

“Under New Ownership”

(Romans 6:1-14)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Everything in God’s Word must be believed in. That is the proper response to God’s Word is faith. But not just in the “big things” like creation, or the incarnation of the Lord – when God took on flesh – or like when Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world (and all of your sin) when He died for us on Calvary’s cross, or His resurrection from the grave, but all the “rest” of it too. And perhaps “the rest of the story” is much more important than we give it credit to be. For example what Romans 6:1-14 is all about...the absolutely crucial rest of the story! Please do not miss it!

Let me assure you that this text is indeed most appropriate for Epiphany: when Christ showed His glory so that we would know that the babe born on Christmas is actually God in the flesh. He let out glimpses of His glory – many of them -- actually – so that we would know that this baby and this man was no mere human being, but true man who was also true God, the Savior of all of His brothers and sisters...all of the other true humans like you and me. That is, the bible texts during Epiphany are about Christ showing or revealing Himself to the world so that people would see that God is alive and well...and even more than alive and well, but actively and powerfully working among us and to this day rescuing people from the clutches of sin, death, and the power of the devil.

All of the bible passages of Epiphany are about this, esp. as is our Gospel today, but so is our epistle from Romans even though it seems so much about our Christian lives today...but this is what makes it so special, because it means that Christ is still “appearing” but now He is doing so through poor sinners like you and me and demonstrating that we are much more than just poor sinners.

Romans 6:1-14 is a gold mine on the Christian life. In studying this text I was reminded of why the Christian life can seem so unnecessarily frustrating. Let me start off by presenting this crucial fact about Romans 6:1-14: when God teaches about the Christian life in these verses, He does so by putting forth two crucial components to be aware of:

First: The Christian Life is described as an indicative: what you ALREADY are in Christ as a result of what Christ has ALREADY accomplished! These things are true. These things are factual. They go in the category of those objective truths of the faith which are quite simply to be believed in: God created the heavens and the earth; Jesus died and rose again to save you; Jesus is true God and man...AND You have died to sin (6:2); AND You were baptized into the death of Christ (6:3); AND You have been buried with Christ (6:4); AND You shall certainly be united in a resurrection like His (6:5); AND Your old self has been crucified with Jesus (6:6); AND You are now in the position of no longer being enslaved to sin (6:6); AND You’ve been set free from sin (6:7); AND You will also live with Christ (6:8).

Let’s soak in this first part: we have a terrible time starting our Christian lives with these Epiphany facts! They seem counter-intuitive. We know about our sin, we feel our sin, we experience our sin...God’s

Word teaches about our sin and we know it's there. We confirm it. And it's so easy for us to do so that while it is enormously healthy and beneficial to confess our sin (1st John 1:8-9) – and if we don't, we're liars and the truth is not in us – on the other hand, sometimes we never get to “the rest of the story.” Christ has forgiven us our sin and this means that we have objectively and truly – actually and factually – received a new position in life; these things are true: you've died to sin; you have His resurrection life. And yes, part of St. Paul's meaning here in Romans 6 is referring to the future resurrection of the body that is yet to come; his meaning, however, also includes the enduring new status that is the life of the Resurrected Lord Jesus **already** yours!

So what? Well, the “so what” answer is **everything** to the Christian and I hope you will absolutely soak in this truth Christian: the “so what” is that the domination, the mastery, the tyranny of sin has been destroyed. This is a fact. So while it may be so that because you are still in the world, you must still deal with the *presence* of sin, what has changed is the *predominance* of sin! Sin is still around, but it is no longer your master. You Christian are now under new ownership. When Christ died, and the life of God entered into the veins and arteries of death itself, death received its terminal cancer; it received its thermal nuclear warhead and it died and sin lost its mastery. This is true, this is factual; this is actual because when Christ died He died to kill sin and you benefited (this is a fact) and when Christ rose He rose to give you life unending (and this is a fact). And those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus – like you have – now have entered into this true status. Sin is no longer your master. That's a fact!

Our problem Christians is not that this isn't really true...of course it's true, but our problem is that we frequently forget it or unwisely jump to the **second** component while by-passing the **first**: that is not only does Romans 6 declare what is indicatively true; it also presents what is imperatively commanded. In other words, the Christian life is presented both as what it IS and presented as to what it must DO. The problem, however, is that either we completely ignore this, which is a sad sin that renders the grace of God as a cheap thing; OR – and this probably happens more than we imagine it does – we by-pass the indicative (what we ARE) and skip to what we are to DO, but when we do this, the Gospel life is morphed into a Law life and there is no power in the Law to do anything. Without the Gospel; without what Christ has done for you and what Christ has already made you to be in Him, you may as well tell a drowning man to swim! So when we skip the Word of the Gospel of what God's grace has done for us in Christ, we enter into the imperative of our new lives and start to sink and then we convince ourselves that perhaps the picture of the Christian is a couch potato who says they believe in Jesus but – so so sadly – are helpless to sin and must live in its slavery! Wrong!

The Lord gives evidence of His life among His people by teaching us: begin with what I've made you to BE; begin with who you ARE; and then go forth and live out this life...experience a new relational position with God and with others for sin shall not be your master! It isn't your master. You have a new Lord, a Savior, even Jesus Christ. How can we put this in a way that is easy to understand?

My favorite illustration is raising children. How do you raise them? How do you teach them? First, you teach them who they are! They are your children dearly loved. They are loved unconditionally! They become co-heirs of your household. Your home becomes their home and when you write your will, you will most likely leave your assets to them. They belong to you and you belong to them. They are your family. They are yours and they know it.

Having such knowledge when they are raised with unconditional love – which by the way always includes Godly discipline – informs them of their positional status. This is the indicative! Under these more or less ideal circumstances (if my illustration can hold ground here), they trust you, they know that your word is no mere word of command, but a word of promise: I'm here to catch you son; I'm here to support you daughter; I love you and I will strive to do all I can to love you. So under these circumstances; with this arrangement, position, and status confirmed, we begin to advance our speech: they start to learn to walk and you step away 6 feet from them and you reach out your arms and you say, "Come here you!" It is a command! It's an imperative! The kid is not standing there going, "Oh no, not that dreadful Law again that shows all my sins!" Not in this case. With the command they recognize who is calling them. And with a smile on their face or with a look of determined hope, they step towards you, they start coming to you. **They know who they are and they know who you are!** And through this faith and knowledge (and faith always contains knowledge), they respond to the command not out of fear, not out of dread, not expecting defeat; but knowing that their loving parent is there ready to catch them and ready to embrace them. The command is buttressed by a promise; the imperative is given confidence by the indicative: they are loved; they are yours...so the command is embraced by their "new nature" that knows that they are in fact empowered by the parents who LOVE them!

This is a picture of the Christian life. The indicative empowers the imperative. The passive aspect of faith that receives and receives Christ over and over again, then knows the active aspect of faith that puts forth and pours out that which they have received! Christ loves you – oh passive one – and then you love – oh active one, but you and I can never lose this biblical order. Because if we do, the imperative has no power from the indicative. If God does create it, then "it" can't go anywhere...there is no life and there is no ability.

But with Christ, you are quite simply under new ownership, but allow me now to break-down Romans 6 just a little more:

1. The indicatives (who you ARE in Christ): verses 1-10
2. Then there is an appropriation (verse 11), you therefore "consider" or "take into account" what is true: that is you're always reminding yourself in faith about your new position (this is an act of faith; and this is the living in baptism that we Lutheran Christians are always talking about). Remember your baptism...remember what actually happened: When Jesus was baptized, He entered your life and the great epiphany was the voice of the Father from heaven and the dove that lighted upon Him and when YOU were baptized, you entered into His life and death, and burial and resurrection and the heavens opened, and the angels rejoiced, and the Father declared your new position: you have died to sin; death is dead to you and the over-flowing life of the resurrected Jesus is yours Christian! This is the reckoning, this is the accounting, this is the consideration that we are called to review and conduct every single day...this is faith in action, God's gift to you!
3. And then with such an accounting, apply it and live it (verses 12-13). Here is the real active life God puts before you. Don't pretend that these don't exist, don't run away, don't rationalize them away...you don't have to be afraid of them because you know how to start: start with the indicatives; start with WHO you ALREADY are!

Verse 12: ***“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.”***

Verse 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.”***

In these two verses the new positional Christians with a new life already established and given are given two prohibitions and one command from God. These are not to spoil your party, but to bless your life. Trust God Christian, the Spirit will lead you to experience that while sin is still present, it is not predominant. And while you still cry out, “O sinful man that I am!” The Spirit will make you confess just as fast: “Jesus is my Savior!” and “I am forgiven!” And then we may begin as that little child who hears the command of their loving parent, “Come here you!” and we are glad to obey...and even if we stumble along the way, we can’t wait to get going! This is the Christian life. Now we apply this new life to our whole experience...so that our “instruments” or “weapons” (the extensions of our actions, our words, our thoughts; every aspect of our being) are **not** at the whim of the old master sin, but in service to the Lord, our new Leader.

But remember this – and this is why context is so important – verse 14!

Verse 14: ***“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”***

How does this section end? Not with a command, but with a promise...it gets back to WHO YOU ARE!!! Sin will have no dominion over you...says the LORD! You are not under law but under grace...says the LORD! This is true; this is a fact!

And this leads me to end with a pastoral consideration. I cannot begin to tell you how much our flesh resists this truth. I know this not only on account of my own sin and my own battle; but on account of the countless testimonies of the Christians I’ve had the privilege to serve over the years. This is God’s Word, it is true, but it is as I said in the beginning counter-intuitive, it is not the way we feel. And so often we feel stuck. This is a battle. It is a battle between the truth and a lie. The evil one lies and tries to convince you that you are a hopeless cause. To hell with him! The truth is that you are not a hopeless cause. The truth is that you are a Christian. You have the indicative and the imperative and with God’s help you live in this even if it seems to manifest only in a meager way.

“Francis Schaeffer [described] his conscience as a big black dog straining at the leash and threatening to devour him. But because of the completed work of Christ, he is able to say ‘Down, be still!’ and the dog has no leg to stand on and no option but to obey! That in itself may lead to a release of tensions and anxieties, which thus frees a Christian who suffers from a wrong sense of psychological guilt.” (Tidball, Derek, *Skilful Shepherds: Explorations in pastoral theology*, Leicester: Apollos, 1997: 274).

Tidball also says, “If God, the sovereign of the universe, has decreed the matter finished, who are we to keep putting the item back on the agenda of our minds?” (ibid, 275) And – Tidball quotes another Christian

writer: "our trouble is that we listen to ourselves too much but we do not talk to ourselves enough." (ibid, 275) But not cheap talk, but the confession of God's Word: you have died with Christ! You are raised with Christ! This is who you ARE and now while sin may be present, it cannot predominate...Jesus keeps forgiving it; and even more, His life is yours. This is our most personal epiphany. It is Christ showing His life today and He is doing it in and through you. This is who you ARE: A Christian; one who belongs to Jesus! I know Christians who despise themselves and this is often the experience of how we despise the old man crucified with Christ...we don't have fond thoughts of him; he is a sickening old Adam team-player; but these same Christians do things that show Jesus: they serve, they help, they care, they love...they extend themselves to others and the beauty is, is that they are living out WHO they really are. This is often hidden. As much as people heard that Jesus was God, but then looked at Him and said, "Are you kidding?!" people look at you and say, "Christian? New Creation? Makes a difference? Are you kidding?!" Oh no, we're not kidding...your life is hidden with God in Christ...and the truth is that you are baptized, the old mastery of sin is defeated, and the new life is very much there...and maybe we don't see like we would hope we might, but get back to your assurance, do the reckoning, do the accounting: You have died to sin (6:2); AND You were baptized into the death of Christ (6:3); AND You have been buried with Christ (6:4); AND You shall certainly be united in a resurrection like His (6:5); AND Your old self has been crucified with Jesus (6:6); AND You are now in the position of no longer being enslaved to sin (6:6); AND You've been set free from sin (6:7); AND You will also live with Christ (6:8)! This is who you ARE...it is good to go forward from this truth!