

“The Word No One Talks About Anymore”  
(A Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost)

**Text:** Romans 6:12-23

**Lectionary Texts:** Genesis 22:1-14; Psalm 13; Matthew 10:40-42; Romans 6:12-23

**Subject:** The power of sin.

**Desired Response:** Consider yourself dead to sin.

**How To:** Respond differently when tempted.

**How Long:** Put into operation the very next time you are tempted.

**Sermon in a Sentence:** “Knowing Christ defeated the power of sin frees His followers to consider themselves dead to it as well.”

**Worship Theme:** “God wants to help us control our minds and hearts so we can overcome sin in our lives.”

Think back with me for a moment to your childhood. It’s okay. Go ahead. Please close your eyes. Now, journey back in your memory to when you were a child—say maybe eight or ten years old. Are you back there, yet? Again, it’s okay. Just think back to those long ago days.

Next, imagine you are talking with someone in your home. Maybe it’s your mom or dad or one of your brothers or sisters. You’re a little annoyed. Suddenly you say something that makes everyone gasp. You use a word you’ve heard some of your friends use at school. Or, maybe it’s a word you’ve heard adults use when they’re angry. In any case, your mom or dad grabs you and in a very scolding voice tells you, “We don’t use words like that! It’s not nice!”

Do you have that memory in mind? Okay, you can open your eyes.

In the vast majority of churches in the United States today there is a word that’s considered almost as offensive as that bad word you said on that long ago day. It’s a word that strikes embarrassment and even terror into the hearts of so-called Christian people. It’s something we just don’t talk about in the church anymore. It’s the word “sin.”

I’ve mentioned this phenomenon before. In fact, you might accuse me of being more than a little obsessed with this condition that has overtaken the church. I won’t apologize for my feelings because I’m convinced that failing to mention sin significantly waters down the horrible reality that we are all sinners. Within us we harbor the most terrible, horrific, nastiness that anyone could ever imagine. Why? Because when Adam ate from the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil back in the Garden of Eden, he began a downward spiral that has haunted humanity ever since. Not only do we inherit the nature that drives us toward sin and

disobedience, but we have compounded that inheritance by adding our own long list of sins. And, those very sins have separated us humans from the God who created us.

The next time you're at a grocery store, or at the mall, or at your workplace, look around you. The people you see are the “Walking Dead”—and I don't mean a bunch of zombies. These people with whom you interact every day are destined to spend eternity in utter and absolute separation from God, tormented by the fruit of their sins, hopeless, helpless, eternally doomed. No wonder we don't want to talk about sin. It's too embarrassing to recognize that all around us people are condemned to eternal death. And, for the most part, we aren't doing anything about it.

Now, within the church, many people are confident they have experienced forgiveness through Christ. But, these same people seem unable to overcome sin in their lives. You, too, may feel assured that through Christ's death and resurrection you have been forgiven the wrongs you have done. But, you still cannot cope with temptation on a day-to-day basis. You are grateful for the peace you have with God. Yet, you long for power when it comes to rubbing shoulders with evil.

I suggest that the basic problem could be in the way you think, because you might not be aware that Christ's work made victory possible for His followers, just as it made forgiveness available to them.

In his epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul addresses this point. He talks, in the first part of his letter, about the work of Christ in relationship to our position of guilt before the Lord. Having settled the fact that our pardon comes through faith in Christ's work on Calvary, and not by means of self-effort or good deeds, (as Laurie LeSuer so eloquently shared with us last week) the Apostle then examines the question of our continuing life in our human flesh.

Should we expect to keep on doing evil following our conversion? “By no means!” Paul answers. He continues in Romans 6:

*We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

*For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. ... 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. —Romans 6:2-4, 6-7, 9-11*

Then, Paul turns to a new reality and expresses it this way in Romans 6:12-23:

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup> Do 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. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.*

*<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<sup>[a]</sup> Christ Jesus our Lord.

The fact Paul is stressing is Christians who understand that Christ made forgiveness of sin possible must also know that He broke the power of sin over their lives, as well. That's right! "*Knowing Christ defeated the power of sin frees His followers to consider themselves dead to it as well.*" Again: "*Knowing Christ defeated the power of sin frees His followers to consider themselves dead to it as well.*"

Please let me share an illustration that possibly would help at this point. Watchman Nee, in his classic *The Normal Christian Life*, puts it this way:

Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that the government of your country should wish to deal drastically with the question of strong drink and should decide that the whole country was to go "dry." How could the decision be carried into effect? If we were to search every shop and house throughout the land and smash all the bottles of wine or beer or brandy we came across, would that meet the case? Surely not. We might thereby rid the land of every drop of alcoholic liquor it contains, but behind those bottles of strong drink are the factories that produce them, and if we only deal with the bottles and leave the factories untouched, production will still continue and there is no permanent solution of the problem. No, the drink-producing factories, the breweries and distilleries throughout the land, must be closed down if the drink question is ever to be effectively and permanently settled.

Well, the blood of the Lord Jesus dealt with the question of the products, namely our sins. So the question of what we have done is settled; but would God have stopped there? What about the question of what we are? Our sins have been produced by us. They have been dealt with, but how are **we** going to be dealt with? Do you believe the Lord would cleanse away all our sins and then leave us to get rid of the sin-producing factory?

To ask this question is but to answer it. (Nee continues.) Of course He has not done half the work and left the other half undone. No, He has done away with the goods and also made a clean sweep of the factory that produced the goods.

The finished work of Christ really has gone to the root of our problem and dealt with it. There are no half measures with God. He has made full provision for sin's rule to be utterly broken.

"Knowing this," says Paul, "that our old man was crucified with him ... we should no longer be in bondage to sin." Knowing this! Yes, but do we know it? Or are we ignorant? —Christian Literature Crusade, 1957, p. 41)

Nee illustrates what Paul set forth in Romans, namely, that at Calvary, Christ was not only the perfect sacrifice whose blood atoned for our sin, He was also the great conqueror who in the very lair of the enemy soundly defeated him. Because of Christ's work, Satan is now a beaten foe. Christ is the victor and sin no longer rightfully has power over those who identify with Him.

What effect does this have on our lives? Throughout Scripture, faith is always built on truth—God's truth. For example, we can't sense forgiveness from God if we don't know the fact that Christ's death made this possible. However, once the truth has penetrated our minds, that is, once the Holy Spirit has revealed this truth to us, we can now, in faith, gladly acknowledge it and forgiveness becomes ours. The proportion of our sin doesn't matter once we see that Christ's death means cleansing is personally available for each one of us. It is a matter of receiving His great gift to ourselves by faith. But, knowing the fact makes it possible to act upon it!

I believe that too few Christians are aware that Christ also literally broke the power of sin over us when He died on our behalf. In Watchman Nee's terms, "He crushed the very source of evil." And, Nee is only reiterating Paul's thoughts from Romans. But, if this is not realized, if it is not understood or known, faith has no way of being born, nor can this truth become operative in the heart.

Maybe you are one who was conditioned to failure by words from a friend:

"Well, Jesus can forgive your sin, but don't expect your life to change drastically just because His Spirit lives in you. Mine certainly didn't."

If some well-meaning, but sadly ignorant, person talks to you like this, the following can be extremely helpful: "*Knowing Christ defeated the power of sin frees His followers to consider themselves dead to it as well.*" If that sounds too extreme, here is Romans 6:11 again:

*"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."*

Let's see if I can illustrate by relating to our experience.

We became Christians on the basis of faith in the person and work of Christ. But, say we didn't realize at the time that Jesus also broke the power of sin over our lives. In the flush of release from our burden, we probably began a pattern that, though admirable, was basically self-effort. When tempted, we each one of us said, "I shouldn't do that; it wouldn't be fair to Christ after He's done so much for me." But, the focus of our struggle while facing temptation was on ourselves. We each asked, "Will I be strong enough?" "I need help." "What will I do?"

I hope that, through discipline, we were often the winner. But, as time went on, the frequency of temptation or the power of several especially difficult problems consistently overcame us. So now, it appears that certain sins will cling to us for life. There seems to be no hope for anything better.

I want to share with each one of us the good news that Christ has also made victory possible for us, including defeat over the very sins that seem to shackle us: lying, lack of self-control, lust, profanity, selfishness, or whatever. According to Scripture, all of these have been stripped of their power by Christ in His work at Calvary.

As we read God's written Word and allow this fact to become firmly planted in our minds, our walk to freedom has begun. For once we know that Christ has broken the power of sin over our lives, we can begin to respond in faith to that truth, just as we did to the truth of salvation.

By way of practical application, the next time we are tempted, we must not focus on ourselves, but rather, quickly turn our minds to this reality—that in His marvelous work at Calvary, Christ defeated the power of these precise sins that trouble us.

Maybe self-pity has been rolling in on us today. Remember that Christ stripped this indulgence of feeling sorry for ourselves of any power over us when He died and rose again. He made it possible that no Christian would have to fall victim to such a force again.

Are we always stretching the truth to make ourselves look better? We’ve been doing it for years and it’s taken a great toll. When we’re next tempted, realize we don’t have to submit to this problem, because Jesus destroyed its power to enslave us when He died and rose again.

Can one ever overcome lustful thoughts? In ourselves we probably can’t. Instead, we must deliberately set our minds on Christ during this temptation, however, because He defeated lust’s coils when He submitted to the test of the cross and the tomb. A part of that great battle was the question of whether impure thoughts were going to be able to hold people like ourselves forever captive. I know, as a fact, that Christ won that decisive conflict, and we can now claim identity with His victory and walk away from this temptation.

Do you see the pattern I’ve been constructing? Instead of being obsessed with the problem and our lack of strength to overcome it, at the initial sign of the Tempter, we each must center our minds on Christ, on His complete victory, and on the truth that through identification with Him we too can overcome.

“Ah,” you say, “that’s just a little mental trick, and I know it’s not going to work.”

Well, it’s a bit presumptuous for you to say it won’t work if you’ve never tried it! Granted, I am only suggesting that we think differently about temptation. However, this recommended thought process is based on the single most important truth we have in this world—namely, that God sent His Son to enable us to be restored to Him and to walk a totally new way! Once the magnitude of that statement captures our minds, we will never again unwittingly excuse sin or see temptation as overpowering.

Let me offer yet another illustration. I know for a fact that some of you here today, at some point in your lives, greatly enjoyed the game of golf. Most non-golfers do not realize how this challenge of placing that little white ball into that hole-in-the-grass is really a game of mental acuity coupled with muscle memory. The skill at golf is an acquired skill. One becomes a better-than-average golfer by doing something that is at once simple, yet quite elusive—one becomes a better-than average golfer by playing golf...a lot. That’s right. Practice does make perfect.

Why does a golfer have to play game after game after game interspersed with time at the driving range? Because golf is a game of mental acuity coupled with muscle memory. And, the only way—the only way—to connect our brains with the muscles in our bodies is through repetitive practice. Every single person who longs to play a better-than-average game of golf can achieve this goal by playing as many games of golf as possible.

As a dear golfing friend said to me one day thirty years ago, “The only thing that keeps me from being a really good golfer is that I have to work for a living.” In other words, if my friend didn’t have to go to work every day and could, instead, spend that time on the golf course, he could achieve his goal of becoming a really good golfer. It would also help if he lived somewhere he could play golf every day of the year.

This same concept is true in the Christian life. If we really, really want to overcome sin in our lives, we must make a disciplined effort to overcome sin. We must connect our minds and our hearts with every other part of our bodies, so that when sin comes knocking, we just don’t answer the door.

“Do you then think human beings can be perfect?” you ask.

No, I have experienced enough of the Enemy's cleverness and my own slowness to learn that I don't entertain such a thought for a moment. But, I do believe that a Christian should have a basic mindset of victory as opposed to one of defeat. An emphasis on self-effort doesn't foster sustained optimism. But, by experience I can testify that: *"Knowing Christ defeated the power of sin frees His followers to consider themselves dead to it as well."*

Yes! That's right! *"Knowing Christ defeated the power of sin frees His followers to consider themselves dead to it as well."*

Amen.