

Life because of Righteousness

by T. Austin-Sparks

"But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died unto sin once: but the life that he liveth, He liveth unto God. Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus ... present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead ... To whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, His servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness ... But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life" (Romans 6:8-11,13,16,22).

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh ... And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:2-3, 10-11).

For our present purpose, the word is in Romans 6:11. *"Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus."* It is part of the last sentence that I want to underline — *"alive unto God"*.

What does it mean to be alive unto God? Well, it is a double-barrelled answer. Firstly, it is to be alive unto *God*. The full force of the whole context or argument of the apostle in this letter is that God should regard us as alive. That is not how man is regarded by God in nature. God regards man as dead, and when God has to take the attitude towards man that he is dead, that is a pretty poor lookout for man, that is, God can do nothing with or for a dead thing. God has no interest in a dead thing. There is no prospect whatever for a dead thing where God is concerned, and that is where man is by nature. God regards him as dead. He is dead unto God, and what is being brought out in this wonderful letter is the whole matter of how man can be alive unto God. That is, how God can look upon man not as dead but as alive, and being able so to look upon him, to have everything for him, a hope, a prospect, a purpose, a plan, everything that is of interest to God now to be brought over in relation to man because man is alive unto God. And now God is able to take account of man as not being dead and outside of everything but alive and inside everything. That is what is here in this letter, and so being alive unto God in the first place simply means being alive unto *God*, so that God can proceed with man accordingly.

Now you might have many plans for a life, many interests bound up with that life, many things that you would hope, expect and seek to realize in that life, but then if death intervenes and that object of your interest dies, everything dies with it and there is an end. Nothing of all your hope or expectation, desire and intention can be realized. It is only if that one is really alive to you that anything is possible, and that is how it is here. So the great thing is to be alive unto God.

But then there is the other side, the second barrel of this answer. We are alive unto God, but that also means God is alive unto us, and that is a great thing, and these two things, which are the one answer to the question, 'What does it mean to be alive unto God?' embrace and carry with them everything.

They mean union with God, as the context shows. I am not going to put my finger upon every passage in this letter, but you will recognize that I am keeping very close to the

Word in what I say. Union with God in Christ by reason of being alive unto God. The very nature of being alive unto God is union with Him in His Son.

Further, it means communion with God, fellowship — that is being alive unto God, having fellowship with God in Christ, communion with the Lord.

Then, out of that and because of that, it means instruction by the Lord. You and I as alive unto God are being directly and immediately instructed and taught by the Lord. The Lord is Himself teaching us, imparting to us knowledge, bringing us growingly into the knowledge of Himself. It is a life of progressive instruction, teaching, education, illumination. That is being alive unto God. God can do it because we are alive and we can enter into it because God is now alive to us. God is alive to us in terms of imparted knowledge of Himself. How do we know we are alive unto God? Because God is teaching us, God is speaking to us, God is leading, God is educating. This is a very real thing. It is something which God is doing in us.

Then to be alive unto God means spiritual growth, that there is an increasing measure of Christ, there is all God's fulness, we are growing in the measure of Christ. That is a sign of being alive unto God. God can do it because we are alive unto Him and we can grow because God is alive to us. This is all very simple, but these are the content of being alive to God, what it means to be alive to God. It means that God in Christ is in us a great living reality, not in us in any abstract way, but in a positive way. The Lord is in us, not remote from us, but resident within by His Spirit, the Living One in us. It means that God is for us, on our side, and it means that God in a peculiar sense is with us, in us, for us, and who can ever fathom what all that means?

Some of the words in this letter convey the rich meaning of what it means to be alive unto God. Sonship — we have that in chapter 8. *"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God"*. Liberty — that is what it means to be alive unto God, set free, and that is what sonship means, liberty in Christ.

It also means that the sovereignty of God is active in our interest. That is the great word which we so often quote. *"We know that to them that love God, all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose."* The sovereignty of God is active on our behalf. It may take years for us to be able to appreciate that, for all of us have the experience that there were patches in our lives when everything seemed to have gone wrong. We seemed to have missed the way. We seemed to have got into a cul-de-sac. It seemed that we had no way through, and for us at that time all the rest of our life seemed to be involved in failure. We have lived, perhaps through years, to come to the time when we see that that was the most important phase of our lives. God was in that, and that now has a place not of regret, not of barrenness, but a place of great fruitfulness and real thankfulness, and it has fitted into the whole. God, because we loved Him and because we were really seeking His interest in our lives, had hold of it, had hold of that dark patch, but He has kept us waiting for years to see how it fitted in, how it was working for good. But there is the fact, and, although we may have to wait years for the explanation and for the proof that Romans 8:28 is right, in the end we do find that God has been working good in all things. The sovereignty of God is a living thing in the lives of those who are alive unto God. To be alive unto God means to be brought into direct line with the divine sovereignty, not to see the sovereignty at work always, but into line with it, in the fact, and in due time, sooner or later, we shall know that was not a patch of vacuum in our experience without meaning or value, without God. That very thing which perhaps, was the most trying phase of our experience, had a very vital place.

All this is what it means to be alive unto God, all in a living way, personally and not traditionally. It is not as a system of religion, not as something outside of ourselves, not as components of something with which we are associated outwardly, but all this in an inward living way — alive unto God in Christ.

Well now, that tests us. It may be that some would say, 'Well, I am not in the good of that. I know something of it, I know parts of it, but I cannot say that is my life, my experience.' Well, it is for such that this may be a word of rescue and help. We have got to come to the Word and look into this perfect law of liberty, and in the first place see what the position is for those who are alive unto God, and then, if we feel that that is not our experience or position, we have got to look again and see what is the basis of being alive unto God. What is the ground upon which all that is to be our blessed experience?

The answer, of course, of this letter and of the Word of God is all gathered up into one word. What is the basis of being alive unto God? The answer is — righteousness — that in a word. But then the answer is defined for us here in the Word of God. We find it in a very simple way with which most of us are very familiar, but I am not hesitating in taking the A B C of things now, and the A B C of righteousness is this.

A — Christ died as us to sin. That is the statement here quite definitely. "*He died unto sin once for all*", not once upon a time, but once for all, forever and for all.

B — We died in Him to sin.

C — Christ lives as us without sin. Do you believe He lives as you? If you do not, then you say, Romans 6 is not true. If you do, then you have set your seal to God that He is true to the Word of God. Christ Jesus lives as you and as me. He never need have come in the flesh on His own behalf, for Himself, in His own separate and unrelated person. The whole meaning of the incarnation of God's Son is to relate Himself so closely with us that there is no division between Him and us, and that is true in His death and that is true in His life. He lives as us.

Will you go the next step? He lives as us without sin. This statement here — "*If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him*" — is not a faith for the future, that 'believe' does not relate to the future. We believe that we shall some day, somewhere, live with Him. No, that is a present faith, that is for now. We believe that we shall live with Him now. He lives as us, He lives as us without sin. Oh, we have not yet grasped the utterness of this, that as the righteous God, looks upon that one Man, He looks upon us as in Him through faith. Faith in the Son of God puts us into Christ and everything here is in Christ and God does not see us in ourselves. He sees Christ as us and therefore there is no condemnation.

D — We live in Him before God on that basis, without sin. I am not straining the teaching that is here. I say it is the ABC.

E — All this is made of value upon the ground of reckoning. Oh, that word has given people a lot of trouble! You can change the word if you like. Account yourselves. Perhaps the change of word does not help very much, but you will see the value later. What are we to reckon? Now follow me closely. What are we to reckon? Are we to reckon that sin is dead? No, emphatically No! The Word does not teach that. It is because you have not grasped that that you get into such an awful mess. People are all the time taking account of the fact that, after all, they still sin, there is still sin in them, and so that contradicts our whole position in Christ, that gets us all the time into the place of unrest. What are you reckoning? Something that the Word of God does not tell you to reckon. It does not tell you here to reckon that sin is dead. If you try to reckon on that, you are counting on something that will let you down every time, however many ways you may try to get out of it. It does not say that. "*Account yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus*". Well now, let us get very close to this. I think we shall get at it best by turning over to chapter 8:10-11.

"And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

Now then, getting to the spiritual through the physical. What does this say? The body is dead because of sin. That is the physical body. Is the physical body actually dead? Is it a corpse? The statement is, *"If Christ is in you ..."*. Now, to begin with, does Christ dwell in a corpse, in an actually dead physical body? I say, No! I think you all agree. But *"if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin"*. Is the physical body actually dead? No, it is not. Is this physical body to which the Word here refers, this mortal body, is it free from death? No, it is not; no one need argue that. It is a mortal body, it is a body of mortality, it has death in it, it is not free from death. We all know that in our mortal bodies. And yet the statement is, *"the body is dead"*. How is it dead? What does this word mean — *"the body is dead because of sin"*, and yet it is not dead, and yet it is not free from death? How is it dead? It is dead in the sense that it cannot in itself do the will or the work of God. That is how it is dead. This body cannot of itself do God's will. It cannot of itself do God's work and it cannot of itself reach God's end — glory. That is how it is dead. It cannot.

Now then, leave that for a moment and go to the next statement — *"but the spirit is life because of righteousness"*, and it is a small 's' — spirit. It is, our spirit is life because of righteousness. That is something other than the body, is it not? The body is dead, but the spirit ... That is something other than the body. The body is dead, the spirit is life.

Now, the third part of the statement. The Spirit of Him that raised up Christ Jesus dwelling in you shall quicken also your mortal, death-ridden body by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.

What then arises out of all this? Just this. We are not to look for or expect an immortal, sinless state in ourselves. You say, 'The body is dead because of sin. Well, that is all wrong, that is not redemption!' The body is dead because of sin. Teach yourself that that is wrong and what are you going to expect on the positive side? You can expect nothing other than an immortal body. Have you anything in Scripture to lead you to believe that you ought now to have an immortal body? No, all the Scripture is contrary to that. Paul carries our corruptible, mortal body right to the end. *"This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"* (1 Cor. 15:53). When? At the last trump. So to the end, mortality, death, will be in this body, and it is nothing but a deception, a delusion, to expect to have an immortal body now, but am I going to leave it there? Am I going to cry despair there and leave it? Not at all! An immortal body would be a sinless body, and corruption is because of sin.

Well, but there is the other side. While we are not to expect or look for an immortal, that is, a sinless body now as in ourselves, we are equally not to regard death as the end of everything. We are to count another life in. That is the point of the argument. What the apostle or the Holy Spirit is saying here is this, 'You have got a body and it is a death body. Death is working in that mortal body because of sin, *but* if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken, make alive, your dying body by His Spirit Who dwelleth in you' and He does not dwell in a corpse. That is not resurrection from the grave, that is now! There are two things. Because of sin there is death in a certain realm, but because of righteousness there is a life which masters death and holds death in check and says, 'You shall not work yourself out until I have done My work.' *"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death."* In other words, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of life, within this mortal, death-ridden body, says to death, 'Stay until I have done. I am Lord here. I am master here.' Not death, but life.

You have got to turn that right over to the spiritual. Chapter 6 teaches this. Are we looking for sinlessness? Are you saying 'I must reckon that sin is dead'? You are on a false line. It is there, *but* there is life because of righteousness in Christ, and you have got to bring the mastery of that life because of righteousness over against the working of death, the law of sin and death. The law of the Spirit of life has to say to the law of sin and death, 'Stay, I am master here. Death is not going to triumph here by sin; life is going to triumph here by righteousness' and you reckon in what? Not that you are sinless, not that there is no sin, but you reckon in righteousness which is the master, which is the greater of these two powers, righteousness triumphant! Oh to do this kind of counting in, counting in righteousness and then there is life!

And, blessed be God, this is to be, by the indwelling Christ, a matter in our spirit, and that is the focal point. You see, here, on the one hand, is the body of death. On the other hand, there is the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead. In between the two is our spirit which is life because of righteousness. Now then, who is going to get into our spirit and rule? That state of death because of sin? Is that going to get into our spirit and rule, keep our spirit under oppression and bondage? Or is the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead going to get into our spirit and rule? It is a matter of our spirit as the vessel of life or death. Let death into your spirit and you are done. Let life by the Holy Spirit into your spirit — you are not made immortal in body in order to sinlessness, but you are made triumphant. You can get on with the work of the Lord. That is presenting yourselves as servants of righteousness. The focal point is your spirit. It is not that your spirit is everything, but it is the focal point, it is the meeting-place. So in spirit by letting in, laying hold in faith upon, the Spirit of life in Christ, we repudiate what is a fact about us in nature, but in repudiating we nullify and our nullifying is only, after all, a bringing of things to the place where God has put them.

What is the active law of this? Reckon yourself dead, on that side, to that active power which is as true in your soul as in your body death. Reckon yourself dead to that. What is the opposite of accounting yourself dead to that? It is not counting yourself dead to it, that is all. It is taking the death into account instead of putting death out of account. Righteousness is the great eradicator; it is righteousness which nullifies, blots out. But how does it blot out? It does not annihilate, but it becomes a power which overcomes in our spirit. There is a tremendous need for the Lord's people to be steady and strong on their spiritual feet over this matter, and that they are not swayed to and fro, knocked about all over the place, but walking steadily.

Christ is my righteousness — that is what is here. Therefore He is my life, and faith takes hold of Him as my righteousness and therefore He becomes my life. If unbelief takes hold of my unrighteousness, then it becomes my death; obedience unto righteousness which is life, or obedience unto unrighteousness, which is death.

So I close. We nullify everything as to life if we remain on the negative side of sin and death. We nullify everything — all that we have said as being the meaning of being alive unto God. Are you complaining that there is no communion? The heavens are closed, there is no fellowship, no living way, no liberty, that these are beautiful truths but there is no experience of them? Are you quite sure that you have not nullified everything by letting into your spirit the acceptance, the accounting, the reckoning of unrighteousness? Are you sure that you are on God's ground of life, righteousness by faith, not what you are? Have I got it home to you? Here is your body (some of you can appreciate this more than others) with its suffering, its weakness and all that you go through because of that mortal body. What are you going to do about it? Are you going to surrender to it and say, 'It is my verdict, it is the thing which counts, it is the criterion'? Are you going to do that because you know there is sin and death in it? You know that there is death because of sin, whether yours or the sin that has come down through the ages. Are you going to accept it as hopeless or are you going to reckon in something else? On the one hand, you are going to reckon that that is not the criterion. That was Paul's great point at Ephesus.

He said, "*We had the sentence of death in ourselves.*" Oh, it was terrible for Paul! He said there was no way out, "*we despaired of life, there was no way out for life. We had the sentence of death in ourselves that ... (there is the saving word!) that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead*". That is the other side.

Now then, in your body you have got death. Are you going to accept that or are you going to say, 'No! Also within this encasement I have the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead and that is the criterion, that is the issue. I do not surrender to that and in not doing so I therefore nullify that because, on the positive side, I take the life which the Spirit of life is to me in Christ.' You take that position. If you do not, you are simply nullifying everything that being alive unto God means.

But what you have to do in the physical realm, you have got to do in the spiritual realm as well. On the one side of our being there is sin and death. It will be there to the end. But there is another part of our being. The spirit is life because of righteousness, our spirit. Then the great, glorious, supreme factor. The Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you. Let me count on that, not on this. Let me reckon on that, not on the other, and in so reckoning, I give God a way, I honour God, I am obedient to God, and in reckoning on the positive side, we release everything that is of the Lord for us, life because of righteousness.

The Lord instruct our hearts in truth!