

Dead to Sin, Alive to God

Romans 6:1-23

Key Verse: 6:11

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

In today's passage we'll talk about what it means to be dead to sin and alive to God. I don't know how many of you have seen the movie, "The Godfather" but there is a scene where Michael Corleone, the leader of the gangster family finds out his brother Fredo has betrayed him. And this is how Michael reacts to his brother. He says, "Fredo, you're nothing to me now. You're not a brother, you're not a friend. I don't want to know you or what you do. In other words you're dead to me, you don't exist." And after this he completely cuts off his relationship with his brother – until he finally has him killed. That is what it means to be dead to something. There is no connection. On the other hand being alive is a completely different matter. In the parable of the prodigal son, after the lost son returns home from being gone for a long time, when his father greets him he is filled with compassion for him; threw his arms around him and kissed him. The father says, "We have to celebrate and be glad, because my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Lk 15) Do you see the difference? This is a human example but let's take a closer look at what it means to be dead to sin and alive to God.

So far in our Romans study we can divide up the book in 3 sections. In chapters 1-3 Paul explains the problem of sin and its effects upon all mankind. And how faith in Christ is man's only means of salvation. In chapters 4-5 Paul explains how faith in Christ saves us from sin's penalty. And now in chapters 6-8 there is a turning point in the book in which Paul describes the process of sanctification, or purification, where a Christian begins to live a new life after they have been set free from sin. So that is where we are going to start today at the beginning of this purification process.

As Paul is writing this letter, he writes as if he is an attorney, anticipating all the arguments ahead of time. He does this because when the letter arrives, he won't be there to debate with them so he tries to answer their arguments before they have a chance to think of them. He has two main questions the first is in verse 1 and the second in verse 15. Let's take a look at verse 1. "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" This verse is in response to 5:20, where he says, "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more." Paul was afraid that this might lead the readers to the wrong conclusion. The more I sin, the more grace I can receive. We should keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace. I think some second generation Christians think like this. Since their parents became Christians they think that they never had to chance to sin like their parents and thus know God's grace. So they want to go out on their own to experience sin so that they can experience grace. In the early 1900s there was a guy named Rasputin. He was a Russian Orthodox Christian and mystic. And he had influence over the Russian Emperor Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra, and their only son, Alexei. Rasputin was the kind of guy that Paul was worried about because he twisted the word God and confused people. Rasputin's idea was that sin and repentance were interdependent and necessary for salvation. He claimed that giving into temptation was needed to proceed to repentance and salvation. So live it up, enjoy all the sin you want and then repent and receive God's grace.

But Paul says, “Un un uh, not so fast.” Let’s read verse 2. “By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” By no means! We DIED to sin; HOW can we live in it any longer? In this statement, Paul introduces a new way of thinking about sin. A Christian is someone who has died to sin. We are dead to sin. This means that sin no longer has control over us. We don’t HAVE to obey it. I know this is hard because when sin calls, it has a really desirable voice. Paul has to hammer us on this point because, as young Christians, we really haven’t experienced being dead to sin in our lives yet. So when Paul says, “Sin doesn’t reign over us anymore,” we say, “Well, you don’t know us very well then.” Because people seem to live in a vicious cycle where we get up, eat, fall into sin, regret it, ask God to forgive us, go to sleep, get up and then go through it all over again. This happens continuously. So Paul wants the Romans to think about sin in a new way. We are dead to sin, forget about it, it has no control over you. We have to have a new mind set. Each morning we have to BELIEVE we’ll have victory even before we start the day. Like an athlete who believes that he can win every game even if the odds are obviously against him. If he doesn’t believe that he can win, he’s defeated before he starts. The beginning of dying to sin is letting the Bible expose all our dirty laundry. Normally we don’t like this, but if we don’t know what sin is, how can we struggle against it? The point of the law is not to condemn us but to sanctify us, to purify us to lead us to Jesus.

To further illustrate this, Paul uses baptism. Verses 3-4 say, “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.” A Christian is someone who is united with Christ. Water baptism represents graphically what happens to us when we become a Christian. We are in a sense united with Jesus in his death, that’s when we go under the water, and we’re united with Him in His resurrection as we come up out of the water. This signifies a change within our lives. Our old self is gone and we have become a new creation. But Paul doesn’t seem to be referring to the water baptism as much as he is referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Because if we are being honest, the ritual of baptism doesn’t really change us, does it? It’s more of an announcement to the world that we have become a Christian. Still, it’s a good beginning. To be really changed, we have to be united with Jesus in His death and resurrection through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our victory over slavery to sin doesn’t come because of our willpower, positive-thinking, or self-control it has to come when we are united with Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus’ death our sins were nailed to the cross. And it’s the power of Jesus’ resurrection that enables us to live the new life, and gives us power to get out of the life of sin.

Take a look at verses 6-7. “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—⁷because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.” Through this we see that we have to let our old self die, that our old way of life may be done away with, so that we may live in a new sphere of life free from sin. All contracts are null and void when we die. Can you think of any that bind us after we’re dead? Even slaves are free upon their death. Some people have even tried to fake their own death just so they could be free. Our death with Christ sets us free from sin. All our passions and pride no longer rule us because we have been united in Christ in His death and resurrection. So Paul says in verse 11, let’s read it, “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” This

is the first step toward victory in the life of sin. So just as we are dead to sin, we are alive to God. As sin doesn't have a hold on us any longer, now God begins to take hold of us. This is the transformation that begins to take place within our hearts. However, does this mean that after we decide to give our life to Jesus, we lose the desire to sin? Even though we are in Christ, and sin and death have no power over us, Satan tells us lies and seeks to draw us back into a life of slavery. The victory that we have in Christ doesn't mean that we don't have any more spiritual battles to fight. On the contrary, verse 12 makes it clear that we still have mortal bodies and passions that make sinful demands upon us. That's why Paul commands us not to offer the parts of our bodies to sin to be used as instruments of wickedness. But even though Paul commands us, we can't just deny sin – we are still too weak. So we have to replace it with something positive, something new. We have to form new habits, godly habits. We have to find ways where we can serve God and use our time for Him. We have to take our focus off of our self and put it on God.

We have to accept that it will not be easy, it will be a battle. Satan is referred to as the “ruler of this world,” so we are not living in neutral territory. We are in a spiritual battlefield. We were brought from death to life by God's grace so that we can serve God here and now. So we must offer the parts of our bodies, ourselves to God so that He may use us as instruments of righteousness. There's no middle ground. We are either used by God or used by Satan. The one who thinks they are above it all, or they're not going to get involved, are only fooling themselves. Make no mistake; we're all in a spiritual war. And though sometimes we may lose a battle eventually we will win the war. For Paul says in verse 14, “For sin SHALL NOT be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” (v14) We are under the grace of God and in the end God will win the war against sin just as Jesus defeated death.

Now we get to Paul's second question. Take a look at verse 15. “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” The other type of person Paul worried about was the one who thinks, “Since I am under grace, I can sin all I want. It doesn't matter what I do because God's grace will cover it all.” It's like having a credit card where someone else is paying the bill. Since God promises to meet sin with His grace, sin must not really matter. So now that we have God's grace, we don't have to worry about giving up our sin. Paul says “By no means!” Take a look at verse 16. “Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?” Paul explains that when we sin, we become slaves to that sin. Most people probably never think of themselves as slaves. All of us think that we're free. But Paul suggests that those who constantly obey something might not be as free as they think, they might in fact be slaves to the one, or thing, they obey. Take for example some people I work with. They say they are free to do what they want, so with their freedom they choose to smoke. No one can tell them what to do. But before they go into work they have to have their morning smoke. And when 10:15 rolls around, they have to go outside for their break and while they are there have a smoke. But watch out if you delay them, they'll get very upset. Then of course when lunch comes they have to have a smoke first, to enjoy their meal. And then again during the afternoon break they like to have some smoking fellowship with some laughs. And finally when the work day ends they enjoy a smoke on the way home, one for the road and then a couple more to relax for the night. And they go through this routine day after day after day, in the rain, in the shine, and even huddled together in sub zero weather. Now I am not bashing smokers because the Bible doesn't say anything about smoking. The reason I bring this up is because we have to look at

ourselves honestly before God and ask Him to reveal to us who our real master is. Paul is saying that each of us has a master, maybe it's smoking, video games, food cravings – Lays potato chips slogan is "I bet you can't eat just one." Or maybe it's lust, fear, or shopping – some people get so burdened with debt they are enslaved. We can say many things with our mouth – claiming that we are slaves to no one, but our actions speak louder than words. If we take a close look at where we spend our time, money, and our thoughts, I'm sure we will find who our real master is.

Paul's point in verse 16 is, don't you realize that you can choose your own master? Since we're going to be a slave to someone, either to sin, or to righteousness, which one is the better master? Paul said that when sin is our master we do things that we are ashamed of (v21) and we offer our bodies to impurity and ever increasing wickedness. (v19) The downward progression gets worse and worse until it spirals out of control. I don't think criminals on death row ever thought their life would end up there. Maybe they started out small by lying and cheating but eventually it progressed to bigger things like stealing and armed robbery. And it usually climaxes in murder. Or someone who thinks lustful thoughts, which leads to staring at people and progresses to looking at porn. They think that it doesn't hurt anyone because they are only looking but eventually their mind is consumed and it leads to either an unwanted pregnancy or committing adultery. As slaves to sin, righteousness has no control over us (v20) and we are eventually led to death. (v16)

On the other hand, when righteousness is our master we are set free from sin. (v18) The benefits we receive lead to holiness and we become slaves to God. We are all slaves to something. Either it will be Jesus or someone or something else. And having a master we will have to give up what we want and take up our master's tasks. But Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Mt 11:29-30) When Jesus is our master, we follow what he does and His burden is light. Jesus gives us true rest in our souls. And the result can be found in verse 22 let's read it. "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." When we realize that we have a master we can either follow the evil master or the good master. That choice is up to us. No one can make it for us. And if we make no decision, by default we will follow our sinful desires and become a slave to sin. So we have to make a conscious decision to obey God which leads us to holiness and have eternal life. Verse 23 is the famous one, and it sums this up nicely for us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." It's like sin is our employer and Satan is our boss and our pay is death. But Jesus is the gift giver and He gives us eternal life.

When we are alive to God, we must realize what a privilege it is. And we have new responsibilities and shouldn't live and act however we like. For example, when we get married, we can't act like we are single, for if we do, then we might not be married very long. We have to deny ourselves, our personal desires and act with others in mind. We must believe that sin no longer has control over us and NOT participate in it any longer. We have to realize that we actually LOVE our sin. Then we have to repent of our love of sin and not take part in it any more. Let's read verse 17. "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted." If we want to really be free from sin, we have to wholeheartedly obey what we learn from Bible study. In my walk with God, I've had many spiritual battles, especially the battle of living a double life. At that point in my life I loved the party life and at the same time I valued the spiritual life. I would go to the Friday meeting and share my testimony and then go out

with my friends afterward and hit the bars. I was stuck in the middle and could not get out. I clearly remember saying to myself, “when is this going to end,” because my heart was being torn in two and I couldn’t enjoy either life. I had tasted the grace of God but couldn’t leave the life of sin. This reminded me of St Peter said, “It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.” (2 Peter 2:21-22) Returning to my life of sin was like a dog returning to its vomit. It wasn’t until one Easter conference, that I sincerely accepted God’s word and actually wanted to try and obey it. God spoke to me through Mt 6:33 “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” And I realized that partying had become my master and it was ruining my life. So I repented of my sin and really wanted to obey God from my heart. It was then that my life began to change. However I have had many battles after that first one that continue even to today. This is the process of sanctification and it continues until we go to heaven.

As I see it, we have two choices. Either we are alive to sin and dead to God. Or we are dead to sin and alive to God. We can’t have both. And Paul is pleading in his letter to the Romans that they don’t have to be stuck in their life of sin anymore because of what Jesus did. Thank God for Jesus! All I can say is, open your eyes and look at who is your master. Does your master lead you to shameful things or to good things like eternal life? Choose wisely and offer your body in a way that leads to life. God bless you.