

Dead to Sin, Alive to God

Romans 6:6-11

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I'm not a big fan of Halloween. For some of you that's nearly a heresy. It's OK, I have decided to place Halloween in the liberty category. But I find our culture's celebration of death and dismemberment a strange reason to spend time and money. Perhaps it's the only way to deal with death; turn it into a holiday and pass out candy. Whatever.

One common feature on neighborhood lawns these days are zombies. What is a zombie? A zombie is a person who was dead but somehow has come back to life, but not all the way back. They are kind of still dead and kind of still alive. And they are grotesque. Their bodies look like they are still in some state of partial decay, but they can walk (slowly), make strange noises, and apparently have access to large cutlery. Not dead, but not quite alive either. *Zombies*.

Romans 6 describes a Christian as one who was spiritually dead, but now has been made alive by God through regeneration. Fully alive. All the way alive.

This seems straightforward, but Romans 6 is a challenging portion of Scripture. One of my pastor heroes from the past is Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He died around 40 years ago, but in his prime, he once was asked when he would do a series in Romans. He said, "when I can understand Romans 6." So, this is not easy material.

Let's do a quick review of Romans so far. Salvation is by the grace of God. Salvation is all God's doing. We have nothing, offer nothing, do nothing. It is completely God's unmerited and undeserved kindness and goodness. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus and his saving work on the cross. In justification, God declares us to have right standing before him forever. Justification places us forever in the sphere of God's favor and love and his precious gift of eternal life.

But how did God accomplish it? We saw last week, through union with Christ. The best doctrine you have not heard of. God united us with Jesus so that when he died *for* our sin, we died *to* our sin. When he was raised to life, we were raised with him in victory over sin and death.

"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. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:6-11 ESV)

I want to focus on the last verse because it states clearly Paul's exhortation, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:11) "Consider yourselves." The old KJV goes with "reckon yourselves." Live with your essential identity as dead to sin, alive to Christ. Dead to sin and alive to God.

This isn't some spiritual mind game where if repeat it enough it must be true. Paul is stating a fact. A spiritual reality. The sinner in union with Christ is dead to sin in terms of sin as my primary identity. Sin as my master. Sin as my Darth Lord. When Jesus died on the cross *for* my sin, I died with him *to* my sin. When Jesus was raised to life, spiritually, I was raised with him. We weren't even alive yet when Jesus died for us, but we see how God was already working to save people who didn't exist and who hadn't sinned yet. He unites us with the work of Christ.

Sin and death are Satan's primary weapons. These give him authority in our lives. But Jesus conquered sin and death. The Death Star has been destroyed. The Ring has been thrown into the fires of Mt. Doom. The White Witch's wand has been broken and Aslan is on the move. Once again, the hills are alive with the sound of music. Need I go on?

Dead to sin, alive to God. Let's tackle this section in those terms.

The Unbeliever – *Alive to Sin, Dead to God*

We don't begin dead to sin and alive to God. We start the opposite. This is described in verse 6, "*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.*" (Romans 6:6) Notice the descriptions of the natural human apart from God's grace. *Old self. Body of sin. Enslaved to sin.* These are all describing what it means to be alive to *sin*. Our natural selves are not alive to God; we are naturally alive to sin. Sin is our master. Sin is our lord. We don't have to train kids to sin, they do so quite naturally. This is not to say that sinners can't make morally good choices or act in morally good ways. They do bear God's image and have a God-given conscience. However, unbelievers sin because it is their nature to sin. There is no spiritual life in them. No Holy Spirit animating righteous living. No new nature in Jesus. Sinners sin by nature and by choice. This was us before Christ too.

"Unbelievers do not possess freedom to choose the contrary; unbelievers do not have libertarian freedom. This does not mean that sin is forced on them against their will. It means that they invariably choose to sin because sin is the circumference of their desires. Believers have been liberated from such slavery to sin and are now free from its clutches." (Thomas Schreiner)¹

This explains the world around us quite nicely. What happens on a planet when 7 billion sinners live side by side? What do you get? You get newspapers filled with embezzlement, rape, divorce, drug addiction, murder, and death. If these gruesome sins aren't the headlines, then the headlines are sinners trying to derive meaning from power, wealth, possessions, pleasure, and fame.

As one example, here we are in the latest political election cycle. One of the craziest I can remember. I encourage you to exercise good citizenry and vote; and vote for candidates who will promote righteousness in our country. Can you see behind the millions and billions of dollars and people screaming at each other, mankind's ancient sin of believing we can fix our problems? When you are dead to God, government is all you have, and government is your god. We see evidence of humanity bowing to it all around us.

This and a host of other systemic ills dominates a sinner's heart as he or she bows every day to lord Sin and lives every day with sin's painful consequence—spiritual emptiness, loneliness, and meaninglessness. But God's mercy and love through Jesus have come to set

¹ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 317.

us free from the enslavement to sin. How? *"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."* (Romans 6:6) Jesus died so that our sinful self, and even our bodies as instruments of sinful expression, might be *"brought to nothing."* Made impotent. Made irrelevant to us. So that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. God has far better designs and purposes for his people than for us to live for things beneath his dignity and glory.

"For one who has died has been set free from sin." (Romans 6:7) He makes the plain observation, dead people don't sin anymore; at least not in their body. The bodies in cemeteries haven't sinned in years. Dead people don't sin anymore. Where is he going? Paul wants the Christian to realize that something fundamental has changed in the Christian's relationship to sin. If when Jesus died *for* our sin we died *to* our sin, then we are no longer alive to sin and dead to God. Now there is a fundamental change. In Christ we are dead to sin and alive to God.

The Christian – Dead to Sin, Alive to God

"Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God." (Romans 6:8-10)

Paul returns to union with Christ as the basis for our death to sin and resurrection. If we have died *"with Christ"* we will also *"live with him."* With him on the cross, with him out of the grave. Union with Christ.

If you are still struggling to get union with Christ, perhaps this will help. This past week we took the family to the orchard. It's an annual tradition. It's also an annual rip-off, but worth it for some cute pictures. One that we have taken every year, same place, same photo, is the school bus with holes cut out where the kids can put their face in it (see below).



Besides being cute, the kids have a sense that they are on the bus. Think of union with Christ as Jesus' crucifixion with a place for you to put your face instead of his. For you to see yourself with Jesus on the cross. The Greek word for "died with Christ" means, *co-crucified*. It's used of the thieves who were crucified with Jesus. Jesus died there on the cross for you, and through union with Christ, you died there with him too. You died to sin as your primary identity. You died to sin's dominance over your motives and purposes. Through union with Christ, Christian, you have completely died to sin's ultimate hold on you.

I suspect many of us don't see it this way. One pastor described the task of pastoral ministry as "*convincing those under the dominion of sin that they are under the dominion of sin and convincing those who are no longer under the dominion of sin that they are not under the dominion of sin.*" (Sinclair Ferguson)² In other words, convincing sinners that they are sinners and convincing Christians they don't have to live that way anymore.

Yes, justification removes the penalty of sin. I'm declared righteous. But Christian, God's purposes are much more than simply declaring us righteous. He is making us into the likeness of his Son, which means making us righteous in our living. Righteous in our doings. Righteous in our moral choices. Righteous in our speech. Righteous in our relationships.

Here is the great news: through salvation we all have a capacity to live this way. The old us before Jesus couldn't do that. We were like pigs to mud; always back in it again. But we are made alive to God, and with regeneration comes a new power and purpose in our lives. An unbeliever who lives in sin has no choice. A Christian who lives in sin, does it by his choice. We don't have to live for sin anymore.

Christian, there is no sin that you currently feel in bondage to that you are actually in bondage to. It may feel like there is no way you can overcome. But if you are a Christian, you are dead to sin as your master and you are alive to God as your Lord. The old is gone, the new has come. With the new is a real freedom from sin's grip on our lives.

We must see salvation not merely as being saved *from* something, but also saved *to* something. To a life far better. To something far purer. To something far more beautiful and wonderful. What is it? The Jesus life. The Jesus-like life of purity, love, truth, and life. "*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*" (Romans 8:29)

What does sin offer us? Where does sin take us? It takes us to hell. In a few verses it will say, "*The wages of sin is death.*" (Romans 6:23) Death is the end of life, but it also describes a kind of death-like living. Unbelievers are the living dead. Sin sucks the life right out of us. Fills us with guilt. Brings its own devastating consequences.

But Jesus is life. That's what he said, "*I am the resurrection and the life.*" (John 11:25) "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*" (John 14:6) New life.

"To be born again is, as it were, to enter upon a new existence, to have a new mind and a new heart, new views, new principles, new tastes, new affections, new likings and new dislikings, new fears, new joys, new sorrows, new love to things once

² Sinclair Ferguson. "The Pastor, the Vine, and the Branches: The Remarkable Reality of Union with Christ." www.desiringgod.org. Desiring God 2014 Conference for Pastors, Union with Christ: Mind-Renewing Foundations. February 4, 2014.

hated, new hatred to things once loved, new thoughts of God, and ourselves, and the world, and the life to come, and salvation.” (J.C. Ryle)³

Sounds great, doesn't it? It is. Which brings me to zombies.

The Zombie – Alive to God, Alive to Sin?

Remember Paul is still addressing the question of whether a Christian can exploit grace as an excuse for sin. Is it possible to be alive to God and remain also alive to sin? Do Christians sin? Yes. Let me make that clear. This is no utopian perfectionism and any honest Christian will tell you in some ways our struggle with sin is worse as Christians because it's actually a struggle. Before we are saved, there is no tug of war. There is no opponent. Sin always drags us across its line. But as a Christian, now I struggle with it.

Salvation is not the removal of sin from my life, but it is the removal of sin as the necessary master of my life. Why? My face is in the cutout of the crucifixion. When Jesus died for my sin, I died to my sin. I'm now alive to God.

What do we say to people who claim to be alive to God, but their lives shout that they are still alive to sin? These are the zombies. They are dead yet claiming somehow to be alive at the same time. We can say, they either are not actually alive to God, or if they are, they seriously misunderstand grace. Grace is not permission to sin, grace is permission and power not to sin. Grace teaches us to say no ungodliness and worldly passions. (Titus 2:12)

What I am saying is that if your life looks like zombie land, you are not experiencing freedom from sin *and* you are not experiencing new life to God. It's the worst possible scenario. Perhaps somehow you have been confused as to what it means to be a Christian and to die to sin's dominance and power. It's called repentance. Perhaps you've never seen anyone living the new life in Christ. Perhaps you are not genuinely converted.

But here's what Paul is making clear: kind of alive to God and kind of dead to sin is not authentic Christianity. This subtle antinomianism lurks in every church. The gospel is cover for ungodly living. Grace is excuse for sinful lifestyles and choices. I'm saved anyway so what is the big deal? You sometimes hear this in the way people talk about their past. *Oh, the parties were insane. Insane! We were wild, like crazy wild. I remember times man I was so wasted...my bros were like, dude. I was like, dude. Crazy! Then I came to Jesus... it's been boring. I miss the good old days.*

Yeah, and Israel missed Egypt. Nobody says it that blatantly, but our posture toward our sinful selves is often a far cry from Jesus' description of the tax collector who bowed in the temple praying, *"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* (Luke 18:13) When that is my posture toward my sin, now I am living out *dead to sin, alive to God*. That's even for Christians. We're often indecisive in our worldly pursuits. But Christians are dead to sin, and we keep dying to it.

Trusting in Jesus applies union with Christ to not only my status before God, but my life before him as well. I don't want anyone here to be asked what today's sermon was about and for you to say, *Sin*. What was the point? *Don't do it*.

Christianity is not moral therapy; it is transformation. Do we consider ourselves dead to sin because I treasure being unified with Jesus on the cross? Do we consider ourselves alive to

³ J.C. Ryle, *The True Christian*, p. 22.

God because we can't believe that we were with Jesus spiritually when he stepped out of that grave?

Which are we today? Unbeliever? Zombie? Christian?

"So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."
(Romans 6:11)

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