

Writeup for Website**Series: The Roman Road****Title: Open Your Eyes**

Do we live in unnecessary fear or bondage? Some do. But Paul expertly outlines what are divine truths & imperatives for us in Romans 6:6-14 this week. What is true of us in Christ may not always feel true, but that does not change our victorious positional standing in him, and it should dictate the choices we make in life.

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

A couple of weeks ago I told you about Duke Raynald III. A morbidly obese man, whose younger brother Edward revolted against, but Edward didn't kill his brother. Instead, he built a room around Raynald in the castle promising he could regain his title & property as soon as he was able to leave the room. The room had windows & a door, none of which were locked. Raynald just had to lose weight to leave. But each day Edward sent his brother a lot of delicious food. Instead of dieting his way out of prison, Raynald grew more obese & stayed in that room for 10 years. He wasn't released until Edward died, but died within a year of his release due to ill health. A prisoner of his appetite.¹ Let's keep that story in mind again today as we read **Romans 6:6-14...**

6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Does it feel like that? No, it does not always feel like I've been freed from sin. Often times it feels I am trapped by it. But Paul is proclaiming a divine truth over us, something we must believe & trust, let's listen as he continues...

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Here Paul states plainly the doctrine of what is spiritually true of us in Christ. Our old man, our sinful nature is crucified with Christ. Sin still resides in the world, it may still affect us in ways - but it has lost its power & sting. It was our taskmaster, it had mastery at one time. But, Christ has initiated our emancipation. We, and it may not always feel like it, have been freed from the power of sin. But our perception does not always match our spiritual reality...

There's an episode in Doctor Who, where his companion, Amelia Pond, stares too long into the eyes of an evil stone angel. And as the prophecy is told, whoever looks into its

¹ (Thomas Costain's history, "The Three Edwards," cited in Leadership, Spring 84, p. 44)

eyes, they become that stone angel. The problem is, it's only imaginary in the persons mind, and as a result the person makes it a reality for themselves - it's a lie implanted, and with powerful ramifications through the power of suggestion. This woman begins to believe, since she's stared at this stone angel, she'll become one herself. And although the Doctor explains this isn't reality, it's hard for her to believe since she experiences what she feels are real symptoms of change. She imagines her arm turning to stone, and the Doctor bites her hand to show her that it's all in her head - her hand isn't stone, it's flesh & blood no matter how she sees it.

The only way for her to stop this process is to close her eyes & remember what the Doctor had already promised her. He's forced to leave her alone in the forest surrounded by danger, with her eyes closed as he goes to prepare the way of safety. And he says, "It's important you trust me, I want you to remember what I told you when you were young." And she says, "What did you tell me?" He responds, "That's the point, you have to remember." And she says, "How can I trust you when you don't always tell me the truth?" Meaning, he doesn't always give her full clarity on everything he knows. And he says, "If I told you everything you'd never need to trust me." He leaves her with a way to communicate with him as he goes off. At one point he contacts her & has her walk blindly following His voice through all the evil angels surrounding her. As long as she trusts his voice she's okay & isn't touched. And as he finally conquers the power of the angels, Amy can open her eyes seeing the Doctors face, realizing their power over her was only ever in her mind - they had no more power over her than what she would give - and the Doctor is proved right, yet again!

In this time of history, between the 1st & 2nd coming of Christ, when the kingdom of God has been inaugurated, but not fully established, we're like Amy sitting with our eyes closed in the forest surrounded by temptation & danger. Jesus has ascended, but left us with the Holy Spirit with which to communicate. He says you have to trust me, you have to remember what I've said. Follow my voice through this world, and I will navigate your to safety & life. I'm your reality, you aren't dying. You'll not turn callous. You won't turn to stone. Sin's power over you has been conquered in Christ - it's no longer your taskmaster. Due to Jesus, 1 Cor 10:13 is now your reality, "*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*" Sometimes we have to avert our eyes, closing them off to temptation & sin, and opening them only to the true voice of Jesus. Fleeing from sin towards Christ's voice.

Sometimes though, we regard ourselves wrongly in light of this doctrine. We don't truly believe His words to us. We've stared too long into the eyes of temptation, and somehow we've believed it's a foregone conclusion that we're doomed & can't escape. **But... Paul comes along & bites our hand, waking us up saying, "we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been set free from sin."** He reminds us that although it may seem like a reality that we live in a world where we're controlled & still slave to our twisted desires - in Christ we need not any longer be controlled by it. That is

because the death He died, He died to sin once & for all, death & sin no longer have mastery over Him; and in Him, they no longer have mastery over us.

This is us, sitting sometimes with our eyes closed in fear amidst all the temptations of life. But the voice of Christ comes & proclaims truth over us. It's his promise with which we're to agree. We may still be frightened, if we open our eyes, will we see ugliness, or the countenance of Christ. The promise isn't dictated by feeling, or emotional release. It's not something we see on the outside of us, as if there is some physical change. It's a divine spiritual reality of being in Christ. Something which God says is true of us as Paul speaks under the influence & authority of the Holy Spirit - as he bites our hand in order to be a healthy reminder.

The image here reminds me of the woman subject to bleeding for 12 years, in the middle of a crowd she touches the corner of Jesus' robe & is instantaneously healed. An image of power in being in the company of Jesus. It's not something we would possess in & of ourselves, but it's one which originates in proximity to Him. The image of aligning ourselves with His truth, and not with lies. Of willingly placing ourselves under his wing, listening only to his voice, hearing his heartbeat through his chest as He embraces us in the safety & restorative powers of the Cross. Which leaves us with a choice, like Amy had, does she listen to the deceitful self within her saying she's doomed, or does she listen to the Doctor? We have the same choice, as Paul continues...

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. 14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

After stating this doctrine which we're by faith to appropriate, he's now stating the practical daily experience to see whether we have made it our own, or not. Contrary to popular belief, there is orthodoxy, or a right way of thinking. You've not been taught that if you're below 50 years old. You've been taught everything is relative, truth is elusive. And there's even some truth to that lie, but it's also not completely true. There are things you can trust, you can hang your hat on. And Jesus, his work on the cross, and his resurrection from the grave - and what that means to you can be trusted. It may not always be clear like the Doctors relationship with Amy, he can't always tell her everything, but he can be trusted.

Right doctrine combined with trust/faith/belief always comes out in how we live. We read in our Community Group this week how God the Father desires for his people to worship in both Spirit & in Truth in John 4. We believe truth revealed to us in the Scriptures comes out in passionate gratitude & obedience. Christ secures not only our pardon, but also destroys the old master's power of sin, allowing us to serve God under the reign of the Gospel. The cross & resurrection of Jesus have broken the power of sin - believers at last stand before a real choice. We now have the power to choose NOT to

sin. And, although the dominance of the sinful nature's been broken it doesn't mean it's been eradicated - we live in the in-between, the already & not yet.

Just as right doctrine with trust comes out in how we live - so wrong thinking & distrust also comes out in our behavior. If Amy hadn't listened to the Doctor she would've allowed herself to be turned to stone - but she had a choice. Sin's a mortal thing, it needs a body in which to manifest itself. Even our thought process is a mortal thing, thinking requires a physical brain. Routine & habit are powerful, when we do something over & over it becomes ingrained, we do it without thought. We can learn sin, and we can unlearn sin; and we can learn holiness under the power we have in Christ.

My daughter plays the scales on her violin until they're wrote in her brain. Tanner plays his drum rhythms until they become natural. He practices his shots on the basketball court, so the in the heat of the game he can twirl, duck & shoot without a thought. When I was learning Bahasa Indonesia, I memorized large numbers of Indonesian vocabulary so that when I heard them they would start to make sense in my brain. Low & behold as time passed I was in conversation with people not thinking twice about language.

Charles Layhton starred as the hunchback in the movie, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. He had to strap himself in a harness & tie himself so the he was in a bent over position in order to seem genuine. As filming progressed, Layhton found it took longer for him to stand up straight after a days's filming. His body was getting accustomed to being bent over. We often are meant to stand up tall & straight in Christ - however, we often hamstring ourselves, tying ourselves down with habitual sin & bad choices getting used to how it feels. Standing up straight at first hurts.

If you've been around church life for a while you may've seen this Throne of life illustration. The two circles represent two kinds of lives, one in which the Self is enthroned (explain), and the other where Christ is enthroned. (explain).

This is our choice as of now, we can continually choose to enthrone the Self over our lives - at which point we must ask ourselves what CS Lewis asked us last week - is our faith imaginary? Or, we can seek life & holiness, allowing Jesus his rightful place of authority. Humankind is created to serve. We will serve. The question is who, Self or Christ? Either Jesus or Sin will reign in our lives. Verse 13 tells us the choice we should make - *Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness..*

'Offer' is a word of worship. You make offering to something you revere or worship. Paul's urging us to make our offering at the proper alter. To fully switch our allegiance, attention & worship to that which is worthy of it. Sometimes it's as simple as our choices. A man walked into the office of a country doctor, clutching his arm, in great pain. "Doc, you gotta help me," he moaned. "I broke my arm in two places. What should I do?" The doctor responded, "Well, Stay outta those two places!"

Don't go to Shady Maples if you have a tendency to overindulge in food. Stop paying your cable bill if you have a problem with porn. Choose the salad & not the bacon double cheeseburger. At a wedding ceremony of a friend the pastor said something very practical & helpful. He said to my friend, 'Mike, there'll come a day when you'll meet someone else whom you could've married. It's at that time I want you to remember the promise you made today, and to avoid that person.' Simple practical advice.

We can sometimes overcomplicate things with all of our pontification on issues, we argue psychology, genetics, addiction, systematic sin, poverty, politics - but most often those are the red herring, the ruse, to keep us from simply making choices to flee sin & turn towards Jesus. They're the avoidance practice when we should simply believe God, and follow. In the end, how does an addict avoid addiction? He avoids that to which he is addicted. An alcoholic doesn't spend time in bars. 12 step programs speak simply of avoiding the people, places & things which trigger the addictive response - there's simple wisdom in that. Make good choices.

Our bodies & minds crave the release some things seem to bring. When I was losing weight, it became evident I wasn't just losing pounds, but retraining my mind through restraint. In the beginning, I felt extremely hungry until my body got used to what I was now willing to feed it. It had been conditioned to pine for unhealthy things & obscene amounts of it. Sin told me I needed more, even other people did (the old Italian grandmother, "Manja!"), I started to avoid the conversation of weight loss & food with those people. I avoided restaurants which were unhealthy, and prayed I'd stay steadfast in my conviction (1 Co 10:13). I learned from friends with healthy habits, and realized, wow, this is really simple, calories in, calories out...

What the text is saying is that in Christ you now have the power to stop the habit of putting yourself in those sinful attitudes or situations. The members of our body are the instruments which sin uses to regain its dominion over us. Sin's personified as a dictator who demands allegiance, service & obedience. The command is to not let sin be your master. You must present yourself to God. Do it now, do it decisively & do it completely! The Bible's saying don't continue to put yourselves at the disposal of sin, but right now, completely & decisively, put yourselves at God's disposal. Offer yourself unreservedly to Him! It's the image of presenting yourself before a king - a word of worship. How & who will you worship? If people could pick the fruit from the branches of your life would it be bitter or sweet to the taste?

It's like an ex-drug addict walking to the store. Old friends invite him to come party like the old days. "I can't, I haven't brought my hands with me," he says. "Whaddaya mean?" they ask. He replies, "These hands no longer belong to me, they belong to Christ." Simple choices to be made. Both God & sin are looking for instruments to use. God works through human instrumentality. If He wants a message spoken, He finds a person who'll speak it. If He wants a deed done, He finds a person willing to do it.

It's our will in question. That strong self-assertive will of mine must go to the Cross & I must die to self once more in my daily choices. We can't expect a tailor to make us a coat

if we do not give him any cloth, or a builder to build us a house if we don't give him building material; and in the same way, we can't expect Jesus to live His life in us if we don't give Him our lives in which to live. Without reservation...we must give ourselves to Him to do as He pleases with us.²

We're not bound in a hopeless struggle, victory's assured. The power of sin is broken & holiness secured through Christ. The law's able to do many things: it commands, demands, rebukes, condemns, restrains, and even points away from itself to another., but it can't save. As it says in Galatians 2:16, "*By work of law will no flesh be justified.*" God has brought about a solution. Galatians 3:10-14 tells us Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rm 8:1). If we accept Jesus as the only means of our acceptance before God, **we accept grace & grace not only saves, it empowers.**

If we fail morally, it's not because the needed power wasn't available, it just wasn't appropriated. We don't want to live like Raynald imprisoned by our sin when the door is wide open before us. God knows what we can become, but sometimes we put ourselves in a self-made prison. The irony being, it's a prison with open doors & windows. One of the worst feelings is regret. We don't want to wake up 10 years from now, wishing we'd walked out the door sooner, only to die a year later. Make worshipful choices towards Jesus now. To do that, I have some simple homework for you...to memorize a few short verses, but I challenge you to find someone with which to do this. Encourage one another, test one another, discuss what you're memorizing & how it's affecting you. They are...

MEMORIZATION HOMEWORK

Romans 6:10-11

10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

² Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, p. 105