

If You Are Dead to Sin, Then Why Is It Still Alive in You?

When my oldest daughter was very young, she almost drowned. While my wife and I were engaged in a casual conversation by the pool, my daughter walked down the steps and into the water.

She was just a few feet away, yet we did not see her. Seconds later, my wife looked over and immediately pulled her up and out. We thank God for His grace that afternoon.

In the same way, sin works in stealth mode; it must be taken seriously—it separates us from God and directly opposes Him. Sin corrupts our character and our testimony. It prevents holiness and quenches and grieves the Spirit within. Why, then, do so many continue to fall into sin?

A story was told of a young boy who kept falling out of his bed. Frustrated, he asked his mother why. She wisely answered, “It’s because you don’t stay far enough in.” In the same way, many of us fall back into sin because we don’t get far enough into God’s framework of safety and protection.

Overcoming sin, especially sexual sin, can be a difficult battle for Christians, but victory is not optional; it’s essential. In Romans 6 and 7, Paul has an open dialogue about our old sinful nature being crucified with Christ so that sin loses its power in our lives. The good we want to do we often do not do, and the evil we seek to avoid we sometimes practice. The result is misery, so Paul asks: Who will free me from this body and life that are dominated by sin? (Rom. 7:24).

It leaves one to wonder, “If I’m dead to sin why is it still alive in me?” How can Paul declare that he is dead to sin in one verse, yet a few verses later ask, who will free me from

the domination of sin in my life? Romans 6:16 is the clarifying verse, "You are slaves of the one whom you obey." You can choose sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God. It's a choice. And once you make a choice, it then makes you. "Grace changes the nature of man, but nothing changes the nature of sin" (Puritan John Owen).

There is power in the Word of God to save us from ourselves, overcome temptation and position us again in the will of God. "For the word of God is alive, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). We must submit to the work of the Holy Spirit as well.

As a believer, God equips us with discernment so that we are able to grasp what is really going on. This is why the role of the pulpit in these dire times is so important. Those who fail to preach the Word of God in all its fullness fail to pierce the heart; sinners are not challenged to turn to the Savior.

Paul encourages pastors to, "Preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). Reprove means to cause others to believe firmly. Rebuke means to warn, confront, or challenge with the hope of changing course. And exhort is to urge, appeal, or to encourage. But many today focus only on exhortation to win favor and acceptance.

We'd do well to revisit Jeremiah 23 regularly. Although this passage was written primarily to the false leaders in Jeremiah's day, the principle still applies to us—stand firm in God's counsel; don't simply exhort, but rebuke and convict as well: "'Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!' says the Lord ... They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one repents from his wickedness ... they say to everyone who walks after the imagination of his own heart, 'No evil will come upon you' ... I

have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied ... but if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way ... therefore, they shall not profit this people at all, says the Lord'" (Jer. 23:1-32).

These leaders, like many today, had "perverted the words of the living God" (Jer. 23:36) by not warning, instructing, challenging and contending for the faith. Pastors, as the church falls deeper into self-reliance and further from reliance on God, our need for bold leadership has never been greater. Change will only occur when there is a strong conviction of sin, genuine faith, humility and sincere repentance—may God grant us the wisdom and strength to proclaim these truths. We must stop confusing God's patience with His approval and preach with conviction from the pulpits again. We are not called to coddle, but to convict.

Be encouraged. God sends His word to heal and deliver us from our destructive lifestyles (Ps. 107:20). But we must not simply hear, we must apply God's truth to our lives. Hearing alone does nothing without the active step of obedience. Obeying God's voice can keep us from sin, or sin can keep us from hearing God's voice.

Turn, or return, to Him today and experience His grace, love and forgiveness. It's not too late. Recall Romans 6:16, "You are slaves of the one whom you obey?" We can choose sin, which leads to death, or we can choose to obey God. It's a choice. And, as stated earlier, once you make a choice, it then makes you.

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