

LOSING YOUR LUGGAGE

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Finding Freedom from Sinful Baggage

A practical look at Romans 6–8

RICK REED



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Losing Your Luggage

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For Linda, my beloved travelling companion
on the journey to freedom.

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Introduction

Your journey toward freedom starts here!

Let me start you off with two true/false questions:

1. **When you became a Christian, your sins were forgiven.**
True or false?
2. **When you became a Christian, you were freed from your sins.**
True or false?

If you are like most people, you found the first one easier to answer than the second. You were able to answer “True” to the first question. You know the good news of the gospel declares all who become Christians are forgiven of their sins! As Romans 8:1 proclaims, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

But you may have found the second question a bit harder to answer. You were not so sure you could honestly say becoming a Christian frees a person from sin. When you look at your own life and the lives of other Christians, you don’t see clear evidence of *freedom* from sin.

In fact, if you were candid, you’d have to admit to areas where you feel stuck in sin. Perhaps you struggle with an arrogant attitude

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that makes you come across as self-promoting, or it could be a critical spirit and a tendency to find fault with everyone around you. It might be a jealous heart which resents the good things others receive, or an explosive temper that erupts in ugly words. It could be a shadowy bondage to pornography. Or a deep-seated bigotry which looks down on people from some ethnic backgrounds. Maybe it's just a pervasive selfishness that keeps you from truly loving others.

If you struggled to answer “True” to the second question, if you carry some sinful baggage, I've got good news. *It's possible to lose your luggage and find freedom from the sins that weigh you down and hold you back!*

I say this because of the truth found in Romans 6–8. In these chapters we discover why we struggle to win over sin. We find out why we carry around so much sinful baggage. Best of all, we learn how to find freedom from the sins that enslave us.

Over thirty years ago, I had a seminary class where Dr. Bill Lawrence unpacked the truth of Romans 6–8 in a way I'd never seen before. It was liberating. It was life-giving. Over the past three decades, I've repeatedly come back to these chapters, digging deeper to understand and apply these crucial biblical concepts. I've also had the joy of teaching Romans 6–8 to others, helping them discover how to lose their sinful baggage and find greater freedom in Christ.

In *Losing Your Luggage*, I'll walk you through these three amazing chapters in Romans so you can see for yourself what God has to say. I want the truth of Romans 6–8 to impact you the way it has impacted me and countless other Christians who struggle with sin. As it does, you'll start to lose your sinful luggage and find a greater measure of freedom in Christ.

Getting the most out of this book

To gain maximum benefit from *Losing Your Luggage*, I'd ask you to complete the personal “Baggage Check” included at the back of this book (Appendix 1). The personal “Baggage Check” should

Your journey toward freedom starts here!

only take you 10–15 minutes to complete. But I’m convinced it will be time well spent. Filling in the baggage checklist will clarify what luggage you most need to lose. It will help keep things real and practical.

Here’s another travel tip. Read the following chapters with your Bible open. What I write in this book only matters if it lines up closely with God’s Word. He’s the One who tells us how to lose our sinful baggage and find our way to freedom.

*Are you ready to begin a journey toward greater freedom in Christ?
Ready to lose some luggage?*

Let’s get started!



Dying for freedom

Romans 6:1–10

Romans 6 begins with an important question for all of us who carry around sinful baggage: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” (6:1).

The answer Paul gives to this question is both profound and perplexing: “By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (6:2).

Let that sink in: The Bible says Christians *died* to sin.

Paul’s answer raises new questions: “If I died to sin, why is sin still so alive in me?” “Is Paul saying Christians won’t struggle with sin anymore?” “Since sin seems alive and well in my life, does this mean I’m not really a Christian?”

We’ll get answers to these important questions in due time, but first we need to understand why Paul says we died to sin. In verses 3–5, he lays down the theological basis for this astounding claim. Read these verses closely and follow his reasoning.

³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we

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too might walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (6:3–5).

Do you see the reason Paul declares we died to sin? It all centres on your relationship with Jesus. When you link your life to Jesus through faith in him, God sees you as united with Jesus in his death (verse 3), burial (verse 4) and resurrection (verse 5). Since Jesus died to sin, you did too. Since Jesus was buried, you were too; this burial is pictured in your baptism. Since Jesus was raised to new life, you were too. In short, since Jesus died to sin and since you are united to Jesus, you died to sin.

I need to add that this is only true if you are a Christian. It's not enough to know about Jesus' death on the cross on Good Friday and resurrection from the grave on Easter Sunday. You must do more than believe it *historically*; you must receive it *personally*. You must link your life to Jesus through sincere faith in him. If you have, then what is true of Jesus is now true for you: you died to sin!

At this point, you may think, *This sounds great. But it also seems unrealistic. The Bible may say I died to sin, but sin sure doesn't seem dead to me! I'm still lugging around a lot of sinful baggage.*

Here's where we need to understand something very important about sin: sin has two sides. Sin has a seductive side and a slavery side. The seductive side of sin tempts us; the slavery side traps us. The seductive sin attracts us; the slavery side addicts us.

Think of the sins you struggle with most. I imagine you'd agree those sins have a seductive side. Sin markets itself quite well. It advertises itself in an attractive way. But, as you've undoubtedly found out, sin doesn't live up to its marketing promises. It may deliver short-term pleasure, but it always results in long-term pain. After enticing us, it enslaves us. Attraction turns to addiction. We no longer sin because we want to; pretty soon, we sin because we have to.

Now when Paul says we died to sin, do you think he's talking about the seductive side or the slavery side of sin? If you are unsure, look at verse 6 and you'll see the answer: "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin" (6:6).

Notice the final words in the verse: "so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." The Bible teaches we died to the slavery side of sin. We haven't died to the seductive side of sin; Paul will make that painfully clear in chapter 7. But we have died to the slavery side. Since your life has become united with Christ through faith in him, God sees your "old self" as "crucified" with Christ. In Jesus, the penalty for your sins has been paid; you are now justified before God.¹

Verse 6 says all this happened so the power of sin in your body might be "brought to nothing." As John Stott explains, sin has not become extinct, but it has been defeated; not annihilated, but deprived of power.² The end result is that your body no longer needs to remain "enslaved to sin."³ If you are a Christian, you can confidently declare: "I died to the slavery side of sin."

The railroad to freedom

Some years ago, our family visited the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. The museum sits on the banks of the Ohio River. That's significant because the river forms the boundary line between the states of Kentucky and Ohio.

¹ The Greek verb *dikaioo*, translated "set free from sin" in Romans 6:7, literally means to be "justified."

² John Stott, *Men Made New: An Exposition of Romans 6–8* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 44.

³ As John Murray notes, "The body of the believer is no longer a body conditioned and controlled by sin. The body that is his now is one conditioned and controlled by what has come to be the ruling principle of the believer in his totality, namely, 'obedience unto righteousness' (vs. 16)." John Murray, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 221.

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Back in the mid-nineteenth century, before Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation, Kentucky was a slave state and Ohio was free. For that reason, many African American slaves risked their lives to cross the river and get to freedom. They often continued north on what was called the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes and safe houses set up to help slaves escape to the northern United States or into Canada.

When our family toured the museum, we heard a plaintive, emotive Negro spiritual called “Oh Freedom.” The lyrics to the song say,

Oh, freedom!
Oh, freedom!
Oh, freedom over me!
And before I’d be a slave
I’ll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.⁴

Since slavery was so oppressive and dehumanizing, many risked their lives to find freedom. They would rather risk death than remain slaves.

If you have experienced an oppressive, dehumanizing enslavement to some area of sin, you have probably had moments when you’ve echoed the sentiment in this song. You say, “I’d rather die than stay enslaved to this temper of mine that explodes and drives people away.” “I’d rather die than stay a slave to a sexual bondage that keeps me ashamed and in the shadows.” “I’d rather die than remain trapped by a hard-driving, selfish ambition that ruins my relationships.”

If you’ve felt that way, Romans 6 has good news for you. You have already died to the slavery side of sin. Old Slave Master Sin is no longer your slave master. You now belong to Christ.

⁴ The background and lyrics of “Oh Freedom” can be found at <https://balladofamerica.org/oh-freedom/>; accessed December 16, 2021.

What we must know

According to Romans 6, your first step toward freedom as a Christian involves knowing this truth in a deeply personal way.⁵ Notice how verse 6 begins with the words “We know.” To find freedom you must take this truth to heart; you must know it to the core of your soul: You died to the slavery side of sin.

It’s crucial to embrace the truth God’s Word tells you about yourself. Here’s why: Old Slave Master Sin will try to trick you into thinking you still belong to him. Sin wants to deceive you into thinking you remain trapped and in bondage.

Imagine yourself as one of the slaves who followed the Underground Railroad up to Canada to find freedom. One day, you spot your old slave-master and realize he has come looking for you. What’s worse, he sees you and heads your way. With an angry, authoritative voice he shouts, “Where have you been? I’ve got work for you to do. Get back where you belong!”

Let me ask you: How much authority does your old slave master have over you now that you’ve made it safely to Canada? The answer is none. You’ve made it to freedom and no longer are a slave. However, on a practical level, the answer is: Your old slave master has as much authority over you as you give him. If you believe his lies about how you still belong to him, you will return to being a slave—even though you are now free.

The same principle holds true for you as a Christian. Your Old Slave Master Sin no longer has any authority over you. From Romans 6, you can know your life now belongs to Christ. God sees Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection as your death to your old life and your resurrection to a new life. But unless you know this—really know it on a heart level—you will be tempted to revert to being a slave again to sin. Even though you died to the slavery side to sin.

⁵ The Greek verb *ginosko*, translated “know” in verse 6, often carries the idea of an experiential *heart* knowledge, not simply a cognitive *head* knowledge.

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The first stop on your spiritual road to freedom begins at the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus. God wants you to know something monumental happened when you linked your life to Christ through faith in his death and resurrection. Whether you feel it or not, you have been set free from slavery to sin.

While there is still much more in Romans 6–8 you need to discover to live out your freedom from sin, the starting place is knowing what God says is true: You died to the slavery side of sin.

Once you personalize this amazing truth, you are ready to take the next steps toward losing your luggage. In the next chapter, you'll discover three life-changing steps you are now ready take on your journey to freedom!

Chapter 1 | Review

**If you are a Christian (if you are “in Christ”),
you died with Christ to sin.**

**You’ve died to the slavery side of sin
not the seductive side of sin.**

**You no longer have to be “enslaved to sin.”
Freedom is possible!**

**The first step on the journey to freedom
is knowing this truth.**

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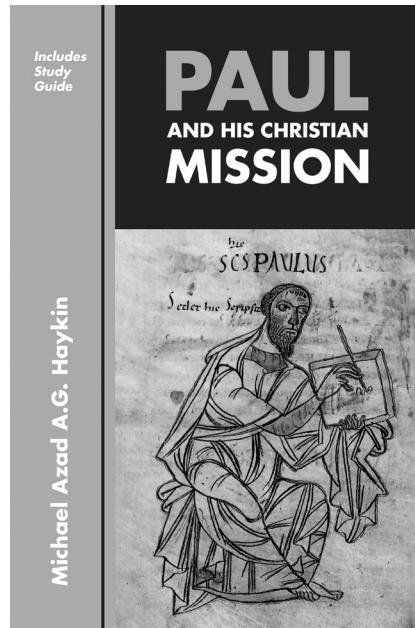
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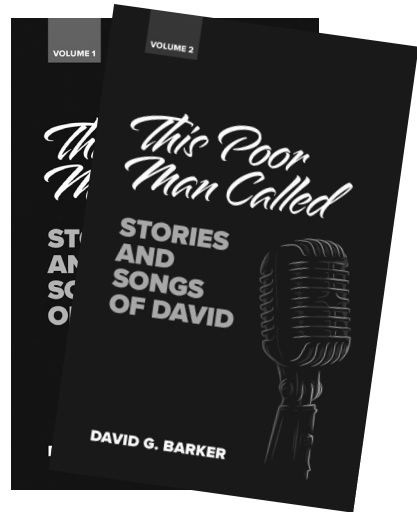
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