

If A Navy Seal Were A Christian
John Dicus
Lorain Avenue Church of Christ (08-11-2024)

Good morning. The title of our lesson today is, "If A Navy Seal Were A Christian"

This evening, one of my favorite TV shows returns. It's a series called "Seal Team".

It's a pretty realistic show. There are a couple of actual Seals on screen with the actors, as part of their team.

The episodes can be very intense.

The team's precision, especially under pressure, sends quite a strong and positive message.

There are many lessons I could draw out for Christians from the exploits of the Seal Team.

For instance, when the going gets hard, it brings out the best in each member of the team, not the worst. If one is lost or in trouble, finding and helping that team member takes precedence.

They talk about their "three-foot box," where they focus on the team members right next to them.

Their lives depend on mutual support. They function with impressive unity. This unity achieves effectiveness, and this effectiveness earns great respect. It draws people to them. It validates their purpose.

We've often studied, as a congregation, how to do a better job of building up one another in love.

You can see so many of the things we've studied in the characteristics of these Seal Team members.

Many of the team members have had to put family second when duty called.

Just as Jesus said, "we might have to do the same with our own families" when serving Him. Jesus needs to come before all else.

Seals call themselves "operators." They train together so they can operate seamlessly.

Now ... what if we considered ourselves "operators" ... as Christians?

Are we? Could we be?

We can't consider ourselves operators if we just serve the Lord on Sundays ... spend time with Christians for a few hours ... and then go about our daily lives, spending the bulk of our time with friends who don't have a shared love for Christ ... can we?

In the 70's, the Miami Dolphins went undefeated for an entire football season. When their lead was threatened, they would crank out another TD, with almost machine-like precision.

They ... the team ... they were operators.

James writes that, "faith without works is dead." Isn't James telling us that having a lot of Bible book-learning ... even when strongly believing that learning is truth ... is not sufficient?

It's essential, but not enough. It doesn't get the job done for the Lord.

Christians need to be "operators."

So, here's where I want to focus this morning ...

The Seal Team Leader was dealing with issues of commitment ... on his part most definitely ... as he worked through his own stuff. And also, with issues of commitment on the part of his team members.

He'd given up a lot of his life ... being part of a high energy team ... being a highly trained operator ... being team-lead with extra responsibility ... being always at the ready to, as they say, "SPIN UP."

Some of his friends advised him to lighten up. Some advised him to retire. Some advised him to ... not take it so seriously.

He'd come back with, "It's my job." "People depend on me." "People die if I get it wrong."

And the key thing he kept saying over and over ... the thing that grabbed my attention and stuck with me ... is ... "You're either 'all-in' ... or you're 'all-out.'"

All the things that make Seals good operators hinge on this one statement ... "You're either 'all-in' ... or you're 'all-out.'"

To most of us normal everyday folks this sounds crazy.

But to our member, Eddie III for example ... or to Larry's son before he retired ("Little Larry" we called him growing up) ...and others with their intense training and vital job responsibilities ...

... to nurses, doctors, EMT's, law enforcement officers ... service personnel ...

... I imagine it does not sound all that crazy.

Most of us are free to choose how much effort and energy we're going to put into any particular endeavor. We're in charge of how we prioritize and balance things.

And if we get it wrong, we can simply adjust and move forward.

People don't get hurt or die.

But not so with a Navy Seal.

Their priorities have been shifted ... re-focused ... such that mission effectiveness is prime.

To make this so ... "You're either 'all-in' ... or you're 'all-out.'"

Read this to say ... "If you're not all-in ... you're as good as all-out.

This motto ... just ... stuck in my brain. It stuck. It was inspiring. It was shockingly true.

And it was delivered genuinely, with a lot of energy.

No reason to doubt the veracity.

I admire such commitment and execution ... and precision.

Becoming a Christian is a dramatic case of re-focused priorities ...

Baptism has spun-up each of us ... to accomplish our God-given mission for Christ.

So, this brings me to the second reason the mantra stuck in my head.

I'm pretty sure it stuck because of Romans, Chapter 6.

When Connie, Larry and I (and others) ... were about 11 or 12 years old ... our Sunday Morn class teacher asked us to memorize the 6th chapter of Romans (my Dad, actually).

We did pretty good, I think. It has served me well. I can still call up most of the chapter from memory.

In the KJV ... mind you ... that's what we had in ... as my oldest grand daughter calls them ... "the olden days" ... when (as she told me) ... I had less "space" between the hairs on my head.

Paul asks the saints in the church at Rome ... (this will be the KJV ... it is unique phrasing ... and is a bit powerful) ...

"What shall we say then ... shall we continue in sin ... that grace may abound?

GOD FORBID

(When Chris was little ... he used to say ... GOD DEBID)

The issue there was ... once the brethren came to understand that they were saved by the grace of God ... by the free gift from God ...

[Paul had told them that salvation appeared in Jesus Christ by the grace of God while they were yet sinners ...]

... once they understood that they were once lost in sin and that they had been saved by grace, they began to ponder ... hmmm! ... if sin brought grace, and grace is good, very good ...

... maybe a bit more sin might yield a bit more grace?

If we have a "get out of jail free card," why not take advantage of it and lighten up a bit?

"God Forbid"

Let me say it like this ...

Just because you might like to see big shiny firetrucks and firefighters in action, setting fires ... to see more firetrucks is NOT a good idea at all."

Getting a little ahead of myself ... but it fits here ...

Paul says a few verses later ... in v10 ... that Jesus died to forgive sins ... once ... ONCE!

That sacrifice, by the grace of God, is all that it took. It was powerful enough for all time.

No way should we even consider that Christ needs to do more of the same.

In the same way, if we put sin to death in our bodies ... if we've made the choice to abandon sin ...

... if we crucify the old man ... old beliefs ... old ways ... old habits ... old leanings of the mind and heart ...

... if we put that old man to death ... and bury him.

Does it make any sense at all to think we can dig our old person up ... then bury him ... then dig him up ... on and on ... ?

That's ridiculous.

If sin ... any part of it at all ... is still hanging around in our life ... it makes more sense to realize that the old man wasn't really dead after all. And although you thought he was ... and you thought you had buried him ...

He wasn't dead and you didn't bury him.

You left him for dead, but left an arm and a leg sticking out of the ground.

Jesus didn't simply pass quietly in His sleep.

The Romans killed Him ... at the Jews behest.

There was NO WAY ... on the Cross ... Jesus was going to see the sun set with His own two eyes.

If we beat up on our old man, and just leave him for dead, there's a good chance he's still breathing.

But if we crucify him, he can go straight into the ground, never to come back to his old ways.

"How can we ... who are dead to sin ... live any longer therein?"

If the old man is dead, he's no longer alive ... right?

There's no such thing as ... half-dead.

And so, if he's not dead, then he's still alive.

See what Paul is saying?

It's one or the other ... but not both.

If you really put the man of sin to death, then how can you be toying with sin?

How can any Godly path forward, involve even the slightest involvement with sinful pleasures?

Paul is making two analogies.

The first analogy ... is the one we've been talking about. Jesus died and was buried.

Before we are baptized, the old has to die. Then we are buried in the water of baptism.

Before people are buried in the ground, they die. Their old life on earth is gone ... they can't go back.

If we truly put the man of sin to death, and are buried in the waters of baptism, we can't go back.

If you CAN go back, then the old guy was faking and wasn't dead.

Continuing ... the second analogy is this ...

Just as Christ was crucified for our sins and was buried ... we crucify our old man of sin. We say good-bye and good riddance ... and we don't look back ... no regrets ... and are buried in baptism.

Paul says ... we are buried with Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine trying to be buried with Christ while faking the death of your old man? Without repentance?

And Paul says ... if we are buried with Christ, we are raised up with Him, to walk in newness of life.

The old man dies. The new man is born.

Jesus tells us ... in John 3:3-5 ... that we are born anew ... born again ... out of the waters of baptism.

Jesus died ... was buried ... and rose ... once. We die ... are buried ... and will rise to live forever.

vv 3-5 " Know ye not, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ ... were baptized into his death?

Therefore, we are buried with him ... by baptism ... into death ... that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father ... even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been planted together [buried together] ... in the likeness of his death ... we shall be also (also be) ... in the likeness of his resurrection"

Here it is ... in the likeness of His death means ... that we need to have crucified old man ... just as the Romans crucified the man Jesus.

Romans 6 ... is a powerful chapter.

So much there.

Here's the piece I want to pull out for you ... building on what we've talked about so far this morning.

Picture this in your mind.

Paul is drawing for us ... a word picture ... of two roads ... two pathways.

They are separated by a considerable distance.

So much so ... that you cannot drive down the middle ... left wheels on one road ... right wheels on the other.

So much so ... that your legs are way not long enough ... to allow you to place one foot on one path ... and the other foot on the other path.

So, you're going to have to choose which path you're going to walk on (can't be both).

One path is the path of righteousness ... the path of service to Christ ... the path to eternal life.

The other path is the path of sin ... the path of serving Satan ... the path to eternal death.

Paul describes quite an immense separation between these two paths. They have nothing in common ... ZERO ... they do not intersect.

With Christ ... you're either all-in, or you're all-out.

Paul says ... vv 12-13 ... "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin ... (mind ... body ... senses ... arms ... legs) ... instead yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead ... and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Christians are children of God. They are alive from the dead, having died to sin and having been raised up to walk in newness of life.

They are refocused ... and are to be totally dedicated to serving God in Christ (spun up).

V 16 ... "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey ... his servants ye are ... to whom ye obey ... whether it be of sin unto death ... or of obedience unto righteousness?"

Don't try to fool yourself.

If you serve the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength ... you are His ... you belong to Him. He purchased you with his own blood.

If you let sin into your life ... you belong to Satan. No middle ground ... you've compromised your mission.

Now hold on ... you say ...

I may not be perfect ... I may have my little vices ... but I love my Lord ...

(Let's put aside the inevitable ... the sins ... the slips and stumbles in the Christian Walk that we repent of.)

What we're talking about here ... is about where your heart is.

We're talking about ... whether or not ... you still allow yourself a dabble here and there in sin.

Remember ... Paul said ... if we really and truly killed off the old guy (or gal) ... why would we have any pleasure at all in digging him or her up from time to time?

Oh ... for Pete's sake ... we say ...

Come on Jesus ... Satan doesn't mind if I dabble around a bit with Him? Why should it be such a big thing with You? You've got most of me?

Satan said he doesn't need all that much of me.

(Please ... never even think about saying that to the Lord.)

He is not willing to share the throne over your life with anyone ... He alone is Sovereign.

He alone can save you and take you to Heaven.

If you try to involve anyone or anything else ... in running your life ... and the mission is compromised. You'll be dead for eternity ... and you may very well take others down with you.

There is Hymn titled ... "In Christ Alone." "In Christ alone ... I love ... I stand ... and live ...

In Christ alone ... my hope is found. In Him the wrath of God was satisfied. On Him alone ... was every sin laid"

Before we crucified the old man and were buried in baptism ... we belonged to Satan. The members of our bodies ... our hearts, minds, arms legs, lips ... served Satan, He was our master.

But once we said good-bye to our old life ... and rose up with Christ ... we belonged to the Lord.

Where do you see the possibility of a blended version of righteousness and sin ... in all this?

As Paul says it ... vv 18-19 ... "But God be thanked ... that although ye were the servants of sin ... ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you? Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."

How do people get from the one path to the other? From the path of the sinner to the path of the righteous?

The two paths don't cross. So how is it done?

We just read how to make the jump.

It's done by obeying the teaching of the Gospel ... in baptism.

In Rom 6:22-23 ... Paul wraps up his message. He shows us where each of the two paths lead ... where the two roads end ... where they empty out.

We don't want to be on the dead-end path.

Paul talks about the shame involved ... in the sinful path ... that Christians have abandoned.

vv 20-21 ... "... when ye were the servants of sin ... ye were free from righteousness.

What fruit had ye then ... in those things ... whereof ye are now ashamed? ... for the end of those things is death?"

GOD FORBID.

"Now ... being made free from sin ... and become servants to God ... ye have your fruit unto holiness ... and the end everlasting life.

For the wages of sin is death ... but the gift of God ... is eternal life ... through Jesus Christ our Lord"

Several years ago, our family was on a trip to Europe. We had just landed and were in De Gaul airport. We were riding the escalator down.

Across the huge atrium ... passengers were being called to begin boarding a plane ... a large one.

Hundreds of passengers piled on the escalator, carrying them up to the level of their gate.

We watched ... with a bit of humor that quickly turned to concern.

The doors leading out of the small landing at the top of the escalator had not yet been unlocked.

And very quickly ... there a huge problem developed. People at the bottom had no idea of the trouble that lay ahead.

The passengers at the top were panicking ... beginning to be crushed. Thankfully, the doors were opened ... just in the nick of time.

Just try and picture that scene.

The road of a lifetime service to sin ... is a lot like that.

A literal DEAD-END

So now, let's talk more about being all-in.

Let's do the math.

Zero % service to Christ ... 100% to Satan ... is obviously NOT ... all-in for the Lord. No argument there ... no ambiguity ... that's a no-brainer.

So ... let's skip down the page a bit ...

How about 50% service to the Lord ... 50% to Satan?

We've already seen that Christ won't accept that.

So ... that's a "NO" ... no all-in for the Lord.

Let's skip down the page some more!

How about a 75/25 ... Lord/Satan split? ... NOPE!

Ok then ... 90/10? Again, Jesus says, "No Way."

Okay then ... 95/5 ... that's reasonable ... you say.

"Not buying it" ... says the Lord.

OK ... "final" offer you say!

99% to you Lord ... just a measly 1% to the things I want to touch and taste and do ... just a teeny, little bit ... every now and then??

I'm yours Lord ... no worries ... just 1%?

NO!! ... "You're either 'all-in,' or you're 'all-out'"

If you even think about giving ... even a piece of yourself to My sworn enemy ... Jesus says ...

... you're of no use to ME.

If you're a Navy Seal on a life-or-death mission ... you've got be sure ... that your team-mates are all-in

There can't be a single part of them ... that's someplace else ... home ... family ... R&R ... whatever ...

They've got to be all-in ...

... in their training ... in their situational awareness ... in their focus ... in their execution.

If they or you are not all-in ... then you're no good to each other. You're no good to your commanders ... to your mission ... to your country ...

But wait!! ... you say ... now ... I'm just an ordinary everyday Christian.

I'm not in a do or die situation ...

I'm not literally fighting ... the war on terror ... get real!

No ... you're not ... it's worse than that.

You're engaged in a war ... where the outcome is far more important ... far more deadly ...
... if you're not all-in.

Here's how the Apostle Peter describes our situation ...

1 Pet 5:8 ... "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (to tear apart and consume).

1 Pet 2:11 ... "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims ... abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul."

And how about Paul ... does he have anything to add to that?

Eph 6:10-13 ... "Be strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

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. Therefore, put on the full armor 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." (As the hymn says ... "to stand entire at last.")

Are you all-in for the Lord?

It's the only way you're of use to Him.

Is this a tall order? YES!

Will it take time, energy, and determination ... and allegiance? YES!

Will there be a time when the fight has to take precedence over family and friendships and jobs? YES!

Is there another way? NO!

If you're not all in ... you're all out!

Invitation Of Christ

What will you do with God's love in His Son? ... Will you return it?

If you're not a Christian with the incredible hope of eternal life ... won't you repent and be baptized ... and rise up to walk in newness of life ... your sins forgiven?

If you're not in ... won't you come in?

If you are a Christian ... but have fallen back into the world ... won't you repent ... and pray to God for forgiveness?

Won't you please come back in?

Either way ... if you allow it ... the blood of Jesus will make you whole ... God and Christ have seen to that

OUT ... is no place be.