he

continues to be the same person metaphysically after the new birth as before the new birth. He continues to have the same personal name, background, parents, place of employment, and residence.

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- The fact that Paul uses the terms "you" and "we" when describing the former unregenerate condition of

himself and other Christians (Ephesians 2:1-7) indicates that he regards believers as being the same persons metaphysically that they were in their unregenerate state.

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- The unsaved person dies with Christ in the sense that he ceases to be an unregenerate man. Before

regeneration he was an "old man," an unregenerate man. However, at the moment of the new birth he ceases to be an "old man."

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- *A Significant Change*
- Although the Christian remains the same person metaphysically that he was while unregenerate, the Scriptures do regard him as a different person in some sense. The Christian is "a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17),

he is in the state of "a new creation" (Galatians 6:15) and is said to have been "created in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:10).

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- The fact that Christians are called "newborn babes" (1 Peter 2:2) indicates that they are regarded as new persons. The use of the terms "old man" and "new man" (Colossians 3:9-10) to describe the individual in his unregenerate and regenerate states shows that there is some sense in which the individual is

regarded as one person in his unregenerate state but as another person in his regenerate state.

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- The author is convinced that it is in the spiritual sense that the Scriptures regard the Christian as being a different person. The individual is one person spiritually in his unregenerate state but is another person spiritually in his regenerate state. In his unregenerate state he is an "old man" who is

characterized by rebellion against the rule of God. In his regenerate state he is a "new man" who is favorably disposed toward the rule of God.

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- Although the Christian was one person *spiritually* in his unregenerate state and is another person *spiritually* in his regenerate state, he is still the same person *metaphysically* in his regenerate state that he was in his unregenerate state. The recognition of this distinction between the spiritual and metaphysical senses of the person helps in the understanding of

Galatians 2:20. In that passage Paul indicates that there is a sense in which he as a person was crucified and no longer lives, but there is also a sense in which he as a person does still live.

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- It would appear that what Paul means is this: the person that he was spiritually while in the unregenerate state has been crucified with Christ and no longer lives, but the person that he was metaphysically before co-crucifixion still continues to live. On the one hand he is no

longer the man who hated Jesus Christ, persecuted Christians, and exulted in his self-righteousness; but on the other hand he is still the same man who was born in Tarsus, studied under Gamaliel, and possessed Roman citizenship by birth (Acts 22:3-28).

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- *The Finality of the Death*
- Scholars agree that in Romans 6:1-13 Paul is talking about a death which is related somehow

to Christians. They disagree, however, concerning the finality of this death in relationship to Christians. Some see the crucifixion of Romans 6:6 as a lifelong agonizing process of the Christian putting to death his sinful disposition or his love for sin. 10

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- Others, who see this death as a continuing process of the believer dying to self and the world, refer to 1

- Corinthians 15:31 where Paul says: "I die daily." 11
- In contrast with those who see the death of Romans 6 as an incomplete, continuing process, several scholars believe it is a once-for-all death which was completed for the Christian in the past. 12

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- The author is convinced that the evidence is in favor of the latter

view. Firstly, the idea of a continuous, incomplete process of dying in this passage ruins the concept of identification with the death of Christ which is taught in the context. According to Romans 6: 10, Christ's death was once-for-all in the past. Since this is so, any other kind of death in this passage makes true identification with the death of Christ impossible.

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- Secondly, in Romans 6:11 Paul exhorts Christians to

consider themselves to be dead to sin. He does not exhort them to consider themselves to be dying to sin. The language implies that they are to reckon themselves as being already in a fixed state of death, not in a continuing process of dying.

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- Thirdly, Paul's question in Romans 6:2: "How shall we

who died to sin still live in it?" makes no sense if the death in question is not a past, completed fact. For the person who is only in the process of dying to sin, it is still possible to live in sin. Only for the person who has terminated his relationship to sin by a completed death is it possible to avoid continuing in sin.

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- This evidence is not annulled by Paul's "I die daily" statement in 1 Corinthians 15:31. The context of this statement indicates that Paul is not talking about a process by which he is continually dying to sin and the world. In verse 30 he talks about being "in danger every hour." In verse 32 he refers to a fight that threatened his physical life. In light of these expressions, the statement "I die daily" would appear to mean that either Paul's life was in constant jeopardy or that he was continually ready to lay down his life for Christ if need be. Thus, Paul is talking about the prospect of physical death, not some aspect of progressive sanctification.

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- It should be concluded then that the co-crucifixion with Christ taught in Romans 6:1-13 is a once-for-all, completed, past event for the Christian. It is not in the process of happening. --
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