

**“DEAD TO SIN - ALIVE WITH CHRIST”** (Lenten Series: *Why the Cross of the Christ?*)

Romans 6:1-14 - March 22, 2020 - Immanuel - Senior Pastor: Dr. Kelly McClendon

**Good morning - and welcome to worship at Immanuel (or good afternoon or evening or whenever you may watch this later.) I'm glad you're with us.**

**Story about watching VIDEO of my Preaching - hands - (waving arms trying to fly?)**

**We're continuing our Lenten Sermon Series** which asks the question, *“Why the Cross of Christ?”* and we're finding answers in the book of Romans. Today's answer is this - *“So we can be dead to sin, and alive with Christ.”* **Let us pray...**

**When my oldest son was about three years old,** I was doing some yard work. I took him outside to play while I trimmed the hedges. Holding his hand, I knelt down beside him so that we could look at each other face to face. Slowly and carefully I said,

- Now son, you can out play here in our front yard.
- You can go next door and play in your friend's front yard.
- You can ride your Big Wheel up and down the driveway.
- You can go in the back yard and play on your swing.
- You can go back inside and watch television.
- You can stay here and watch me trim the hedges.
- These are all the things you have my permission to do.

***“But you can NOT go out into the street. It is very dangerous there. You cannot play in the street. Do you understand what I'm saying?”*** My 3-year-old son, nodded his head and said *“Yes, Daddy.”* I let go of his hand and he ran straight to the curb, put one foot in the street, and then turned his head toward me and smiled, as if to say, *“Foolish mortal!”*

**Now, why would he do that?** After clearly understanding all the freedoms and blessings I had offered to him, why would he deliberately go to the one place I told him not to go?

**He did it because that little boy, was like so many other people**

- They want to do things their own way
- They want to live by their own rules
- They want to make the final decisions about what is right or wrong for them

**This orientation and desire to be “in charge”** of our own lives lies at the very heart of the conflict between humanity and God. God created us and loves us. God wants to supply us with all kinds of blessings. As He told Israel in Jeremiah 29:1, *“I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

**But people - too often - look at God,** and instead of focusing on the blessings He offers we focus instead on what we see as restrictions that God would place on our lives. We don't see that those restrictions are meant for our good, to keep us from harm.

**We desperately need to recognize this fact** - to enjoy God's best in life, we must first submit to God's authority. As the old hymn says, *"Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."*

**One day Jesus said, "IF you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."** Jesus went on to say, *"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (John 8:31-32) It is somewhat counterintuitive - but in order to be truly free, we must first surrender ourselves to Christ. We must turn ourselves over to His great authority over our lives. We must give up our delusions of independence and live in full dependence on the sovereignty of God.

**In our text, Paul was writing to Christian people.** In the previous chapter he reminds us that we are saved by grace through faith, in this chapter he clarifies what that means. Evidently some people had developed a serious misunderstanding about grace and were falling into **license**. I believe that this terrible error is growing even more common in our day and age. The liberty that grace makes possible is very different from license.

**"License"** is when some people say, *"I am free in Christ therefore, I can live as I please."* Or, *"God loves me no matter what I do, so I can do whatever I want - even to the point of sin."*

**License can be defined as an abuse of grace to serve oneself - selfishly and sinfully.**

**I gave my Mother many things to worry about when I was a teenager.** I was often rebellious and reckless and it is a miracle I even survived those years. One thing my Mom worried about, that I thought was silly, was the length of my hair. It is hard to imagine now, but for most of my middle school and high school years my hair was down to my shoulders.

**My Mom wanted me to cut my hair** for my senior picture. I refused to do it so she took my driver's license when I was sleeping and then she hid it. She knew that my driver's license was precious to me, because it equaled freedom and independence. It meant I could get out of the house and go wherever I wanted - and I always wanted to go somewhere. I tried to argue with my Mom, I said, *"Why is this a big deal? You know even Jesus had long hair!"* She replied coldly, *"Yeah, and Jesus walked everywhere he went! In fact, if you want to be like Jesus, give me your shoes as well, and wrap yourself in a sheet before you go!"* In the end I cut my hair, got my license back, and I still don't like my senior picture.

**When you first get a driver's license** you think you're free to go and do whatever you want to do and that's thrilling. Only when I became a parent did I understand my mom's point of view. For a parent when your child gets their driver's license, it is one of the most frightening seasons of life. It means they'll have a new level of independence, which means you lose control, but more importantly it means they go beyond your constant protection. That is scary - because there is great potential for misusing freedom so that you harm yourself or other people. It is a dangerous world, and it's more dangerous when you go too fast or go the wrong way.

**That's why there are rules for the road**, to help us choose more wisely and to be safer drivers. There are also restrictions on licenses. For example, my license says I can drive my car or my motorcycle but only if I wear my glasses - which makes me and everyone else safer.

**I want you to imagine** that we have a Christian driver's license, something to identify us as children of God who live in a **state of Grace**. I want you also to imagine that every such license has a basic, but all important restriction - it says, ***"Your freedom must always, and only, be expressed through obedience to God."***

**The Apostle Paul wrote about people who were disregarding this truth.**

**In Romans 6:1, and 6:15** Paul asked a question he was evidently hearing from others, and then he gave his own answer. *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, so that grace may abound? By no means!"* And then, *"What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? By no means!"* To take it more literally from the Greek Paul is emphatically saying, *"heck no!"* but he doesn't say really say *"heck."*

**License is a rebellious approach to life that leads to ruin, but it still very popular.**

**Jude 1:4 says this**, *"For certain individuals, whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."*

**The term license here means "without restraint."** These people do not submit to the authority of God. These people make no real effort to restrain their sin, or invest themselves in the choices that can lead them to holiness.

**Galatians 5:13 says**, *"You... were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."*

**In his book, Rebuilding Your Broken World**, Gordon MacDonald tells about the time in 1988, when Charles and Diana, then the Prince and Princess of Wales, went with some friends on a skiing trip to Switzerland. Then shocking news came of a terrible accident caused by an avalanche. One of the prince's lifelong friends was killed and another was seriously injured. How did it happen? A day or two later the press reported that the prince's group, at his insistence, had chosen to ski out on slopes that were closed to the public.

**The avalanche warnings had been posted**, but they had chosen to go beyond the fences because, as one of them observed, that's where the most fun and excitement were to be found, and besides they were royalty or with royalty. In their quest for "fun" they went beyond the margins of what was wise. The result? One lost life, and several broken hearts.

**In Romans 6 Paul issues a caution, “Don’t allow your liberty to degenerate into license!”**

**Paul declares that any notion** that we can do whatever we please, even if God has said “No” is just absurd. Paul declares that we (believers) have “died to sin.” Since we died to sin, it means we should leave that life behind. We shouldn’t carry what is dead around with us.

**Of course, we know we’re not yet sinless.** We also know how often we are still tempted. But there is a sense in which we are already dead to sin. In what sense? Just this - because of what Christ did for us on the cross, we can leave behind guilt, and shame, and fear, and regret. We can even leave behind sin’s power over us because, in Christ, we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

**To illustrate his point Paul uses the image of adult baptism.** He says the act of baptism illustrates our new relationship with Christ. When a person is baptized (by immersion) they are taken under the water to symbolize they are dying to sin with Christ and they are brought back up out of the water symbolizing that they are rising up with Christ to a new life.

**Unfortunately, many people miss the point of this verse by going off into a discussion of the nature and purpose of baptism and how much water is required to get it right.**

**Paul is not trying to teach us about baptism.** He is using one form of baptism to help us understand the two dimensions of salvation. In Christ we die to sin, and in Christ we are raised to a new life. Salvation is supposed to involve a transformation from sin to holiness.

**In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul said, “If any person is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has passed away and the new has come.”**

**Imagine a prisoner who has served their prison time,** or who’s been granted pardon. Then imagine that after the cell door has been opened, and they’re told they’re free to go, that they choose instead to stay in that cell! That sounds ridiculous. Right? But people do it every day.

**Christ offers freedom and new life, but first you must leave your prison and follow Him.** When you trust in Christ, you are not only given a new life, but a new power to live it out.

**Paul is encouraging us to remind ourselves, “I don’t have to live the same way anymore! Sin has no power over me. Christ has set me free and I have the power to move in a different direction. I am going to choose to live in holiness as God enables me.”**

**If we really belong to God, then we should live like it.** If we really do trust Him, then we should follow Him in our daily living. We must stop pandering to our sinful nature. The notion of an unchanged believer is a contradiction in terms. Transformation is the result of true faith.

**As I've said, the process of sanctification (being made holy) is a lifelong process.** We will still sin on occasion. However, the true believer should be making progress away from sin. We're not home yet - but we can stay on the right road headed in the right direction.

**Think about it this way.** I knew a guy who, like me, was right-handed. He wrote with his right hand, threw a ball with his right hand, and did most of his work with his right hand. But then his right hand was severely injured. He had to learn to use his left hand. It took a long time. At first he could barely feed himself or get dressed or go to the bathroom alone. Everything was awkward and forced. His handwriting was illegible and he threw a ball like a preschooler. But eventually he learned to manage and do very well with just his left hand.

**We have been sin-oriented for much of our lives.** That won't change overnight. At many points along this new way of life, we may seem very slow moving or weak, and the image of Christ may be barely recognizable in us. But if we continue to work at following the Lord more closely, we will begin to see the life of Christ being revealed in us.

**One of the questions people ask is, "Is real change possible?"** We know people can learn new skills, or get an extreme make-over to change their appearance. But is it possible for a human heart and personality to really change? Is it really possible to be free from the sin that enslaves us and separates us from God? **Paul answers "Yes!"** Real change is possible.

**The key to our freedom is Jesus Christ.** It may sound trite and simplistic but it's true. History is filled with the stories of those who were:

- They were set free from their past mistakes
- They were set free from their powerful addictions and immoral inclinations,
- They were set free from their smoldering hatred and bitterness
- They were set free from their selfish way of living.
- They were set free from guilt, and shame, and fear, and regret, and inability to what is right

**These people were transformed by the power of Jesus Christ.**

**That same power to change and to live in holiness is available to you.**

**It all starts when we come to Christ in honesty and humility,** and we pray, "*Christ – I repent of my sin (I turn away from it and toward you). I ask for your forgiveness. I trust in you and I accept what you did for me on the Cross to save me from my sin and to make me new.*"

**There is nothing you can do to earn this grace** - but if you really want to change - know that the offer of grace is extended to you in Christ. This grace is a staggering and undeserved gift.

**You need to accept God's gift,** and you do that by placing your faith in Christ as your savior and Lord. You begin a new life, and a new freedom, by first surrendering all control to Christ. I hope you've done that, or that you will do it now, and if you do, please let us know.

**If you have already responded to Christ by faith**, but you want to see God's **more** of God's transforming power in your life, then you probably already know what to do - so just do it.

**What you probably already know is this** - you need to devote more time and attention to what we call "*Spiritual Disciplines*" or what John Wesley called "*the means of grace.*"

**Simply put -**

- You need to spend more time reading and studying the Bible as God's Word to you.
- You need to spend more time in prayer - speaking to God and listening for God's guidance.
- You need to spend more time in worship and praise (and you can do that at home).
- You need to spend more time in fellowship with other believers (and now is a good time to think of creative ways to stay connected with other Christians for mutual support)
- You need to spend more - in the sense of giving to financially support Christ's church
- You need to spend more time in ministry - serving others in need (again be creative)
- You need to spend more time sharing your story of faith with others who don't trust Christ

**With this pandemic going on**, you probably have some time available that was previously devoted to other things. Take this time and give it to God. Invest in that relationship.

**Here's some other simple ideas.**

- **When you wake up each morning remind yourself that you've been set free in Christ.**
- **Every time you face a temptation say to yourself, "*I'm no longer helpless. God's strength is sufficient for me to resist this temptation... if I give in, I'm choosing to walk away from the Lord, but instead, I will choose Christ and then I will trust and obey.*"**
- **Every time you stumble... get back up again and turn to Christ!** Ask God to help you to tap into His power so you can experience His victory in your daily living more and more.
- **As you plan your calendar, spending, and leisure activities ask, "*Am I giving myself to serve my sinful nature, am I giving myself to serve Christ? Are my choices leading to go God's way or am I turning to my own way?*"**

**Again real change toward holiness doesn't happen overnight**, but if you stay on the right road (trusting in the Cross - and following Christ), and if you keep moving in the right direction (obedience) then you'll get there one day - either here, or in glory - God's will for His children is for them to live with Him in Holiness.

**God's will for His children is that should be dead to sin, and alive with Christ.**