

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Change in Christ

Romans 6:1-14

Introduction:

A. Jeff's former pastor shows the danger of not changing.

Years ago I received an email that made my heart sink. It was about the forced resignation of my senior pastor at that time. I'd like to read you an excerpt from that email. "Pastor's resignation is the result of his confession of a six month inappropriate, though non-physical, relationship with a married woman in Colorado. At this time Pastor and his wife are not living together. He has also admitted to a problem with alcohol." Now when this all came out, my former pastor was leading a large growing church, had a beautiful wife, and three good kids who were walking with the Lord. He had known and served God for many years. In fact, he even published a few books about knowing God.

Now I don't know all the bad choices my former pastor made, as he walked down a path that destroyed his marriage and ministry. Maybe he valued the approval of people too much, and it made him vulnerable to the attention of other women. Maybe he made the mistake of abusing alcohol to try to numb his internal pain. Maybe he isolated himself from people who would hold him accountable for his actions. Ultimately, none of us know for sure.

But I do know that my former pastor understood that sin is destructive. He used to describe sin as chocolate covered Alpo. How sin can look good, can even taste good at first, but that underneath it is so disgusting. And on top of knowing the dangers of sin, I'm also confident that the Holy Spirit was convicting my old pastor of his sin. Yet despite all that, he kept walking down a path that destroyed his marriage and ministry. He failed to make necessary changes, and he, his family, and his church paid the price.

B. We can wonder, "Why change?" and "How do I change in Christ?"

Now if we spent a few minutes in honest reflection, we can probably think of a thing or two in our lives that need to change. Something that is hindering our relationship with God and people. Something that might even eventually lead to our lives falling apart, if we don't change it.

Now unfortunately, as you know, real change is often very difficult. It was not easy for the Roman believers of Paul's day, and it's not easy for us. The Romans, of course, knew the first five chapters of the book of Romans. They knew that you can only get right with God by coming to Jesus in faith. And they knew that once you received the gift of salvation, you have peace with God, hope in any circumstance, and God's Spirit pouring love into your heart. At the end of Romans 5 it even says that when sin increases, grace abounds all the more.

Now perhaps you, like the Romans, have thought, "Well, if I already have God's love, a secure future, and every sin forgiven, past, present, and future, why not keep living as I please? It seems like I can have my cake and eat it too - I can indulge in some sin because all my sins are forgiven in Jesus. So why change?"

This lack of motivation is not our only obstacle to change. Even when you are motivated to make a change, you have to answer another difficult question, how do I change in Christ? Or in other words, how does one grow spiritually?

Now there is perhaps no place in the Bible that answers these questions with greater detail than Romans chapters 6 through 8, which cover the topic of spiritual growth, or as it is sometimes called, sanctification. So if you've got your Bible, please turn to Romans chapter 6. Romans chapter 6. Today we'll cover Romans 6:1-14 and next week we'll cover Romans 6:15 - 7:6. As we examine these passages we're going to consider four realities that can help answer the questions, "Why change?" and "How do I change in Christ?" We'll look at two realities this morning and two more next week. These are real things that we must continue to remember, day after day after day. Realities so important that God can use them to help you make important changes. Changes that can get you off a path to destruction and on to a path of greater life and joy in Jesus.

I. Sin is Out to Get You (6:1-2, 12-14)

A. Sin is enslaving

The first reality is that sin is out to get you. Sin is out to get you. Please follow along with me as I read Romans 6, verses 1-2. "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?" Look with me at verse 1. Here we see Paul raise the question, are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? And his answer is an emphatic, "By no means!" We cannot continue in sin, we must change.

Now Paul mentions sin a lot in this passage, 10 times in 14 verses. But it is in verses 12-14 where he goes into the greatest detail about the dangers of sin. So please look at those verses as I read them - “¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

Please look back at verse 12. Here we see Paul command the Roman believers to not let sin reign. Sin is not to be our master anymore. Now look at verse 13 - here we see Paul emphasize the point when he says, “do not present your members to sin.” Paul is saying, don’t present any member, any part of yourself to sin. You are not to place yourself at sin’s disposal. Now these commands suggest that genuine believers are in real danger of becoming enslaved to sin. The same tendency for self-destruction that lived in my former pastor lives in me and in you. You may be dead to sin, as it said back in verse 2, but sin is not dead to you.

So as believers, we make choices that decide whether we’re letting sin rule, or God rule. When we let sin be our master, verse 12 notes that we obey sin’s passions. That word “passions” at the end of verse 12 is the Greek word *epithumia* (ἐπιθυμία). Now “thumia” means a desire for something and the prefix “epi” means “over.” So an epi-thumia is an over-desire, a really strong passion for something. And a strong passion for something bad can definitely turn into slavery. For example, letting your lustful sexual desire lead you to keep watching pornography until you are addicted to it would be a sinful slavery. This is one way that sin is out to get you, and it’s a very dangerous one.

However, there is also a second way that sin enslaves. Pastor Tim Keller helped me see that the term *epithumia* can also be an inappropriately strong passion for something good.¹ And this inappropriately strong passion for something good can also enslave. For example, there’s nothing wrong with wanting to excel in school or in your career. After all, we were designed for a perfect world, one where we would do meaningful, fruitful work. However, there is a point

¹ I heard this in a Tim Keller sermon on Romans 6. *BDAG*, p. 372, confirms that the term can be, “a desire for something forbidden or *simply inordinate*” (emphasis mine).

where that desire for success can become an over-desire, an *epithumia*. Students, it's fine to want good grades. But if you want good grades so badly that you can't help but cheat on tests, you're enslaved. Workers, it's fine to want career success. But if you want it so badly that you become a workaholic that keeps going even as your health and family fall apart, that's a problem, and you've become a slave. A slave that would likely lie to a customer or steal credit from a co-worker, if his or her job was in jeopardy.

B. Tests to help identify enslaving “over-desires”

So how do we know when a desire for something good has become an over-desire? How do we know when sin has enslaved us in this way? Tim Keller suggests three tests that will help you see when an over-desire is enslaving.² First, pay attention to when you get really angry. If someone or something keeps you from getting a good thing, you could get frustrated or angry. But if someone or something keeps you from getting an over-desire, an ultimate thing, you'll get incredibly angry. Have you, or me, blown up in anger recently? Is there someone who's done something to you and you're bitter and just can't seem to forgive them? Pay attention, you may be enslaved to sin. Keller's second test is fear. When something good is threatened, you're worried. But when an “over-desire,” something ultimate in your life is threatened, you'll experience epi-fear. Does anything worry you, or me, so much that you can't think straight? Anything worry you so much that you know it drives your behavior? We need to pay attention to those things. Now Keller's third test is sadness. When you lose something valuable, you grieve, you can weep and weep. However if you lose an over-desire, an ultimate thing, you'll feel like life has lost all of it's meaning. Does the thought of losing anything make you, or me, feel like you'd never want to get out of bed again, or that you might even want to end your life? Pay attention, for underneath that extreme sadness may be a slavery to sin, and you may not even realize it.

Maybe some of us “over-desire” romance, we just *need* to be in a romantic relationship, even if it's one that we, and everyone else, knows we need to get out of. Maybe some of us place so much importance on how our kids turn out that it becomes about us as parents rather than

² The three tests are also from a Tim Keller sermon I heard on Romans 6.

about blessing our kids. Whatever it is, if you got an “over-desire,” something that you perhaps value even more than God, you’re enslaved to sin. And that slavery can run so deep.

C. An example of how an “over-desire” can be enslaving

Let me share an embarrassing example from my life. Around the time I started to understand the dangers of “over-desiring” good things, I realized that I over-desired the acceptance of other people. Instead of focusing on God’s love and acceptance as the base of my value, I looked at my performance and the opinions of other people to find my worth. This sin was master over me. But I did not really understand how enslaved I was until my first semester in seminary, in my World Missions class. This class had a ton of assignments and honestly, I felt like a lot of it was busy work. Now one of the few assignments I did value was that each class period, one student shared about an overseas mission trip he or she had been on. Now I had been on multiple overseas mission trips and I thought this was a good assignment. But I was annoyed with the other “busy work” assignments, and I started thinking, you know, there are more students in this class than there are days of class, so not everyone will have to present. So when the signup sheet was passed around, although there were spots still open, I didn’t signup; I just passed it on.

So later in the semester, one student shares about his mission trip to Japan. I happened to be sitting near him the day he presented. I didn’t know him well, but I thought he had done a good job, and I honestly wanted to encourage him. So I gave him some specific compliments about his presentation, which he seemed to really appreciate. As we were talking, he then asked me about what country I was doing for my presentation.

So, what do you think this assignment skipper who over-valued the opinion of others said? Without a pause, as I sat in a seminary class studying to become a pastor, in the middle of a conversation about missions, while sincerely wanting to encourage this brother, who I hardly knew and wasn’t even interested in being good friends with, I lied to his face. I told him that the signup sheet was already full when it reached me. Now I told this lie instantaneously. There was no couple of seconds where I was deciding whether or not I would lie. I lied, as fast as the snap of my fingers, like it was a reflex. Now some of you might be thinking, “That’s really messed up”; and others of you might be thinking, “Doesn’t sound like a big deal to me. It was just a little white lie - no harm, no foul.”

But let me ask you, where do you think a life that has that kind of over-desire for the approval of people is going to lead? A gnawing anxiety about what others think of you; a constant pressure to perform; a feeling of despair when others reject you; an unhealthy need to protect yourself that is so strong, that even when you're trying to encourage a brother, you can't help but lie to his face. The kind of self-protection that will hurt the honesty and health of every one of your relationships. Paul was not exaggerating when he said that sin leads to slavery and death.

D. A fisher and fish illustrate how sin is out to get you

Sin really is a choice to slavery and death, no matter how appealing it looks or feels at first. It's like the relationship of the fisher and the fish. This fish pictured here saw a tempting, baited hook. It looked delicious, and so he bit down, thinking he was about to eat, to feast. But the irony is that the fish is instead about to die. He's the one about to be feasted on.

It's just like that with sin. It will dangle a hook with bait in front of you. And that bait will oftentimes look really, really appealing, it could even feel like a source of life. But when you bite down on that hook, no matter how tasty the bait is at first, you have made a choice towards slavery, towards death. Take a look at that fish, caught and helpless. That fish is me, and that fish is you, every time we take sin's bait. If you keep remembering that sin is out to get you, it'll help you to not take the bait. It will help you change for the better.

II. You are radically connected to Christ (6:3-11)

A. We are connected to Christ's death and resurrection

And thankfully because of our second reality this morning, we don't have to choose sin, with its slavery and death. We are able to change, to choose life. The second reality is that you are radically connected to Christ. You are radically connected to Christ. Look at verses 3-5 with me as I read. 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. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

As we look at these verses, you'll notice that Paul calls to mind our baptism. It's like he's telling the Romans, "Don't you remember what your baptism symbolizes?" It's your public

confession that you're identified with Lord Jesus. In our baptism tradition, the dunking in the water represents one identifying with Christ in his death, and the coming out of the water represents one identifying with Christ's resurrection life.

Now Paul mentions our connection to Christ's death many times in the passage. Look at the end of verse 3, which says that we, "were baptized into his death." Look at verse 4, which says, "We were buried therefore *with* him by baptism into death." And verse 5, which says, "We have been united *with* him in a death like his." And verse 6, which says, "Our old self was crucified *with* him." And verse 8, which says, "We have died *with* Christ." I think that's a point Paul wanted us to get. And Paul also mentions our connection to Christ's resurrection life a couple of times in these verses. Look at the end of verse 5, which says, "We shall certainly be united *with* him in a resurrection like his." Look at the end of verse 8, which says, "we believe that we will also live *with* him."

B. Connection to Christ means freedom from sin

Now it's hard to fully understand what this means, but the text is saying we somehow participate in Christ's death and resurrection. Did you notice how many times I said "with him" as I quoted these verses? We are radically connected to Christ. And that is glorious news for us. Our participation in Christ's death and resurrection means that we are freed from sin's power. Please look again at verse 6, "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin."

Let's examine this idea further. Please follow along with me as I read verses 9-10. "9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God." These verses make it clear that Christ defeated sin and death on the cross. As verse 9 says, "Death no longer has dominion over him."

Now please look with me at the beginning of verse 11. "11 So you also must consider..." Now that word "consider" is the Greek word *logizomai* (λογίζομαι). It is a math and accounting term. It can mean to make a calculation or to evaluate a calculation.³ So Paul is saying here in verse 11, do the math, what does everything we've covered add up to? So you're no longer in

³ BDAG, p. 597.

Adam, a helpless slave of sin. You're in Christ now. You are in His death, so you enjoy His victory over sin and death, you're set free from sin's penalty and power. And look, you are in Christ's resurrection life, so you're going to enjoy an indescribably glorious future with Him in eternity. That question, back in verse 1, "are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" In the words of Bryce Harper, "That's a clown question, bro." It's a question that suggests you don't begin to understand what has happened to you in Jesus. We've added it up in these verses, and the calculation can only lead to one consideration. As verse 11 says, "¹¹ you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Conclusion:

A. To change in Christ, remember that sin is out to get you.

This morning we've discussed two realities, two things that are real. Two things that, when we continue to keep them in mind, can help us change in Christ. To move away from death and towards abundant life in Jesus. First, you must keep remembering that sin is out to get you. We're all vulnerable to sin, just like my former pastor. And when sin dangles some delicious bait in front of you, it's important that you remember the hook underneath that leads to death. This can help us avoid taking sin's bait and instead make changes for the better.

B. To change in Christ, remember that you are radically connected to Christ.

And second, you must keep remembering that you are radically connected to Christ. Now I'm not the kind of person who would bore you with pictures of my kid. That would be inconsiderate. Okay, maybe I would show you a few. That's our son Grant. When I get home from work, and I see this cute little guy smiling and crawling towards me, I am just so filled with love for him. Even just looking at pictures of him stirs something up in my heart.

So let me ask you, what do you think God the Father feels when He looks at His Son, Jesus? How indescribably potent that love must be. And the unbelievable thing is, you're in that love. For when the Father looks at you, He sees Jesus, for you are radically connected.

Connected to Christ, the one who loved you enough to give everything He had on the cross for you. Jesus doesn't want you to only have peace with God, as wonderful as that is. He wants you to fully share in His victory over sin and death. Jesus has come to set you free - free from the penalty of sin and free to say no to the power of sin. And one day He'll set you free

from the very presence of sin. He is always there for you and He always delights in helping His people change.

Let's pray...