

“Dead to the Law”/ “Dead to Sin”

In the previous article, we saw what Paul meant when he said that a Christian is “not under the law.” He meant that such person is not under the *penalty* of the law.

We have all *earned* the death penalty as a result of our sinning. But, when we truly repent and are baptized in Christ, then Christ’s sacrifice *pays* the death penalty in our *stead*. We are then no longer under the *penalty* of the law---we are no longer “under the law,” as Paul phrased it.

With that understanding in mind, let’s look at two other statements by Paul, both of which are best understood *in light of* this discussion of not being under the *penalty* of the law. What we will examine in this article is Paul’s statements about Christians being “dead to the law” and “dead to sin.”

Let’s first consider the statement that Christians are “dead to **sin**.” This phrase is found three times in the New Testament. It’s found twice in the 6th chapter of Romans, and also in I Peter 2:24.

Notice its occurrence in Romans chapter 6. Verse 2 says, “...How shall we who **died to sin** live any longer in it?” Then, in verse 11, Paul says, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be **dead indeed to sin**...”

It’s important to understand the *context* of these two statements. Chapter six is a discussion about baptism and our subsequent new life in Christ. It could be said that the *theme* of this chapter is found in verse 6---which is right *between* the two verses just referred to. Verse 6 states: “Knowing this, that our **old man** was crucified with Him [buried *with* Christ *through* baptism, says verse 4], that the body of sin might be done away with, **that** we should *no longer* be **slaves** of sin.”

So that’s the *theme* of the chapter, and that helps us understand these two verses *in* this chapter---verses about being “dead to sin.”

When we are baptized, we receive God’s Holy Spirit---and it is God’s Spirit that **enables** us to “no longer be *slaves* of sin.” The Holy Spirit within us *enables* our “old man” to be *buried* in the watery grave of baptism, and for us to then “walk in *newness* of life” (verse 4). Having God’s Spirit within us **enables** us to *please* God, by living according to His law (Rom. 8: 7-9).

Let’s now consider verses 16 – 18: “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, *you are that one’s slaves whom you obey*, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though *you were slaves of sin*, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been **set free from sin**, you became slaves of righteousness.”

Yes, it’s by the power of the Holy Spirit within you that you have been “set free from sin”---i.e., set free from being a **slave** to sin.

We, as Christians, do stumble and commit occasional *acts* of sin. But we are no longer *slaves* of sin, as we were prior to baptism. And **that** is what Paul is speaking of when he says that we “**died to sin**”! We are no longer *slaves* of sin. We are no longer **dominated** by a carnal mind---a mind that is *hostile* to God and *not subject to the law* of God (Rom. 8:7).

Now that we’ve seen what Paul meant by being “dead to *sin*,” let’s now see what he meant by being “dead to the *law*.” The phrase is used in Rom. 7:4 and also in Gal. 2:19.

Let’s examine the Rom. 7:4 passage, where Paul says, “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become **dead to the law** through the body of Christ...”

Notice that Paul did *not* say “the law is dead.” Rather, when he said that a Christian is “dead to the law,” Paul simply meant that a Christian is no longer *held captive* by the **penalty** of the law---that the death penalty no longer has dominion *over* the person (Rom. 6:3-5, 8-9; 8:1). Accordingly, he says, “you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to *another*, even to Him who was raised from the dead, **that** we should bear **fruit** to God” (Rom.7:4).

So we are *now* to be married to Christ; whereas we *were* married to **sin**. We were a *slave* to sin, and therefore “married” to sin. But now we are to be married to “another,” that is, to Christ! Accordingly, we are now to bear fruit to God, which is made possible by Christ living His life in us and through us.

Now, verses 5 to 6 of Romans7: “For when we were in the flesh [i.e., before we received God’s Spirit (Rom. 8:8-9)], the passions of sins which were aroused by the law {“aroused up by [what] the Law [makes sin]”---Amplified Bible} were at work in our members to bear fruit *to death*. But now we have been delivered from the law [i.e., “from the *penalty* of the law”], having died to what we were held [“*being dead wherein we were held*”---KJV].”

When we *were* under the death penalty, it was as if we *were* dead---because death awaited us. But now, we’ve been delivered from that.

Then, verse 6 continues by saying, “so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” And that is best understood as “not *only* in the oldness of the letter.” Why? Because God’s written word---along **with** the Holy Spirit---is our guide! After all, in the very next verse (verse 7), Paul (who *had* God’s Spirit) says that he would not have *known* that coveting was a sin except **BY** the written law--- the letter of the law---*revealing* that it is a sin. And that’s similar to what Paul said in Rom. 3:20, that “**BY** the law is the *knowledge* of sin.”

Again, it is only **BY** the Holy Spirit within us---which is Christ living His life within us---that we *can* live by not only the *letter* of the law, but also by its spirit and intent.

In conclusion, we’ve looked at two phrases used by Paul: being “dead to sin” and being “dead to the law.”

In the phrase “dead to sin,” Paul simply meant that a Christian is no longer a *slave* to sin, as the person formerly was, prior to receiving God’s Spirit.

In the phrase “dead to the law,” Paul meant that a Christian is no longer held captive by the *penalty* of the law---that the death penalty no longer has dominion over him.