

# Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## **Romans 6:1-14** **“Who’s Running Your Life”**

September 25, 2016  
(19<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill  
Main Street UMC  
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646  
Church Office: 864-229-7551  
Church Website: [www.msumc1.org](http://www.msumc1.org)

**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

ROMANS 6:1-14 "WHO'S RUNNING YOUR LIFE?"

Panel 1 // 6:15-23, Alien Powers

A. vv.1-2 DOUBLE QUESTION ON SIN (Question From Opponent). Dialog/Diatribe Continues

Questions Based On A Wrong Inference From 5:20-21

Same Question 3:5, 4:1, 7:7, 8:31, 9:14, 30. New Topic

Does More Sin Mean More Grace? Gal. 5:13, More Disease Mean More Medicine?

1a Q1

What shall we say then?

b Q2

"Are we to continue in **Sin** that **Grace** may abound (increase)?"

//3:8, I Sin, God Forgives, How Convenient!

What Keeps Grace From Fostering Lawlessness? Antinomian, Moral Free For All

B. v.2a SHORT ANSWER.

Sin = Power Operating In A Force Field, No Easy Escape

What's Life Look Like When We Have A Right Relationship With God?

2a

By no means!

*me genoito* = strong negation!

What Does Sanctification Look Like? A Life Of Gratitude, Struggle?

A' vv.2b-3 DOUBLE QUESTION ON SIN AND BAPTISM (Question From Opponent).

Dead

b Q3

How can we who died to **sin** still live in it?

Sin As Status/State/Servitude, Burial Is An End To Something!

Domain Of Sin, Cosmic Power, In What Sense Have We Died?

We Are Made *Right* (Justification) In Order To Be Made *Good* (Sanctification)

3 Q4

**Do you not know**

vv.3, 6, 9; Bridge, Appeal To Tradition: 11:2, 1 Cor. 3:16, 15:3-5, 6:2-3

that all of us who have been baptized/ *into* Christ Jesus//

Acts 8:16, 2 Cor. 5:14, Baptism Assumed As Normal, p.v.

*into* his death/ were baptized?

p.v., a-b//b'-a', Appeal To Experience, Gal. 2:20, 3:27-28, 1Cor. 12:12-13

Christ Represents All Humanity, Solidarity, 2 Cor. 5:14 As Key Idea

B. vv.4-14 LONG ANSWER, 2 PARTS: 1) INDICATIVE: IS, 2) IMPERATIVE: OUGHT.

*Walk* = Metaphor For Life, Effort + Direction

1) vv.4-10 The Indicative: 3 We Affirmations + 3 Reasons, What Already Is!

*We*

Form (3x): Thesis + Purpose + Reason/ *For*

4

Death/Life

1a *We were buried therefore with* him by baptism into death,

*syn*, Deep Identification/Participant

*so that* as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,

1:3-4, 8:11, 1 Cor. 15:3b-4, Holy Spirit

we too might walk in newness of life.

Death, Burial, Resurrection, New Life *Now*, Resurrection Later

New Life = No Longer In Old Realm

5

b FOR if we have been conformed to/ the likeness (pattern) of his death, (Past) *lit. Grown Together*  
we shall certainly be conformed to/ the likeness of his resurrection. (Future) *Final Life Later*

Died To The Old World/Old Self, 2 Ages, New Man

6

Death

2a *We know* that our old self (man) was *co-crucified with* him

p.v. = Self Under Sin's Awful Power, Gal. 2:19

*so that* the body of **sin** might be destroyed,

*Body Of Sin* = Total Self, Not Substance But The Flaw

and we might no longer be enslaved to **sin**. *New Metaphor, Freedom From Its Grip/Power/Distortions/Values*

Real Battle, Died To An Old Way Of Life

Free

7

b FOR he who has died is freed (acquitted/vindicated) from **sin**.

6:18, 22, Not Yet Death

Believing

3 *syn*-compound verbs = *with*

8

Life

3a But if (since) *we* have *died with* Christ,

Death, Released From Sin's Tyranny

we believe that we shall also live with him.

2 Cor. 4:13-14, //2 Tim. 2:11, Life Purpose

Knowing

He Is The Fulcrum Of History, *Already/Not Yet*

9

b1 FOR **we know** that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again;

*New Realm*

2 death no longer has dominion over him.

v.12, *No longer* = Out Of Its Reach!

10

2' The death he died he died to **sin**, once for all,

Death Once To Our Sin/ Rebellion, 5:16-25

1' but the life he lives he lives to God.

No More Battle For Him, Life Forever

What God Does (vv.4-10) = Basis/Enablement For What We Are To Do (vv.11-14)

2) vv. 11-14 The Imperative: 3 You Appeals + 1 Reason, What Ought To And Can Be!

Sober Recognition + Action! Live In The New World // Gal. 2:19-20

Reckoning

11

1 So you also must consider (reckon) yourselves dead to **sin** and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

No Magic Key! Battle Zone, Take Your Baptism Seriously

We Live In Overlap Of Two Realms; He Does Not

Effort

*Weed Your Garden!* Best Analogy = Addiction + 12 Steps

12

2 Let not **sin** therefore (continue to) reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.

Take Up The Battle For Your Own Life!

1:24 = Infected Desires, Gal. 5:16-25, Self-Control = Tell The Bully *No*

Holy War

Whole + Parts/Capacities, Grace Frees Us To Choose Rightly

13

3a Do not yield your members to **sin**

*Limbs*, New Freedom, Real Battle, Yield Parts To The Right Power

b as instruments (weapons) of wickedness,

Gk. *hoplon/adikia*, 13:12, Not Back Under Old Powers

a' but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life,

Warfare! Daily Surrender

b' and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.

*Members* = Whole Self Through Parts

Assurance

Law Shows What Is Wrong/Right, But No Power To Enable It

14

FOR **Sin** will have no dominion over you,

*reign*, Great Promise! Not *Ruled* By It, All Struggle!

since you are not under law but under **Grace**.

New Power/Love Has Been Released; Use It!

## WHO'S RUNNING YOUR LIFE?

*“Let not Sin continue to reign in your mortal bodies,  
to make you obey their passions.”*

Because we can, we must, if we are to cooperate in our liberation.

### ROMANS 6:12

**F**rederick Douglass grew up a slave in Maryland. Born— we think— in February 1818, he was taken from his mother as an infant. For years as a child, all he had to eat was runny corn meal dumped in a trough that kids fought to scoop out with oyster shells. He worked the fields from early to late. Beaten many times with a leather whip until blood ran down his back, he was once kicked and beaten by his master until he almost died.

Even so, when Frederick considered an escape, he struggled. He writes in his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass- An American Slave*, that he had two great fears. The first was leaving behind his friends:

“I had a number of warm-hearted friends in Baltimore, friends I loved almost as I did my life, and the thought of being separated from them forever was painful beyond expression. It is my opinion that thousands would escape from slavery, who now remain, but for the strong cords of affection that bind them to their friends.”

His second fear was this: "If I failed in this attempt, my case would be a hopeless one; it would seal my fate as a slave forever."

As bad as his situation was, and as hard as is to review such history, we have to admit there's more than one kind of slavery, isn't there? More than one kind of bondage? More than one kind of servitude to the power of another?

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**Romans 6:1-14. . . . . 4**

Talk to a substance or porn addict and see how deep is the grip of bondage, the one to alcohol or cocaine, the other to visual dopamine stimulation and a lust for novelty that turns people into consumables.<sup>1</sup> Listen to a woman in an abusive relationship who keeps going back and calls it love. Or a business leader who thinks only of money and ignores his wife and children. Or a young man who knows that coming to Christ would mean the loss of friends and their shared habits, or the housewife so addicted to the opinions of her circle of friends that to risk their scorn is more than she can bear. Or what about those Sin has frozen in some form of hopelessness and who have essentially abdicated in place, no longer being an agent in their own lives. Is this not also slavery? The specifics change, but behind the particulars an alien power engulfs them all, and that power, says Paul, *is Sin in the singular with a Capital S*, and from it all the symptoms flow, thus *sins plural with a little s*. Behind the infractions is something more fearsome and large and pervasive, a spiritual power it took the death and resurrection of Jesus to conquer. And we all deal with it all the time.

Classic Christian teaching- which I might add is highly offensive in our culture- is that every human being, save one, is born with an appetite to rebel against God, and that the name for this controlling power is *Sin with a Capital S*.<sup>2</sup> Not just little or big violations, *sins with a small s*, but the power of the desire itself, like a systemic disease from which flow many symptoms. Sin is a condition before it's an action, a heart orientation away from God before it's an offensive behavior. And in its company are found two others powers that ought to be capitalized: *Death* and *Evil*, and the three are arrayed against us all.

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<sup>1</sup> See "The Effect Of Porn On The Male Brain," [www.equip.org/article/the-effects-of-porn-on-the-male-brain-3](http://www.equip.org/article/the-effects-of-porn-on-the-male-brain-3); Al Mohler, "Hijacking the Brain– How Pornography Works," [www.albertmohler.com/2010/02/01/hijacking-the-brain-how-pornography-works](http://www.albertmohler.com/2010/02/01/hijacking-the-brain-how-pornography-works).

<sup>2</sup> The U.M. Articles of Religion, Article VII: Of Original or Birth Sin, "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually" (*BOD 2012*: 65).

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And this is why the testimony of Frederick Douglas can serve as window. Never underestimate the struggle people go through to answer the call of Jesus Christ and to leave the slavery of the cosmic powers that bind and enslave them. They may fear the lost of beloved companions; they may fear they will fail in their attempts, and that would be worse. But we can take heart from Douglass's experience. On September 3, 1838, he remembers:

“I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind. I have been frequently asked how I felt when I found myself in a free State. It was a moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced. I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions.”<sup>3</sup>

A new state, a free state, meant a new state of affairs for Douglas. He was relocated from one realm to another, and here the rules were different. No one owned anybody else. And this is the magnificent claim Paul lays before us, that through identification with Jesus Christ— which happens inwardly in faith and outwardly in baptism— we are transferred from one state of being to another, from one realm to another and given a new freedom worth maintaining. Even now we live and walk *in newness of life*. Something has happened because of who Jesus is and the ongoing relationship he offers. We are no longer slaves who can only cooperate with our bondage. So when Sin comes knocking with an invitation to return to the old ways, we say *No* and *Not again*, and we do this in the power of the One who lives within us. And it is a warfare all our days.

In 2010 Chris Simpson led a white pride march. A year and a half later, he abandoned the white supremacist movement and in April 2012 was baptized.

Simpson, a 38-year-old garbage man and former Marine, had the words "PURE HATE" tattooed across his knuckles. After the loss of his first child, Simpson had loads of hate and anger built up inside. The white pride movement gave him a place to direct his rage and frustration at people of other races.

Things began to change, however, during a family trip to Walmart. One

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<sup>3</sup> “Frederick Douglas on Escaping Slavery,” [www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2000/july/12534](http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2000/july/12534).

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of his children looked down an aisle, then up and said, "Daddy, you can't go down that aisle. There's an (and then he used a racial slur) down there."

"It was time to make a change," Simpson said of his children. "I don't want them following that path."

After he and his family watched the movie *Courageous*, Simpson began attending church. A month later he was baptized as a follower of Jesus Christ.

"Any kind of burdens I carried before, I let them go," he added, "No need to carry things that happen in the past. I forgave all those who wronged me, and asked forgiveness from those that I've wronged."

Simpson left hate behind. He's even going through the Freedom Ink Tattoo Removal Program— starting with the word HATE.

And where did I find this story? In a Christian magazine or book? No, in the July 2, 2012 Washington Post. The title is "Former White Supremacist Sheds Hate and Embraces Christianity."<sup>4</sup>

### **TURNING TO THE TEXT**

I don't know how it is with women, but men— I've observed— take great delight in old things that are familiar and carry deep meaning. A truck they had as a young man that's now redone, an old shotgun granddad gave them as a sign of their bond and time together in the woods, a favorite pair of old blue jeans, or a tool they trust, perhaps a Boy Scout sash full of merit badges.

This week I found such a treasure that took me back thirty-eight years. I pulled my research file on Romans 6:1-14, and there in the file was a thirty page term paper I wrote for a class on Romans in the Spring of '78 with Dr. Lee Keck, who went to be the Dean at Yale shortly after he marked a red *A* and the words *Good job* on the cover. Silly as it sounds, I felt a deep sense of pride all over again as I went through the paper reading his marginal comments written in pencil. I was only twenty-four then, and I remembered the feeling that I was now in the club of scholars because one of the best had said my work was good.

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<sup>4</sup> Aaron Aupperlee, "Former White Supremacist Sheds Hate and Embraces Christianity," *The Washington Post* (7-2-12).

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**Romans 6:1-14. . . . . 7**

So today’s passage is an old friend I haven’t seen in a while, and it feels good to return and see, not how Paul’s thinking has changed, but how mine has matured. And if you’re looking for a place to set up camp to understand both the gift and struggle of following Jesus in the company of others, this is it. The *old you*, the enslaved you, is dead and needs to be counted so. And the *new you*, the true you, must say a constant Yes to Christ and take up the weapons he gives us to stay free and loyal. You do not have to live the way you used to. Frederick Douglas the former slave says so. Chris Simpson the former racist says so. Pastor Phil the former Frat Guy says so. The Apostle Paul– the former hater of all Christians– says so. There is one battle that finally matters, and that is the battle for you. And here we find surprising wisdom in the testimony of Bono– lead singer of U2– who said in an interview about his life with Christ:

“Your nature is a hard thing to change; it takes time.... I’ve heard of people who have life-changing, miraculous turnarounds, people set free from addiction after a single prayer, relationships saved where both parties ‘let go, and let God.’ But it was not like that for me. For all that ‘I was lost, I am found,’ it is probably more accurate to say, ‘I was really lost. I’m a little less so at the moment.’ And then a little less and a little less again. That to me is the spiritual life. The slow reworking and rebooting the computer at regular intervals, reading the small print of the service manual. It has slowly rebuilt me in a better image. It has taken years, though, and it is not over yet.”<sup>5</sup>

The reason Bono’s words rings true is that his is a modern reworking of Paul’s realistic vision of being a Jesus follower. We don’t earn the gift of freedom in Christ, but once in a new state, it takes the effort to live deeper into the freedom given, not earning but effort.<sup>6</sup> Even the desire and effort to

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<sup>5</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Romans 6:1-14.

<sup>6</sup> The thought is Dallas Willard’s, “Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. Grace, you know, does not just have to do with forgiveness of sins alone” ([www.goodreads.com/quotes/49184](http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/49184)).

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continue is a gift from the God who requires our full participation. We trust and walk into one layer of freedom after another under Christ’s personal direction.

Paul’s good news, briefly summarized, is that what God desires and has a right to is our trust based on the divine actions laid before the world in Jesus Christ. God demonstrates his trustworthiness and asks, “Will you trust me?” And when we quit resisting and take the risk, we’re given the gift of a new, right relationship with God. Forgiven, freed, rescued, restored, adopted and at home in the family, and that is the basis for a new life of embracing one agenda and resisting another. And if you continue to feel the pull and tug of the old powers that cut such deep grooves into your character– as you surely will, it means you’re in the right battle. A B-17 bomber pilot once told me, “Pastor Phil, if they’re not shooting at you, you’re not flying over the target. The path to the target is through flack alley.” Easy versions of the Christian life are all lies. The benefits are many, but the struggle is constant, and the issue is, “Who’s running your life?”

Now the danger of Paul’s message of God’s grace drawing out human trust is that it can be so easily twisted out of shape, the short version being, “I love to sin. God love to forgive. What a grand arrangement!” Or, as Paul’s debate partner put it in verse 1, “What are we to say then? Are we to continue in Sin that Grace may abound?” To which Paul responds with a decisive, “By no means!” or– as we might say– “No way!

An example of this perverse idea of continuing in Sin to help polish God’s resume presented itself to Dr. D.A. Carson who used to meet with a young man from French West Africa to practice German. He writes:

“Once a week or so, we’d had enough (German), so we went out for a meal and retreated to French, a language we both knew well.... I learned his wife was in London, training to be a medical doctor. He was an engineer who needed fluency in order to pursue doctoral studies in engineering in Germany.

I soon discovered that once or twice a week he disappeared into the city’s red-light district. Eventually I got to know him well

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enough to ask what he would do if he discovered that his wife was doing something similar in London.

"Oh," he said, "I'd kill her."

"That's a bit of a double standard, isn't it?"

"You don't understand. Where I come from in Africa, the husband has the right to many, but if a wife is unfaithful, she must be killed."

"But you told me you were raised in a mission school. You know the God of the Bible doesn't have double standards."

He gave me a bright smile and replied, "Ah, le bon Dieu, il doit nous pardonner; c'est son metier" [Ah, God is good. He's bound to forgive us; that's his job].<sup>7</sup>

There's a six syllable term for such thinking and acting by Christians—*Antinomianism*— and it means *against the law*, the *nomos* of God. It's claiming God's pardon without the call to holiness, without a changed and changing life. It's forgiveness without repentance. I continue just as I am and still claim God's promises, or, as Paul's debate partner put it, "Are we to continue in Sin that Grace may abound?" and to give the full force of Paul's reply, I'd have to use one or more non-church words, so I'll leave filling in the blanks to you. "By no means!" is a bit polite. It's a contradiction to stay as I was and resist the change Christ offers which is to leave my old world for his new one. Same address, new world. Same place, new possibilities. The *old me* pulling back, *the new me* leaning forward, and every day a question: Who will I yield to? Who's running my life? Which powers will I serve: Sin and Evil and Death, or Grace and Life and Hope? Do I believe walking with Jesus is really a better way to live and love, to live and love and die? Am I really a new person? Does it show?

This meeting of God's kindness and God-enabled human trust does not leave us in the same mess as it found us; it powerfully and effectively carries us into a new state, a new sphere of power under the reign of Jesus Christ. What God is after is a new kind of human being who obeys from the heart because of

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<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson, "God's Love and God's Wrath," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (October 1999), 387.

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new desires. And this is not just a pleasant idea; it's been experientially verified by many. I love what Russell Moore has written, precisely because it's a reversal of how we normally present the Christian life:

“For too long, we've called unbelievers to ‘invite Jesus into your life.’ Jesus doesn't want to be in your life. Your life's a wreck. Jesus calls you into his life. And his life isn't boring or purposeless or static. It's wild and exhilarating and unpredictable.”<sup>8</sup>

In the last days of the Civil War, Richmond fell. To see old photographs is to see a city destroyed, and President Lincoln insisted on a visit. Even though no one knew he was coming, slaves recognized and thronged him. He'd legally liberated them in the Emancipation Proclamation more than two years previous;<sup>9</sup> now the Union Army made it a fact. But what to do with the new state of affairs? According to Admiral David Porter, an eyewitness, Lincoln made a brief appeal to the assembled, “My poor friends, you are free— free as air. You can cast off the name of slave and trample upon it . . . . Liberty is your birthright.” The gaunt man with the beard also warned them not to abuse their freedom, “Let the world see that you merit [your freedom]. Don't let your joy carry you into excesses. Learn the laws and obey them.”<sup>10</sup> Nine days later Lincoln was dead.

Free from a cruel master, but not free for self-indulgence. That's very much the message Paul gives to those who've been liberated by Jesus' death and resurrection. He gives us our true birthright— the spiritual freedom of a new relationship with God. But that freedom isn't an excuse for self-indulgence; it's the basis for obeying God's laws in a new way, because they are truly good and good for us. We don't earn any points by obedience, but we do learn a new way of living, a better way, a way that leads to life.

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<sup>8</sup> "A Purpose Driven Cosmos," *Christianity Today* (February 2012).

<sup>9</sup> January 1, 1863.

<sup>10</sup> Edited, James L. Swanson, *Bloody Crimes* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2010), 46.

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**Romans 6:1-14. . . . . 11**

Now to deal with the challenge of having his message so twisted by the antinomians and libertines, Paul makes an interesting move. He asks two open ended questions,<sup>11</sup> then gives an answer in two parts: what is, and what ought to be,<sup>12</sup> what God has done first, then where we are to join in because a new state of affairs has been enacted. Rather than indulging his disgust at those who mock Christ, he takes a deep breath and argues for a better understanding.

Paul is a teacher who reasons with people on the basis of God's actions in Jesus. And while he makes an appeal to the will– the *decider* in each of us, he also educates the reason and makes a case to the heart and its desires. He aims at persuasion, to win them over to his vision that Jesus Christ makes a difference not just at the end when life is over but in the present where life is lived. It's a battle, but the victory is his, and therefore ours. We can take up our local fight against the powers of Sin and Death and Evil precisely he has broken their grip over us and will one day utterly destroy them. And until then, every life and every idea and every action is contested territory. In other words, *you are a battlefield*, and in your most reflective moments, you know it's true. We're all aware of forces larger than ourselves pulling on us and calling for our allegiance. Or am I the only one?

Now the two questions that clear the space for his answer are at the end of verse 2 and in verse 3: "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" and "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus into his death were baptized."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> vv.2b-3.

<sup>12</sup> The *indicatives* (what is) of vv.4-10 begin with "We were buried," and continue with "We know" and "But since," with each of the three backed up with a reason signaled by *For/Gk. gar* (vv.5, 7, 9-10). The *imperatives* (what ought to be, and can!) of vv.11-14 begin with "So you must" and continue with "Let not sin" and "Do not yield your members," and the three are grounded in a single reason beginning with *For/Gk. gar* (v.14).

<sup>13</sup> The rearranging of the clauses of the RSV preserves the underlying a-b//b-a' chiasm of the Greek: *baptized-into Christ Jesus // into his death-were baptized*.

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**Romans 6:1-14. . . . . 12**

“Well,” his hearers must think as the letter’s being read in one of the house churches, “How did this all happen? I don’t feel dead to sin. In fact, I feel very much alive to its lures and constant appeals to the worst in me. Have I missed something?” I remember laughing at a cartoon in *Leadership* magazine, a professional journal for pastors. Two couples are seated in a living room engaged in Bible study. “Well,” says one of the women, “I haven’t actually died to sin, but I did feel kind of faint once.”<sup>14</sup>

At issue is just how we’re linked to Jesus Christ so his victories empower us for new life in an old world. He fully identified with us in taking on human flesh, living a perfect life of love among the likes of us, putting the kingdom of this Father on display for three years in the public eye, and then— as the fulfillment of all he was— he freely embraced a cruel death as an innocent man and perfect sacrifice, went down into the darkness of death, and from there was resurrected to continue his mission through his surprised followers. And when someone hears this story, and when the Holy Spirit stirs in them a desire to know him, and when they accept the offer, something real but invisible happens. God gives them citizenship papers for a new world that is even now active in the middle of the old world, which is our world this side of God’s kingdom where the powers of Sin and Death and Evil run rampant over all that is good and true, beautiful and innocent, to smear and deface it. And so the battle begins.

Now the beginning of new life in Jesus is not just one thing but many. He identified with us, and we are drawn into being identified with him. Simple trust. Public baptism, a complex rite of initiation which— when activated by the Holy Spirit— brings us under his rule and joins us to his people across time.<sup>15</sup> And one of the images Paul uses— oddly enough— is horticultural.

When I was a child my mother learned from Mrs. Evans— the local expert— how to graft camellias, and if done carefully, the graft and host grew together as a hybrid with new colors. And so when Paul says in verse 5 that we’ve been

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<sup>14</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Romans 6:1-14.

<sup>15</sup> The official U.M teaching document is “By Water And The Spirit,” [www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/by-water-and-the-spirit-full-text](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/by-water-and-the-spirit-full-text).

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*conformed to the likeness of his resurrection*, the word *conformed* is a word for the shared life of a hybrid, literally *grown together*.<sup>16</sup> It's not the conformity of a stamp or mold but the conforming power of a shared organic life that works from within, like a baby being knit together in the womb. We are piped into the life of the risen Jesus so that the pattern of his life becomes ours: death to sin, resurrection to new life. John uses the same idea when he invokes the vineyard image of vine and branches, "I am the vine," says Jesus, "and you are the branches," a shared flow of life to produce a harvest.<sup>17</sup>

In trust we say Yes to God's character and offer; in baptism we are pressed into a new form, and by being grafted into Jesus, his life flows into us and we become a new kind of human being. We live, but he now lives in us, and it shows. The word pictures and metaphors are many, but the lived reality—a new life which sets us against the old ways—is one thing with many facets. It's a comprehensive cure for a systemic problem; it's how God unhooks us and detoxes us from the malevolent powers of Sin and Death and Evil. The new life already stirs within us and shall one day consume us whole in resurrection.

The old Phil is dead. I have a death certificate and later conversion story to prove it. It's my baptismal certificate from when I was only nine months old. In a way beyond full understanding, Jesus stamped me with his death and resurrection when all I wanted was to stay dry and fed and held close, which is what love then meant. Little did I know what was ahead!

It's taken a long time to grow into the implications of my new identity, and it's still a struggle, which is to me a signal not that something's wrong but that something's right. No to Sin in all its deceptive subtleties; No to being squeezed into the world's distorting molds; No to the powers that lie to me; No to treating people as means, not ends; No to desires and ambitions that could burn my life down; No to the American dream of making ease the goal of life; No to sitting on the sidelines while others engage the pain of our world; No to

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<sup>16</sup> Gk. *sym-phytoi*, literally *grown together*; a *phytos* is a plant (Leander E. Keck, *Romans* [Nashville, TN: Abington, 2005], 161).

<sup>17</sup> John 15:1 ff.

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**Romans 6:1-14. . . . . 14**

ideologies of the left and right and their false alternatives; No to anything that minimizes the supremacy of Jesus Christ for all people and his offer of a healed relationship with God beginning with simple trust. C.S. Lewis was right, “I became my own only when I gave myself to Another.”<sup>18</sup> It’s an odd paradox of the faith that the more I follow Jesus and come under his wise benevolence, the more I become who I was made to be, the real Phil, not some silly caricature bent all out of shape by Sin and its awful distortions. Knowledge of him and self-knowledge deepen together. He knows and tells me who I am.

I’ve visited the Augusta VA once a week now for several months because my brother Tony is a patient due to concussions, seizures, and chest trauma from a cargo container that broke loose and smacked him against a bulkhead as the cruiser *Halsey* was dropping off Seal Teams in and around the Persian Gulf. As I park and head towards the front door, I run a gauntlet of pain that humbles me and make me acutely aware that long after a war is over the wounds of the wounded remain, only some of which are visible.

On sunny days the wheel chairs are lined up under the front portico. I walk past the bodies of young and old, few of which have all four limbs, and all of which have the stare of long pain endured. Various ball caps identify their branch of service, and I can usually guess where the injuries occurred, either Vietnam or the current interminable Gulf Wars since 2001, fifteen years now. Scars, burns, stumps, the mental trauma of PTSD, some never to work again, disabled, a monthly check, a word of gratitude on parade days, but so much time to burn in a daily effort to keep meaning and hope alive. Boredom is the new enemy. They carried weapons into combat, but the primary weapon was not a rifle or grenade; it was them and their limbs, their arms and legs, their faces and feet, their minds and bodies, their smarts and courage. They presented not just guns but themselves on a field of battle, thus the marks in their flesh.

Some modern Methodists are uncomfortable with martial imagery; they think it condones violence in the name of faith. A generation ago some wanted to take *Onward Christian Soldiers* and *Soldiers Of Christ Arise* out of our

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<sup>18</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Romans 6:1-14.

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hymnal. I do not agree; neither did Paul. Something is lost when a sense of spiritual and moral combat goes soft and civilian.

As he traveled Asia Minor and through Greece to Corinth— from which Romans was written— Paul saw images of the older Greek and Spartan *Hoplites*, what we term “combat infantry.” They were *Hoplites* because they carried *hopla*, Greek for the instruments of warfare, for weapons— primarily shield and spear.<sup>19</sup> Paul uses just that plural word— *hopla*— in verse 13, and the standard translation is not so much wrong as weak. It misses the military intent and the sense of soldierly duty. How different is the feel of “Do not yield your members or limbs as *instruments* of wickedness,” to “Do not yield your limbs as *combat weapons* of wickedness.” It’s not a marching band but a marching army. The instrument is not a thing; it’s you, and you will either be a combat weapon for wickedness or a combat weapon of righteousness. You yield yourself each day to one or the other agenda, as Paul called on his friends to do in verse 13:

“But continually yield yourselves to God as men and women who have be brought from death to life (a resurrected army), and yield your limbs and all your capacities to God as *combat arms* of righteousness.” And then a promise of support and ultimately victory at the end, “For Sin will not have dominion over you, since you are not under law but under Grace.”

### CONCLUSION

One of the holes in my resume is that I— unlike my brothers, father, and uncles who all served in the military in wartime— did not serve. So when stories come up around the table, *the preacher man* is an outsider. Lame jokes about *The Lord’s Army* only sharpen the separation. Now this may tell you more than you want to know, but some mornings when I pop out bed, my first thought – corny as it sounds, is, “General Jesus, Pastor Phil reporting for duty. May your operations be advanced on my part of the front today. I await your orders, and I offer myself and all capacities, physical and mental, as a *weapon of your kind*

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<sup>19</sup> [www.ancient.eu/hoplite/](http://www.ancient.eu/hoplite/)

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*of righteousness.*” And when I strap on my collar and pick up my Bible, it has the same feel as *locked-and-loaded*. I need that kind of tough mental preparation because at bedsides and grave sides, in counseling and in teaching, the stakes and outcomes are high, sometimes life and death. In case you haven’t noticed, life is a battlefield, the fire live, the casualties many. And in the middle of it all, little platoons of Christians bearing witness and offering hope

There is a quote from Nikos Kazantzakis’ novel *The Saviors of God* that never ceases to move me. I don’t read it often because of its effect. My guess is that harkens back to a deep conviction that life with Jesus is more a dangerous adventure than a peaceful glide to glory:

“My prayer,” he writes, “is not the whimpering of a beggar nor a confession of love. Nor is it the trivial reckoning of a small tradesman: Give me and I shall give to you. My prayer is the report of a soldier to his general: This is what I did today, this is how I fought to save the entire battle in my own sector, these are the obstacles I found, this is how I plan to fight tomorrow. My God and I are horsemen galloping in the burning sun or under the drizzling rain. Pale, starving, but unsubdued, we ride and converse. ‘Leader,’ I cry. He turns his faces towards me, and I shudder to confront his anguish. Our love for each other is rough and ready, we drink the same wine in this low tavern of life.”<sup>20</sup>

Can someone tell me when we became an audience instead of an army?

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<sup>20</sup> From *The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises* in Reuben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, editors, *A Guide to Prayer* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1983), 116.

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