

Death to sin and to sins.

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We trust that the following record of conversation over a deep problem may prove to be a “word in season” to someone who is weary in the strife against sin.

A.—I am in difficulty as to my own personal position regarding certain passages of Scripture, and would much appreciate your help. I want to be honest, and not to assume experiences that do not exist. I hear so many who speak of “victory”, of having attained “the throne position”; others pray that they may be enabled to “crucify” some special sin or disposition. Some affirm that for years they have “never sinned”; others tell me that the “old nature in them has been entirely eradicated”; so that I almost come to doubt whether I have been saved.

B.—In these remarks you have brought together quite a number of important items of doctrine, and unless we deal with one thing at a time, our conversation will probably but deepen your confusion. Suppose you tell me, first of all, what you do unfeignedly believe, not of course the whole range of doctrine, but that which is intimately related to your immediate problem.

A.—That very suggestion seems to give at once a sense of relief. Let me say that I believe with all my heart the teaching of Rom. v. 6-8, that “Christ died for the ungodly”, and that I have been “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. iii. 24). On the question of my full acquittal before God, and of my acceptance in Christ, I am thankful to say I have no doubts at all. My difficulties begin when I get to Rom. vi. There I read, “dead to sin”, “our old man crucified”, “reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord”.

B.—Far be it from me to say one word that would minimize sin, or lead one step away from the highest ideal of holiness of life, but it will probably help you to see things in a clearer light if we observe what is actually said in Rom. vi., remembering as we read that *right division* enters into every phase of the truth.

Suppose we take the opening section that occupies verses 1-14, and divide its teaching up into two columns, according as it speaks of an accomplished *fact*, or of a present or future *effect*. Let us denominate the one column “Root” and the other column “Fruit” and see what is learned therefrom.

Root.	Fruit.
How shall we that are dead to sin We were baptized unto His death. We are buried with him by baptism into death	Live any longer therein? That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. That henceforth we should not serve sin.
Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed If we be dead (or died) with Christ	We believe that we shall also live with Him.
Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace.	Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness.

Let us take the last statement first. What is the one reason given by the apostle for the statement: "Sin shall not have dominion over you?"

A.—It is simply that we are not under law, but under grace.

B.—That indicates a complete change brought about by God alone through Christ, and becomes effective to all who believe. If you should sometimes fail in your walk, and not manifest the new life that is yours, does that cancel that great change?

A.—No, I am still under grace, and treated as such, even though I should at times fail to manifest my new relationship.

B.—Let us go back another step in the passage. You are told to "Reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive unto God". How is this possible?

A.—Why, by the words you have omitted, "through Jesus Christ our Lord".

B.—You mean by that, I suppose, that when Christ died for you as your surety, God reckoned that you died too, and that when He rose from the dead, God reckoned that you rose too? Just exactly, therefore, what have you to do in the matter?

A.—*I* am to reckon what *God* reckons.

B.—Does this imply a kind of fiction?

A.—No, for previously he says most plainly: "We died with Christ"; "Our old man is crucified with Him"; "We are dead to sin".

B.—Does it tell you anywhere in these verses to “put yourself to death”? to “crucify yourself, or your sinful nature”?

A.—No, it rather tells me that all this is done.

B.—What does it actually say to us then?

A.—It tells us not to allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies, because the great change is an accomplished fact. It tells us not to yield our members unto sin, but unto God, as those who are alive from the dead. It tells us that this service is now possible because the old man has been crucified with Christ, and that we may walk in the power of the new life.

B.—It appears, therefore, that we must take as actual truth the statements: “you are dead”, “you are alive unto God”?

A.—Yes, I do not see that we can do anything else with them.

B.—It appears, therefore, that the dominion of sin has been broken?

A.—Yes, the very fact that the old man is crucified leads on to the words: “that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

B.—Now I suggest that you proceed with Rom. vi., still dividing between that which is a solid fact in Christ, and that which should grow therefrom. Observe, in verse 16, that it is assumed that you are now free to yield your service either to sin or to righteousness, and the result of that choice is plainly set forth as fruit—either of shame or of life.

You remember that Eph. ii. 1 should read: “dead *to* trespasses and sins”, and not “dead in trespasses and sins”.

A.—Yes, I remember that the same order of words come in I Pet. ii. 24 & Rom. vi. 10, where the A.V. reads “dead to sins” and “dead to sin”.

B.—Well, will you observe the point of difference between Rom. vi. 2 and Eph. ii. 1, and between Rom. vi. 6 and Col. iii. 9 and Eph. iv. 22?

A.—I will read these verses together:—

“How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein” (Rom. vi. 2).

“And you being dead to trespasses and sins” (Eph. ii. 1).

“Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed” (Rom. vi. 6).

“Ye have put off the old man, with his deeds” (Col. iii. 9).

“Ye have put off concerning the former conversation the old man” (Eph. iv. 22).

B.—Now do you see the great point of difference in these two sets of Scripture?

A.—They appear to me to be speaking of the same thing.

B.—Look again, and think of Root and Fruit.

A.—Yes, I see, Rom. vi. 2 says “dead to *sin*”—that is the root, that is the dominion which has gone. Eph. ii. 1 speaks of being “dead to *sins*”—that is the outcome, the result worked out in our lives. The one is a fact once for all accomplished. The other is a goal towards which the whole of God’s gracious work is leading.

And again, Rom. vi. 6 speaks of the old man being crucified, and the body of sin rendered inoperative, whereas Col. iii. 9 and Eph. iv. 22 speak of his “deeds” and his “former conversation”. The old man is to be “put off” by us, but not “crucified”—that is beyond our powers, and is the sole work of the Son of God, Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

B.—You have answered a part of your own problem in the best possible way. You have allowed entrance to the Word that giveth light.

A.—I thank you for throwing me back upon the Word, and not upon experiences, either your own or that of others.

B.—That question of “experiences” is one which we must deal with separately. It lies very near to the root of a great deal of trouble. For the time being prayerfully ponder Rom. vi.