

## HEART FREEDOM

### ROMANS 6:17

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Would you look please at Romans 6:17--that's the verse that we're studying this morning? 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." Do you see the last clause? "The standard of teaching to which you are committed." One of the big problems in the world has arisen because of a misunderstanding about Christianity that has come from a misreading of that last clause.

Most of us say, "Paul, you messed it up again with your Greek grammar. You should have said, "This is the standard of teaching which has been committed to us." Really most Christians have misread the verse that way and it has resulted in a group of Christian thinking reformers who felt that their chief responsibility was to pass on to others, the teaching that had been committed to them. And so the church has bred for years, finger-shaking Christian reformers who have tried to pass on to their children and to anybody who would listen, the standard of teaching which had been committed to them.

So there has developed a vast group in Christendom who preach what they do not practice. Eventually this leads to politicians who claim to be speaking for law and order but do not practice law and order inside their own hearts. It results in a hypocritical kind of Christendom. Brothers and sisters, the verse does not read like that at all. If you look at it, Paul is very clear -- the standard of teaching to which you were committed. Sons and daughters of God are people who are committed to a standard of teaching, not who have had the standard of teaching committed to them to do a lot of finger-shaking and a lot of didactic preaching. They are a people who are committed to a standard of teaching.

They are a people who live in a certain way not a people who talk in a certain way. You know it yourselves, every time you get a group of people who live a certain way, the world wants to speak to them and hear them speak. But every time you get a group of Christian thinking reformers passing on a standard of teaching you get the world putting its fingers in its ears and not wanting to hear. I don't think we could blame it.

Now, God says that we are people who are committed to a standard of teaching. What is the standard of teaching? Well, it's very clear. It's in Romans 8:2.

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death."  
That's the standard.

The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus -- that's the standard to which we're committed. The law of the spirit of life is expressed in the laws of the spirit of life in the Old and New Testaments. Those are descriptions of the normal behavior of the life of the Holy Spirit. Everybody who receives the Holy Spirit into himself or herself is committed to letting the Holy Spirit live his normal life through them. And the life they will live will be the life described in the laws of the spirit throughout the Old and New Testaments.

In other words, law in the Bible is not something that you're trying to obey. If a law is there you must try to obey it. My mom never said to me, "Now son, you must try to talk like an Irishman otherwise we'll really be disappointed in you." So I went to elocution and speech class and tried to

talk like an Irishman. No, it came naturally because I had Irish life running through my veins. So it is with the normal life to which we are committed as sons and daughters of God. We have the life of God's uncreated spirit running through our veins and so we end up living up to the normal life that the Holy Spirit lives Himself.

That life is described there in Exodus 20:3. The Holy Spirit behaves a certain way and has certain actions, thoughts and words that he produces inside a human being. This is the standard to which we are committed. For instance in Exodus 20:3 it says, "The Holy Spirit will have no other gods before me." That's one of the marks of the Holy Spirit. When he dwells in a person, he'll have no other Gods before me.

Exodus 20:7, "The Holy Spirit will not take the name of the Lord your God in vain for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." When the Holy Spirit is present in a person, you automatically will not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Exodus 20:8, "The Holy Spirit will remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." It just comes naturally to him and when he dwells in a person it comes naturally to that person. Exodus 20:11, "The Holy Spirit will honor your father and your mother." That will come naturally. Exodus 20:13-16, "The Holy Spirit will not kill. He will not commit adultery. He will not steal. He will not bear false witness against your neighbor. He will not covet your neighbor's house."

That is the normal life of the Holy Spirit. If you look at Matthew 5:44, that life is elaborated in the inner life. Matthew 5:44, "The Holy Spirit will love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." He will just naturally do that. That's the kind of thing the Holy Spirit did when he was inside Jesus' physical body and he doesn't change. He is part of the Godhead. He is unchanging.

So that is the kind of life that we're committed to. The Holy Spirit will believe all things, will bear all things, and will endure all things. The Holy Spirit is not jealous or boastful. He is not arrogant or rude. He does not insist on his own way. He is not irritable or resentful. First Corinthians 13 describes the kind of behavior that the Holy Spirit produces inside a person when he comes to live inside them.

So you remember last Sunday we said that living under grace is not an arrangement whereby we are permitted to deviate from the normal life of the Holy Spirit with impunity. Living under grace means having the opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit into you and then allow him to live the life of Jesus over again inside you. And that is the standard of teaching to which we are committed. Living under grace is far from being a way out in order to sin with impunity. Living under grace is receiving the Holy Spirit into you and allowing him to reproduce Jesus' life.

This is why Jesus and the apostles always said that the life of grace is not a freedom to break God's laws but it's a freedom to exhibit and express those laws freely and fully in your own life. You remember Jesus said that and we looked at it in that same chapter 5 of Matthew. Jesus certainly gave no license to us to live above law or to be free from obeying the law. He simply said that it would be a natural result of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us rather than an attempt of us to selfishly and independently obey them on our own.

Matthew 5:17-19—"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an

iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

You remember Paul says the same thing in Galatians 5:19-21. It's strong brothers and sisters so I think you should look at it lest you doubt if it's there.

Galatians 5:19-21 – “Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like”, then the strong words, “I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.”

There's no law against those because the laws simply describe the life of the Holy Spirit. When you're letting the Holy Spirit be Himself in you, you're not offending any law. In fact, the apostles actually go so far as to say that if the Holy Spirit is ruling in your life then you can't behave any other way than the way he behaves.

Now that's strong. The apostles say, "If you have the Holy Spirit ruling in your life and filling your whole being then you can't behave any other way." It would be like me trying to speak with the Minnesota accent. It is something that's impossible to me. You can't do it if you have a certain kind of life running through you. You can't behave as if a different kind of life is running through you.

Now, maybe you want to see at least one or two of the places where that's stated. James is one of them. James 3:11-14, "Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish?" Well you answer it yourself. Does a spring pour forth fresh water and brackish at the same time? It doesn't.

Eventually, something may contaminate it and it becomes a brackish spring but even that is unusual.

“Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? Can the Holy Spirit in you produce envy and jealousy? Obviously the meaning of the question is that the answer must be no.

Really, what Paul is saying in Romans 6:17 is that for the early Christians in the first century, conversion was very simple. They had been slaves of sin. That's what Paul says in Romans 6:17, "You were once slaves of sin." They had been slaves of sin.

They had tried to live a life independent of God and had found themselves enslaved to making all the provisions for themselves that only God could. They found themselves wrapped up and fulfilling their physical, social, psychological and mental needs. They were once like that. But now, they have been brought out of that. They had been shown that Jesus was able to give them a supernatural life that would enable them to live free of all those things. And all those things that they did, God condemned them for but Jesus died for them.

So now, they were to be baptized into Jesus and they were going to be baptized into the kind of life that the Holy Spirit produced in them. What they did with the early Christians in the first century is that they would get them around, (those who were going to be baptized into Jesus) and they had a book, a collection of sayings which we have today but isn't part of our Bible, called the 'didache'. Those of you know Greek know that it means teaching.

They had a list of the teachings that Christians automatically produced in their lives as a result of the Holy Spirit. They would instruct the converts of the teachings. They would say, "All right, when the Holy Spirit comes into you, this is the kind of life he is going to live inside you. It's just the same life as Jesus lived." And the converts would say, "Great, that is great. That's what we want." Then they would be baptized into Jesus, into his death and they would begin to live that life.

That's right, it was beautiful. I mean they would just live that life because there was nothing to prevent them living it. But we are highly sophisticated now and have progressed tremendously and so we complicate the whole business. We share the difficulties of living this life with each other that we're almost psyched out before we even begin.

Now, brothers and sisters, there are two ways in which we differ from the attitude that the early Christians in the first century had. First of all, we differ from them on the height of the standard of the teaching. Secondly, we differ from them on the depth of the obedience that is needed. We differ in those two things.

Let's look at the height of the standard of the teaching. First I want to make one thing perfectly clear, I am not the president. I want to make one thing perfectly clear, the reason why I share the height of the standard with you is not so that you'll come under condemnation but so that you would come under the spiritual principle that is stated in that verse, "Be it unto you according to your faith."

Do you see that if you don't believe that that is the height of the standard, then that in a way, paralyzes you and prevents you from ever entering into that standard. I think a lot of us are in that position, and that's why I am sharing the height of the standard with you. If you don't believe that the standard is that or that you can live such a victorious life, then you will never believe God for it. You'll spend your whole life crawling along the ground, making excuses and rationalizing away your partial disobedience.

So dear ones, that's why I share it with you, not so that you'll come under condemnation. There's no reason why you should come under condemnation. The only reason God accepts us is because of the blood of Jesus. It's not because we live a victorious life, it's because of the blood of Jesus. So there's no reason for coming under condemnation. But it's so that you'll begin to believe God for the high standard of living that he has provided for us in the Holy Spirit.

Now, where do we differ about the height of the standard? I don't think we differ about the quality of the standard. I think for instance, most of us agree, "You're right brother, when the Holy Spirit came into me; he gave me a great love for people." Most of us will agree that we have had some experience of a great love of people. Most of us will agree that we've felt real patience at times with people. "At the beginning when I first received Jesus I felt a real patience for those in my home."

In other words, most of us here will agree that at times we have all felt a very high quality of love or a very high quality of peace or a very high quality of patience. Where we differ from the height of the standard is in the phrase 'at times'. It's the consistency of the standard that we disagree with. It's the constancy of this life of victory that we fall short of. And that is where most of us are failing to believe the high standard of teaching to which we've been committed.

Most of us will look at a verse like Romans 6:14, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace", and you remember how we talked about the Greek word used there for sin. It is the Greek word 'hamartia' and the article is before it, 'hay hamartia'. And when you talk about the sin as opposed to just sins, you mean the power of Satan to incite us to rebellion and an independent attitude towards God.

Most of us would agree, "You're right. I am no longer a slave to 'the sin', to the power of sin. I am no longer a slave to Satan's power. I am no longer dominated by Satan in my life." Most of us who are Christians would say, "Yes, we're at least as free as that from Satan's power." Most of us would go as far as Romans 6:17a.

Romans 6:17a, "But thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin", and we would say, "You're right. We were once slaves of sin, now we aren't. There's no doubt we no longer yield that unthinking, unreflective, unquestioning obedience to lust that we once did." That's what a slave does. A slave yields unquestioning, unreflective, willing obedience to his master. Most of us would say, "You're right. Since I became a Christian, I have stopped yielding that kind of unquestioning, unreflective obedience to lust or to pride or to envy or jealousy."

In other words, when I get angry or envious or jealous, I really get worried. That's what I think most of us would agree with. We've at least come that far. We've ceased to be a willing, unquestioning, automatic slave to Satan. The problem is we still do these things at times. There are periodic times of selfishness.

There are carnal fits of resentment that we get into when we cry over ourselves and just hate everybody. We do manage to pray over it after half an hour or maybe a day. If it's husband-wife, sometimes it takes a week but we eventually pray over these things. But at times we would say that we come under them.

Now that is the difference between carnal and spiritual Christians. A carnal Christian will experience victory at times. He will experience freedom from envy at times. He will experience joy and love at times. A spiritual Christian will experience them constantly, allowing for the fact that Satan tempts and that Satan can inject feelings, which you can't resist and reject.

A spiritual Christian finds that there's nothing coming up from within him but continual joy and peace and love. Now that's the distinction between a carnal Christian and a spiritual Christian. It isn't that the carnal Christian never experiences love but it's that it is inconsistent. It is not constant.

Now, lest you think this is some wild Methodist heresy, I just repeat to you, that the commentator Lensky that I have used through the years says this, "Paul does not say that by committing sin while being under grace and not under law, Christians would at once change masters and adopt these sins, their former tyrannical ruler and leave God, their blessed liberator."

So that's important you see. It doesn't mean that every time a carnal Christian man sins for a while he changes his master. No, he doesn't do that. He is not a slave to that master. He just at that moment chooses to obey him rather than God. These Christians want to remain under grace and under God but here is the important thing.

Imagine that grace is not averse to their committing sin on occasion. This is a Lutheran who is supposed to believe that you sin in act, word and thought every day of your life, (which obviously Lutherans do not believe) but he says this, "These Christians want to remain under grace and God but imagine that grace is not averse to their committing sin on occasion. They do not desire the old tyrant, 'the sin'. They think however, that they may indulge in some measure of sin, but even this is impossible."

So brothers and sisters, that's it. A carnal Christian is one who has experienced freedom from unquestioning, unreflective obedience to Satan but he is one that is still in a sense, obeying God and obeying Satan when he chooses. In other words, a carnal Christian is still able to plead Jesus' blood. It's guilt you see, that makes us slaves of Satan.

You do something; Satan accuses you, and says, "You're worthless. You're useless. Now even a carnal Christian is able to reply to Satan and say, "Listen, I am justified by the blood of Jesus".

Romans 5:9 says that, "God sees the blood of his Son and he is pleased with that blood. He accepts me because of the presentation of Jesus' life. It's not because I am living a flawless life." Therefore, even a carnal Christian is able to maintain freedom from guilt and to confess his sins continually as they crop up. He is able to keep out of the slavery of Satan.

Satan brings slavery when he is able to paralyze all motivation for good through a terrible debilitating fear of the past and of guilt. That's how Satan enslaves you. You know you're so under the things that you've made a mess of yesterday that you haven't even the motivation to try again today. Now even a carnal Christian can get free of that kind of slavery because he can say, "No Satan. I don't accept your accusation. I answer it with the blood of Jesus. If God is satisfied with his Son's blood then certainly I am and you have to be whether you want to or not."

Therefore, even a carnal Christian can walk free from guilt. So they're free from Satan's slavery in that way. Here is the problem. They have not become slaves of Jesus' spirit. That's the difficulty. A carnal Christian, who obeys God at times and obeys Satan at times, is perhaps freed from being a slave of Satan but they have not yet become a slave of the Holy Spirit. They have not yet yielded unquestioning, unreflective, absolute, automatic obedience to the Holy Spirit.

So in a sense they live between two worlds and they aren't getting the best of both worlds. They're usually getting the worst of both worlds. The reason is, of course what you find there in Romans 6. It was last week's verse. Romans 6:16,

"Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin," (and there it is, not 'hay hamartia' but just 'hamartia', sin, just an ordinary sin) which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

You see a carnal Christian is not a slave to 'the sin', to the great rebellious independent power of Satan but when he obeys a sin, he becomes a slave to that sin. So, a carnal Christian is usually one who is freed from all sins but just one is giving me a little trouble, and that's usually the mark.

There is usually some besetting sin that a carnal Christian cannot get free from. Maybe it's unclean thoughts, maybe it's a driving selfish ambition, maybe it's a continual failure to keep your temper, maybe it's greed for clothes or greed for food but a carnal Christian is one who has come free of slavery to the independent power of Satan and he wouldn't dream of going back under that but they are a slave to ordinary sins that keep cropping up in their lives.

Now the reason brothers and sisters is that they in fact, haven't become an unquestioning slave of the Holy Spirit. Of course Satan loves to make them believe that the problem is that sin. Satan loves to get them all involved in their lust or in their selfish ambition or in their pride. He loves to persuade them, "You're okay, except for this little thing. This partly comes from the fact that your mother rejected her pet cat when she was a child and you have inherited a trait from her that runs through your personality."

Well, you know it's bluff. It's the old bluff psychology that is not true. There is good psychology but that's a bluff psychology. We're always busy rationalizing and concentrating on the individual sin. Loved ones, the problem is not the individual sin. The problem is that we're between two worlds. We've ceased to be a slave of Satan but we're not yet a slave of Jesus' Spirit and that's what is needed for us to come into that.

Romans 6:17 really expresses the depth of obedience, that a child of God experiences, "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." A child of God who is walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit is obedient from the heart. Their life reflects constantly the laws of the spirit of life in Jesus because their heart has become free.

They no longer negotiate with God over commands because they realize that negotiation is not obedience. They've given up their right to negotiate and when the Holy Spirit tells them to get up in the morning they get up without asking 'Why' and without negotiating with the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit tells them to shut up, they shut up without asking him "Why, is it reasonable to shut up?"

They just obey the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit says, "Give so much to God", they give so much without questioning. They have become an automatic willing bondservant to the Holy Spirit. Now brothers and sisters, that is the only way into freedom and when you are a carnal Christian, you have a double mind, you have a divided heart and what is needed is what Paul talked about.

He said, "The Holy Spirit cleansed our hearts by faith." What we really need is to have our hearts cleansed by faith so that we not only obey God but we rejoice to obey him so that is easy right from the inside. And that only comes by the Holy Spirit filling you with Himself.

What are the conditions for the Holy Spirit filling you? Well, we've talked about them so often. You could lead into it a different way if you wanted. The word used in verse 17, "From the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed", that word 'paradoken' in Greek is the same word as 'pilot', and was used to describe Pilot's action with Jesus. Pilot committed Jesus to be crucified. He handed him over to be crucified.

Now children of God who are filled with the Holy Spirit are children of God who have handed themselves over to be crucified with Jesus. That is really the first condition of being filled with the Holy Spirit. It's Romans 6:11, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." And that's the first step. You must consider yourselves from now on, dead to any ability or option or arbitrary decision to obey sin. That is not open to you. It is not an optional extra to you now.

The only option you have is to be a slave of Jesus' Spirit. You commit yourself to dying to

everything else but his Spirit. So it means reckoning yourself dead to your right to negotiate with the Holy Spirit, and to your right at times to disobey him.

Can you come to that kind of decision? Yes, you can, certainly. A man or a woman can be honest about that kind of thing. A man or a woman can come to the ground of their heart and like the early Christians in the first century, can give up their right to ever disobey God. Yes, you can. I know it's fashionable today to say, "Oh no. We're weak human beings and there are all kinds of psychological reasons."

Loved ones, the early Christians didn't fiddle around with that. They weren't too concerned with the division between the person who has the Holy Spirit and the person whom the Holy Spirit has. They weren't too concerned with the person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells as a guest and the person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells as host and fills completely.

The early Christians knew one complete surrender and they regarded it as true. When they were baptized into Jesus' death, they died to their right to disobey God and they died to their right to obey anybody but the Holy Spirit, on the dot, and at the moment. You can come to that loved ones and I do encourage you. Don't sit there and say, "Oh brother, you can't come to that. I am too complex a person." No, brothers and sisters, you can come to that.

You can come to the ground of your heart where you die to your right to disobey the Holy Spirit, you really can. You can come to an honest place in your heart. Our problem is we haven't come to it because we don't like the idea too much. We have to deal with that in our own hearts. Then in Romans 6:13, the second part, it says, "Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life." And that's the daily submission.

That's treating him as if he is your master. Being a slave to him means yielding him instant, unquestioning obedience every moment of the day. And that's the kind of life that is described in verse 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." I cannot tell you the fresh breeze that flows through your inside when you are able to obey God from your heart. It's so good. It's so good not to be fighting half a dozen resentments and disagreements deep down. It's so good not to be un-victorious or 'just victorious' because of the big struggle I have inside.

It's so good to be really free and it is possible. It's possible to be free inside otherwise God's word wouldn't talk so often about obeying from the heart. I'd ask you about your own hearts. How often have you looked at a friend who has done something well and you've known it was your responsibility to love him? Outwardly you have loved him but inside there's that creeping little resentment because he has done that thing well. Or, how often has your roommate done something that really offended you? You know you are a Christian so you are supposed to be patient. You are patient by dint of strong will power, but inside there's resentment and an anger boiling up.

Now loved ones, there's something better than that. There's some life better than that and it's the life described in Romans 6:17. It's entered into by Romans 6:11 and Romans 6:13, Consider yourselves dead to sin and dead to any right to ever disobey God and any right to be anything but a slave of Jesus' Spirit. Then day-by-day submit yourselves to the Holy Spirit.

Now would you do that? Would you commit yourself to obeying the Holy Spirit without asking him any

questions? If you do that, you'd be into this life. You'd be into it this moment. Now let us pray.

Holy Spirit, if there is something deep down inside us that still retains it's right to negotiate with you and is still therefore Lord and Master of our lives, will you show us that? Holy Spirit, if we are not yet ready to become a slave of yours, yielding, unquestioning, constant, consistent obedience to you without trying to run our own lives with Your advise, Holy Spirit will you show that to us now?

We do want that kind of freedom that comes with slavery to you and we want freedom from these feelings inside. So will you make this real to us Holy Spirit and enable us to die to our right to disobey you and to our right to have our own way ever for the rest of our lives? We trust you to deal with each one of us throughout the hours of this day that we may come into total consistent, constant, freedom and victory as children of God. Amen.