

“Wanted: Dead *and* Alive” (Romans 6:3-5)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Alleluia! Christ is risen! [wait for response] And because He lives, He works in us so that we become His sanctified people. Let’s talk about that. Perhaps you’ve seen it in a movie, the old bounty-hunter signs “Wanted: Dead or Alive”...either bring the bad guy in for justice or execute that justice yourself...either way bring him in dead or alive and you’ll get your reward. Dead or alive, it doesn’t matter. Interestingly though in our ongoing thematic consideration of our lives rooted in Christ, Romans 6:3-5 has God telling us that He has a sign over His baptized children and the wording is slightly different: God wants us both ways, dead *and* alive. ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Chapters 6-8 of Romans have been touted as the most important three chapters in the entire Bible on Christian sanctification. The entire context of Romans is crucial of course. For example, Paul won’t touch sanctification until justification is viewed as our foundation in Romans 3-5, but when we get to chapter 6 we get to the rest of God’s work of grace and see what our lives in Christ look like when we are converted to Christ.

What does *not* change in all of these things is that St. Paul continues to teach on matters of faith. We are counted as righteous when through the gift of God called “faith” we cling to Christ as our justification: you are declared righteous on account of Christ for you. Now believe it! And thank God that He doesn’t have you fall back on your will as that which you must animate, but that He wills that you would believe...He has chosen you (John 15:16) so that now by grace you may believe in Him and indeed with a newly created will, you may choose Him. That is, by grace God also causes us you to experience choosing Him so that even the Lutheran Christian can sing, “I have decided to follow Jesus!” though the hymn pales in comparison to the more orthodox hymns. But the point remains, in the same way that John teaches in 1st John 4:19 that we love because He first loved us, we may be bold to say that we choose God only because He has first chosen us. His will to save us amounts to our new will to desire salvation. This faith is the gift of God so that no one can boast.

I review the doctrine to be able to say that it is no different when it comes to sanctification. He chooses, so you choose; He loves, so you love; He forgives, so you forgive. Sanctification is Christ for you just as much as justification is Christ for you. On account of Christ, you live a new life with new desires and new impulses even while the old ones are still there raising havoc; the constant *tentatio* or affliction that every true Christian must experience if they are the real McCoy created in Christ Jesus.

But all of these things are matters of faith. This seems painfully obvious. Imagine that, you’ve just heard another preacher say that this is a matter of faith...how condescending could a preacher be? No duh! Of course it’s a matter of faith. That’s why we’re all gathered here in chapel today. This is all a matter of faith, but when it comes to sanctification, even though we

may say it's a matter of faith in Christ until we turn blue in the face, we resist this truth with all our might, especially when it comes to sanctification.

We behave hypocritically. We don't want it to be a matter of faith. We want it rather to be a matter of how we feel. We want to feel like better Christians, stronger Christians, more spiritual Christians, more loving Christians...we are hawks when it comes to eyeing our spiritual progress and reasons to consider ourselves more and more Christian by what we do. Paul says we walk by faith, not by sight, but we want to see and feel our sanctification. We want to see holiness and feel holiness, and then we'll finally believe that we are sanctified the way we ought to be.

But this is a losing proposition. This is not the way it works, if I may use such mechanical, functional, and pragmatic language. But things do indeed "work" a certain way...even sanctification, but it isn't your work, so it cannot rely on your feelings and your observations...if it did, then it would no longer be the work of God.

God, however unlike you and me, is not inconsistent, but completely consistent: He still calls us to live by faith. So what does sanctification actually *do...how does it play out?* Answer: by faith you don't get back to your performance, but you get back to what God did: and this is not just another Lutheran thing, but a Romans chapter 6 thing, it is a Word of God thing. Sanctification gets back to the fact that God baptized you and when He did – the master of time and space and all reality – connected you to the death of His Son. And when He did, you died.

So see the sign: God wants you DEAD! That is what you are called to believe. Elsewhere in 1st Corinthians 7:39 St. Paul uses an illustration: think of being married. If you die, however, you are no longer married. Once upon a time, because you were born in sin and in sin did your mother conceive you, you and sin were such pals and lovers that you got married. You were married to sin, sin was your spouse, you lived with sin, you dined with sin, you were one with sin. But when God baptized you, God said, you died. The marriage is over. God has provided the out. This is more severe than a divorce. You, the spouse of sin, are now a deceased spouse. The partnership is dead.

And you know what? If you insist that you must feel it, sense it, spiritualize it, be holier in order for this to be true, then you are not walking by faith. This truth of sanctification requires faith: what God says is true! As surely as God created the heavens and the earth by His Word; as surely as Jesus rose from the grave; just as definitely it is true: when God baptized you, you were buried with Christ, you were joined to the death of Christ who died with your sin on Him...you've died to sin. The marriage is over. This is the truth. This is the Word of God. This is just the way it is: sin is no longer the boss of you. God has said He wants you to live this way: you're dead and that's just the way it is. When sin comes calling, you can show sin your sign and say, "I'm dead, get lost!"

But here's the thing: since you've been joined to Christ and have died with Him, we have no choice but to continue to know the ramifications of being bound to the Lord. He also conquered death and rose from death: He lives! And this means: so do you! You are now alive, but this life has nothing to do with your old marriage, you've remarried and your bridegroom is

Jesus. And He just has a certain way about Him. He is all love. He is all goodness. He is all beauty. Now your new life is like His. That's just the way it is. This is why Christians keep serving, they keep forgiving, they keep praying, they keep worshipping, they keep doing good. But it is the life of Christ they know. It is knowing that God has put another sign around you: it says "Forgiven," "Redeemed," and "Loved." And to sum it all up, it is a sign that only needs one word, "Alive!" So you have two signs and if you prefer, you may just make them into one big sign. It is the way God wants you to live by faith...this is the way God wants you period: Dead *and* Alive. Through faith in Christ, when the sin nature is aroused, we see our DEAD sign; and through faith in Christ -- when we're mindful of our baptism and our new lives in Christ -- we see our ALIVE sign...this is who you are. This is sanctification. It doesn't lose track of your status in Christ and the way God sees it: **"Wanted: Dead *and* Alive!"**