

Romans 6:3-11

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11

I grew up in the golden era of cowboy shows on TV; I started out with Hopalong Cassidy, The Lone Ranger, and Roy Rogers; but really cut my teeth on more sophisticated fare like Gunsmoke, Bonanza, and The Rifle Man. The plot structure of these shows was utterly predictable. In the “moral universe” of the cowboy show, there were few shades of gray. The bad guy robs the bank and runs from the law. The robber shoots and pillages, leading the law on a wild chase through the brambles of the untamed west. In order to help catch the varmint-always unshaven and unkempt, the sheriff would put posters up all over the countryside. The poster suggested that this bad cowboy was such a menace to society he had to be stopped. If stopping him meant killing him, that was acceptable and within the confines of the law. The criminal was wanted dead or alive. Some of you television trivia buffs will remember that an actor named Steve McQueen got his start as the hero in a show entitled: Wanted Dead or Alive.

The poster posited only two possibilities; no middle ground. Put the outlaw in jail or in a casket, we don't care. We just want this criminal. We want him dead or alive.

But in Romans 6:11 Paul declares “you must consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God.” The sheriff wants the criminal dead or alive, but God wants the Christian dead and alive. In the life of the Christian death and life are supposed to happen at the same time. We are to be dead to sin and alive to Christ.

How can that happen? Dead and alive would seem to be two contradictory ideas that are the antithesis of each other but not to Paul. His reasoning goes something like this: there is a dark side to the world. It affects everyone. It whispers in your ear and tells you to lie to your spouse; it makes you jealous when your neighbor buys a new car and you can't afford to, it makes you suspicious of all those Latin Americans who are moving to Charlottesville. It's that voice that tells you that you are not gossiping when you talk about other people's business. There is a dark side to life and Paul calls it SIN!

Unfortunately sin has left its mark on every life. Sin's signature is death. But the good news is that there is a way to break the curse of Sin, and ironically, it is through death.

In other words we must fight fire with fire. Sin rules over us like a tyrant, and it brings death. The only way to break free from the death of sin is through death-dying, not in the natural realm. But in the spiritual realm. Dying in the spiritual

realm for Paul is represented by baptism. Baptism is a powerful symbol of dying to sin.

So, in v. 3 of chapter 6 Paul writes: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Paul wants us to know the significance of our baptism. It is the outward and visible sign of our desire to be His, Christ’s, and to share his life-his death and his resurrection.

To be baptized into fellowship with Christ is like a spiritual 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Baptism into Christ is Independence Day. Baptism into Christ is understood as that moment when we break free from the hostile power of Sin, no longer being held captive by its seductive power.

Paul says that after we have been buried with Christ by baptism into his death, we are dead to Sin. Now, let’s be clear that does not mean we will never again transgress. As long as we are in the flesh, we are prone to making mistakes-mistakes for which we can sincerely seek pardon. However as Christ’s baptized, Sin need not have dominion over us. Why? Because as Paul explains when we are alive to God in Christ, we will walk in newness of life. In the death and resurrection language of the church, we can roll the stone against the door of the tomb-turn away from the power of God, and we do everyday, but Christ keeps coming to burst out of the tomb and to make his entrance into our fearful lives. To be baptized is to understand the continuing life of grace and mercy we receive daily from a compassionate and forgiving God.

So, when we are dead and alive, transformations occur. When we are dead and alive the Holy Spirit can do miraculous things in our lives. When we are dead and alive, something on the inside starts working on the outside-and there will be a change in our lives.

If we take Paul’s words in Romans 6 seriously, there will be a funeral everyday in our lives. Every day we look to bury something that needs to die. Baptism inaugurates our daily death to things like selfishness, dishonesty, and degraded love. Because we have been plunged into Christ’s life, He continues to live with passion in ours.

We can become alive to the possibilities of a new life because of what we are celebrating here today and every Sunday- the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The one who makes all things new; including you and me; through the power of the resurrection we can be alive to God and our neighbor. Because of the resurrection we can become living sacrifices, wholly acceptable to God; we can do that because we are dead and alive.

Dead to sin and alive to Christ. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory in the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.