
Can we express our gratitude for Olivia and her willingness and her courage to share part of her story with us? And as I watched that, I don't know about you but there are a number of emotions that I experienced.

One of the things that I'm just reminded of is that there isn't a weekend that goes by where somebody doesn't join us either in person or online, maybe for the very first time, who has no idea what's going on. And man, they are looking for hope. And we want to be ready to give it to them.

I just want to welcome you wherever you are joining us from. So glad to have you with us. If you have a Bible, go ahead, and get to the end of Romans, chapter 5. That's where we left off last week. We're going to finish up chapter 5 and we're going to cover all of chapter 6. I've actually got way more material than I have time for.

Next week we'll unpack chapter 7. And chapters 6 and 7 kind of fit together. I think you'll see what I mean by that here in just a few minutes.

This past summer our family took a bucket list trip, vacation, to Hawaii. We've always wanted to take our kids. Lindsay and I, when we got married way back in the late 1900s, we honeymooned in Hawaii, and we always wanted to go back and take our kids. Our kids always wanted to go, and our son was getting ready to head out to college this fall so we were like, "This summer is the time to do it."

We had an amazing trip. All kinds of great experiences. Honestly one of the best family vacations that I think we've ever had.

One of the highlights for me personally was that I got to take my 17-year-old daughter, Campbell, scuba diving. The resort that we were staying at was offering this. Neither one of us were certified, but we started off in the swimming pool just blowing bubbles and then we ended up progressing into the deep end of the pool and eventually made our way into the ocean.

We ended up going down for over an hour—down to the bottom of the ocean and we saw some amazing things: a sea turtle, pufferfish, and just some incredible things.

But I've got to be really, really honest with you. I was trying to be brave, but I was so nervous. I was fine until I looked up. And when I looked up, I had this sensation of being buried alive. It was a long way up there and I thought, "If anything goes wrong with my mask or the oxygen tank, I'm in trouble."

Every now and then I would look over at my daughter to see how she was doing. And it was really discouraging because she was as cool as a cucumber. I'd look over at her, like, "You okay?" And she'd give me a thumbs up, like, "I'm having a great time, Dad."
"Yeah, me too."

Here's the deal. I just didn't want to be that guy in the group who would freak out and pull everybody's mask off. I didn't want to be that person.

And part of what triggered the anxiety for me is that, when I was down at the bottom, I recalled this story that I had read years ago. I had totally forgotten about it until this moment. It was about an experienced diver who had some oxygen deprivation due to the depth that he was diving at. And so he got disoriented and thought up was down and down was up.

So when it came time for him to resurface, when the oxygen tank was running low, he thought he was swimming up but in reality, he was swimming down and he ran out of oxygen, and he died. And that was the moment that I recalled that story.

Now, what we've been doing in this series together is we've been walking through the book of Romans, which in essence is Paul helping us see that we all experience a different kind of disorientation. Not necessarily a physical one, although it can affect us physically, but more a spiritual disorientation where we end up thinking up is down and down is up.

The way that he's been describing it is that we can exchange the truth of God for a lie. We aim our affections (my favorite definition for worship) toward created things rather than Creator God. The prophet Isaiah would say, "We call good evil and evil good."

So throughout this study in Romans Paul is recalibrating our internal compasses back to True North. And we've said that True North is really representative of two things. It is the Gospel message and the voice of Jesus. We want to follow after Jesus in every area of our lives as Lord and not just see Him as Savior.

Now, if you're just now joining us, by way of review, Paul is writing this letter to a group of people living in Rome who are really not so different than you and me. And they have experienced something very similar to what you and I have experienced in the last couple of years—a massive crisis that disrupted their lives that then led to anger and anxiety and division. Just what we've been through in the last couple of years.

So Paul writes this letter, and he says, "Let me remind you of what the Gospel message is because you are an influential church that is going to have influence around the Middle East. Now, where we left off last week, at the end of chapter 5, is Paul giving us at least part of the explanation for why life is so hard. He gave us a reason for why we have abuse and trauma, why we have infertility issues and miscarriages, why we have COVID and cancer.

He says, "The reason why we are experiencing these things, at least in part, is because we are under the curse of the first Adam." So we go all the way back to the Garden of Eden at the beginning of Genesis and Adam's sinful decision opened up the door for pain and suffering in this world.

I gave this definition of original sin—we kind of talked about that term. Original sin is not just a sin that nobody else has ever thought up, you're the first one to have that kind of mind to commit that sin. That's not original sin.

Original sin means that even though you and I were not physically in the garden with Adam and Eve taking part in the forbidden fruit, God still holds us liable for their decision because we have ratified their decision over and over and over again in our lives, if we're being honest.

And that hardly seems fair. However it is also not fair that Jesus, as our second representative Adam, went to a cross on our behalf. I wasn't there for that either. I didn't have to literally be nailed to a Roman cross, thankfully, and yet Jesus did so on our behalf and now He transfers, or to use a financial term, He credits His righteousness to our account. Somebody should respond to that. That's so, so good.

So where we left off last week is that Jesus has reversed the curse. Now, what that means.... This is what some theologians call the: already but not yet. Meaning God has already won the victory. But He has not yet returned to restore this world to what it was intended to be. We're in the middle.

That means that we have an enemy, Satan, who is limited in his dominion over the world, he's mortally wounded, limited in his reach. I don't know if this is a helpful metaphor or not. It kind of helps me. It's like Satan is like a mortally wounded animal. Say he's like a dog with rabies. He's chained up. He's still roaming around. There is a certain radius where he can roam, but there is an extent to his reach.

You get anywhere near him, though, he will bite you. Your relationships, your marriage if you're married, your kids if you have kids, your mental and emotional health—all of that stuff is right in his crosshairs and he's trying to take you down, which is why all of those things that are worthwhile in life are complicated and require lots of effort and energy and work because there is an enemy behind the scenes who is trying to take all of those things down.

And we oftentimes blame God for all of the pain and suffering in this world and we fail to recognize that there is an enemy behind the scenes. This is why Peter would say to us in 1 Peter, chapter 5, verse 8:

"Stay alert!" In other words, keep your head on a swivel. Don't fall asleep at the wheel. "Watch out for your great enemy," Then he names him, "... the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith."

What that means is that you and I can go nose to nose with him, not because of willpower but because of God's power that is at work within us.

And now we're getting to the subject of the day. If you're taking notes, you might write down this summary because we're going to finish up chapter 5 and there is a big transition here. We're finishing up the first five chapters. So chapters 1 through 5 of Romans is Paul's explanation of what God has accomplished for us through Jesus.

Now, chapters 6 and 7, that we're going to be in for the next few weeks is Paul explaining what God will now accomplish in us. We're talking about our interior lives through Jesus.

As we wrap up the last few verses of chapter 5 and jump into all of chapter 6, Paul is going to address something that, I don't know about you, but I've always wondered about this, and I've always wrestled with it as I've grown up in church. I think it is especially going to be true for many of you who have grown up in church, but even if you didn't you've probably thought about this in some fashion.

Really, I could summarize it into this question. I'm just wondering if anybody can identify with me. Have you ever had a moment in your life where you just stopped and you thought, "Why am I not making any more progress in my personal and spiritual growth than I am?"

Any of you just been frustrated with where you are in life? You're like, "You know what? I thought by the age of 30 I wouldn't be wrestling with this anymore, but I am." Or, "I thought at the age of 40. Or, "I thought by the age of 50, I'd finally see that particular struggle that I've been facing kind of in the rear-view mirror, but I haven't." And it's really discouraging.

See spiritual growth is not like up and to the right. It's more like peaks and valleys—three steps forward, two-and-a-half, maybe even three-and-a-half steps back. And that can get really frustrating.

Maybe you thought that you had a handle on your anger and then you lost your cool once again and you said something to people who you love that you didn't mean.

Maybe you thought that you were getting your pride reigned in, but you exaggerated the truth once again at dinner with friends and on your way home your spouse very kindly pointed it out. That is merely a hypothetical. That has not happened in my life.

Maybe you thought you had finally pinned down your insecurity, but you got defensive once again and when somebody at work just gave you some honest feedback so that you'd get better, you were like a racquetball wall. They just couldn't give you anything. It bounced right off of you and right back to them.

You thought that you had a handle on your lust, but you allowed yourself to go there once again and now you just feel so ashamed.

“Why do certain temptations have such a grip on me? Why do I still keep self-destructing? I’ve gone to counseling. I’ve read the book. I’ve listened to the message series. I’ve gone to the retreat.

“So why at this point in my life, as a grown adult, why don’t I love God more than I do? Why am I not more generous than I am? Why am I not eager to talk about my faith with a stranger sitting next to me on the plane? Why, if I’m being honest, don’t I care more about people?”

And if you’ve wrestled with any of those issues, and you’d be lying if you said you haven’t, we can relate to Paul. I think that you’re going to find chapter 6 and 7 really encouraging because this is Paul identifying with those struggles.

In fact, next week in chapter 7 Paul says something that I’ve always resonated with. He goes, “Why is it that I really just don’t understand myself? The things that I want to do, I don’t. And the things I don’t want to do, I keep on doing.”

Now, here’s the deal. You and I will not have recalibration in our lives until we get a real understanding of how formation works. And I hope that you’re beginning to catch that this is a mega theme in the series that we’ve been in. That word formation I just want you to get so familiar with it.

We can talk about spiritual formation, but really the idea is like: who am I being formed into? It’s a question of character. It’s a question of personal daily disciplines. It’s a question of my daily choices and decisions.

And what I want you to see is that you and I both, we are day by day being formed into the image and likeness of something or someone. The question is: are we aware of it and are we intentionally making decisions to be formed into the right kind of people?

Here's the thing. If you are a follow of Jesus, your primary aim should be, “I am going to be formed into the image and likeness of Jesus. My lifetime is an opportunity to develop more Christlike character within me, so that I’m ready and prepared to spend an eternity with Him.”

Now I want to be really, really clear about something. You are saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus alone, period. You can’t add anything more to that. What that means is that if you are a follower of Jesus, it is a free gift that God gives to you; Jesus has done the work on your behalf.

Now the Bible tells us there are four tangible things that we do to receive that free gift of salvation. They are not works; they are what you do to respond to the work.

You believe that Jesus is God’s Son, and you want to follow Him as Lord and Savior. He went to a cross on your behalf, He went into a grave, defeated death so that you can defeat death one day too.

You confess, "I'm not going to hide my sin anymore. I'm not going to make excuses for it anymore. I'm just going to get that stuff out in the open and I'm going to be authentic. You repent, which means turn around.

And then you're baptized. And we'll get to the explanation for that in a minute.

None of those things are works. They are a response to the work that God has already done on your behalf. Now, if you've done all of those things, your salvation is secure. You do not fall in and out of God's grace—thankfully. There is no need for you to, as somebody told you recently, baptize yourself 16 times in the neighborhood pool. You don't have to do that anymore.

So from that position you have confidence to now move forward and say, "I want to be formed more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus. Not because I'm trying to earn something but because I'm trying to become someone. I'm trying to allow the character of Jesus to come through me."

Is that clear? I know that is really dense stuff and I'm trying to be as clear as I can. Apparently not.

So we're going to jump in. Chapter 5, verse 20—we've got to back up to get a running start into chapter 6. Paul is going to go back to the law. He says:
"God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were."

Remember who he is writing to. He's writing to Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians who were fighting, primarily because the Jewish Christians kept wanting to impose the law on the Gentile Christians. They would say, "It's Jesus and..." fill in the blank. So Paul is writing to combat that.

Now, for our context today, he's obviously talking about the Old Testament law, but he's also talking about all of the rules. Maybe some of you just thought, "Christianity is just a bunch of rules, stuff that I've got to do to confine who I am and confine all my fun so that God will accept me." And that is a drastic misunderstanding of the Gospel.

He is saying that the law is not a checklist of things that you've checked off so that you're good to go to heaven one day. The law is simply a mirror. It just shows you how sinful you are, how you could never actually get through by checking off all of those things, and how much we need a Savior.

The law does not create sin in us, it simply reveals it. Following Jesus is not about keeping the rules. We couldn't possibly do so if we tried. Thankfully, Paul continues, and he says in verse 20:

“But as people sinned more and more, God’s wonderful grace became more abundant. So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God’s wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Now, if I could summarize that whole paragraph in one sentence, I’d say this: “What that means is that you cannot out-sin God’s grace.” Some of you are trying, but you can’t.

I always get choked up when I invite somebody to church. And he is like, “Oh, man. You wouldn’t want me coming to your church, preacher. If I walked in the doors the roof would cave in.” And I’m like, “Man, you’re giving yourself way too much credit. You are not that good of a sinner.” God’s grace will always outmatch it.

Now, for those of you who maybe didn’t clap, for those of you who may be ones or fives on the Enneagram, those of you who are all justice oriented—it’s all about justice—you’ve probably got this question, “Alright. Well, if good behavior is worthless, then why be good at all?”

Like, “If you’re saved by grace, that makes me a little bit nervous, Aaron, because that feels like we’re giving people license to live however they want. Won’t people take advantage of that grace?” And Paul anticipates that, which is why he responds to his rhetorical question that he wrote in chapter 6, verse 1:

“Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace?”

That should be the natural question that any of us have as we come to this point in our study of Romans because for the first five chapters, Paul has been doing an incredible job of arguing that salvation is a free gift that comes to all who receive it.

Every other world religion teaches the exact opposite. So if you’ve ever thought or if you’ve read or if you’ve heard that essentially all religions are the same, they are all different paths up the same mountain leading to the same place, then you really haven’t studied all world religions.

Because all of the world religions teach the exact opposite, they say if you obey and you do a bunch of things, jump through a bunch of hoops, and check off the check list, then maybe your deity or whoever you are following after will accept you—maybe. Hopefully, you’ll do enough. Christianity says the exact opposite. It says that you and I couldn’t possibly be good, so God sent His Son, Jesus, to be good for us, “Therefore, I’m accepted through Christ and now given that position I don’t have to do what is right. I want to do what is right.”

See, this question is so important because if Jesus really did pay it all, how does that work in the day to day? Does God just issue us some sort of divine Visa card? And He’s like, “Hey, man. Just run up the bill. Do whatever you want. I’ll pay the balance at the end of the day.” In other words, “I’ve accepted Jesus. I’m going to live like hell and still get heaven.”

In an even sicker twist, Paul says, "Some might even assume that God gets more glory for showing us grace. So let's do him a favor by sinning more. So that way God gets even more glory. And here's Paul's answer to that question, verse 2:

"Of course not!"

Actually, this is the strongest way to say no in the Greek. I get this. I've got teenaged daughters in the house and there are different ways they can say no to me. Like if I ask them to do something, I may get a very respectful, "No, father. I don't want to do that." Or they can go, "Uh? No!" So I always know that if they bring out that, that's a really emphatic way to say, "I don't want to do this."

This is Paul saying, "Uh? No!" And he goes:

"Since we have..." Now he's going to bring up these two phrases that I think are so important for our understanding of this topic, "... died to sin," what in the world does that mean? "how can we continue to live in it?" Romans 6:2 (NLT)

Now this is the root of the question that we asked earlier. If Paul says we have died to sin when we believe, confess, repent, and are baptized, "Why does sin still feel very much alive within me? Why do I still lose my temper, still struggle with lust, still gossip about others even though I know I'm doing it? Why do I still fall back into addiction?"

Once again, this gets into the root of what the world has against Christians, "You guys are just a bunch of hypocrites. You say that you believe something but you're living just like the rest of us." And for many of us we'd have to go, "Yeah, we kind of agree with you."

Maybe you thought that at one point in your life you would no longer wrestle with a sin issue. You've been following after Jesus for one year, 10 years, 20 years, 50 years, and you're like, "Why is this sin issue still resurfacing in my life?"

I remember when this became really real to me. I was in my mid-twenties, and I went to a men's conference. They had us divide up into groups at the conference. There was a bunch of young guys and there was one older sage in our group. This man was in his 70s, white hair, wrinkles. He just oozed wisdom and Christlikeness. And we were just drinking in everything he had to say to us over the weekend.

And we were talking about the subject of our thought life and impurity and lust. And I remember one of the guys in the group turned to this older sage and said, "At what point in your life did you stop wrestling with lust?" And I'll never forget what he said. He looked back at us, and he smiled, and he goes, "I'll let know."

I remember my mind just blew. I was simultaneously encouraged by his vulnerability and discouraged at the exact same time. I thought, "Well, maybe by the time that I got to his age it

wouldn't be a struggle." I thought maybe when I got married it wouldn't be a struggle anymore. And yet, here's the deal. This is going to be a decades long battle with sin and temptation.

Now we were talking about lust there but that's not what this sermon is about. We're talking about all kinds of sin struggles and issues. Maybe lust isn't your deal. But maybe anger is or pride is or maybe greed is. And you're like, "Why does this thing keep coming to the surface?" What does dead to sin practically mean? I think there is a spiritual meaning and then there is the practical sort of day-to-day biological fleshing of this out.

I think the way that we get to the answer of this is by deduction, "Well, here's what it doesn't mean." If you're taking notes maybe there are just a couple of things: Died to sin doesn't mean that, as Christians, we will no longer want to sin. We'll still want to sin. And, it doesn't mean that we have lost all interest in sinning. It's fun. Cutting corners, getting what you want, it appeals to our flesh in a very real way. We are imperfect human beings still under the curse of Adam but at the same time under the grace of Jesus, the already but not yet.

One commentator says this. When he talks about dying to sin, he's not talking about the literal impossibility of sin, but the moral incongruity of it. It is out of alignment with who Jesus died for us to be—your identity.

So it's sort of like when your car is out of alignment, it will still go down the road, but you'll chew up the tires. It's the same thing when it comes to personal sin in our lives.

Paul is going to take the rest of chapter 6 (and come back or join in because next week when we'll also cover chapter 7, which is the second part of this) and he's going to try to unpack this for us.

But if I could take a stab at a sentence of clarity, I might say this, "The moment you give your life to Jesus you are no longer under the reign, or we could say ruling power, of sin."

Remember chapter 5, verse 21. Sin reigns, grace also reigns all the more. Sin still has power, but it no longer has its dictates over you.

If I could use this illustration, I'm a big World War II buff. I like any documentary or book on World War II. I'll read it or watch it. And maybe this might be helpful for some of you. In World War II when the Allied forces took control of Berlin, the power of the Axis countries was broken.

So for all practical purposes the war was over. Hitler had been defeated. Yet, at the exact some time there were still pockets of German soldiers roaming throughout the countryside, controlling small towns, terrorizing people, but the Nazi regime was not in power any more.

And Paul is saying the exact same reality is true in this spiritual war that we are in. God has won the victory. Satan is defeated. Grace overrides the reign of sin in our lives, but sin still

exists. Why? Because you are not all soul and you're not all body, you are a soul and a body that is very much under the curse of sin.

Satan has been defeated but he is still terrorizing people and we are still in a fight, except your motives for the fight have changed. You're not fighting to justify yourself in God's eyes, you're fighting to become more like God.

I like how Tim Keller puts this:

"Died to sin doesn't mean that sin is no longer within you, or that it has no more power and influence within you. It does. But sin no longer can dictate you. Though you may give in to it (and the Bible predicts you will), you don't have to give in to it. You have died to it; it can be dead to you."

I love how John puts it in 1 John. He says, *"I write this so you won't sin."* And right after that he goes, *"But when you do, you have a mediator with God the Father."*

God isn't expecting you to be sinless, He's expecting you to be repentant. He's expecting you to be authentic. He's expecting you just to say, "It's me again." And to take off the mask and to stop hiding. And there is grace there at every step.

Verse 3:

"Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined Him in His death? 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."

And right here he's just talking about the four things that I just mentioned to you moments ago about how we respond to the free gift of God's grace.

Baptism has been so confused by so many people. I honestly think that there is a deceiver behind it who is trying to confuse us on this. Listen, it is not a work that you do to earn salvation, it is something that displays your salvation.

And the reason why we baptize by immersion (and I know that many of you have experienced sprinkling, I'm not saying that you've done anything wrong or that that is bad, I am saying that the New Testament word is baptizo, which means to dip, plunge, immerse, or hold them under until they bubble, that's what that means, so immersion is symbolizing your death, you're being buried with Christ and coming up resurrected as a new creation in Christ. Why? Because God knows that we need something tangible to do in order for it to get cemented into our hearts.

There has never been anybody I have ever baptized who was totally casual about it. He was nervous, she was anxious, he was afraid, she wanted to throw up. And I was totally fine with it. Why? It's a big deal. He or she was putting to death the old self, being resurrected to walk as a new creation.

Can I just say this to you? Every now and then I'll talk to somebody and I'm like, "Hey, man. Tell me your story." And they will say something along these lines. "Well, I've just always believed in God. I've just always kind of followed Jesus."

And hear my heart in this. I'm not doubting the sincerity of his belief. I'm not doubting his salvation or his relationship with God. But I am asking, "Has there ever been a tangible marker in your life where you've declared your allegiance to Jesus? And if not, there should be."

See the biblical way to respond is not praying a prayer, it's not raising your hand, walking an aisle, texting Jesus to 87221, serving in Kids' Ministry (well maybe Kids' Ministry will get you in, keep you out of purgatory, alright?) No, it's: believe, confess, repent, and be baptized. It is simply an act of obedience.

In the book of Acts, when Peter preached the lights out it says that at the very end there were people there who were cut to the heart and they said, "What do we do?" and Peter said, "Repent and be baptized." And if you have not, I want to urge you to do so. In fact, last hour we had five unplanned baptisms.

Paul goes on and he says:

"Since we have been united with Him in his death, we will also be raised to life as He was."

Romans 6:5 (NLT)

That word united is a horticultural term. It's like when you take branches off of one tree and you graft them into another tree. And when you accept Christ, the Spirit takes the dead branch of your life and grafts it into the living root of Jesus Christ, the Vine, and His power starts to flow into you.

This is why trying to overcome sin in your life, you just can't power it through willpower. If you just try to white knuckle it, you just give it all the more power. It's only when you begin to abide in Christ that His power helps you overcome it. Verse 6:

"We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might..." can you say these words out loud with me together at all of our campuses and online, "... lose its power in our lives."

He says, "That is what has happened." And you might push back, you might object and say, "Wait a second. I think I've done all of that. Aaron, when you talk about the four things, I could finish the sentence before you said it.

"I've accepted Christ, I've confessed, I've repented, I've been baptized and yet I still struggle. I still mess up all of the time. Like, if verse 6 is true, then why does it feel like sin still has so much power over my life?"

It's because, verse 6 explains the spiritual reality and yet there is still a biological, physiological thing that we've got to do in obedience. In fact the theological word for this is sanctification. So there is justification you are justified in God's sight, and now you spend the rest of your days in sanctification trying to unlearn all of those sin patterns that used to clean your clock.

So here's what it means to get out from under the power of sin. It means a couple of things:

I will no longer tolerate it

I'm not going to overlook it. I'm not going to just shrug it away and go, "Well, you know. Nobody's perfect."

I'm not going to premeditate it

Have you ever done that? Divine Visa card. I'm going to sin next week. A week from Tuesday and I know that God will forgive me because that's sort of what He does.

I'm going to no longer excuse it

Where I just kind of go, "Well, in comparison to other people, it's not all that bad. I'm no longer going to try to make progress to overcome it. I'm just going to say, 'Well, this is the way that I am.'"

Once again, I keep coming back to this gold mine that is Tim Keller and he says, "Paul is not saying that Christians cannot commit individual acts of sin or that we don't struggle with habitual sin. But we cannot go on abiding, connecting, in the realm of sin. We won't continue to deliberately take part in the same sin without feeling convicted or remorseful."

In other words, conviction is a gift. Conviction is a good thing. Now differentiating this from shame, conviction is, "Hey, this is what I've done that is out of alignment with who I am in Christ." Shame is, "Oh, well this is who I am." The Holy Spirit will never do that.

The Holy Spirit is urging you to turn and actually live in alignment with who Jesus died for you to be. Conviction is the Holy Spirit putting on the brakes and it's a really good thing.

In fact, I would say that when you no longer feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit, that's a big, red flag. The Bible says the only unforgiveable sin is blaspheming the Holy Spirit. What that practically means is the Holy Spirit puts on the brakes, convicts you, and you tell the Holy Spirit to take a hike.

Here's the thing. He's a gentleman. He will. And when that happens, your heart hardens and you no longer see sin as sin you no longer feel the pumping of the brakes. And it's not that God can't or is unable or doesn't have the power to forgive, it's that you no longer want it. That's why it's the unforgiveable sin.

Paul goes on in verse 6 and says:

"We are no longer slaves to sin." I'm going to unpack what that means here in just a few moments. *"For when we died with Christ, we were set free from the power of sin."* Meaning that it no longer reigns over us.

"And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with Him. We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and He will never die again. Death no longer has any power over Him."

"When He died, He died once to break the power of sin. But now that He lives, He lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be..." the way that you see yourself, it's an accounting term. *"So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus."*

This is the question of your identity, and we live right now in a culture that is obsessed with it. So we try to identify with something that sort of gives our life purpose. And right here he says that you should consider yourself dead to your sin and alive with Christ because this is how God considers you. You don't formulate your own identity; God gives it to you.

And he says that we should consider ourselves dead to sin, which means in that moment in which we are tempted we recognize who we are, and God infuses His power to help us overcome that temptation. So instead of living out of my shame and my desires and my pride, I will live up to who Jesus died for me to be.

In other words, change begins, literally, with how you see yourself. And that is not self-actualization, that is not self-help, that is the Gospel.

Last week I talked to you about how Jesus was led out into the desert to be tempted by Satan. And at the very beginning of every one of Satan's temptations he starts with an attack on Jesus' identity. Have you ever noticed that? He said, "If you are the Son of God," when God had already declared that Jesus was.

What was he doing? He knew that if he could weaken Jesus' understanding of His identity, He could weaken Jesus to His core. And that is a pattern for how the power of sin works in our lives. Satan will do whatever he can to get your eyes off of your new identity in Christ by bringing up your past, by bringing up your addictions, by bringing up your attractions, by bringing up your behavior.

He is not just a deceiver and a liar, he's an accuser, "Man, who do you think you are anyway? Walking into that church, raising up your hands during the songs in the service. If those people only knew what you'd done last week, they would realize how much of a fraud you are. Look how badly you messed up. You'll never make any progress. You might as well just give up. Actually, why don't you take all of that frustration, aim it at God. Get mad at Him."

And the moment you start believing all of that, he already has you. That is the power of sin. And being alive to God through Christ means believing what God has declared about you even when you don't feel it. Even when you're not quite sure how it all works. That's what faith is.

You are fully righteous in His sight. You are dead to sin. It no longer has power over you because resurrection power resides within you. And as you believe that, He releases the power of new life into you.

That's what Paul is driving at in 1 Corinthians 10. He goes:
"God is faithful." He's solid and secure. He's unchanging. "He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you can endure." 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NLT)

Temptation is not sin. Noticing an attractive person is not sin. Being tempted to lose your temper—not a sin. It's in that split second of a decision where you pray, not, "How can I do this and get away with it," but, "God, can You provide a way out of it?"

And right there He promises a way. And if you mess up, all that is required is just transparency, and a willingness to say, "Man, I messed up and I don't want to do that again. That's not who I am in Christ." And His grace covers you so that you can keep going.

One of my favorite things to do is to watch The Voice with my girls. It's a reality show. It's a singing show. And basically the judges are all turned around and then somebody starts to sing and if they like the sound of the voice they turn the chair around and invite him/her to be a part of their team.

This is sort of like before you even started singing God flipped His chair around for you. "Hey, man. It's not based on the tune. It's based on My love for you."

Paul says:
"Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires." And I can fill in here because every time you do it just makes it easier. "Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life.

"So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace." Romans 6:12-14 (NLT)

Which, by the way, is something that you can actually rehearse to yourself in a moment of temptation.

And some of you may not seem too happy with this. Once again, kind of objecting saying, "Wait a second. Won't there be people who will take advantage of that?" And Paul is going to take

one more round at this. Verse 15:

"Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning?"

The technical term for this mindset is:
Antinomian

And the word is really not all that important for you to remember. This is not going to be on the final exam to get you into heaven or anything like that. But it may be helpful because this is what Paul is talking about. It comes from two root words anti which means against, nomos, which means law. And it's this idea, antinomian: The belief that there are no moral laws God confines us to. So just live however you want.

It takes a biblical teaching to an unbiblical conclusion. The biblical teaching is that we are no longer required to obey the law as a means of salvation. Following the rules will never get you in. Yes, Jesus has fulfilled all of those righteous requirements for us. However, instead of using that as an excuse to do whatever we want, this should motivate us to cultivate righteousness in our lives because we've been transformed.

In other words, we spend so much time on focusing on going to heaven and not enough time saying, "Are we going to be the kind of people who will enjoy heaven?" Because you're going to be with Jesus for eternity.

It's this idea, "I'm not just trying to do what I can to get in, I'm actually trying to become someone..." This short life is preparing you for eternity. Therefore all of the trials and the difficulties and the struggles and the suffering, you can look at them as, "Why would God allow this?" or you can look at them as, "God is actually trying to build up my character for all of eternity."

Following the commandments is not a condition of relationship, it is confirmation of one. You don't need to obey the Ten to be saved but by striving to obey the Ten you'd be free. Free from what? All of the sin struggles that are enslaving you.

I guarantee you right now, you look at some things that have meant a lot to you that you've lost in your life. If you trace them all of the way back, it's because you gave in to a sin struggle. And at first it was fun, and it gave you short-term gratification. In the long run it enslaves you. It took away the things that you love the most.

So Paul answers his question once again in verse 15. He goes:

"Of course not! Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this

teaching we have given you. Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living."

Paul is saying an invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to go to war, not with culture, not with your neighbor, and not with other religions, but with your personal sin. Dying to sin does not mean that we will never be tempted or ever sin again. It means that we are going to recognize who Jesus died for us to be and we are no longer going to be ruled by it. It is a result that says, "Sin no longer reigns in me."

What does that practically look like? It means that I'm no longer going to:
Premeditated sin

Not going to plan it. I'm not going to:
Sin without conviction

When I sin, I'm going to immediately keep in step with the Spirit, I'm going to recognize it, I'm not going to be defensive, I'm not going to hide it—I'm just going to own it.

I'm not going to:
Normalize sin

I'm not going to go, "Hey, man. This is just who I am." It's like, "No, no, no. Who did Jesus die for me to be?" And my attitude will be, "I will resist and rebel against it. And in those moments when I stumble, and I fall, and I give in..." and you will, you humble yourself and you repent of it and you run back to the grace of God that He gives you in Jesus, confident that right there in that moment He is shaping you to become more and more like His Son.

I read a book when I was in college that was a turning point for me. The title was called *The Pursuit of Holiness*. And I love the title. It's not like holiness is given to you, holiness is a pursuit that will go on for every decade of your life. And holiness, if I could break it down, means:

Death to sin through identification with Christ.

That's recognizing that Jesus went to a cross for me so I'm going to crucify myself. I'm going to identify with Him in the waters of baptism. It also means:

Death to self, day by day, through imitation of Christ.

And it's more than just a gimmicky bracelet *What Would Jesus Do?* It's this idea that I want more and more of Jesus until it is Christ alone. A resolve that says, "God reigns in me so sin will no longer reign over me." And when I fall into it and when I mess up, and I will, I see it for what it is, and I turn from it, and I make things right and I make a resolve not to fall again.

Verse 19:

"Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this. Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy."

Verse 20:

"When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

An author by the name of Leslie Jamison set out to write a personal memoir on the power of addiction and the title of it is called *Recovering*. And she describes how addiction is sort of like a ghost that is haunting the western world. Right now everybody is addicted to something everywhere.

Whether it's a substance, or whether it's just somebody else's approval. We're all addicted to something. It's the way that we nurse our insecurities and our incompleteness.

And she said, "All addictions, when you boil it down, reduce themselves to the same cycle that enslaves us." It just repeats itself over and over again our lives regardless of whatever you are addicted to. It's where you desire something and then you use something and then you repeat something. We call that addiction. The Bible calls that slavery.

And this pattern will reap some sort of a result in our lives. Maybe not now, maybe not next week, but maybe when you are 50 or 60.

I had a wise mentor tell me one time, he goes, "Hey, man. The key to being joyful and having a fruitful life in your 50s and 60s is to deal with all of your junk in your 30s and 40s. Repent of it. Work on it—otherwise it just stays in your heart, and it yields some sort of result later on.

See, the Bible was written in an agrarian society, which means that they used a lot of agricultural metaphors, so vine and branches, seed, and soil. And basically every time it talks about that it's like, "Hey, it's a small little thing like a seed. You put into the ground and it's going to reap exponential impact. A tomato seed, a whole bunch of tomatoes.

Now, if the Bible were written today, it would likely use the idea of compound interest, because more of us probably relate to that than we do agriculture.

I remember when Lindsay and I first sat down with a financial advisor after we were married, he was walking us through the principle of compound interest. And he said, "Hey, it's not so much the amount you need to set aside for retirement, it's do it as early as you can because

compound interest will eventually kick in. Not after year one. Not after year 10. Maybe not even after year 20. But man, 25, 30, 35, 40 years that thing will start to exponentially increase at a rapid rate.

And what is true financially is even more true spiritually. Every time we give into flesh's desire to sin, we plant something within the soil of our hearts that starts off small, it takes root, it grows, and it yields some sort of harvest, AKA the life you have.

Now, fortunately, the opposite is also true. In that moment of temptation if you sow to the Spirit, you end up yielding a harvest of Christlike character.

And now, this is where we get to the very practical reason why once you've given your life to Christ, sin still keeps resurfacing itself in your life and it's a continual battle. John Mark Comer writes about this in his book *Live No Lies*. He talks about Heeds Law, named after Dr. Donald Heed, who was a neuroscientist. And he states this:

"Cells that fire together wire together." Translation, every time you think or do something it becomes easier to think or do the same thing again and again. And the more that you repeat that process the harder it is to break free from that self-perpetuating cycle.

So through repetition, thoughts and actions get into our brain's habit system, which is either your best friend or your worst enemy, depending on how you sow into it. It gets encoded into the wiring of your brain.

In other words you develop these grooves in your brain called neuropathways, which makes it really, really difficult to forget how to ride a bike. It also explains why maybe you can't stop looking at porn, because it's just been grooved into the neuropathways.

And every time we give in to sin, we etch a neuropathway into the grooves of our brain and from there they begin to shape our muscle memory until we end up in the New Testament's definition of slavery, or what Augustine calls the shackles of gratification.

So let me leave you with this definition:
Our character (your character) is merely the collection of our choices.

So where are you headed? Paul says you can be controlled by the Spirit of God, the way you see yourself, or you can be controlled by the desires of the flesh. So understand. You're saved by grace through faith. From that position of security you can begin the process of sanctification, which is the theological way of saying carve new pathways in your brain's thoughts.

That's why reading your Bible daily is so important. It's not because God is going to quiz you when you get to heaven, it's because you're trying to develop new neuropathways. That's why

God says, "Hide My word in your heart so that you won't sin against Me in the moment of temptation."

When I was in college, I had an Old Testament history professor who, from my perspective at the time, seemed like he was already 105 years old. He was a sweet man. Incredible teacher. I'll never forget the day in class when he shared with us that he had some sort of a diagnosis, some sort of a dementia diagnosis, and so he knew that there was going to come a day when he would lose his mental capabilities. And he told all of us in class.

He said, "I've always memorized Scripture my whole life." But he said, "I'm more diligent about it now than ever before because I know that a day is coming, pretty quickly, when I'm going to lose my mental capabilities." And he said, "I don't want the darkness that is in my heart to come out of my mouth so I'm trying to hide as much of God's Word in my heart so that one day when I no longer am aware of what I am saying, what comes out is good, right, and true."

That's what we are talking about. So, it's not an issue of following the rules to get you into heaven. It's the issue of since you are free in Christ, who do you want to be? And sin enslaves, but God sets you free. And if you have not received that free gift, I want you to do so today.

Father, we come to You right now. We thank You that Your grace outpaces our sin, not so that we would be emboldened to keep on sinning, but so that we might die to sin, have the hope of heaven, and grow to look more like You.

So, God, meet us in this place. Give us the courage to respond. Give us the strength to endure. In Jesus' name and everybody says: Amen.