

Romans: Living A New Life

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. If anyone doesn't know me, my name is Eric. I'm the youth guy here at Watermark. I love working here. I love being a part of this church family, and I'm very excited to get to share with you guys from God's Word today. If you noticed, we're in Romans 6 today, which means we're jumping in into the middle of a letter that we've been going through for a couple months, and I thought, based on the context, it could be helpful to do a little recap of where we've been so far so that we can see how this fits into the whole. So Romans is written by this guy named Paul to the church that was at Rome, and he starts out the letter by telling a story of two different types of people, and really he says each one of us is one or the other of these two types of people.

There's one type of person who goes out there. He says, forget about God. I don't need him. I don't believe that he's even real. I'm going to do what I want. I'm going to live how I want, and I'm going to find my salvation through being a liberated person. That's one type of person. The other type of person says, I believe that there is a God, and here is the list of rules that God has given us to follow, and I'm going to follow those rules so perfectly that God cannot help but accept me because I am such a good person. So we've got this person who tries to find liberation from God, and this person who tries to obediently earn God's favor, and Paul paints pictures of these two people, and he says, regardless of which one you are, because every one of us is one or the other, or some combo of the two. He says, everyone has fallen short. He says, God has a standard, and no matter how hard we try, we can't reach that standard, and we all have a problem.

Every single one of us. No matter how hard we try, no matter how obedient we are, we've fallen short of God's standard, and because of that, he says, we're under God's wrath, not a good place to be.

But he says, there's a solution to this problem that God has given us himself. He came to the earth as a man, as Jesus. He came and lived this perfect life that none of us could live. He died a death that we deserve, but that he didn't, and he traded places with us. He took his perfection, and he offers it to us. He offers us what Paul calls the righteousness of God. Paul says, because we were messed up, we had broken our relationship with God, and in a legal sense, we were guilty before God, and deserving of a punishment. And he says, through Jesus, we're able to have a new right relationship with God, and a new right legal status before God. A word that he sort of combines those ideas in one word, righteousness. And he says, this righteousness isn't something we earn by trying harder, and being better, and doing more. It's a gift that's offered to us by Jesus because of what he's done. And this letter is written to Christians, so he's operating off the assumption that once you get that, you're moving forward. Now, if you've trusted in this, you're living life as a Christian.

But what does it mean to live life as a Christian? And so he starts to get into examples from the past of people who lived lives trusting in God. He talks about Abraham, and how Abraham had this faith, and how it was Abraham's faith that saved him, this trust in God that saved him, not the obedience that he had.

[3 : 28] And he starts explaining how amazing it is to live life as a Christian. And he gets to the end of Romans chapter 5, and he has this sentence that he says. He says about God's grace. He says, where our sin increased, God's grace abounded all the more. The more sin that we had, the more God forgives us.

And he's saying, it's so amazing, God, so incredible, that it's not about us. It's not about what we've done. It's about what Jesus has done. And what Jesus has done is so powerful, so amazing, that it's not just like, oh, you're good, we'll forgive a little bit. You're not so good, we'll forgive a little bit, and you can earn the rest. No, he says, the more sin we have, the more God forgives us, the more amazing that forgiveness is. And when we get to the passage where we are today, he says, now I know some of you are thinking something based on what I just said. And I need to correct a potential misunderstanding before we move forward. And that potential misunderstanding is, people look at this, and they say, hmm, the more I sin, the more God forgives. The more I sin, the more God gets to show off his grace. So I should just sin as much as possible so that God can forgive me and show off how amazing he is for forgiving me. And Paul is going to, in today's passage, address this wrong idea and show us that the fact that we've been forgiven, if that's true of us, means that we should be living radically transformed lives today. So let's jump into Romans chapter 6. The first thing I want us to see is that the fact that we've been forgiven by God is not a license for us to sin just so we can get forgiven. He starts out in Romans chapter 6. He says, what shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Basically, the more we sin, the more God forgives. So let's just keep sinning.

Let's rack up this list of things that God can forgive. And then God gets to show how amazing he is by forgiving it all. And it's this perfect, convenient solution because God gets to show off how amazing he is. I get to live the life that I want. Everyone wins, right? Paul says, no, not at all.

He says, when Jesus forgives us, yes, he forgives us from our guilt for our sin, but he says something bigger, something deeper is taking place there. He says, throughout our lives, we're born and we live as slaves to sin. It traps us. It holds us under its power. We might think we're free, but really we're not.

We have to follow it. And he says, when Jesus comes in, when Jesus forgives us, it transforms everything. It's not just that we're forgiven for the guilt of our sins, but we're freed from its power over us. There's a transformation that takes place. And he says, this transformation is so great that if we view this forgiveness we get from Jesus as a license to sin as much as we want and stack up that list of things for God to forgive, it either means that we haven't really understood this transformation that took place in us, or we're lying to ourselves about the fact that the transformation has taken place. I'll say that again. He says, if we see our forgiveness as a license to sin, as an excuse to just stack up a list of things that we can do wrong so that God can forgive us even more, either we don't understand the change that has happened inside of us, or we're lying to ourselves saying that we've been changed.

[7 : 19] He says, we have a new nature. We've been changed. There's a commentator. He said, sin forgiven is hated. Sin unforgiven is cherished. And that's exactly what Paul is showing us here. That if we've been forgiven for our sin, we see how it's trapped us before. We see the price that Jesus had to pay to forgive us. We see the hurt and the heartache and the brokenness that comes into our world because of our sin. And we hate it.

When we've been forgiven for that, we can't hold on to it anymore. We can't long for it and cherish it. If we still long for sin to be our primary mode of operation after we've been forgiven, he's saying it's a good reason to question whether you've actually been forgiven. Because there's a change in our nature. The thing that used to give us power, the thing that used to sustain us, it can't sustain us anymore. I think a good picture is a baby. You have a mom, she's pregnant.

The baby's hooked up to the umbilical cord. The baby's getting all the nutrients from the mom. And then the mom gives birth. And there's a change in that baby's nature. It goes from unborn baby to born baby. And in that change in nature, there's a way, a change in the way that it gets its nutrients. Now, instead of being hooked up to the umbilical cord, it breathes on its own. And it eats and drinks on its own. Yeah, it still needs the mother to sustain it, giving it milk and stuff. But it can't get that sustenance from the umbilical cord anymore because it's been a change in its nature. And if this baby, after being born, tries to hold on to getting all of its nutrients through the umbilical cord, it's going to die.

Because the umbilical cord can't sustain a real live baby. He's saying the same way, in our old life, we were slaves to sin. We were hooked up to sin. We got all of our power from sin in our lives. Whether that's pride, thinking of ourselves very highly. Whether that's ambition and just becoming the best that we can be. Whether that's greed, stockpiling as much as we can. He says these are the things we hooked up to to get our power. But when we become Christians, if we become Christians, that changes our nature. That changes the source of where we get our power.

And if we try and hook up to the old source that we got our power from, that sustained us after we become Christians, we're going to starve ourselves to death spiritually.

[9 : 58] So he says we have to live this radically different life because of this change in our nature that's happened. It's not just that we shouldn't think this way. Not just that we shouldn't use our forgiveness as an excuse to sin. But he says because of the change in our nature, if we've authentically been changed, our new nature is such that we can't use our forgiveness as an excuse to continue in sin.

Because we've been changed. Because the things that we think can sustain us from our old life can't sustain us in our new nature, in our new life anymore. The second thing I want us to see today is that a transformation, this transformation that's happened, means that we're now alive to Christ and dead to sin. That's the change that's happened in our lives if we are Christians. That we're alive to Christ and we're dead to sin. And Paul is giving us an action plan for living as Christians. So if we want to understand this action plan for living as Christians, we have to understand this fact. We're alive to Christ, we're dead to sin.

And what this word alive to Christ, dead to sin, it's not just that when we become Christians, everything inside of us from before magically disappears and the slate is totally different.

We don't have any experiences from life to grow on anymore. It's more of a picture of a regime change. We're living life under a different regime. I think a good picture of this is found in the NBA.

Okay. Anyone follow the NBA? A couple people? Anyone heard of LeBron James? A handful more people? Yeah? So in 2003, there was this high school kid named LeBron James. He was an amazing basketball player.

[11 : 46] Everyone looked at him and they said, this kid has potential to be the next Michael Jordan. And the draft was coming and hype and hysteria was everywhere about this kid, LeBron James.

And the first pick in the draft, the Cleveland Cavaliers draft LeBron James to be on their team. And he comes and he tears it up. He spent seven seasons playing with the Cavs.

He's setting levels of statistics that are unheard of. And after seven years with the team, he gets frustrated because the team hasn't been surrounding him with other good players.

And his contract ends. And he becomes a free agent in the summer of 2010. He goes out on the free agent market and he decides to sign with a team called the Miami Heat.

Because he has friends who play on the Heat who are really good basketball players. And he says, if I go play with the Heat, I can play with my friends. And I think we have a much better chance of winning the championship than I ever had in Cleveland.

[12 : 47] So he changes regimes. He goes from being alive to the Cavs, dead to the Heat, to being dead to the Cavs, alive to the Heat. Now here's the thing.

The Cavs, that fall, let's play out this hypothetical scenario in our minds. The Cavs coach calls up LeBron and says, hey, why aren't you at training camp right now?

Training camp started. You're supposed to be here. Now LeBron has a couple options of what he can do right now. He can say, you're right. I should be at training camp right now.

I need to come and listen to you. And he could pack up his bags, fly over to Cavs training camp, and spend time with the Cavs practicing, working out, training with the team. But we all know that would be stupid of him to do.

Because his identity has been changed. He's under a new regime. If he goes and he listens to the Cavs coach, he's listening to someone who actually has no more real control over him. If he goes and listens to the Cavs coach, he reinforces this idea that what's no longer true of him is still true of him.

[13 : 50] And if he listens to the Cavs coach, he's missing out on an opportunity to live life in his new identity by going to the Heat training camp. He has the option still to listen to his old coach.

He has the option to live life as if he's still under the old regime. But he doesn't have to. He's free from their power. He has a new identity found under the fact that he's living under a new regime.

And it's a similar story with us. When we become Christians, we go from being alive to sin, dead to God, to dead to sin, alive to God.

We switch regimes. It doesn't mean that we all of a sudden stop being tempted, all of a sudden never have any temptation to do anything wrong ever again, and live these amazing, empowered lives.

It doesn't mean that our past and everything we've done no longer affects us, but it means that we're living life under a new regime. Sin can still call us up, to use the analogy.

[14 : 58] Ask us to come along with it. But it actually has no real control over us anymore. We don't have to listen. And just like it would be stupid for LeBron to go to the Cavs training camp after becoming a member of the Heat, because it reinforces a false identity, when sin calls us up and says, hey, why don't you change the numbers in the accounting so that you can take a little extra home this weekend?

When sin says, why don't you disobey your parents and play video games instead of cleaning your bedroom? We have the option to listen to it, but it would be stupid of us to, because it reinforces this idea that our identity is different than what it truly is.

And it robs us of this opportunity to live life under our new, true identity. It's actually in here, when it says, a new life, in verse 4, that phrase, a new life, a better translation of it is, I think what you have in your bulletins, newness of life, or a new life which actually is life.

The option that we have here isn't, we're going from being alive to being alive differently. What's this change that's happening is, before we were living a parody of life.

We were living something that claimed to be life and claimed to give life, but it wasn't. It was all a lie. It was a facade, put up to make everything look pretty.

[16 : 39] But if we've become Christians, we've been set free from that facade. We've been set free from that parody and called to live a life that is truly life. So like I said, what does this look like in our real lives?

Yeah, we'll still be tempted. Sin doesn't want to give up that easily. It's had control for far too long. But when we're tempted, we don't have to give in.

We don't have to listen. We have the power to fight temptation when it comes. And even more, this new life means that when we fail, when we do listen to our old master, we actually have the power to carry on.

Here's what I mean. Before, when we're alive to sin, everything that we do is based on our own power. How good can I be? How much can I do to get to God?

Or, how liberated can I be? How much can I do to just be free? Either way, it's all dependent on us and what we do. And when we fail, we are crushed.

[17 : 48] If we're trying to be that good person who earns God's favor and we mess up, what does that lead to? Oh no, I'm so sorry. I don't know if God can ever forgive me.

I can never be okay again. We're crushed. But when we have this new life, when we have this transfer from being under sin's regime to being under God's regime, there's this recognition that we can never do it ourselves and that's the point.

The point is, we're messed up. We need Jesus. And because of that, when we're under this new regime, when we fail, it still holds true. We're messed up. We need Jesus. That's what gives us the strength to carry on when we mess up.

So, on a practical level, say we're in the office this week. Someone comes to you, they say, let's change some numbers here, make millions more for the company, you take a little extra commission home. It's a real temptation.

You have the option to go along with it. But you don't have to because you've been set free from the power of sin in your life. Or if you're a kid, your parents tell you, go do your homework.

[19 : 05] There's lots of options for what you can do at this point. You can throw a fit and say, no, I'm not going to do it. You can go play video games. You can go watch a movie. You can go online and search up Tumblr accounts and look at Tumblr user pizza and post stuff from their account to yours and tag it.

But you don't have to. You're free from that power that's telling you sin and disobedience is what gives you strength in life. And it's this new life.

It's this true life. It's a life that's not a parody anymore. It's authentic life that we have in Jesus. And it calls us to live radically different.

The third thing I want us to see today is in verse 11. Paul says, So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. And the reason we must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus is because if we are Christians, this is something that is already a reality for us.

I know that might sound confusing. I'll explain what I mean. There's this New Testament scholar named N.T. Wright and he has a quote on this verse. He says, this verse could sound as though it's an opinion that might yet be false.

[20 : 27] So consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God. Might be true, might be false, but if you reinforce it with positive thinking, think it through hard enough, you can convince yourself that this is the fact and this is the truth and you can live in that truth.

Go positive thinking. It looks like that could be the case, but what N.T. Wright says is Paul intends it emphatically, this fact that we're dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus.

He intends it emphatically as something that's necessarily true of all those in Christ. Paul's not telling us to consider this because it might be true, it might be false.

We need to convince ourselves that it is true. He says consider it because it's already true. Why do we need to consider it if it's already true? N.T. Wright continues, it needs considering because it's not an obvious truth.

But once the sum has been reckoned up, it will appear to be clearly the case. The fact is, if we are Christians, we are dead to sin. We are alive to God in Christ Jesus.

[21 : 32] But that's not something that's staring us in the face every day. What's staring us in the face every day? Temptation. A broken world. The knowledge that we ourselves are broken people.

the fact that we're under a new regime, the fact that we've had this change is not something that is blatantly obvious to us staring us in the face. But that doesn't mean it's not true.

And so we need to constantly remind ourselves of the truth of this fact because if we don't constantly remind ourselves, we're going to forget it. There's a pastor in the States named Bill Johnson.

He says, we can't afford to have thoughts in our heads about ourselves that are in conflict with what God thinks about us. God has given us this glorious, amazing, powerful truth in our lives.

We are dead to sin. We're free from its regime. We are alive to God in Jesus Christ. It's not a matter of opinion.

[22 : 36] It's a fact. But we still have the option to forget about it and live as if it's not true. But this is a powerful, life-changing truth.

And if we decide to believe something about ourselves and our identity now that's different than what God actually says is true about us, we're going to rob ourselves of immense joy.

We're going to rob ourselves of life that is truly life. we're going to rob ourselves of freedom. Our Christian lives will be marked by tragedy, by a failure to live up to who God wants us to be.

And that's why Paul tells us consider this to be true. You know, if you look through the entire book of Romans, this right here, he spent five and a half chapters explaining to us who we were before, what God has done for us.

And right here in verse 11 of chapter 6 is the first time in the entire book of Romans that Paul actually gives us a command. He's not saying, think about this as a way of earning God's forgiveness, as a way of earning God's acceptance.

[23 : 54] He's saying, look at what God has already done for you. Look how he saved us when we were so messed up. Look how he forgave us when we had turned away from him for so long.

Look at what he went through to purchase our salvation. And only after you've seen that, only after you've understood that, can we properly respond.

And the first step to responding is taking what's true of us and believing that it's true of us in our lives. and what happens in our lives when we begin to properly consider what's true of us already?

Let's jump back to verse 4. He says, we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

He says we get to walk in newness of life. Now, I do a lot of walking. I don't know about the rest of you. I've done a lot of walking in my life. I've done a couple hundred K hikes.

[25 : 02] It is long. It is exhausting. And when I think about a metaphor for my Christian life, walking in newness of life is not my ideal phrase.

For a lot of reasons. Number one, walking is slow. I want fast progress in my Christian life and walking is slow. You spend hours and hours and hours and you look back and you're like, that's the same mountain I could see five hours ago.

It's frustratingly slow. Also, it's hard. Yeah, it can be easy when you start out but then you get hills and you're carrying heavy bags and you think, why can't I just be sitting in a car with the air conditioning on, cranking out my favorite tunes, relaxing.

No, I'm walking. I'm still walking. I want a break from walking because it's hard. It can be painful. You can get sore muscles, you can get blisters and when you have a destination to get to, you can't just stop.

You have to get to your destination. You have to walk through the pain. Why would I want to do that? It's monotonous. You get out on hiking trails and it's quiet and there is nothing happening and even if you're hiking with friends, you can talk for a couple hours but after a while, the conversation sort of dies and you're just walking and it is so monotonous.

[26 : 31] I don't want my Christian life to be marked by monotony. I want excitement and it's just, walking is inefficient especially in Hong Kong.

You walk and you're like, oh, I'm crossing a road here and then you walk for three more hours and you're like, I'm crossing another road. That would have been a five minute cab ride. so inefficient.

When I think about a metaphor that I want to mark my Christian life, I think riding a yacht in newness of life. Get to my destination, lounge out in the sun, jump in the water, it does all the work, I just am along for the ride, having fun with my friends as it's happening or riding a Ferrari in newness of life.

How fun would that be? Right? As long as I'm in the driver's seat. But that's not the picture that God gives us. He says, we're walking in newness of life.

And there was one commentary I looked at this week. They said this phrase that we too might walk in newness of life. Paul thought that it was a good metaphor for the steady, unspectacular progress that should characterize the Christian life.

[27 : 47] As I thought about that, it terrified me how true that is of my Christian life. Steady, unspectacular progress.

If I'm being honest, I want God to work in spectacular ways in my life. I want God to do big, amazing things and have these huge changes overnight that all of a sudden one day I was, oh, miserable, what's life all about and the next day, like, yeah, and never look back.

That's what I want in my Christian life. That's not how God typically works. It's unspectacular. Most of the time, I don't even see the changes that's happening.

But it's steady. It's there. If I look back to yesterday, I probably can't see much difference from today. but if I look back two years ago, even two months ago, I can see that I've made progress.

I've gone somewhere. I think this is something that's characteristic of each of us. I mean, even as much as I want it in my life, I want it in the lives of the teenagers that I work with.

[28 : 56] Right? I want kids to sit in church and pay attention and not talk to their friends. I want the kids to be passionate about reading their Bibles. I want the kids to sit in church and not be playing on their phones.

I want the kids to be excited about telling their friends about Jesus. And even if the kids today aren't that excited about it, tomorrow I want them to wake up and have that excitement. But really, God works the same way in their lives as he does in mine.

Steady, unspectacular progress. from day to day, I don't see much progress in a lot of them. But as I look back over the years, I can see God working in a lot of their lives.

And I think that's the case for a lot of us, that God doesn't just give us these shortcuts, but he's working in our lives because we're alive in him. We're dead to sin.

And so, I want to leave us with some questions as we finish up today. Some reflection thoughts on this passage. First up, and this is foundational to all the other questions that I have, am I still relying on myself for salvation rather than on Jesus?

[30 : 13] Because the Bible says this new life in Christ is a gift that we get from God. It's not something that we earn on our own. And if we're still relying on ourselves, then the stuff I've been talking about today, the stuff about being under a new regime, it's not true of us yet.

And before we can live life under this new regime, we have to see that we can't save ourselves. We can't fix ourselves. We need Jesus to save us. So the first thing I want to ask us is, are we still relying on ourselves for salvation, or have we actually trusted in Jesus for that salvation that we need?

Secondly, if we are Christians, are we using the fact that we're saved by faith, not works, and the fact that God forgives us for whatever we do wrong as an excuse to sin?

Are we using God's forgiveness as an excuse to continue in sin in our lives? And if so, is it because we don't properly understand the change that's taken place in us?

Or is it because we're lying to ourselves about the fact that a change has actually happened? Third question, what does it mean in our lives that we're dead to sin and alive to Jesus?

[31 : 46] Where are the areas in our lives that we see the biggest impact of this? Is it at work where we no longer feel the pressure to go along with the boss when he tells us to do something wrong because we're free from needing to prove ourselves in that way?

Is it at school where we no longer feel the need to go along with peer pressure because what other people think of us doesn't define us, what God thinks of us defines us? Is it at home where we're free from finding our identity and how successful our kids are?

Where are the areas of our lives where we see the biggest impact of this regime change in our lives? What are the areas in our lives where sin and temptation keep calling us up and asking us to come back under their power?

What are the areas in our lives each of us has areas that we're more susceptible to than others? What are those areas in our lives where we keep hearing that temptation, where we keep getting calls, come back, come back, come back, I miss you?

And when they come, how are we fighting against them? And finally, am I considering myself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus?

[33 : 19] Is this command that Paul gives something that I'm following and obeying in my life? If not, why not? And if so, how do you see that changing you?

Maybe you can't see a difference from yesterday to today, but if it's something that's been going on for any length of time, how do you see a transition over that period of time? You know, as we're here today, the good news is that each of us here, we're not saved by what we do.

We're not saved by our ability to live as great Christians. Our obedience to God after we become Christians doesn't save us any more than our obedience to God could save us before we were Christians.

Ultimately, us becoming Christians, us living as Christians, it's all dependent on Jesus. It's all dependent on God's grace, all dependent on God's forgiveness. How good or bad we are at living out our Christian lives doesn't change the fact of whether we're saved or not.

It doesn't change the fact of whether God loves us or not. But what we see here is there's this life, there's this power, there's this joy that's available to us because of the fact that we're Christians.

[34 : 37] And if we choose to live as if what's true of us isn't true, and if we choose to live as if what's not true of us is true, we're robbing ourselves of that joy.

We're robbing ourselves of that power. We're robbing ourselves of the opportunity to live in the life that is truly life. So let's consider ourselves dead to sin.

Not because it's this lie that we need to trick ourselves into believing it's true, but because if we're Christians, it's already true of us. And let's consider ourselves alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Because that is the amazing promise that God gives us, that if we have trusted in him, that these things are true of us already and have the ability to impact the way that we live our lives today.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the gospel. We thank you for the fact that there's nothing that we can do to earn your love, but because of that, there's nothing that we have to do to earn your love.

[35 : 48] thank you for Jesus, the perfect sacrifice who came and did for us what we could not do for ourselves. For the fact that he set us free, that he gave us life under a new regime, a regime that is powerful and life-giving and joy-giving, a regime that's run by you.

God, I pray that as we go throughout our weeks this week, that we would, that we would consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, that we would take these truths and we would apply them to our lives and we would see how you transform us as we do that, and that we wouldn't trick ourselves into just waiting for spectacular things from you, but that we would see signs of this steady, unspectacular progress as we walk with you.

Thank you for your love, and in Jesus' name, amen.