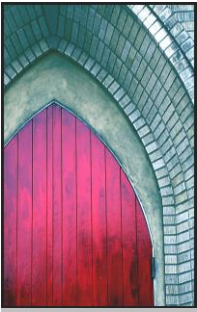


Dead and Alive

TEXT: ROMANS 6.1-14



Rev. Jon Dunning
November 8, 2009

Oak Hills
Presbyterian Church,
Overland Park,
Kansas

WHAT NOW?

How do you know that you have arrived? There may be much in your life that feels incomplete, but it's possible that you may already feel like you have arrived and you wonder, what now? It may be based on your home, your family, your job, or your 'toys.' Or it may have something to do with your faith. When we arrive spiritually, one of three things happens: some continue to live as if God's love for them is founded on their ability to behave. Others run the other direction and live with the cynical despair that sees only their darkness and

have no hope for change. Yet others live with quiet apathy that neither strives for anything, nor expects anything.

The beginning of Romans 6 is about answering the question "what now" when we believe that we have found peace with God through justification. When we have arrived, cynicism and apathy make perfect sense, and any need for change in our lives often leads us into places of guilt, fear, and mere effort. To those who find themselves asking some form of the question "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" or who struggle to believe that grace does in fact abound, Paul directs our attention to Jesus.

ROMANS 6.1-14

¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 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 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. ⁶We 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. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹²Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

"DEAD"

Former Marine Lt. Donovan Campbell has written a memoir of leading a platoon of 40 men in combat in the Iraqi city of Ramadi. In talking about leading well in that situation, he said that "... you must have absolutely no concern for your own safety. You can't think of home, you can't miss your wife, and you can't wonder how it would feel to take a round through the neck. You can only pretend that you're already dead and thus free yourself to focus on three things: 1) finding and killing the enemy, 2) communicating the situation and resulting actions to adjacent units and higher headquarters, and 3) triaging and treating your wounded. If you love your men, you naturally think about number three first, but if you do you're wrong. The grim logic of combat dictates that numbers one and two take precedence." When the goal of combat is to defeat the enemy threat, the way one leads well is to set-aside any self-concern and 'pretend that you're already dead.' To this, he adds the thought that even treating your own wounded cannot come before the pursuit of the primary goal. In a twist of logic, self-preservation would only keep you from leading well and achieving a goal.

In Romans 6, the answer to the question "should we continue in sin"^{6.1} is "By no means!"^{6.2} At the center of that answer is Jesus. Continuing in sin is absurd because of Jesus. He lived a sinless life, bore our sin and so suffered its consequence—death—and rose again from the dead in victory over sin once and for all. For us, response to this work of grace is to "pretend that you're already dead": "you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."^{6.11} We must be careful, though, because in this we are not called to merely "pretend." This is not presumption; this is not imagination. Paul does not call us to speculate as to what might be. We live the new life, resting on the truth of our death and resurrection in Jesus.

Paul makes the connection for the believer in baptism.^{6.3-4} He has made the case unequivocally that salvation is by faith alone.^{cf. Rom 3.21-26; 4.3-5, 13} When he speaks of baptism, he does not write as if an outward ritual saves us; his point is that baptism functions as a sacrament (a visible sign of an invisible reality), which for the believer finds its evidence in faith. In other words, for those who believe in Jesus, Paul urges them to look back on their baptism as a sign and seal of God's work in them that has now come to fruition. We move forward in the new life by faith, and that faith is grounded in what Jesus has done in space and in time.

What, then, does the application of the work of Jesus received by faith in our lives consist of? How do we go about living as those who are dead to sin and alive to God?

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

For the believer, refusing to continue to live in sin begins with the question "who's in charge?" The way that we consider ourselves "dead to sin" is by not letting "sin reign in your mortal bodies"^{6.12} Continuing in sin is allowing sin to take the lead in our lives—to rule over us as our king. Back in verse 6 Paul speaks of the same idea in different terms when he speaks of being "enslaved to sin." Considering ourselves dead to sin

means refusing to live as if our sin—rebellion against God and refusal to worship him^{1.18-32}—is in charge of our lives.

At the end of verse 12, Paul adds to this an understanding of how sin works in each of us: it is obedience to the passions of our bodies. This tells us two things: sin flows from a place of desire—of passion, and that there is something inherently bodily about sin in our lives. We live with sin as our king when we let the desires of our bodies direct us. The problem here is not that our bodies are evil; sin enters when we choose to allow the passions of our bodies to rule us we are nothing more than animals.^{Ps 73.22} John Calvin has said that “. . . *It is the worship of God alone that renders men higher than the brutes, and through it alone they aspire to immortality.*” Paul’s concern is with a whole-being transformation for us, one in which our inner and outer lives are unified in their pursuit of God. In this, he directs us to not let sin reign in our lives.

We begin to apply this by asking ourselves why we do the things that we do. Taking this beyond mere introspection, we need to ask “what king am I serving?” Taking it further, “Is there a bodily desire that I am allowing to rule my life?” If you are not a Christian, I challenge you to ask these questions. Who are you serving with your life? You may be convinced that you are serving your ideals and principles, or even that you are simply looking out for your best interests, but you might be surprised to find what you’re actually serving and where it will lead you. For the Christian, these questions are vital for the same reasons. The assumption behind these words is that we are not naturally engaged in not letting sin reign, and therefore we are giving our loyalty to something.

WHO GETS WHAT?

In Tolkein’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, there is a point in which Pippin, one of the young hobbits meets the father of Boromir—the valiant warrior clouded by desire for power who gave his life to save Pippin and another hobbit. When he meets Boromir’s father Denethor, he says “*Little service, no doubt, will so great a lord of Men think to find in a hobbit . . . yet such as it is, I will offer it, in payment of my debt.*” And then Pippin draws his sword and lays it down at Denethor’s feet. Later, Pippin is alone with Gandalf, the wise and powerful wizard, and Gandalf warns Pippin that Denethor is , a man also clouded by a desire for power, and is craftier than what he appears. But Gandalf has to remind Pippin, “*you are now sworn to his service . . . you are at his command and he will not forget.*” Pippin presented his sword to Denethor, pledged his loyalty, and now he must obey.

As Paul outlines for us here, the first question we need to ask is “who’s in charge?” The follow-up question is “who gets what?” In verse 13 Paul says “*do not present your members to sin . . .*” Whether we see it or not this is how we often silently pledge our loyalty. The unrighteousness of which Paul speaks is not limited to a contamination of the soul; Paul is concerned about the unrighteous ways that we live outwardly. And so we need to ask ourselves, to what are we presenting our members? What are the images to which we present our eyes, and where will those images lead us? What are the conversations to which we present our ears and mouths? Are we simply consuming and passing along gossip, slander, and coarse joking? To what are we presenting our hands and feet? Are we contributing to or walking away from (ignoring) violence that must be stopped?

Notice the other ‘side’ of this call for us. Paul doesn’t merely say “stop it and do what’s right,” even though there are times when that’s exactly what we need to be told. Look again: “*but*

present yourselves to God . . . and your members to God”^{6.13} We need this. Paul’s instruction to us is to cast ourselves in our need before God; weakness, temptations, rebellion and all. Lest we try and reduce our sin to individual acts or parts of ourselves, Paul says “*present yourselves . . .*” This is the casting of everything we have and everything we are before the only One who can and will work out in His righteousness.

WHY?

The final question we can ask with regard to the call to “*consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*”^{6.11} is “why?” The answer to our question runs through nearly every verse of this passage, but verse 14 is a helpful summary: “*sin will have no dominion over you.*” This is not a command; it is a statement of truth. For the believer, sin is no longer ‘lord’ or king. Sin no longer has a ruling authority in the life of the believer; it has no place by which it can demand our obedience. This flows directly from the death of Christ in our place because “*one who has died has been set free from sin*”^{6.7} and “*death no longer has dominion over him*”^{6.9} Jesus defeated death for us, and therefore conquered sin while we were still enslaved to it and sitting under its kingship.^{Rom 5.6-11} Sin does not have ultimate authority over the believer any more.

In the second part of the verse, Paul adds that the believer is “*not under law but under grace.*” We must remove any thought that says there is no place to consider obedience, nor any value of understanding God’s law. God’s law is not imperfect, it is not flawed.^{Rom 7.7-20} In simple terms, it is not enough for us. It reveals to us God’s will and therefore directs us in how to live, and it declares our guilt to us when we cannot keep it.^{Rom 3.19-20} The point of the Bible is that law is not enough for us because we are the flawed part of the equation. Those who are “*under law*” have only law by which to live. The law is the extent of resources available. For those under grace, believers in Jesus, there are all the resources of one who has lived, died, and risen in our place and how sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven.^{Rom 6.5-11; 2 Cor 5.21; Eph 1.13; heb 1.1-3}

We need to hear all of the hope of eternity in these words. Verse 14 is the cumulative declaration of verses 1-10, so that we can “*walk in newness of life*” by way of verses 11-13. The command in these verses is NOT to conquer sin. The command is NOT to die and come back to life. The call is to live knowing that these things have been accomplished for us. Because sin no longer has dominion, we can oppose its seeming reign in our lives with confidence that it has been defeated. Through Jesus, we are “*alive to God*” and can therefore strive for righteousness in everything we do. These verses presume a process for us—but that process does NOT include death and resurrection. The process is our learning to not let sin rule in our lives, and to offer ourselves to God. The promise is that as we grow in this, we will see more and more our ability to offer our members to God as instruments for righteousness.

And so we ask, what now? Ultimately we’re all looking for something more. Some search in the form of striving for God’s approval that they can’t earn, while others work hard at ignoring the desire through either cynicism or apathy. These are all forms of sin, though we rarely want to admit it. The declaration to the believer is that we have been set free from these forms of sin ruling over us in order that we might live new lives. If you are a believer, consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God. Refuse to let sin reign, offer yourself to God, and look for His grace at work in you and through you.