

## **Death becomes life**

### **Summer Quarter: Toward a New Creation**

#### **Unit 3: Life on God's Terms**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of July 31, 2016**

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**Lesson Scripture: Romans 6:1-4, 6:12-14, 6:17-23**

**Background Scripture: Romans 6**

Introduction: Spanish explorers of America were convinced that they had discovered the end of the world. Spain celebrated their achievement by minting coins. Each coin had the words, "Neplus Ultra" – no more beyond. Soon, however, the continent had been crossed. Adventurers looking upon the vast Pacific Ocean realized that there were other regions to be explored. The first coins were returned to the mint, melted down, and new coinage was inscribed with "Plus Ultra" – more beyond.

Paul reminds the readers and hearers of his Roman epistle that there is more beyond just existing when life is lived on God's terms. Those who are dead to sin are, by faith in Christ Jesus, made alive. Only in Christ can death to sin become a personal reality.

#### **Read aloud Romans 6:1-4, 6:12-14, 6:17-23**

A counselor working with an individual suffering from an addictive disorder often attempts to help the ill person understand that a drug-free existence requires leaving behind a current lifestyle. This act may involve finding a circle of sober friends, fresh location, changing employment, personal disciplines, and constant dependence upon God as a higher power. There must be a deliberate break with the past.

Paul declares that a converted believer cannot continue in sin in order to make the grace of God more therapeutic. Jesus Christ died for human deliverance from sin. In the resurrection, Jesus Christ rose to give persons a meaningful life. Humans must die to sin and live a fresh life in Christ. This faith relationship has not only made humans free from sin, but it also makes humans slaves to righteousness.

#### **Romans 6:1**

Some practice illogical reasoning concerning God's amazing grace. Should a baptized Christian continue to sin in order for God to display more mercy and forgiveness? God forbid! Baptism requires a human to engage in ethical practices and moral conduct reflecting God's love.

#### **Romans 6:2**

Again, Paul emphasizes a vital point in his theological argument. Should humans keep on sinning after receiving grace? Of course not! Grace bestowed is not a ticket of indulgence. Grace received does not grant lifetime freedom to sin. Grace does hold accountable all humans who have been given divine, unmerited grace.

Grace does not bestow a lifetime admission to heaven regardless of personal behavior after grace has been granted.

### **Romans 6:3-11**

Paul reminds the Romans of the meaning of baptism. A believer experiences in baptism what Jesus Christ went through with his baptism, death, and resurrection. It is, for the convert, the point at which an old life is left behind and a new existence begins. At that time, humans die to sin. The human body, so easily affected by sin, has in baptism become stronger in opposing the influence of sin. Because humans have been judged “not guilty” by God’s grace, baptism in Jesus Christ bestows strength to withstand sin’s corrupting, destructive, and dominating power.

In his struggles with sin, depression, and hostile threats, Martin Luther, the Reformer, often would repeat to himself, “I have been baptized. I have been baptized.” In baptism, grace given is also grace continuing to be bestowed. Baptism makes humans dead to sin but alive in God.

### **Romans 6:12-14**

American mobile society creates an industry in which houses are being listed for rent and purchase. No wise buyer would sign a contract and accept a document that allowed the owner to keep lifetime rights and privileges to one room in a home. Paul reminds believers not to hold back any part of their bodies in receiving grace. Humans in baptism are to give all they are to Christ. Sin cannot maintain residence in any part of a committed, baptized receiver of God’s grace.

### **Romans 6:15-16**

Is it possible for baptized humans to live with no concern of being governed by law and grace? Paul’s answer is emphatic, “Certainly not!” In Paul’s era, it is estimated the Roman Empire had more than six million persons who were slaves. The writer of Romans now uses this negative social condition to make a positive point. Sin and righteousness are forms of obedience that cannot co-exist in a follower of Jesus Christ. Under Roman law, an owner of a slave had total control of the enslaved person. A slave could not serve two masters. Now that the human belongs to Christ, services to any other master would be impossible. Jesus commented that, “Everyone who commits a sin is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34)

### **Romans 6:17-19**

Humans who were once slaves of sin should give gratitude to God for their deliverance. In their hearts, they now obey the teachings they have received. They have become servants of righteousness. The human body is not to be involved in any impurity. All parts of a human are to be dedicated in the service of righteousness for holy living.

### **Romans 6:20-22**

Humans who were slaves to sin did not concern themselves with righteousness. Sin did not bring fulfillment, but shame and death. A new master, God, has taken control, and the results are holiness and eternal life.

### **Romans 6:23**

Sin, in payment for disobedient living, writes a check made payable to death. Those who accept grace by faith in Christ, and leave the clutches of sin behind, are rewarded with a free gift from God: eternal life in Christ Jesus. Humans have earned death, but through grace and faith in Jesus Christ, God gives the gift of life now and forever.

### **Reflections for discussion of Romans 6:1-4, 6:12-14. 6:17-23**

- a. What are some of the personal and social conditions holding humans slaves to sin and blocking their acceptance of God's grace? Such a list might include pride, materialism, self-centeredness, apathy, and sexual indulgence.
- b. How can humans demonstrate they are dead to sin and raised to new life in Christ? In secret, attempt to do a Christian act of kindness to another human without any knowledge or recognition of self becoming known. Volunteer for a ministry in Christ's church no other person wishes to do.

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