The Book of Romans Foundations

Learning to Walk in New Life

Introduction

What happens after we come to Christ?

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley went reluctantly to a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London. Someone was reading Martin Luther's preface to Romans. As Wesley listened, he wrote, "I felt my heart strangely warmed." What moved him? He came to trust that Christ had taken away his sins. Even his.

Some of us can remember when that became personal. We knew Jesus forgave sins, and then we realized he had forgiven ours. But maybe you came to church today with a question you feel embarrassed to ask. If Jesus has forgiven me, why did I hear those same hurtful words come out of my mouth again this week?

Paul gives us words for both parts of that experience. Justification means God puts us right with himself through faith in Christ. Sanctification means God sets us apart as his own and begins changing us from within. Let's hear where Paul starts when he speaks to people who still struggle.

Where do I most want the people closest to me to see the difference Jesus is making?

Point 1

Remember what your baptism declares

Romans 6:1–4 ESV

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

A Paul takes our question about grace seriously

Romans 6:1–2

Paul has just told us that where sin increased, grace increased all the more. Someone listening might say, “Then why change? If I sin again, doesn’t that just give God another opportunity to show mercy?” Paul answers by asking us to consider what happened when we came to Christ. The Savior who forgave us has brought us out from under the rule of the very thing we are asking permission to keep.

Preaching emphasis Grace gives a person who has lived under sin’s power a new beginning with Jesus.

B Baptism tells the story of the Lord we belong to

Romans 6:3–5

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Paul opens with a question. If God’s grace abounds where sin increases, why stop sinning? Paul takes us back to the water. Picture someone from this church going down into the baptismal water and coming back up. What story did we just witness? Jesus went into the grave and rose again. Through faith we belong to him, and his death and resurrection change the life we get to live today.

Notice the purpose in verse 4. We were raised with Christ so we could walk in newness of life. Walking happens one step at a time. The next time anger rises, you may recognize that familiar urge to wound somebody with a word. Verse 11 gives you something true to remember in that moment. You are alive to God in Christ. You can pause and ask him what love requires of you now.

When an old habit feels familiar, whose story do I expect to determine what I do next?

C Christ has broken sin’s claim on us

Romans 6:6–7

6 We know that our old self[a] was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free[b] from sin.

Look at verse 6. Paul calls the person we were under sin’s rule our old self, and he says that old self was crucified with Christ. Some of us have described our worst habit the same way for years. “That’s just who I am. My father had a temper, and so do I.” Paul gives us reason to question that last sentence. Your family history may help explain where you learned that response. Jesus has given you a new history to draw on. His death and resurrection now belong in the story you tell about yourself.

Now look at verse 7. Paul says that the one who has died “has been set free from sin.” Why can Paul say that about people who still feel temptation? Because when we were joined to Christ in His death, sin lost its right to rule us. You may still feel that familiar heat rise in your chest when someone speaks sharply to you. But in that moment, you belong to Jesus, and by His Spirit you can choose how to answer.

Maybe the first sign of that freedom in your home is that your child spills something and, this time, you take a breath, reach for a towel, and say, “Let’s clean it up together.” And if you’ve already raised your voice, you can go back, look your child in the eye, and say, “I was wrong to speak to you that way. Will you forgive me?” For some of us, those are words we never heard growing up. By the grace of Jesus, they can become words our children hear from us.

D Count on what the risen Jesus has done

Romans 6:8–11

8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Listen to the confidence in verses 9 and 10. Death once laid hold of Jesus. He rose, and death will never rule over him again. That is why Paul can ask us in verse 11 to count ourselves alive to God. He grounds that instruction in something that happened to Jesus on a real morning. Even on a morning when you feel discouraged, his resurrection still holds true.

When I say I am alive to God, my confidence rests in the risen Christ.

What have I learned to excuse with the words “That’s just who I am”?

Who could walk beside me as I practice a different response?

In baptism we publicly confess that our lives belong to the crucified and risen Jesus. We can lean on that truth when a familiar temptation returns.

Think back to the baptismal water one more time. If someone came up out of the water and told you, “Pastor, I still need help learning how to live this,” you would walk alongside them. Give another believer that same opportunity to walk alongside you. Now listen to what Paul tells people who have come up out of that water to do with the bodies God has given them.

Point 2

Offer yourself to the One you belong to

A Offer God the part of you that is about to act

Romans 6:12–14

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Verse 13 brings that question right down to a particular afternoon.

A friend tells you something embarrassing about someone else. Later, you pick up your phone and open the group chat. Your thumb is hovering over Send. There is a person on the other side of that story whose dignity is in your hands. Offering yourself to God in that moment might sound as ordinary as, "They trusted me with that. I'm going to keep it to myself." That is a real use of Christian freedom.

Think about the word "offer." I can put my voice at the service of a rumor, or I can use it to speak up for the person who is absent. Paul says we can offer ourselves to God as people who have been brought from death to life. That is an invitation we can answer with our next sentence.

A decision that takes five seconds can be an act of worship.

B Pay attention to the voice you obey

Romans 6:15–19

15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves,[c] you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

Paul moves from baptism to the hard image of slavery. His listeners knew what it meant for a master to give an order and expect obedience. Sin once held that kind of claim on us. In Christ its authority has been broken. Now Paul asks a very practical question. Whose purposes will your hands, your mouth and your feet serve today?

Paul describes obedience that comes from the heart in verse 17. Imagine how it would feel to discover that someone guarded your confidence when you were nowhere in sight. That private choice tells you

something about what they love. Paul thanks God when he sees that kind of change taking place in people.

C Look honestly at what your choices produce

Romans 6:20–22

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Paul invites them to look back at the fruit of their old way of life. Ask yourself what happened the last time you passed along that story. Who became more suspicious? Who stopped sharing openly? Now imagine what can grow when that same friend learns their confidence is safe with you. Paul calls the fruit of belonging to God holiness.

Two people may remember the same conversation differently. I may remember the laugh I got. The person I spoke about may remember the day they stopped trusting me. Paul invites us to look at the whole harvest. A changed life can begin to produce something another person can actually enjoy: safety, honesty and the freedom to speak openly again.

D Receive eternal life as God's gift

Romans 6:22–23

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

One person says, "God will forgive me, so why worry about what I say at home?" Another says, "If I can get through a whole week without losing my temper, maybe God will accept me." The first treats grace as permission to sin. The second turns obedience into a price to pay. Listen to verse 23. Eternal life is God's gift in Christ. And verse 22 tells us what grows in a life that belongs to him: holiness.

We have something to offer God today because he has already given us life in his Son.

When we give God our ordinary decisions, the fruit of holiness begins to appear in ordinary relationships.

Maybe offering your mouth to God means going home and saying, "What I said at breakfast was cruel. I hurt you. Will you forgive me?" That conversation is one way to put verse 13 into practice. But where do we find the courage to have it?

Point 3

Follow the Spirit as a child of God

A Begin where God begins with us

Romans 8:1–4

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.[a] 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you[b] free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin,[c] he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit

Hear the order. Paul announces freedom from condemnation before he calls us to put sin to death. When God brings that conversation at breakfast to mind, you can tell him the truth about it. Christ has already given you a place to stand before the Father.

Verse 3 tells us what that freedom cost. God sent his own Son to deal with sin. When I confess what I did, I can give up the energy I have been spending on my defense. I can use it to hear the person I hurt and begin to make things right.

B Notice where your mind keeps returning

Romans 8:5–8

5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

In verses 5–6 Paul takes us inside, to what occupies our minds. Long before I spoke sharply, I may have been rehearsing a case against the other person. I can ask the Spirit to show me what I have been feeding. Then I can listen long enough to hear what that person was actually trying to say.

There is a moment many of us know well. The conversation ended an hour ago, but in our heads we are still winning the argument. What would happen if we brought that exact thought into prayer? “Lord, I keep replaying what he said. Help me see what I missed.” A mind set on the Spirit has room to receive an answer that interrupts our own version of events.

C Depend on the Spirit for the next act of obedience

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Romans 8:9–13

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Look at the promise in verse 11. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us. One day God will give life even to these mortal bodies. And while we wait for that day, His Spirit is already at work in us. That's why Paul can say in verse 12 that we owe the flesh nothing. We may have given in to the same sin a hundred times. That history doesn't obligate us to give in the next time.

Now listen to the way Paul puts it in verse 13. He says, **"by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body."** Keep those words together. *You put to death* means there's a choice for you to make. *By the Spirit* tells you whose help you can count on as you make it. And a few verses later, Paul gives us the words "Abba, Father." You can call on your Father while you're still struggling to do what's right.

Suppose I make a mistake at work, and in the morning meeting my supervisor starts questioning the person beside me about it. I know exactly what happened. I also know that if I keep quiet, this meeting might end without anybody finding out it was me. Right there at that table, I can pray, *"Father, I'm afraid of looking bad. Give me the courage to tell the truth."* Then, while my heart is still racing, I can say, "Before we go any further, that was my mistake. I'm the one who needs to fix it."

The prayer and the speaking up belong together. I'm depending on the Spirit as I open my mouth, own what I did, and spare someone else the blame. Church, where are you feeling that tug today? What's the next honest, loving thing you already know to do? Call on your Father right there, and trust His Spirit to help you do it.

D Come to the Father when you struggle

Romans 8:14–16

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons[f] of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

And what if you went home last Sunday determined to change and by Tuesday had to apologize again? Hear how Paul ends this passage. The Spirit bears witness that we are God's children. A child who has done wrong still has a Father to call on. Sometimes the first sign of growth in a home is that an apology which used to take three days now comes before bedtime. Ask the person who lives with you what that difference means. Then thank the Father and ask for his help again tomorrow.

The Spirit who leads us to confront sin also assures us that we belong to the Father.

Think about the places where you would most like that inward change to become visible. Let me show you a picture.

Illustration

The glass of chocolate milk

You can have chocolate in milk and yet not have a glass of chocolate milk.

Let's compare a glass of milk to a person and the chocolate to the Spirit given to that person when they receive Christ as their Savior.

If you pour the chocolate in the milk and let it set, the chocolate stays on the bottom.

A person is given the indwelling of the Spirit when they received Christ and are justified before God.

Now take that same milk with the chocolate at the bottom and stir it. The milk and chocolate blend together and you have chocolate milk that tastes delicious.

The stirring is the believer allowing the Holy Spirit to change and transform the soul. Through prayer, reading Scripture, confession of sin, and many spiritual disciplines spiritual transformation occurs.

Conclusion

Coming home to the Father

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At the start we heard Wesley recognize that Christ had taken away his sins, even his. At the close Paul gives that assurance a voice. We can call God our Father. Think of that breakfast table again. Because you belong to Christ, you can go back to the person you hurt. Because the Spirit lives in you, you can listen after you apologize. And because God is your Father, you can ask for help the next morning too.

Invitation

Church, take a quiet moment. Where did you recognize yourself in this passage? Perhaps there is a habit you have been excusing. Perhaps you are so ashamed of it that you have stopped praying about it. Hear Romans 8:1 again. In Christ you can come to the Father today.

1 Remember Bring to mind what Jesus has done for you.

2 Offer Name the habit or conversation you want to place in his hands.

3 Walk Choose one act of obedience and one person you can ask to pray with you.

Responding in faith

For the person coming to Christ If you have never put your trust in Jesus, you can come to him just as you are. The gift Paul speaks of is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Tell him where you need his mercy. Entrust your life to the One who died and rose for you.

For the believer If you already belong to Jesus, what is one act of obedience you can name before you leave today? Maybe it is that apology. Maybe it is calling a trusted brother or sister and saying, “This keeps happening. Will you pray with me and check in on me this week?” If you would like someone to stand with you in prayer, you are welcome to come forward.

Final emphasis We can bring the Father both our gratitude for the ways we have grown and the place where we still need his help.