

Alive to God in Christ

Romans 6:5-11

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on April 4, 2021

Introduction

- ❖ As I was trying to figure out what to preach this Easter Sunday, I looked through my previous Easter messages to get some inspiration. And I noticed that I've preached all the Resurrection passages in the Gospels, and I already covered 1 Corinthians 15. So I was wondering what other text would be fitting to preach.
 - ▶ **And then I also noticed that my previous Easter messages focused a lot of attention on the historicity of the Resurrection.** I was giving credible reasons for believing that Jesus did rise bodily from the dead. I was speaking into the skepticism that many of our non-Christian friends share. They have a hard time believing that a man, much less a crucified man, could be raised from the dead. And along with other supernatural claims of that sort, they question the faith altogether.

- ❖ But I heard an interesting remark in a podcast recently about how – **in generations past, people's skepticism of the Resurrection led them to question regeneration.** That is, their intellectual doubts about the Resurrection led to existential doubts about regeneration – the idea that Christian salvation involves a complete transformation of the self where you become a new creation. So in the past, intellectual doubts were more prominent.
 - ▶ **But nowadays, it's people's skepticism of regeneration that is leading them to question the Resurrection.** This is especially true for those who formally identified as Christian. Perhaps a pastor (or another spiritual leader) that they once looked up to had a dramatic moral failure. They were confronted with the ugliness of religious hypocrisy. Or maybe just in their own religious experience, they struggled to see any identifiable change. They kept dealing with the same struggles and same issues.
 - And all this talk of regeneration, of conversion, of transformation – seemed more and more like wishful thinking. **So eventually their existential doubts about regeneration (particularly their own) led to intellectual doubts about the Resurrection and the Christian faith altogether.** In such cases, existential doubts are much more prominent and pressing.

- ❖ I found that really helpful. I realized I've spent a lot of time addressing intellectual doubts but not so much existential ones. So this Easter I want to speak to those struggling – not so much in believing the Resurrection is plausible – but those struggling to believe real change in their lives is possible. **Perhaps you've grown disillusioned with Christianity. It doesn't seem to work – at least not as you expected.** You were promised that once you became a Christian, you'd be a new creation: the old is gone; the new has come! But you don't feel all that different, and you're still dealing with the same old sins and struggles as before.
 - ▶ So I chose an Easter passage that still deals with the Resurrection but with a more personal and existential approach. That's why we're in Romans 6. **Here in our text, we're going to see the connection between belief in the Resurrection and the experience of real change and newness of life.**
 - The connection comes down to what you consider – what you believe to be true. It matters what you consider about the Resurrection, but here it comes down to what you *consider about yourself* in the light of the Resurrection.

- ❖ **Now we started in Romans 6:1-4 last week, and there we saw that the Apostle Paul was addressing a common criticism laid out against the gospel of grace that he preaches.** We learn in the beginning of the letter that he's never met these Christians. He didn't plant this church. Which is why he provides a systematic explanation of the gospel, including possible objections. He's thinking maybe they're dealing with the same ones he's encountered before.
 - ▶ Here, in chapter 6, the common criticism that Paul mentions is the accusation that preaching a gospel of grace will only encourage people to continue in sin and never experience real change and newness of life.

- ❖ **So this hypothetical objector is also concerned with experiencing real change in life, but he thinks Paul's gospel is going about it all wrong.** What this objector is hearing Paul say is that – if you just profess with your mouth right answers about Jesus and believe your heart certain theological truths – then all your sins past, present, and future are forgiven. That sounds like a recipe for moral disaster – like giving people a license to sin. It's like saying, "Do whatever you want because all your sins are forgiven!"
 - ▶ To that objection, Paul explains that the grace of God in the gospel doesn't just forgive your sins. It doesn't just wipe your slate clean. It goes further to change your identity altogether. Which fundamentally changes your relationship to sin. **And this new identity of yours is found in the person of Crucified and Resurrected Lord.** Once you consider yourself in light of these new realities – once you see yourself as God sees you in Christ Jesus – then it results in real change and newness of life.
 - So as we look more closely at vv5-11, there are three considerations if you are a Christian. (1) Consider your union with Christ. (2) Consider yourself dead to sin. (3) Consider yourself alive to God.

Consider Your Union With Christ

- ❖ Let's begin with our first consideration: **Consider your union with Christ.** This is mentioned in v5. Let me read that, "*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's argument is that if Christians have died with Christ, then we've died to sin, and we shall certainly live with him in the newness of resurrection life.** That's his main argument in our text.
 - ▶ But dying with Christ and be raised with Christ is all founded on this idea of our union with Christ. It's such an important concept. **Even the idea of Jesus dying for us and receiving the penalty of sin – makes no sense without union with Christ.** In fact, without union with Christ, his death would've been a travesty of justice. An innocent person would've been killed in place of the guilty.

- ❖ Perhaps you've heard the sermon illustration where a judge finds a defendant guilty and hands down a punishment of some large monetary fine. But then, the judge graciously steps down from his bench and proceeds to pay the fine out of his own pocket. Now that's used to convey the idea of Jesus graciously paying the penalty of sin for us. But the illustration has a glaring problem. Such a transaction would be unjust. **It would be wrong for an innocent party to pay for the wrong committed by the guilty party.**

- ❖ So how is the Crucifixion not an act of injustice? How can God acquit guilty sinners and condemn his innocent Son – and not be guilty himself of wrongdoing? **The key is the doctrine of union with Christ.** It teaches that believers do not exist separately from Christ. In God's eyes, we exist *in Christ* – just as Christ lives in us through his Spirit.
 - ▶ So at the cross, guilt and punishment wasn't transferred between two separate persons, one innocent and one guilty (like a judge and defendant). No, Jesus and believers are united as one – bound together by a real, spiritual union.
 - **So when Jesus died, God considered all who would trust in his Son, to be present *with his Son* in his death.** When Christ died on that tree, we died with him. Christians don't get off scot-free. **No, the gospel says we owe a death, and by virtue of our union with Christ, we died with Christ and paid that debt – but without having to taste death ourselves (2 Cor. 5:14).** Christ our Substitute tasted death for us. That's the good news!

- ❖ All of this occurred in the eyes of God, in the eyes of his Law. **Our union with Christ involved a positional change, a status change.** A couple weeks ago, we talked about positional sanctification, and how at the moment of our conversion, our position or status before God was fundamentally changed. Union with Christ explains that positional change.
 - ▶ **A helpful comparison would be a marital union, which Paul says, in Ephesians 5, actually refers to Christ and his Church.** Now let's say, within that marital union, you co-sign a loan. Let's imagine it to be a very big loan, so now in the eyes of the law, you both share that debt and are equally burdened by its crushing weight.
 - **Unlike the judge and defendant who are viewed as two separate persons, a husband and wife are viewed as one – in union with each other.** Now imagine if the wife was in an accident and was somehow incapacitated from working. She can't contribute anything, but the husband lovingly does the work for the both of them and pays off the debt. That transaction, though one-sided, would be completely just because it has both of them in view.

- ❖ That, my friends, is how we should see the cross. **It was a one-sided transaction where Christ died for his Bride, for the Church. But because of our union with Christ, what took place at the cross had both Christ and the Church in view.**
 - ▶ When Jesus died – in a positional sense and a forensic (legal) sense – we died with him, paying off our debts together. So now we are considered debt-free in the eyes of God. And don't, for a second, think this is merely imaginary or symbolic. **What took place at the cross is very real – for whatever exists in God's eyes is most fundamentally real and has real consequences for how we ought to live.**

- ❖ That's Paul's point in Romans 6. **If you have truly died with Christ at the cross – if that transaction was real – then there are real consequences.** V5 spelled it out – if we have been united with him in a death like his, then we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. That suggests that real change and newness of life are in store.

- ▶ Which makes sense because a fundamental change in your identity has occurred. **Positionally, you have entered into a new relationship towards sin and towards God – but in diametrically different ways.** That’s what Paul goes on to explain in vv6-10. Summing it up, in v11, with a command to “*consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*”

Consider Yourself Dead to Sin

- ❖ So those are the two considerations that logically flow out of a consideration of our union with Christ. Because you’re united with Christ in his death and in his resurrection, then consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God. Let’s take them each at a time. Here’s our second point: **Consider yourself dead to sin.**
 - ▶ This is emphasized in vv6-7. Let me read it, “*6We 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. 7For one who has died has been set free from sin.*”
- ❖ Now notice how Paul doesn’t just say, “We were crucified with Christ,” but he specifically says, “*our old self was crucified with him.*” **The old self (lit. “old man”) is a term Paul often uses in his letters and sets it in contrast to the new self** (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). Now he is not talking about two competing natures inside of a Christian. That idea cedes too much power and influence to the old self.
 - ▶ No, the old self (old man) is referring to the First Man, Adam, whose name in Hebrew means “man”. **In Paul’s theology, all of humanity is born into this world in Adam** (Rom 5:12-14). In relation to Adam. Our identity is rooted in him, the old man.
- ❖ **And that means Adam is not just our first father. He’s our federal head.** It’s like how, in the federal government, our federal head would be the president. He’s the head of the nation. He represents and speaks for all citizens. And it doesn’t matter if he was or wasn’t your choice to represent you. By virtue of being a US citizen, the president is your federal head.
 - ▶ The same goes for Adam. You could argue, “I didn’t choose him to represent me. I want to represent myself!” But the fact remains: **By virtue of you being a human created in the image of God – the first human (Adam) functions as your federal head.** What that means theologically is that whatever Adam does extends to you.
 - What did Adam do? In Genesis 3, the old man distrusted and disobeyed God. Which resulted in death and not just bodily death. **Genesis 3 describes a spiritual death resulting in spiritual captivity to sin.**
- ❖ That means all of us are born under the captivity of sin. Paul mentions this enslavement to sin at the end of v6. **So as long as I am living in Adam – in the old self, under his headship – then I am under the reign and tyranny of sin.** That is the state of everyone outside of Christ. If you’re not yet a Christian, you are *in Adam*. You are living in relation to the old man/self. And you are under the enslaving power of sin.

- ❖ Now please don't misunderstand. **That doesn't mean that, as a non-Christian, you can't do good things or be a nice person.** You have to understand the way Paul defines sin in the book of Romans. In chapter 14:23, he says, "*For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*" If faith in Christ – with a desire to please Christ – is *not* what is motivating you to do what you do, then what you're doing is sin.
 - ▶ **So with that understanding of sin, Paul says that everyone who is still *in Adam* is a slave to sin.** You can't help but sin. It comes natural to you because, as a non-Christian, it is natural to *not* trust God nor to seek to please in him in all you do.

- ❖ **But once we are united with Christ by faith, then the old man and his slavery to sin has no hold on us anymore.** We are liberated. Set free. Saved – not just from sin's penalty – but from sin's power. That's what Paul meant when he said in v7, "*For one who has died has been set free from sin.*" He's citing a general principle: **Death severs the hold of sin on a person.** You can't tell a dead person what to do. The dead are free – as free as free can be. Upon death, all debts are canceled. All contracts are voided. All obligations are lifted.
 - ▶ **So if the Son has set you free, you are free indeed. And remember, he set you free by uniting *with you and dying for you.*** You're no longer in Adam. You're in Christ. The Second Adam, the new man, is your new federal head. And whatever he does extends to you. So as Christ died, you died. And, in v10, it says the death he died, he died to sin, once for all. Which is why we're to consider ourselves dead to sin.

- ❖ Do you realize what it means to be dead to sin? To no longer be under its sway? **It means, as a Christian, you can say "No" to sin.** Titus 2:11-12 says the grace of God has appeared to offer salvation, teaching us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions. **Christians – unlike those still in Adam – have the power of contrary choice.** By the grace of God, we can choose to trust in Jesus and to please him with our actions, or we can choose otherwise. **Christians never sin by necessity. We sin by willful choice.**
 - ▶ We can't excuse our sinful behavior by suggesting that we couldn't help it. That we had no choice. That the devil made me do it. No, God says that every time we face temptation, he gives his people a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13). **So that just makes those times when we do choose to sin that much more heinous. Making us that much more debtors to God's grace.**

- ❖ **Friends, I have a sense that, for many of you, this may be your Juneteenth moment.** Perhaps you've been a Christian for some time. You're no longer in the old man. You're in the new man, in Christ. And yet, you've been living like you're still under the enslaving power of the old. Not much has changed.
 - ▶ **So in many ways, you're like one of the 250,000 black slaves in the state of Texas. Who, by 1865, had never heard of the Emancipation Proclamation that went into effect two years earlier. Who were free now but continued to live enslaved.**
 - News travelled slowly in those days. So it wasn't until June 19, 1865 that Union General Gordon Granger stood on the balcony of Galveston's Ashton Villa and proclaimed the good news of freedom for all.

- ❖ **I feel like a Gordon Granger proclaiming emancipation to Christians who never knew how free they are from the power of sin.** Ever since the moment you became a Christian, that old man has been crucified. Your life under Adam's headship was over. You have been dead to sin and set free from its power since that moment of conversion. But now this is your Juneteenth moment. Today is the day you've finally heard and understood the good news. Today is the day you consider yourself dead to sin.

Consider Yourself Alive to God

- ❖ And once we consider ourselves dead to sin, v11 tells us to consider ourselves alive to God in Christ Jesus. This is our third and final point: **Consider yourself alive to God.** Let's keep reading in v8, "*Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*"
 - ▶ Here Paul is simply reasserting the logic of v5. If we have died with Christ (that is, we've been united with him in a death like his), then we believe that we'll also live with him (we'll be united with him in a resurrection like his). **So to be a Christian is to be – not just a free person – but a brand new person. Not just forgiven but resurrected.** Not just dead to sin but alive to God in Christ.
- ❖ Now in v9 Paul goes on to explain the kind of life that Christ is living, and essentially, it's immortal life. Listen to v9, "*We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.*" **Christ's resurrection signaled a decisive break from the power of death.** Unlike Lazarus, who was resurrected only live another however many years before he had to die again – Jesus will never die. He was raised to immortality in a body that will never die.
 - ▶ And since we have been united with him in a resurrection like his, Christ has defeated death for us. **That means he's removed death's sting for us** (1 Cor 15:55). Death stung Jesus and left its stinger in the side of our Crucified Lord.
- ❖ **And just like a bee that used its stinger and is destined to die, death sealed its fate when it stung Christ.** It still buzzes around, but it can't hurt those united with Christ. And at the final resurrection, death itself will die.
 - ▶ Now when I say death can't hurt those united with Christ, I'm not suggesting Christians won't experience bodily death. **But I am suggesting that bodily death, for the Christian, should no longer be a feared enemy but should be treated as an obedient servant.** Death is like an usher ushering us into our true country. Like a doorman, welcoming us into our true home.
- ❖ So if we have died with Christ, then – not only is sin no longer our master – death is no longer our enemy. Being alive to God in Christ Jesus would then mean living a resurrection life – a life without fear. **Friends, could it be that the reason we struggle to experience real change and newness of life is because we're so often crippled by fear?**

- ❖ **The tyranny of fear has crippled many of us from making any significant strides in our walk with God.** Why do we center so much attention and put so much effort into pursuing worldly riches or chasing after worldly fame and acclaim? Why don't we give even half the attention or effort towards the pursuit of holiness or life transformation?

- ❖ Because we fear death. We keep believing the lie that this life is it. That you only live once. That this is as good as it gets. **We act as if death is the end of the line – the conclusion of our story.** So along with the world, we try to accomplish it all and achieve it all and accrue it all in this life. Which explains why we have a hard time experiencing real change, and why we might grow disillusioned with regeneration and eventually skeptical of resurrection.
 - ▶ What we fail to do, as Christians, is to consider ourselves alive to God in Christ. **We fail to consider that we are literally immortal, having been united with Christ in a resurrection like his.** We fail to consider this life (in the words of CS Lewis) as merely the cover and title page and now at last upon death we'll begin, "*Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.*"

- ❖ **If we would only consider our true identity from God's vantage point – if we could see ourselves as he sees us – then we would live new lives.** Lives lived from a completely new vantage point and oriented around new priorities and new pursuits. As Paul says in **Galatians 2:20**, "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*"
 - ▶ We have been crucified with the Son of God, buried with him in death – so we too have been raised with the Son to newness of life and will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. Amen.