

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 the last passage we learned that since we have been justified through faith in Christ we can enjoy the spiritual fruits of peace, joy, glorious hope, and the love of God. Through sufferings, these inner fruits grow in us. Finally, we can mature in the full image of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is one senior missionary who has had many sufferings in his life of faith. These sufferings have not made him bitter. These sufferings matured his inner man. Now his hope in heaven is as real to him as his life in this world. Since he has this glorious hope he is joyful always and a source of encouragement and blessing to others. May God help each of us to bear the fruits of faith.

In today's passage Paul explains more deeply the nature of our new lives in Christ. In brief, we are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Being dead to sin, we are now freed from sin. Being alive to God, we now have access to the power of God as our source of strength to live a dynamic new life. However, to live this new life to the full extent, we must deeply understand the death and resurrection of Jesus. We must learn how to see ourselves through Christ. We must claim this new life with faith and vigor and offer ourselves to God to live as his servants. Today let's learn how to live this glorious new life in Christ.

First, shall we go on sinning? By no means! (1-2).

In the previous passage Paul concluded that where sin increased, grace increased all the more. God's grace is greater than all our sin. Praise God! However, to the sinful mind, this glorious truth can be terribly abused. Look at verse 1. "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" To some, God's amazing grace looks like a license to sin. They conclude that more sinning entitles them to more grace. For example, in Genesis, Lamech murdered a man intentionally, then claimed eleven times more protection from God than was given to Cain (Gen 4:24). When God pours out his grace on such people, they get worse instead of getting better.

On the other hand, those who treasure God's grace can grow in their love for God and be a source of blessing to others. John Newton was once lost in a sinful life as a sailor on a slave-trading ship. During a storm at sea, the ship was sinking. John Newton realized that if he died in the storm, he would surely go to hell. So he repented and cried out for God's mercy. The ship was miraculously spared. When Mr. Newton reached the shore, he went directly to the nearest church and fully surrendered his life to Christ. He received God's calling as a pastor and hymn writer. He obeyed this calling wholeheartedly and bore abundant fruit, fruit that lasts even now. He wrote "Amazing Grace."

Obviously, God's grace is not a license to sin. To the question, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" Paul gives a resounding, "By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (2) Those who want to abuse God's grace do not understand Jesus' death and resurrection at all. In verses 3-10, Paul explains that in Christ, we died to sin and are made alive to God. Thus, there is not even the thought of abusing God's grace. Rather, we are freed from sin and empowered to live a glorious new life.

Second, in Christ we are freed from sin (3-10).

In verses 3-10 Paul explains how Christ's death frees us from sin. Verse 10a says, "The death he died, he died to sin once for all..." Jesus, uniquely in history, did not deserve to die a sinner's death. He was sinless, holy and blameless. He was in very nature God. But he took upon himself our sins, the sins of the world. He died for our sins. He died once, for all, for the sins of all people. That was the end of sin. The price was paid. Indeed, the power of the cross of Christ is truly great. It satisfied God's righteous demand once for all.

The cross of Christ is even more than a payment for sin. It has the power to completely transform our lives on earth. When we accept Christ by faith, God unites us with Christ in his death. Paul explains this more clearly through the concept of baptism. Look at verse 3. "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" When a person is baptized, he or she is put under the water, symbolizing the death of the old person. What water baptism symbolizes, the Holy Spirit actualizes. 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—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." In brief, when Christ died, our old sinful nature died with him. Since death is the end of sin, we are now freed from sin.

Since the time of Christ, down through the generations, there have been innumerable people who experienced freedom from sin through the cross of Christ. For example, before becoming a Christian, St. Augustine lived as an intellectual hedonist. Such people think that if they deny themselves any pleasure they will die.

But when Augustine accepted Christ, he was totally changed. He died to his sin of intellectual hedonism. Once, he met a former girlfriend on the street. She walked toward him with seductive intent, saying, “Augustine, it is I.” But Augustine turned and ran the other way, shouting over his shoulder, “Yes, but it is not I.” He meant that he had completely changed. He was not the same person she had known. His old self no longer lived. He was freed from sin. In this way, Augustine became “St. Augustine.”

God does not want us to remain as slaves to sin after we accept Christ. Through the cross of Christ we die to sin. Through the cross of Christ we are freed from the power of sin. One person was sick with the sin of self-glory seeking. He showed himself off in many ways, at every opportunity. But when he accepted Christ, the power of the cross changed him. He was freed from his sin of self-glory seeking. Now he has a deep desire to glorify God alone and to encourage others. Let’s accept in our hearts that there is victory over sin. In Christ, we died to sin; we are free from sin.

Third, in Christ we are alive to God (3-10).

Not only are we united with Christ in his death, but we are also united with Christ in his resurrection. Look at verses 4-5. “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.” Look at verses 8-9. “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.”

Christ's resurrection was God's eternal victory over sin and death. Christ's resurrection is the power source of our new life. It is the power of God who raised Christ from the dead. Thus, our new life is dynamic and victorious and there are endless possibilities for spiritual growth and development. For example, Paul was once a narrow-minded Jewish Pharisee. But the resurrection power of Christ made him into a new man, a shepherd for the Gentiles. While in prison for preaching the gospel, Paul met Onesimus. Onesimus was a slave who had run away from his master, most likely after stealing something valuable. Onesimus was too sinsick for anyone to endure. But Paul loved him with the compassion of Christ. Paul said of him, "...he is my very heart" (Phil 12). Onesimus was changed into a new person and became a useful man in Christ. It was the power of the Risen Christ working through Paul. Missionary Angela Kim in Hong Kong has sacrificed everything for the work of God, even her health. She may look weak. But there is a tremendous power of the Risen Christ working in and through her and her coworkers. Many house churches and innumerable student shepherds and shepherdesses have been raised in Hong Kong.

Not only is Christ's resurrection a power source, but it also means permanent union with God. Look at verse 10b. "...but the life he lives, he lives to God." Through Christ we can also live in God's presence and have access to his mighty power. So there is no need to remain in fatalism or sorrow over ourselves. In Christ, we can live to God.

Fourth, offer yourselves to God (11-14).

When we live in Christ, the way we see ourselves must be drastically changed. Look at verse 11. “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” We must not think of ourselves based on our sins. Instead, we must count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Here the words “count yourselves” have a very clear meaning. We must train our minds to believe that we died to sin and live to God. We must declare victory by faith.

This requires us to struggle against our former habits and desires. In reality, these things have lost their power over us. But victory does not come to us automatically. We must claim this victory by faith, like the Israelites when they entered the promised land. In Joshua 1:2,3 God said to Joshua, “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.” God said he was giving them the land. But it was not without struggle. They had to put their feet onto enemy territory. They had to claim the promised land one step at a time. It was their act of faith. With the same kind of faith, we must also claim victory over sin and new life in God through Christ.

The practical expression of this faith is explained well in verses 12-14. Look at verse 12. “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.” Like a defeated boxer, sin wants to get back into the ring and have another chance to reign. But we must not let sin reign. We must claim Christ’s victory over sin by faith constantly. We must be vigilant against the sneaky power of sin. We must be clear about small sins that don’t seem to be so serious.

Look at verse 13. “Do not offer the 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.” We must see our bodies as living sacrifices to be offered to God, day by day. In America, how we use our fingers is really important. Some use their fingers to press the TV remote, video game controller, or computer mouse to enjoy sin vicariously. We must offer our fingers to type Bible study material or dial the telephone to call Bible students. Some use their eyes to indulge in ungodly mental fantasies. They must use their eyes to read the word of God. Some use their feet to travel to places of promiscuity. We must use our feet to travel to foreign lands as missionaries. We must offer the parts of our body to God as instruments of righteousness.

As we do so, we must have the attitude of one who has been brought from death to life. This means that we must acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and the one worthy of our life sacrifice. In Dumas’ novel, “The Count of Monte Cristo,” Edmond Dantes is falsely imprisoned. By the help of a good shepherd, he gains freedom and lands on a remote island. There he meets a band of pirates and is forced, as a matter of his own survival, to have a duel with one of them to the death. Dantes wins the battle; he is in a position to slay his opponent. But he does not. He spares the man’s life. Then this man surrenders his life to Dantes and becomes his lifelong servant. It is because he thought his life was no longer his, but it belonged to Dantes. Christ Jesus has brought us from death to life. We must offer our new lives to him in deep gratitude and wholehearted appreciation.

When we offer ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness, God accepts. God uses us in his redemptive history. There was a woman who simply wanted to

express her love to Jesus when he was facing arrest and trial. She brought a jar of very expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus. In this way she offered herself to God. Jesus accepted her act as a most beautiful thing and an eternal part of his gospel history. When we offer ourselves to God like her we can have great joy and the privilege of being used by God in his history.

Fifth, “slaves to righteousness” (15-23).

Paul said clearly that we are not under law, but under grace (14). We no longer live in bondage to sin or under the yoke of legalism. We can come to God freely through Christ and ask his grace and mercy to help us in our struggle. However, we must not abuse this grace by living at random. In verses 15-23, Paul explains that we must have a clear direction for our new lives. 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?” When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, he becomes our master. Submission to him sets the direction of our new lives. Paul calls this submission being slaves to obedience, slaves to righteousness, and slaves to God.

Some people resist the idea of submission to God. They feel that they will give up their freedom. This is an illusion. Man cannot have absolute freedom. Man is not God. Man was made to serve. Either he will be a slave to righteousness or a slave to sin. There is no middle ground. Slavery to sin is a nasty downward progression like being on “a highway to hell.” It is slavery to impurity and ever-increasing wickedness. The final result is death, both physically and spiritually.

God gave us his one and only Son Jesus to rescue us from slavery to sin. Through his word we gain access to a new life. When we wholeheartedly obey the word of God, the power of sin loses its grip on us. We become slaves to obedience that leads to righteousness. We grow in holiness. The final result is eternal life. How wonderful it is to grow in God! Shepherd Alan Wolff and his fellowship members have kept up early morning prayer for over a year. Now Shepherd Alan looks trim and even more handsome. Moreover, they have so many sheep it is hard for them to take care of them all. Let's decide to obey the word of God wholeheartedly and grow in holiness.

In this passage we learn that in Christ we are dead to sin and alive to God. By faith, we must see ourselves in this way. By faith, we must claim freedom from sin and new life in God through Christ. We must offer ourselves to God as his servants. Then God gives us victory. May God bless you abundantly with this new life in Christ.