

Romans 6

by John Nelson Darby

In Romans 6, John Nelson Darby explores the believer's identification with Christ's death and resurrection, emphasizing freedom from sin and the call to live a life of holiness empowered by grace.

Scripture: Romans 6:1

Topics: "Grace", "New Life in Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Romans 6, emphasizing the believer's connection to Christ as the second Adam and the transformative power of grace that liberates from sin. He illustrates that true liberty is found in being dead to sin and alive to God, highlighting the importance of motives in our actions and the necessity of yielding ourselves to God. Darby stresses that while we are called to live righteously, it is through recognizing our identity in Christ's death and resurrection that we can bear fruit unto holiness. The sermon underscores that our new life in Christ is not merely about avoiding sin but actively living in accordance with God's will, which leads to true joy and fulfillment.

Transcript

We get in this chapter the practical application of the great principle of which the apostle has been speaking at the end of the preceding chapter, namely, our connection with the second Adam, as previously with the first. We shall see that it is practical in its nature, and we shall do well to see the double aspect of it; the power of practice and the real groundwork of that power. Liberty is always the ground on which grace sets us, and liberty is the only ground of the Holy Ghost's power. Liberty is that to which we are called, it is not slavery, even unto holiness, but liberty always, but that liberty death to sin. The apostle first sets forth the ground simply and clearly, and then proceeds to the fruits, for there is actual righteousness which bears fruit. As He says, "Now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

There is wonderful depth and value in this chapter, as there must be in that which comes from God. This practical righteousness does not merely produce a fruit down here, that is man's thoughts, and man's thoughts end always with himself; but flowing from Christian life, as we shall see, and walking in the path suited to it here below, it frees from obscuring lusts, and tends to purify the heart practically, so that we see God. It has fruit unto holiness. The daily details of a Christian's life have thus the deepest importance, not only as doing right, but that this produces fruit that goes up in holiness to God, leads to a state of soul in which God is known and enjoyed, the soul being set apart for Him.

52 All that comes from God must go back to God again: so in the meat-offering - the frankincense which was laid on the meat-offering was burnt, and the savour of it all went up to God: the priest might eat of the meat-offering, but the sweet savour of all ascended up to God; just as Christ Himself came down from God, His whole life down here being one continued savour rising up to God, and at the end He offered up Himself, a sacrifice well-pleasing to God. The reality of the fruit of righteousness is that it is living to God, as the apostle says, "Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ hath loved us, and given himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." This is Christian morality, it is God's nature in man. Here, however, it is only seen as a fruit or effect - the divine life coming down from God, to God it must return, and where this is wanting, it is all nothing.

All the value of an action is in the motive. Fruit will be manifested; but it is not so much what a man does, as his motive for doing it. Even in nature, two men may do the same thing from very different motives; the motive of the one being himself and his own pleasure, will be evil; while the other, being the good father of a family, and doing it for their good, his motive will be good; it is in the motive of our ordinary actions that we have to be continually judging ourselves, that we be not judged of the Lord. The saint, in judging himself, must be grieved when he sees so many other things come in and mix up with that which he presents to God; self comes in, and like the dead flies, spoils the savour of the ointment. It may not be seen by others, but our own hearts before God know how very much of self comes in, making the ointment send forth a bad savour, yet we know God graciously and lovingly accepts all our service through Christ, being a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The great principle laid down in chapter 3 is that the blood meets our sins.

53 Chapter 4 brings out faith in the God who had come in, in power, and raised the One who was under death - raised Him from the dead. "Believing on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." Christ was put to death in the flesh; looked at as man, we see Him going down into death, and a divine power coming in, and raising Him up again. It is precious to our souls to observe in scripture the same divine power is attributed to the three Persons, thus giving us a proof of the Trinity being engaged in the work. The Lord Jesus said, "Destroy this temple (this spake he of the temple of his body), and I will raise it up in three days"; and again, "Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father," Rom. 6:4. And He was "quickened by the Spirit."

In the former part of chapter 5 we get faith applied to justification; the conclusions from Christ's being delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification, and the results of this are given: we have peace, present favour, and hope of glory; we rejoice in tribulations, for God's love is shed abroad in our hearts, and finally, are able to joy in God.

Then comes, beginning with verse 12, the question of sin in our nature, where all heads up in Adam and Christ, and we see that the law was brought in by the bye, when man was already a sinner, with no thought of producing righteousness, but that the offence might abound and so manifest man's sin. The law is righteous, and comes in, convicting of unrighteousness those to whom it was given, because those to whom it was given could not keep it.

Man's only ways of being with God are, to be innocent, or to be saved. If a man is innocent, he does not want the law; Adam could not have known what it meant. If it had been said to Adam, "Thou shalt not lust, thou shalt not steal" - how would it have applied? Whom was he to steal from? But the law supposes lust to be there, therefore says, "Thou shalt not lust." The commandment which forbids, supposes the forbidden thing to be there, or the tendency to it, where the thing prohibited is a sin in its nature. The fruit

of the tree was in the garden, which was the very thing prohibited to Adam; but till Satan got hold of Eve, there was no lust to eat of it. "Thou shalt not eat of it," was a simple test of obedience, but even then the object was before them. A right rule only proves a fraudulent thing to be fraudulent, it does not make it right.

54 It is impossible for a man to be saved by the law, as the law supposes the presence of sin; an innocent person does not know what sin is, but man by the law is addressed as a sinner, that he might be saved by grace; but God having now come in, He could not confine Himself to those merely under law, but extends His grace to all - grace is the only ground He can be upon. Again, the law was not given till four hundred years after the promise. The promise was first.

In chapter 5:19, we have the two headships brought out in their results. By one man's disobedience, etc., and, note here, all are thus alike, the individual's sins do not come into account, though they do in judgment, for we are judged according to our works. But here, one man's disobedience made us sinners, and one Man's obedience makes us righteous. That seemed to make it no matter how we lived; but the subject of chapter 6 is just to meet such a thought as this. The perverseness of the flesh will turn the law to a different purpose from that for which God gave it, and grace for a different end from that for which God bestowed it. The law that was given to convict man of sin, man takes up to make a righteousness of his own out of it; and grace that was really given to make man holy, man turns into licentiousness. Though it is true that souls were quickened before Christ came, by virtue of His divine power to quicken whom He would, yet we get this great fact, that Adam became a fallen man, a sinner, and lost, before he was the head of the fallen family. So Christ finishes the work for righteousness before He becomes the head of the redeemed family.

We have not only come into the position of fallen Adam, but we have got a nature that likes sin; and where there is the life of Christ there is a nature which loves holiness: this is the argument of the apostle. But if a man naturally likes unholiness, how is he to get rid of this? His reply is, "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" It is not an argument as to what we ought to be. That which forms the groundwork of Christian life is that we have died with Christ. It is never said to man, You ought to die to sin. The believer is placed in Christ. How? In a Christ who has died and is risen. That life which I have in Christ is after Christ is dead and risen again; thus I have life in a Christ who has died (that is where I exist), in whom I have died unto sin, for if we are made partakers of justification through Him, it is because we are made partakers of His death. But, if, as regards the old sinful Adam, we are made partakers of death - have our part in and by it - we cannot live on.

55 To follow more precisely the apostle's argument: If I am a Christian, justified by Him, it is that I have part in His death. It is my very profession. I have been baptised to His death. But if I have died to sin to be made righteous, I cannot live in it because I am righteous. You have died unto sin in Christ. There is more than that when we look into it, as to detail: the blood of atonement was put upon the tip of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the great toe of the right foot of the priest, thus shewing that we are not only saved by the blood, but that nothing was to be allowed in thought, word, or deed, discordant with its holy claim. There is that which becomes a Christian, but that is not what is brought out here, but the truth of our having part in His death, so that we are to reckon ourselves alive to God through Him, not through the first Adam in his flesh.

How have you got your place, your life, your character in Christ, but through a dead and risen Christ? Well then, if I am dead, I am not still alive. Hence it is that the exhortation is never to us, to die, for we have died

with Christ. How then can a man live in that to which he is dead? It cannot be. If I am dead to sin I cannot live in sin, God forbid! There is putting to death, for practically we are to mortify our members, that is power, but we are never told to die to sin. You may try to die to it, but it will not do. It is still there. But the cross of Christ has for faith killed your sin, when He put your sins away.

We first get a new life and a new nature, and then we can begin to kill the members of the old nature, reckoning oneself dead, otherwise it is hopeless. I can now deal with this old thing as not me, for now I have a new thing which is me, therefore I do not admit that old thing to be me at all. I have for ever done with it, having got this new thing by which the old is overcome. In this chapter 6, the apostle is speaking of our liberty, as scripture always addresses the believer as dead with Christ.

What Christ have you a part in? Not one living on the earth before death, but in His death, though He be now alive again. "Buried with him by baptism unto death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Thus we get the glory of the Father as all engaged in the resurrection of Christ, and in result, as the measure of our walk down here. "By the glory of the Father." I can rest upon that expression, because it is that which can feed the heart, for Christ, as man, is brought out by and into the full glory of the Father, and that which meets the subtlety of the world's pretension (for the world had rejected Him), and the subtlety in our hearts, for all that leans to what obscures that, is the old man, which would have, not that which is of the Father, but of the world.

56 The Christian is fed and settled by what shews the perfection of Christ, as raised by the glory of the Father. There is not a single thing that was connected with the glory of the Father that was not made good by the death and sealed by the resurrection of Christ. Take death, for instance, God's righteous judgment, but the ruin of His creature, and the present display of Satan's power. We had all come under the power of death. Divine power comes in, and raises Him who, in grace towards us, went down under death, and by raising Him makes good God's judgment, while it sets aside what it was exercised in, and destroys him that had the power of death, that is the devil. There was the power of God, the love of the Father shewn out besides, for it was the Son who was there; and yet His righteousness, too, for Christ had fully glorified Him there, where it would seem impossible, made sin - and in death, its wages - for us. Was ever the love of the Father drawn out in like manner, as in the resurrection of Christ? Never! There was in Christ's death a fresh motive for the Father's love, in the Son's sacrificing Himself to shew forth the Father's glory. Then the Father's own glory was concerned in it, because it was the Father's own Son, one with Himself, who was under death; therefore the Father must come in and raise Him up, for His own glory.

Then also the righteousness of God is concerned. The world was to be convinced of righteousness, therefore God could not leave His soul in hell, neither could He suffer His Holy One to see corruption. He was God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, received up in glory. The angels must be witnesses of this great work of the resurrection of the Son of God. There would have been a hopeless gap in heaven, could it have been possible (which it was not, He could not be holden of it) for Christ not to have been raised from the dead and set at the right hand of God.

57 Now we see (I do not say realise) what this newness of life must be. The character of this newness of life is that I know the Father. Ought I not to see divine righteousness in it? Ought I not to see divine love in it? Ought I not to see the glory of His person in it? When I see Him who went down into the lowest parts of the earth, I see the Father's glory going down, so to speak, there, to raise Him up to His own right hand, and this it is that associates my thoughts with, and gives me the knowledge of, the Father's glory. The soul, in the power of the Holy Ghost, entering into the knowledge of the Person of Him who went down into

the grave, must be filled with adoring wonder and praise, for the heart, seeing the Father concerned about Christ, goes up to the glory of the Father. Where God has thus made the soul to comprehend that a once dead Christ has ascended up to God, that is everything. For how could you or I rise up to see the glory of the Father? Impossible! But His glory is brought near to me, when I see the Father raising up a dead Christ, knowing that Christ was in the grave, because of sin, though Son of God, and that He is now with God in heaven.

Thus my affections are drawn out, when I see who it was that went down to death for me. For how came He there? Because I was a sinner, yet He glorified His Father in all that He, the Father, was. And do I not see that He, who was there so laid, deserved to be raised? For who was it? The blessed Son of God, who had taken the form of a servant, and was found in fashion as a man. Do you think that a poor unconverted person sees that the Father must have raised up Jesus, even for His own glory, seeing who He was, and what He had done? No; and therefore, when speaking to the woman of Samaria, when He had said, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink," and she replies, "Give me this water," and there was no intelligence of what He presented to her; then He speaks to her conscience, "Go, call thy husband," and that opens her understanding. "I perceive thou art a prophet"; but when Jesus saith unto her, "I that speak unto thee am he," then the divine knowledge of the Person of the Son of God opens out to her soul. And the Person of the Lord filling her heart, she goes and tells others about Him. The revelation of the Person of the Son of God to this woman's soul, was the turning-point in her history. So it is with us. When we have intelligently received the Person of the Son of God, not as a doctrine merely, but as the object and power of a new life in our souls, then our hearts follow Christ, as it were, and go up after Him in spirit in this new life, and everything is dead to us below. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. I do not say there will be no conflict, but the heart has done with everything out of Christ. Then, how very near it comes to us, yea, is realised in us! "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death"; that is, entering into, and associated with Him in death down here. Grace comes down to us here, and Christ goes down to death for us.

58 Was divine love the less, because it was down here, and not above? No: it reached even to my state of sin, for it was to sin that Christ died, as He did for my sins. Was divine power the less? No: He has destroyed, on the contrary, the power of death, and him who held it. It is there I learn that the Son of God must go down unto death, if He is to deliver me from sin; and as His heart followed me down here to be made sin, so now my heart is to follow Him in resurrection (for if I have a portion in His death, I shall have also in His resurrection). For I cannot have a half Christ, and it is not merely that my sins are put away, because justification includes not merely the fact that He died, but also that He is personally accepted of God, and if He raised again, it is in the power of a new life. So that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin, or as the word is, that you should not be the slaves of sin, for you were slaves unto sin, but now you are freed (justified) from sin. He does not speak merely of sins. But no one can charge sin, the activity of lust and will, on a dead man. You were slaves, properly speaking, under the title of dominion by another, for the slave is ordered wherever his master pleases, not knowing at night what he should do in the morning; naturally we are slaves to sin.

The passage in John 8:33 is remarkable, as shewing that it was slavery to sin under the law, for the Jews being addressed as under the law, it says, the servant, or, slave, abideth not in the house for ever, but the Son abideth ever; if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. So we are freed from the slavery in which we were held, and in perfect liberty, all having been left behind in death, for he that has done with sin must be dead to it. When a man is dead you cannot charge him with anything; his life

has ceased to exist, he is out of the scene. If you say, How can I be free from sin, when I find it still in me? That is gone to which sin was attached. We are not told to die, for we are dead, and you cannot be charged with sin if you are dead, neither can you be under its power. Do you ask, How can that be, when I find I am not dead? Because it is in Christ you have died. Christ was put in your place. Is Christ in the grave? No; the thing to which sin is attached is gone, is done with, for He has died. Do not say it is not so. Are you wiser than God? for God says it is so. The tree and the fruit are both judged in God's sight. Christ has died for the tree and its fruit, as that which could be charged on you, and died to sin, so that you may reckon yourself dead to it. Christ attached sin to Himself on the cross, and it is gone for ever; there is an utter end of sin for faith; it is the vile thing I hate. Am I distressed about my evil deeds? They are the very things that Christ's death put away. Am I distressed about sin in the flesh? I am not in the flesh, I have died to it, for I have my life in Christ, who has died. "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin." I should have no need of such a word as reckon, if there was no more actual existence of sin in the flesh; I am called to mortify, in living power in Christ, the deeds of the body, not to die to sin, but to reckon myself dead. It is holy liberty from sin we have, and not liberty to sin. I am to reckon myself to be what faith shews me Christ is in my place; and walk in newness of life,* then there will be the fruit unto holiness.

{*Verse 1 of chapter 6 treats of continuing in sin, because of grace; since one Man's obedience saves me, I cannot, for I have my part in death. That is not living in it. Verse 15 supposes me free in the power of a new life. Am I to sin in this freedom, or give myself up to God? Which is the meaning and character of this new life I have through Christ?}

59 I would make two remarks here. First, the fruits are produced; still, the grand doctrine of Christianity is, that I am saved by a mediator; if I have to answer for myself, I am lost; "Enter not into judgment with thy servant," Psa. 143:2. If God enters into judgment with me, all is over with me. The whole doctrine of grace is, saved by a mediator; for, "if I wash myself in snow-water, and make my hands never so clean, yet wilt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." The instant I see God's eye upon me, I shall see myself as one out of a ditch, yea, my clothes shall abhor me. Job wanted a daysman, to lay his hand upon both. My coming to God depends upon some one coming between.

60 The conscience should be delicate as to the slightest approach of evil, only let it be in liberty. The more delicate the conscience as to the sense of the least defilement, the more the need of a mediator is felt. But you say, I find that what ought to be dead in me is still alive. Well, did Christ die for the sin that you have not, or for the sin you have? The very sin you are daily finding out in yourself, this is the very sin for which Christ died.

Jealousy of conscience about sin is right, the more the better, only with it remember the grace which has put it away. Christ has set me in a new life through Himself, raised from the dead, so that death cannot touch it, because He lives beyond its power; judgment cannot touch it, because He has borne it and died, there is not a single thing that could ever possibly come against me, that the blessed One did not allow to come against Him. Yea, He took it all upon Himself, and we are clean out of the Red Sea, on the other side; that life which we now live, we live by Him, reckoning ourselves dead to sin, because He died unto sin; He died not for Himself, but to sin, to enter into a new state of existence as man, and we live through Him. See the holiness of Him who was "made sin." He was taken through everything, He was thoroughly tested in every way, to try if He were in anything unwilling to obey. What if He had shrunk? But no, every evil was refused by His blessed holy nature. He learned obedience by the things He suffered. He went through everything - the scorn of the world - the power of Satan, even to the wrath of God. He was tempted in all points, like as we are, sin apart - Satan found nothing in Him. It was His meat and His drink

to do His Father's will.

But it is never said He took delight in suffering for sin, but He says, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me"; the having His Father's countenance withdrawn from Him, when bearing the sin, He could not find delight in; but He had said before, "I delight to do my Father's will." This cup, He asked that it might pass from Him; no other cup did He ever ask to be withdrawn, and now He said, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." He would rather suffer this than that God should not be glorified.

61 We can now share the suffering for righteousness' sake, but the suffering for sin we cannot share; He made an end of that, and now He lives beyond it all in resurrection. He had the Spirit of holiness (all His life through this was true of Him), and during His life down here it was fully tested, but now we see Him alive again, "raised from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness"; therefore He is no half-Saviour, for He died unto sin, and now He liveth unto God. Therefore we are to reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin, and live unto God. This is a very practical question, for it is not that you are to say, if you have not the realisation of this, you cannot have the value of the blood; no; you must first know the value of the blood, and so have it all in Christ. The groundwork of living to Him is to be dead to sin; but we are to reckon ourselves dead to sin in Him. It can avail nothing to exhort you to live to God, if you have not the life of God in you. There is the double thing, the position in which God has set you, and the fact that people expect to see what you really are manifested.

It is not said experience yourself dead to sin, but reckon yourself; nor is it said you may reckon yourself so, when you see yourself walking with God; neither does He say, when sin does not reign in your mortal bodies, then reckon yourselves dead to sin. No; that is not grace; but the Holy Ghost draws the practical consequence from all which faith teaches. This is the only means of living godly before the world.

Righteousness, as stated in the end of chapter 5, shews me how I am enabled by it to live before God; I can only be living before the world, then, as belonging to God; so I can only be living before God in the sense of acceptance, being justified from sins by the blood, and now dead to sin, reckoning myself so, because Christ who is my life died unto sin, and I am free. Then how blessedly comes in "yield yourselves," not merely to righteousness, though it be so, but to God, never stopping short of God. If I do a right thing, and do not do it to God, all is short of its true end and character; my heart is not right in its aim and motive. I should really therefore yield myself to God. Did Christ ever do anything for Himself? No; for in the gospels we see His was a life of love. He had not time even to eat; always living for others. He not only did things which were commanded, but because they were commanded; the will of God being not only the guide, but the motive of all He did. He gave Himself for us, but a sacrifice and offering to God.

62 Well, then, if you are delivered from sin, you are delivered from yourself, and what a blessed deliverance, to have a right to have done with myself! It is the best thing in the world to have done with myself. "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." If we are under the law, we are under the dominion, as well as under the curse of sin. "Oh, but," you say, "sin has dominion over me, therefore I am afraid God will not have me." What are you doing with grace? How can you dare to come before God for anything, if you are not standing in grace? It is only as you are under grace, that you can have any power over sin. If you are standing in grace, you are under favour, because God is good - you are free, but you are under grace; therefore Romans 5 comes before chapter 6, righteousness before holy liberty in life, and if you try to reverse them, you get into chapter 7.

If, because I do not love Christ as I ought, which is a higher thing than the law, I then begin to doubt whether I am His or not, I am still under law, but with a higher standard, Christ being the law, instead of the ten commandments. It is not realising grace. God loves the holy angels, but that is not properly speaking grace. Grace is love towards those who do not deserve it. Oh! but you say, if a man is delivered from the law he may become careless; the subtlety of the heart is such that it is quite true it may abuse grace. Law is given to convict of sin; man uses it to make out righteousness; grace to free man from sin, and give him power over it, and he uses it to licentiousness. But a person is not to be licentious, because he is free from the law - "ye became the servants of righteousness."

If we are led of the Spirit, we are not under the law, but we shall be led in holiness; we have liberty, and not slavery, but it is divine deliverance from the power of sin; we yield ourselves wholly to God, because we are free to do so, and if God has given you liberty, will you be a slave again to sin? But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness. What is holiness? Separation from, and abhorrence of what is evil, and for us by separation of heart to God. I should not call Adam holy, but innocent; God is holy, for God abhors evil, having full knowledge of it, and delights in good; Christ is holy; we, too, are holy, for in the new man which we have put on, we hate the evil and love the good, though we cannot do it as God does. Holiness in us must necessarily have God for its object. In walking in righteousness, the heart has to say to God obediently; the will is not in activity, the lusts not at work. The effect, through grace, is growing separation of heart to God, and acquaintance with Him. Thus you have your fruit unto holiness. What fruit does sin bear? None; it only brings to death. I walk in what is pleasing to God, and thus, the new man being active likes what God likes; and what will be the consequence of this? In the moral activities of this new life, I get separated from the influence of evil, increasing in the knowledge of God; not only actual fruits produced (though that is true, as the tree will be known by its fruits), but this practical bringing forth of internal fruit is connected with righteousness according to the will of God, and a walk with Him in the light.

63 The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; I get drawn away from the spirit of the world - this practical walking with God is connected with growth in the knowledge of God, leads me on in likeness to Him: in every-day life to have a constant reference to God's will, leads into the light practically. "If the eye be single, the whole body will be full of light." Learning God - going on with God, not merely slipping and then getting on again. It is not simply desiring to live to Christ, but our hearts should be more withdrawn from everything around, a thorough consecration of the heart, a growing up in the knowledge of God in heart and spirit; and there will be this growing up unto God, if our life be yielded to Him - servants to God - having God's will as our blessed privilege. God's own will, flowing from His nature, should be our will. What is higher or more blessed than this? It is what Christ had; Christ thought it worth while to leave heaven to do God's will, that we might be drawn up there, and made to bring forth fruit unto holiness down here.

64 There is a positive joy in pleasing God, it is perfect liberty. The gift of God is eternal life; and it is sweet to see that while grace leads us through the path of righteousness, it is still all grace. I would rather have eternal life as the gift of God, than ten lives of my own, because it is the proof of His love to me. The Lord grant that our hearts may be so grounded in grace, that we may indeed yield ourselves unto God, and be growing up in the doing of His will - remembering it is founded on reckoning ourselves dead to sin, and alive unto God; thus we live out of the world, as to separation from evil. as He is.

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