

This is a continuation of an ongoing series titled "Things that Matter Most." We have studied in previous lessons that apart from God's redemptive work and calling, we would never have discovered who and what He is. We also are, as sinners, always trying to justify our condition before Him. Common arguments are that we aren't all that bad and that if we try really hard to be good, somehow that will count as "brownie points" before a holy God who demands that we be holy as He is holy.¹

The redemptive work of God involves God alone. Man can only respond to the call of the Holy Spirit Who is now moving the hearts of men toward the call of the Gospel. RC Sproul once said that God has invested His omnipotence in the preaching of the Gospel (Romans 1:16). It is this power that is operating in the world to call all men to Him - not the other way around - not that man is through his insight seeking God. Paul has an interesting metaphor about man's ability to seek after God - that of a blind man groping in the darkness of his blindness after God.²

The exciting news is that when man responds to the call of the Gospel he is given new life and that life enables him to have a personal relationship with God. I like Peter's expression of this new life:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 1 Peter 1:3.

The exciting news is that God the Father has bestowed great mercy³ upon us. The picture here is that of a poor, unfortunate individual becoming the beneficiary of a rich philanthropist and as a result of his fortune is rescued from his misfortune - that's the picture of mercy. In the Hebrew the picture is that of one bending his knee in order to help an unfortunate man up from his difficulty. The picture here is quite wonderful. Sinful man is dead in his sins and completely unable to deliver himself from this condition.⁴ Our Heavenly Father in His abundant mercy reaches down and delivers us sinners from our death and has given us *new birth into a living hope*. This was accomplished through the resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is precisely this new

¹ "Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Leviticus 20:7.

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; [16] for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16.

² Acts 17:27, especially NASB and, of course the original.

³ I like KJV's use of *abundant* instead of NIV's *great*, but the rest of the NIV translation is preferred over KJV

⁴ Eph. 2:1

birth into a living hope that both Paul⁵ and John⁶ have also written about in God's word. This morning I would like to introduce us to Paul's teaching from his epistle to the Romans - chapter 6.

Passage from Death to Life

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? [2] God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Romans 6:1-2

This was Paul's response to an argument made by his detractors that if God can forgive the sinners many sins through grace rather than legalistic obedience to religious code - perhaps the sinner should sin all the more so that grace would abound all the more. This is, of course, absurd - the detractors have completely missed the point of Paul's teaching in chapter 5 of Adam's sin and its consequences on the human race and Jesus Christ's obedience and its wonderful result of abundant grace and gift of righteousness and eternal life to sinful man who believes in the finished work of Christ.⁷ The whole point of Paul's teaching is that when sinful man believes on Jesus Christ as Savior, *new life is imputed to him*. Believing man literally makes a passage from his former condition of death to that of life.⁸ When Paul says we *die* to sin he is not teaching that we enter into sinless perfection.⁹ Rather, we now have the ability to *not* respond to the call of Sin's demands.¹⁰ Later on in his epistle to Ephesians he clarifies this point by describing the sinful condition of man as living in the realm of sin completely under its influence and control.¹¹

Paul's Metaphor of the Garden

**For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death,
we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Romans 6:5**

I've used this passage many times to describe the new birth. The picture is not that we have merely been planted in the ground as a seed to burst into life as a new person

⁵ Rom 5:17, 18; 6:4, 13 and other passages.

⁶ John 20:31; 1 John 3:14.

⁷ Rom 5:21.

⁸ Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. John 5:24

⁹ To address this point, see Romans 7.

¹⁰ See Lenski on this.

¹¹ Ephesians 2:1 - 3.

but that we have been planted *together* with Christ in the likeness of His death, which brings to mind a whole gamut of images related to His death, and are inseparable in our association with Him *in His life!* When seeds are planted together, their roots become entangled in such a way that one cannot transplant one plant without transplanting the other - the association is that intimate. So it is with our relationship with Christ. When we receive Christ as Savior, *we die to Sin in the sense that we die to its absolute control - its demands - its way of life.* So it is with our life in Christ. We live in an inseparable association with Him and mortify the Sin in our lives.¹²

Our Disassociation with Sin

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:11

Dead in the sense of Ephesians 2. The Sin nature is still there but it is our enemy - an enemy to be defeated - not our master or friend to which we are *obligated*. "Reckon" is a term of mathematics. Just as mathematics are abstract concepts, but very real, so is our new relationship with our Sin nature. My job consists of testing new, and sometimes revolutionary antennas. The design of these antennas are based almost entirely on mathematics. In fact, it is possible to *predict* the performance of an antenna based on complex mathematic formulas - to graph these performance results and to compare them with the test results that I run on the actual antenna when it is tested. Now, this "reckoning" is so real to the design engineer that if the patterns from the tests differ from the predicted patterns from the mathematical formulas, we likely will question either my test setup or the fabrication of the antenna *never the reality of the design formulas*. Fortunately for me it is seldom my test setup but rather the "fabrication guy."

My point is this: our new relationship with the Sin nature is just as real in the sense that we are dead to it as those antenna design formulas are to the design engineer. It should not be a stretch in our thinking to reckon ourselves to be dead to Sin any more than it is a stretch for the design engineer to place his confidence in the design formulas associated with his antenna.

Our Inseparable Association with Him

But let's look at the other part of this passage.

"...but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:11b.

This is the thrilling phrase. Remember our former sinful condition of spiritual death?¹³ There was no room for association with God in any form. Our passage in

¹² Rom 8:13, Col 3:5.

¹³ **Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: [3] Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling**

Acts 17 taught that we were groping around for God and that even though He was close by - we could not discover Him. Now, however, our condition is very much different. We are ***alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord***. Remember Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus? Except the sinner is born from above and is spiritually alive, *he cannot see (perceive) the kingdom of God*. "Cannot see," indeed - that is an understatement! A dead man certainly cannot see any more than a spiritually dead man can see God's kingdom. What a terrible condition to be in. Blindness is a disabling medical condition - the patient can be trained to cope with his disability but death, on the other hand has no remedy! We bury our dead because there is no "cure." Spiritual death, praise the Lord, has a wonderful remedy - Christ! Our passage here is revolutionary - we can see the kingdom of God - we can be in intimate relationship with God. We can perceive Him and His realm not with our eyes but with a heart that has been regenerated and infused with life from Christ Himself.

Our new Relationship with Christ - a new Pattern

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. [18] You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. Romans 6:17-18

There are several points that must not be missed in this passage. We were slaves - to sin. We have already covered this point but I must point out further that there was *no* escape from this condition in the Roman world. Escape from slavery in the Roman world meant certain death.

Paul wrote a very poignant letter to his friend Philemon regarding a runaway slave Onesimus who belonged to his friend but was now a convert to Christ and Paul's aid. We need to understand in that letter that Philemon had every right in Roman law to have Onesimus executed for his crime of running away - it was a wonderful account of forgiveness both on the part of God and Philemon in Onesimus' behalf that he was not executed but gladly received back into Philemon's house. My point is this - that escape from the house of Sin is not possible apart from Christ. In the case of Onesimus, he was received back into a new relationship of - yes - slavery - but no - not to the old relationship but the new - that of two brothers in Christ. Let's look at the second part of our passage - verse 18.

When we are delivered from Sin's deathgrip we are not delivered to an autonomous self-rule but rather we become willing slaves to Christ and His righteousness - a far better and preferred condition to our former relationship with Sin.

Three Final Metaphors of Our New Life in Christ (Rom 6:21 - 23).

We close with three illustrations of our new life in Christ. First, back to the garden - fruit. I have an apple tree in the back part of my property. The first few years I was

the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.
Ephes. 2:2-3.

there the fruit of this apple tree was very tasty - perfect for an apple pie. After a while through my neglect, the fruit became wormy and useless. We could no longer use this fruit - it was worthless. Imagine the thought of eating an apple pie made from wormy apples! What a disgusting thought. There is no value to be reaped from a life lived under the Sin nature. In fact, the only result of such a life is death. On the other hand, a life lived as a believer results in good fruit - in this passage of holiness and eternal life (vs. 22b), of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), of the light (Eph 5:9), of righteousness (Phil 1:11). Second, let's consider our occupation - being made free from Sin we become servants of the Lord and produce good fruit. Third, the workplace. When we apply for a job a very important part of the process is our salary. But it actually doesn't stop there for what we produce on the job should be an important part of our consideration. In the case of the believer the benefits are many including eternal life. Paul closes his lesson in life in Christ by pointing out that our wages in the former life was death - but the *gift* in our new occupation with Christ is Life - eternal and fulfilling.¹⁴

¹⁴ The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. John 10:10