

Alive to God 1-10-16

Father, we are so glad that we're Your children, that You forgive us when we sin. Help us to receive that forgiveness, to be restored to fellowship w/You. It is beyond our comprehension how a holy God can love sinful man. Amen.

Do you do the crossword in the Journal? Whenever the clue is "sermon topic," the answer is a 3-letter word. The 1st letter is s, the 3rd letter is n. You got it! The answer is always sin. There are lots of other sermon topics – forgiveness, joy, redemption, peace, freedom, love, salvation, but the answer is always SIN. Well, today, the sermon topic IS sin – there is a lot of confusion about sin.

A friend of a friend of mine asked my friend how she could be friends w/me because my friend drinks beer occasionally. I was at a party in Hill City and I heard someone say, "Hide the beer! Pastor Evelyn is here." I assume they did not want me to see it. Someone suggested that what that meant was they were afraid **I'd** drink it. Whatever! But one does wonder what it is they think is sin. Some think they are righteous because they don't smoke, they don't drink, they don't chew & they don't run w/girls who do! As long as we can make a list of all the things we don't do, & think we are good, we are self-righteous. We think we are morally superior. "Oh, we would never do that! (At least not in public!)" Thinking we are good just because we haven't been caught, is delusion.

Self-righteousness is a huge problem. For one thing, everyone has something that they deal with on a daily basis. If it isn't something obvious, it's something hidden. We have a tendency to rate sin – some being worse than others. Yes, it is true Paul says “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.” That does not mean the sexually immoral person is worse than any other person – it means the consequences of sexual sin are worse. And shame accompanies it – wounding people in ways they may not understand.

The 2nd thing about self-righteousness is that when we are in denial of what we are truly like, we never get healed. We may not like to face our “dark side,” but until we do, there is no authentic living – we live a lie. The important piece is we not only must face ourselves flawed, but we also must receive God's love for us just the way we are – sinful, flawed! God doesn't wait for us to clean ourselves up b/4 He loves us. No, He loves us just the way we are.

To talk about sin in terms of lying, swearing, stealing, inappropriate sex, eating too much, drinking too much, is missing the point. I'm not saying it isn't important how we live our life - it is important. Paul says in 2 Cor. 5, “we must all appear b/4 the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” Not everyone thinks that Christians will have to stand b/4 the judgment seat of Christ (they think Paul was talking to the

unsaved Corinthians), nevertheless, I know what I will say if the Accuser (the devil) has any opportunity to try to condemn me. I will say, “I will acknowledge my guilt, but I will plead the blood; the precious blood of Jesus my Lord who took my sins to Calvary.”

Getting back to how we look at sin, the worst thing about sin is not the act; the worst thing is it separates us from God. We are on our own path. God is on the shelf somewhere. We are going our own way. When Beth Moore was in Rapid, she said some things to the young women. She said, “the devil does not want your virginity. He wants your faith. The devil’s not trying to trick you into sinning; he wants to draw you away from God.” It was a powerful word. What she was saying was “there are worse things than losing your virginity - like a hard heart that goes its own way & refuses to ask for forgiveness, & then living w/the guilt & shame.

So is your thinking going along the lines of what Paul thinks the Romans are thinking? In Chapter 5 he has been writing about “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” His rhetorical question at the beginning of Ch. 6 is “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” He answers that question: “By no means! How can someone who died to sin still live in it?” We are baptized into Christ Jesus – therefore, baptized into His death. We are new creatures in Christ – the old is gone! Our reading concludes with – “so you must consider yourselves dead to sin & alive to God. Now you get it, right? Clear as can be??

We aren't stupid; how can this be? Considering ourselves dead to sin – is that mind over matter? Our flesh is alive and well. Don't forget Ch. 7 of Romans is Paul's lament that the things he doesn't want to do are the very things he does. The things he wants to do are the things he does not do. Obviously, Ch.7 is after Ch. 6. So Paul was acting in ways he did not want to act. How does one reconcile all of this? How is it we are dead in Christ & alive to God?

In 1863 the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by Pres. Lincoln. Slavery was legally abolished! Slaves were legally set free. Yet most people continued to live out their years without knowing anything about it. They had chosen to remain slaves.

Our slavery to sin is broken when we are baptized into Christ. We are dead in Christ. Freedom results as we live as dead men in the world. What does this mean for us? Do dead men hold grudges? Do they insist on having things their way? Do they demand their rights? Do dead men live as they please? Dead men do none of these things. But here is the problem, we don't live as if we are dead. Our flesh embodies our sinful nature.

In His book, "In the Grip of Grace, Max Lucado tells a story of the boy who was shooting rocks with a slingshot. He could never hit his target. He was in his Grandma's backyard one day & saw her pet duck. On impulse he took aim and let fly. The stone hit, and the duck was dead. "The boy panicked and hid the bird in the woodpile, only to look up & see his sister watching. After lunch that day, Grandma told his sister to help with the dishes. She responded, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you Johnny?" And she whispered to him, "Remember the duck!" So, Johnny did the dishes. What choice did he have? For the next several weeks he was at the sink often, sometimes for his duty, sometimes for his sin. "Remember the duck," Sally would whisper when he objected. So weary of the chore, he decided that any punishment would be better than washing more dishes, so he confessed to killing duck. "I know, Johnny," his Grandma said. "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgive you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave out of you." He'd been pardoned, but he thought he was guilty. Why? He had listened to the words of his accuser.

What does this mean in practical terms? We sin. We can deny it, hide it, or confess it. When we confess it – “Yes, Lord, I’m guilty. Forgive me.” We take that forgiveness & refuse to listen to the lies of the enemy – “you will never change! You are hopeless! See there you go again! You might as well give up!” No, we’re forgiven. Our goal is to become “obedient from the heart.” In other words, we don’t live trying to get by with as much as possible. We want to obey Him because we love Him. As Paul says in 2 Cor.5, “we make it our aim to please Him.” So each day, when we wake up, we ask, “what can I do to please You today, Lord.” You will get an answer. You’ll know. And then you ask the Holy Spirit to help you do it. It’s a love thing.

We love Him because He first loved us. It was agony. It was shameful. People spit on Him. They cursed Him. A crown of thorns pierced His head. He was bleeding – He’d been whipped, scourged, made to carry His own cross. They mocked Him. Yet, He spoke words from the scene of His death, that have rung through the ages, bringing life & forgiveness, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!”

See from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow & love flow mingled down. Did e’er such love & sorrow meet. Or thorns compose so rich a crown? Love so amazing so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.