

## ***Transformed by the Way of the Cross***

Spring Sermon Series on Romans

Romans 6:1-23

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

March 20, 2016 (Palm Sunday)

**TEXT:** Romans 6:1-23

We continue this morning in our spring series on Paul's letter to the Romans. We have been reading Romans with the question of how does Romans change us. How are we transformed by

# ROMANS

**"...PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE,  
HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD,  
WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL WORSHIP.  
DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD,  
BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWAL OF YOUR MIND,  
THAT BY TESTING YOU MAY DISCERN  
WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD, WHAT IS  
GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT."**

**ROMANS 12:1-2 SERMON SERIES FEB 7 - MAY 29, 2016**

the gospel? The gospel is central to Romans. Paul considers himself set apart for the gospel. He is eager to preach the gospel in Rome, and as we have been journeying through Romans, we have seen that Paul sees the world around him as standing in need of a radical transformation. This is true in Romans 1 for the world out there. It is true in

Romans 2 for the world right in here. In Romans 3, we discover that the world is transformed by the cross and Christ's offering of Himself for our forgiveness, and the benefits, the effects of the gospel, begin to unfold. In Romans 4, we find we have a new family of faith. In Romans 5, we discover a very new beginning that we have. Now we turn this morning to Romans 6.

In Romans 6, we hear Paul's address to us inspired by the Spirit, that you and I are invited to a very radical transformation of our lives, a transformation that is shaped and effected by embracing the way of the cross. When you are young, and your mother or father gives you your first aluminum can, and you learn how to use a can opener, you open the can and there are wonders inside that can. Depending on whether it is from the parent's point of view or the child's point of view, that can could be SpaghettiOs or it could be lima beans. Depending on whose point of view it is, those wonders are different. But, when you first learn to open a can with a can opener, you also have to get a few extra instructions. You have to be taught how not to cut your fingers off, because that would ruin what's in the can. More seriously, you don't want to lose a finger. You also may need a more advanced lesson. If you see a can that has a dent in the side, adults will know that sometimes a dented can generate food poisoning, which is another negative. It doesn't matter how good the SpaghettiOs or the lima beans are, all of those go bad with food poisoning. You need extra instructions when you open a gift, whether

that is an aluminum can with food inside of it or whether you open and unfold a gift as staggering as the gospel of Jesus Christ. Romans 6 has a dual warning. There are two possible misunderstandings of the gospel of grace. The gospel is the good news of God's forgiveness in Christ, and this can be radically understood in two very different but related ways. Romans 6:1-14 gives us one of the misperceptions, and Romans 6:15-23 gives us the other misperception. I don't want you to decide beforehand which you are most vulnerable to, but each of us this morning is vulnerable to one of these misperceptions.

Let me tell you the misperception what we might call the critique from the outside, or the misperception from the left, if you will. The misperception from the left is that if God gives me forgiveness of all my sins, then the gospel is like a blank check, and I can live however I want to,



and whenever I need to, I will just go and cash it in for more forgiveness. This was poignantly expressed by the English poet W.H. Auden. Auden said: "I love to sin. God loves to forgive. The world is admirably arranged." W.H. Auden misperceived the gospel of grace. The misperception of Auden's statement is that the desire for sin that exists within me, the descent of humanity in Romans 1 and 2, is very real, very powerful, very destructive, and the good news of the gospel does not mean a license to continue to sin. Paul faced this

criticism and responded to it. Remember that when he is writing Romans, he is just fresh off of 3500 hours of teaching in the lecture hall at Tyrannus in Ephesus. He has heard this objection hundreds of times, and so he answers it Romans 6:1. He says:

*"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?"*

This is the misperception. This is, if you will, the 'food poisoning version' of the aluminum can. Do I keep sinning so I get more grace? Grace is wonderful! I love it. How do I get grace? Grace is the response to my sin, so I will sin more. Look within your heart. This thought is not far from you. Paul's answer to this is an emphatic: *BY NO MEANS!* Paul answers this with an expression in the Greek language the in the optative mood. The English language does not even have this mood. It is the mood to negate something that might ever even come into the scope of your thinking. It is the strongest possible way in the Greek language to say: "Absolutely not; that's a crazy, *food-poisoning-kill-you-with-a-SpaghettiOs* kind of thought; (That is the New Living Translation, in case you were wondering.) don't even think about that!" The ESV says: "*By no means!*" The King James says: "*God forbid!*" The New American Standard says: "*May it never be!*" This expression Paul uses 15 times in his letters, and it is his way of saying in the strongest possible way: "Don't even think that. That's the kind of thought that will kill you!" So how does

he explain what's wrong with that thought? His answer is surprising. Shall we sin that grace may abound? He says: *"Absolutely not,"* and he asks a question, like a good rabbinic teacher. If you get a bad question, one way to buy time for yourself is to ask a question in response. And so he says in Romans 6:2:

*"How can we who died to sin still live in it?"*

Dead people don't sin. Aeschylus, the Greek poet, said that people don't rise from the grave. He hadn't heard about the resurrection yet. But Paul says that dead people don't sin. You are dead to sin. He enfolded this by saying in Romans 6:3:

*"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"*

We have such unity and union with Jesus Christ by embracing the way of the cross that we have died to our old life characterized by sin. Every one of us who has been baptized into Christ Jesus has been baptized into His death. We shared in His death, and we were buried with Him into His death by baptism, and our union with Christ, being united with Christ in baptism, then means that we are united with Him in His resurrection, with the result in Romans 6:4:

*"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."*

We walk in newness of life. Paul says that if you have confessed Jesus Christ; if you have been baptized, that is publicly identified yourself with Christ; if you have united yourself with Him, then you are united with Him in dying, and you are united with Him in rising. Then you are dead to your old life so that you can live in newness of life. This transformation is possible only through the gospel. Paul uses language that is somewhat hidden in the English translation. There are four verbs in this passage to describe our union with Jesus Christ. The first one is here in Romans 6:4. It is just a single word to say we were buried with Him. We were laid in the tomb with Him, if you will. He says in Romans 6:5:

*"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."*

Do you believe this? Do you believe that by faith in Jesus Christ you die to your old life so that by the power of the Holy Spirit filling your being, you actually get to walk and live in a brand-new way? I believe that for each and every one of us. This is the glory of the gospel. Look at the imagery. It is so vivid, so powerful. Paul really believes that the way of the cross is real and to be walked by each of us who believe. In Romans 6:6, he says:

*"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."*

What strong language. Dead people don't sin anymore; my old way of life has been nailed to the cross with Jesus Christ. Why? So that my body of sin, my old way of thinking and doing, my food-poisoning-kill-me-before-we-even-have-lunch way of thinking is destroyed, and I am no longer enslaved to this pattern. Paul says the one who is dead, has died to sin. But you know the dying with Christ is only half of the gospel. Holy Week goes all the way through until Easter Sunday morning. We wouldn't be here without Sunday morning. Good Friday is the death for our sins, and we walk with Jesus and die to this old life so that we might be united with Him and be raised from the dead. Paul's logic is compelling; his union with Christ is overwhelming. In Romans 6:8, he says:

*“Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.”*

This living with Christ is not just a future state. The first Easter morning is the beginning of the new creation, and we are in it. Paul's preaching and teaching that he has refined for hundreds of sermons, thousands of hours of teaching, ends this first section with three points of application, three imperatives that end this first section. He reasons from this, from our union with Christ:

Number one: Paul says in Romans 6:11:

*“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*

You and I must consider ourselves, we must reckon ourselves, dead to sin. I'm totally dead to it. That is powerful language. Since I'm dead to it, it doesn't move me when someone offers me the bowl of SpaghettiOs, I say: “No interest. I'm walking right past. I'm going for the organic spinach salad.” Things like that are not possible without a new creation. I'm dead to it. I don't want it. I have no desire it, but I consider myself alive to God in Jesus Christ. You have got to think this way, and your life changes.

Number two: Paul says in Romans 6:12:

*“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.”*

You have died to it, so don't let sin have dominion over you to make you obey its passions. You know your body will generate all kinds of strange desires. There is no positive use of passion in the New Testament. It is a surge for desire. Some passions may be easy to refute. Some of you are thinking: “It is early in the morning and this whole SpaghettiO thing has no power over me. I've had a good breakfast; I'm immune to it.” But there other passions that will surge forth from your body: passions like ambition; passions like comparative analysis of yourself with the person next to you; passions like a desire to get ahead by pushing others down. Passions will rise up in you like a lust for power, lust for authority. Passions like ambition. Passions like a desire for something or someone that God has not given to you. Passions will rise up in you like

appetites for food, appetites for intimacy, appetites for certain social status, or the accumulation of wealth. These things will rise up in you, if not right now, over the course of your life. Paul says that the power of these passions that rise up out of our own fallen nature is broken and you don't have to obey it.

Number three: Paul says in Romans 6:13:

*“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.”*

The imagery Paul uses here for *members* is imagery that describes the parts of our person. He doesn't mean church members. This is not addressed to pastors. He says: “Don't present your members.” Take a look at your members. You've got several of them. You've got feet with all these really neat digits on them. Hands, with digits on those too you. You've got this full physical apparatus to act, to move in this world, and Paul says: “Don't present your physical apparatus as an instrument of unrighteousness, but present yourself, ‘here I am,’ to God. I have died with Christ; I am alive in Jesus Christ; and here I am. I have been brought from death to life, and here I stand alive in Jesus Christ. I present myself to God as an instrument of righteousness.” I think that the first misunderstanding is easy to spot. It is easy to spot the danger of that. It is easy to recognize this misunderstanding of grace from the outside, but there is a second misunderstanding of grace that is introduced in Romans 6:15, and this misunderstanding is a little bit more complicated. It is a little bit like an electric can opener. There is a lot that can go wrong with an electric can opener. The second misunderstanding is what Paul says in Romans 6:15:

*“What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?”*

This misunderstanding reasons that since we are under God's grace in Jesus Christ, does it mean there are no obligations to obey? Does God's Word not have any role in our lives? Is it possible to say: “Well, I'm under grace, not under law, so things like ‘you shall not steal,’ ‘you shall not commit adultery,’ ‘you shall not murder’ no longer apply to me since I'm under grace”? When you get pulled over as I was pulled over on Wednesday on my way to pick up Eric Metaxas, which was really awkward because his flight was arriving 30 minutes early. I was trying to talk on the phone with the hotel to get his room set, and all the sudden I was pulled over. The police came to my window, and I said: “Officer, I'm am just going to start off and say I'm really sorry for whatever I was doing. I'm in the middle of a big moment here.” I told him I was on my way to the airport to pick up a VIP visitor. The officer smiled at me, and he said, “I saw that you were on the phone. I saw that you were going 60 miles an hour through a construction zone.” Then he said, “Listen, I am going to give you warning right now. Go, pick up your guest, and have safe time. Just look in your rearview mirror now and again.” I just said,

“Thank you so much!” You know, if I had started that conversation as he approached the window and just said, “Hey, look man, I'm under grace, not under law,” I think that would have resolved differently.

N.T. Wright, former Bishop of Durham, tells the story of being transported by a London cab driver, and the cab driver asked him: “What you do for living.” Wright tried to explain: “I am a Bishop, and I preach, and I teach, and I try to help people become more like Christ.” The cab driver just cut him off and said to Wright: “The way I look at it is like this. If God raised Jesus from the dead, then all the rest is basically rock 'n roll.” You see, this is a misperception, if you will, from the inside. Paul's preaching and teaching that we are under God's grace can be misperceived to think that God's Word, God's Law, God's Torah, God's teaching has no role in our lives. We can be tempted to think that the result of the gospel is that we are independent from God. We are especially vulnerable to this way of thinking as Americans because we so value independence. It is woven into the fabric of our national identity that freedom is found by rejecting rule and authority, so we are especially vulnerable to this. Does God's Word, does teaching have a role in the Christian life? Are there obligations? Are there covenant stipulations? Are there things that we must do, ought to do, should do, in light of receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ? Paul moves to answer this question in a surprising way. Paul says in Romans 6:16:

*“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?”*

Paul sets before us in this picture that none of us is independent, and this strikes to the core of us. We are not independent by receiving the gospel. What has happened to us by receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ is not independence to live however we want to, but what has happened to us by receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ is a change of masters. The only time it is good to be a slave is if you have the best possible master, and that Master is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says in Romans 6:17:

*“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.”*

You used to be a slave of sin. You used to go where sin prompted you to go. Some of you know this very closely. Some of you know the experience of not being totally in control of yourself and being moved by promptings, whether electronically, whether they are social, whether they are the promptings for your own heart, and you're bound to them. Paul says you used to live that way, but now something has changed. Look what has happened. You become obedient from the heart to this standard of teaching. The Greek expression here is the *type* of teaching, the *pattern* of teaching, so there has been teaching that you have received, and you used to be

enslaved to sin, and now you are obedient from the heart to this new teaching. What is this teaching? Something radical has happened on the other side of receiving the gospel. Paul believes that what has happened to those who receive the gospel of Jesus Christ is this radical transformation that was described by the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

Ezekiel 36 is one of the most important passages for understanding the New Testament. It is one of the most important passages for understanding the logic of Paul's missionary labor and his seeking of community transformation. Ezekiel 36, beginning at verse 25, describes this time of renewal, restoration, and new life. The Lord says in Ezekiel 36:25:

*“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”*

Our sin is removed, our idolatry is washed away. That is just the beginning. Look at what happens. In Ezekiel 36:26, the Lord says:

*“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”*

Our hearts which are deadened to the ways of God, our hard hearts are taken out and a brand-new heart is put inside. God says: “I will cleanse you from your idolatry; I will do open-heart surgery on you.” And what happens next? The glorious ending of the gospel is this. With a new heart, what happens? Just like the creation of humanity in Genesis 2, God says in Romans 6:27:

*“And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”*

What happens when the Spirit of God comes upon you? Do you live in radical independence of God and do your own thing? No, you discover the royal road of freedom, real freedom. When the Spirit of God is within us, the Spirit of God then causes us to walk in God's statutes and to observe His ordinances and His command. When the Spirit of God comes on us, we walk in God's ways, and that is where real freedom is found.

This is the scenario of Jeremiah 31 of the New Covenant, that God's Torah, God's teaching is written on our hearts, and we know Him and we walk in His ways. The glory of the gospel is that whereas we used to be slaves to sin, in Romans 6:19, he says:

*“For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.”*

If you get in your head that the gospel means there is no Torah, there is no teaching, then you are going in this lawless way. Paul says we used to be slaves to impurity and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness. One of my favorite rabbinic sayings is: “The reward of disobedience to

God is the temptation to disobey again, and the reward for obedience is the opportunity to obey again.” But now, though we were slaves to sin, we have been changed, and we present ourselves to God as slaves of righteousness leading to sanctification. Paul reaches a climax of the second part of the chapter, and he says in Romans 6:20:

*“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.”*

But now, we see in Romans 6:22:

*“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”*

We have become slaves of God with the result that our lives are changed into a pattern of holiness and life. This imagery of being enslaved and being rescued by God and brought out from slavery into the freedom of being slaves of God should remind us all who know the Scriptures well of this great paradigm in the Bible of redemption. Do you see it? You were slaves, and God brought you out with a mighty arm. He set you free and brought you to the place of His own presence, and He revealed to you His will. He poured out His Spirit so that you might live. Do you see it? God is replaying the narrative of the exodus, and the second exodus led by Jesus Christ on the road to the cross, the Calvary Road, goes straight through Passover. Jesus Christ is our Passover Lamb whose blood pays the price for our redemption and brings us into the glorious freedom of being slaves of God. “Let My people go,” Lord says, “so that they might serve Me.” God is not interested in independence. God is interested in a people whom He has bought for His own possession, who will know Him, love Him, and walk in His ways. No one comes into the sanctuary to exchange their marriage vows, then leaves the sanctuary and says: “Call me sometime.” No one is adopted into a family to be forgotten and then called the day when the parent dies. No one is invited to a banquet to come in through the outer court and go out the back door.

We have been bought with a price so that we can live in fellowship as part of God's people in this new exodus, this new freedom, this new righteousness. We have been bought with a price. We have been set free from sin and become slaves of God leading to sanctification and eternal life. This is the glory of the gospel in Romans 6:23:

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

The wages, the outcome, literally in Greek, *ta psonia*. These are the things that you buy in the grocery store. That is when you see the case of SpaghettiOs discounted and you think: “I'm buying the whole case.” It's what you buy. Sin causes you to buy death. The Gift of God is Life, and this Life begins right now. If you have received Jesus Christ and you are under grace, that means that you are dead to sin, transformed by the way of the cross. It also means that God's

Word has an important place in your life. That means you're under grace so that you get the joy of discovering God's Word, His wisdom, His will, His teaching.

I love the Bible. I started loving it right after I received Jesus Christ. It is one of the effects of knowing that you are a real believer. I told some of you at the beginning of our series that one of the most recent translations of the Bible is a translation done into the Mato language. It is just being completed now. Missionaries, in part sent out from Kenwood Baptist Church, have gone to this people group in Papua New Guinea. As I have talked with Scot Stober, I think that in places the Mato translation is the best one I have ever heard. There are some key translation decisions that are done with excellence. As we think about Romans 6, it is God's Word coming to people just newly discovering the gospel of grace. I love this picture of two older men from the Mato tribe just discovering God's Word. They have just gotten the Bible in their language. They are just finding out about a God who created the world. They are just finding out that they were made in His image and likeness. They are just finding out that God is not pleased being worshiped with our idolatry. I love the expression



on the man on the left. He has the whole Bible and is reading through it. He is trying to make sense of it. I also love this picture of this group of women just receiving the Bible. See the woman holding the Bible, and there is a mix of expressions. There's wonder, astonishment, what is the meaning of these things? The woman on the far side smiling

with the discovery and the woman holding the Bible reflect the expression of the beginnings of new life. New life begins for real. I love this picture of these young women who received a copy of the Gospel of Matthew and of them in their tribal dress celebrating that they have received the Word of God in their own language.



The beginning of new life is starting to take hold. Let me share with you a couple of verses from

the Mato version of Romans 6. The Mato version translated back into English reads like this:

*“Before you put the parts of your body in both dirty behavior and law exceeding behavior’s hands so that you were under them, and they both led you to repetitively do many bad behaviors. But now you must put the parts of your body into straight behavior’s hand so that you are under it, and it will lead you to become God’s.*

*“When you were bad behavior’s workers for nothing, you weren’t under straight behavior even a little. But what good fruit came from the behavior you did at that time, the behaviors that now you have shame for. Those behaviors’ end is death!*

*“But God unbound you from the bad behaviors that bound you, and you became God’s workers for nothing. So then, the fruit you receive is that you became God’s, and that way’s end is unending life. Because bad behaviors’ repayment is death, but God’s gift is unending life, he freely gives it to us because we are adhered to Kristo Yesu our Lord.”*

(Romans 6:19-23 – Mato Version).

If you are ‘stuck to’ *Kristo Yesu*, to Jesus Christ, that means new life starts right now and you are dead to sin and alive to Him.

I want to set before you these contrasting pictures of a man who lived without Christ. Without



Christ, he is painted in his tribal costume. He has a spear in his hand. He is ready for war. Do you know what happens to you when you receive the gospel, the Good News of God’s grace? The Word of God starts to take hold of



your heart you are unbound, and you begin to live in a new way. That new life is characterized by joy and happiness, and the new life that we find in Jesus Christ is rooted in Scripture. You see this man changed by the power of the Scripture, changed, ready to present himself as an instrument to God in His service.

New life in Jesus Christ begins now. Being united with Christ means dying to sin and being raised to new life. This new life is characterized by obedience of faith, the New Covenant realized, the Torah written on the heart, empowered by the Spirit to live in God’s ways. Beware of these misunderstandings of the Good News of God’s grace.

We read in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

*“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”*

As Jesus said to the woman in John 8:10-11:

*“‘Woman, has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.’”*

Would you pray with me.

Lord Jesus, we give You our praise. We rightly give to You glory, laud, and honor, Lord Jesus, our Redeemer, our King. Lord, You have come into this world to seek and to save us, to purchase our lives for Yourself, and now Lord, with our lives belonging to You, we pray that You would free us from our sin. We pray, Lord God, that You would cause us to walk the way of the cross, to see ourselves as is dead to an old life, an old way of thinking and living, and see ourselves as alive in Jesus. We pray, Father God, that You would keep us from that false understanding that the gospel makes us independent, but rather dependent on You, created in Your image, renewed, redeemed, filled with the Spirit, so that we might walk in Your ways. We give You our praise and thanks.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.