

# Dead to Sin, Alive to God

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[ 0 : 00 ] When I was training to be a vicar at Ridley Hall in Cambridge quite a few years ago now, there was a New Testament lecturer called Mike Thompson who excelled in the study of Paul and his letters.

One Friday afternoon that the following week was going to be really difficult for us because we were going to be studying Romans and we all thought, gosh, if Mike says that the study of Romans is difficult, then it must be.

And it was. And it is. Let's just pray for a moment. Lord, we thank you that throughout our lives we've just sung you have been faithful.

Lord, you are so, so good and your goodness is running after us. And we thank you, Lord, for your word and we thank you for this letter to the Romans that is so relevant for us today.

And we pray now you'd pour out your spirit upon us and speak to us through it, Lord, as we think about the passage that Liz has just read for us.

[ 1 : 37 ] Thank you, Lord. Amen. So for this sermon, I used Tom Wright's commentaries called Paul for Everyone and Romans for Everyone.

I think in your home groups, you're studying Romans for Everyone. And I would highly recommend them to you. They explain all of Paul's letters so well and in very easy, everyday language.

Tom Wright says the following about Romans. Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome is his masterpiece. It covers many different topics from many different angles, bringing them all together in a fast-moving and compelling line of thought.

Reading it sometimes feels like being swept along in a small boat on a swirling, bubbling river. We need to hold on tight if we're going to stay on board.

But if we do, the energy and excitement of it all is unbeatable. And the reason is obvious. Because Romans is all about the God who, as Paul says, unveils his power and his grace through the good news about Jesus.

[ 3 : 05 ] And as Paul insists again and again, this power and grace is available for everyone who believes.

I think we all know Jesus' wonderful story of the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15. The younger son twists his father's arm for his share of the property.

He goes off and spends it all and then comes home. He thinks in utter disgrace. But then, to his astonishment, he finds his father running down the road to meet him and throwing a huge party in his honour.

He's welcomed back as a son, even though he doesn't deserve it. And even though his older brother is grumbling about it. Now, come forward a year or two and imagine a thought creeping into the young man's mind.

Life has settled down to a reasonable humdrum existence again. His older brother tolerates having him around, more or less.

[ 4 : 14 ] His father is getting older. He remembers with a happy sigh the day he came up the road and his father came running to greet him. And he thinks, perhaps I'll do it again.

Why not help himself to enough things to survive, run away for a few weeks, and then play the penitent and come back again? Maybe I'll get another party.

Now, we might think this is absurd, but don't believe it. It's exactly what a great many people think. A famous philosopher two centuries ago said, God will forgive me. That's his job. And a great many people today do believe that.

We, I'm sure, believe that. But they perhaps also think that the only topic the church should say to anyone is the message of forgiveness. If you do something wrong, it's okay.

[ 5 : 15 ] God will forgive you. The only thing to say to someone who sins is, that's fine. God loves you and forgives you. Yes, God loves, reaches us while we're still sinners.

As Corrie ten Boom said, there is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still. But God doesn't want us to keep on sinning in order that his love may go on reaching us.

It's the very opposite. God loves us just as we are. But he loves us so much, he doesn't want us to stay as we are. God is in the business of transformation and turning our lives around.

And part of that process lies with us deciding to lead our sinful lives and choosing to be led by Jesus and trusting in him for our lives.

As it says in John 10, verse 10, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. And in Romans chapter 6, Paul is trying to explain this.

[ 6 : 29 ] I would encourage you to take time this week to read the whole of chapter 6. If you really want to, I'd encourage you to read chapter 7 and 8. They're all linked.

In fact, read the whole of Romans. In fact, read the whole Bible. I don't know what your week's looking like this week. But I could go on and on recommending. But certainly read Romans chapter 6.

And really, pray before you read. I'm not telling you to read an ordinary book and just a chapter of it. This is a God-breathed book that will really speak into your lives.

And as you pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through it, he really will. And the passage will come alive for you. And verses will be highlighted for you to focus on.

Sometimes we hear in the news of someone who's suffered a bad accident or a particular kind of illness. And they can no longer remember who they are.

[ 7 : 33 ] It must be, you know, a really horrible situation to be in. Both for the person concerned who's lost their memory and for their family and friends and those trying to help them.

We're so used to people knowing their name, where they live, what job they do, who their family are. So the thought of talking to someone who genuinely can't remember any of these things is quite alarming, isn't it?

There are even those more rare occasions when we hear of a child who's been lost as a baby. And they're found sometime later, having been brought up by animals without any idea of what a human is.

They've had no human contact. And faced with one of these situations, what we long to be able to do is to help the person concerned to discover who they are so that they can bring their lives back into line with their identity.

People who suffer memory loss can often be eased back, bit by bit, into normal life, into finding their way around once more, and gradually sometimes the memory returns.

[ 8 : 50 ] The child brought up in the jungle can discover overnight all kinds of undreamed-of human possibilities, such as speaking as a human speaks.

Paul's aim in this passage that we read for us is to do something of the same with people who need to learn, again, what they've forgotten.

And actually, we need to be reminded of our new identity that we have as baptized Christians. We often forget. We have a bit of memory loss.

Imagine also, for a moment, a map with two types of humanity on it, those in Adam and those in Jesus Christ. We all begin life in Adam, and when we give our lives to Jesus, we move to the other side and become those in Christ Jesus.

Our old life is crucified, and sin has no more claim on us. We're free from all its charges. Even if we feel like we're still in Adam, and that our old life has a hold on us, it's not true.

[ 10 : 03 ] It's not the truth. We are now in Jesus Christ. So, what is true of Jesus is true of us as well.

However unlikely it sounds, and however much it doesn't yet feel true, it is the truth. And what is true of Jesus, ever since the glory of Easter Day, is that he is alive again, with a life that death cannot touch.

He hasn't come back into the same life, as Jairus' daughter did, and Lazarus, and others who were raised to life by Jesus. He has gone on through death, and out the other side, into a new bodily life beyond the reach of death.

A concept which can be quite hard to grasp, but about which the early Christians are very clear. Paul's point is that if we're in Jesus Christ, then that is where we are.

Of course, we're not yet bodily raised, as one day we shall be, that remains in the future. That future is secure and certain for all of us.

[ 11 : 21 ] But part of the point of being a Christian is that the future has come forward into the present, in the person and achievement of Jesus, so that we, his followers, can taste the reality of the future while living in the present.

The Christian stands on resurrection ground. We're not in Adam. We are in Jesus Christ, the one who died and is now alive forevermore.

Paul declares in verse 11 that we must count this, or calculate this. And the word calculate that he uses is a word used in bookkeeping, in calculating accounts, in working out profit and loss figures. Now, of course, when you do a calculation, you get an answer, which, in a sense, didn't exist before. But in another sense, all that the calculation does is to make you aware of what, in fact, was true all along.

It doesn't create a new reality. Until you add up the money in the till, you don't know how much your day's takings were worth. But actually adding it up doesn't make the day's takings a penny larger or smaller than they already are.

[ 12 : 50 ] Paul is telling us to do the sums, to add it up, to work it out, the calculation, and not give up our spiritual courage for a fresh leap of faith in which we imagine ourselves to be completely sinless.

And here is the point. It's often hard to believe the result of the calculation. But faith, at this point, consists not of shutting our eyes and trying to believe the impossible, but actually opening our eyes to the reality of Jesus and his death and resurrection.

And to the reality of our standing as baptized and believing members of Jesus' people, those who are in Christ Jesus.

That's the challenge of verse 11. We need to remember who we really are so that we can act accordingly.

Imagine renting a house from a landlord who turns out to be a bully, always demanding extra payments, coming into the house without asking, threatening you with legal action or violence if you don't give in to his demands.

[ 14 : 12 ] You get used to doing what he says out of fear. There doesn't seem to be a way out. But then to your relief, you find somewhere else to live. Someone pays off your remaining rent and you can leave.

You move out and you settle in your new home. But to your horror, a few days later, the old landlord shows up at the door and barges into your home.

He's angry and demands more money. He threatens to take you to court. The old habit returns. You are strongly tempted to pay him what he demands just to get him to leave.

But you know you're not his tenant anymore. You've seen the paperwork. His final bill was paid. Nothing more is owing. Trembling, you get up and tell him to leave because he has no claim on you. Now, depending on how unpleasant a character the landlord is, you may or may not have to call the police. But Paul's appeal in verse 11 of our reading is exactly that.

[ 15 : 24 ] Remind yourself of the paperwork. Remember who you really are in Christ Jesus. Don't give in to the voices that tell you you're still in Adam after all and should be behaving just like you used to.

Resisting temptation isn't a matter of pretending you wouldn't find it easier to give in. It's a matter of learning somehow to think straight and to act on what you know to be true and what the truth is.

That the old has gone and you are now a creation, a new creation in Christ Jesus, dead to sin and alive to God.

God. So the choice for us is being slaves to sin or to God and his plans and purposes for our lives. Embracing our true identity as freed from sin and presenting ourselves fully to God and his covenant justice is a choice that only we can make.

[ 16 : 34 ] But I can assure you that when you choose to say no to sin and yes to God, you will never regret it. It will be the best choice you ever make.

I'm conscious that I've said a lot this morning and it's meaty and challenging. Let's just pause for a moment, perhaps close our eyes and just allow the Holy Spirit to help us as we reflect on what Paul said to the Romans that was read to us and what I have spoken about it this morning.

Let's imagine for a moment that Paul is writing this letter and he looks up and glances around the church.

What might he say about us today? Would he see a church full of people who are dead to sin and alive to God?

I sense that we all need to be reminded that we are in Christ Jesus. The old has gone. We are dead to sin.

[ 17 : 58 ] and alive to Christ. But perhaps there are some of us here this morning who are struggling to leave the old life behind.

It's as if it's got a hold on you that you can't let go. God wants to remind you that you are a new creation.

No more in condemnation and you can stand boldly in his grace and forgiveness. Perhaps you are struggling with temptation.

May the Holy Spirit strengthen you and flood your being with a fresh sense of Jesus' love for you. I'm going to invite Julian and the worship group to come and play for us and let's just spend a little bit of time allowing the fact that we're dead to sin and alive to God to take as it were a fresh root within us and let's just be thinking about that.

We are dead to sin and alive to God. Lord we thank you for speaking to us this morning through this wonderful letter to the Romans.

[ 19 : 38 ] thank you that we are all a new creation in Christ Jesus. That is the truth and that can never change and it's the case even when it doesn't feel like it.

Help us Lord by the power of your spirit to put our sinful lives to death and to be alive to you and the life you have in store for us.

Thank you that you sent your Holy Spirit to help us to lead lives that are good for us and that glorify you.

Amen.