

Romans: The Good News of God

Consider This

Romans 6:11

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Scripture

In his commentary on Romans, James Montgomery Boice, from whom I am drawing today's material, spends an entire sermon on one verse.¹

Today, I also want to look at Romans 6:11 in a more focused way because it is so important. Let me begin with a question.

How many times up until Romans 6:11 has Paul urged his readers to do something? That is, how many exhortations have there been? How many commands has Paul given to the Romans?

Five? Ten? Thirty?

What do you think? How many commands has Paul given so far?

The answer to this question is that there have been none at all! The reason I emphasize this is to call attention to the most significant thing to be noted about Romans 6:11. This verse *is* a command, and it is the *first* in this letter. This is the first time in 5½ chapters that the apostle has urged his readers to do anything.

What are they to do? Romans 6:11 says:

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

Introduction

We live in an age of instant gratification. Advertizing is geared to the "I want it now" attitude of consumers.

Earlier this week I heard a discussion on the *O'Reilly Factor* about a book to help young children whose moms undergo cosmetic surgery. I understand that about 11 million people each year

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, Vol. 2, The Reign of Grace: Romans 5-8* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 673-680.

undergo cosmetic surgery, and the book was designed to help young children understand how their moms could go out in the morning shaped one way and then come home in the evenings shaped in a completely different way! Part of the discussion of the panel centered on how so many people want a quick fix to change rather than go through the time and effort of diet and exercise.

Recently someone mentioned to me that Oprah Winfrey is involved in the fastest growing new religion. Apparently, she has been promoting a book titled, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* by Eckhart Tolle. Oprah and Eckhart have teamed up for interactive web-training sessions that have drawn millions of people to each meeting. The blurb on the back cover of the book says, "Illuminating, enlightening, and uplifting, *A New Earth* is a profoundly spiritual manifesto for a better way of life—and for building a better world."² Millions of people are interested in getting a quick fix for the spiritual issues in their lives.

This past week I finished reading a book that is making the rounds in some Christian circles. The book is titled, *The Shack*, and it is written by William P. Young. It has been as high as number 2 on the Amazon.com bestseller list, which means it has sold tens of thousands of copies. What is disturbing about this book is the number of well-known Christians who have endorsed it. The most troubling one is by pastor, author, and theologian Eugene Peterson, who wrote *The Message*, a well-received paraphrase of the English Bible. He said, "This book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* did for his. It's that good!"³ Unfortunately, the book is riddled with theological error about the Trinity, which undiscerning readers will not pick up. Instead, in a desire to get a quick fix for tragedy, they will absorb the contents of the book—and suffer loss instead of gain.

The problem is that we want "quick fix answers" for all of

² Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* (New York, NY: A Plume Book, 2006), back cover.

³ William P. Young, *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* (Los Angeles, CA: Windblown Media, 2007), front cover.

life's problems. Whether it is with how we look, or how we grow spiritually, or how we deal with tragedy, we just want answers—and we want them *now*!

It is extremely important for us to understand the apostle Paul's approach. He never goes straight to solutions. He always lays a foundation of doctrine and teaching and instruction *before* he begins to apply it to our lives. Or, to put it in theological terms, the *indicative* always comes before the *imperative*.

What Paul wants his readers to understand in our text for today is the Christian's union with Jesus Christ. Paul's way of talking about this is to say that Christians are "in Christ," "in Jesus Christ," or "in him." (Apparently, someone has counted that these phrases occur 164 times in Paul's writings!)

One of them is in our text for today, and it is the first time this exact phrase has occurred in Romans. Yet it is what Paul has really been talking about for several chapters.

Romans 5 dealt with it directly, contrasting our former state of being in Adam with our present state of being in Christ. In Romans 6 this has already been presented indirectly in terms of our having died to sin and having been made alive in Jesus Christ.

This has been done for us by God. It has been his work, not ours. We have no more joined ourselves to Jesus than we died for our own sins. If we are Christians, everything that is necessary for our salvation has been done for us and to us by God.

Lesson

Today, I want you to understand two realities that are true of every Christian. These two realities are true of you, if you are a Christian. But before we look at the two realities, I want you to understand the verb in Romans 6:11.

It is the word "**consider.**" The Greek word is *logizomai*, and it can also be translated as "count," "reckon," or even "credit."

It will help you in your understanding of Romans 6:11 to know that *logizomai* has already been used several times in Ro-

mans and that in every case it has referred to recognizing something that is factual. In fact, *logizomai* has appeared fourteen times before now (2:3, 26: 3:28; 4:3-6, 8-11, 22-24), and it will occur again (in Romans 8 and 9).

The chief use of *logizomai* has been in chapter 4 where there are 11 occurrences. Paul employed it to show how your sins have been credited to Christ and punished there, and how his righteousness has been credited to you.

These two “considerations,” “reckonings,” or “countings” are the two parallel sides of justification. They are not just imaginary transactions. Jesus really did die for your sin; he suffered for your transgressions. Similarly, his righteousness really has been transferred to your account, so that God counts you righteous in him.

This has bearing on Paul’s command in Romans 6:11. For although he is proceeding in this chapter to the area of what you are to do and actions you are to take, his starting point is nevertheless that you must **consider** as true what God has himself already done for you.

This is so critical that I want to ask pointedly: Do you really understand this? We cannot go on until we do.

Can I possibly say it more clearly?

Let me put it this way: The first step in your growth in holiness is considering as true what is, in fact, true.

Or to put it another way: The key to living the Christian life lies in first knowing that God has taken you out of Adam and has joined you to Jesus Christ, that you are no longer subject to the reign of sin and death but you have been transferred into the kingdom of God’s abounding grace.

Or I could say this: The secret to a holy life is believing God.

I. The First Reality: Dead to Sin (6:11a)

In our text Paul says there are two things God has done that you are to consider. First, if you are a Christian, you are **“dead to sin”** (6:11a).

This does not mean that you are immune to sin or temptation. It does not mean that you will not sin.

But it does mean that you are dead to your old life and you cannot go back to it.

That is the reality Paul first stated explicitly in Romans 6:2: “We died to sin,” he said.

In verses 3 and 4, he restated it: We were “baptized into his death” and “buried therefore with him by baptism into death.”

It was also said in verse 5: “We have been united with him in a death like his.”

Verse 6 said it, too: “Our old self was crucified with him.”

Verse 7 again made the point that we “died” with Christ.

All those statements are factual. They describe something that has happened.

On the basis of this truth, Paul now tells you to “**consider yourselves dead to sin.**”

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it this way: “Consider, and keep constantly before you, this truth about yourself.”⁴ In other words, learn to think of yourself as one who has been delivered from sin’s realm. Sin’s power has been broken in your life. It no longer has mastery over you.

This is such a pivotal text that it is worth adding a number of things that “**consider yourselves dead to sin**” does *not* mean. Lloyd-Jones lists six of them:

1. “**Consider yourselves dead to sin**” does *not* mean that it is your duty as a Christian to die to sin. The text has nothing to do with duty. It is concerned with fact.
2. “**Consider yourselves dead to sin**” is *not* a command for you to die to sin. How can you be told to do what has already been done to you?
3. “**Consider yourselves dead to sin**” does *not* mean that you are to consider that sin as a force in you is dead. That would not be true. Sin is a force in you, though it is a force whose effective

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6, The New Man* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1973), 113.

power over you has been broken (v. 6).

4. **“Consider yourselves dead to sin”** does *not* mean that sin in you has been eradicated.
5. **“Consider yourselves dead to sin”** does *not* mean that you are dead to sin as long as you are in the process of gaining mastery over it. That would make the statement refer to something experimental, and it does not do that. It refers to a past event.
6. **“Consider yourselves dead to sin”** does *not* make you dead to sin. That is backwards. What Paul is saying is that, because you have died to sin, you are to consider it so.⁵

II. The Second Reality: Alive to God (6:11b)

The second reality Paul says you are to consider is that you are now **“alive to God in Christ Jesus”** (6:11b).

Just as you have died to sin (and must consider yourselves so), so also have you been made alive to God in Jesus Christ (and must consider yourselves so also).

This is the positive side of the matter. But now I ask: “Just what does being made **‘alive to God in Christ Jesus’** mean? What changes have taken place?”

Let me suggest some to you.

A. *You Have Been Reconciled to God*

First, you have been reconciled to God.

In the earlier chapters of Romans there has been a grim sequence of terms: sin, wrath, judgment, condemnation, and death.

But God has lifted you out of that downward-spiraling sequence by a set of opposing realities: grace, justification, obedience, righteousness, and eternal life.

This means that you were subject to the wrath of God but that now, being in Christ, you are in a favorable position before him.

Before, you were God’s enemy. Now, you are his friend and,

⁵ D. Marty Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6, The New Man* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1973), 116-118.

what is more important, he is a friend to you. There is a new relationship.

B. You Have Become a New Creature in Christ

Second, you have become a new creature in Christ.

Not only is there a new relationship between yourself and God, which is wonderful in itself, but you have also become something you were not before. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-18a, Paul puts it like this: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself. . . .”

Another way of putting this is to speak of regeneration, or of being born again, which was Jesus’ term for it. He told Nicodemus, “You must be born again” (John 3:7). It seems to me that this was a deliberate reference to the way in which God breathed life into Adam, so that he became “a living creature” (Genesis 2:7). Before that, Adam was utterly inert, a lifeless form. But when God breathed some of his breath into him, Adam became alive to God and all things.

Similarly, this is what happens when God breathes new spiritual life into you in the work known as regeneration. You become something you were not before. You have a new life. That life is responsive to the one who gave it.

Before you were born again, the Bible meant nothing to you when you read it or it was read in your hearing. Now the Bible is intensely alive and interesting. You hear the voice of God in it.

Before regeneration, you had no interest in God’s people. Christians acted in ways that were strange to you. Their priorities were different from your own. Now they are your very best friends and co-workers. You love their company and cannot seem to get enough of it.

Before regeneration, coming to church was boring. Now you are alive to God’s presence in the service. Your worship times are the very best times of your week.

Before regeneration, service to others and witnessing to the lost seemed strange and senseless, even repulsive. Now they are your delight.

What has made the difference? The difference is you. God has changed you. You have become alive to him. You are a new creature.

C. You Are Freed from Sin's Bondage

Third, you are freed from sin's bondage.

Before you died to sin and were made alive to God, you were a slave of your sinful nature. Sin was ruining you. But even when you could see that clearly and acknowledge it, which was not very often, you were still unable to do anything about it.

You said, "I've got to stop drinking; it's killing me." Or, "I am going to ruin my reputation if I don't stop these sexual indulgences." Or, "I've got to get control of my temper; or curb my spending [or whatever]." But you were unable to do it.

And even if you did get some control of one important area of your life, perhaps with the help of a good therapist or friends or a supportive family, the general downward and destructive drift was unchanged. You really were *non posse non peccare* ("not able not to sin"), as Saint Augustine described it.

But, being made alive to God, you discover that you are now freed from that destructive bondage. You still sin, but not always and not as often. And you know that you do not have to. You are now *posse non peccare* ("able not to sin").

You can now achieve a real victory over sin.

D. You Are Pressing Forward to a Sure Destiny and New Goals

Fourth, you are pressing forward to a sure destiny and new goals.

Before, you were not. You were trapped by the world and by its time-bound, evil horizons. Being saved, you know that you are

now destined for an eternity of fellowship and bliss with God. You have not reached it yet. You are not yet perfect.

But you echo within what Paul said in describing his new life in Christ to the Philippians: “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

E. You Are No Longer Satisfied with this World and Its Offerings

And fifth, you are no longer satisfied with this world and its offerings.

In fact, the world never did really satisfy you. The world, which is finite, can never adequately fill beings that are made with an immense capacity for fellowship with and enjoyment of God. But you thought the world and its values were satisfying. You expected to be filled.

Now you know that it will never work and that all you see about you, though it sometimes has value in a limited, earthly sense, is nevertheless passing away and will one day be completely forgotten. Your house will be gone; your television sets will be gone; your beautiful furniture and cars and bank accounts will have passed away. So these tangible things no longer have any real hold on you.

You have died to them, and in their place you have been made alive to God, who is intangible, invisible, and eternal, and of greater reality and substance than anything else you can imagine.

Therefore, you know yourself to be only a pilgrim here. You are passing through. Like Abraham, you are “looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

Conclusion

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

Nehemiah is an illustration of what this means and of what your attitude should be.

Nehemiah had determined to rebuild the walls of the ruined and abandoned city of Jerusalem. But he was being opposed by the rulers of the rival city-states around him. Two of his opponents were Sanballat of Samaria and Geshem the Arab. They invited him to a conference to be held about a day's journey from Jerusalem on the plain of Ono. This was a ploy to slow down Nehemiah's project and perhaps even to kidnap or murder him. Nehemiah refused to stop the work and go to the meeting.

His words were classic: "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3).

Later when the same people tried to frighten him with rumors of a plot on his life, Nehemiah replied, "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in" (6:11).

It is that courageous, self-aware attitude to life that I commend to you. "Am I to continue in sin that grace may abound?"

You should be able to answer, "How can such a one as I do it—I who have died to sin and been made alive to God in Christ Jesus?"

For that is what has happened to you, if you are a Christian. You have been removed from your former state to a new state. Your job is to consider this, to reckon it so, to count on it. You must say, "A person like me has better things to do than to keep sinning." Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

From Ray Ortlund's, *A Passion for God*:

O God, we your church are losing our radical edge, because we have forgotten this aspect of the gospel. Our discipleship is so flimsy, so unconvincing, because we do not understand this basic doctrine of death to sin, followed by new life, in union with our crucified, buried, and risen Lord.

We do not see our conversion to Christ as a death to our old life. We see it as a pleasant ornament on our old life—a little religion added in.

We see conversion as a drop of oil to keep the gears of our pagan lives running smoothly, when in fact conversion demands that the gears come to a stop and begin turning in the opposite direction.

We condescend to *include* you in our unexamined lives rather than *die* to those old lives and start all over again with you from scratch.

O God, we urgently need to understand what you are teaching us here. We need to rediscover what it means to live in union with Christ. We need to see that holiness is not legalism and that grace is not cheap.

O God, spread this message throughout your church today. Let it reach our ears and our hearts, creating within us a yearning for renewal in holiness, consistent with the gospel.

And, O God, let us live in sweet, felt union with our Lord Jesus Christ, drawing new life from him moment by moment.

And all of this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.