

June 23, 2002
AM Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Dying With Christ” (Title and message based on ideas from a message by Rev. Mary Rearick Paul, senior pastor of Bethel Church of the Nazarene in Quincy, Massachusetts.)

Rom 6:1-14 NLT

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more kindness and forgiveness? 2 Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? 3 Or have you forgotten that when we became Christians and were baptized to become one with Christ Jesus, we died with him? 4 For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

5 Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised as he was. 6 Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. 7 For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. 8 And since we died with Christ, we know we will also share his new life. 9 We are sure of this because Christ rose from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. 10 He died once to defeat sin, and now he lives for the glory of God. 11 So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus.

12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to its lustful desires. 13 Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God. 14 Sin is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead, you are free by God's grace.

Several years ago (almost 30 years ago) a girl that Ann and I knew got involved with a cult called “The Way International. She was going to their Bible Studies held in the home of someone she knew. She liked reading and studying the Bible but was confused about some of the things the group was teaching and doing. She talked to Ann and I about this. I asked her what she was confused about. One thing she mentioned was that after the Bible study was over the group would go to a bar and sometimes smoke pot and some of the attendees were involved sexually with one another. She felt these things were wrong and it especially bothered her that they were doing these things right after they had studied the Bible. I asked her if she spoke to the leader about it and asked what he had to say. She said he told her that, “It is ok to sin because God forgives us.”

A QUESTION ABOUT SIN:

Some one recently asked in a sermon: “If you could live however you please and still know that you would have forgiveness of sins, how would you live?” (Rev. Mary Rearick Paul, senior pastor of Bethel Church of the Nazarene in Quincy, Massachusetts.)

Be careful how you answer that question. Do you think it would be ok to sin because God would forgive? There have been, through the ages, people who taught that since God gives the grace of forgiveness to those who sin it is actually good to sin. The more you sin the more grace you will receive. I have never met a Christian (including myself) who did what was wrong and not pay some consequence for it. Sin, even if it has been forgiven, has consequences and is never a good thing.

Paul begins chapter 6 of Romans by asking the ridiculous question: Rom 6:1 NIV “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” or “should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more kindness and forgiveness?”

But wait a minute, maybe the question is not so ridiculous. It raises the serious struggle all Christians have regarding what it means to be forgiven, what it means to have the power of sin broken, what it means to die and rise with Christ.

Christians may not feel they still struggle with sin. But when they are in a position to make choices for their lives it is clear that sin still has an influence in their decisions. They may not be conscious that their behavior is motivated by sin. They wouldn't name it sin. They may get angry if someone suggested their actions were sinfully motivated. They may deny they had any choice in the events of their lives. They may tell you that someone else is to blame. They may defend their actions. They may even blame God for not giving them the breaks they deserve. Yet the breaks are there if they were willing to question the purpose of their actions, see it for what it is (selfishness) and turn their lives fully to God. It is natural to blame our actions, attitude and anger on everyone else and not see our own responsibility for our actions.

WARNING SIGNALS:

When we experience a negative or destructive emotion (e.g. anger, worry, depression, fear or guilt) that should be like the light on the dashboard of our car that warns us to “check engine soon.” Note: SOON! One thing I remember my driver-Ed teacher in high school saying was that when the “idiot light on your dashboard comes on, that does not mean ‘ignore this and keep driving’ it means take care of this problem NOW! So a destructive emotion is an indication to take a look “under the hood” soon or NOW! Ask yourself some questions. What am I feeling? Why am I so upset? What am I thinking? What am I telling myself? What did I do? What was the purpose for doing what I did? Everything you do has a purpose.

“CHECK UNDER THE HOOD”:

You will find as you “check under the hood” that there is hurt *and* if you are willing and look hard enough and allow the Lord to do His work you will also see sin.

When the Lord has shown me the sinfulness of my actions, motives or attitude I have felt broken and desirous to change, yet helpless to change.

THE GOOD NEWS:

The good news is that Jesus died and rose again not only that we might know forgiveness of sins, but that we might know the freedom to live the life of God.

HOWEVER:

The way into this life of God is death, death to the old self. This is not easy. We often struggle with letting go of what we have known even if we recognize it's need to go. We don't like to talk about death. It makes us uncomfortable. Nevertheless the word of God tells us that the way to life in God is through death with Christ. Therefore God's answer is to ask us to die.

Death is not something we like to discuss. Death means pain and grief. And so even putting to death sin is something we avoid by denial, avoidance and running away. But (just as in physical death) if we can look past the death to the possibilities that can be born if we let go of the old, we might be able to face death straight on.

In your life without Christ, you taught yourself and therefore always felt that whatever you think is right. It is hard to see and accept that your thinking is not always right. It is also hard to realize that the life of grace that is offered through Jesus Christ comes through "death". Even when we may be fully aware that the life we have created (before knowing Jesus) is really not working – still it is a death with its own grief to, by God's grace, move into the new life he offers. We often hold on to shiny meaningless costume jewelry when God offers a treasure chest of real jewels. We are being asked to let go of that which is familiar.

I can tell you that God is trustworthy. I can tell you that God has better things for you than the best of what you have known. I can tell you that the life God desires to give you is full of grace, peace, strength and hope. But you will have to enter the death of the cross to know the fullness of this life. Whether it is the burial of the old self, the life of sin, or the burial of what has been, we must let some things die. Death is necessary for the new life of God.

My experience is that a person can experience God's grace in amazing ways yet still struggle with living the life of God. The time and tools needed to break the power of sin often depend on how deeply established the old self is. First and foremost we must call upon the power of God. It is in Jesus' name that the chains are broken. There also needs to be an obedience to the call of God. This call of God into new life may include taking actions like confession, counseling, doctor's care, accountability or acts of restitution.

There has to be a willingness to allow our old self to be sacrificed with Christ so that the new self can be born. Unfortunately people in and outside of the church hesitate to enter fully into the death of Christ. Most would say that they want the fruits of this experience but find that actually releasing themselves into the baptismal waters of Christ's death is far more difficult than they anticipated.

Our lives should be about more than struggling with “old stuff.” God has the power to set us free! As much as the death of Christ is for us, the resurrection of Christ is for us as well. Given our histories and addictions it just may take longer for some to allow the old self to die. And yet as we turn to God and say “yes” to His call and what He desires for us and enter into death from the things He does not want, we can be freed from the power of sin.

REMEMBER:

If we are in Christ we must remember the facts of verses 6 –7 “Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin.”

To remain free from sin and its bondage, we need to engage in honest review and confession. There are effects of living in this world and challenges that arise as we work out our relationship with God and others. But we must consider ourselves dead to sin. To be truly alive to God in Christ Jesus means that we continue to let the Spirit pour through our lives the baptism waters - taking away all the remnants of the old self.

It is this new life to which Paul points us this morning. If our lives have not changed, if we are still chained by sin, if there is no power to live out this restored relationship with God, then for what purpose was Christ’s death and resurrection? Christ’s death and resurrection was “so that the body of sin might be done away with” (Romans 6: 6). There is a freedom that is ours through Christ Jesus and the life that is ours through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Is there something that needs to die this morning? Are you ready to let go of the old so that the new can come? In Christ we have one who walks with us into death and leads us into resurrection.