

Romans 6:11-14 A Call to Holy Living

Introduction

A couple of years ago I was talking to a prominent pastor from Ghana about the phenomenal growth of the Christian Church in West Africa, particularly in his country and in neighbouring Nigeria, together with the extraordinary missionary zeal that has been witnessed in recent decades with their people church-planting around much of the globe. He explained what had motivated the sacrificial service rendered by a good number of these people. It was simple when Protestant missionaries first came to the Gold Coast (Ghana) in the 1820s onwards their life expectancy was on average about eighteen months and the standard practice for many of them was to bring their coffin with them. You knew how it would end! Yet the ships that came to take the coffins home for burial brought new missionaries to take their place. This visible witness was as powerful as anything the missionaries said or did in their short times of service. They in the most dramatic fashion had died to their old lives in their home countries and given their lives in service to God in the cause of Christ and world evangelisation. In a much less dramatic fashion there are people who become disillusioned with life in their homeland and choose to migrate to another country in search of a better quality of existence. Many Scots have done that over the centuries to North America in particular, or later to Australia and New Zealand. For the majority although they keep in touch with family and friends back home they are committed to a new life from which there is no going back, it is a chapter closed. Yet there is another illustration more close to home for many of us who have lived all our lives in our home country. The day we got married is a day of permanent transition. We were single people who could live on our own freely and ultimately only be accountable to ourselves. However, a day came when we decided in full agreement with another person that God had brought us together and that this relationship would be made permanent through the formal and solemn commitment to Christian marriage. In theory, a couple could live as two single people living in separate rooms in a marital home, eating all their meals alone and taking separate holidays or days out with completely separate financial arrangements for attending to their bills and other payments. Yet although other people might not feel free to comment to the couple concerned about their lifestyle choices it might be wondered why if a couple chose to get married they did not wish to invest in some quality time together. The old life as a single person is dead- over. A new life as a married couple has begun. For most us there were struggles as we had issues to work through in the first year or two of changes that needed to be made now that we were married. But we made the necessary adjustments as the old life was over and a new one had begun. Now any relationship like the Christian life is a work in progress, but it operates upon the conviction that the old has passed and a new way of life has begun. This assumption undergirds Paul's comments here in Romans 6:11-14. When a person has committed their life to follow Jesus they have committed to a set of convictions about priorities and values; about what is really important and shapes our lives compared to lesser options that might have been chosen by another person. The apostle has explained what Jesus did for us on the cross in the previous three chapters of Romans, but it is here being translated into daily living about its transformative impact on who we are and how we approach the challenges that cross our pathway.

1. The Call (Romans 6:11)

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11). How many times has Paul asked his hearers or readers to **do** something in this letter so far? It is worth pondering for a moment! There has been much information about what human beings have done, with a primary focus on human sinfulness and the need for the Gospel. There has been a significant amount of explanation of what God has done for us in Jesus because of His great love for us. Yet the remarkable thing when we look closely at this letter of Paul is that he does not begin asking the recipients of the letter to do anything at all until this verse, Romans 6:11. What is the significance of this? What does he want us to grasp here?

(a) The Priority of what God has done

In Western culture a large proportion of us are by nature activists of one form or another. When a problem arises for many of us our natural inclination is how quickly can I fix this and what needs to be done by me to fix it, rather than how did the problem arise in the first place and how can I prevent it reoccurring? ‘How to...’ books and manuals have proved to be very popular over the years. However, it has been determined that many of us despite our desire to engage in D.I.Y. of various kinds are not too good at it so simpler guides are required. There appeared a new genre of literature, for example *Computing for Dummies* appeared to attempt to communicate the principles that have escaped some of us in more advanced literature. A quick check online while writing this message revealed that even this literature has become more specialised targeting older people, the age group perceived to have most difficulties adjusting to the advances in modern technologies! However, while the intentions behind such literature may be laudable not everybody is suitably gifted to fixing computers, rewiring houses or some other similar tasks! There is a place also for recognising the need to employ other people to assist us.

In the Christian life we can be tempted by the quick fix approach to spirituality. ‘How to live the Spirit –filled life’ ‘How to wake up every Monday morning full of joy’; ‘How to be constantly victorious over sin’ ‘How to overcome all your struggles / addictions / depression/ disorder etc’; I was quite surprised as far back as the 1980s visiting Christian bookshops in the USA to find that the overwhelming majority of books were of this kind. Thankfully they are less popular over here in the UK to this day, but what happens in the USA tends to transfer over here in time. If Christians are convinced that their growth in the faith is simply a matter of finding the right book to read or practitioner to follow, or having some spiritual experience after prayer, beyond which all their difficulties and problems go away then they will quickly become disillusioned or disappointed. Paul here in Romans 6 and 7 will make it very clear that our struggles to overcome personal weaknesses and temptations to sin will be with us till the day we die. We through the Holy Spirit, he will explain, can be victorious in and through our daily struggles and challenges, but the battle will continue every day you are alive. What is most important to grasp is that we stand on the solid and unshakeable foundation of what God has done for us in Jesus. Our security is not in our accomplishments, past, present or future, but on what He has done for us. Our minds are constantly assailed by advertising messages urging us to look like this or dress like that or...a series of irrelevant communications! Forget them all! God loves you as you are – a human being created in His image –period! Therefore, you are of infinite worth – do you need to hear that today. God invested the very best He had in sending Jesus to die in your place and mine on the cross –do you think He will fail to give you the assistance you need to complete the journey of faith till the day He calls you home? Of course not! So many of us in the workplace can feel overwhelmed with the demands of things to do, people to see, a myriad of calls to make, e-

mails to respond to and the unending reams of paperwork. We can become overly anxious and fearful about how we can cope for another five, ten, or however many years left in the workplace. At such times we need to take a momentary step back to remind ourselves who we are in Christ, why we are here, and the real purpose of work and our lives in the different spheres here on earth. It is no accident that we are nearly halfway through Paul's letter here before he asks us to do anything. It is God's work supremely that united us with Christ. It is God's work supremely that will by His Spirit equip and enable you and me to accomplish all we need to do each day of our lives. Although there are a small proportion of people who need the metaphorical 'kick up the backside' to do anything at all with their lives, the vast majority of us need to be reminded afresh of all that God has done for us and our security in His amazing investment in our lives from before we were born till into eternity.

(b) **The pause to reflect on our position in Christ** (Romans 6:11) *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.* What it is that Paul wants us to stop and reflect on in the light of what God has done for us in Jesus? He lists two important things that we might have lost sight of in the busyness of our daily lives as Christians and which he understands as the secret of living a holy life as a believer. (i) We are dead to sin this is something he has already unpacked earlier in Romans 6, that is that our lives as Christians have begun a new chapter since we trusted Jesus. We cannot go back to the old life. We will still be tempted to sin and at times will sin in thought and word and deed, but its hold over us has been broken and with God's help we have begun a new life with Him. The picture of our baptism alluded to in 6:3-4 is the vivid illustration of this point. We must, therefore, remember that the apostle is making a statement of fact. *We are dead to sin...* It is **not** a duty we are urged to attend to or a command to be obeyed, but a statement of fact. It does **not** mean we are not tempted to sin, but no sin has effective power over me. In Christ I have the resources to accomplish all He calls me /us to do. This side of heaven I will still be a sinner but I accept as a fact that my life has changed once I trusted Jesus. I have begun my new life in Him and the old chapter is now closed. (ii) We are alive to God Paul in Romans 6:1-14 had been repeating in slightly different vocabulary the same point that some of his first readers needed to grasp more clearly. *We were buried with Him..we too may live a new life* (Romans 6:4); or verse 8 *–we died with Christ...we will also live with Him.* This is a present tense experience here that Paul is describing. His reference to resurrection with Jesus in Romans 6: 4-5 is not to life beyond the grave, which is described in detail elsewhere in Paul's letters, but to the quality of life with Jesus in there and now through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. *Being alive to God* means: **We are reconciled to God.** We are no longer out of fellowship with Him, rather we are friends with God (Romans 5:10). This is a permanent arrangement – outside of Christ our sin separated us from God and we could never have been good enough to rectify the situation, but in Him reconciliation is complete. We will never be the subjects of His wrath or fear eternal separation from Him in eternity because that is impossible because of what Jesus has done. *Being alive to God* means: **We are new creatures in Him** To Nicodemus Jesus explained that it was like being born all over again (John 3); Paul himself put it this way in II Corinthians 5:17-18: ¹⁷ *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!* ¹⁸ *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.* You know when you become a Christian that the Bible comes alive and you begin to grasp what God is saying to us; you value gathering with other Christians for worship as a whole family on a Sunday and where possible on other occasions; you naturally want other people to receive what you have found, even if we can find it difficult to share our faith in words with some people. *Being alive to God* means: **We have a new sense of perspective** we are part of something far

bigger than we could ever imagine. In this immediate context, a local family of approximately 200 adults and children with a few hundred others associated with weekday activities; part of a Baptist family in Scotland of 20-25,000 people, up to 110 million internationally, a part of a wider Evangelical Christian family of 800-900 million people around the globe. You may have only a few Facebook friends- but your Christian family is big! We have a God-centred vision of wanting to play our part in extending His kingdom. Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:9-10: “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, ¹⁰Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.* This begins in us before it touches anyone else. This vision can give us a passion to be the best we can be for God. Paul expressed it this way from prison in Rome, in a letter to some Greek Christians: *Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).* **Being alive to God means: We have an eternal perspective** As Paul expressed it: *For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain (Philippians 1:21);* or as Hebrews 11:8, 10 states concerning Abraham: *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.* We need to be so heavenly minded in order to be of greater earthly use. Of course our feet have to be firmly grounded in the real world but our mind our focus and sense of perspective sees things from God’s perspective. That is who I am is more important than what I do; my priorities should be those informed by biblical values and priorities for family and church family.

2. **The Command** (Romans 6:12-14)

¹²*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness (Romans 6:12-13).* How in practice do we ensure that we can grow in Christ-like maturity and have principles and priorities in line with those of Jesus? Thinking of it in terms of the human body (a) **Cultivating a Christian mind** (our heads) Paul later in this same letter to the Romans will write: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1-2).* With what do you and I fill our minds? There is already an overload of necessary information about life in general, school or work or a wide range of other necessary things. However, in terms of the magazines or books we read; the websites we explore or other sources of information all shape our thinking and values. For others it is the (computer-based) games we play or other forms of entertainment that may be our passion. The challenge to have a Christian mind is not simply to fill it with Bible knowledge or even practical skills for participating in worship or various forms of church or community service; or even a desire to grow in personal holiness, effectiveness in sharing our faith and using our spiritual gifts. It includes the values and standards that underpin our words and actions in the workplace as an employer or employee. Questions could rightly be asked if someone was a pious person on Sunday but a ruthless employer or disruptive employee during the week and other similar issues. We have a holistic faith and life and sometimes it is hard to work out how we live authentically as Christians in each area of our lives. Yet in the boardroom or the office, the classroom or the sports-field, and in many other places, God calls us to model

personal integrity so that others may see something of our faith being worked out in each area of our lives.

(b) **Forming a God-centred perspective on life** (our eyes and ears) How many adverts or other forms of commercial sales have you been subjected to over your lifetime? How many images have flashed before your eyes consciously or subconsciously registered in your mind? What we choose to view and listen to, not just in terms of personal entertainment, will affect deeply the kind of person you become. Do we prefer wholesome and positive communications about other people or is our preference to hear negative and critical ones? A person who views pornographic images of other human beings on a regular basis will inevitably begin to see them as objects for personal gratification rather than human beings to relate to appropriately. This is not a new challenge. John in I John 2:15-16 warned his readers: *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.*¹⁶ *For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world.* The answer is not living as a solitary hermit in a monastery or nunnery because God created us to live in the real world interacting with a wide range of people and cultures and circumstances, as Jesus made clear in his prayer for us in John 17:13-15, It states: *I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of My joy within them.*¹⁴ *I have given them Your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.*¹⁵ ***My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one.*** Isolation and segregation are the tools used to stop infections spreading! What we have to seek to do is seek a godly appreciation for our beautiful world and the wonders of creation by experiencing some of it. Valuing arts and music and giving thanks to God for the potential beauty and pleasure available from them; however, resisting the disease of materialism that causes people to value things above other people, and to disengage from the poor and needy, physically and spiritually; A recognition that we work to live and not vice versa –which many of us as Western Christians struggle to address. The attitude that it's not my /our problem is too easy to say but it is deeply challenged by Jesus' teaching about the care of our neighbours –the people who need our aid- and we theirs at times as well. The call to Christian discipleship from Jesus echoes powerfully down the centuries. Mark 8:34-37³⁴ *Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: 'Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me.*³⁵ *For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me and for the gospel will save it.*³⁶ *What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?*³⁷ *Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?* How do we live in each area of our lives with His priorities and values? There are no easy answers or quick fixes to imbalanced priorities. We need to ask God in prayer to show us how best we can be the men and women He has called us to be.

(c) **Developing discipline in our speech** (our tongues) James in chapter three of his letter wrote these words: *Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.*⁶ *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*⁷ *All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind,*⁸ *but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*⁹ *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.*¹⁰ *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be* (James 3:5-10). How do we speak to and about other people? Do we look for reasons to think well of another as the priority or for reasons to be suspicious of them or find fault with them? Are you /am I a person who looks for ways to encourage others by our words when we can find a genuine opportunity to praise someone for faithful service in the church or wherever, or do we note the many good things and major on

a minor shortcoming in our thoughts or words? To be continually critical of others when less than perfect oneself is in Paul's words to serve as an *instrument of wickedness* rather than an *instrument of righteousness*. We may sing 'Make me a channel of Your peace Where there is hatred let me bring Your love' (C.M.P.456), but if in private conversations or in Church Meetings we seek to speak in a divisive manner, casting suspicion on other believers or refusing to have fellowship with them it raises serious questions about the credibility of sounds uttered with our lips in praise before God. The world is watching us closely. John13:34-35 is not just about relations within congregations but also between them in localities and beyond. Jesus said: '*A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*'³⁵ *By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.*' Is there an area personally or collectively where we could improve?

(d) **Choosing balanced priorities in activities** (hands and feet) We must have a right attitude to work whether paid or voluntary, for example. Paul wrote: *...to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: you should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you,*¹² *so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody* (I Thessalonians 4:11-12), and in Ephesians 4:28: *Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.* A right attitude to sharing the Gospel –Romans 10:14-15: *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*¹⁵ *And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'* Our default position as Christians is that we must take opportunities to evangelise and church-plant unless God explicitly reveals to the contrary, because of the command of Jesus in His commission to us Matthew 28:19-20. The Declaration of Principle of the Baptist Union of Scotland describes it as a 'duty', a core credential of member churches to engage in this work. A right attitude to time with family members and friends, seeking to ensure that not all our time is taken up with fellow Christians as our witness for the Lord can only be effective if we have a meaningful engagement with people yet to come to faith in Christ.

(e) **Spiritual warfare** (Ephesians 6 winning the battle) Yet when you seek to honour God in this way all kinds of pressures and problems will arise to hinder the forward advance. Ephesians 6:10-13 states: *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*¹¹ *Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*¹³ *Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.* The devil will do his worst to discourage us from taking our opportunities to extend God's kingdom and live God-honouring lives. He will try every dirty trick in the book (usually through other people) to give excuses why God's revealed will is not the way to go. Paul's strong advice under such pressure is to resist him and *stand your ground*. Will you /will I do that?

(f) **The Promise** (Romans 6:14)¹⁴ *For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace* (Romans 6:14). This is a gentle reminder from the apostle of the fact that in Christ who has already won the victory that the final outcome is not in doubt. Some days life is such a struggle in general or as a Christian that we can feel very down or even despair. God's grace is so amazing, it is totally sufficient for all your needs –never forget that, for Jesus' sake, Amen.