

Homiletics Analysis: Romans 6

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Romans 6 is Paul's sustained answer to two devastating misreadings of the grace-alone gospel he has articulated in chapters 1–5: "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (v. 1) and "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" (v. 15). Both questions arise logically from the doctrine of justification by faith — if God justifies the ungodly and grace superabounds where sin abounds, does the gospel not license moral indifference or even promote sin? Paul's answer is a thunderous *mē genoito* — "By no means! / God forbid!" — and what follows is not a bare moral command but a sustained theological argument: the gospel itself, rightly understood, is the death of sin's lordship. The chapter divides into two parallel movements (vv. 1–14 and vv. 15–23), each opening with the same antinomian question, each responding with the same logical structure: *know* what has happened to you in union with Christ → *reckon* (count it as real) → *present* yourself accordingly. The controlling image of the first movement is **death and resurrection**: the believer has been baptized into Christ's death and raised with Him to new life — sin's dominion over the dead person is legally and actually broken. The controlling image of the second movement is **slavery**: every human being is a slave to something; the believer has been transferred from slavery to sin leading to death to slavery to God and righteousness leading to life. The chapter closes (vv. 22–23) with the starkest possible contrast: "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This Text — Intent

God is seeking to shatter the antinomian assumption at its root — not by appealing to moral effort or legal threat, but by making the believer see what has actually happened to them in union with Christ. The intent is not guilt-induced obedience but *identity-grounded* obedience: you are not fighting to get free from sin's power — you are already free; you are now being called to live out of that freedom. Paul's intent is to produce in the reader a radical reorientation of self-understanding: "I died with Christ; I am alive to God; sin is no longer my master." Once that claim lands, the imperatives ("do not let sin reign," "present your members to God") flow as logical consequence rather than moral pressure. The intended effect is believers who fight sin not out of fear of condemnation — that has already been settled (3:21–5:21) — but out of *knowing who they now are*.

Subject Sentence: Union with Christ breaks sin's dominion and transfers the believer into new life.

Primary Claim: Because the believer has died and risen with Christ, sin is no longer their master — and God is now calling them to live as what they already are: dead to sin, alive to God, slaves of righteousness rather than death.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Meaning of Baptism (v. 3–4)

The most contested interpretive question in Romans 6 is whether “baptized into Christ Jesus” (v. 3) refers to water baptism or to Spirit-baptism/union with Christ as a spiritual reality. Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and some Anglican readings take water baptism as the primary referent, treating the sacrament as the instrumental means by which the believer is actually joined to Christ’s death and resurrection — a *baptismal regeneration* or at minimum a *baptismal union* reading. Reformed and Baptist exegetes largely argue that Paul’s primary referent is the *spiritual reality* of union with Christ, of which water baptism is the visible sign and seal. Several features of the text support the Reformed reading: (1) Paul’s argument does not depend on the reader having been baptized — it depends on the reader being *in Christ*; (2) the imperative logic (“know... reckon... present”) presupposes that what is described in vv. 3–5 is already the believer’s condition, not a condition conferred through a subsequent rite; (3) the parallel passage in Colossians 2:11–12 makes the same argument using circumcision imagery alongside baptism, strongly suggesting Paul is reasoning from the spiritual reality signified, not the rite itself. The Reformed reading does not *dismiss* water baptism — it properly locates it as the *visible ordinance* that publicly enacts what has already occurred spiritually. The Lutheran contribution worth retaining is the seriousness with which the visible sign is tied to the reality it signifies — Reformed exposition should not so spiritualize the argument that the ordinance of baptism loses its connection to the death-and-resurrection identity Paul is describing.

The “Already / Not Yet” of Freedom from Sin (vv. 14, 22)

Wesleyan and Holiness traditions have read Romans 6 as the basis for a doctrine of entire sanctification or sinless perfection — the argument being that if sin “shall not be your master” (v. 14) and you have been “set free from sin” (v. 22), this describes an achievable state of complete freedom from the sin nature in this life. This reading overreaches. Paul’s indicatives in Romans 6 are *positional and legal* — they describe the believer’s standing in Christ (sin’s dominion has been broken at the level of lordship and ultimate outcome), not the empirical elimination of sinful desire or behavior. This is immediately confirmed by Romans 7, where Paul describes the ongoing conflict with indwelling sin in terms that would be unintelligible if Romans 6 promised complete experiential freedom. The imperatives in Romans 6 themselves (“do not let sin reign,” v. 12; “do not go on presenting your members,” v. 13) are only necessary if sin remains a *threat* to be resisted, not a defeated enemy that no longer tempts. The Reformed reading distinguishes carefully

between *dominion* (broken — sin is no longer lord) and *presence* (ongoing — sin remains as indwelling corruption to be mortified). This preserves both the confidence of v. 14 and the realism of Romans 7–8.

“Dead to Sin” as Moral Achievement (vv. 2, 11)

A common popular misreading — not tied to any single tradition — treats “dead to sin” as a spiritual discipline to be practiced: if you sufficiently focus on Christ, sufficiently meditate on His cross, you can achieve a state of emotional and volitional deadness toward sin. This reading transposes Paul’s indicative into an imperative — what Paul states as *fact* (“you died,” v. 2; “consider yourselves dead to sin,” v. 11) becomes a spiritual technique to be mastered. The text resists this. “Consider yourselves dead to sin” (v. 11, *logidzesthe*) is an accounting term — it means “reckon this as the true account,” not “work yourself up to feel dead.” The *reckoning* is grounded in the *event* (union with Christ in His death, v. 5), not the other way around. Expose this error directly in preaching — it produces either pride (in those who think they have achieved it) or despair (in those who try and fail to feel sufficiently dead to sin).

The Antinomian Question as Pastoral Context

Some expositors treat the opening questions (vv. 1, 15) as merely rhetorical devices — straw men Paul sets up and knocks down. This misses their pastoral weight. These are *real* questions that arise from the grace-alone gospel (see Jude 4; Galatians 5:13), and Paul’s engagement with them is substantive rather than dismissive. He does not say “that’s a foolish question” — he says “here is why the gospel itself, rightly understood, makes the question impossible.” The Reformed tradition’s commitment to the *third use of the law* is here grounded not in law at all, but in *union with Christ* — the deepest possible anti-antinomian foundation.

Key Canonical Support

- **Romans 5:12–21** — The Adam/Christ typology establishes the covenantal structure (in Adam: sin reigns to death; in Christ: grace reigns through righteousness to life) that makes Romans 6’s death/resurrection logic intelligible. Sin’s dominion in Romans 6 is the unpackaging of what “sin reigned in death” means at the individual level.
- **Galatians 2:20** — “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” — the most compressed statement of the Romans 6 identity in Paul’s letters. Confirms that “dying with Christ” is not metaphor but the believer’s actual legal and spiritual standing.
- **Colossians 3:1–10** — The direct applicational parallel: “Since you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above... For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God... Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.” The same

indicative-imperative structure as Romans 6, confirming this is Paul’s consistent gospel-logic for sanctification.

- **1 Corinthians 6:19–20** — “You are not your own; you were bought with a price” — the slavery-transfer image from Romans 6:17–22 reappears: the believer’s body belongs to God, not to sin. Grounds the “present your members” imperatives in the reality of redemption.
- **John 8:34–36** — Jesus’s own teaching on slavery to sin and the freedom the Son grants: “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Romans 6 is Paul’s full theological exposition of what Jesus announced in principle.

Aim: To show that the gospel of grace, rightly understood, is not a license for sin but the only true and sufficient power for freedom from sin’s dominion — and to call believers to live out of that identity rather than against it through sheer moral effort.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
6:1	Antinomian question #1: “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”	Arises directly from 5:20 — where sin increased, grace abounded all the more
6:2	Thunderous denial: <i>mē genoito</i> — “By no means!” Grounds refusal: “We who died to sin — how can we still live in it?”	“Died to sin” is the controlling indicative of the entire first movement
6:3–4	Argument from baptism: baptism into Christ = baptism into His death; we were buried with Him so that as He was raised, we too might walk in newness of life	Death → burial → resurrection pattern; newness of life is <i>already</i> the believer’s condition
6:5	If united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly also in His resurrection	“Likeness” (<i>homoioōma</i>) — our union with His death is real and effectual, not merely representative
6:6	“Our old self was crucified with Him” — so that the body of sin might be done	“Old self” = the Adamic self; “body of sin” = the sin-ruled body; “done away with” =

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
6:7	away with, so that we should no longer be slaves to sin “For the one who has died is freed from sin”	rendered inoperative (not annihilated) Legal principle: death cancels sin’s claim. Foundational axiom for the whole argument
6:8–10	Christ died to sin once for all and now lives to God; our death with Christ is completed and our resurrection life is secured	Christ’s death and resurrection are the pattern and ground of the believer’s own death/resurrection — not merely the model but the source
6:11	Therefore: “Reckon (<i>logidzesthe</i>) yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”	First imperative — not a spiritual technique but an accounting term: count this as the true ledger entry
6:12	“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts”	Second imperative — sin can still <i>try</i> to reign; the believer’s death does not eliminate the threat but it does break sin’s title to lordship
6:13	“Do not go on presenting your members as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness”	Third imperative — body-level, concrete: where you direct your physical members is the arena of sanctification
6:14	“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law but under grace”	Grounds the imperatives in another indicative: grace, not law, is what actually breaks sin’s dominion
6:15	Antinomian question #2: “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?”	Second movement opens with a variant of the first question — now focused on the law/grace distinction rather than the sin/grace one

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
6:16	“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves to the one you obey?”	Establishes the slavery principle: obedience reveals and reinforces lordship; no one is neutral
6:17–18	Thanksgiving: “You were slaves of sin but you became obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were committed; and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness”	Historical transfer: <i>were</i> slaves of sin → <i>now</i> slaves of righteousness; “from the heart” — not external compliance
6:19	Concession to human weakness in using the slavery analogy; imperative: “present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification”	Paul acknowledges the metaphor is imperfect (God’s “slavery” is freedom); the imperative mirrors v. 13
6:20–21	What fruit did you have in slavery to sin? Things you are now ashamed of — their end is death	The backward look: sin’s wage was always death, even when it wasn’t visible
6:22	“But now, having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your benefit resulting in sanctification, and the outcome is eternal life”	The forward look: slavery to God = sanctification = eternal life
6:23	“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”	The chapter’s climactic contrast and summary: sin pays wages (what is owed for work rendered); God gives a gift (unearned, freely given)

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	6:1–2	The Antinomian Question

Division	Verses	Label
2	6:3–10	Refused: “We Died to Sin” The Theological Ground: Union with Christ in Death and Resurrection
3	6:11–14	The First Set of Imperatives: Know, Reckon, Present — Under Grace Not Law
4	6:15	The Antinomian Question Repeated: “Shall We Sin Under Grace?”
5	6:16–19	The Slavery Argument: You Are Always a Slave to Something
6	6:20–23	The Two Outcomes Contrasted: Death as Wages / Eternal Life as Gift

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Union with Christ breaks sin’s dominion and transfers the believer into new life.

Primary Claim: Because the believer has died and risen with Christ, sin is no longer their master — and God is now calling them to live as what they already are: dead to sin, alive to God, slaves of righteousness rather than death.

Applications (Five)

1. Stop negotiating with sin as though it still owns you. (*Mind/Belief*) Romans 6 declares that sin’s title to lordship over you has been legally cancelled by your death with Christ. Every believer who lives in chronic, grinding guilt — treating sin as an undefeatable adversary, quietly assuming “this is just who I am” — is operating with a false ledger. Paul’s word is *logidzesthe*: reckon it. Count the true account. The fight against sin begins not with gritted-teeth willpower but with a brutally clear-eyed recognition of what the cross has actually done: the old self was crucified, and you are no longer sin’s property. This does not mean sin stops knocking — it means you now have the legal and spiritual standing to refuse it lordship.

2. Receive the gift rather than paying the wage. (*Affections/Worship*) Verse 23 is one of the most important economic statements in Scripture: sin *pays* wages — what you earn,

what you are owed, what justice demands. God *gives* a gift — unearned, freely extended in Christ. Many believers live in a spiritual economy of wages even after conversion, relating to God as though they must earn continued acceptance through performance. Romans 6 calls for a deep affective reorientation: you are not in a wage relationship with God. You are in a gift relationship. The response to a gift is not more work — it is wonder, gratitude, and the kind of love that wants to please the giver, not pay him back. Let this passage disturb any residual sense that you are earning your standing before God.

3. Present your physical body deliberately to righteousness rather than to sin.

(Will/Behavior) Paul is relentlessly concrete in vv. 12–13: “Do not let sin reign in your *mortal body*; do not go on presenting your *members* as instruments of unrighteousness.” The arena of sanctification is not primarily your inner spiritual life in the abstract — it is your hands, your eyes, your tongue, your physical location at particular moments. This passage calls for a specific, bodily-level audit: where are my members currently being presented? What do my hands reach for? Where do my eyes go? What does my tongue produce? Present those specific members, today, to God as instruments of righteousness. This is not legalism — it is the concrete outworking of an already-accomplished freedom.

4. Identify whose slave you actually are — because everyone is a slave to something.

(Mind/Belief) Paul’s blunt anthropology in vv. 16–22 refuses the modern fiction of autonomous self-determination: you are always obeying something, always presenting yourself to some master, always being formed by some pattern of obedience. The question is not whether you are a slave but *whose* slave. Many people live under the comfortable illusion that they are “free” from both sin and God — they are simply self-directed. Romans 6 diagnoses this illusion: that self-direction is itself a form of slavery to sin. The genuine freedom Paul describes is not freedom *from* all authority but freedom *into* a new authority — one whose service produces life rather than shame. Ask directly: what am I actually obeying? Whose pattern of life is actually forming me?

5. Let the shame of your former life under sin fuel present gratitude, not present paralysis. *(Affections/Worship)* Verse 21 asks a devastating question: “What fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?” The expected answer is: none. The fruit of sin under sin’s lordship was shameful, empty, and death-bound. But Paul does not use this backward glance to produce shame-driven paralysis — he uses it to sharpen the contrast with where the believer now stands: free, belonging to God, bearing fruit in sanctification, destined for eternal life. The appropriate response to your former life in sin is not a crushing shame that disqualifies you from present confidence, but a clear-eyed gratitude that *that* is no longer who you are or where you are headed. Your past is the evidence of what grace rescued you from — let it make you marveling, not miserable.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Romans 6 is the definitive Pauline exposition of the relationship between justification and sanctification — establishing that these two benefits of the

gospel are inseparable without being identical. The chapter teaches that union with Christ in His death and resurrection is not merely the ground of forgiveness but the ground of freedom from sin's lordship — which means holiness is not a second work added to salvation but an organic consequence of the same saving act. It teaches that every human being exists in a state of slavery — either to sin (producing death) or to God (producing sanctification and eternal life) — which is a complete refutation of autonomous self-determination as a coherent anthropology. And it establishes that the gospel itself, rightly understood, is the most powerful anti-antinomian force available — not because it threatens with law but because it reorients identity: the person who knows they have died and risen with Christ cannot treat sin as their home.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Romans 6 is a foundational text for the Reformed doctrine of definitive sanctification — the conviction that at the moment of conversion, a decisive break with sin's dominion occurs (not merely its guilt) by virtue of the believer's union with Christ. This stands in contrast to views that locate the believer's freedom from sin's power in a subsequent crisis experience or in the progressive accumulation of moral effort. The chapter also provides the clearest scriptural grounding for the Reformed understanding of the *third use of the law*: the imperatives of the Christian life are not issued as conditions for acceptance but as consequences of an already-accomplished union — law functions here as the *shape* of the new life, not the *engine* of it. Most significantly, Romans 6 grounds all of Christian ethics in *gospel* rather than *moralism*: the reason the believer fights sin is not that God demands it under threat but that sin is no longer their master, their home, or their destination. The gospel has changed what they are — the imperatives simply call them to live accordingly. This is the exact architecture the Reformed tradition has always insisted on: indicative precedes and grounds imperative; grace produces obedience rather than permitting its absence.

Main Takeaway

Sin is not your master anymore — Christ's death was your death, and His resurrection is your life. You don't fight sin to *become* free from it; you fight sin *because* you already are. Stop living as though you are still paying sin's wages. You are not. The gift has already been given.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Turning the indicatives into additional imperatives.** The most common error in preaching Romans 6 is to moralize Paul's foundational declarations ("you died to

sin,” “the old self was crucified”) into spiritual disciplines — as though “consider yourselves dead to sin” means “work hard at feeling dead to sin.” This is the opposite of Paul’s argument. *Logidzesthe* is an accounting term, not a meditation instruction. Paul grounds the reckoning in the event (union with Christ’s death), not the other way around. Preach the indicatives as *facts the believer is being called to believe*, not as spiritual states the believer must achieve. The imperatives follow from the indicatives — do not collapse them into each other.

- **Preaching Romans 6 as the answer to sin-guilt rather than sin-lordship.** The question Paul is answering is not “how do I feel forgiven?” but “how do I live free from sin’s dominion?” Romans 3–5 has already answered the forgiveness question. Romans 6 addresses sin’s *power*, not sin’s *penalty*. A sermon that uses this chapter primarily to assure believers of their forgiveness has misread the chapter’s agenda. The chapter is about sanctification, not justification — which is not to say they are unrelated, but the specific problem being addressed is sin’s ongoing reign, not sin’s guilt.
- **Skipping the antinomian context and losing the chapter’s logic.** The two antinomian questions (vv. 1, 15) are not incidental — they are the engine that drives the entire chapter. If you do not explain *why* Paul has to make this argument (i.e., because the grace-alone gospel genuinely raises it), the chapter’s sustained logic appears as a free-floating ethical lecture. Preaching this chapter requires establishing the real danger the questions represent: not hypothetical bad actors, but the logical implication of justification by grace alone that Paul himself must answer. This is also a significant pastoral opportunity — many believers have the same unspoken question.
- **Treating the slavery metaphor as uniformly negative.** Paul explicitly concedes that “slavery” is an imperfect human analogy (v. 19). The temptation in preaching is to make all slavery-language dark — but vv. 22–23 describe slavery to God as the condition of life, sanctification, and eternal life. The New Testament is not embarrassed by the image of the believer as God’s slave (*doulos*) — it celebrates it. The preacher should not sanitize this language but explain *why*, in this case, slavery to God is the believer’s greatest freedom: because the one to whom you are enslaved is good, righteous, and the source of life itself.
- **Missing the economic force of verse 23.** “Wages” (*opsōnia*) is a military pay term — the soldier’s due, what is owed for service rendered. Paul is making a precise economic and legal point: sin *pays* what justice demands for the service you rendered it. God does not pay — God *gives*, freely, in Christ. A sermon that flattens this into “sin leads to death and faith leads to life” loses the forensic and gracious precision Paul intends. The contrast is not merely between two outcomes but between two economies: debt versus gift, earning versus receiving. Many believers functionally live in a wage-economy with God even after conversion — this verse directly confronts that error.

- **Failing to connect the chapter to the believer's baptism.** Whatever one's precise theology of baptism (see Interpretive Evaluation above), Paul's argument in vv. 3–4 is explicitly baptismal — he says “do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” This is a reminder-argument: Paul is pointing the Roman believers back to the moment of their own baptism as a *visible enacted declaration* of the death-and-resurrection identity he is now expounding. Preaching that abstracts entirely from the ordinance loses the pastoral concreteness Paul intends. The believer's own baptism is a standing declaration of their identity — they can and should look back to it as Paul directs his readers to do here.