

**Romans (28):
Dead to Sin, Alive to God**

Introduction:

Although we are in the sixth chapter of this epistle, we are in the introductory verses of a major division of the epistle that began with Romans 6:1. The subject of this division is the believer's sanctification. This continues to be Paul's theme through Romans 8:17. For our purposes we are using the definition used by believers who are Reformed, or historically Protestant, who long ago defined the biblical teaching regarding sanctification:

“Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”¹

Last Lord's Day we arrived at Romans 6:11, which reads, ***“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*** We saw this to be quite a significant verse in that it is the first expressed ***command*** of this epistle by the apostle Paul to his readers. Everything prior to this verse was instructive and informative, but with this verse Paul is telling his readers to respond to what he has taught them. We then considered a couple of implications for this. One point that we stressed was this: that the first command is given, after nearly 6 chapters of explanatory text underscores the truth that ***Christian living is largely a function of the will exercised in response to the understanding of our mind.*** We then rehearsed a problem in what most evangelicals assume regarding their understanding of biblical psychology. Most believe that the Bible teaches that when God made Adam that he made him as having *a body, a soul, and a spirit*; that man is trichotomous being. Further, it is commonly believed that when Adam sinned, that He died spiritually, which is certainly true. But what they assume wrongly is that this means “the spirit” of man was extinguished. After Adam and Eve sinned, it is believed, they were only body and soul. They further teach that it is through the physical senses of the body, mankind interacts with the physical world; he relates to the physical world through his soul, which is comprised of the ***mind*** (thinking capacity), ***emotions*** (or affections), and the ***will***, that which is the ability to choose. This is part of their argument is true to the Scriptures. But they are wrong in that they argue further a person is not a “complete” individual—body, soul, *and* spirit-- until God causes him to be born again, at which time God recreates that spirit in him. It is believed, therefore, that this renewed man relates to God “spiritually”, but what they really are saying is “intuitively”, in the realm of impressions, feelings, “leadings”, or random thoughts that they believe God communicates directly with our “spirit.” This is wrong. And although not all who believe or have held to man as a trichotomous (trinity) being would espouse what we have just described, very, very many do so.

This wrong view of personhood can have profound effects on how people understand they relate to God. Again, it is common for people to fall prey to thinking that God “leads” them or directs them through subjective feelings and impressions with their “spirit.” But at the same time they resist the plain and clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures, either rejecting it altogether as less spiritual, being “soulish” in nature, or at least less reliable and relevant than “direct” communication from God “to my spirit.” Just this week I was waiting in my truck for my wife at the mall as I was listening to a national Roman Catholic question and answer radio show. A Roman Catholic nun took a call from a woman who was interested in becoming a nun. The woman had told her that she had “come to the Lord” through the gospel being preached by the Baptists. The nun related that she, too, had been “saved” after hearing the

¹ This is the answer to the 35th question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

“gospel” by the Baptists and that she had become a Baptist. But the time came that “the Lord had impressed upon her” that she should consider Roman Catholicism and “she knew” that if she refused to do so that she would be disobeying God. She did say that she consulted the Word of God. She did not use the doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures to assess and weigh what was true and false, her belief was that God had led her directly to govern her life. This is illustrative of how a vast number of “Christians” understand their “relationship” with God. But as we said last Lord’s Day, this is not biblical Christianity. It is mysticism, which occurs when ignorance of the divine truth of God’s written Word is substituted with superstition and subjectivity. That way of relating with God is not spiritual, but rather it describes one who is governed by the “lusts of the flesh.” That person is not experiencing true sanctification, true transformation by the renewing of one’s mind as one corrects error in one’s thinking and acts out according to that new understanding of truth.

Now what we have before us in Romans 1 through 6:11 repudiates this false view of the Christian life. Paul gave instruction to his readers about who God is, what sin against God is, how God has justified us through faith in what Jesus did, and now we are to begin to see ourselves and order our lives accordingly. Doctrine--what God’s Word teaches us—leads to practice; our justification is the ground of our sanctification.

Now this assertion of biblical “psychology”, that God made a human being a body and soul, not body, soul, and spirit, is not commonly taught or affirmed. And so, I believe it is important to show biblically that this is the case, for I do not ask you to believe anything simply because I believe it or affirm it, but because you are convinced it is what the Word of our God teaches. And so, I would like to rehearse some of what I had given you last Lord’s Day in your notes, but which we did not have the time to cover at that time.

The main issue is whether or not in Scripture the soul is set forth as distinct from the spirit, or these are two nuances of the one component of a human that indwells the body. When God uses the term “*soul*” to describe a person, He is showing the distinctiveness of that man or woman as an individual person with an individual self-identity. When God uses the word “*spirit*” to refer to a person, He is emphasizing the fact that each of us owe our life to God who gave us life, that each of us are dependent upon Him in this life, and thirdly that our true self is distinct from the body. But the Scriptures teach that the soul and the spirit are one and the same.

We can demonstrate our assertion by showing from the Scripture that the same qualities or characteristics that are sometimes attributed to the *soul* of a person are in other places of Scripture assigned to be characteristic of one’s *spirit*. We can also show readily that some characteristics that those of the other persuasion attribute to the *spirit*, the Scripture attributes to the *soul*, and *vice versa*. In this way we can show that the soul and spirit of a man are one and the same. Consider some of these biblical verities.

1. When the person of man is used in Scripture. Sometimes the Word of God describes a man as “body and soul”, such as in these verses:

Matthew 6:25 -- “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your *life* (Greek word for “soul”), what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your *body*, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”

Matthew 10:28 – “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the *soul*. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both *soul* and body in hell.”

1 Corinthians 7:33f. “But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in *body* and *spirit*. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.”

2 Corinthians 7:1. “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of *body* and *spirit*, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

James 2:26. “For as the *body* without the *spirit* is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

2. The seat of spiritual exercise. When we examine *spiritual* experiences being described in the Scriptures, they are often times described as occurring in the “soul.” This again supports the idea that a man’s spirit and a man’s soul are one and the same.

(1) We read of spiritual *sorrow* on the part of our Lord:

John 12:27. “Now is My *soul* troubled.”

Matthew 26:38. “Then He said to them, ‘My *soul* is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’”

(2) We read of spiritual *desire* and spiritual *joy* manifested in one’s soul. “*The highest spiritual exercises are ascribed to the soul as well as the spirit.*”² We read in **Psalm 42:1-6:**

As the deer pants for the water brooks,

So pants my soul for You, O God.

²My *soul* thirsts for God, for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God?

³My tears have been my food day and night,

While they continually say to me,

“Where is your God?”

⁴When I remember these things,

I pour out my *soul* within me.

For I used to go with the multitude;

I went with them to the house of God,

With the voice of joy and praise,

With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my *soul*?

And why are you disquieted within me?

Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him

For the help of His countenance.

⁶O my God, my *soul* is cast down within me;

Therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan,

And from the heights of Hermon,

From the Hill Mizar.

Numerous passages could be cited like these. For the use of soul see Psalm 63:5; 103:1, 2; 116:7; 130:6; Isa. 26:9; for the use of spirit for similar kinds of experiences see Psalm 32:2; 34:18; Prov. 11:13;

² I am indebted to the chapter on “Trichotomy” by John Murray for these arguments and the many Scripture references used for support of what I asserted in this message. See John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2 (Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), pp. 23-33.

16:19; Isa. 57:15; Ezek. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26. For an example of the use of “spirit” consider **Psalm 51:10-17**.

- ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast *spirit* within me.
- ¹¹Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹²Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me with a willing spirit.
- ¹³Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.
- ¹⁴Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.
- ¹⁵O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.
- ¹⁶For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it;
You do not delight in burnt offering.
- ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken *spirit*,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

(3) We read of spiritual *devotion* to be manifested in one’s soul.

Here I will cite the words of Reformed scholar **John Murray**:

In Mark 12:30, for example [which reads, “And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength”], we have a statement of the sum of devotion to God. The four terms used as heart, soul, mind, and strength. If the spirit is the organ of God-consciousness, it must surely be enlisted in the highest reaches of devotion to God. It would not be consistent with this alleged primacy to omit the spirit in such an enumeration of the aspects of personality.

In like manner various passages refer to community of interest and purpose in the kingdom of God to wholehearted dedication in the fulfillment of the demands of the Christian vocation. This devotion is expressed in the terms of the soul as well as of the spirit (cf. Acts 4:32; 14:2, 22; Eph. 6:6; Phil. 1:27; 2:2, 19, 20). ‘One spirit’ and ‘one soul’ are, at least, parallel if not synonymous (Phil. 1:27). To do anything wholeheartedly is to do it from the ‘soul’ (Eph 6:6). One soul is equivalent to one heart (Acts 4:32).

The conclusion is inescapable that the centre of devotion and the seat of the most characteristic exercises of the regenerate person is the soul as well as the heart and the spirit. The evidence cannot be adjusted to the supposition that the soul is the outer chamber, and that it is the spirit that is the organ of God-consciousness and the centre of spiritual mindedness.³

We could show many other reasons why this idea that a man is comprised of spirit, soul, and body is not biblical. And the notion that the spirit of man is the locus of God’s greatest interaction with, revelation to, and fellowship with a human being is patently unbiblical.

God has made you to be a body and soul, and often times your soul is identified as your spirit in the Holy Scriptures. The main point I wish to stress is this. God has made you to be a spirit, and your spirit

³ Murray, vol. 2, p. 27.

is comprised of a mind with which to think and reason, affections with which you can experience your emotions, and a body through which your spirit lives. God communicates to your spirit, that is your soul, through His written Word, the Holy Bible, which the Holy Spirit enables your mind to comprehend, your heart to respond in a devotional manner, and a will to conform your actions to that revealed Word.

Now there are two passages of Scripture that are often cited to assert and defend a *trichotomous* understanding of a Christian, that he is a spirit, a body, and a soul. The first is **Hebrews 4:12ff**.

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to *the division of soul and spirit*, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

The thought is that the Word of God is able to separate the soul and spirit. “Clearly they are two different things which are separate from one another.” But the Greek words translated “Piercing to the division” is never used to describe separating two different things from one another, but rather dividing a single thing into two parts. The Word of God is able to distinguish the soul as it manifests one’s self-identity and at the same time the Word is able to show that soul, or spirit, rather, is life having been given by God. This verse does not teach they are two separate components to a human being.

The second is **1 Thessalonians 5:13**. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may *your whole spirit, soul, and body* be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here Paul was not describing the nature of a person, but he was expressing his desire for sanctification to take place in the whole person of a Christian. “It is in accord with the usage of Scripture to employ an accumulation of terms to express completeness...and it would be unwarranted to assume that it is intended to provide us with a definition of the component elements of human nature.”⁴

There is a verse later in this epistle of Romans that underscores all of what we have said of the primary role of the mind of understanding truth as the divine means of sanctifying God’s people. **Romans 12:1 and 2** read,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Here we see that Paul appeals to the need for Christian to experience transformation, in other words, the believer’s sanctification. How is this experienced by the believer? The “mind” needs renewed through acquiring truth. The believer is then to order his life according to that truth that his mind has acquired. This is the way of sanctification, through the hegemony (domination) of the mind.

Let us return to our text. Romans 6:11 reads, “*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” What does this precisely mean? What is it that the Lord would have us believe or do?

First, what it does not mean: it does not teach the Christian to have faith that he is dead to a sinful nature that still resides in him. Several weeks ago we spoke of the Keswick view of sanctification, which has been the predominant view about the manner of sanctification that evangelicals have taught since the latter 1800’s. It was common for them to take Romans 6:11 and say that what you are to do is by faith you are now to reckon yourself dead to your sinful nature. If you “believed” this to be true, then God would cause supernaturally for the temptation to sin and the power of sin to be removed

⁴ Murray, vol. 2, p. 31.

instantaneously from you. All of a sudden, through faith, they would claim, you are raised from a carnal or fleshly level of living and you would be lifted to a new plain, to a sphere in which you would not be tempted any longer and you would have thereafter victory over sin. This is suggested in this statement from a confession of faith:

It is the will of God that each believer should be filled with the Holy Spirit and be sanctified wholly, being separated from sin and the world and fully dedicated to the will of God, thereby receiving power for holy living and effective service. *This is both a crisis and a progressive experience wrought in the life of the believer subsequent to conversion.*⁵

This is the common view of those who espouse two kinds of Christians—carnal Christians and spiritual Christians. [At the end of these notes are some graphic representations that promote this view that has been widely taught by Campus Crusade for Christ, now called “Cru.”]

If the above view of Romans 6:11 is wrong, then what does God intend us to do in this command that is given us in Romans 6:11? We are being commanded *to view our identity as having died to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ*. Verse 11 should be read with verses 9 and 10 for context. We read:

⁹“We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Because of this historic truth and reality of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and due to our understanding of our union with Him in His experience, we are to *identify* ourselves with Him and live accordingly. Paul is not saying that we are now continually dying and being raised. He is saying that the one decisive historical event of Jesus dying and rising, and we with Him, has *defined our identity* as Christians and we are to live accordingly.

This is not a difficult matter for us to understand even though it may seem at first rather cloudy because of other viewpoints to which we may have been influenced in the past. When we are told to “**consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus**”, he is simply saying that you are no longer to identify yourself, see your identity, with your former sinful life, but rather, you are to view yourself to be alive in Christ.

Paul uses a present imperative, urging us constantly to view ourselves in this light. As always in Paul, the indicative grounds the imperative. In union with Christ we *have been made* dead to sin and alive to God; it remains for us to appropriate (v. 11) and apply (vv. 12-13) what God has done for us. As Thielicke puts it, ‘The imperative does not refer to the dying. Over this we have no control, since Jesus Christ has died for us and we only receive the gift of dying and are drawn into it. The object of the imperative is that we should take this death into account, take it seriously, and thus make the gift become a gift in which we participate.’

If you were obedient to this verse it could have a profound influence on your frame of mind when you struggle with sin.

Now in order for me to drive home this truth to us, let me say that it is likely that many of you, maybe even most of you, that when you are struggling with sin, you identify yourself with your sin failing to obey the command of verse 11. When you sin you feel guilty, maybe very guilty. Perhaps you feel so low because of your sin, you do not feel right being with other Christians in church. You may feel that

⁵ This is from the confession of the Christian Missionary Alliance denomination.

God himself must be against you for the sin you commit is bearing so heavily upon your soul. If this is your frame of mind, then you have not obeyed the commandment of Romans 6:11: “**So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**” You might ask then, how am I to view my identity as dead to sin but alive to God in Christ? If you are a (true) believer in Jesus Christ, then you were in union with Jesus Christ when He died, was buried, and rose again. This decisive act of God changed who you are. You are now dead to sin but alive to God.

Now here it is helpful to understand death to mean separation. When a man dies, his soul is separated from his body. When a Christian died with Christ, he died with respect to his sin, or was separated from his sin. To be very clear and practical about this idea we may see Paul’s personal account of life as he applied the principle of Romans 6:11 to his own experience. In the next chapter of Romans we read of Paul’s own struggle with sin. Here is what he wrote in **Romans 7:14-21**:

¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. (Rom. 7:14-21)

Take note that Paul did not see his identity, who he was as a Christian, as shaped or defined by sin. Rather, he saw his identity with the new life he had in Jesus Christ. When Paul the Christian sinned, he did not say, “I sinned. I feel guilty and miserable because I am a wretched sinner.” Rather, he wrote in verse 17, “So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.” He did not deny that he sinned, but because he had counted himself dead to sin, he was separate from his sin. As a Christian he saw sin as an evil principle in him, but it was not him himself. This was not a denial that he was responsible for his sin, for he declared in verse 18, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” But he did not identify his true self with his sin, but rather he was one with his Lord. “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, *it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*” That is Paul practicing what he was preaching in Romans 6:11, “**So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**” The command in Romans 6:11 is that if you are a Christian, you are to “separate” your sense of identity, who you are from your sin; you are to identify yourself with the new life that you enjoy before God in Jesus Christ.

This will make a great deal of difference in how you deal with sin in your life. Instead of identifying yourself with your sin, feeling condemned and alienated from God and from God’s people, not feeling yourself worthy to come to church, or to pray, to witness to others for Christ, you will feel free to gather with God’s people, come into the presence of Your Savior, from whom you may receive grace and power to battle your sin.

Let us now look at the next paragraph of **Romans 6:12-14**.

¹²Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (Rom. 6:12-14)

Verse 12, just as had verse 11, contains an imperative mood verb, in other words, it is in the form of a command that Paul directs to his readers. “**Do not let sin therefore reign in your body, to obey its**

passions.” This is a command to us that we purpose to live consistent with who we are—dead to sin and alive unto God. Verse 11 has to do with our self-identity; verse 12 has to do with our activity. Sin is set before us as a power that would control us if do not actively resist it and refuse to allow it to have control over us. We have been delivered from the dominion of sin through the death of Christ; therefore, do not let it reign over you as a Christian.

Now it should be pointed out that Paul does not here give the means or manner of defeating sin. He will do so later in the passage. Here he is simply commanding Christians that they are to be actively resisting sin from having dominion over their lives. Later he will explain that this must be done through the Spirit, but here he is pressing upon Christians to live according to who they are in Christ.

Verse 13 is more specific as to the arena in which we are not to allow sin to control us. *“Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”* “Your members” has to do with your physical body as well as the aspects of your soul including the mind, the affections, and one’s will. Sin no longer has mastery over you; therefore, do not let it have mastery over you. Become who you are and are becoming in Christ.⁶ Again, here Paul gives the command, but later he will prescribe the manner in which this may be accomplished. He is commanding his readers to live so as to be consistent with who they are in Christ.

We then read verse 14 the explanation for verse 13, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” This follows the pattern that Paul commonly uses. He introduces a word or theme only to explain the matter fully at a later point. Here he states the truth: The believer is not under law but under grace. He will soon begin to tell his readers what this means for who they are and how they should live. We will need to address this later also.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty, dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24, 25)

⁶ Schreiner makes a good point: “The adage ‘become what you are’ has commonly been employed to set forth the relationship between the indicative and the imperative. This designation is not fully satisfactory, for believers still await the day of resurrection and the completion of redemption (8:22-25). Such a maxim falls prey to over realized eschatology, suggesting that believers already possess all that they need in Christ. The correlation between the indicative and the imperative is instead more dynamic. A better maxim is ‘become who you are becoming.’ Thereby the necessity of carrying out the imperative is preserved.” Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 321.

The following is a graphic description of the false teaching of carnal Christianity, that one can have Jesus as Savior but not surrender to Him as Lord of one's life.

Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-Filled Life?

By Dr. Bill Bright

Every day can be an exciting adventure for the Christian who knows the reality of being filled with the Holy Spirit and who lives constantly, moment by moment, under His gracious direction.

The Bible tells us that there are three kinds of people

1. Natural Person

(Someone who has not received Christ.)



Natural Person (Self-Directed Life)

Self is on the throne, directing decisions and actions (represented by the dots), often resulting in frustration. Jesus is outside the life.

"A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

2. Spiritual Person

(One who is directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.)



Spiritual Person (Christ-Directed Life)

Jesus is in the life and on the throne. Self is yielding to Jesus. The person sees Jesus' influence and direction in their life.

"He who is spiritual appraises all things...We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:15).

3. Carnal Person

(One who has received Christ, but who lives in defeat because he is trying to live the Christian life in his own strength.)



Carnal Person (Self-Directed Life)

Jesus is in the life but not on the throne. Self is on the throne, directing decisions and actions (represented by the dots), often resulting in frustration.

"And I brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to carnal men, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still carnal. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshy, and are you not walking like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)