

**DYING TO LIVE**  
**Romans 6:1-14**

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It's so exciting when it all goes up – the Christmas tree, the mantle greens, the front door wreath. And oh, those of you who line the rooftop with lights. Now they have to come down. And what do you do with that old Christmas tree or once gorgeous garland.

As you take down the tannenbaum, Julia Georgallis, a 32-year-old London-based industrial designer turned baker, is calling upon holiday revelers to consider a culinary alternative. She literally wants you to eat your Christmas tree.

Yes, you heard me. She said, and I quote, “For some reason, when you mix Christmas trees with dairy, it's kind of unbelievable.” She has spent the last five years concocting Christmas tree recipes and hosting sold-out culinary classes to promote her Christmas tree delicacies.

Talk about a taste of the tannenbaum. In fact, she has published a cookbook called “How to Eat Your Christmas Tree.” Among the Yuletide favorites are Christmas tree pickles or Christmas tree hot-smoked fish. Or – are you ready? – Christmas tree ice cream. Get out the churn. Kids, gather around. We're about to munch on the merry Christmas tree.

The flavor of tree needles, they say, are lemony to slightly bitter, on par with the very best spices. In fact, one enthusiast says, “You've never had fresh lake trout until you've had it smothered with a Douglas fir pesto.”

Now, I know some Baptists spike the eggnog for that hap hap happy holiday party, but she's actually advocating Douglas fir-infused eggnog. Best eggnog ever.

Before you go to Christmas tree cuisine, however, let me warn you that some plants are poisonous, and your pastor is not advising you to nibble on those needles.

Whether you gobble on the Christmas tree or deliver it to the dump, Christmas is passed, and we're beyond the Christmas season sermons, let's get back to our business in the book of Romans.

Today we pick up again in our study in Romans. We took a break for Christmas, and now we find ourselves back where we left off – Romans 6:1-14.

## I. Died to sin (v. 2)

Paul was being slandered. Turn back to Romans 3:8. Some of Paul's enemies, those who loved the law more than the grace of God, had mistakenly portrayed Paul as saying something along these lines: "Let us sin more that grace may abound."

Look at Romans 3:8.

And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"?"

Or in Romans 6:1.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?

If the answer is "yes," then nothing has changed about the lives of believers compared to the lives of unbelievers. Sin, therefore, and its co-conspirator, death, would still rule in our lives.

Paul, in our passage today, draws on the believer's experience of baptism, contending that believers have died to sin when they died with Christ. The believer's destiny is tied to Christ's destiny.

I want you to notice all the language of "with" or "participation." We are buried with Him (6:4). United with Him in death (6:5). Crucified with Him (6:6). Died with Christ (6:8) to rise with Christ (6:5) and live with Him (6:8). Put bluntly, those joined to Christ have died to sin, and, therefore, cannot continue to live in sin.

Paul's first idea here is that we have died to sin when Christ died bearing our sin on His back. He said (v. 14) that we now live under grace and not under law.

In verse 5, the word for "united" is *symphytoi*. You see where we get the word "symphony" from – to grow together, to fuse together, to harmonize. Our death is harmonized with Christ's death.

But avoid the misconception that we can now live loosely. May it never be (v. 2). Paul's enemies were saying Paul's reasoning goes like this: "My sin magnifies God's glory and God's grace. Therefore, the more I sin, the more God gets to forgive. So, if you follow Paul, you're following a lawless life, a life lived in sin."

That is a crude parody of Paul's gospel. Paul has said that we don't live under the law; we live under grace. But as God gives grace, obedience flows from the faith we have in God's transforming grace. In fact, the very process of dying with Christ and dying to sin re-creates those of us who accept the narrative of Christ. And it generates holiness (2 Corinthians 3:18).

In fact, so sure is Paul that we have a break with our old sinful life, our Adam-like life, that he says we are undergoing death to sin. Paul doesn't keep shouting "Stop sinning." Instead, he argues that we no longer live under sin's dominion. We are no longer slaves to sin because we have a new status as those who have died to sin. When we're baptized, when we plunge under the water,

it is a sign that dying with Christ in baptism signifies our acceptance of Christ's death for our sins as our own death to sin (v. 7).

Throughout Romans 6 there are metaphors for slavery. A slave no longer has a legal obligation to a master once a slave is dead. Death abolishes the claim of ownership. In Christ, we have died to sin, and sin, therefore, is no longer our master. Dying with Christ, we thereby terminate sin's rule and reign over us.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul pens that he has passed on the things of first importance. In other words, this is what is really important about the story of Jesus: That Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day. There's the gospel right there – it's all you need to know. Christ died for our sins, was buried and raised on the third day. And we portray a picture of that gospel in our baptism. Being baptized, we are saying we died with Him, we are buried with Him, and we shall rise with Him.

What does it mean (v. 2) to have “died to sin,” to be baptized into Christ's death (v. 3)? A believer is so united with Christ in baptism that Christ's death is viewed as the death of the one who is baptized. The old life in Adam is set under the judgment of the cross and dies and is buried with Christ. The new life in Christ, therefore, rises out of the baptismal waters. When you are baptized, you are proclaiming “Jesus is Lord” and putting your faith in the fact that God raised Him from the dead.

Look at verses 10-11.

For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

He died to sin. But death isn't the end of the story.

## **II. We are alive to God (v. 11).**

Yes, the second part is “alive to God.” If we die with Him, we rise with Him (v. 8).

It was unusual to say the least. Talk about planning ahead. I officiated at a funeral service several years ago, and the family handed me a thank you note. Now, it's not unusual to receive a thank you note from the family, but this note was written and signed by the dear saint whose funeral I performed. She was completely prepared for the service: the casket had been purchased, the songs and the soloists were selected; scripture was chosen. She had even written a poem to her family, which was to be read at the service. She'd sold the house, sold the car, and labeled every item in the house as to whom it should belong upon her death. I had never seen anything quite like it in all my days as a pastor.

Unlike this prepared saint who faced death with courage and confidence, however, many people recoil at conversations about death and life after death.

**While sunning himself in the Bahamas, a wealthy English businessman received a telegram from his butler, which read simple: “Cat dead.” Distraught at the loss of his beloved pet, the**

**businessman cut short his holiday and returned home. After giving the cat a decent burial in the garden, he chastened his butler for the cold-hearted nature of the telegram.**

**“James, you should break bad news gently,” he said. “If I had been telling you that your cat had died, I would have sent a telegram saying: ‘The cat’s on the roof and can’t get down.’ Then a few hours later I would have sent another telegram, saying: ‘The cat’s fallen off the roof and is badly hurt.’ Finally, a couple of hours after that, I would have sent a third telegram, saying” ‘The cat had sadly passed away.’ That way, you would have been gradually prepared for the bad news and would have been able to deal with it better.”**

**“I understand, sir,” said the butler. “I will bear that in mind in the future.”**

**With that, the businessman booked another ticket to the Bahamas and resumed his holiday.**

**Two days later, he received another telegram from his butler. It read: “Your mother-in-law is on the roof and can’t get down.” (www.jokes.christian.com)**

Since the beginning of time, man’s greatest fear has been the fear of death. George Tilboarg tells us that the fear of death is present in our mental functioning at all times. Melanie Klein, a British psychologist, added that the fear of death is at the root of all human anxiety.

One thing is certain, when we preach on death, no one is left out.

When it comes to preaching, most people think that the preacher is talking to someone else and not to them. But when the topic is death, you can be certain that I am talking to you. When it comes to life’s ultimate statistic, the results are clear: one out of one dies. Death is no respecter of persons. The Bible says, “It is appointed unto man once to die and then the judgment.”

You can try to postpone it, lessen the pain, deny its existence; but one thing is clear, you cannot escape it. There is an art to dying well, and it needs to be learned by men and women when they are healthy. If you want to know how to die right, then you need to know how to live right.

We will die in this life sooner or later and we will leave something and someone behind. A little girl looked at the obituaries and said, “Look, Mom, they all died in alphabetical order.” But it doesn’t happen that way. We must always be prepared.

The truth of the matter is that you and I write our own funerals every day. We cannot shortchange death.

So we must live as men and women preparing, learning the art of dying well. We write our funerals by what we say, by what we do. At every funeral, people attending evaluate the life of the departed one. The preacher digs deeply to call us to remember the good. Sometimes we ask him to be a maker of miracles. Regardless of what the pastor might say, our lives have already written the funeral. We spend our whole lifetimes preparing our funerals.

The good news, the gospel, is that in Christ we die to sin and are raised to eternal life.

Romans 6:5

Paul argues that the story of Jesus becomes our story.

We have been crucified with Christ. But also, because Christ was resurrected, we, too, will have forever life.

V. 5 – We don't have to live as slaves to sin because we were crucified on the cross with Christ.

Because Christ lives, we, too, will live.

**It was like the experience of Antonio Parr in Frederick Buechner's *Open Heart*. As he stood at the Brooklyn graveside of his twin sister, "some stirring of the air or quick movement of squirrel or bird brought me back to myself," Parr recounts, "and just at that instant...I knew that the self I'd been brought back to was some fine day going to be as dead as Miriam...Through grace alone I banged right into it--not a lesson this time, a collision."**

**Christian faith, however, has always argued that meaning in life will be found beyond life. "In my end is my beginning," the poet, T. S. Eliot, wrote. Those words are found not only in his early poem, "Burnt Norton," but also on his tombstone. In a profound way, where we are headed affects how we travel. And death, for all its mystery and starkness and seeming darkness, leads, for the believer, to something better than life.**

**Despite the richness of this world, the New Testament reminds us that we are on our way to a reality even clearer and more substantial than we presently experience. "Here we do not have an enduring city," the writer to the Hebrews wrote, "but we are looking for the city to come" (Hebrews 13:14, NIV). Or, as Paul put it, "We look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen" (2 Cor. 4:16, 18). (*Christianity Today*, June 24, 1991, p. 30)**

What Paul is trying to get us to see in Romans 6 is that if we die with Christ, we also rise with Him. It's the theology of participation. We participate in His death – that is, His death on the cross was our death to our old selves. And, thus, we shall surely participate in His resurrection if we have believed in Him, both who He is and what He has accomplished.

Notice what he says in Romans 6:8-11.

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

This is where the Messiah has been ever since the glory of the first Easter day. He is alive again, with a life that death cannot touch.

When Jesus called Jairus's daughter back to life, or when Lazarus was called forth from the tomb, those who were brought back to life were brought back to the same kind of life. In fact, I sort of feel sorry for those in the New Testament, for Lazarus had to face death all over again, as did those brought to life by Elijah or Elisha.

But not so with Jesus. He didn't come back on this side. He went through death. He wasn't just called back to the starting line. He went through the finish line. He went to life beyond death. He went to a place in His new, resurrected state, where death itself could not touch Him.

The early Christians were very clear about this. Once we are in the Messiah, then we are through death – even though we haven't yet fully died.

Now, of course, those who have died ahead of us haven't yet experienced a bodily resurrection, nor have we – for we are still in our bodies. But just because that's in the future doesn't mean that our final state is any less certain. When the tomb of Jesus was empty, He made certain that our tomb would be empty, too. He began the age of the resurrection.

Those who believe in Jesus stand on resurrection ground. We're not in Adam anymore. We are in the Messiah. We, too, stand on the other side of Easter – so that we can join Paul in saying, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

1 Corinthians 15:50-55

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this imperishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality...Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?

Paul says in Christ we:

1. die to sin
2. but live to God

Have you died with Him that you might rise with Him?

Has His story become your story?