

Many of you have asked... because this is my first Sunday back... if I had a good vacation. The answer is “yes... *I think that I had my batteries re-charged... and I want to prove it to you... by having you dive right into some **deep** thinking with me... to start things off today...*” ... Rest-time is over! ... God has called us to a very significant passage of Scripture that will change us forever... if we will actively engage ourselves with it.

In order to introduce our significant passage today... I am going to say something that I hope you will allow to sink-in. ... So I will say it... and then pause for you to think about it. ... Are you ready...? (Here it is.)

In our age... as in every age... people are longing for happiness –

- *not realizing that what they are looking for... is **holiness**.*

[PAUSE]

Isn't that as true of a statement... as any that you will hear...? People long for an ever-elusive happiness... because they lack a sense of lasting fulfillment. ... But true life-satisfaction... only comes with holiness.

I hope that you will agree with that... but the moment we recognize this truth... we are confronted with a different reality... that turns many believers away from pursuing a life of holiness. (And it is this)... Holiness (itself) is elusive!

(You say)... “*Pastor... I have heard more sermons than I care to admit that have challenged me to the core about my need to be holy... but I can't recall ONE that tells me **HOW**. ... How do I make positive changes **that last** in my life...?*”

- If we have REALLY been freed from sin in Christ... why does sin still give me so much trouble...?
- If we have been made holy before the Lord (in Christ)... why is my life so often **UN**holy...?
- If we have been made righteous (in Christ)... how can my life be a better demonstration of that truth...?

I am excited to study today's passage with you (which more than one theologian has called "*the most practical passage of Scripture in the Bible.*") ... (You see) Romans chapter six – "*will scratch this itch.*" We are about to dive into a life-changing passage that get's right down to the nitty-gritty of "How Can I Be Holy?"... "How can I make positive changes that last?"

This (very well) could be the most important sermon that I have ever preached to date! HOW ARE WE TO LIVE LIVES OF VICTORY...?

In our passage before us... the Apostle Paul answers this very systematically. If you are not "growing in Christ"... "maturing in your faith"... "making positive changes that last"... then I can pretty much guarantee that the problem is to be found in today's verses. ... In them... we will see that in order to grow... #1. there is something we must KNOW... and #2. something to fully ACCEPT... and then #3. something to OFFER. ... This will be our outline today: "Something to KNOW" ... "Something to ACCEPT" ... and "Something to OFFER." ... So... let's get started.

Please look at the opening sentence of Romans 6:1

Romans 6:1a – "*What shall we say then?*"

"Say about what?" ... You might ask.

OK... I've been gone for a few weeks... but the answer is found in the previous section of Romans... where we left off. ... Please look again with me at Romans 5:20.

Romans 5:20b – “*but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*”

Have you been less than perfect in your walk with Christ...? ... Well... here is some ***terrific*** news! God has *more than enough* grace... and all of it is flowing toward you... to restore you... and to have you live victoriously for Him.

HOWEVER (!) You don't need to be a “rocket scientist”... to know that there will be many people... (even believers)... who will read this... and then distort this precious truth.

“Well... OK then... Since there is this ‘super-abundance of grace’... and since sin brings more grace... let's sin! ... Woopie! ... Hey(!) If God loves to forgive... why not give Him more to forgive...?” [PAUSE]

The Apostle Paul recognized that one of the dangers in preaching about God's “super-abounding grace”... is that it *can* (and often *is*) interpreted as a license to sin.

(TRUTHFULLY)... haven't you ever given in to certain temptation... because at the height of your temptation... you had such self-talk... and convinced yourself: “*Well... since there is plenty of God's grace to spare... He will always forgive! I can go ahead and enjoy this sin NOW... and then later go to Him and ask forgiveness...*” ?

As the Apostle Paul clears away this delusion... he will provide us with the tools we need for living lives of victory – (positive change that lasts.)

Romans 6:1-2a – “*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!*”

I can still see and hear my beloved Greek professor in Seminary (Dr. Leonard Hillstrom) shout “ μη γενοιτω !!! ” whenever one of us would give a “stupid answer” to an easy question of his. No one wanted to hear him shout “ μη γενοιτω !!! ” at us.

In verse 2 here... the Apostle Paul used this same phrase... and it is as if he shouts it at us. The Greek words (μη γενοιτω) literally mean "*let it not be,*" and they have the force of a powerful negation. They actually mean, "*It is inconceivable for it to be thus*" or "*It is unthinkable,*"—"It should not even be considered." Some translators render the expression, "*God forbid!*"

After I had graduated from seminary and had been pastoring for a few years... I saw Dr. Hillstrom at a pastor's conference at Mt Hermon...that my wife and I attended. (He was there with his wife... as well.) During a break... Patti and I engaged them in a ping-pong game. Patti has a special touch for placing the ping-pong ball (just) perfectly at the edge of the table... so her opponent thinks it is on its way out of bounds... and they let it go. But it just nicks the edge... and they lose a point. ... [PAUSE and smirk] ... What a thrill it was for me to shout “ μη γενοιτω !!! ” back at my beloved prof.

But why did Paul use such a forceful negation here...?

Romans 6:2

Why is it unthinkable? ... Because it is impossible for those who are *dead* to act as if they were alive. ... It is just as absurd to suppose that a

Christian should desire to live in sin... as that a dead coyote laying on the path... would bite you... if you passed by it... (even if you kicked it.)

To be *dead* to a thing... is a strong expression denoting that it has no influence over us. ... A man that is dead... is uninfluenced and unaffected by the affairs of this life. ... He is insensible to sounds... and tastes... and pleasures. He is unaffected by the hum of business... to the voices of his most cherished friendships... and to winning scores of his favorite football team (for which he once had great zeal.) ... When it is said that a Christian is *dead* to sin... it means that it has lost its influence over him... he is not subject to it.

But (perhaps) the military examples that were used by more than one commentator of this passage (including Chuck Swindoll) – might serve as a better illustration. ... They spoke of how impulsively they *once* snapped to the obedience of their superior officers. But after they were discharged from the military... those same officers had lost their influence over them. If they barked an order for them to “*drop and give me twenty*”... they were very much “*capable*” of doing it... but they didn’t have to... and were not very likely to do so. The (once very real) power and authority... was now dead.

For us... sin’s (once very real power over us) is now dead. Christians are obviously ABLE to commit many of the same sins that they committed *before* they were saved. But they will not live *perpetually* in them... as they once did.

Christians who cannot make positive change that will last... have something that they really do not know. They do not know *that they have*

(*already*) died. (You see) many believers merely think that they **ARE dying** to sin. Others misrepresent this truth by believing that they **SHALL die** to sin. But Paul wrote in verse 2 (here) that we **HAVE died**... and he is very clear about it. He wrote it in what is called the aorist tense... The aorist tense refers to a finished **past** action. (We have already died.)

Paul has more to say about this in verses 3-10. ... As we turn (now) to them... watch for... as see... how many times this word "**know**" comes up. We are to know that we have died.

Romans 6:3-10

Some people try to find the key for making lasting positive change... in an intense emotional experience... thinking that if only they can make themselves feel close to God... they will become holy. ... Others try to find personal holiness through a special formula or methodology. They think that if they **do** certain things... or follow a prescribed ritual... they will live lives of victory.

But godliness does not come in that fashion. ... In fact... approaches like these are deceiving. (LISTEN!) A holy life comes from **knowing**— *knowing* that you can't go back... that you have died to sin... and been made alive to God. The key to a holy life is not our experiences or emotions (however meaningful or intense these may be)... but rather our *knowledge* of what has happened to us... and that we cannot go back.

John Stott says, "A born-again Christian should no more think of going back to the old life than an adult to his childhood... a married man to his bachelorhood... or a discharged prisoner to his prison cell."

Can an adult still want to be a child or an infant? ... A happily married man a bachelor? ... A freed man a prisoner again? ...Yes... I suppose some could. ... But no right-minded person would want to.

We have a very profound union with Christ... Christ died to sin... and so have we. Paul wrote of our being baptized into Christ... into His death and His resurrection. This baptism happened to us the moment we trusted Christ.

Whenever we do a baptism around here there are a few explanations about that truth that I like to give. The Greek word “ βαπτίζω “ (from which we get our word “baptize” was used by the ancient Greeks to describe one of their sailing vessels that sank to the bottom of the Mediterranean Ocean. They said of it... that it was baptized. It was submerged and now had a permanent identity with the Mediterranean Ocean... because it could not be raised from it. It was now ONE with the ocean where it sank.

Among the many rich images of this word (βαπτίζω)... it means to be completely identified with something else. ... But the Greeks *also* used it to describe a significant and irreversible change that has happened. An army at war would baptize a city... when its hordes would flood inside and wreak havoc. Permanent change happened to it. (And then) Textile merchants would submerge cloth in a colored die and irreversibly change the appearance of the cloth. (It could never go back to the way it was.) The term used was that the cloth was baptized. That cloth was irreversibly changed – and it was forever identified (in unity) with the colored fluid that it was dipped in.

The Apostle Paul used the word βαπτίζω in a different letter to express the exact same thought that he used it here.

1 Corinthians 10:1-2 (ESV)

¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

What do the verses mean? ... Obviously... they refer to a permanent identification of the people with Moses... as a result of the Red Sea crossing. ... Before this crossing... while they were still in Egypt... they could have renounced Moses' leadership. They could have told Moses to go fly a kite... they are retaining their allegiance to Pharaoh. ... But once they crossed the Red Sea... they could no longer do that. They were permanently joined to Moses. ... They were not able to go back.

By now you are probably beginning to see why this discussion of baptism is so important... and why Paul brings it up... in verses 3 and 4. We have such a profound union to Christ. And death to sin.

Will we sin? ... Yes! ... But we do not need to... and we will do so less and less as we go on in the Christian life. ... We are so intensely identified with Christ's death and resurrection... that we actually did die with Him and truly were raised with Him... so that we now share in His resurrection life. ... This is what Paul says of himself in Philippians 3:10 - *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection.* ... He means that he wants to be victorious over sin.

"But what if I do go back? What if I do sin?" ... (I love what James Montgomery Boice writes as an answer.)

Here are three points to remember:

1. *It won't work.* Do you remember my illustration of an adult trying to return to childhood. Can he do it? ... Well... he can act childlike... though it would be a *dishonor* to him and an *embarrassment* to everyone else. ... But to become a child again? ... It can't be done. An adult can behave in an infantile manner. But an adult cannot *be* a child.

In the same way... if you are a true Christian... you cannot return to sin in the same way you were in it previously. You can sin. (We do sin.) But it is not the same. If nothing else... you cannot enjoy sin as you did before. And you will not even be able to do it convincingly. You will be like Peter trying to swear that he did not know Jesus... after having spent three years in Jesus' school. People will look at you and say, "*But surely you are one of his disciples.*"

2. *God will stop you.* God will not stop you from sinning... but He will stop you from continuing in it. And He will do it in one of two ways. Either He will make your life so miserable... that you will curse the day you got into sin... and beg God to get you out of it... ... or God will put an end to your life. Paul told the Corinthians that because they had dishonored the Lord's Supper... God had actually taken some of them home to heaven (1 Cor. 11:30). If God did it to them for that offense... He will do it to you for persistence in more sinful things.

3. *If you do return to the life you lived before coming to Christ and if you are able to continue in it... you are not saved.*

1 John 2:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

Salvation is new life. It is union with Christ. Therefore... unless you are turning from sin and growing in righteousness... you are not saved. It is presumptuous to think that you are! This is why Scripture warns:

2 Peter 1:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

There is no such thing as a Christian... who has not died with Christ... and been raised to new life with Him. ... We have something that we must KNOW as believers... in order to have positive change (which lasts) in our life. ... [PAUSE] ...

History records that after Abraham Lincoln issued the Proclamation of Emancipation (which freed all slaves and made slavery illegal in the United States)... many slave owners in the South tried to keep the news of it from their slaves... for as long as they could. As long as they did not know about the removal of slavery's power of control... many slaves kept right on working.

But there were (at the same time) *other* slaves who did know that they had been set free... but they continued to live their lives as slaves. Why...? Because they could not even imagine a life of freedom. ... Slavery was all that they knew.

Likewise... there are so many believers who KNOW the truth about our death and our resurrection with Christ. But they simply cannot envision their freedom. They have been so conditioned to their life as a slave to sin. That is why KNOWING this truth (that we are seeing in Romans 6) is not enough. We must KNOW this truth. ... Second... it is something we must ACCEPT.

Romans 6:11

Here in verse 11... Paul intensifies our mere KNOWING it. We must take it further... and ACCEPT this truth. ... We see this expressed in the word Paul used for “consider.” It is the Greek word “λογιζωμαι.”

In classical Greek... λογιζωμαι had two main uses:

1. It was used in commercial dealings in the sense of evaluating an object's worth... or reckoning up a project's gain or losses. ... In other words... it was a bookkeeping term.

We have preserved a bit of this in our English words “log” ... “logistics” ... and “logarithm.” ... A log refers to the numerical record of a ship's or airplane's progress. ... Logistics is a military term dealing with the numbers and movement of troops or supplies. ... A logarithm is the exponent to which a base number is raised to produce a given number.

2. *Logizomai* was also used in philosophy in the sense of “objective” or “non-emotional reasoning.” ... We have preserved this meaning in our English words “logic” and “logical.”

The common ground in these two uses of the word... is that λογίζωμαι has to do with reality... with things as they truly are. In other words... it has nothing to do with wishful thinking. ... Nor is it an activity that makes something come to pass... or happen. ... It is an acknowledgment of... or an acting upon something - that is already true... or has already happened.

In bookkeeping... for example... it means posting in a ledger an amount corresponding to what actually exists. ... If my accountant (during tax season) plugged into her computer the data that I gave to her... and then handed me my completed tax-return forms while saying to me... "*I hope this is true... I hope this is true...*" I would look for another accountant – immediately! ... Her job is only to observe and account for the facts that are presented to her.

This has bearing on Paul's exhortation to us in Romans 6:11. ... The first step in our growth toward holiness... is knowing... and the second is counting-as-true... what is (in fact) true. ... All through the day – every day - we need to recognize and accept this truth.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones renders it: "*Consider, and keep constantly before you, this truth about yourself.*" It will not do us any good... if we only consider this - one time - or infrequently. If we want to grow in holiness... this is something that we must frequently do.

But... (you see)... this is the exact point where a lot of believers will get snagged. ... They will not persist in it... or perhaps they won't even do it at all... because deep inside... they do not think that it is even possible to have the power of sin and enticement broken. They are like the

emancipated slaves who remained as slaves because they could not envision it. Rather than accepting what God says is true... whenever they are tempted to sin... they foolishly say to themselves... “*Oh well!... I will just ask God to forgive me after I have pursued my pleasure of sin...*”

This is why there is (yet) a ***third*** part... to what Paul is giving us here. This third part... is the step that brings us to ***persistently accept*** this truth. ... We have a truth to ***KNOW***... (SECONDLY) to ***ACCEPT***... (and THIRD)... there is an ***OFFER*** that we must regularly make... which seals the deal of Paul’s systematic answer for how we can live victorious Christian lives.

Romans 6:12-13

These verses mention presenting the members of our bodies to the Lord and not to sin. ... Now this is such an important concept... that Paul will bring it up again in Chapter 12.

Romans 12:1 (ESV)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Have you ever done this...? ... For Paul to bring it up ***twice*** in the same letter... he is exhorting us to do something very important. But have you ever (actually) presented the members of your body to the Lord...? (I know... it may sound kind of silly... but please don’t reject the idea because of such an *initial* impression.)

There is an urgent sense to what Paul is writing here... and I think he is being somewhat ***literal***. Every day... (and no less than once a day)... do it

several times a day... (do it when you first wake up in the morning)... but come before the Lord and say something like:

“God... here I am... alive from the dead. I have died and I am resurrected to new life – with Christ. Praise Your Name forever! Now here is my body. Today... I want to offer you my mind for You to use. Let me think right thoughts. Here are my eyes and my ears. Let me observe life around me the way You do. ... God... here is my mouth which has my tongue. Let it be used to build others up... and not for tearing down...grumbling... un-wholesome talk... or gossip. ... (Oregon has enough forest fires burning out of control right now.) Oh! And my heart... God... It has all these passions. Let me passionate only about the things You are passionate about. Let me see where my passions and Yours are not the same. Let my hands do Your work... and my feet only take me where You want me to go.

There is a fellow pastor (a friend of mine) in Fresno California... who once walked up to me... and instead of greeting me in our culture’s most accepted manner (“*Hi... How are you?*”)... Jim walked up and said “*Hi, have you presented the members of your body to the Lord today?*” Once I got over the shock... and we discussed it... he told me that he planned to greet every believer that way. (I don’t know if he is still doing that; this was several years ago)... but I wonder if we would have more of us showing greater signs of victorious living... if we had such a regular reminder of how to make positive change that lasts...?

When I was in High School... the church youth group that I was part of... had a unique way of greeting one another. It also came from Romans chapter six. Whenever we would see one another on campus or at church... we would say “*Hi... aren’t you glad you’re dead.*” (Back then... I cared a lot less about looking and sounding strange to others.) But we

were reminding each other about the principles that we have studied in today's passage.

How are you going to remember these principles from our passage this morning...? Do you agree that they are important...? Will you present the members of your body to the Lord each and every day...?

I close with a warning that is directed particularly to anyone who has much head knowledge about doctrine... and who supposes that just because they know such things... and give mental assent to them... that all is therefore well with their souls... and that they are saved.

That is not necessarily the case. If you are such a person... I need to warn you that it is not enough for you only to believe these things. ... Salvation is not mere knowledge. ... It is a new life. *It is union with Christ.*

Therefore... unless you are turning from sin and going on in righteousness... as you follow after Jesus Christ... you are not saved. It is presumptuous to believe you are. So examine your life. Make sure you are saved. Don't leave here today without asking someone how that is done.

... [P A U S E] ...

In our age... as in every age... people are longing for happiness –

- *not realizing that what they are looking for... is holiness.*