

## SECRETS TO LIVING FREE IN CHRIST – II

Romans 6:5-11

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Before becoming a screen star, young Burt Lancaster was a circus performer, a job he was fortunate to land, considering his less-than-flawless audition.

Robert Wise, in his work, *Your Churning Place*, records what happened the first time Burt Lancaster auditioned for the circus. He writes:

He was asked to perform on the parallel bars, so he leaped on the bars and began his routine. Because he was nervous, his timing was off, and he spun over the bar, falling flat on his face some ten feet below.

He was so humiliated that he immediately leaped back on the bar. As he spun again at the same point, he flipped off and smashed to the ground once more! Burt's tights were torn, he was cut and bleeding, and he was fiercely upset! He leaped back again, but the third time was even worse, for this time he fell on his back. The agent came over, picked him up, and said, "Son, if you won't do that again, you've got the job!"

What a picture of the way so many of us self-determined Christians attempt to live the Christian life! With a misguided sense of our own adequacy, we leap into this venture and that, teeter, and then flop face first onto the ground. Then what do we do? We brush off the sawdust and go at it again, falling even harder the next time. In a reference to such futile activities, Chuck Swindoll once wrote, "If somebody doesn't come along and stop us,

or enable us to perform without beating up on ourselves, we will either become so frustrated and discouraged that we give up on life, or we might even kill ourselves.” (*The Birth of an Exciting Vision*, Swindoll, p. 18)

Jesus came to this world for that very reason. He came to free us from the tyranny of failure and to give us life eternal, beginning with today. He came to rescue us from enslavement to our hurts, sinful habits, and hang ups. He came that our lives could be transformed into the persons each one of us deep down would long to be, the person God created us to be. He came to give us hope and to set us free from living a defeated life.

No place in scripture better describes the truth about what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us, in terms of us giving us hope and enabling us to live free in Christ, than the passage that we are looking at this morning, **Romans 6**.

Last week, we looked at Paul’s introduction to **Romans 6** in **verses 1-4**. There, the apostle introduces us to a faulty outlook on life that some Christians had already adopted as their way of Christian living. From **verse 5** through **verse 11** he continues to refute this faulty outlook and make suggestions for a better way to live free in Christ. Let’s begin by rereading those first four verses that we covered last time, hitting the highlights and reestablishing the context of our passage. Then, we will proceed verse by verse from **5-11**.

Paul states the faulty outlook in **verse 1** and then gives a quick response to it in **verse 2**. He writes, “**<sup>1</sup>What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup>By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?**” The faulty outlook was the idea that if our sin causes God’s grace to abound, and thus brings God some good press, maybe we should sin more so that God can receive more good press as demonstrations of his grace increase. Furthermore, “Won’t God love us anyway, so let’s just do whatever we want?” This was a repulsive idea to Paul. In fact, it was unconscionable. He tells us that we have “**died to sin;**” it no longer has the power or authority to rule over our lives. Why would we return to living in such a way that hurts us? It’s like Burt Lancaster trying to do a flip again, only to get hurt even more. It makes no sense.

So, beginning with **verse 3**, Paul goes on to explain why this bad outlook on life should be replaced by a better one. He reveals the first secret of how to experience freedom in Christ so as to live as one ought. We can have freedom from those sins which so easily entangle us and control our lives. He writes, **“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”**

If we are going to find freedom in Christ, to live as we ought and as we were created to, the first secret we have to grasp is to know the truth of what Jesus accomplished for the Christian. Three times in this section of scripture, Paul repeats the importance of knowing some very basic and essential facts about what happened to us as believers the moment we were saved. Hence, if we don't understand or know these things, then we have no hope of finding freedom from negative controlling factors in our lives. We will never find true freedom in Christ.

To help explain what it is that we are to know, Paul uses two illustrations. The first illustration we saw last time is given in **verses 3-4**. It's the illustration of baptism. He states:

**<sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>We 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.**

As we mentioned last time, Paul is not speaking about water baptism, but of a spiritual baptism or a spiritual identification with Jesus Christ. The term **“baptism”** was used in the first century to describe the dipping of a light-colored garment into a dye that was perhaps red. Once the fabric was dipped into the red dye, it would be changed in its identity from its original color to the color of the dye. This process, the changing of a color or the changing of the identity of the cloth is what the term **“baptism”** refers to.

The illustration of baptism was used to demonstrate that who we were before we met Christ, our old life, died with Christ on the cross and was forever buried. And who we are now, as a result of being baptized into Christ's resurrection, is real and will continue to be into eternity. Last time I used circles to help make more evident the reality of Christ's death and resurrection. The second set of circles demonstrates what happened to the human race after Adam sinned. No longer did God's spirit dwell in our spirit, the control center of our being. God's controlling presence and power was replaced by the propensity to sin that Paul calls elsewhere "**the flesh.**" At that point, our identity, who we were, was called sinner.

But when Christ died for our sin, and when we put our confidence in His finished work on our behalf, our identity, the very control center of our being, our spirits, changed. Our spirit came to life with the power of the resurrected Jesus Christ at our disposal. We were now called saints, or set apart-to-God ones. Sin no longer has authority or power to rule over our spirit. We now have the power of the resurrected Christ living in us. If we choose to ask Christ to live through us and to deliver us from temptation, He will empower us to take the way of escape. But if we choose to ignore his power, we can allow sin rule our lives.

But Jesus didn't to put sin to death, resurrect, and give us His authority and power over sin that we might toss it aside and go on being enslaved or addicted to sin. That's Paul's point. Jesus did what He did because He wants us to enjoy walking in newness of life!

In **verses 5-10**, our passage for this morning, Paul gives his second illustration to better help us understand the reality of our new life, our new identity in Christ. He says in **verse 5**, "**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.**" The term "**united**" literally is the same word for grafting a branch into a tree.

For instance, let's say you have a nectarine tree that isn't producing very hearty nectarines, because its root is sick and weak. If you choose, you can solve that problem by cutting off the good intentioned nectarine branch (in a sense killing that branch because you have removed it from its previous source of life) and grafting it into a hardier similar tree, such as a peach. In

that case, the hardier peach tree gives new life and power to the newly grafted nectarine branch.

Meanwhile, the nectarine branch always knows that it is a nectarine branch and will always and only produce nectarines. The branch maintains its personality of being a nectarine, but no longer produces its fruit from its old life, the old tree. It has no more ties to that old tree. Now, it has a new life source to which it is permanently united. It produces its fruit by the life and strength of the stronger and healthier peach tree. Over time, the branch and the tree grow together until you can't tell the difference between the graft and the natural branch. The life of both is fully shared.

In the same way, before Christ we were like the nectarine branch that was connected to Adam or a sickly nectarine tree. But when we were saved, we were permanently grafted or united, like a nectarine branch, into a stronger and healthier stock of tree, Jesus Christ. We are permanently separated from the race of being “**in Adam**” and permanently united “**in Christ.**” And we now draw upon Christ's power to produce spiritual fruit or needed changes in our lives.

Notice something else about these two illustrations of baptism into the death of Christ and the grafting of a branch into the life of Christ. There is no pick and choose offer going on here. You cannot die with Christ without also being raised to a new life. The death in Christ and the resurrection life happen automatically the moment we are saved. They go hand in hand. That new life is a spiritual new life, drawing upon Christ's resources that now reside in us, because He lives in us.

Paul continues in **verse 6**, “**We know** [there's the word “**know**” again] **that our old self** [our former self] **was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing.**” Sin is here described as a body of sin, like sin is a splinter. This splinter is a foreign body that often gets lodged in us. Sin is like a splinter in our bodies, causing infections and pain. Sin is not our bodies, but it is through our bodies that we can pick up sin splinters which lead to different kinds of struggles in our lives.

Paul's point in these verses is that our body's previous enslavement to the

control and dictates of sin splinters is broken, because the new control center of our being, our spirits, has been changed. Sin can still be in our bodies and souls, but it can no longer control us if we don't want it to. It has been **"brought to nothing,"** rendered inoperative or powerless. We can still choose to sin. It is in us and can affect our bodies, but it no longer represents who we are and has no authority control us. Whereas before in Adam, we had no choice but to sin, now that we are in Christ, we can choose to live in His power. The truth of this is declared in **1 John 2:1**, in which the apostle John says, **"My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin."**

Keep in mind that our identity, who we really are, is based on our spirit. And our spirit is no longer to be controlled by sin. We can ignore Christ's power and sin, but why bring all of that shame back into our lives.

Paul's point is that Jesus abides in and with our spirits, and thus we should go to Him for control of our lives, to deal with the temptation of sin. That's what Jesus meant when He said to His disciples in **John 15:1-4**, **"I am the true vine . . . Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."**

And if we should sin, if we should live as a branch not abiding in the vine, we don't have to allow the splinters of sin to remain in us and infect us or control us. Instead, as we recognize our sin-splinter, we can remove it, according to **1 John 1:9** by confessing, admitting to God that we have sinned. We can ask for his cleansing forgiveness and be immediately cleansed and put back into His service.

Therefore, Paul goes on to complete the thought in **verse 6** and **7** that since this is true, 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.** The point is that we should no longer live as though we were slaves to sin. We are not slaves to sin. Instead, as we will see later in **Romans 6:18**, we are to live as slaves to righteousness, for that's who we are in Christ.

Paul continues in **verse 8** to explain what I said earlier. He states:

**<sup>8</sup>Now if we have died with Christ** [through our baptism in Christ's death], **we believe that we will also live with him** [through our baptism with his resurrection]. **<sup>9</sup>We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.**"

Paul's point that Christ "**will never die again**" is that just as Christ can never go back to His pre-resurrection body existence, neither can we. We are once and for all changed forever. We are permanently changed at the core of our being; our spirits are forever alive, never to die again. We are new creations. We can foolishly choose to live like sinners and reap what we sow, but we don't have to. We have what it takes to never live that way again. We are forever changed, never able to return to our previous condition.

Paul then adds, "**<sup>10</sup>For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.**" His point is that just as Jesus lives for God, so we are now designed to live for God. There is no logical reason for us to go on sinning. Paul personally testifies to the reality of this in his own life when he writes:

**I [his spirit] have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I**  
**[the old dead spirit] who live, but Christ lives in me [my new spirit];**  
**and the life which I now live in the flesh [in this earthly body] I live**  
**by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up**  
**for me. Galatians 2:20**

In **verses 3-10**, Paul has shown us that a victorious walk with Christ, victorious over the temptations to sin, begins with understanding or knowing these facts. But whether you live as a victor or a victim is

determined by this second ingredient to living free in Christ, which Paul mentions in **verse 11**. “**So you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**”

But what does it mean to “**consider**” something? This word was originally a Greek accounting term. If a business owner was having cashflow problems in his company and couldn’t figure out why, he would hire an accountant to look at his books. The accountant would read the facts, and on the basis of the facts, he would turn to the troubled business owner and say, “Here is the state of your affairs. This is the course of action I recommend.” In other words, it’s not enough for the business owner to just understand the fact that he is losing money, he must take action to rectify the problem. It is one thing to know you have a problem. It is another thing to understand the facts, understand reality, and act upon them. To consider means to act upon what you know to be true. You are now a saint, not a sinner. So, live like it. Choose to no longer sin when temptation comes your way.

Take note of something else here. This is the first time in **Romans** that Paul suggests that we Christians do anything for ourselves. This is Paul’s first exhortation or command in the book. Up until now, everything Paul has written has been informational about what God has done for us. But now, based upon the knowledge of what God has done for us and what He says is true about us, Paul says we are to do something. We are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. How do we do that? Based upon what Paul has written here, I suggest three things we can do when we are faced with temptation to do that which is wrong.

First, I am to remember that I do not have to obey sinful desires, because I am dead to sin’s control. Once I became a Christian, I finally became free from the forcible control of sin over my life, and I can refuse to obey it, whether it is the sin of bitterness, jealousy, greed, the inability to forgive, or any of our long list.

Second, I am to remember that I am alive to God in Christ. I have the very power of God in me and available to me through Jesus living in me.

Third, I can choose to live as a saint, not a sinner. I can offer my thoughts, attitudes, and body to Jesus to be used by God in a righteous manner rather than a sinful manner, to bring glory to Him. I can do as Jesus would do.

Paul recognizes the reality of life. He knows that we are going to get spiritually ambushed by evil. There will be times that we all stumble and fall. That's why when he commands us to consider, he uses in the original Greek a present tense verb which fully translated means, "Keep on considering yourself dead to sin and alive to God." This is not something that you do just once in your life and it is all over. You are in a war, friend. This war is fought one battle at a time. But each victory you win, you become stronger and more convinced that God is faithful to deliver you when you understand what is true and you consider it to be true so as to act upon it.

There are two principles that we must keep in mind in the days ahead if we want to find freedom in Christ. The first is that if Satan can keep you ignorant of the truth about who you are in Christ, he can keep you spiritually impotent.

Ladies and gentlemen, you cannot experience the abundant, exciting, and meaningful life if you are not continually studying and examining the Word of God to learn truth. The reason that the Christians in Rome were struggling with living for Jesus was because they were ignorant. Three times Paul stresses the importance of knowing or being informed. Hence, it is very simple. If you don't establish a discipline of sitting down alone with the Lord, preferably on a daily basis, to ask Him to teach you as you read His Word, you cannot grow up in Christ. You cannot experience the abundant life. You will remain an ignorant victim to sin's control over your life.

The second principle hitch hikes off of the first. It is not enough to simply know the truth, but we must consider it or apply it. Christian living depends upon Christians learning and applying what they know to their lives. It does you no good if you jam your head full of facts about who you are in Christ, or what are spiritual gifts, or what does God promise about the end times, if you don't answer the question, "So what? How am I going to apply this to my life today and from now on?" James put it this way:

**But prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does. James 2:22-25**

God wants so much for you to get the most out of life, that He provided you with a Savior, the truth, an instruction manual, and the power to get the job done. Let's use these. If we don't, we have only ourselves to blame.