

## Notes on Romans 6.1-23

This is a synopsis of the relevant section of NT Wright, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections: New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume X (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2002).

### C. Baptism and Freedom 6.1-23

In Rm 5, Paul has been talking about two two kingdoms or two regimes or two kings: 'Sin reigned in death'; God's purpose is that 'grace might reign, through righteousness' (5.21). He has framed his discussion in terms that recall Israel's slavery in Egypt and subsequent liberation in the Exodus. Those who are in the Messiah are no longer slaves to sin. So where do we live on this map?

Paul begins Rm 6 with a question:

What will we say then? Should we stay in sin, so that grace might abound? (6.1).

The verb tells us he's asking a question about *status*, not about behavior, as the argument ensuing right away in 6.2-11 will show. Behavior is included, and even highlighted in the second paragraph (6.12-14), but it's not his primary focus here. The third paragraph (6.15-23) is clearly about behavior, but it introduces an important argument about two kinds of 'slavery'. *Status* is thus the issue throughout Rm 6, and this is evident in how its conclusion, 6.23, directly echoes 5.21:

6.23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift (*chárisma*) of God is the life of the [messianic] age, in the Messiah, Jesus our Lord.

5.21 As sin reigned in death, grace (*charis*) also might reign through righteousness leading to the life of the [messianic] age, through Jesus, the Messiah, our Lord.

So where do we fit in this map of two kingdoms? Do we find ourselves now in the Adam solidarity or in the Messiah solidarity? Are we still under the reign of sin and death, or the reign of grace and righteousness? And since God's grace reaches down to the kingdom of sin to rescue us there,

should we remain in that dark sphere so that grace may do its work? Should we live like those who belong to the kingdom of sin and death?

We have died and risen with the Messiah. We have been transferred from the old solidarity, and now belong to the new; we must behave accordingly. And the event in which this dying and rising was accomplished was our baptism.

The Exodus was a baptism; as Paul noted of the wilderness generation in 1Co 10.2, 'our fathers were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.' Now, baptism in the *Messiah* is a New Exodus. And the long argument that is launched by 5.12-21 includes, toward its climax, a passage (8.12-27) in which *we* are the *new* wilderness generation, on our way home to the promised land, accompanied by the presence of God through the Spirit.

Jesus was the leader of the movement that began with John's new-exodus baptism, and Christianity was a new-exodus movement from the beginning. Jesus spoke of his own coming ordeal as a 'baptism' (Mk 10.38; Lk 12.50), and he died at Passover, Israel's great Exodus feast. At the meal he shared with his followers on the night he was betrayed, he wove the New Exodus theme with his death inextricably: 'redemption' would occur, no longer now when Moses led Israel out of Egypt, but when Israel's Messiah would die and rise again, leading his people out of the bondage of sin and death. The movement that had begun with Moses was symbolically renewed with John at the Jordan, and came of age at with Jesus at Pascha.

Paul is all about this change of status: God 'has delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' (Col 1.13-14). This is exodus language. Rm 5.20-21, again: 'where sin abounded, grace superabounded, so that as sin became king unto death, even so would grace become king through righteousness, into

the life of the [messianic] age, through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord'. Rm 6 now argues that we have been liberated from the one kingdom and now belong to the second.

A main theme is the rescue of slaves: We are no longer enslaved to sin (6.6), death is no longer our master (6.9), sin no longer is king over us (6.12-14). The whole discussion of 6.16-23 hinges on the notion of slavery recently abandoned and freedom newly found.

The key event through which slavery is abandoned and freedom is gained consists of a personal crossing of the Red Sea, as we pass through water, re-enacting Jesus' death and resurrection, which he already interpreted in terms of Passover imagery. Exodus is not a distant echo in Paul's discussion of baptism in Rm 6. It is his main theme.

Baptism is what brings us into the historical narrative of the New Exodus. The master narrative was renewed when Israel's history was refocused on the Messiah and his death and resurrection. The life-stories of individual people, Jews and Greeks alike, needs then to be brought within this larger narrative by the appropriate symbolic means.

Why was Jesus' death so important? The Messiah represents his people, so that what is true of him becomes true of us. Paul used the word *χριστός* (*christos*) not only specifically of Jesus himself as Messiah, but of the whole company of the messianic people. We are 'in the Messiah'. But he's the point-man. 'God has accomplished what the Torah could not' (8.3), and he has done this 'through Jesus the Messiah', that is, by the agency of the human being Jesus of Nazareth, whom he has shown to be both Messiah and Lord by the resurrection (1.3-4).

We join the story of the New Exodus and become members of the New Exodus people when we are baptized *into* the Messiah (6.3). That which is true of the Messiah thus becomes true of us; that is, what happened to him now happens to us *in him* and *with him*, as in the string of words beginning with *syn-* ('co-') show, in 6.4-8: we are 'co-buried', 'co-planted', 'co-crucified' with him. Our status and condition is no longer that of death and sin; we are *in* the Messiah now (6.11), and since he died to sin and now lives to God, that is true of us now as well.

When God made his promises to Abraham, he spoke of slavery, exodus, and inheritance (Gn 15). Expounding those promises in Romans 4, Paul saw Abraham's inheritance of 'the world' (4.13) fulfilled in the creation of a single Jew-plus-Gentile family under Israel's one Creator-God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In Rm 6, Paul sets forth what is true of the baptized and believing Christian so as to make it clear that one's basic status is now with the Messiah rather than with Adam, in the kingdom of grace rather than the kingdom of sin and death.

But into this sequence, as already noted in 5.20, came the Torah (6.14-15). Paul does not mention the Torah in this chapter until 6.14, where he says, sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are 'not under Torah but under grace.' He will continue exploring the meaning of slavery and freedom in relation to the human condition in the rest of Rm 6 (6.15-23). But in the Adam/Messiah dialectic, it turns out that the Torah is on the side of Adam. So if baptism brings us out of the Adam-sphere— or rather, out of the regime of sin and death— it brings us out of the Torah-sphere as well. Once this is clear, then in the next chapter (Rm 7), he will turn his full attention to the question: What then do we say about the Torah? First, though, the question of *status*.

Chapter 6 falls naturally into three sections: The first (6.1-11) and third (6.15-23) begin with similar questions; the middle one (6.12-14) is a bridge that applies, and rams home, the first, while preparing for the third.

### 1. Dying and Rising with the Messiah 6.1-11

**6.1-2.** As often with Paul, a tight-packed introduction contains all that is to come. A rhetorical question whose form familiar already (e.g., 3.1; 4.1), enquires what conclusion might be drawn from what has just been said, and suggests a possibility that is then firmly rebutted.

As already mentioned, the question is primarily about *status*, with behavior included but not the sole or main topic; translating 6.1b as, 'shall we go on sinning' jumps the gun by looking ahead to 6.12-14 (which is about behavior), rather than to the answer given immediately in 6.3-11. The Greek speaks of *remaining in a place*, in a *status*. Of course, to 'remain in sin,' can mean to 'go on sinning', but Paul is saying something like 'should we stay in France?' Naturally, if we do, we will continue to speak French. But recall that he has just been describing 'sin' as a dark ruling power, not primarily a style of conduct. His whole argument is that we have been moved out of one regime into another; and *therefore* (6.12) it is no longer appropriate to go on speaking the old language. If we do 'remain in sin', we will still be in the kingdom of sin and death. That is indeed where God's grace has reached, in the Messiah. But— 'we are the kind of people whose main characteristic is precisely that we have died to sin, so how can we live there any longer?' (6.2).

**6.3.** 'Don't you know that all of us who have been baptized into Messiah Jesus were baptized into his death?' The key word of course is 'into': baptism is *into* the Messiah, and hence *into* his death. Like David, the Messiah is one 'in whom' those who belonged to him are summed up: 'We have ten shares in the king,' said the men of Israel, 'and in David also we have more than you' (2Sm 19.43). Rebellion broke this solidarity: 'We have no portion in David, no share in the son of Jesse!' (2Sm 20.1; 1K 12.16). The opposite movement is coming 'into' the king, the Messiah; that is

effected in baptism. Since the Messiah is Jesus, the crucified and risen one, then coming into the Messiah means dying and rising with him.<sup>1</sup>

**6.4-5.** What then does it mean to be 'baptized into the Messiah's death' (6.3)? Baptism involves being 'co-buried' with the Messiah—the first of a string of 'co-' (*syn-*) compounds that occur in 6.4-8: what happened to the Messiah has happened to those who are 'in him' by baptism. His resurrection means that those who are 'in him' now stand, and must walk, on resurrection ground. We no longer belong in the world of death; we don't wait till the final bodily resurrection (8.11) before beginning to 'walk in newness of life'; our 'walk' is based on a present status, not merely anticipating the future reality. It's not just that we have died to sin and must not live in it anymore, but that 'he lives to God' and thus we too are already 'alive to God in Messiah Jesus' (6.11). We must now live accordingly. Paul says, 'those whom [God] justified, he also glorified' (8.30). We must allow the past tense its full weight.

Jesus was raised 'through the glory of the Father.' In 4.24, as in 8.11, it is the Father who raised Jesus. But why does Paul speak of God's 'glory' as the agent in this event?

Paul explains this by saying 'if we have been co-planted in the likeness of his death, we shall certainly be (in that) of his resurrection' (6.5). The key word is 'likeness' (*homoiōma*). Adam lost his 'likeness' to God, that is, his 'glory'. So God's gift to the justified consists not just in their resurrection (cf. 8.11,17, and 29-30) but in their 'glorification'— something he said at the very beginning of this whole major section (5.2), and will repeat at the end (8.30). (This is why we give the newly baptized a garment of white: it signifies the garment of glory that has been returned to us.) But remember that Paul is talking about our behavior as a function of our new *status*; he's not just saying what's true of our future resurrection. 'We shall be [in the likeness] of his resurrection' is a *logical* future: 'if it's true that we have been co-planted... then that will now be true as well'.

'Walk' is a rabbinic metaphor for human conduct; 'walking in newness of life' is the conduct that follows from the change of status, but Paul is still emphasizing the status. This new way of 'walking' anticipates the resurrection in the present, by the practice of holiness of which Paul speaks both here and in 8.12-17 (see also Col 3.14, where exactly the same connections are made).

**6.6-7.** Paul explains further, and arrives at the central statement of the paragraph. 'Our old person was co-crucified' (another *syn-* compound, cp Ga 2.19). The 'old self' (*ho palaios hēmōn anthrōpos*) denotes the entire self 'in Adam.'

Again as in 5.12-21: in baptism the old Adamic solidarity is decisively broken. The 'old self', whole and entire, is put to

death once and for all. This does not mean that the Christian cannot sin; but in baptism the whole person leaves the Adam-world for good, leaves it by death, a final one-way journey. We have to feel Paul's sharp point before we allow caveats and nuances to dull it.

The purpose of this death is 'so that the body of sin might be abolished', 'so that we should no longer be under the lordship of sin.' Paul is still thinking of the two realms of sin and grace (5.21), underscoring which of the two countries we now live in and (more to the point) which of the two overlords now rightfully claim our allegiance.

'...Co-crucified so that the body of sin might be abolished, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin' (6.6): By 'body' Paul often means not 'physical body,' but something more like 'person,' including the physical aspect but also hinting at the 'personality' that goes with it. But logically, if the abolition of 'the body of sin' is the *result* of co-crucifying 'the old self', it can't quite be the *same* as it. So 'body' means something more like 'solidarity' here: 'the old self was crucified with the Messiah, so that the solidarity of sin might be broken, and we should no longer be enslaved to sin.'

When the Jesus-story and the Jesus-reality entwine with ours, the communal solidarity of sin, the sense and fact of helplessness that we have as we go along with sin, is broken, for we are come under a different lordship.

We have been justified— cleared or acquitted (*dedikaiōtai*)— of sin (6.7). Our freedom from sin comes through God's judicial decision. This judicial decision is pronounced and its effect embodied in baptism.

**6.8.** Paul reached the heart of his analysis in 6.6, added a further comment in 6.7, and now begins building toward his conclusion in 6.11. As usual, a terse preliminary statement (6.8) is filled out (6.9-10), before the conclusion is drawn (6.11). 'If we co-died with the Messiah, we believe that we shall also co-live with him' (6.8). This 'shall,' like the future in 6.5, is best taken as a logical future after 'if.' Obviously, it has a future reference as well, but it will not support 6.11 unless it refers to the present.

**6.9-10.** 'We know that the Messiah, raised from the dead, will never die again' (6.9a). Jesus' resurrection was not just a resuscitation, like Lazarus's (Jn 11.1-44). Jesus' body was the beginning and sign of the renewal of all creation (see particularly 8.11; 1Co 15.50-57; Ph 3.20-21). The transforming of our bodies at the resurrection is modeled on the transformation of Jesus' body at his. In Jesus, the new creation has already happened in this world, and it will come in the end upon all. Paul once again insists that what happened to the Messiah happened also to those 'in him.' He cannot emphasize strongly enough that the rule of sin and death has been decisively broken, and that we are no longer subject to it. 'Death is no longer lord (*ou kyrieusei*) over him' (6.9b); Paul

<sup>1</sup> Cf Ga 2.15-21.

is still working out the implications of 5.21, and urging his audience to do so too.

**6.10** The Messiah came under the rule, the sovereignty, of sin and death; not that he himself sinned, but that he came, as Paul says in 8.3, 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'. Adam lost his 'likeness' to God; now in the 'likeness' of Adam's flesh, the Messiah dies to sin so that we may die in the 'likeness' of his death (6.5). 'To die to sin' meant to die under its weight, and in doing so to come out from its domain. And this happened 'once and for all' (*ephapax*). Jesus the Messiah died once and once only, and was thereafter finished with death.

'But now he lives, he lives to God' (6.10b); in other words, he is not subject to death, but lives in God's domain, in the realm of grace and righteousness.

**6.11** Paul has now told *Jesus'* story in terms of the two spheres of existence in 5.12-21 so that, through the identity of the Messiah and his people that he has established, he might show the true status of those 'in the Messiah.' Now he urges his audience to 'reckon', a bookkeeping metaphor: 'Do the math', he says— the Messiah has died, once for all, and been raised; you've been co-crucified with him, you've co-died with him, been co-buried and co-raised; therefore, *you're* dead to sin and alive to God too (6.11).

This 'reckoning' takes place in the our own thought-processes. It's not, as in some schemes of piety, that the 'reckoning' *achieves* the result of dying to sin and coming alive to God, any more than balancing your checkbook creates money in the bank; but it opens the eyes of mind and heart to *recognize* what is true. Think it through! Trust what has in fact happened to you!

On the map of 5.21, the Christian belongs in the kingdom of grace and righteousness, not in the old kingdom of sin and death.

Maybe we're tempted to think that sin and death are still just as powerful in us as they ever were before we came to faith. Paul would say that we haven't yet considered the seriousness of the Messiah's resurrection and of our baptism. On the other hand, if we were to say that we've been baptized, and evil has no further attraction for us, Paul would say we haven't yet considered the seriousness of sin and death. But facing these enemies, we stand on resurrection ground. This is ultimately about the Lord, the Messiah; but because of baptism it is about us as well: 'Reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in the Messiah, Jesus'— this answers the question we started with: 'Shall we stay in sin, so that grace may abound?— Not at all!' (6.1).

## 2. The End of Sin's Regime 6.12-14

Rm 6.12-14 forms a bridge from the first half of the chapter to the other; imperatives bring the indicatives of 6.2-11 into practical reality, and set the terms for the discussion of slavery and freedom that is to come. Like the rest of the chap-

ter, we're still exploring the world of 5.12-21, and of 5.20-21 in particular.

**6.12.** The sphere over which sin, no longer enthroned, can still exercise power is the 'mortal body', since it 'reigns through death' (6.21). The Christian still possesses a body— that is, a whole person— which will die and, indeed must even be 'put to death' (8.13) insofar as it has desires that must not be obeyed. Paul acknowledges continuing ambiguity and struggle in our lives, but in no way does he take back his trenchant and definite statements in 6.2-11.

'Therefore, don't let sin reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its desires' (6.12). 'Obeying' belongs with the idea of being 'ruled', and looks back to 5.21, where 'sin ruled', and ahead to the point he's going to make about that in 6.16-17; 'bodily desires' (*epithymiai*) looks even further ahead to 7.7-8.

**6.13.** 'Present' can have sacrificial overtones, as in the similar context in 12.1. Don't present your *members* to sin, but present your *selves* to God: Note how Paul is working within the logic of 6.1-11: it's technically impossible for us to present our *selves* to sin, since we have died and been raised with the Messiah and now we 'live to God' (6.11). We can still present our *members*— the varied parts of personality, mind, or body— to sin, but that would be out of tune with what we are, who have been brought from death to life.

Paul's image here is a military one: 'Don't present your members to sin as weapons (*hopla*) of injustice' (6.13). We could talk for a long time about the implications of 'weapons of injustice' in any social, political, or economic context, for instance, that of Rome, or America. Early Christians *never* participated in Rome's wars, for example.

The clear appeal is reinforced with a promise in the next verse.

**6.14.** Sin, he says, will not be lord (*kyrieusei*) over you. You have transferred your abode, your status. The word *kyrieusei* can mean a political lord, like Caesar, but it can also mean a master of slaves. So Paul drops the military image as soon as he uses it and begins getting ready instead for a discussion of slavery that he will begin in 6.16. There, instead of sin/death and grace/righteousness, as in 5.21, he will speak rather of sin/unrighteousness and God/righteousness.

But for the moment, he explains 'sin will not be lord over you' (6.14) by saying, 'for you are not under Torah but under grace.'

This mention of Torah might at first seem a little strange, but Paul still has 5.20-21 in mind, which has been the basis for Rm 6 so far, so he is turning the argument subtly toward the role of the Torah, which will be his major theme in the next chapter: 'The Torah came in alongside, so that trespass might abound, but where sin abounded, grace superabounded' (5.20).

God's righteousness is revealed 'apart from the Torah' (3.21); justification is by faith 'apart from Torah works' (3.28); it was 'not through the Torah' that God made the promise to Abraham and his seed, that he would inherit the world (4.13). Rather, 'the Torah works wrath' (4.15). The Torah, in fact, stands on the Adam-side of the fence. Those who belong to the Messiah, who have died and been raised in baptism, do not live in the Adam solidarity, *and hence do not live under the Torah*. (Cp Ga 2.19: 'through the Torah I died to the Torah, that I might live to God.') If we did live under the Torah, sin would indeed have dominion over us. That will take all of Rm 7 to explain.

In this transitional section, Paul has discussed our need to bring our behavior in line with our new status, but he is still mainly thinking about status, not behavior.

### 3. Slavery and Freedom 6.15-23

**6.15.** If it's true that 'as sin reigned in death, grace would also reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (5.21), and if 'the Torah came in alongside to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more' (5.20), and if we are no longer under Torah— are we now 'sinners'? This question, like that of 6.1, is not confined to committing actual acts of sin. For a Jew to come out from the sphere of Torah meant to join the 'sinners' (cf Ga 2.15-17). So the translation of 6.15 would not be, 'Shall we then sin', but 'Shall we then be "sinners"', that is, like the Gentiles?

This time the emphasis is on behavior and less on status, though the latter is still important— it's about the appropriateness of certain kinds of behavior for those who have the God/grace/righteousness status.

**6.16.** 'You are slaves of the one to whom you give yourselves in obedience' (6.16a)— this introduces a discussion of slavery: You can be 'slaves either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness' (6.16b). One can be a slave either of sin, or of obedience. The 'obedience' to which one might 'give yourself in obedience' is, of course, the Messiah's own obedience (5.19). And if 'obedience leads to righteousness' (6.16b), and 'grace would rule through righteousness' (5.21), then 'obedience' is another metaphor for the grace/righteousness sphere.

The two slave-masters produce totally different sorts of life in those who obey them. Or rather, one produces death; the other, righteousness and peace with God (5.1).

**6.17-19a.** We were in the Adam solidarity; now we're in the Messiah solidarity. We were slaves of sin, but now we've become obedient to a certain kind of teaching; we were set free from sin, and are now slaves of righteousness.

'You have become obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to which you were committed'. The phraseology points more to a teaching such as we find in baptismal con-

texts in other letters (e.g., Col 3.1,17), than to the person of Jesus himself— the basic Christian 'proclamation' (or, as theologians say, the 'kerygma'); or the baptismal catechesis. Delivered to imprint of the teaching, the baptismal candidate acknowledges the Messiah's lordship, and is made to die and rise with him.

Having been slaves of sin, we have now become obedient to this new pattern 'from the heart'; cp e.g., 2.29; 5.5; 10.8-9. The heart is transformed by the imprint (*typos*) of the teachings— which is, by the Spirit— from the dark condition described in 1.21 to the renewal and illumination described in 2Co 3.2-3; 4.5.

It's a paradox, that we were liberated from sin, and enslaved to righteousness (6.18). But this is not to 'virtue' or to 'moral goodness'. Rather (as Paul will eventually make clear), we have become slaves to God; to his righteousness, revealed in the Messiah's death and resurrection (3.21-6), through which grace has operated (5.21).

It would be odd, in view of the whole chapter, to think of our being enslaved to a quality of our own ('virtue'), rather than in some sense to God.

**6.19b.** By way of explaining 6.17-18 (*gar*, 'for, because'), Paul restates the command of 6.13. He is explaining the balance of the two 'slaveries,' and further unpacking the paradox of being 'liberated' from one slavery into a different one: *just* as you once presented your members as slaves to uncleanness, *so now* present your members as slaves to righteousness. 'Uncleanness', we remember, was part of the problem in 1.24.

The energy and initiative we once put into uncleanness and lawlessness must now be put into the 'slavery' to righteousness, which leads to 'sanctification.'

'Sanctification' (*hagiasmos*) is a ritual, liturgical, temple-related term. It is not so much about ethical qualities as about the ability to approach the presence of God. This has behavioral consequences, of course, but the main emphasis takes us back to 6.11: 'alive to God', and farther back, we have 'access to this grace in which we stand' (5.2), that is, into God's presence. 'Slaves to righteousness, unto sanctification' means we owe allegiance to the God whose covenant faithfulness rescued us in the Messiah; the result of this allegiance is that we become fit, through the obedience that wells up from the heart, to enter the presence of this same God. Paul is here unpacking further what was said so densely in 5.1-2.

**6.20-22.** By way of yet further explanation, Paul introduces the metaphor of fruitfulness that brings the chapter back to its origin in 5.21 (grace reigning through righteousness to eternal life) and at the same time points toward the new topic of Rm 7 (the 'fruit' borne by the two ways of life; cf. 7.4-5). The previous slavery bore a particular fruit— shame

leading to death (6.21; cf 5.5). Slavery 'to God,' produces the fruit of sanctification, which leads to the life of the age to come.

Hope does not make us ashamed (5.5a), because it truly leads to life; sin produces shame, because it leads to death. 'Shame' is not simply a feeling of humiliation, but actual defeat, disintegration, and death (cf. 1.32). Slavery to God brings us into 'sanctification,' and qualifies us for access to God's presence, and thus for the life of the age to come.

**6.23.** In the end, we are back to 5.21, having thoroughly explored the territory it opened up:

...so that, as sin was king in death, grace might also be king through righteousness leading to the life of the [messianic] age, through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord.

The two paths— or rather, the two statuses— of humankind are characterized by sin and death on the one hand, and by God and life on the other. But, as in 5.15-17, they are not balanced exactly. Sin pays wages in proportion to what has been done. 'The gift of God is the life of the [messianic] age, in the Messiah, Jesus our Lord.'

Rm 6 has explored the meaning of 5.12-21 in terms of the human renewal that results from the 'New Exodus' of baptism. Paul is not offering ethical or moral instruction, but talking about the *change of status* that we enjoy through baptism.

We are no longer slaves, but free.

*When we look at the Adam/Messiah contrast we should be in no doubt that we belong on the 'Messiah' side of it. This must, of course, be put into effect by the moral effort of not letting sin reign in the 'mortal body'; but we are not some kind of hybrid, half in Adam and half in the Messiah. That which has happened, that into which we have been baptized, has happened once and for all.*

But if we add the Torah to this Adam/Messiah contrast, and what do we get? Rm 5.20a indicated that it only brings about an increase in 'trespass' (7.7-25). The gift of superabundant grace does what the Torah could not do (8.1,11). So the New Exodus results in covenant renewal, the prophetically promised replacement of the 'old letter' by the 'new Spirit' (6.4; 7.6). This is nothing less than the resurrection and renewal of all creation (8.12-30). At the heart of which stands the sending, the death and the resurrection of the Messiah, God's son, who took upon himself the weight of Adamic sin and Torah trespass, and now welcomes into new life those who through suffering and prayer are led by the Spirit toward the inheritance promised long ago to Abraham. This is where we see at last what 'the obedience of the Messiah,' the theological driving heart of 5.12-21, really meant.

## Reflections

1. Being a Christian means living within a particular story. It's a subversive story focused on Israel and the Messiah, and reaches its climax in the Messiah's death and resurrection. No Christian can ever tell this story too often, or know it too well, because it is the story that has shaped us in baptism and that must continue to shape our thought, life, and prayer thereafter.

God's good news is the story of Israel's Exodus from slavery into freedom. This is the narrative within which Jesus deliberately framed his own final moments with his followers, the story on which he himself drew to give meaning to his death.

2. The exodus story offers itself as the true story of the human race. It is not just one 'little story' among others on the cultural smörgåsbord, about a certain kind of 'religious experience'. The Christian gospel is, at this level, telling the story that all humans know in their bones we want to hear.

3. Grace reaches where we are, and accepts us as we are, because anything less would result in nobody's being saved. But grace is always *transformative*. God accepts us where we are, but does not leave us where we are. There is such a thing as continuing to let sin reign in one's mortal body, and we need serious moral effort to combat its self-centered desires.

4. The pattern, the motive, and the moral power to live in true freedom (in other words, in 'slavery' to God) come from weaving our life story together with the death and resurrection of the Messiah in baptism. We are called to allow the dying and rising of the Messiah in which we have shared to have its force and way in our own lives. Jesus and his dying and rising are more than just a great example for us— who seriously thinks we can live up to *Jesus* on our own strength? But what happened to him becomes part of our own story through baptism. We can indeed make our own the victory of grace, and present our members, and our whole selves, as instruments or even weapons, not of injustice, but of God's own regime.