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Romans 6:1-14

Twelfth Message

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THE CASE FOR RIGHTEOUS LIVING: A NEW NATURE

Our celebration of Palm Sunday acknowledges the most important week in the history of mankind. In fact, even the gospel writers devoted a large proportion of their work to this week. For example, Mark dedicated 6 of his 16 chapters to this week. John used 9 out of his 21, practically half of his gospel. The point is that all of Jesus' previous ministry was preparation for this week. There is no other week like this in human history, nor will there ever be one to follow.

As you know, this week began gloriously with Jesus mounted upon the foal of a donkey, humbly entering Jerusalem to offer himself as King. Those who recognized him were the children who laid palm branches down and sang, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." This was the magnificent entrance of the Messiah.

But the glory was short-lived! When Jesus went into the temple to teach, he taught on judgment, saying, "This city of Jerusalem and this carnal kingdom of Israel is at an end. Out of the death of this kingdom, a heavenly kingdom with a heavenly king will be born." His message was not received well by the authorities who took this opportunity to plan his death.

Of course, this was followed by the betrayal of Judas and the abandonment of the disciples in Gethsemane. Then even the head of the apostolic band Peter denied that he knew Christ. Finally, Jesus was turned over to the authorities to be mocked, scourged, beaten, and spit upon. Isaiah tells us that he was not recognizable as a man when they were done.

In the end, Jesus was hung on a tree to die the death of a criminal, abandoned and cursed by God himself. His final cry on that cross was, "It is finished!" From that point, the Father turned back to his Son and began to vindicate him. Not one of his bones was broken; no unholy hand touched his body. He was placed in a holy sepulchre, the grave of a rich man. Then God raised him on the third day and seated him at his right hand.

Most of us are familiar with the facts of that week, but do you know what this history means for you today? Do you know the implications of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus for your own life? Romans 6 is the greatest text in Scripture dealing with these events. Paul tells us that what happened during that week makes righteous living available to every believer by granting him a new heart and a new nature. When Christ died, was buried and resurrected, every Christian experienced the same.

The outline of our text comes under the heading of "The Case for Righteous Living." Paul begins with a question regarding righteous living. Then he gives us the basis for this kind of living found in our union with Christ. Then he tells us the attitudes of righteous living. Finally, he explains the actions of righteous living.

Let us begin with the question in verse 1.

I. The Question Regarding Righteous Living (6:1-2)

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? (Rom 6:1 NASB)

In Romans 5, we examined the history of Adam—the destiny of his race and the sin, havoc and death he created through one act of sin. Then we looked at the glory of the person of Jesus and his race. We discovered that where sin abounded grace abounded all the more through Jesus Christ. No matter what mess Adam created, Christ redeemed it with a grace that was stronger to save than Adam's sin was to ruin.

Thus, the question arises: "If God's grace abounded, why not sin all the more that grace might continue to increase?" In other words, why not remain a slave to sin so that God may continue to shower his grace? This was not a hypothetical question for Paul, but was an actual accusation he faced from Jews who said he could not teach grace alone because this would lead to licentious living. They thought the Law was still necessary to keep Christians from getting out of line.

Paul even struggled with Christians who believed this philosophy. Paul wrote Romans from the city of Corinth. In his Corinthian correspondence, it is obvious that many Christians felt that they could live as they pleased since they were already forgiven. The Corinthian church had problems with incest, drunkenness at the communion table, exploitation of the poor, and divisions. Rather than expressing disapproval of these things, the Christian leaders said, "This is an assertion of our Christian liberty."

In church history, we discover the same trend. Many taught this truth: "Continue in sin that grace might increase." One of the most notable examples of this was a Russian monk named Gregory Rasputin. F. F. Bruce describes him as:

the evil genius of the Romanov family in its last years of power. Rasputin taught and exemplified the doctrine of salvation through repeated experiences of sin and repentance. He held that, as those who sin most require most forgiveness, a sinner who continues to sin with abandon enjoys, each time he repents, more of God's forgiving grace than the ordinary sinner.

I think this question is relevant not just to Paul's day but to our own. Just as Paul faced the Jews, we have legalists who impose rules on the gospel because they say grace is not enough. And we have many examples of Christians who live as they please, giving the legalists plenty of ammunition.

Paul's answer is quite brief. Read verse 2:

May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

First he gives an emotional response from the heart, then a logical response from his mind.

His emotional response is, "May it never be!" To even repeat this question is repulsive to Paul's heart. He is shocked that he even has

to deal with it. If we truly understood the depth of God's grace and his hatred toward sin, we would be repulsed as well. Because of our media and the age in which we live, we are so accustomed to sin—adultery, sarcastic speech, drug abuse, and violence—that we no longer have this divine sensitivity and revulsion toward sin. We do not respond as Jude when he said, "I want you to hate even the garment spotted by the flesh."

Remember what happened in Russia during the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl? Remember all the grief, pollution and damaged lives? The radiation even went into the atmosphere, affecting the rain and crops in Europe. What a mess! Suppose someone with enough technological genius was able to clean up the mess and institute a radical new energy source which was pollution-free. Someone could have responded, "That was a great work! Let's have another meltdown to see you do it again." What revulsion that would cause! We would respond, "God forbid we should do such a thing when we now have such a wonderful solution!" This is how Paul reacts to this question.

His logical response is, "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" This is the theme of our text. We are dead to sin! When we came to Jesus Christ, we died to sin. I am sure you are saying, "Are you kidding? My body looks alive, and sin is doing better than my body!" This reminds me of the objections someone once made when he was told that he was living in the age of the millennium. He said, "If this is the millennium, I want my money back!" When we examine our lives before a text like this, we conclude the text does not fit reality.

Since the figure of the cross sometimes fades into the background, I have brought pall-bearers and a coffin into the sanctuary. Imagine yourself lying in the casket. We are going to bury you once and for all! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

In Paul's argument, he will tell us that the basis for righteous living is our union with Christ. Look at verses 3-5.

II. The Basis for Righteous Living: Union with Christ (6:3-5)

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection...

Paul outlines five facts which form the basis for righteous living. The first one is that when we believed in Christ we were placed into him. This is symbolized by baptism.

In the early church, when someone believed, he was immediately baptized as a public declaration that he was a follower of Jesus Christ. We have drifted away from that practice in our culture. We almost make belief and baptism two separate experiences. In the early church, they did not do that. When they came to Christ, they renounced their old life publicly with baptism and announced that they were new creatures. In marriage, when you commit yourself to your spouse, you do it publicly with a ring which symbolizes the vows you have taken. You acknowledge that you are now accountable to one person for life. The exchange of rings is inseparable from the vows. In the same way, baptism and belief were seen as two events from the same experience.

Baptism is an apt symbol because the word itself means "to be placed into something" resulting in a permanent and radical change. It was used in the ancient world of dipping a piece of cloth into dye and making it radically and permanently different. The cloth became one with the dye.

Paul is saying that a Christian is not merely a forgiven sinner, but one who has been joined into a personal and permanent union with Jesus Christ. Notice how he emphasizes this with his prepositions. He says we are baptized into Christ, baptized into his death, buried with him, and united together with him. The first great fact is that when we believe we are baptized or placed into Christ in a permanent union.

The second fact is that baptism into Christ means being "placed into" his death. One of the great tragedies in our culture is teenage suicide. One of the reasons behind these suicides is the fact that sin has escalated in our culture. Peer pressure today pulls teenagers into the worst forms of sin possible. In my day, when teenagers wanted to rebel, we chewed gum in class or threw erasers across the room. Only the most daring guys would smoke in the restroom or cut class. Today our teenagers face alcoholism, drug addiction, and sexual abuse. When they enter into these sins, they look at their lives, which they know ought to be innocent, and hunger for their lost youth and purity. As a result, many commit suicide out of self-hatred. Suicide is the ultimate renunciation of the old life.

The good news of the gospel is that when we believed in Jesus Christ, we climbed into the casket and died. Our old self, the one we hated, died with Christ. When talking with someone who is contemplating suicide, tell them the good news: "Do it right now! Place your life in Jesus Christ, and your old life will be gone. You can walk away clean. He will bury your old life right here." I know that once our old life is placed in the grave, we like to dig it up again. We create all kinds of tools to dig up the old man, but Scripture says he is dead.

The third great fact is that when we are placed into Christ's death we are buried with him. I have often wondered why Paul adds the term "burial." Is death not enough? Having been through the deaths of a couple of close friends, I have seen the significance of burial as the seal of death. When relatives place their friends in the ground and have a service, the fact that this person is no longer alive comes home to them with inescapable conclusiveness. When my wife's sister passed away, many denied her death until we had a service. Out of our four parents, two have told Emily and me that they do not want to have memorial services. In their hearts, this is their way of avoiding the finality of death. Once death arrives, we cannot go on with our families. Burial symbolizes that life is over.

The fourth great fact is that if we are buried with Jesus, it follows that we will be raised with him. The text says, "Since we were united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection." The word "united" is an agricultural term meaning "planted together with." It is used of seeds placed in the ground to die and bring forth new life. A medieval Jewish rabbi named Judah Halevi caught this secret about God:

Besides this, God has a secret and wise design concerning us, which should be compared to wisdom hidden in the seed which falls into the ground, where it undergoes an external transformation into earth, water and dirt, without leaving a trace for him who looks down upon it. It is, however, the seed itself which transforms earth and water into its own substance, carries from

one stage to another, until it refines the elements and transfers them into something like itself, casting off husks, leaves, etc., and allowing the pure core to appear, capable of bearing the Divine influence.

His only mistake was to think that the law of Moses could accomplish this. Paul says this is not so. What transforms us is dying with the Messiah, being with him in the ground.

The divine life comes with our resurrection. Paul says the final purpose of all of this, being united with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection, is that we might walk in a new life now. When we accepted Christ, we were crucified, and our old life which was dominated by sin was left in the grave. Then we were actually resurrected. This new spirit came to live in the old body. Now we have a new spirit to walk in a new kind of life.

What Paul is writing about happened to him in experience. In the city of Lystra, he was stoned with rocks and left for dead. In another text of Scripture, he says that at one point in his life, and it may have been this occasion, he was caught up into the third heaven. He saw the glory and majesty of God and the new heavens and earth. His experience was so magnificent God had to give him a thorn in his flesh to keep him humble. When he returned to earth to live in this old body, he was a different man! He saw that he was no longer a slave to sin and that he could walk in newness of life for the rest of his days.

God's grace does not merely supply our forgiveness. It also gives us all the divine equipment we need in order to live a holy life. This is why Paul is appalled by the question: "Shall we continue to sin that grace might increase?" God has given us everything we need. There is no more to be had. We now have a new heart that responds to the life of God, and we have resurrection life. This is the basis for righteous living. It is not ethics, a firm resolve or trying harder. The basis for righteous living is a relationship, our union with Christ. You have been placed in him. This is the most important doctrine of Scripture.

Paul now moves from these facts regarding righteous living to the attitudes involved. Look at verses 6-11.

III. The Attitudes for Righteous Living (6:6-11)

...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.

The word we are to notice is "knowing." This is the attitude leading to righteousness. This word does not mean what we moderns think it means. We say we "know" something when we have all of the intellectual data, when we have the objective facts necessary for getting an A on the test. However, the Hebrew idea of "knowing" refers to an intimacy so deep it is used for the sexual relationship between a husband and wife. The man who loves his wife "knows" his wife, and out of their knowing they bear children.

In other words, Paul is saying, "Don't make these truths abstract. Take them into your heart, and receive this reality into your being." This means we are to read the Scripture, memorize it, and meditate upon its meaning in order to become so intimate with it that we clearly see the implications of the cross and the resurrection.

We are to know the implications of his death, that our old man was crucified. When Christ died on the cross, we were there. When we consider the cross this Easter week and remember the mocking

and scourging and all of hell unleashed against the Son of God, we need to remember we were there. Jesus took our place and drank the wrath of God dry. He swallowed every drop. The crucifixion had one purpose—to free us from sin. Paul clearly says this: "In order that the body of sin might be done away." This is the definition of "dead to sin." The words "done away with" mean "to make powerless, ineffective, or barren." It was used in the ancient world of unfruitful trees or unproductive land.

This does not mean that sin has been destroyed or that it ceases to exist in our bodies. Rather, sin's power has been broken, made ineffective. It has been overthrown. We still have all those urges crying out for attention—those tyrants of sin shouting out orders for us to fulfill our sinful desires. But we are dead. Sin has no power over our new divine life in the human heart. Paul says the person who has died is freed from sin. Death pays all the debts. There is no more debt to be paid. How can you demand more of a dead person? Sin no longer has any claim on our lives. Our body is in the grave.

Paul says we are to not only meditate upon the implications of the cross but also on the implications of the resurrection. Look at verses 8-9:

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

This is great truth! As a seed, we went into the ground with Jesus Christ. Thus, when Jesus Christ was raised to newness of life, so were we. Death no longer has power over us. Every morning when we face the world anew, we must think of ourselves in these terms. We have to understand that for the first time we have a heart that can respond to God.

Under the Old Covenant, the law made demands on Israel—be righteous, be holy, respond to God's grace—but the heart would not respond to God or love God fully. Jesus did respond to God with his whole heart, and this is the same Jesus who lives in us. Thus, our spirit is perfect even though our body is not. We cannot add a thing.

As a result, I must be careful about how I refer to myself. If you are like me, you know your weaknesses, especially since you have become a Christian. For example, I know that I am impulsive and insensitive. I like to speak before I listen. I know these weaknesses so well that I can freely say this about myself. But what does this tell you about me? This is what I used to be! This is Brian in the flesh. This is not who I am in Jesus Christ.

I need to be careful how I describe myself because I have no excuse for continuing in sin. I am perfectly capable of putting on the new man. Have you ever noticed in a family argument that if someone knocks on the door you can immediately turn off your anger? We can put on the new man in an instant. We just choose not to do so.

Though these fleshly urges will be with us the rest of our lives, we need to be careful how we view ourselves. We cannot say, "I am prejudiced, and that is the end of it." Since Christ in us is not prejudiced, we do not have to be. We cannot say, "I am just an angry person." Christ in us is sensitive and speaks with gentleness. We must see ourselves according to our new nature. This heart transplant is permanent.

Meditate on these things. This is the first attitude we are to have. Seek Christ in the heavens for this is where we are also. This is the real us.

The second attitude we are to have is that we are to reckon this to be true. Look at verse 11:

Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

“Reckon” is a banking term meaning “to put to one’s account.” Let me illustrate this for you. I am now the executor of my wife’s sister’s estate. As her trustee, I have access to all of her funds. Her medical bills are now arriving in our mailbox. When I see these bills, I do not scream, “How are we going to pay for this? We will go broke!” I know I have funds set aside for this purpose. Since I can count on them, I just write the checks and mail them.

We think we are spiritually bankrupt. When God makes demands on us to be righteous, we say, “I know I have Christ, but I don’t have the resources.” God says we do, whether we feel like it or not. Count on them! This is not a “let’s pretend” exercise. This is the reality of faith.

Every time I count on the resources of Christ, it is contrary to my fleshly urges. Do you ever naturally have love welling up within you and oozing out of your pores? No! We are not patient; we are not bold when we share about Christ. We must count on the fact that God has given us these characteristics and act upon them. Then the resources will come. This is an act of faith because we do not feel this way. Our old nature cries out to do other things all the time.

The basis for righteous living is our union with Christ. Our attitudes should be that we know these things to be true and count on God’s resources. This leads us to our final step in which Paul tells us the actions of righteous living in verses 12-14.

IV. The Actions for Righteous Living (6:12-14)

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on [stop] presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.

The Law made good, ethical demands upon us to love God and our neighbor, but it could not change our wicked hearts. Grace came along with the same demands, yea even higher demands, and gave us the resources and a new heart to respond to God. I love the little poem:

Do this and live the Law commands,
But gives me neither feet nor hands.
A better way God’s grace doth bring,
It bids me fly and gives me wings.

What are righteous actions? The first action Paul gives is a negative one. We are to take hold of this old, tyrannical sea captain, Sin, who is used to running our ship. He was always shouting orders at us in order to get us to respond in sin, but God has thrown him overboard. Even so, he continually tries to climb aboard again. Paul says we are to grab this pompous tyrant by the scruff of the neck and toss him back into the sea. Do not let sin reign! Stop! This is the first action for the new king.

Once we have done that, we are to set up watch for he will try to climb back up the side of the ship. We are to guard ourselves against his continued intrusion. We are to watch the actions of our eyes, hands and feet in order to keep us away from sin. All of this is to guard the heart because this old man is aggressive. He will constantly try to return.

Third, we are to present ourselves to God. Now we are the captain of the ship. With the sextant of the Scripture, we know where we are going. We are to take the rudder with the help of the wind of the Spirit and sail in the right direction. In the Christian life, we always sail in a gulf stream against the current.

The minute we let our sail down and quit making our presentation to God, we will drift in the wrong direction. Our natural drift is always toward sin. Have you noticed that about the Christian life? Whenever I am passive, I do not choose righteousness. My natural drift is toward impulsiveness, insensitivity, and other forms of wickedness. I need this continual presentation and the sextant of the Scripture. I must grab the rudder, hoist my sail, and use the full wind of the Spirit. This is always a struggle. Righteous living is a constant battle, but we are winning. We will make it in Jesus Christ. These are the actions of righteous living.

Paul has explained righteous living carefully. There can be only three reasons for remaining in sin now that you are a Christian. Perhaps you were ignorant of the truths in Romans 6. As of now, that excuse is no longer valid. Second, you may refuse to believe Paul. Maybe you do not reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to God. Or third, you may refuse to obey. This is where we work in counseling. We help people with their ignorance, their lack of faith and their disobedience.

In what area of your life have you remained in sin because you did not know or refused to believe that you are a new person in Christ? William Tyndale wrote in his commentary on Romans:

Now go to, reader, and according to the order of Paul’s writing, even so do thou...Remember that Christ made not this atonement that thou shouldest anger God again; neither died he for thy sins, that thou shouldest live still in them; neither cleansed he thee, that thou shouldest return, as a swine, unto thine old puddle again; but that thou shouldest be a new creature, and live a new life after the will of God, and not of the flesh.

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