



January 6-7, 2018
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Wanted: Dead and Alive

Romans 6:1-14

I'm excited to welcome you to 2018! For one thing, isn't it great to have the Whites back?! Thank you for your prayers, your work and your generosity in helping make that happen. December was a challenging month! I'm grateful for a fresh start to a new year.

I'm ready for January for another reason, too! December was a very expensive month for us! We are remodeling our house. (Need I say more?) We made a year-end gift towards our Beyond These Walls pledge. (Incidentally, we have some more great news about that; I'll share it next week!) And...this is a biggie...we wrote our last college tuition check for Cooper! Woohoo! The last ever...until grandkids come along, I suppose!

As many of you know, college is *crazy* expensive. But in our case, it could have been even more expensive were it not for Anne. Anne's husband Dave and I were on the Whitworth board together. When he heard Cooper was going to Whitworth, he offered to help. Very kind. But in Cooper's senior year of high school, tragically, Dave died. Honestly, I never thought another thing about his kind offer. Then, in that summer, we got a letter from Anne. Wanting to honor her husband's wishes, she included a check to help with tuition. It was for \$1000.

Remarkable, right? It was a *big* help! Then, just before second semester, we got *another* note from Anne. And another \$1000 check. And again. And again. And again. Last month, we received the eighth check towards Cooper's last semester. And here's the thing: I do not know Anne. I don't recall meeting her, although I'm sure I did. I wouldn't recognize her if I saw her. She doesn't know Cooper. She certainly doesn't owe him...or us... a thing. And yet, the checks kept coming. Faithfully. How would you describe such incredible generosity? Here's my word...and I take it from Paul's writings to the Romans: **grace**. Undeserved, unmerited kindness. **Grace!**

Now, as a parent, what would be my number one concern regarding this gift? That my son would be ...what? Appreciative! Grateful. That he would send thank-yous ...*written* thank-yous; that he would *never* presume upon Anne's kindness...never reach the point of saying, "Oh, look. Another check. Isn't that nice?" (And by the way, Cooper has been *great* about staying in touch. Just want to go on record!)

Now...what would be the *second* most important thing that I, as a parent, would be concerned about? That my son make the *most* of this incredible gift! That he demonstrate to Anne that this investment in his life will produce fruit; will better equip him to be the man that God created him to be. Will help him accomplish great and greater things in life.

This story speaks to the topic to which Paul now turns in Romans. For five chapters, he has developed two key themes.

First, that every single human being is sinful... living in disobedience to God's will...and in their own strength, there is nothing they can do about it. We can never be good enough to earn God's love or favor. But the second theme is this: grace.

God **in his grace** has taken care of this sin problem; he has offered up his own Son, Jesus, whose sacrificial death on the cross... (what is the theological term for that? **Propitiation**)... graciously paid the price for our sins. If we believe in Jesus...if we receive this gift of his saving death...in that moment, God pronounces us free of our sins and welcomes us into his family. What is God's declaration called? **Justification!**

Now...why does Paul tell us that we receive such an incredible gift? One reason! What? God's grace! His undeserved, unearned favor. We see this clearly in chapter 5:1:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.

And having opened chapter 5 with this reference to grace, it now becomes the drumbeat that repeats itself. Six times he uses that word. Grace, grace, grace, grace, grace, grace. *Such* a great word. Such a Christian word. The idea that God, out of his pure grace, loves the unlovely ...redeems the irredeemable...for no reason other than he wants to...**that is grace**. And it *is amazing!* Amazing grace.

But it raises an important question: *If* when we are sinners, God is able to show us grace, which is stronger than our sin...then if we *keep* sinning...doesn't that mean that God can show *more* grace? If grace is a good thing...and grace is offered to us when we are in sin...then the *more* we sin, the more God's gift of grace can be offered. Right? There is a theological term for that idea. (Of course there is!) Antinomianism. Anti=against. Nomos=Law. Antinomians believe that if you have grace, then you can be *against* obeying the law. You don't need it. The more the sin, the more the grace.

Paul has some very sharp things to say against this idea beginning in chapter 6.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.

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. 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. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6: 1-11)

Paul is responding to criticism he has received from his enemies. They claim that he is an antinomian. They his doctrine of grace gives permission to sin! How does Paul respond in verse 1?

"By no means!" That's not strong enough. A better translation would be, "God forbid!" He goes on:

“How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

What does he mean by that? How did we “die to sin?” Look at verse 2:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” When you think of baptism...when you think of YOUR baptism...what thoughts come to mind? Cleansing? Washing away of your sins? Being filled with the Holy Spirit? Becoming part of God’s family?

All of those things are true. **But I’ll bet you don’t often think of your baptism as a funeral, do you?** But that’s exactly what Paul is saying. He imagines baptism as full immersion... a dunking! (By the way, when we built this sanctuary, I was pulling for installing a baptismal tank! I thought it would be cool: Presbyterians that dunk! I lost that one!) But when Paul imagines someone being immersed in the water, he likens it to what? A burial! We are buried with Christ!

When I was in Egypt, I had the chance to visit the pyramids of Giza and climbed up inside of one of them, the Great Pyramid. Believe me, it was not for the claustrophobic! You had to stoop down as you crabbed your way for hundreds of feet until you emerged into the burial chamber deep inside the pyramid. It had long ago been stripped of its treasures. The only thing remaining was a large, open stone sarcophagus. It was kind of creepy, honestly. So guess what I did? I got into that sarcophagus and laid where an ancient pharaoh’s mummified body once laid.

Paul says that when we are baptized into Jesus...we aren’t just being washed clean...we aren’t just being initiated into church membership. **We were laid in the tomb with Jesus.** In verse 5 he says that we are “united” with Jesus in his death. Later he says that our “old self” has been crucified with Jesus so that we are no longer “enslaved to sin.” **And if we are crucified and buried with Christ...guess what happen to us on the third day?** We were *raised* with Christ, too! When we are baptized, we share in Jesus’ death, in his burial...and ultimately, in his resurrection to new life.

This is known as “**union with Christ.**” Jesus didn’t just die for us. Jesus wasn’t just buried for us. Jesus wasn’t just raised up for us. By faith, we who are baptized into Christ **participate** in all of these things. In fact, one way to describe Union with Christ is with these words:

What is true of Christ is true of me. I know...kind of lofty.

Think about it this way. I skydived when I was a young man.

In those days, they taught you how to do it on the ground...hooked your parachute to a static line so that it would automatically deploy...and kicked you out of the plane.

TODAY they do it differently. You are hooked up to someone else...an experienced jumper. It is called a tandem jump. Where he goes, you go! What he experiences, you experience. You jump... you fall... and hopefully, you land together...softly...and safely!

This is a picture of union with Christ. He doesn’t just do these things for us. We participate IN them!

Baptism is our own funeral...the funeral of our old self! And when we come up from that water...in Christ...we are a new person. His Spirit now lives in us. And... (listen to this...this is important)...**for the first time, we have a fighting chance against sin!** Up until now, Paul has told us repeatedly, we

have **no chance** against sin. It wins every time. But now...with Christ...in Christ...we have the strength and the power to fight back. Now sin doesn't HAVE the final word. United with Christ, we can be victorious over sin.

This is God's incredible grace. And Paul says, "Why in the world would you want to stay in the grave? Why in the world would you want to continue to be enslaved to sin? You are hitched to Jesus...the victor over sin and death. Why wouldn't you want to experience real, resurrection life with him...life that *can* be victorious over sin! Why would you take for granted such an incredible gift? Why would you mock God's grace? Why would you hold in contempt the offer of forgiveness that came at such a costly price to Jesus? Why would you presume upon that grace by living a sloppy, sinful, ungrateful life after experiencing God's forgiveness?"

It brings me back to my opening story about Anne and her gift. How ungrateful would it be of Cooper to become complacent...presumptuous of her generosity? And perhaps even worse, how grace-less would it be if he were to take this degree and do nothing with it...waste it. Make no use of it? Any sane person would say, "How can you mock such a gift! You have been given the chance to soar. Why in the world wouldn't you want to?"

When I was a kid, we lived on a farm. One of our animals died...I think it was a cat. We buried it. Months later, I got curious. So I dug it up to look at it. I wanted to dabble in death. There are many here who, although you have been baptized... although your old sinful self has been buried with Christ...you aren't content to leave it there! Although you have been united with Christ in his burial AND resurrection...you continue to dabble with death. You want to dig it up. You want to fiddle with it. You want to crawl back into the tomb. You want to lay down in the sarcophagus again.

Why would you want to do that? It is ugly and stinky and yucky. You remember how awful it made you feel when you were living that way? There is a reason you gave your life to Christ in the first place! You wanted to be set free from the guilt, the shame, the purposelessness of the way you were living! You wanted to be set free. And you ARE free! If Christ has set you free, you are free indeed! Why would you return to bondage?

This passage closes with

"...consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

That word "consider" can be translated "remember." In other words, "Think about it! Use your head! Remember that you don't have to sin any more... you are free to live as you have never lived before!

Let this moment, as you renew your baptismal vows...be an opportunity for you to roll the stone over that dead, stinky past of yours and declare to Jesus, "I want you! I want your resurrection! I want your life. I don't want to mock your gift! I don't want to presume upon your incredible gift of grace ever again!"

(Before benediction.) The grace of God is one of the greatest things in the world. By his grace we have been set free from a life of sin, guilt and death. And yet the enemy loves to entice us...to invite us to crawl back inside the tomb! Is there one thing...one remnant of your old, dead self, that you need to reject this week? Need to roll the stone back over? The Holy Spirit wants to help you do that... Your dead to sin...and alive to God in Christ! Live as if that were true!