Dr. Dave Mathewson, Hermeneutics. Lecture 29
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Interpreting Romans 6:1-1

What I want to do in the last two sessions is to work through two New Testament texts to illustrate how the different methods can be applied to understanding the biblical text. I want you to follow along and attempt to identify, I’m not going to explicitly say, “Now I’m doing historical method, now I’m doing lexical method or word analysis or word study or now I’m looking at grammar.” I want you to be able to identify what method is being applied, so I’m not going to explicitly indicate what I’m doing, but as I work through the texts, applying the different methods, I want you to be able to identify and be aware of what I am doing.

The Text of Romans 6:1-11

The first text that I want to look at comes from one of Paul’s letters in the book of Romans--Romans chapter six, one through eleven. We’ve already talked about it in relationship to a couple of things related to the literary context, but I want to look at it more detail. As a text I think it is illustrative of the way interpretive approaches can be applied. So, let’s read Romans chapter six, one through eleven, since it’s short it’ll only take a minute, but I’d like to read it to familiarize you with the content and what’s going on. “What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die
again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.” Verse eleven, “In this same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

**Historical Setting**

Well, first of all, it’s important to ask, “Why was Romans written?” What are the historical circumstances surrounding the writing of the book of Romans? How does that help us to understand the book and the text? First of all, when you look at the text of Romans itself, it seems to contain rather clear hints by way of references to certain geographical locations as to why Paul wrote it, and the circumstances that surrounded his writing it. For example, in chapter fifteen and verse twenty-five, and actually that reading twenty-three and a few of these verses, “But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make contributions for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles had shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.”

So Paul clearly indicates a number of things in these references in chapter fifteen, these geographical references. In one other section of the latter chapters of Romans it seems to be clear that Paul is probably writing from the city of Corinth. But in the sections we’ve read, we can construct a scenario. Number one, Paul clearly is on his way to Jerusalem. Paul is en route to Jerusalem with an offering he has gathered from the churches of Achaia, that he has gathered and now he is taking it to Jerusalem.

But also, these texts clearly indicate Paul’s intention to eventually make his way back west to visit Rome and even beyond that, to continue on to Spain. So Paul clearly indicates that the Roman church is an important one and that he wants to visit, although
apparently he hasn’t yet, but that now he’s taking up an offering after his ministry in the region of Achaia. Now he is going back to Jerusalem with an offering, but with the intention that he will make his way back through Rome, and that even beyond that to go further west, beyond Rome go even further west into Spain.

Another important feature of that comes from extra-biblical information is that in A.D. 49, the emperor Claudius, the Roman emperor during this time, in A.D. 49, expelled the Jews from the city of Rome. There’s mention of that in one in particular historical writing that refers to the emperor Claudius expelling all the Jews from Rome, and it was not until a few years later, A.D. 54, when Claudius died that the Jews were permitted to return. It wasn’t long after that, in about 55 to 57 A.D., that the book of Romans was written.

So based on all of this evidence, is it possible then to suggest why Paul might have written this letter? Actually, most interpreters think that the book of Romans has more than one purpose, and at least the following three purposes seem to emerge from the text and what we know about the historical background. Number one, is Paul seems to be paving his way to visit Rome, and ultimately to go further west to visit Spain. That is, he appears to want to secure Rome as a basis and as support for his further missionary activity. So he writes to secure Rome as a base for what he wants to do in the future; his ongoing missionary activity of preaching the gospel. Second, because of this, perhaps Paul seems then to attempt to explain in some detail the gospel that he is going to preach. Perhaps he needs to explain it because of some misunderstanding that has taken place and some of the opposition from his opponents, especially Jews, and now Paul in securing Rome as a base, now explains in some detail the gospel that he preaches. So we find in Romans one of the clearest and most detailed expositions of Paul’s teaching. And then third is Paul writes to unite Jew and Gentile, perhaps related to this expulsion of Jews under Claudius and now they return and find the church is predominantly Gentile. The struggle that might have ensued in integrating them back in might have caused a breach in the relationship between Jew and Gentile, and so Paul writes also to unite the Jewish and Gentile Christians. So, at least those three purposes seem to lie behind the book of
Romans.

**Contextual Analysis**

But let’s look at chapter six as part of our argument, this is a detailed explanation of Paul’s gospel. In Romans chapter six, this first thing we want to do is put it within its context. Romans chapter six, obviously, follows from chapter five. What is significant about that is chapter five verses one through eleven in particular, begin a section where Paul begins to examine the results of justification that he has argued for in the first four chapters. In the first four chapters he’s argued for justification solely by faith, that is now available to Jews and Gentiles, now they can both be justified and declared God’s people. They are declared righteous based on faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works of the Law, but now the results of that justification by faith are seen particularly in chapters five through eight. That is the hope that they now have through justification by faith means that first of all, this hope is based on and this justification results in freedom from God’s wrath, chapter five verses one through eleven. It also means freedom from the power of sin in chapter six, it means freedom from the law in chapter seven. Ultimately, their hope means freedom from death, and their justification results in freedom from death. So these chapters demonstrate that the hope that comes from justification is based in the freedom that God’s people have from God’s wrath, from judgment, from sin, from the power of sin reigning over them from death and the law as well.

But six, one through eleven, more specifically seems to flow naturally from chapter five, the second half of chapter five and verses twelve through twenty-one, in two ways. Number one, we’ve already seen that in chapter six, one through eleven, the text we just read a moment ago, is a response to a possible objection from something that was said in chapter five in verse twenty where Paul said, “the law was added so that trespasses might increase, but where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” And so, chapter six verse one begins with a question, “if grace abounds where sin increases, should we go on sinning more, so that grace can increase all the more?” The more I sin, the more grace is going to increase and abound. So, on the one hand, Paul is responding to a possible objection based on something he said back in chapter five, by raising a
question.

**Diatribe Form of Argument**

Now this is what is known as, this occurs in the form of what is known as a diatribe that is by introducing an imaginary opponent Paul enters into kind of a dialogue with this imaginary opponent who raises questions and possible objections.

There’s been a lot of interesting study as to what is entailed in this. Many have traced this back to a typical Greco-Roman technique of teaching in the classroom, so it was just a way of instruction, it was just a way of the teacher raising possible objections to his argument to further his argument and his teaching. It may not necessarily represent what anyone has actually said it may be the author’s, just the author’s own way rhetorically of advancing his argument in his teaching. So Paul seems to be relying on a fairly common form that scholars have identified as a diatribe, that may have had its roots in philosophical schools and teaching. So clearly Paul is anticipating in diatribal fashion, possible objections and responding to them as a way of advancing his argument. It’s difficult to tell, though, whether these objections, these questions he raises are Paul’s own way of simply advancing his argument and anticipating possible objections, or whether these questions raise real objections that his opponents or Judiazers, for example, themselves have raised. That’s a possibility. But what I want to simply focus on is how his question functions to move Paul’s argument forward and relate chapter six to chapter five.

So the first way that chapter six relates to chapter five is this question-answer format, the question raises a hypothetical or possible objection to something Paul has just said. The second way that this relates is, I think in chapter six, and we’ll see this in just a moment, the Adam-Christ contrast which we found in chapter five still continues into chapter six, that is, in chapter five we find this contrast between Adam and what he did and accomplished in plunging humanity into sin and death, and now, also into chapter six what Jesus Christ does through his death on the cross, through his act of obedience. In contrast to Adam’s act of disobedience to sin, now in his act of obedience, Christ now brings righteousness in life. So Adam and Christ are portrayed as two heads of humanity;
Adam of the old humanity, dominated and ruled by sin and death, and now Jesus Christ forming and establishing the new humanity characterized and ruled by life and righteousness. So there are two humanities, two spheres with their respective heads, Adam and Jesus Christ. This will continue to influence what we find in Romans chapter six.

Another way of connecting the two is, chapter six might also function to demonstrate that in contrast to what could be possibly induced from five-twenty, where sin increases, grace increases all the more, should we continue to sin? Is now Paul says, no, justification, rather than freeing one to do what one wants, justification has inescapable moral consequences. Chapter six is a clear reminder that no one can go on sinning, where sin increases, grace increases all the more is not a justification for continuing to sin. So chapter six will show that justification and the hope of God’s people in chapter five has moral consequences.

Detailed Analysis

So, to look more closely at chapter six one though eleven itself, we’ve already seen that it develops according to a question-answer format. Chapter six verse one raises a question that we saw is based on a potential understanding of chapter five verse twenty as a possible objection to Paul’s argument, followed by the answer to that question. So the whole texts operates by this question-answer format, the question in verse one, and then two through eleven constitutes the answer to that question. Again the question being, “therefore, should we go on sinning so that grace might increase?” Actually, the question is in two forms. “What shall we say then?” is the first question. Then more specifically, the question is: “should we go on sinning so that grace might increase?” That’s the rest of the text of Romans six, one through eleven, specifically two through eleven is a response to that question.

Now, the response itself is in at least two parts. Number one is the initial answer to that question in verse two, is that well known, “by no means.” It’s interesting to explore a number of translations to see how they handle this. “By no means” or “May it never be” or the old King James Version I think said “God-forbid.” This is, the first response in
simply kind of an all out, just interjection; “By no means,” no way! This should never happen; God-forbid that this would be the case. That is where grace increases, should we sin more so that grace can increase? God-forbid that that would ever be the case; that can never happen. This is kind of the initial outburst to the question, “By no means.” But Paul goes on, the second part of the response to the question is, Paul goes on in more detail to describe why is this absurd and why should this not be the case. And I think the key is, the main part of the response is found in the second half of verse two, “We have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?” That is the second part of the question, again the first is the outburst, “God-forbid,” and now to give it more content, the reason that God forbid is that we’ve died to sin, so how can we live in it any longer? There’s something inconsistent about God’s people who have died to sin living in sin. There is a contradiction there, an inconsistency.

But to further look at six, one through eleven, this part of the response, “we’ve died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?” that now will get further explained and unpacked in the rest of verses three through eleven. In other words, what does it mean that we have died to sin? How have we died to sin in a way that makes it absurd that we would continue to live in it? So the rest of this, starting with verse three, Paul is going to explain how is it we’ve died to sin. Obviously, he’s addressing his readers that are still alive. Why would he write this letter to people that are actually dead? So now he’s going to explain in what way have the readers died to sin that makes it so absurd and contradictory that they would continue to live in it.

And then verse eleven will give the summary exhortation that refutes the objection in verse one. “Should we then continue to live in sin so that grace might increase?” Verse eleven overturns that in a summary command: “No, instead consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God.”

As we said, that fact that we have died to sin in verse two, then calls for further explanation in the rest of the text. But I want to start by examining what does Paul mean by saying we’ve died? Should we understand this in perhaps lighter terms, as far as it simply means we don’t respond to sin, or that sin has no affect on us, or something like
that. I think Paul uses death in the strongest sense of the term, and I think he uses it in the sense of physical death. That is, as we saw in chapter five verses twelve through twenty-one as this contrast between Adam and Christ that I said still continues to influence this section of chapter six, one through eleven. In five, twelve through twenty-one we saw that Paul operates with two ages or two eras or two humanities that have their respective heads. The old age, the old era, the old humanity with Adam as head, dominated by sin and death, and then a new age, a new era, a new humanity that has been created and inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ. I think Paul’s operating with the understanding, the only way to be released from or to transition from the old era to the new era is through death. The only way to escape the power and influence of the old era and old age under Adam, is to physically die. So, one must die to be released from the power and authority of the old age under Adam.

The other thing to notice here is how Paul uses the word sin. He uses the word sin as a singular, notice he does not say, “You have died to your sins,” but he says, “You’ve died to sin,” singular. That is because I think Paul conceives of sin as a power which rules over us and controls us as part of that old era and old age under Adam. So the only way that I can be released from, or escape the power of the present evil age, the present era, or under Adam, dominated by sin, the only way I can escape the control and domination and rule of sin is to physically die.

But that still raises the question, “In what way can we say we’ve physically died?” In what way can we say we’ve experienced the death that has ended the reign and rule of the present age under Adam and the rule and domination of sin over us. Verses three and four explain that: “We have in fact died,” that is, we have in fact experienced that death that releases us from the power of the present age. We have in fact actually died and experienced that physical death, that era-ending death by being joined to someone who has in fact actually died and that is the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ’s death has brought to an end the old era. And by virtue of being joined to Jesus Christ we also share in that death that brings to an end the old era and brings to an end the rule and reign of death and releases us from that power.
But you’ll notice that for Paul, he moves beyond only discussing Jesus’ death, which brings to an end the old era, but he discusses the fact that Jesus’ resurrection, is necessary in inaugurate a new era. So, we’ve also, according to Paul, we’ve also then been joined to Christ, not just in his death, to his death, but we’ve also been joined to his resurrection. We’ve been united to Christ in his death so that we’ve been released from the power of sin and the old era under the headship of Adam, but through being joined to Christ’s resurrection, we also now participate in a new era, the new age that Christ has inaugurated that’s characterized by life and righteousness, as we saw in five, twelve through twenty-one.

The further link in this is to ask, “How is it that we have been joined to Christ?” Paul links that with baptism. He says it is through baptism. Baptism is the means that joins us to Christ, that links us to Christ in his death, burial, and his resurrection. Therefore, it’s important to understand what Paul means by baptism here. Many have interpreted this to mean spiritual baptism, that is Paul is referring to being baptized or immersed in the Holy Spirit, such as one finds in a text like 1 Corinthians 12. And especially, many students of the New Testament have been attracted to this explanation of baptism here in Romans 6. In order to avoid contradicting what Paul has said elsewhere, justified solely by faith, and not by works of the law, he’s argued for that in chapters one through four. So now it would not be inconsistent for Paul to usher in another work, baptism, as the means by which we are saved and united to Christ. So, some have therefore concluded that this must refer to spiritual baptism. However, I think there’s still much to be said for identifying this and physical water baptism, as an early rite of the early church, that in a sense initiated them into the church and into the people of God. For example, usually when baptism is used metaphorically, it often has a qualifier such as a baptism in the spirit, or something like that. So that probably baptism here is utilized in its physical sense as water baptism, as again the rite of the early church. But why does Paul emphasize baptism? Probably, the way to understand this is, Paul would have conceived of the salvation experience and process as consisting of a number of elements that all are bundled up together. That is faith, and conversion, and the gift of
and receiving of the Holy Spirit, and water baptism would have been seen as a unified experience. So that therefore, baptism would function as a way, as something that stands for an entire conversion experience, using a kind of a figure of speech or a use of language called metonymy, where a part stands for the whole. So Paul could refer to the baptism experience, the physical rite of baptism as standing for the entire process of conversion. It stands for the process, the entire process of faith, and conversion, and receiving the Holy Spirit. Water baptism then would be simply the means of referring to that entire experience. So Paul can say, through water baptism, assuming faith and conversion, et cetera, through water baptism then one is joined to Christ, his death and his resurrection. So, by doing that then, by being joined to Jesus’ death and resurrection, we then are released from the old age, the old era, and the reign and domination of sin and death under Adam by being joined to his resurrection then, we also are inaugurated or we also participate in the new era of salvation that Christ inaugurates through his resurrection, characterized by life.

Therefore, for Paul, his point so far is that it’s inconsistent for Christians then to continue to live in sin, this very question, “Should we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” is absurd by virtue of the fact that we have died to sin through being joined to Christ through baptism, being joined to Christ’s death and resurrection. We’ve died to sin because we have experienced the death that brings to an end the reign of the old era in sin, by virtue of being joined to someone who has actually died, the person of Jesus Christ. But more than that, not only have we been released from the age and the domination of sin under Adam, but now through being joined to Christ’s resurrection, we also participate in the new era, the new age, and have the hope of participating ultimately in the end in Christ’s resurrection.

Verses five through ten, then, go on to explain in more detail and unpack this even further. What does it mean to be united to Jesus in his death and resurrection? Verses five through ten explain this further. And here, notice that Paul uses, first of all, he uses slavery language in verse six, part of dying to sin and being released from this present age is we’re no longer slaves to sin. We’re no longer under it’s rule, again Paul conceives
of sin as not just individual acts of sin, although that’s part of it, but that is merely a result
of sin being a power and a master that controls and dominates us. A part of dying to sin,
by virtue of being joined to Christ in verse six, is now we are free, we are no longer
slaves to sin. We are free from its tyranny; that seems to be Paul’s main point, that by
being joined to Christ in his death, we have died to sin, therefore freeing us from the
reign and the tyranny of sin over our lives.

But notice the two other ways he describes sin’s domination over us. Number one,
he uses the language of old self. In verse six he says, “For we know that our old self has
been crucified.” Again, we should probably understand this language in light of chapter
five, twelve through twenty-one. The old self is not some ontological part of me, my
being, or some separate part of me, or some impulse that resides in some specific place in
my body, but probably the old self refers to my entire being, my entirety of myself,
physically and spiritually as under the influence of Adam. As part of the old era under
Adam that is under which we are controlled and dominated and ruled by sin. That old
self, who I was in Adam, my entire self, ruled by sin, under the old era has now been
crucified and put to death. I think Paul’s language of crucified in intentional, again
because the way that that has been crucified is that we have been joined to Jesus’ own
crucifixion, his own death and crucifixion is in some way ours as well. By virtue of being
joined to Christ, we participate in that so he can say “my old self,” not some separate part
of me that gets obliterated, but who I am under the old era, under Adam, dominated and
controlled by sin has now been crucified by virtue of us being joined to Christ and
sharing in his death.

But furthermore, notice also he uses the language of the body of sin, so that the
body of sin might be destroyed or done away with. Again I think the body of sin is not
referring just therefore to my physical body, that there’s something sinful about the
physical body that Paul finds repulsive as opposed to the spiritual part of me. But again,
instead, body of sin probably is to be understood in a similar way. To my old self, that is
my entire self as under the rulership and tyranny of sin, under Adam as part of the old era
that has now been destroyed and done away with, again by being joined to the death of
Jesus Christ. So strong is our connection with Jesus Christ’s death that Paul can use this language of who I was in Adam under the old era, ruled by sin, has been crucified, has been destroyed, it’s been completely done away with.

So verse seven seems to articulate the primary principle that lies behind this, when Paul says anyone who has died has been freed from sin, that’s Paul’s whole argument. It requires a death, the only way to be freed from the tyranny of sin and the old age is to die. And again, that’s exactly what Paul is convinced has happened to Christians by virtue of being joined through baptism as kind of the part that stands for the whole conversion experience. Through baptism, we’ve been joined to Jesus’ death, which brings to an end the rule of sin and the old age in the life of God’s people.

So then, verses nine and ten simply go on, and notice how in nine and ten, Christ’s death is described in a way that picks up some of the language of verse two. Back in verse two when Paul says “if we have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?” And in verses nine and ten, Paul wants to make sure that’s the very experience Christ participated in, or that’s the very way to understand Christ’s death. So in verses nine and ten he says, “For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he could not die again. Death no longer has mastery over him.” It no longer rules over him, in the same way that verse six, sin no longer and death no longer rule over us. “The death he died, he died to sin once for all,” which reflects verse two, “we have died to sin, but the life he lives he lives to God.”

So the way Christ’s death to sin is described in verses nine to ten is a reflection of the way our death to sin, is described back in verse two. So Paul wants to make clear that again, there’s an inconsistency about God’s people continuing in sin, because in fact, they’ve died to sin, that is, they have died to the tyranny and the power of sin, sin no longer rules over them because they have died, releasing them from the era, the present era and age under Adam and the rule and tyranny of sin. But the way that they have died, the death they have experienced is by being united to someone else’s death, that is the death of Jesus Christ that brings to an end the old era. Paul is clear that more than just being united to Jesus’ death, we have also been united to Jesus’ resurrection, and so
therefore we have been raised to live a new life. So it’s not just being released from the power of sin, but it is participating in a new life by virtue of being joined to Christ’s resurrection.

Notice some of this language, though, for example in verse nine, “For we know that since he was raised from the dead, he can not die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.” But to back up verse eight he says, “Now if we died with Christ we believe that we will also live with him.” Notice the future tense grammatically, “We will live with him.” Interpreters debate, should we take that as a strict future, that is, as a reference to the second coming, we will live with him in the future in the second coming, or is this more logical? If this is true, then this will also be true as well, so that the sharing in Christ’s resurrection could be present as well.

No matter which way one takes it, both are clear in the context, it’s clear that we already participate in Christ’s resurrection through baptism, even though the ultimate experience of that resurrection, and the ultimate release from the tyranny of sin does not come until the future, the new creation, or the second coming of Christ. In this case, we still await ultimately the second coming of Christ, although again, even then, Paul has already emphasized our ability to walk or live in new life back in verse four of Romans chapter six.

So all of this is meant to argue to this point that the perspective articulated in the question in verse one is absurd. There is a contradiction and inconsistency about Christians or about the perspective of Christians sinning so that grace may increase. God’s people have died to sin by virtue of being united to Christ though baptism in his death, God’s people have died to sin so that there’s an inconsistency of claiming to be united with Christ, yet to go on sinning. Paul says that’s an absurdity because we’ve already experienced that death that breaks the power of sin in the old era that releases us from that and we’ve also been raised to participate in a new era and a new life by virtue of being joined to Jesus’ death, burial and his resurrection. So death is necessary to bring to an end our existence in the old era. The only way to break the power of death or sin
over us is to die. And Paul is convinced that that has indeed taken place by virtue of being joined, although he doesn’t explain exactly how we have been joined to Jesus Christ, he still is in fact convinced that Jesus’ historical death in some way has become ours by being united with Christ. We participate in that so that his death is the death we experience that brings to an end the old era and its domination over us. But in the same way, we’ve also been united with his resurrection that ushers us into new life, causing us to participate in the new era of life, but more than that it gives us hope for future resurrection and ultimately overcoming the power of sin.

But the text then ends in verse eleven, in undoing this hypothetical objection in the form of this absurd question in six, one. Paul now ends by overturning that with an ethical exhortation in the form of a command. Notice that it begins with “In this way,” that is based on what the author has just said in verses nine and ten, that is, in the same way, in what way? According to verse ten, “In the same way that Christ died a death to sin, so that sin no longer has mastery over him, in the same way, now he lives life to God,” Paul says, “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, in the same way that Christ is dead to sin, in the same way count yourselves dead to sin,” but “in the same way,” in verse ten, “that God lives, that Jesus lives, and the life he lives he lives to God, In the same way, consider yourselves alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Again, it’s through being united to Christ in his death and resurrection that Paul can say that this is all true. Interestingly that word “consider” is a term that suggests to, not only to consider, but to judge, to consider it the case. This is not simply a fiction, it’s not the idea of consider something to be such, even though it really isn’t, or think of it this way, even though it may not be the case. But instead, this is a judgment or consideration that is not a fiction, but it is a reality, it is to consider something true and valid because Paul said, indeed, it is a reality, we can consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, not as a fiction but as a reality because, in fact, we have indeed been joined to the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So this considering or judging in verse eleven is to be seen in light of the reality of Christ’s own death and resurrection that now becomes ours by virtue of being united to Christ and participating in some way in his death and
Already but not Yet Tension

What I want you to note is it’s intriguing that Paul ends this way with a command, because this seems rather, in some sense, to create a tension in the text, because note how Paul has used rather strong, unqualified language up until this point. Starting in verse two he says, “We have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer?” He uses terms, such as in verse six, “We know that our old self was crucified,” again using a language that refers to Christ’s crucifixion, and then he says, “So that the body of sin might be done away with,” the language was probably even stronger than that, “might be destroyed.” And then, verse seven, “Anyone who has died has been freed from sin.” So you have this strong, unqualified language. We’ve died to sin, the body of sin has been destroyed, the old self has been crucified, because of death we’ve been freed from sin. Sin is a power that exercised tyranny over people. Now Paul uses rather strong language, we have died, we have been crucified, the body of sin has been destroyed. We have been freed from sin.

So how is it that Paul ends this section with a command or and imperative? This seems to create a tension in the text. If we’ve really died to sin, if the body of sin has been destroyed, if the old self has been crucified, if through death we’ve been freed from sin, why does Paul have to now tell us to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God? Why is it that we need to be told that and commanded that if that is in fact a reality? What I think we find here in the text is part of the tension we find throughout the New Testament between what is already true by virtue of being joined to Christ, but what is not yet complete or unconsummated because the end has not yet come in what Christian theologians identify as the second coming of Christ. Because the ultimate end time resurrection and new creation have not yet taken place. It’s only been inaugurated in initial or partial form. It’s already present, but has not yet arrived in its fullness and perfection. It’s because of that tension, the tension between what is already true, what has already been begun and inaugurated, and what has not yet been complete and consummated. Christians live in the tension between those two. It’s that tension that is reflected in Paul’s language. So the already is, because we’ve already been joined to
Christ, the already means Paul can use absolute language. Yes, we’ve already died to sin, the body of sin has been destroyed, the old self has been crucified. We’ve already died to sin and so we’ve been freed from it. That is true already because we’ve been united to Christ. But because of the not yet, because of perfection, the final resurrection and the new creation have not yet arrived, we still then need the imperative, we need to consider that true and continue to live in between that tension, between what is already true, but what has not yet been completed and perfected.

In between that time, what is required of God’s people is a process of considering and reckoning that we’ve died to sin, by virtue of being joined to Christ and we now live to God. Other terminology that New Testament students often use is the tension between the indicative and the imperative. The indicative are statements of what is already true by virtue of being joined to Christ, so the indicative is you’ve died to sin, why live in it any longer? The indicative is, the old self has been crucified, again using very strong language. The indicative is the body of sin has been destroyed. In verse seven, the further indicative, again anyone who has died to sin, anyone who has died has been freed from sin. So, verses two through ten are basically in the indicative, simply statements that are true by virtue of being joined to Christ.

The imperative then, comes in verse eleven, that balances the already with what is not yet the case. Also, the indicative grounds or makes possible the imperative. It’s impossible to consider myself dead to sin and alive to God if that in fact is not true. The imperative has no teeth, it lacks force if it is not grounded in the indicative, that is the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that is the reality we have been joined with.

So the indicative is why Paul can make these rather strong statements. You’ve died to sin, the body of sin has been destroyed, and the old self has been crucified. But this tension between what is already and what is still to be realized creates the need for the imperative. So Paul can end in verse eleven, “Therefore, you need to consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God.” A command to live out life in this tension between the already and not yet, but an imperative, a command that is valid and not
necessary and is doable because it’s grounded in the reality of Jesus’ own death and resurrection that we have been joined to.

**Following Context**

Notice how chapter six one through eleven relates to what comes after it. Verse twelve is where English translations are interesting, you’ll notice that a number of English translations break the verses up a little bit differently in six, one through eleven. The NIV text that I’m looking at, the original NIV begins a new paragraph at verse eleven. It sort of separates verse eleven off from verses one through ten. Probably because, again, verse eleven is imperative, it is a command for the readers to appropriate what is true in their own lives based on the reality of verses one through ten. But notice, verse eleven begins with a “therefore”, which often is a strong way of linking something back to what has previously been said, and often is used to introduce a new thought, that probably verse eleven should go with one through ten and is the conclusion to one through ten. But then, verses twelve to the end of chapter six, seem to work out in more detail and spell out in more detail the command of verse eleven. So eleven is sort of an imperative, “consider yourselves dead to sin, and alive to God.” But what does that look like, what does that entail? Chapter six, verses twelve and following to the end of the chapter spell out in more detail what that involves. So verse twelve begins, “therefore,” that is based on verses one through ten, or one through eleven, especially verse eleven, “Therefore, because you have died with Christ, been united with Christ and died to sin through Christ, and been raised by identification with Christ to live a new life, therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey it’s evil desires.” So now, again, based on the indicative, of verses one through ten, here’s the imperative. “Do not let sin reign in your moral bodies.” Verse thirteen, “Do not offer parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life. And offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are no longer under law, but under grace.” So the rest of this chapter continues to unpack and spell out in more detail what is involved in the concluding command of one through eleven.
So what I’ve tried to do in looking at this text is apply the different methods, passage in terms of the vocabulary and meaning, looking at the, making a few grammatical comments, looking at its theological content and the theological themes, relating it to it’s broader context, and the ultimate context of Romans one through six, but also how it grows out of what comes before it and how it merges into and prepares for what comes after it. So hopefully, as we worked through the text, you were able to identify the different methods that work; historical criticism, context work study, grammatical analysis, theological analysis, et cetera, to see how that works.

One of the things we didn’t talk about explicitly was the Old Testament in the New. Obviously, that lies under the surface, based on the comparison between Christ and Adam from chapter five. Now that runs over into and continues to inform chapter six, one through eleven. But I’ll stop there with the text, again hopefully you get a clearer idea of how the different methods can be implemented in understanding this text.

What I want to do in the next session, then, is look at another text, a very different text, with different literary features, different needs and raising different questions, and that is a passage from the book of Revelation, and we’ll look at that in terms of the different methodologies and how that might affect the way we interpret that text.