

July 5

CONSIDER YOURSELVES DEAD!  
SECOND IN SERIES ON "THE WAY OUT" OF THE HUMAN DILEMMA, ACCORDING TO ROMANS  
ROMANS 6:1-14

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I heard through the grapevine that some thought my sermon last week, the first in the series, was depressing! If you thought that was depressing, wait until I get wound up! I didn't intend to be depressing. I do admit to being "heavy." These are not "entertaining" sermons, but are intended to deal theologically with basic issues. I am hoping to strike a note of hope in these sermons. One of the reasons for depression, disappointment, and discouragement is unrealistic expectation. If you expect life to be fair and just, sweet and comfortable, where evil is punished and good is rewarded; then, you will be disappointed and depressed! On the other hand, if you understand the human condition to be dominated by sin and death, you will respond with enthusiasm, hope and commitment to the Christian good news--the gospel.

The good news is that God has acted in Christ to overcome the world and bring us out of the human condition. That is our hope and cause for rejoicing. That hope is why we sing in the midst of despair, whistle in the face of fear, and fight the devil with confidence in ultimate victory. As Christians we are pioneers of a new humanity. Isn't that exciting? God has chosen us to be his people, his workers, his instruments, in the redemption of the world!

Last week's sermon was the first in a series on "THE WAY OUT" of the human dilemma, according to the book of Romans, using the suggested lectionary readings as our texts. I concluded last week's sermon with these questions. When are we brought out of the human condition? Does living in Christ mean we no longer live in the human condition of sin and death? When and how are we freed from sin, sorrow, disease, injustice, and death? And, in the meantime, how do we deal with sin and death?

In our passage this morning, Paul wrote, (Romans 6:5-6) "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 so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." In the Old Age, the former period, sin and death reigned because of Adam. Through Christ, the New Age has dawned; we have passed from death to life. When Jesus was crucified, the old humanity was crucified with him. Those who believe are no longer "in Adam," but "in Christ." This change or transition is so dramatic, Paul refers to it as "crucifixion." We share in the crucifixion of Jesus where sin and death were overcome through the resurrection. No longer are we united with the head of the old humanity, Adam, where we were subject to sin and death. Now, through the obedience of Jesus Christ, we share in his righteousness and victory.

The crucifying, the death of the old self, is dramatized, symbolized, celebrated, and actualized by baptism, Paul says. Those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus are baptized into his death. Paul is describing immersion here. Going under the water is like burial, coming out of the water is like resurrection. When one is baptized, the old life is buried, and the believer is now raised to a new life.

The result of dying is to be free from sin. 6:7 "For he who has died is freed from sin." 6:6 "so that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." 6:8 "But if we have died with Christ, we

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believe that we shall also live with him." The Christian life is a whole new ball game. We have died to one kind of life and have been raised to live a new kind of life. We are different people. We are "in Christ." Because we are in Christ, and Christ is in us, we can live with God, and live the life of God. Sin and death have been conquered by Christ. When we died with Jesus, when our old self, our old life, is crucified, we do not merely have our sins forgiven, we are actually delivered from the power of sin. No longer are we slaves to sin.

Therefore, says Paul, 6:11, "consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Consider yourselves dead. Do you remember playing dead when you were a child? I used to play dead with my boys and got quite skillful at it until they learned to tickle me. Paul tells us to play dead with sin. It's a matter of attitude. Consider yourself as one of Christ's and therefore not subject to sin. As far as sin is concerned, you are dead.

But, it is not that easy, is it. Sin is a live issue for all of us. We still live in this world. Paul realized this also. Notice the difference in tense Paul uses with the verbs. Look at 6:5. "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 have already died with Christ to sin, but united in his resurrection is still in the future--"shall certainly be." Likewise, in 6:8, Paul wrote, "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." Living with Christ is future: "shall live." And in 6:14, "Sin will have no dominion over you." "Will have" is future.

We are living in an in-between time. We live in this world, waiting for the New Age to come; yet there are signs all around us and in us that the New Age is beginning to appear. That is our hope and for which we work and wait. Barrett in his commentary on Romans put it this way, (pg. 122)

Baptism is the gateway not to heaven, or the fully 'realized' kingdom of God, but to a life which is related both to the present age, which is marked by sin and death, and the Age to Come, which is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Therefore, we live in confusion. We live in the midst of sin and death, but we have seen the ideal. We have experienced a foretaste of the kingdom. The new has not yet come, but yet it has begun to come because the Holy Spirit has been given to us, and the Spirit is the very life of the new age now dwelling in our midst. (The Holy Spirit is the subject of a future sermon in this series.) So we live our best and do our best, confident in the future. Sometimes we get discouraged, but again, it is a matter of expectation. We cannot expect too much in a world dominated by sin and death. June 26 marked the 42nd anniversary of the signing of the United Nations charter by fifty nations. Some folks are discouraged when they look at what the UN has accomplished. On the other hand, someone said, "The United Nations was set up, not to get us into heaven, but to save us from hell." And that it has so far accomplished. It's a matter of expectation. We do God's work faithfully to light a light, show the way, and make as many improvements as we can, thankful for small victories, confident in ultimate victory.

Now, how do we "consider ourselves dead?" Let me suggest four ways.

First, 6:12-13, "Let not sin therefore reign....Do not yield..to sin." Sin is a tyrant, a despot, who has been deposed, overthrown. Sin has lost its authority; therefore, do not yield to its authority. Would the Americans who defeated the British, won our liberty which we celebrate this weekend, continue to serve and obey King George VI? Would the Austrians continue to obey the Nazis after World War II? NO, the tyrants have been overthrown! So, why continue to serve sin?

Paul continues, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies." The word translated "body" in this verse is the same Greek word which was translated "self" in verse 6, where "our old self was crucified." Paul is describing the whole person here, not just the physical body. According to Barclay's commentary, Paul is not talking about "sins of the flesh" in this context, but our ultimate allegiance. Christ is to reign as the chief, the lord, of our lives. Don't make sin your first priority, but Christ.

Don't let sin reign! The Interpreter's Bible on Romans comments, (pg. 478)

We are, so far as sin is concerned, to regard ourselves as dead. We do not respond to its suggestions. We are not answerable to its demands. We live in a world where its writ does not run and where its power is impotent. This, we should notice, is the way we are to consider ourselves. Paul does not suggest that the promptings of sin no longer awaken any response in our hearts, because sad experience teaches us that they do. But as a rule our reaction is determined by our estimate of ourselves, and we are often alive to sin's suggestions only because we do not consider ourselves dead to sin's authority. The first step in passing beyond the influence of sin is to know that we have passed out of its kingdom.

Second, consider yourselves dead by getting in touch with the Holy Spirit and putting to death those attitudes, habits and concerns that hinder you from your best. Through the centuries, earnest Christians have sought to "die" to earthly desires and concerns. Through prayer, meditation and spiritual exercises, they, like Jesus in the wilderness, seek to overcome those inner desires and temptations that prevent them from living with Christ in completeness. Historically, spiritual persons took the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience in order to help "consider themselves dead" to sin. In current language we refer to the temptations of money, sex, and power, which every Christian must come to terms with. Here in our church we are very privileged to have Dwight Judy lead our Committee on Spiritual Nurture. The committee plans spiritual retreats for your growth. We are blessed; very few churches offer this opportunity. The next retreat is Saturday, July 18, led by Dwight Judy. There is a flyer in the bulletin this morning, and you may register at a table on the patio.

Third, recognize the necessity, admit and enter wholeheartedly into the struggle to consider yourself dead. Ernest Best in his commentary on Romans wrote, (pg. 69)

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The one who dies with Jesus does not merely have his sins forgiven, but is actually delivered from the power of sin; he is no longer its slave. This should not be understood to mean that the believer never sins. Sin is regarded here as a hostile power waging war on man; in verses 12-14 it is depicted as ruling over him. What Paul means is that the believer is freed from the power of sin, not that he is sinless...Since he still lives in this world where sin has its power he cannot escape its pervasive influence but has to fight it.

Paul sees life as a struggle. "Fight the good fight," he encouraged. Our Old Testament lesson this morning told the story of Jacob who wrestled all night long with an angel. To keep sin at the door rather than in the heart requires a struggle, a constant battle. Paul knew the Christian life is a struggle as we shall see in the next sermon in this series.

Fourth, you can consider yourself dead and break sin's dominance by offering yourself to God. 6:13, "Yield yourselves to God as people who have been brought from death to life." Accept Christ's death on your behalf. Believe that the old age--the old humanity, the human condition--has died. Accept your death and see yourself as having died, with Christ, to sin. By faith, consider yourself dead to sin. By faith, live out your baptism. See yourself as the person God intended and intends you to be. By faith, offer yourself to God. Pray, "Have thine own way, Lord. Hold o'er my being absolute sway! Fill with thy spirit till all shall see Christ only, always, living in me."

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