

"Walk In Newness of Life"

In the sermon last Sunday, I quoted the MIT professor, Doctor Rosalind Picard, who became convinced by evidence of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. She said that after she had prayed to receive Christ as her Lord and Savior, her world changed dramatically – she wrote - *as if a flat, black-and-white existence suddenly turned full color and three-dimensional*. She added *I felt joy and freedom but also a heightened sense of responsibility and challenge*. Although people have different experiences, I thought that's one person's beautiful expression of the beginning at least of what **Romans 6:1-4** is speaking about when it speaks of *walking in newness of life*.

In the weeks leading up to Easter, we've been focused on the cross, the resurrection, and God's saving Grace received by faith. Last week, we looked at **Romans 4:25**, where we're told that *Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*. Now, if you have believed that and received Christ, what's next? This is an important question not only for those who *have* faith in Jesus but for any who have questions about where faith in Christ leads us and means for us.

Romans 6:1-4 tell us

I. THE GRACE AND FORGIVENESS WE ARE GIVEN IN JESUS IS GIVEN NOT SO WE CAN CONTINUE IN SIN BUT SO WE CAN LIVE A NEW LIFE.

Look at **Romans 6:1** *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?* The answer is emphatic! **Verse 2** says, *By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* We're staying in Romans today because we've been looking at different passages in Romans for the last month. We've looked at the themes of sin, grace, and forgiveness. But we also need to know this: The new life to which God calls us is a life in which, even though we know we have forgiveness, we grow increasingly to see sin more clearly. Seeing sin

more clearly, we hate it more deeply. Hating it more deeply, we long to be more fully free from it. *We see it more clearly...*

A. Sin includes bad behavior, but it goes deeper than that.

I read a story in which a psychiatrist was talking to a Christian friend about the kinds of troubles that drove people to come to her for help. At one point, she stopped and, with a tone of skepticism, said, “*Oh, but you're a Christian, so you probably think the problem is we're all sinners.*” So her Christian friend asked, “*How do you think the Bible defines sin?*” With a sort of snarky smile, she said, “*Oh, probably something along the lines of drugs, sex and rock'n'roll.*” What followed was a long conversation in which the Christian tried to help the non-Christian see that the Bible's view of sin is deeper than that. The outward actions people think the Bible is focused on as sin, while they *may be* sinful, are not the cause but the result of something deeper.

The first chapters of Romans comprise an extended block of teaching. It's a three-chapter-long indictment of mankind. It begins by saying the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of men who suppress the truth about God. It begins to talk about how we human beings turned away from giving God his rightful place in our hearts. Instead of our good creator being our center and source of life, we worship and devote ourselves to other things, possessions, people, or achievements. We worship so many that aren't God. Scripture makes the case that out of that root issue comes sinful behaviors. He talks about sexual immorality and homosexuality, but not only that, he talks about envy and greed and gossip and slander of people who are foolish and faithless and heartless and ruthless. All of that is in **Romans 1** where the focus was on the Greek and Roman world.

In **Romans 2** he speaks to his own Jewish culture and in **Roman 3** he ties it all together. Paul, as a Jew, was part of a religious culture that encouraged him to think of Roman and Greek pagans as bad people, to be looked down on. In that setting, and in ours, **Romans 3:9** makes a fantastic claim: *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks,*

are under sin. Those words, "No, not at all," were radical then, and they are radical now. This is, like getting up at the Republican National Convention, listing all the craziness and immorality of the wokeism in the Democratic party, the evils of abortion, letting that land and then saying, *What then? Are we better? No, not at all!* Don't misunderstand. I'm not talking about political platforms but about personal standing before God in terms of sinfulness. Many people have such a narrow view of sin that when you talk about it from a deeper biblical perspective, they actually think you're going softer on sin. The underlying root of sin is our tendency as human beings to place something other than God in the place of God. We give that person or thing the devotion God alone deserves, try to find life in it, and that God substitute is the root out of which sinful actions emerge.

B. It is important to understand sin Biblically and face it honestly, personally and humbly.

I read about a hospital that had a problem getting staff to comply with hand-washing procedures. Their mandate was 90% compliance but couldn't get past 80%. One day, a group of 20 doctors and administrators were taken by surprise when the hospital's epidemiologist corralled them after lunch and had them press their hands into a sterile Petrie dish that contained a growth medium. The samples were sent to the lab to be cultured and photographed. The photos revealed what wasn't visible to the naked eye: The doctors' hands were covered with gobs of bacteria. Imagine being a doctor and realizing the same hands that would examine a patient later in the day were harboring an army of microorganisms. It was revolting. One of the filthiest images was made into a screensaver for the hospital's network of computers, ensuring everyone on staff could share the horror. The problem was they had dismissed the seriousness of their contamination. They just didn't see it. They didn't feel it. If they didn't see it or feel it why would anyone want to make them confront it and be made to feel bad because of it? Could it be that the benefits of recognizing what had gone unrecognized was worth the pain of recognition? Of course, the answer is yes! There are some things that are uncomfortable to face, honestly, but the discomfort is worth it because... ***The discomfort we experience in facing the truth about***

ourselves can lead us to the profound comfort found only in God's Grace. It can also help motivate much-needed change.

That's important because the Grace we are given in Jesus is given so we can begin to live a new kind of life. And here's a second truth.

II. THE NEW LIFE GOD CALLS US TO LIVE IS EMPOWERED BY THE GRACE HE GIVES US IN JESUS.

A. God's Grace calls us to the most radical change possible for the most radical motives imaginable.

Romans 6:1 says, *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?* The question is probably one that Paul had been asked because it appears in a couple of places in his writings. And it's based on how emphatically he emphasized the Grace of God. Grace is a word used to describe a gift you do not deserve or earn.

Romans 5:1-2 *Therefore being justified by faith....not by our works or performance or promise or anything else... we have peace with God.² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this Grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* By faith, you turn and trust in Christ, and he makes you right with God, and that gives us peace and a standing "in grace." It is the lavish clarity of this grace that provokes the question of **Romans 6:1** *If grace is really that freely given, should we continue in sin so that grace can abound?*

When people hear the gospel shake their heads, and say something like, "So you're saying you can just believe in Jesus, and God saves you no matter who you are or what you've done?" We should be encouraged. This question only surfaces if you have made the gospel clear. If we preach the same gospel Paul preached we should get the same questions Paul got.

Sometimes, when people hear the message of the cross and salvation by grace, they say something like: "You're saying that if I place my faith in Christ as my Savior, all my sins are forgiven forever. So I'll never be condemned, right? If that's true why would there be any reason or incentive for living a moral life at all? If I don't have to earn it or deserve

it, why would I care about changing anything in my life?" That is actually a very revealing statement. If you think like that, what you are saying is that if you were to lose your fear of rejection by God and judgment by God, you would lose all incentive to live a moral life or grow into a better person. If a person really feels like that then what they are saying is their only incentive for personal growth is self-protected fear. The Bible actually says *"yes." God frees you from the fear of His condemnation, but he does so not so that you will live a looser life but so that you will live a deeper life.* " The Bible does talk about the fear of God. But that means a reverence for His greatness. Fear can be a motive for coming to Christ. However, the Bible does not offer the fear of God's condemnation as the motive for living as a Christian. In **Romans 8:15**, Paul says, *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him, we cry, "Abba, Father."*

One of most respected and classic confessions of Christian faith, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, has a chapter on Christian Liberty in which it says that one aspect of Christian liberty is that through faith in Christ, we are set free from the guilt of sin and the wrath of God and given free access to God so that we yield obedience to him, *"not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and a willing mind."* The Christian gospel *does* call for deep change, but it does not base the incentive for that life on fear of God's rejection or condemnation.

B. The newness of life to which Christ calls us is neither legalism nor license.

Are you familiar with those terms? *Legalism* can be hard to define. It's not just a single teaching but a kind of mindset towards God, primarily as a demanding judge and lawgiver. It's how you relate to him. It's the idea that you relate to God and he relates to you conditionally - conditioned on how you're obeying his Word. It can be the idea that you earn your salvation by keeping God's laws. But it can also just be the mindset, the feeling, that your daily relationship with God is conditional, based on your performance, your works, and your actions. The idea of *license* is that because God gives you Grace and forgives

your sins, you have a license to indulge your worst habits and engage in sinful actions, and it doesn't matter.

Being human, we sometimes think that the way to avoid legalism is to give yourself more license. Then, sometimes, if we think that license is the problem, we may imagine the way to avoid license is to impose more laws. Neither approach is the new way of life to which God calls us. Actually, both legalism and license have at heart the same mistaken view of who God is. Legalism doesn't really believe that God is as loving and good and lavish with his Grace as the Bible says he is, and so it thinks surely we have to relate to him on the basis of our performance, and his love for me fluctuates with how good I am. The result is either we lie to ourselves about how good we are or we feel crushed. But license is also a failure to believe in the gracious generosity of God because license believes that the commandments of God and the callings of God are not coming out of his loving heart and for not only his glory but our good. Like Eve in the Garden of Eden, instead of hearing God's saying, "I love you, I'm in fellowship with you, and I'm giving all of you this for you to enjoy, this one thing is off limits," we focus on God demanding that we *not* have that one thing and we doubt his goodness and the serpent hisses into our ears that God isn't really for us he's for keeping us from becoming like him.

The new way of life says: Believe the gospel and what it tells you about God. Believe God overflows with grace and generosity in Christ. And the way of life he has revealed for you also flows out of the same goodness and grace toward you. As you turn from unbelief to trust in him, walk in that newness of life.

*Look at **Romans 6:1-4** again. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that Grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

C. God gives us baptism as a physical sign of new life so that we can more deeply see and know the reality of His Grace.

In Scripture, water baptism does not save you. It is, however, the God-given outward sign and seal of the oneness with Christ that brings newness of life. When you are baptized as a believer in Christ, just as the waters close over you in baptism, God has closed the story of your past life and your old self. Just as Christ rose from the waters of death, so we rise from the waters of baptism to live a new life shared with him, led by him, a life that will never end. If Christ is your Savior, you are no longer the person you used to be or would be without Christ. You don't have to live like those who are without Christ. *Real change begins with new life. And the new life gives us hope for real change.*

I once heard a counselor say one of the first things he has to do when people come for help with long-standing issues is to give them hope. He cannot do much of anything with them until they find some hope. Sometimes, you can struggle for a season without much sense of growth and progress. You can even begin to question if you *can* really continue to grow. Whenever that is the case, whatever the issues are, the first step is to come back to the reality of this new life that Christ gives and baptism pictures. The reason we're told that real change begins with a new life is so that we will draw hope and courage from that assurance. That's why, in another place, Paul says, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* We have to live this new kind of life in the same old broken world. And we still cling to some of our old baggage. So there will be setbacks. Don't let spiritual setbacks rob you of your hope in Christ.

Don't believe the lie that you are just stuck in your hang-ups, bad habits, and sins. It is not true. You may not grow as fast as you like. You may not grow at your chosen pace and with your chosen priorities for change. Maybe there is something you are desperate to change because it embarrasses you, but God is at work with a different set of priorities. Maybe God is bringing pressure to bear to change something that matters to him, even if it is of little importance to you.

Maybe you haven't reached the point of deep and humble dependence on God, which only comes when you have tried and failed, been hurt and disappointed, and let others down. Wherever you are at right now, whatever you struggle with, do not believe the lie that kills hope. God isn't done with you. There is more newness in life for you to walk in!

CONCLUSION

At a conference, once I heard about a church leader in India who became a Christian when he was eleven years old. When he became a Christian, his Father kicked the boy out of the house in the pouring rain and said, *"You are dead to me. I never want to see you again."* Of course, the boy wasn't literally dead. But the Father, in his anger, was saying, *"I'm going to assume the perspective that you have died, and I'm going to live and treat you accordingly. Everything in your relationship with me and in your whole life has just changed."*

Now, that is a very negative and hurtful way of saying that someone is dead to you. But what if that idea could be turned around. That angry and abusive Father later became a Christian himself, and when he did, the Scripture is teaching us that what God said to him, in his love, is this: *"The old you, that old sinful, cruel and abusive man, is dead to me now, your sins are forgiven you have been given new birth by the Holy Spirit, and raised to new life, all of which is pictured in baptism. Everything in your life and your relationship with me has changed. You have a new life to live. Now live that new life."*

Where does this find you and where does it leave you? Have you received Christ? That's where it begins. You don't start a new life and improve then come to him. You come to him *for* a new life. You come to him saying, *I am believing you died and rose again for my salvation I'm trusting I'm asking for you to forgive my sins and begin to make me the man or the woman that you want me to be. I turn from my foolish sin and my false hopes to change myself and save myself to trust in you.* If that is your prayer, or more importantly, your faith, because it's not about saying a prayer but turning in faith to Jesus; if he is your Savior and Lord, take heart, go on, walk in newness of life.

Amen.

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

My Lord and My God, I know and confess I have grievously sinned in thought, word and deed. I have not honored, obeyed, or worshipped you as you deserve. I am thankful that there are no qualifications for coming to Christ for I have no claim other your promised grace in Jesus received by faith alone. He is my Savior. Thank you!

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord Jesus, Help me to live a life of robust faith in your astounding love, amazing grace, overflowing goodness and empowering presence. Continually enable me to trust in your love, turn from my sins, to grow in grace and to walk in newness of life. In Jesus' name, Amen