

# How to daily live a life pleasing to God—what all the theology about dying to sin really means

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Questions answered in this lesson:

How are we supposed to live our daily lives if our faith in Jesus is real?

If God saves us as a free gift of grace, dependent on Jesus death on the cross, does he really care what we do after we accept him? Can we do whatever we want, knowing we'll be forgiven?

On a more serious note, what if, after we have trusted Jesus as Savior, we truly want to live a life that pleases Him—how do we do that?

To answer the questions, I just asked is vitally important for every Christian if we believe, as the Bible clearly teaches, that one day each of us will stand before Jesus to give an account of our lives. Though we are saved from eternal death by the grace of Jesus, he does have expectations of how we should live after we accept the gift of salvation and that's what this podcast is about.

I'm doing this special edition because what I have recently learned I found so helpful in my Christian life that I wanted to share it.

The context for this lesson is that in addition to teaching the ongoing class of going through the Bible chronologically at our church—and the podcasts on [www.bible805.com](http://www.bible805.com) as a result of them, I also have the privilege of teaching our Pastor's weekly Bible study when he is away.

Currently he is on his summer vacation and the study is going through Romans. I'm not easily intimidated by teaching assignments, I welcome them, but Romans is a challenging book. I've spent many hours in study, thinking about the passages, and asking the Lord, as I do in all my lessons, "What is it that you want me to learn and teach in **this lesson?**"

The answers to that prayer have helped me immensely in the practical living of my Christian life and I was so excited about what I've learned that I wanted to share it with all of you.

The section assigned to me was Romans 6. My lesson last week was on Romans 6:1-14 where it talks about the reality that we are dead to sin

and alive to Christ. This week's lesson and podcast is based on Romans 6:15-23 that I've titled

## How to daily live a life pleasing to God—what all the theology about dying to sin really means

### Key question

As stated, the first part of chapter 6 of Romans talks about us being "dead to sin" and "alive to Christ"

And goes on to talk about in 15-23 that we are "slaves to righteousness"

To be honest, I had NO IDEA what that was talking about—how in the world to make it practical in my daily life. All this talk about being dead to sin—it didn't seem like that was my daily experience.

Lots of theology there, one can hide behind, but our relationship with Jesus is much more than mere theology

So, after lots of as I said prayer, study and thinking about it—I believe the Lord helped me find some very practical answers.

As part of my study, I want to give credit where due—from many commentaries and sources, (one used a lot overall is *Hard Sayings of the Bible* by Kaiser, Davids, Bruce, and Brauch) I'll try to list in the notes—but I won't always give a verbal citation

Let's read the passage and then tackle it

### The passage

Slaves to Righteousness in the NIV

<sup>15</sup> What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!<sup>16</sup> Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. <sup>18</sup> You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

<sup>19</sup> I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as

you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. <sup>20</sup> When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. <sup>21</sup> What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! <sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**This entire passage can be summed up in the idea that we are dead to sin, no longer slaves to sin and are challenged to be slaves to righteousness in our everyday lives**

The words are obvious—no lengthy explanations needed here

What I found difficult is WHAT IN THE WORLD does that mean in everyday life!!!???

I know I'm a Christian, I know Jesus saved me, but when I mouth off when I get angry or frustrated, sin certainly doesn't seem to be dead in me?

Is Jesus not doing what He is supposed to? Did this "dead to sin thing" not work for me?

Again, very excited because I discovered some answers this week that have really been life-changing for me, here we go

**I'd like to try to explain it in 2 ways**

#1 A bit technical involving the use of the Greek language in this passage that is the theological foundation—this is brief, but important

#2 Some practical illustrations—that I hope will make it come alive and doable—several them, but I trust they will make it all make practical, understandable, and I hope will change your life to put this passage into practice

**#1 the Technical understanding of the Greek**

Greek is an extremely precise language with moods and tenses more fine-tuned than we

have in English. In most instances the English (and other languages) translation is useful enough—but for some of the more complex passages, drilling down to the Greek is useful. This is one of those places.

In the first part of chapter 6, the passages that talk about us being dead in Christ are in what is called the **indicative mood**

In the Greek language, **the indicative mood is used to factual assertions**

Paul is saying that, it is a **FACT** that believers are dead to sin, freed from sin and crucified with Christ

**BUT>>>>>and here is what is important>>>>>**

In in other parts the Greek language shifts when it talks about the idea that believers might no longer be enslaved to sin and might walk in the newness of life

These statements are in the **subjunctive mood**  
***The subjunctive mood is the mood of possibility and potentiality. The action described may or may not occur, depending upon circumstances.***

**This is the KEY to understanding and applying the passage**

We'll have some examples that will make it clear in a minute

Here is what an understanding of the Greek tells us:

Our position in Christ (dead to sin, alive in Him because of his death and resurrection—symbolized [a picture of it, not the cause of it] by baptism) **is a FACT**—a present and eternal reality

**HOWEVER,.....**

Our living a life of growing freedom from sin is **"only present as a possibility that must be actualized."**

- Our living a life of growing freedom from sin is **"only present as a possibility that must be actualized."**

- Can be summed up in these two contrasting verses that introduce this section:



**One other example—While working on this I read an interview with a navy SEAL Platoon commander**

**<https://theweek.com/articles/576599/8-secrets-grit-resilience-courtesy-navy-seals>**

What are SEALs for those perhaps unfamiliar:

Definition: AMERICAN MILITARY: A Naval Special Warfare unit who is trained for unconventional warfare; "SEAL is an acronym for Sea Air and Land" SEAL.

To be even be accepted into their training is an accomplishment, but men in the class the commander who spoke was in Out of 256 only 16 graduated — and James was one of them. Recommend reading the whole thing, but a few excerpts from it—that relate to making the goal of our Christian lives practical

#### **SEAL VALUE: Motivation for becoming a SEAL**

When asked what to do to prepare, was it increase physical strength, number of pushups, speed in running that made the difference, he was asked

**No—drive and desire far more important**

Studies show physical endurance not nearly as much to do with actual physical ability—but the mental strength to believe you can do it

Application: in the Christian life—not the actions we check off—ultimately how much do we want to make being dead to sin, alive to Christ, a slave of Christ real in our lives is key.

**WE MUST decide this is THE MOST IMPORTANT thing to us.** A SEAL can't go into training halfway if he wants to make it. We can't DIE (that is a serious word) to sin if we want to keep partially alive in it. Just a little sinning .....a delusion—will get to that more later.

#### **SEAL VALUE: Plan and focus on improvement**

SEALS are “the sort of people who survive are the sort of people who prepare for the worst and practice ahead of time. They've done the research, or built the shelter, or run the drills. They look for the exits and imagine what they will do. . . . These people don't deliberate during calamity because they've already done the deliberation the other people around them

are just now going through.”

And how do you become an expert? **By focusing on your weaknesses, not your strengths.**

(how different than always telling people they are wonderful when they aren't)

SEALs take this very seriously, doing a debrief after each mission to review what happened and spending 90 percent of the time discussing what they could do better next time. His quote: ***When you go out on a mission, you always acknowledge your successes but much more important than that is you take a hard look at your failures and are willing to accept criticism. One of the key strengths of the SEAL Teams is the culture of constant self-improvement. No one ever says, "That's good enough." On almost every real-world mission I was on — even the most successful ones — we spent 90 percent of our post-mission debrief focusing on what we did wrong or could have done better.***

#### **Reminded me of one of my favorite C.S. Lewis quotes**

First the quote and then how I'm applying it with SEAL advice in mind

***Surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of man he is? . . . If there are rats in a cellar you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only presents them from hiding. In the same way the suddenness of the provocation does not make me an ill-tempered man: it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am.***

#### **How to deal with the Rats in the cellar of our lives**

The Rats in my cellar are some people I work with in my regular job that I have lots of problems with. Specifics aren't important, but the rats appear with how I talk about them when upset or frustrated. I say things I shouldn't in ways I shouldn't—I hate reacting and talking like I do. I want to change that—after debriefing one negative explosion fortunately, not in public as I was working on this lesson...here is what I learned

Considering this lesson, how to deal with these

and other rats

I can't avoid turning on the lights so I don't see the rats—things will come up; I can't ignore it—they won't go away

Can't tell yourself I will not see rats, I will not see rats— for me “I won't talk like that, I won't talk like that” but something comes up, the light goes on and out they come

***I have gone down the stairs and do the hard work of killing the rats***

The cellar of my mouth, where the rats reside, is my heart.

I must work on the attitude in my heart—prepare like the SEALS—I know the situations where I will want to respond inappropriately. I know what causes the response is anger and frustration and a sense of “that's wrong to do.” But I also need to think carefully that in many of these instances I have no authority or control and my negative reactions will only make things worse for all concerned. I need to think through, practice, rehearse POSITIVE ways of dealing with things and in many instances it is to keep my mouth shut and do the work I am responsible to do. and was reminded of

The tranquility prayer in AA-- useful here change what I can, accept what I can't wisdom to know the difference

Also there are many passages in the Bible about the tongue, not letting corrupt communications come out of my mouth, whatever is good, kind, lovely—to think on that, commands that our words be wise and healing—many verses I've copied out and am working to memorize and THINK THROUGH how they specifically apply. Not just specific verses, but passages that talk about when it is time to simply walk away. Jesus did that when people did not respond, as did Paul and others and to pray and think about how these apply. But whatever I do, the mouth needs some rat poison.

Won't be easy, but I have a plan and working the plan bit by bit I trust the rat infestation will eventually die out.

2 more thoughts that apply that I've found helpful:

**From *the Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle quoted in commentary on Romans by James Edwards**

“... Aristotle offers the following insight on slavery in moral and spiritual matters. Each action which we do in life is voluntary, he says, but with each voluntary action our disposition becomes increasingly involuntary. We continue, of course, to make choices, but over a period of time, the choices are influenced by a disposition that which is increasingly determined, either for better or worse! In Paul's words, **you are slaves to the one whom you obey!**

**C.S. Lewis, from *Mere Christianity***

Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway lien or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible.”

To kill my rats, to become a person of kindness and acceptance, instead of responding in snarky anger—I can be quiet and pray for the situation. I can't lie to myself and say some situations aren't horrid when they are, but if I can't do anything about them, I can work hard to be the best representative of Jesus I can be in the situation or if it is time to walk away from all or part to do that graciously and gracefully.

**One last SEAL example**

Summarized in his statement: **Give help and get help**

His example: The people who make it through [SEAL training] are the **guys to whom the team matters more than anything, including their own pain**. Many of the guys who quit . . . are, on the other hand, people who frankly just don't care as much about that stuff. You'll be carrying a log in training that weighs a few

hundred pounds and you're carrying it with six guys for two and a half hours. Among other reasons, those who quit don't seem to feel much remorse when they duck out from behind that log and ring the bell so they can take a shower and be done. Guys who ultimately make it would never even think about doing that because, even if they were in such dire pain, they just would never do that to their teammate.

APPLICATION HERE: we are on a team, in the BODY, the church and we need to remind ourselves that what we do has a great impact on others, and we are important to each other. We need to carry each other's burdens, not shoot our wounded, and never leave anyone behind.

### **I used the story about the SEALS—because it I liked the story, but there are many Biblical precedents and similar analogies**

Paul often used military analogies  
“fight the good fight” Put on the whole armor of God, I buffet my body and make it my slave...  
To actualize, to make real our relationship to Christ will take work\*\*\*Summarize, challenge IN all the Bible—always—**God does what we cannot, but he won't do what he has commanded us to do**

ONE MORE analogy—my husband has type 2 diabetes—he's a big guy, 6'3 and almost 300 lbs.—very muscular and I think incredibly good looking, but a very bad weight for blood sugar. Told if he didn't lose weight this time, he's having to start taking insulin—somehow that got to him. We went to see a dietician and he was put on a very strict, for two weeks a liquid diet—they call them “shakes” but that is a stretch of the word. To be a supportive wife (honestly, I need to get my weight down also) I'm doing it with him. It's been two weeks and he's down 20+ pounds, but we still have a long way to go—so we progress to a more varied, but still challenging program.

As I was doing this lesson and thinking about the diet, I realized it is also a perfect analogy of the balance between what God did for our in securing our salvation on the cross and what we need to do to make it real in our daily lives. On the diet we have taken advantage of an

extraordinary formulation of these high-protein liquid meals (I still can't call them “shakes”)—someone had to create it, balance it all, produce and package it—**we couldn't do that**. We can only accept what they did, but the shake sitting on the shelf, or a shake part of the time and burgers and fries the rest, won't work. **We have to follow the plan**—we must make decisions ahead, keep future goals in mind—totally clean out the cupboards and refrigerator, no eating out, tell our friends and class at church what we are doing—get back to it when we fail—talk, pray and strategize how we will be people who eat healthy and exercise for the rest of our lives to be all we can be to serve our Lord. The sum of all those things—taking advantage of what we couldn't do ourselves but participating in it as much as we are able, has put us on a track of ever-increasing health.

**I Hope these analogies help make the theology practical—it has helped me so much. I no longer feel I was missing out on some mystical death to self thing—in some ways harder because I must take responsibility for my spiritual life—but I know it's the true meaning of the biblical passage**

Christ has done for us what we couldn't—but that doesn't mean we sit around waiting for heaven—to quote from our passage:

*Rom. 6:19* **I speak this way, using the illustration of slaves and masters, because it is easy to understand: just as you used to be slaves to all kinds of sin, so now you must let yourselves be slaves to all that is right and holy.**

Being a slave to something isn't easy, as the examples I hope have helped show, it's work yes, but there is no better way to live—anyone who has a good marriage will tell you that it is worth all the effort, anyone who has lost a significant amount of weight and able to get off insulin and high blood pressure medication will tell you it was worth that, any SEAL who suffers through the initial training and ongoing challenges is incredibly proud to serve his country in the very best way also.

All these goals were achieved with determination and work—and to maintain them takes continuing work—but they all pale

in comparison with the joy and peace that comes from a growing relationship with the Lord that we make more real every day as we make decisions to be obedient to His Word and to become more like Him

The end of our passage sums it up:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom. 6:23 or as the Message puts it:

***But now that you've found you don't have to listen to sin tell you what to do and have discovered the delight of listening to God telling you, what a surprise! A whole, healed, put-together life right now, with more and more of life on the way! Work hard for sin your whole life and your pension is death. But God's gift is real life, eternal life, delivered by Jesus, our Master. Romans 6: 22-23 The Message (MSG)***

The choice is yours: like when the children of Israel came out of Egypt—God gave them his laws and promised life and blessings if they obeyed, but judgment and punishment if they sinned.

God has saved us: we can have a life leading to sin and death or one, though maybe not as easy, leading to an abundant life in Christ now and forever

Like the OT prophets challenged the people then—I want to give you the same challenge: Choose LIFE!

**That's all for now,**

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Until next time, I'm Yvon Prehn, your fellow pilgrim, writer and teacher for Jesus.

I'd like to close with this benediction:

May you know the invitation of God, to

move

-from confusion to clarity

-from wandering to rest

-from loneliness to knowing you are loved

-from turmoil to peace

From wherever you are on your spiritual journey to a growing knowledge of God's Word and in your personal relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit . Amen