

SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE

Being Holy in an Unholy World

“The Price of Power”

Romans 6:5-14

On my very first missions trip to South America back in 1987 when I had the great privilege of leading a group of 11 men into the little land-locked country of Paraguay to help build a church...no one on our team could speak single sentence in Spanish.

I mean we were just a bunch of good ole Southern Indiana boys who had no experience at all in cross-cultural relationships. And here we were traveling to South America to work and minister among a group of people who spoke Spanish.

How would we be able to communicate? What would we do if we got lost and needed to ask for directions? How could we quietly ask someone, “Where’s the bathroom?”

So this is what we did. One of the members of our church, a high school teacher, had grown up in Ecuador. His parents were missionaries there and so he spoke Spanish fluently. He gave us a crash course in Spanish—a one night lesson.

He gave us a paper that had 20 simple sentences or phrases in Spanish that he encouraged us to memorize. He said, *“If you’ll learn these 20 simple statements then you’ll be able to survive in Paraguay.”*

Now one of the sentences on his “Top Twenty” list that he taught us to say in Spanish was *“¿Cuánto cuesta?”* Any Spanish speakers here this morning who would like to translate that for us? It means, *“How much does it cost?”*

That’s a very important phrase to know if you’re a first-time visitor in a foreign country as you search for souvenirs. **How much does it cost?** But that’s not just an important question to know how to ask if you’re a first-time traveler to South America or to any other foreign land; it’s an important question to know how to ask for most ventures

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in life. **Everything of value costs something.** There is a law of exchange that rules in every sphere of life and this is that law: **To get, you must give.**

It rules in the **business** world. If I want to buy a house or a car or a boat or a hat, I must pay the price that it costs. It rules in the **intellectual** world. If a young man or a young woman wants a good education, if they want to be properly prepared for some particular profession, they must pay the price of going to class, staying up late to study, saying no to a lot of things that would be a lot of fun so they can complete their assignments and do their work and get their degree.

It holds true in the **spiritual** realm. We like to say that salvation is free. No, it’s not! Yes, it comes free to us. It is called *“the gift of God”* (Romans 6:23 New International Version). Eternal life! But let me remind you that it cost God the Father the life of His Son.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 New International Version). **Everything of value costs something.** That’s what I want to talk about this morning as we begin to wind down this series of sermons entitled: **Swimming Against The Tide: Being Holy in and Unholy World.**

Do you understand that being holy will cost you something? There is a price to pay if you really want spiritual power in your life. Now I’m convinced that it is God’s will for every person in this auditorium to be holy. He exhorts us in His Word, *“Be holy, because I am holy”* (1st Peter 1:16 New International Version) and one of the blessings we receive when we allow God make us into holy men and holy women is power.

Jesus said to the disciples of His day, *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you”* (Acts 1:8 New International Version). He was talking about spiritual power in our lives—power over sin and selfishness in our lives, power to not be ruled and pushed around by our lusts and passions, power over our tongues and our tempers, power in prayer, power in winning others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. But, listen, there is a price to pay if you want that kind of spiritual power and that’s what I

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want to talk about this morning.

What is that price? What does it cost? I believe the answer to that question is found in a passage of Scripture in the book of **Romans**. Please take your Bibles and turn to the book of **Romans**, the **6th chapter**, and I'll begin reading starting with that **5th verse**.

If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Romans 6:5-14 New International Version

Let me see if I can simplify this a bit. It seems to me that Paul is saying that the Spirit-filled life involves at least three things. **(1) You Have To Be Dead To Self; (2) Alive To God; and (3) Wholly Available To Be His Instrument For Righteousness.**

Now let me sharpen the focus a bit and look at what Paul means in respect to each of these areas.

Dead To Self The very first thing Paul mentions in this passage of Scripture as he talks about living the Spirit-filled life is this matter of dying to self. He says in **verse 6**, ***“For we know that our old self was crucified with him.”***

There is an individual who lives inside each one of us whom the Bible refers to as **“self.”** Paul talks about this “other person” who lives inside of us in **chapter 7 of Romans**. He writes in **verse 23**, ***“There is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me”*** (New Living Translation).

In other places, he refers to it as the **“old man”** in US (Colossians 3:9 King James Version) OR our **“old self”** (Colossians 3:9 New International Version) OR OUR **“earthly nature”** (Colossians 3:5 New International Version) OR OUR **“carnal”** nature (Romans 7:14 King James Version).

But who he is referring to is this “individual” who lives within us who so desperately wants to sit alone on the throne of our hearts and our lives, this “individual” within us who is always tugging at our heartstrings crying out, ***“I want what I want. I want it my way. I want it how I like it. I want to do what I want to do.”***

Have you ever rubbed shoulders with that “individual”? Have you ever seen him raise his ugly head in some meeting, in some argument at home, in some decision you have to make about your future or how you're going to spend your money or how you're going to spend your time? Of course, you have!

This earthly nature, this carnal spirit, this sinful and selfish person lurks in the hearts and the minds of every man and woman alive and you're going to have to contend with him. Let me tell you a little bit about his nature—three things.

He covets praise. He thrives on acclamation. He hungers for recognition and if doesn't get it from others he'll get mad and sulk or conjure up ways to heap it upon himself.

He is immensely impressed with his own importance, his own wisdom, his own knowledge, his own shrewdness; but what he wants more than anything else is for others to be impressed with him and notice him and praise him.

He may put on the garb of humility and use the language of modesty, but

his ear is nonetheless keenly tuned to listen for and revel in words of praise. In fact, he pretty much does what he does in order to get applause and acclamation.

Now here's a second thing about his nature. He shrinks away from criticism. He is extremely touchy and sensitive. He is easily slighted, quickly hurt, chronically defensive. Even the slightest suggestion that he could be wrong or that he might have blundered sends him immediately into attack mode in which he defends his actions and explains his reasons and buries you with all kinds of "evidence" as to his being right.

He is always concerned with, "*What will people think? What will people say? What will people believe?*" He lives in constant fear and concern over this huge, vague, awful group known as "they."

In fact, he doesn't dare do a lot of things—good things, right things, needful things—because he's afraid someone might think that he's odd or peculiar or some kind of religious fanatic.

There is a third telltale earmark of "self" that is always there in one form or another. He is assertive. He dearly loves to have his own way and will do just about anything to get it. He has his plans and ambitions and pity the person, be it man or God, who gets in his way.

Do you recognize this individual who Paul is talking about who lives in you? He says there is only one way to deal with him if we truly want God's blessing and God's presence and God's power in our lives. **We have to crucify self.**

We can't coddle him or compromise with him or coexist with him. Paul says there is only one thing to do if you want to be Spirit-filled. You have to crucify him. You have to lay him on the altar of sacrifice and allow him to die.

Jesus said it like this: "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it*" (Luke 9:23-24 New International Version).

I just want to remind you this morning that every person's heart is a battlefield. If self has possession, Jesus is lovingly and persistently striving to get possession. And if possession has been yielded to Jesus, I can guarantee you that self will do everything in its power to try to take back the possession of your heart.

And so in every heart there is a **throne** and a **cross** and each one of them is occupied. If Jesus is on the throne, ruling, then self is on the cross, dying. But if self is being allowed to live and reign and rule, guess who it is that is actually sitting on the throne of your heart? It's not Jesus! Self is sitting on that throne and in the words of the writer of **Hebrews**, we are "*crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace*" (Hebrews 6:6 New International Version).

I don't want to do that, do you? And so this is what it's going to cost you if you truly want spiritual power in your life. **You have to say no to self and allow him to be put to death by the power and presence of God in your life.**

Alive To Christ That's the second thing Paul talks about in this passage of Scripture in **Romans 6**. He says, "*Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus...Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life*" (Romans 6:11,13 New International Version).

Dead to self—but alive to Christ! *What does it mean to "be alive to Christ"?* I believe the apostle **Paul** describes that very clearly in **Galatians 2:20**. Listen to what he says. "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (New International Version).

It is to live your life in such a way that whatever God says to you, whatever He asks you to do, wherever He asks you to go, whatever He prompts you to do, you do it...because you live in total trust and faith and confidence in Him. The default setting of your life is to say "yes" to Jesus—always, everywhere, anywhere, regardless of the consequences.

The famous Italian tenor **Luciano Pavarotti** who passed away not long ago said that his life was forever shaped by some words his father spoke to him when he was a very young man.

His father, a very common man, a baker, was the one who first introduced young Luciano to the wonders of song. He urged his son to work very hard to develop his voice and although they were a very poor family his dad scrounged and scrimped enough to find the money to pay for his son to receive some vocal training.

But when you grow up in a poor family you understand the need to be able to have a job that will put bread on the table, so Pavarotti enrolled in a teacher's college when he became of age and taught school for a couple of years but his passion for music just wouldn't let go of him.

Finally, he said one day to his father, *"Shall I be a teacher or a singer?"*

His father replied, *"Luciano, if you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. For life, you must choose one chair."*

He said, *"I chose one. It took seven years of study and frustration before I made my first professional appearance. It took another seven to reach the Metropolitan Opera. Commitment! That's the key. You have to choose one chair."*

Being alive to Christ means that you say to Him, *"Jesus, I'm going to sit in Your chair. No matter what it costs me, no matter what I have to do, no matter where I have to go, no matter how big or small the sacrifice, I'm going to sit in Your chair and be Your man or be Your woman and follow You wherever You lead."*

Dead to self! Alive to Christ!

Wholly Available To Be His Instrument For Righteousness.

Look at that last part of **verse 13**. *"Offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."*

In **Romans 12** Paul says it like this: *"I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship"* (Romans 12:1 New International Version).

Now here's the part I want to emphasize—"wholly" available to God. If you're taking notes this morning, underline that word "wholly"—wholly available to God to be His instrument for righteousness. No holding back! Not just a part of your heart, not just a part of your life, not just a part of your self—but wholly available to God to be His instrument for righteousness.

I stumbled across a poem recently that was written by European pastor, a very eloquent man, who came to the realization that he had not been fully following Jesus Christ. In much of his life "self" was still very much in control.

But he came to a fork in the road and he realized that ultimately God will have all of us or He will have none of us—that no man can serve two masters. And so he describes in this poem his struggle and ultimate victory along the highway of holiness. Listen to his words.

Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow,
That a time could ever be
When I let the Saviour's pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answered:
"All of self, and none of Thee."

Yet He found me: I beheld Him
Bleeding on the accursed tree;
Heard Him pray, "forgive them, Father,"
And my wistful heart said faintly:
"Some of self and some of Thee."

Day by day, His tender mercy,
Healing helping, fully and free,
Sweet and strong, and oh, so patient,
Brought me lower, while I whispered:
"Less of self and more of Thee."

Higher than the highest heaven,
Deeper than the deepest sea,

**Lord, Thy love at last has conquered;
Grant me now my soul's desire,
*"None of self and all of Thee."***

Where are you on this journey? Self dies hard. But here's the price of power—spiritual power: **You Have To Be Dead To Self; Alive To God;** and **Wholly Available To Be His Instrument For Righteousness.**