

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

DEAD TO SIN & ALIVE TO GOD

Have you ever done something so embarrassing it left you saying to yourself, “I could have just died!”?

Greg had a habit of talking about his job while at home, & his young daughter had always expressed great interest. So one day he took her with him to spend the day at his office. Although usually a bit shy, she seemed excited to meet each colleague he introduced.

Near the end of the day, several co-workers were standing around, & one of them asked if she had enjoyed her time there. “Well, it was okay,” she responded, “But I thought it would be more like a circus.” Confused, her father asked, “What do you mean by that?” She answered, “Well, you said you work with a bunch of clowns, & I never got to see any of them!” **PAUSE**

It’s safe to say that Greg could have just died right then & there. How dead are you? Do you think about dying every single day? That’s the issue the great Apostle Paul puts before us this morning, “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin & alive to God in Christ Jesus.” But what does Paul mean by that phrase, “consider yourselves dead to sin?”

Some people think it means anything they do is okay, because they’re convinced that God will overlook their faults. They’re dead to sin. Others actually tell themselves they have no sin. Maybe you’ve heard them tell you the same thing? So everything that went wrong must be your fault. Do you think about dying every single day? **PAUSE**

God gives you opportunities to do so, but I’m not talking about that close call in the car accident, or the time you fell where you just missed splitting your head wide open. No, I’m talking about what Paul wrote in today’s Epistle reading, “Do you not know that all of us who

have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death...” You & I have an opportunity to die each & every time one of our thoughts, words or deeds may cost us something. All of us have known that feeling. The question is, “Are we in touch with those feelings?”

And I don’t mean touchy feely stuff, like the kind of ‘feelings’ chick flicks are about. I mean the kind of feelings that are exhibited so clearly in little children that haven’t yet bought into the concept of sharing. The ones who pull back the toy & say emphatically, “Mine!” Those are the feelings God expects, & enables, us to be in touch with.

Have you looked for those feelings in yourself? Have you died to them already today? You probably haven’t if you aren’t admitting they are there, inside you head & your heart & your soul. Those feelings are a corruption of what God created us to be. They’re the timid & selfish result of our rebellion against our Creator.

Those feelings are sinful & corrosive to our relationships with other people & with God. They are the feelings we need to be aware of, in touch with, so that God can kill them when they arise within. As Paul wrote, “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin & alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

After getting busted by his daughter, for calling his coworkers a bunch of clowns, maybe Greg resolved to die to that particular sin. At the very least he should have found himself more in touch with his negative feelings on the issue. Now he can ask for God’s help in dealing with them, in dying to them.

Satan tries to keep us in the dark, unaware of our sin, because then it’s much easier for him to keep us enslaved, sinning in the same way, over & over again. As we become aware of our sin, the next step is learning not to make excuses for it. One way to go about considering

yourself dead to sin is to not make excuses. Taking responsibility, holding yourself accountable, those are additional ways of considering yourself dead to sin. Our worship services are designed to reinforce that habit through the public confession of our sins right at the beginning, “Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful & unclean.”

Lutherans don’t do that just to beat people down. We do it in accordance with the Word of God in Romans chapter 6. Sin doesn’t go away easily. We can’t just wish it away. It must die, & that’s serious business; quite unlike how we often look at it. We cannot enter into full newness of life unless we identify & look forward to, death in Christ; death to our sinful nature.

People addicted to drugs talk about two habits you have to break: the body habit & the mind habit. Breaking the body habit puts you in hell for several days, with a little less torture for another month. The mind habit is far more difficult to break. There’s something inside you that makes you come back to the drugs. Our sinful nature makes us come back to sin.

The destructive desires inside of us: abuse of alcohol, drugs & sex, use of pornography, greed, envy & anger, & many other sins we can name, are addictive. They feed the soul that’s been twisted by sin. They become habitual. They destroy body & soul. Breaking the habit of the mind – & keeping it broken – is a problem, not just for a month, but for a lifetime.

That means a lifetime of dying to sin, dying to the twisted nature within. Paul, in his letter to the church at Rome, makes a critical turn at this point. He addresses the practical problems of living with a sinful nature warring against the saintly nature. Paul does so with a question regarding the connection between God’s gift of new identity, & His expectations of living out that new identity while following the footsteps of Christ’s way of living.

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” For us, the practical application of that is

this: when God's children sin it hurts. If sin doesn't make you feel bad, if it doesn't hurt, then the gap between you & your Savior is growing dangerously large. Jesus is the only way out of our addiction to sin.

So in focusing on stewardship this morning, if it doesn't hurt, if you don't feel the cost of being a Christian, then the distance between you & Christ may be growing dangerously large. Giving up the thoughts, words & deeds, that come naturally too us, should feel like it's going to cost something. God is demanding your very life. **PAUSE**

Do you cringe when you think of giving money to the church, & what you could do with it otherwise? Do you hesitate when you think of spending two hours here on a weeknight, when you could be relaxing back at home? Do you enjoy using your tongue to point out the faults of others, such that not doing so would cost you too much pleasure?

Each & every time giving up one of my thoughts, words & deeds may cost me something I have an opportunity to consider myself dead to sin. You also know that feeling. Are you in touch with your sinful feelings, & considering yourself dead to them? We should spend more of our time living by the Word of God, & less time trying to satisfy our feelings & desires.

But the truth is we don't even know where to begin. We've tried hard at being good Christians & run into abject failure. On the other hand, because we can't stop anyway, there are times we decide to just forge ahead with sin. Maybe if we get it out of our system the desire will go away. But our conscience won't let us be at peace with either manner of thinking.

In each case, what we should do is impossible to achieve. In fact, the Law only spurs us on to more sin. To quote Jesus' disciples, "Then who can be saved?" We want to have life in Christ, but we want our old life too, however corrupt & twisted it may be. We are addicted to it in the habits of our mind, & are powerless to overcome it. That's why Paul's answer, God's

answer, has nothing to do with our own actions. The salvation Paul offers is not related at all to what we should do. It's true we should consider ourselves dead to sin, but he recognizes that we're incapable of eliminating our sinful nature. We need help, not from within, but from without. God Himself must act, on our behalf, from the outside working in.

That's why the Gospel can bring such reassuring peace & joy, because it's not just another thing I have to do. Jesus' gift of forgiveness does not tie my heart, mind & soul into knots, twisted knots, of self-hatred & hopeless despair. When Jesus forgives, I can rest. The things I should do, the Law, they never allow me time to rest.

Just as rest brings healing to the body, it also brings healing to the soul, & you can't rest if you are always doing things. So Jesus came in order to give back to mankind what we had lost through sin. Jesus gave us the gift of rest, rest from our guilt, rest from our striving, rest from our sin. It's in that rest, that we are healed from the corrosive & deadly effects of sin.

Once healed, or at least in the process of healing, we can begin to live again, as God created us to live. Sharing, giving, self-sacrificing, in Christ we have the resources to do things again that cost us something. I can sense that forgiving someone who's hurt me, is going to cost me. If I'm weary with guilt & sin I have no strength to do so.

The only way we have the ability to forgive is for God to forgive us first, & that's what He did in sending His Son to die on the cross. All the sins of the whole world were paid for. Then at our Baptism God is the one working as He connects us to Jesus' death. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"

Paul's description of Baptism as a genuine burial of sinners is the language of reality, no matter how abstract it sounds. God's Word always has determined & created reality. The words of Scripture, in today's OT reading, are proof of that. In Baptism, God's Word kills our sinful

nature, but not just for the sake of killing. God's Word kills solely for the purpose of making alive again, & alive in a far healthier way. So as we consider ourselves dead to sin we do so solely for purpose of realizing that we are nevertheless alive to God in Christ Jesus. We confess our sin publicly as part of considering ourselves dead to sin & alive to God in Christ Jesus.

How dead are you? What are you consciously dying to today? That is where all true stewardship begins. If we are not dying to greed, then we will live in a miserly way. If we are not dying to gossip, then we will live with a corrosive tongue. And yet we do not find hope in our own dying to sin, but in Christ's dying on the cross. He did perfectly what we cannot do.

None of us, will ever, be totally aware of our sins, but Jesus paid the penalty for our lack of awareness. We will never totally stop making excuses, but Jesus did as He said the buck stops here when He willingly allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross for you & for me.

There is rest & healing in those very words, & they enable us to consider ourselves dead to sin, yet alive to God in Christ Jesus. Those very words of God declare that we are alive & those words, not our doings, make it so. The struggle between the old & the new within us goes on, but in Christ, it is God who forgives, & it is God who sets free, so that even we can live.

Jesus brings healing, rest & peace to our body & soul. It is in Him that we are truly dead to sin, & alive to God, so that we can live & give. Amen.

Amazing grace – how sweet the sound – that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see! Through many dangers, toils & snares I have already come; His grace has brought me safe thus far, His grace will lead me home. Amen.