



## **Living in Christ**

Romans 6:8-14

*Rev. Fred Greco*

---

This morning we will be looking at Romans, chapter 6, specifically verses 8-14. It follows on what we looked at last week, the first seven verses of Romans 6. We are continuing to look at Paul's study in the doctrine of sanctification. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 6, beginning at verse 8:

*"Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 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. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."*

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we ask this morning that you would attend your Word with power, that even as you are the author of this Word, O Lord, O Holy Spirit, that you would point us toward the Lord Jesus Christ, that in him we would find all our sufficiency, all our hope. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

As we continue in Romans, chapter 6, we see that Paul has been shifting from what Christ has done to make us right with God (justification) to what Jesus Christ means for our lives now (sanctification). Paul will continue to lay down principles for us, but he is also going to get practical. This, if we are honest, can make us a bit uncomfortable, when Paul comes to us and applies God's Word to us and tells us what we should *not* do and what we *should* do.

But as Paul comes to us in this practical vein, what we must remember is the order in which he lays out God's Word: first, how we are right with God, and secondly, the result of being right with God. This morning I'd like us to see two main things from our text. First, Paul declares to us that *we have the power to be holy*. From God in Christ we have the power to be holy. Then secondly, because we have that power, Paul gives to us from God *a command to be holy*. He gives us a command that we are to follow and that we are to be holy before a holy God. The power to be holy and a command to be holy.

## Power to Be Holy

Let's begin by first looking at Paul telling us about *the power we receive to be holy*. Paul has been continuing his line of thought that he started in the beginning of chapter 6. This should not surprise us. Even though we are treating with this week by week, sermon by sermon, and seeking to go into God's Word, you have to remember that if we sat down at a desk to read Romans 6 it would take us but two or three minutes to read through the entire chapter.

So it should not surprise us that there is a line of thought that goes throughout all of chapter 6. Paul is not breaking off and entering back in. He's not treating every sort of subject. What we have before us this morning builds off of what Paul said earlier in chapter 6 that we looked at last week. At the same time, there is a shift in emphasis of how Paul is treating this subject of sanctification. Paul previously, at the beginning of the chapter, reminded us that we are dead to sin because we are united to Christ.

That is actually summarized by Paul at the very beginning of verse 8. "Now if we have died with Christ..." Now, taking that as a starting point, he moves on to life *in* Christ, and that's the remainder of verse 8. "...we believe that we will also live with him." These two truths are interrelated. As a matter of fact, they cannot be separated any more than you could separate the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. They come together.

We must understand what Paul is saying to us here. We must hear his argument. Paul begins this passage with an *if*. When we hear "If we have died with Christ," we immediately begin to think of a conditional clause. You know what that's like. "If *this*, then *that*." For the most part in English a condition has something that *might* be fulfilled (technically that's called a *protasis*), and it is followed by a conclusion that follows if the first thing comes about. We call that conclusion an *apodosis*. But you could just think of it simply as *if* and *then*.

We may think that's what Paul is doing. If that's the case, we miss his point, because Paul is not trying to say it is *possible* that you have died with Christ. He is saying that *because* we have died with Christ something follows. We could even translate the *if* here in this verse *since* or *because*. This is not a possibility that Paul is raising; it is a certainty that he is putting before us.

Now we know this for two reasons. The first reason is because of the Greek grammar. I'm going to spare you a long, boring, dry lecture on Greek conditions and grammar, but what you need to know is that there are two types of conditions in Greek, and you can tell them apart clearly by the grammar, by the mood of the verbs, by what the verb looks like. One type of a condition is what we were speaking of earlier: where a possibility of one thing leads to a conclusion of another thing.

The second is where there is a first truth that is raised (*since*), which leads to a second truth in course (*a then*). That is what we have here in our text this morning. But you don't need the Greek grammar lesson, because all you need to do is look up at verses 2-5, and you'll see the entire context of this passage is Paul saying to us

a certainty that we are dead to sin because we are united with Christ, that we are alive to God because we are united with Christ.

You can't read verse 8 and act as if verses 2-5 don't exist. They go together. It helps us to understand what Paul is putting before us. So here what we have is a true *if*, which leads to a true *then*. We *will* live with Christ. But why does Christ live? Christ lives because he is resurrected. This is very clear from verses 4 and 5, where Christ was raised from the dead and where we are united with him in a resurrection like his.

That means our life is grounded in the resurrection. Let me say this again clearly. Your life right now is grounded in the resurrection. Not your life to come only, but your life *now* is grounded in the power of the resurrection. Paul is not merely talking about life after death. No. The context of our passage is not that death is not the end. We leave that for 1 Corinthians 15 and other passages. This passage is about the fact that sin has no dominion over us.

We are first told that sin has no power over us because we are dead to sin, having died with Christ. Now here we are told that the Christian has the power to live in righteousness because he *lives* with Christ. Do you see the train of Paul's thought? First he was talking about our *death* with Christ. Now he's emphasizing our *life* with Christ, our resurrected life with Christ.

There is a certainty to this. It is not a conjecture. It is not just a hope; it is a present reality that we possess. That's why Paul says, "We believe," right now, in the present. It is an article of faith. It is something that affects us right now as we live. Even the future tense in verse 8 leads to this. We will also live, not just in the future state, Paul says, but in Christ's resurrection life now. This is a sense of certainty Paul wants us to have about our life in Christ.

So, what is it about the resurrection life that the believer experiences? Often we focus on the resurrection of the body from death. The Bible is emphatic about that, about resurrection of the body from death. We find that in 1 Corinthians 15. We find it in Romans 1. We find it at the end of the Gospels. The resurrection is a true and real doctrine, but that's not what Paul is doing here, because there's more to the resurrection than just the resurrection of the body. We have to remember that the worst thing we face is not bodily death. The worst thing we face is spiritual death.

Paul has already told us that apart from Christ we are helpless. We are sinners who are dead to God. That's what he said in Romans 5:6-8. He makes that point more explicitly in the book of Ephesians. He says that God, even when we were dead in our sins, made us alive together with Christ. Jesus makes the exact same point in John 5:24. He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me *has* eternal life." Present possession. "He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." Not *will* pass; *has passed* from death into life.

What we need is new life, to be alive to God, to have spiritual life. That's what Paul is talking about here. Before we can be resurrected from the grave with our bodies we must be resurrected from our spiritual death. If we think about this, this helps us to make sense of what is often a difficult passage in Revelation, chapter 20, where we read in verse 4:

"I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God, those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection."

There's a problem here if you look at this as only a bodily resurrection. The rest of the Bible is exceedingly clear. There is only one resurrection from the grave. There is a resurrection of the just and the unjust, of the sheep and the goats. There is one great throne judgment. So commentators and Bible scholars try all they can to figure out who else is resurrected at a different time from other people who are resurrected.

The point is the first resurrection is not about the body; it's about what Paul is talking about here in Romans 6. It is a spiritual resurrection. It is a passing from spiritual death to life. Because of what Jesus has done, we are made alive spiritually. So what is it that Jesus has done? This is important. Paul keeps following his pattern. Do you recognize the pattern Paul has here? His pattern is to tell us what God has done, what is real, and then he follows up with an application to us based on that reality.

That's what Paul is doing right now. He has told us we have a resurrection right now, and let me tell you what Jesus has done in this resurrection. Jesus has, first and foremost, atoned for sin. In his death Jesus has brought sin to nothing, Paul says in verse 6. He has completely done away with the guilt and the punishment of sin. That is the entire force of Paul's argument. There is nothing left for us to do, because Jesus Christ has done it all.

I don't know about you, but my hymnal does not go, "Jesus paid some things; I still owe him a whole bunch. I'd better work really hard, otherwise I won't be saved." That's not how the hymn goes. It's, "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe." That's what Paul has been saying throughout all of the book of Romans: Jesus has paid everything to atone for sin. Christ has died, and that death is applied to us. We died with Christ. If you think about it, that phrase we died *with Christ* is even more powerful than Christ died *for us*, because there's a certainty and a finality to that.

This morning, are you frozen by the guilt and shame of your sin? Are you fearful that you will not measure up for God? Perhaps you carry the weight of having disappointed others in your life and you fear disappointing God. What the Bible assures you of is that Jesus has completely dealt with your sin. There is no guilt, there is

no shame, because it's paid for. You need to move on. Paul will tell you where you should move on to, but it begins with resting in what Jesus has done.

Secondly, Jesus has done more than to *pay* for sin; he has broken its power as well. The resurrection is proof of this. We take this all the way back to the beginning of this letter in chapter 1, verse 4. It was by the resurrection that Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power. Paul comes to this point again. The resurrection is proof of Jesus' victory. Paul tells us in verse 9 that Jesus will never die again. Why? Well, because he has been raised from the dead, because he has been resurrected. That shows us that death has no power over him. Death no longer has dominion over him.

Now, sin rules over mankind by death. There is no escaping it. It doesn't matter how wealthy you are, how powerful you are, or how famous you are. Death *will* come over you, but Paul says that Jesus has broken these chains. Death doesn't rule over him. It is not his lord. Jesus' resurrection is not just a new beginning; it is a finality, the finality of the power of sin. Sin can no longer have power because of Jesus' work.

So today, you have to view the resurrection through this lens. Many of you have confidence in a physical resurrection, but do you have the same confidence in the resurrection power of Christ to deliver you from sin right now in the present? It's the same resurrection power. We understand this because Jesus has done everything that is necessary to put away sin. Jesus will never die again, we are told. Death has no dominion over him.

How can we trust these truths? Well, that's because Jesus has done all that's necessary to defeat sin. There is nothing left. Paul tells us in verse 10 that he died to sin "once for all." This is one word in the Greek language. The other place where it is used is in the book of Hebrews, where it is describing the priestly work of Jesus Christ, that he died once for all for sin.

There is no second sacrifice to come. There is no third atonement on the way. Jesus has completed his work. He has died once, and there is no need for him to die again, because he has completely accomplished his work. On the cross he said, "It is finished," and he meant that. That phrase is a very strong and powerful phrase. He uses the most complete sense of the word possible, a perfect verb of the verb *to finish*. There is no drop left.

In the book of Hebrews it describes the once and never again sacrifice of Jesus. There is nothing left for him to do. He's not waiting for you to do something. All you need to do is to trust him. Paul wants us to clearly understand the reality of what Jesus has done. He has been very detailed about this. You could say it starts all the way back in chapter 1. He wants us to understand the reality of what Jesus has done before we give our response, because our response is rooted and grounded in God's reality in Christ.

Why does Paul take so much time to describe the reality of our life in Christ? Remember, what he's doing here is writing a letter to a church, and he's writing to them, he tells us, for the purpose of encouraging them

and strengthening them for the tasks before them. So we might ask, "Paul, why are you taking so long to get to the point?" You know what this is like in terms of our human communication. It typically happens in terms of a conversation between a man and a woman.

Something might be broken, and the woman feels the need to tell the man what led up to the breaking, how it was broken, why she thinks it was broken, what it might mean that it's broken. All the time, the guy is trying very hard to maintain eye contact and interjecting things like, "Yes, I'm listening to you," while not looking off at the football game. All he wants to know is, "What do I need to do to fix it? I don't need the whole story." That's how men and women are different.

But this is not Paul talking like a man or talking like a woman. I just give you that to illustrate that at times we think, "Let's just get to the point," but here we can't "just get to the point," because we won't understand the point unless Paul drills it into our minds who we are in Christ. We won't be able to successfully live in Christ apart from that. You can't make a dead man think or walk or speak. You have to make him alive first, and then once he's alive he must stop living like he's dead.

That's what Paul is doing here. He tells you what Jesus has done and that you are now in Christ and, as a result of being in Christ, that you can and must respond to God. This is what we call the *indicative* in grammar. It is a statement of the reality, things like "The book is red." "The car is brown." "The store is five miles away." These are indicative statements of reality. Until we understand that, we won't know what to do. You might think of it *this* way. Sometimes we need a little bit extra explanation of reality.

I'm sure there have been one or two parents in this room who have experienced this. Your child comes up and says, "I'm starving. I need to eat." They open up the refrigerator and say, "There's nothing to eat. I'm starving. I'm going to die." Mom says, "There's chicken over there on the shelf, and there's fruit there in the drawer, and there's some leftover pasta *there*, and you can heat up that macaroni over *here*, and there's some milk if you're thirsty." The response is, "There's nothing in the refrigerator. I'm going to die of hunger."

You say, "Son, daughter, unless you're willing to accept reality, you *may* die of hunger, because we're not living in the Sahara Desert. That's a refrigerator full of food. You need to understand reality and live in accordance with it." That's what Paul is doing for us. We're standing there with all of the benefits of Jesus Christ before us, with all of his obedience, with all of his power, with the work and power of the Holy Spirit, with the decree of God, and we say, "Oh, we can't possibly do anything. We have no help at all. We're all on our own."

Paul says, "No, you're not. Not only are you not on your own; God in Christ has taken care of everything for you." So we must avoid two errors. The first is that we can initiate with God, that we take the first step and God responds, but the second is that we don't need to respond to God once he has already worked in us, that that's the end of the story, that we don't need to live for God in Christ.

## Command to Be Holy

That's where Paul gets to the second thing I'd like to look at this morning: *a command to be holy*. Paul moves on to the commands of God. Grammatically, we call these *imperatives*; that is, commands. It may surprise you to know that here in verse 11 of chapter 6 is the very first appearance in the entire book of Romans of a command. Paul has gone five and a half full chapters without using one imperative, without one command. But then after this he follows it up with three more commands in verses 12 and 13.

This is really the pattern of all of Paul's letters. He lays out the reality of life before the response. Christian, the Bible always has imperatives, but they always follow indicatives. It's never the other way around. Who we are gives us the power to do what God commands and who we are is the result of God's work. So it makes sense that Paul's first command to us is actually linked with an indicative.

The first thing he tells us to do is to consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. "Think about who you are," Paul says. This is important. Paul does not say, "You need to become dead to sin." He doesn't say, "You need to become alive in Christ." No, what he *does* say is "You need to appreciate the facts which are yours by union with Christ."

So what does that look like? How do we appreciate the facts of what Jesus has done? Well, Paul doesn't leave us guessing. He starts in verse 12 with a specific. He says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body..." Notice several things. First, Paul is giving you a command, an imperative. You are to do something. In this case, you are not to let sin reign.

Secondly, note that that command is rooted in a fact, an indicative. He makes that clear in the *therefore*. "Let not sin therefore reign..." Now you know it's coming. What is the *therefore* there for? It points us back to the facts that Paul has laid out earlier in chapter 6, that we are dead to sin in Christ and alive to God. "Because that's true," Paul says, "therefore, don't let sin reign."

The reality of Christ's work places an obligation on you to obey, but more than that, it gives you the power *to* obey. It's only because sin *doesn't* reign because of Jesus' work that it can be said to you, "Don't let sin reign." This is the work of God. It is a crucial sequence that comes to us. Sin does not have dominion or power; therefore, don't allow it to act like it does.

Paul is giving you more than hope; he's giving you a command based on reality. We might think of it *this* way. Some of you may know someone who remained single later in life, did not marry early. Then, eventually, that person marries later in life. As they begin married life, they keep acting like they're single. They make plans without consulting their spouse. They make large purchases without talking to their spouse. They act like they're single.

Eventually, what you have to do is pull them aside and say, "Listen. You're married. You didn't have to get married, but you're married. You'd better start acting like a married person. Don't act like you're single, because you're not single anymore." That's what Paul is saying to you. You're in Christ. You need to start acting like you're in Christ. Don't act like you did before when you were in Adam and in sin. "Be who you are," Paul is saying.

Now does this mean Christians never sin? No. But it *does* mean that sin doesn't have dominion. It does not compel you to sin. There is a difference between being unable *not* to sin (fallen man) and being able *not* to sin (redeemed man) while we wait to be unable *to* sin (glorified man). You see, this is what is involved with the Christian as he lives in accordance with the declaration of God.

Paul is not just general in his exhortation to be holy. You've heard me say it before; I will say it again. Nobody grows in "fuzzyland." No one grows in Christ with vague platitudes and generalities. We need to get down to specifics. That's what Paul does here. This is not just a general exhortation, "Be holy." No, he tells us what it means not to let sin reign, not to give it power, not to allow us to obey its passions. We cannot allow sin to rule over us.

This makes perfect sense, because the verb *to have dominion over* or *to rule over* is the verbal form of the noun *lord* that you see throughout your Bible. Everywhere you see *the Lord Jesus Christ* it's the same word. What Paul is saying is you can't have two lords. Either Jesus is your Lord or sin is your lord. Either Jesus has dominion over your life and he guides you and directs you or sin has dominion over your life. It's one or the other.

Sin gets its hold on us through our bodies, Paul says. This is a very practical and easy way for us to understand how we need to fight sin and not let sin reign over us. Paul says, "Start by thinking about your bodies." Is this the only way we sin? No. But it *is* the most common, the easiest. We might even say it's the lazy way to sin. So Paul starts with something that forces us to see his point. Sin can reign in our bodies, but it doesn't have to.

When he says we should not use our bodies as "instruments for unrighteousness" in verse 13, he uses a word that describes the weaponry and armor of a soldier of his day. If you've ever seen a period piece or a film set in ancient Greece or in the time of the New Testament, you may remember seeing a man decked out in all armor with a large helmet with a plume and a huge shield and greaves and a breastplate and a gigantic spear with a sword. That is his weaponry. Those are his instruments. Same word. It's what he uses to accomplish his task.

Paul says our bodies are similar in that way. They are instruments we can use to accomplish something. So what are these parts of our bodies? Let's think about a few very briefly. Let's think about our eyes. Men, what are you watching? Not just at home but when you're traveling and you're by yourself in a hotel with nobody

around. What are you watching? Are you watching things that delight in violence and cruelty, in lust and uncleanness?

Ladies, what are you looking at? It used to be that this application was only for men. Studies show that the highest increase in the watching of filth is among women in America today. Even if you say, "Well, I would never look at something like that," what are you looking at? Are you looking at things that make you envious, that make you want to forget the life you have because you so want to have that perfect marriage that's on the screen, where it's always sunny and every week they save a puppy. That's what you want your life to be.

Are you envious, prideful? Are you looking for an escape from the reality of making dinner and cleaning up the house and working? Children, what are *you* looking at? You know what I'm talking about. When you're sitting there on your laptop or you're looking at an iPad. Maybe it's on YouTube. Mom or Dad comes in the room, and the first thing you do is turn it off because you know you're not supposed to be looking at it. You know there's a consequence for looking at it.

Well, then the question is... *Why are you looking at it?* If you shouldn't be, if your heart tells you you shouldn't be, if your conscience tells you you shouldn't be, why *are* you? Don't let sin reign in your body. What about our ears? What are we listening to? Are we listening to vulgarity? Are we listening to untruths? Are we listening to mockeries about God?

What about our tongues? Are they being used with our ears for gossip, to run others down? James tells us that the tongue is one of the most destructive forces in the world. Are you using your tongue to build others up, to encourage others? What about our hands and feet? What are we doing with our hands? Are we supporting others and ourselves? Are we living for God's glory or are we living for our pride and our vanity?

Where do your feet take you? Paul will tell us later in Romans 10 that the feet of those who bring the gospel are beautiful. Where do *your* feet take you? Do your feet take you to places where Jesus is denied, where sin is open? Think about where you go and what you do. Do others see that you follow Jesus because of that? And if they don't, why not?

Finally, notice again that Paul roots these strong commands in the reality of what God has done. He tells us that we are to use our bodies not just to avoid sin but as tools of righteousness, as weapons of righteousness. We do this as ones who have been brought from death to life, Paul says in verse 13. We are not to present our members to sin because we present them one time, once and for all to God.

Our obedience is not the ground of our relationship with God, but our relationship with God *is* the ground of our obedience. Verse 14 gives us an explanation of the enabling power we have. Paul says, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." Some look at this verse and say, "I don't

need to listen to God's commands because I'm not under law; I'm under grace," and you wonder, "Did you pay any attention to anything else Paul has said in chapter 6?"

To use this as an excuse for disobedience is to completely miss Paul's point. What Paul is actually saying is the exact opposite. Paul is saying that sin has no dominion over you because you have the power of grace. Law (that is, the command) cannot justify. It cannot relieve bondage. It cannot give life. It only condemns, but grace sets free. Grace delivers. Grace gives you the power to reject sin and live for God.

Right now, today, God is calling you to obey his Word. He is calling you to put to death the sin in your life. More than that, he is calling you to righteousness, to be a light of obedience to his Word in a dark world. He's calling you to be different, to show that Jesus is real and that Jesus makes a real difference in the lives of his people. Paul is calling us in a very practical way today to be dead to sin and alive to God.