

Alive in Christ

Romans 6:5-14

September 24, 2017

Introduction:

The Fourth of July is a great American holiday where people like to do activities such as gather together for cook-outs, watch fireworks, and oddly enough, shop for mattresses, because for some reason “Fourth of July Mattress Sale” ads seems to be ubiquitous whenever the first week of July rolls around. I’m not sure how the Fourth of July and the sale of mattresses have anything to do with each other, but I know that if I’m ever in the market for a new mattress, that’s the date I’m going shopping!

That of course begs the question: what exactly is the Fourth of July holiday all about that make mattress sales seem strangely incongruent? I can recall asking my kids when they were younger, “Why do we celebrate the Fourth of July?” and the only answer they could give had to do with seeing fireworks. Unfortunately, when we refer to the holiday that falls on the fourth day of July only as “The Fourth of July” we obscure the original reason for our celebration. The holiday we observe on July fourth is formally known as “Independence Day” which is the day back in 1776 when the thirteen colonies officially declared their independence from the British Empire by signing the Declaration of Independence.

But as you perhaps remember from your American history class from school, the British weren’t exactly enamored with our ambitions for independence. While we had declared ourselves to be a free country, we still needed to fight the Revolutionary War against the British, because King George wasn’t going to let us go without a fight. Our freedom led to fighting in order to make what was true on paper true in reality.

Perhaps that’s a helpful analogy for us to keep in mind as we look at what the apostle Paul has to say to us this morning. While Christ has set us free from the ruling power of sin, we still have a war to wage. Sin hasn’t simply put down it’s arms and surrendered. Now that we’ve been set free from sin, we need to fight against it and pursue righteousness instead. We’ve been armed to fight the good fight of faith, but we must take up the shield of faith and the breastplate of righteousness and begin to make the forensic righteousness gained for us by Christ a practical reality in how we resist temptation and live righteously for Christ.

So to that end, I would invite you to open your Bibles to Romans 6, which is to be found on pg. 942 of the pew Bibles should you not have a Bible of your own in your possession. We are going to cover v. 5-14 this morning, but to begin, I want to have us just focus on v. 5-11. Please follow along as I read then starting at v. 5 of Romans 6, through v. 11. Paul writes, **“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 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."

Let's work through this paragraph together as I draw out two summary ideas from it and then once we're done we'll move on to the next paragraph where I'll have a couple more. So we have four points total to consider this morning and the first one is this...

1. The power of sin has been broken because we've died with Christ

Our passage is a continuation of what Paul was addressing last week. He raised the question, "Should we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" and answered with a resounding, "No way, Jose!" We died to sin so therefore we should not live in it any longer. That's v. 1-4 in a nutshell. But now he's continuing with his explanation in v. 5 when he says, "**For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.**" So, Paul is advancing his argument saying not only have we been united with Christ in his death, but we will also be united with him in his resurrected life. That's the summary statement, as it were, of the rest of this passage from which he's going to unpack further the implications of being united in his death as well as being joined to him in his resurrected life.

So then, in v. 6-7 Paul focuses on our dying with Christ first. Look at what he says there in v. 6-7. "**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.**" There are a few key phrases I want us to notice that communicate that the power of sin has been broken when we were justified by faith in Christ. The first is that due to being crucified with Christ, the body of sin has been "**brought to nothing**" or as other translations say, "done away with." The idea is that our old self, referring to the way we lived before we were Christians, such that we were living according to "the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body," as Paul puts it in Eph. 2, is now ended. We used to live that way, obeying our sinful desires, but no longer. Such a way of life that once characterized our old self is "**brought to nothing**" because that's not to be true of us any longer. We're done with it. You aren't who you were before.

This then brings us to the second key phrase and that helps to describe who we were before and so Paul says that now we're "**no longer... enslaved to sin.**" Our old self, before we trusted in Christ, was enslaved to sin such that sin was all we could do. We couldn't bring ourselves to please or obey God in any way. We loved the darkness rather than the light and so we acted in accordance with what our hearts desired. We were enslaved to sin because our desires were all sinful, and since we can only do that which we most desire, we could only choose to sin. Mind you, we could choose to sin in numerous and diverse ways, but sinning was our only option. We were not free to choose to love God or obey him because we didn't want to. Our wills were in bondage to our sinful passions and desires which ruled over us.

As a result, we were utterly helpless to help ourselves. We didn't possess the ability to choose to love God because we didn't want to and would never want to because sin's

power over us was total. An unbeliever is not free to choose Christ because he cannot choose what he doesn't desire. Our old unregenerate selves apart from Christ were enslaved to sinful desires that made it impossible for us to choose anything other than sin. So, Paul rightfully uses the word "**enslaved**" to describe the bondage of our wills to the sinful passions that held sway over us.

But now look at the third phrase Paul uses in v. 7, which is the opposite of enslavement. He says the "**one who had died has been set free from sin.**" When we become a Christian, God causes us to be born again so that our hearts are changed, meaning that our desires are transformed. Whereas once we viewed sin as desirable, now we see Christ rightly as our merciful savior, and see our sin for the horrible rebellion that it is, and we long to live in a way pleasing to God. Because we now have new desires, we are free from our slavery to sin. We can now act upon those desires for righteousness by choosing to obey God. Whereas we couldn't resist sin before because it was what we desired the most, the new birth creates in us new desires for God that frees us to resist sin and live righteously.

We need to grasp this because our view of the effects of sin is too often far too weak. Unbelievers are *enslaved* to sin. They do not have a free will in that they are free to choose to either reject or accept God any more than a man shackled to a prison wall is free to get up and leave. Their will is enslaved because their desires are only sinful, bent away from God and towards sin and self. They cannot choose what they don't desire. The only way the bondage of their will is broken is by being born again by the power of the Holy Spirit, given only by God's grace, that transforms our desires so we can (and do) believe and obey. If God doesn't cause them to be born again, they can never choose Christ because they will never want to.

But Paul wants to move from speaking about dying to sin to the other side of the coin, which is that we've also been raised with Christ. So our second point is this...

2. **The power of the resurrection is ours because we've been raised with Christ**

Now look at v. 8 in your Bibles. Paul says, "**Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.**" When we trust in Christ, we are so identified with him that not only is it as if we died with him on the cross, but it guarantees we will also share in his resurrection. What happened to Christ is what happened to us, and so not only do we die with him we rise to new life with him.

But that new life is not only what will happen in the future: it's a present reality right now that manifests itself in our lives. Paul expands on what this means in v. 9-11. Look there with me. "**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.**"

So his logic works like this: Jesus, having been resurrected, died to sin's power and lives to God. Since you are now one with Christ by faith, then what happened to him is also

true of you. Therefore, live according to that truth. Don't act as if sin still has dominion over you: it doesn't. You are spiritually alive to God because the same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you.

Paul is trying to help us change our thinking. Any kind of defeatist attitude towards sin or wrong-headed belief that we can keep sinning like we did before we were saved needs to be put to rest. The power of sin has been broken: we have been liberated from it and have a new position in God's sight and a new heart that empowers us to live for him.

I like what Martin Lloyd-Jones had to say in this regard. Let me quote him at length,

"Take the case of those poor slaves in the United States of America [in the 19th century]. They were in a condition of slavery. Then the American Civil War came, and as the result of that war, slavery was abolished... But what had actually happened? All slaves, young and old, were given their freedom, but many of the older ones who had endured long years of servitude found it very difficult to understand their new status. They heard the announcement that slavery was abolished and that they were free, but hundreds, not to say thousands, of times in their... experiences many of them did not realize it, and when they saw their old master coming near them, they began to quake and tremble, and to wonder if they were going to be sold..."

*[So then,] you can still be a slave experientially, even when you are no longer a slave legally... Whatever you may feel, whatever your experience may be, God tells us here in his Word, that if we are in Christ... we are no longer under the reign and rule of sin... And if I fall into sin, as I do, it is simply because I do not realize who I am..."*¹

Notice that Paul instructs us in v. 11 saying, **"You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."** Consider this to be true. Get it into your heads that as a Christian you are no longer a slave to sin. You're dead to it. It no longer has power over you like it once did. Believe that truth because it is true. Furthermore, you are now alive to God. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come. Believe that! Don't live like a slave now that you've been emancipated. You've have been set free in Christ so believe it and live in light of it.

This then brings us to the next paragraph which is the "therefore" of what we've been saying. Since this is true - since we have died with Christ and will be raised with him, since sin's power over us has been broken and we've been given new life in Christ - what therefore should we do? So then, moving on now, **Therefore...**

3. Stop living as if sin still has power over you

Look now at just v. 12. **"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.** The application of everything that Paul's been saying since the beginning of the chapters comes in right here. Sin no longer has power over you so don't give it any.

To help us with this, let's go back to my opening illustration where I talked about the American War for Independence. Once the colonists declared their independence, King George lost his power over us. King George no longer reigned over the thirteen colonies. We didn't have to obey his laws, pay the taxes he imposed on our tea, or submit to anything he said because we were no longer under his power. That's what sin is like for us. It used to rule over us but now we've been set free and are no longer under its authority.

But imagine if some of the colonists in Boston decided they still wanted to pay the tax on their tea. Or that they kept obeying the orders of the British Redcoats and continued to submit to King George's laws. That would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? "Hey colonists, you don't need to do that anymore. Stop paying taxes you're no longer obligated to pay. Don't obey laws of a king that no longer holds power over you." What kind of dumb colonist would continue to submit to King George on July 5, 1776 and beyond?

Yet that's exactly what we're doing in the spiritual realm as Christians when we choose to continue to let sin reign in us. Christ has gained for us our freedom and yet we will choose to still submit to sin. So Paul says, **"Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey its passions."** Or put another way, "Knock it off guys!" You used to have to obey your sinful passions because that's all you had. Sinful passions were the only game in town before you came to Christ, but now that he's freed us from our enslavement to sin, we have new passions and new desires, a hunger and thirst for righteousness that have come as a result of the new birth. Now you can choose not to sin. You have a choice whether to sin or not, to either submit to Christ's lordship or return to the slavery of sin. So since you are free, don't let sin reign in you any longer. You're free: live in accordance with that freedom that empowers you to say "no" to sin and "yes" to Christ.

So let me ask you: are you letting sin reign in you? In spite of the fact that Christ has broken the stranglehold of sinful desires in you, do you keep returning to it? Even though sin doesn't have the monopoly over your desires anymore, it can still wage guerrilla warfare against you, so you need to be vigilant. So you are watchful or lazy? Are you striving for the righteousness Jesus said his followers would hunger and thirst for or are you neglecting the pursuit of holiness? The pursuit of personal holiness is what God has called us to do; we are not just to kick back after we get saved and treat our sin flippantly because we think, "Well, once saved, always saved. Jesus paid it all so it doesn't matter if I engage in sin occasionally." If you're tolerating ongoing pride or lust or gossiping or laziness or selfishness or you're nursing some grudge or bitterness against someone, listen to Paul's command once it because it applies to you: **"Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey its passions."**

Grace Fellowship, you've died to sin when you trusted in Christ and you will be raised with him at the resurrection, so live in that power now by ceasing to return to your old master. Sin will call out to you so it can enslave you once again, but don't fall for it! You have been set free! If you view some particular sin in your life as an unbreakable habit, let me tell you that such a notion is a lie from the pit of hell. In Christ, you've died to sin, so resist it. Fight it. Wage war against it. Strive diligently to kill the rebellious pockets of

sin that is trying to hide out in the bushes of your heart and weed them out. Live in accordance with the victory Christ has granted to you by faith in him. You are dead to sin's power so refuse to let it have dominion over you any longer.

So that's the negative side of the coin: do not let sin reign in your body by obeying its passions. But the flip side of the coin brings us to our fourth point, which is this...

4. Start living as instruments of righteousness

Look now at just v. 13 in your Bibles. **“Do 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.”**

Now that we've been liberated from our enslavement to sinful desires, we can choose how we're going to live: we can either present the members of our bodies as instruments for righteousness or present them as instruments for unrighteousness. The underlying Greek word that is translated as “instruments” is an interesting one because it's actually a military term that when used elsewhere is usually translated as “weapons.” I like that word picture. The members of our bodies are weapons that can be used to either good or evil ends. When I read that I thought of how our tongues are described in James 3 as a fire that can set a forest ablaze. So then, think of your tongue as a flamethrower, that with your words you can scorch others with gossip, lies, and slander. Or imagine our arms as swords that can be swung to injure others through physical violence.

We are in other words a walking arsenal, with the weapons of our hands and feet, our eyes and ears, our mouths and minds, that we can either be presented to God to bless and heal or be presented to the enemy of our souls to bring about harm. So let's go back to the example of the Revolutionary War. What would you think of a colonist who raided the armory, gathering up the all rifles and bayonets, and presented them to the Redcoats? Would that make any sense? You've been liberated from the British Empire; why would you go and present to them your weapons to be used against you? Yet that is what we're doing when we sin. It's as if we're saying to the devil, “Here you go, Satan. Use these to wage war against the One who rescued me from you.”

So don't present the members of your body as weapons for be used by Satan against your liberator, Jesus Christ. How much more counter-productive can you be than that? Use the members of your body to pursue the freedom of living righteously. You've been brought from death to life, so don't engage in those things which once brought about sinful death. Live in the power of the resurrected life of Christ that enables you to choose to utilize your body for the glory of God.

And in case we've forgotten the principle truth that lies behind all this, look at v. 14 with me briefly. Paul instructs us to offer ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness because, **“sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.** We aren't under the obligation of the law as means by which we need to earn our righteousness anymore. Not that we could have anyway, since all the law could

do was show us our sin and make us realize just how far short we fell from obeying it. But in Christ, we have received grace and are under grace, such that we've been free from the sin that the law made so evident in us. That power has been broken; as Paul says again as he has in many different ways throughout Romans 6, "**Sin will have no dominion over you.**" You are not a slave to the sinful passions that once ruled over your heart. You are free to obey God by the power of the Holy Spirit, so go and live righteously because now at last you finally can.

Conclusion

So as I wrap this up, it doesn't take a rocket-scientist get the point of what Paul wants us to do as a result of this passage, does it? You died with Christ so don't live in sin anymore because you were also raised with Christ to new life by spiritual rebirth that allows you to now truly live righteously. So do so. If you have sin in your life that you've been living with and tolerating, you don't have an excuse. You haven't broken whatever sin habit it is because at the end of the day you have chosen not you. It's not that you lack the ability: if you are in Christ, then you've died to sin and have been made alive to God. You've been transferred from the enslaving dominion of sin into the liberating grace of God in Christ Jesus. Now be what you have become. Live in the freedom of righteousness that God has purchased for you by the blood of his Son. Stop trying to shackle yourself back into the chains of sins that Christ has broken. Step out of your prison of sin into the radiant light of the gospel that has called you to the glorious freedom of living righteously. You are alive in Christ, now live like it, for the glory of God. Let's pray.