

## Prayers

### **To God**

**Come to us in power, Lord Jesus, so that we may serve You with vigour and honesty. We need Your help because we do not necessarily have all the care and compassion that others need from us. May we not be afraid to confess our weaknesses and limitations, so that we may receive Your forgiveness and the power of Your love. Lead us on to stand firm in faithful witness and service, we pray: AMEN**

### **For Self**

*Pray for the children in your wider family. Name each of them, young or not so young, and lift before the Lord the complex relationships that have developed within family life. Pray blessing on all the embers of your wider family. If possible, take time and care to do this.*

### **For others**

*Pray for people who have no food this day  
Pray for people who have no water or must fetch it from long distances  
Pray for people who have no proper shelter, especially refugees  
Pray for people who are being victimised because of their race and religion*

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## Meditation

How is it, Lord, that you care for us each moment of the day?

In the midst of the night Your watchful Spirit  
Holds our bodies, minds and spirits until we wake:

As we eat, Your Creative power works within,  
So that we draw sustenance from our food, miraculously:

When we talk, our hearts give rise to the words we say,  
But the Spirit gives them meaning to those who hear us:

In doing our work, the Saviour watches closely, seeking  
To build the Kingdom of God even through all we do:

If we take a rest, we access the great God-given gift  
Of self healing and restoration; of body, mind and spirit:

And as we spend time with those we love and for whom we care,  
He watches and guides our sharing in love and fellowship.

You care for us each day, Lord God, because You love us!

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## Bible Passage

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

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, do not allow sin to rule your earthly bodies, so that it makes you obey its desires. <sup>13</sup> Do not offer any part of your body to sin as a means of doing evil, but give yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer all the parts of your body to God as a means of doing what is right. <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no power over you, because you are not under law but under grace.

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## Bible study Review

Here, again, Paul writes with such power and authority that we are in awe of the text before us. This brief passage is important to our understanding of the Christian faith over the centuries, because it summarises how sin is overcome and people can be reconciled to God in the famous saying '*you are not under law but under grace*' (6:14). This simple phrase powerfully expresses most of what Paul has said so far in Romans. It says that God deals with sin generously and with 'grace', and not by rules or regulations, specifically, the 'law' of the Old Testament. The Laws of Moses have always been valuable but they could not enable people to have a relationship with God; moreover, salvation is available only through God's grace, by means of the life and death of Jesus.

To begin with, Paul urges '*do not let sin rule your earthly bodies*' (6:12). In this way, he accurately identifies the way that sin works, for it seeks to 'rule' or dominate each part of life, whether it be feelings, thoughts or actions. Paul knew just as we know today, that most sins are habitual in nature and feed people's various needs, such as for food, or for gratification, or even for love. His advice is therefore to recognise the weakness of our earthly bodies, and make a stand against sin by placing ourselves in the hands of the God who made us, who is the only authority capable of dealing with sin. Of course, to make this stand means to make a conscious choice to accept both God's grace and authority. For a Christian, such a choice should be just like the conscious choice once made to have faith in Christ or to be baptised, it is a choice for the authority of God and against the authority of sin and bodily desires.

In verse 13, Paul continues to explore what it means to take a stand against sin. It is clear that he is speaking directly to Christians, that is, to those who have been '*brought from death to life*' (6:13). A clear obligation is placed on them to ensure that they do not '*offer any part of your body to sin as a means of doing evil*'. The phrase is intriguing, because it invites each of us to consider that unless we chose otherwise, any one part of our physical, mental or emotional make up can be tempted to yield to sin's power. But we must continue to make the same positive decisions throughout life, to '*offer all parts of your bodies to God as a means of doing right*.' (6:13).

There is a straightforward message here, and it is this. The grace of God and the new life of Christ are characterised by a continual desire within the Christian to do what is right and to please God, moreover, this should take the form of standing against every form of evil and standing for what is right in God's eyes. There is a slight suggestion within this that the Christian must somehow live by paying constant attention to the detail of life, and what is 'right' and what is 'wrong', but if we have followed everything Paul has said, then we should realise

that his teaching would never say this. God looks for those who show that they have a heart set on doing what is right. With this in mind, Paul concludes '*sin will have no power over you, because you are not under the law but under grace*' (6:14).

This last verse is frequently taken out of its place in Scripture, because it is a good summary of Paul's wider teaching about the difference between godliness in Christ and godliness as defined by the old Jewish Law. Nevertheless, we are wise to read this whole passage carefully and note that the famous phrase '*you are not under the law but under grace*' is a conclusion to Paul's practical advice about the Christian life. He insists that the Christian is one in whom God's grace is matched by the positive intent of the human heart to give no ground to sin.

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## Going Deeper

Tragically, many Christians today still profess faith but do not know what to do about sin, and it must be asked therefore, whether they truly know the authentic Gospel (and the reasons for this may or may not be their fault). As we study this text further, we will look firstly at what Paul says about how a Christian should deal with sin, and then look at the famous verse 14, and study why it is fundamental to the rest of Paul's letter and the New Testament.

### ***Dealing with sin as a Christian.***

In these verses of our passage today, Paul tells his readers that they must not allow any part of their bodies to co-operate with sin and evil (6:12), and urges them to offer themselves wholly to God for the purpose of doing what is right (6:13). It sounds simple enough, but Paul has just explained that through baptism, 'we know that our previous human nature was crucified with Him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we should be enslaved to sin no more' (6:6). We noted in the introduction that there seems to be a contradiction here, for why do we need to work at overcoming sin when its power has already been destroyed? In addition to the answer I have given above, a fuller answer lies in understanding something more about the world in which Paul and the people of his day lived. At first sight, this will appear to be strange, but with care, we will see how what they believed still holds for us today, along with Paul's advice about how to deal with sin.

The first disciples and evangelists sincerely believed that when Jesus died on the Cross, a timeline was drawn in history. Before he died, the world lived under the old order of God's Covenant, dependent upon the people of Israel and God's revelation of Himself through them. This represented a past 'age', or 'era', and now that Jesus had died and a New Covenant of God's grace was established, a new 'era' had begun in which all people could enjoy a relationship with God through Jesus. This much is easily understandable to us now; but there is one more step. They felt that the 'new era' was a very temporary period of time before Jesus would come in glory and all evil and death would be destroyed on the 'Day of the Lord'. Throughout the New Testament, this expectation is very real amongst all the people of the early church. See, for example, the controversy about whether John would or would not die before Jesus came in glory (John 21:21-23) and the beliefs of people at Thessalonica about the imminent second coming, which had to be corrected by Paul (1 Thess 4:13f.).

But what difference does this make to our understanding of sin and what Paul says in Romans? If we put ourselves in the place of Paul and the people of his day, we will perhaps understand why what they said sometimes switched rapidly between the problems of the present, and the final resolution of them at the end times, which they believed were just around the corner. As

far as they were concerned the work of Jesus changed everything, and his death and resurrection was like the starting of a timer that was rapidly counting down to the end of time. His work, and the complete glory of God in victory were very real to them, and only very slowly were people beginning to understand that the second coming might take some time (humanly speaking!). God was not going to bring everything to an end within a few years, and the 'present age' was one that would last for a long time, during which the Gospel would have to be lived out and passed on from one generation to another.

So for Paul, the complete victory of Jesus over sin was very real and almost 'present', and this is what he celebrates when writing about the work of Jesus and the meaning of baptism in Romans 6:1-11. He explained that Jesus did on the Cross what no-one else could do, which was to demonstrate on earth the victory over sin that would one day be complete in heaven. It is as if Paul then realised that he had to give guidance on how this victory, something that belongs to all Christians through their baptism, can be put into effect in the temporary world in which Christians live. This was something the early Christians were only just beginning to come to terms with, and they were not yet sure how to balance the fact the Christ had defeated Satan and His works on the Cross, but Satan was still at work in his 'final fling' before his ultimate defeat in God's final victory at the End.

### ***Giving our bodies to the Lord***

Paul's advice is still realistic and wise because we still live in this temporary age. If we have been baptised, then we have the power to stand against sin (6:12), but because the world has not come to its final end, Satan will still knock at our door, and sin will still present itself to us. Paul therefore tells the believer to 'give yourself to God', not just in a spiritual sense, but bodily, because Paul knew that sin most often strikes in our physical sensations, from what we see and feel, to the experiences of love or sex. There is no particular meaning to Paul's references to 'parts of the body' (6:13) beyond this general reference to the body, for the phrase is just the same as the one he uses in 1 Corinthians 12 when talking about the 'body' of the church which is made up of parts; the eye, the hand, etc. Some people have thought that Paul was covertly suggesting that Christians should avoid the kind of sexual sin he describes as prevalent amongst pagans earlier in his letter (1:18ff.). It is an interesting theory, but Paul means every kind of sin, including sexual sin, without any particular emphasis.

What is very clear is that Paul suggests that Christians make a habit of prayerfully offering every part of their own bodies to Christ; arms, legs, eyes, ears etc. The more you think about this, the more creative such an exercise can be! We must not make little gods out of how we manage our bodies; what we eat, how we exercise etc., but we are called to make sure that our bodies reflect God's call upon our lives. This is an important aspect of our Christian faith, which is not often spoken about.

### ***Living under grace***

If we bear in mind everything in this study so far, then it is not surprising that Paul goes on to say that the secret of living in this temporary life is to accept that through the death of Jesus, celebrated in our baptism, we live under the power and the authority of the grace of God. There is no other religious or human system of law by which we might measure 'goodness' or find evidence of dealing with the problem of sin. Everything is taken care of if we live in the presence of God through Jesus Christ, and this is what it means to have victory and power over all sin, and live 'not under law but under grace' (6:14).

This text presents us with a choice, and it is the same choice lying at the heart of all faith. We must decide whether to keep close to our Lord Jesus and learn what it means to live a life in His presence, or to go our own way and take our chances believing what we will and doing what we like. There is an evil illusion within the world today that suggests we are only truly free when we are able to do whatever we want. But it does not take much thought to work out that if everyone did what they wanted for themselves, hardly anyone would be happy, because we all depend upon other people liking us, wanting us, relating to us, and loving us. By observation, the people who are most free are those who feel secure in their relationships; and ultimately, those who choose and accept a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, accept His rule and live under His grace, are of all people, most free.

Because we still live in a world that has not yet come to its end, sin is an enemy to be fought, but the victory in this battle belongs to Jesus. Our privilege is to surrender our needs and our sins to Him so that He will overcome them and liberate us, as our baptism should tell us. We are then able to access the power of Christ in our everyday lives if we yield our bodies to Him. This is what Paul means when he says that 'sin will have no power' when we live 'under grace' (6:14).

In the rest of Paul's writings he frequently uses the same contrast of 'law' and 'grace' to illustrate what he means by the two options facing all people when confronted with the Gospel. Clearly, Paul had to deal with many people who, in his day, were powerfully attached to the 'Law' of the Old Testament which they believed to be the basis of any relationship with God, and Paul fought this by speaking about the contrast between law and grace (especially in the letters to the Galatians and the Philippians). However, any system of morality that people make for themselves is 'law' in comparison to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The real choice for most people is not between Judaism and Christianity, but between God's way in Jesus ('grace') and any other path ('law' – in a general sense).

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## Application

### ***Discipleship issues***

It is therefore important for us to make sure that we understand what it means to live 'under grace', and not live a life of legalism. Legalism can creep in to any form of human activity, and it shows its head when people become attached to particular ways of doing things in church which have no real connection to the heart of the Gospel; whether this be music, buildings, or any other part of the business of the church. The New Testament frequently calls upon God's people to do things well and with 'order' (1 Cor 14:40, 2 Cor 13:11), but the community of believers cannot just be about 'how things are done'; it must be about living under the 'grace' of God. This means that faith must show itself through liberty and freedom from sin rather than particular ways of doing things or being religious.

Generally, people are used to the existence of various religions and what is called 'spirituality', within which people do various things to express their beliefs, from lighting candles to going to church or attending religious meetings. What the world is not used to seeing is real Christians who live otherwise ordinary lives but who show through the manner of their living and their relationships with others that they are truly 'free' from the powers of sin and evil in the world. This does not mean merely that we should always show others that being a Christian means we are 'good', though we should accept that this is part of our call. It means that we should

show we are able to rise above the problems, wrongs and evils of the world and are not overcome by them or defeated by them, oppressed by them or threatened by them. Moreover, we can testify that our lives are strengthened by the power of Almighty God.

This is what it means to live under the grace of God. It would be very helpful if God's people would encourage and help each other to demonstrate God's grace and testify to it in this way.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- Think of one or two people who you know from your own church and perhaps one or two from other churches, who seem to you to live victorious Christian lives. Talk with them about whether this is how they perceive things, and you will learn a great deal from them.
- Pray for those who still perceive sin as an insurmountable problem that cannot be resolved. Pray that the message of the Gospel will be preached with power, so that people will respond to it and live in Christ, and with His power.

### ***Questions for groups***

1. *Discuss what it means for you to live under grace, and not under law. What should it mean for the church of God?*
2. *How can we offer our bodies to God in a meaningful way, in order to fulfil this Scripture?*
3. *How does sin 'rule' the bodies of those who have not given themselves to God, and what does this mean?*

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## **Final Prayer**

**Lord Jesus; You saw all manner of sin and strife within the world, and You stood above it and fulfilled Your ministry in love and in power. May we follow Your example and give testimony to the love of God and the power of the good news of the Kingdom. Thank You for this privilege, Lord Jesus; AMEN**