

## Freedom and Slavery

Romans 6:20

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Do you remember what it is like when you were about 7 or 8 years of age? I know not all of us had happy childhoods so don't let's get all filled with self-pity, if we can't look back to happy childhoods. I think more of us than we realize didn't have happy childhoods but you remember back about 7 or 8, whatever it was like, it was kind of good somebody often would make a great fuss of you and would think a great deal of you. And the mom or dad at some time or other seemed to think that you were the center of the world, and for a few years you did seem to be the center of the world -- and everybody made a great fuss of how you looked or what you did or they looked after you and took a great deal of care over you.

You felt that you had some real significance. I think one of the real traumas that we go through when we go to school and especially when you go to junior high and senior high is you begin to feel that you're not so important in the world and that there are millions of other little happy souls that think they're equally important. And you begin to come into all that problem, you remember of lacking a sense of significance and beginning to feel that you are just one of a great number. And especially if you come to a place like the University of Minnesota or almost any school today, you begin to feel that you're just one of a great crowd and it doesn't matter much what you do.

Brothers and sisters, even though probably very few of us here could be described as neurotic, yet probably most of us feel something the same about that kind of subject. Most of us probably feel inferior at times to others and most of us probably feel at times that we're not of much use compared with somebody else and most of us probably feel at some time that people aren't giving us the attention that we deserve. Probably most of us are trying to get recognition or acknowledgment from somebody in some way and so most of us are probably the same here. We put on fronts of all kinds when we come into the theatre [where Campus Church met at that time] or when we come into a group -- but probably most of us are under the same kinds of pressures.

We're just desperately anxious for somebody to notice us or somebody else to think that we're important. That's one of the reasons why falling in love is so exciting -- because for one moment somebody seems to think you're very important or you're all the world to them and most of us probably are in that situation. Now the tragedy is of course that most of us don't find any real answer to that. There's a limit to how many Elvis Presley's there can be. There's a limit to how many Richard Nixon's there can be. That side is Democrat, that side is Republican. There's a limit to how many famous people there can be, so most of us have great difficulty finding an answer to that need for significance.

What we have been finding over the past three or four years is that the reason we lack the sense of significance or the reason we lacked the sense that somebody recognized us or thought of us at all was not because we had just grown up. It wasn't because we no longer had a mom and dad to make all that fuss of us. We have been finding, brothers and sisters, that the reason we have such a sense of insignificance in the world, the reason so many of us have such a sense of anxiety about what we're doing in this world, the reasons that so many of us have such a problem with the whole identity crisis of who we are, is because the Creator of the universe wanted us to live in dependence upon him but we haven't been doing that. We've been living in dependence upon ourselves.

And so he has committed to himself to rejecting us forever and to destroying us after our 70 years is up.

That's why we have such a sense of insignificance -- not because our mom doesn't think we're important anymore, not because our professor doesn't think we're important anymore, not because our friends or our wives or our daughters don't think we're important anymore -- but because the Creator of the universe has rejected us because of the way we've been treating him. That's really why we have such a sense of insignificance and why there is such a consciousness of angst throughout all our society, why there's such a sense of imminent disaster about to fall upon us. We have seen over the past three or four years, that that's the real problem.

The real problem is we have no justification for being here because deep down in our hearts we have a sense that the only significant other in the universe has rejected us and has taken away our right to be here in this world, and that's why we have such a sense of insignificance. That's why we have spent, I suppose six years altogether, studying a letter that a man wrote to a group of people in the city of Rome. He wrote it in about 57 A.D. and the first five chapters of that letter that we have been studying over the past six years deal with just this problem of our own significance or our own importance or our own sense of meaning or our own sense of purpose in the world. This man Paul explained to us exactly what I have explained to you -- that the reason for the terrible sense of insignificance was because we hadn't been living in dependence upon our Creator, we've been living our own way. So he had rejected us, and there was a secret sense of alienation from him inside us all the time and that's why we felt so useless and purposeless in the world.

What Paul went out of his way to say was, look, the Creator of the universe had to condemn you to death because if he continued to let you go your own way throughout the whole universe you'd have spread your dirt and your sin and your filth and your rebellion throughout his whole universe, so he had to stop it somewhere -- that's why he condemned you to death. But do you know what he has actually done? He has actually put all your little selfish wills that wanted to live independent of him into his son Jesus and destroyed you there. And so Paul has been saying to us, the Creator of the universe does not feel alienated from you. He doesn't feel antagonistic towards you. He committed himself to destroying everything that opposes him but the way he has done that with you is to take what was in you that opposed him and destroy it in Jesus.

So he has nothing against you. He has nothing against you. So it's a lie if you believe that you're alienated from the Maker of the universe. He is not alienated from you. He accepts you because he is satisfied that he has destroyed you in Jesus. So the first five chapters of this letter just deal with that whole problem, of how to come into a feeling that you're justified in being here on this world. How to come into a contentment that you're justified in being here -- a full, real human being breathing the air in this world and having a right to your place in this world. Paul said, you could come into a sense of justification or of being justified in being here if you really believed that the Creator of the universe had already destroyed your old selfish will in Jesus.

That's why Paul used a phrase in Romans 5:9. He used a special phrase to describe the kind of relationship that we now had a right to have with the Maker of the universe and therefore with each other. Romans 5:9, "Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God." Paul would say, you see, you're justified in being here by Jesus' blood because Jesus' blood is an expression of the fact that God has destroyed you in Jesus and he is satisfied with that and doesn't want to destroy you again and so you're justified in being here.

So you have no need to fear some imminent disaster. You have no need to fear that the Creator of the universe is going to destroy you at the end of this world. You have a right to be here. Of course, many of us have found that when we really started to believe that, there came a great sense of justification inside us. We began to find that we were no longer trying to justify ourselves by our talents. You know the way we do that, try to justify ourselves by our talents, try to prove that we're worth respecting by the talents that we have or we try to prove to our parents that we're worth looking up to or worth maintaining at college because of the grades we're getting or we try to prove to our peers that we're worthy of their respect because of the grades that we're getting or because of the sports that we're performing. But in some way, we've so often felt we had to justify ourselves. Well, we find that when we began to believe that God had nothing against us, suddenly there comes a great freedom from that need to justify ourselves. We find ourselves freed from that desire and that's what the first five chapters of Romans talk about, dear ones. They talk about justification.

Now here's what many of us found. We found that we had come into a right relationship with God and a reasonable kind of relationship with our peers but we found that it was difficult at times to live consistently like people who were justified. In other words, we would find at times a creeping kind of envy or jealousy coming up inside us. That is the mark of those, of course, who don't feel they're justified at all. You envy someone else when you feel that you aren't justified in being in this world alongside them and so you envy them and you want to be like they are or you get jealous of people because they seem to be more at home in this world than you are and you feel that you aren't at home in it and that you aren't justified in being here. So the old jealousy comes up or it's the same with the pride. You work up the pride to try to prove to yourself that you are justified in this world.

So many of us found that though we realized that we were justified in being here and though we realized that the Creator of the universe thought the world of us because of Jesus, so what did it had matter what the professor thought -- we found at times that a competitive spirit of rivalry still rose inside us. We would find that we were not living like people who were justified. We were still living at times like people who were uncertain of themselves, insecure, who felt they had no right to be here, felt they had no purpose in life, no meaning in life. Now, loved ones, that's what we've been studying -- the answer to that -- in particularly Romans 6, because from Romans 6 on, Paul deals with the whole problem of living like people who are justified.

He calls it sanctified, he uses another word for it. He calls it being sanctified. He says, "Yeah, you know that you're right with God because Jesus has died for you and you can live at times like that but there are moments when your whole personality has not been completely re-routed and you find your personality acting according to the old ways, acting frightened and insecure at times, filled with jealousy and anger at times, filled with fear and worry at times." Paul points out, "Your mistake is that you think you can live like a justified person without God's help. You think that God has done everything for you that needed to be done in justifying you in Jesus death", and Paul points out, "No, in order to live like a justified person you have to allow God even to do that for you."

Loved ones, that was a great new truth to many of us because most of us were brought up in the school that you have control over your own personality. If you want to stop being jealous, you can stop being jealous. If you want to stop being envious, you can stop being envious. If you want to stop being proud, you can stop being proud. Most of us were brought up to feel, "Well, yeah, power

over your own personality. You can do surely what you want to do", and what Paul has been showing us in his letter is, "No, you can't."

The reason you lose your temper continually, the reason you keep getting angry, the reason you envy at times is that you haven't allowed God to do the work in you, which will enable you to live like a justified person. That's why there are many so-called Christians around who don't live like Christians. They are Christians in that they know they're right with God and they don't fear any longer their death but they aren't Christians in the sense that they don't live like that. They still live as if they're afraid of God. Now really the reason is that they have not come into what Paul calls "a sanctification" or what many of us have called being filled with the Holy Spirit or being baptized with the Holy Spirit and that's what we've been talking about during this past year.

Now brothers and sisters, I wanted to share that with you so that you kind of know where we've come to in the studies and Romans 6 deals with the whole resolution of that problem. Really, it's a two-fold thing if you would like to look at in Romans 6, you can see it there. Paul says, "The whole problem is with the old self. The old self feels it still has to justify itself." So he points out the difficulty that many of us have in this justified life. Romans 6:1, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" Well, of course many of us find ourselves still living in sin and then he goes on to the real answer to the question, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Of course, as justified people, most of us would agree with that. We'd say, "Yeah, we know that Paul. We know that the reason we're justified in being alive here on this earth is that God has already destroyed us in Jesus so he doesn't want us to destroy us again. So we have no need to fear him. So we know that's why we're justified." But Paul begins to point out, "Yes, but that is also the key to living like justified people." It's 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. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." And that, brothers and sisters, was the key to the whole problem -- that old self -- because what many of us found was, we had something inside us that still wanted to justify itself.

It had been used for years to justifying itself. For years we've been used to justifying our success academically, to justifying ourselves by our high grades, to justifying ourselves by our good performance to our husbands or wives, to justifying ourselves by our good performance on the field in sports. For years, we have been used to the old self justifying itself. Now the real answer to this whole problem of the old self continuing to justify itself is to see that it really was destroyed with Jesus and it has no right to justify itself. It doesn't even exist. It's been crucified with Jesus and it has no right to prove that it's good or bad or indifferent. It's been destroyed with Jesus, that's the end of it. Now we're free from it to live as God wants us to live.

Of course many of us have grasped that truth intellectually but have failed to enter into it experientially and so we've been looking for the past year at how you enter into it. We found that it's a two-fold condition that you need to be willing to fulfill. The first part of it is there in Romans 6:11, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." And we found that the first part was really to believe it had happened, not to start a kind of masochistic treatment of your old self to try to destroy it. Not to try to auto-suggest it out of

your life but to simply consider that it had been crucified and it was dead and finished with it.

In other words, to intellectually take the attitude, "I have been crucified with Christ. I have no longer a reputation to defend. I have no longer a position to maintain among my peers. It's been done. I have been crucified with Jesus" -- and we were to believe it intellectually. Now we did find that the Greek word "logidzesthe" means "to treat yourself as being really dead" and so we did find that believing entails a willingness to believe, a willingness to be part of what you believe. In other words, if you believe that you're crucified with Christ, you must be willing to be treated by other people as Christ was treated. To be willing to be looked down upon by other people, to be willing to be criticized wrongly and unjustifiably by other people, to be willing to be insulted by other people, to be willing not to have a pillow to put your head upon to sleep, to be willing not to have a good reputation, to be willing in every way to be treated as Jesus was treated. So many of us have found that considering yourselves dead to self with Jesus is not just a matter of an intellectual juggling game, it is in fact a real willingness deep down to be crucified with Jesus.

Then the second part of entering into the freedom from the old self and being free to live the justified life is in Romans 6:13: "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 your members to God as instruments of righteousness." The second part is a real willingness to submit day-by-day to the Holy Spirit, really to treat yourself as having no internal motivational headquarters of your own, and to look always to the Holy Spirit as your guide, moment-by-moment. In other words, really the way to enter in is to trust and obey. You trust that you've been crucified with Christ and you obey the Holy Spirit day-by-day.

Now it's that area that we've been dealing with the past few weeks, the whole area of moment-by-moment submission. You remember we shared before, that unless you've entered into some kind of crisis situation in regard to your willingness to die to self with Jesus, it won't matter how much you try to submit to the Holy Spirit day-by-day because the old self will still be there struggling, crying out, "The good that I would I cannot do and the evil I want to avoid that's the very thing I do." But if you've really been willing to come into a place where you're dead to self with Jesus, then the day-by-day submission is vital in order to live like a justified person.

In other words, in order to live free from envy and free from anger and free from jealousy -- and that kind of submission is a really radical thing, dear ones. It is really radical. I'll try to show you just by looking at the verse that we're studying today, how radical it is in verse 20. Romans 6:20, "When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness." Paul is pointing out that it's as radical as slavery, that the obedience and the submission to the Holy Spirit that is needed in order to live in victory over those feelings is like a slavery. It is a willing slavery but it is like slavery. It's a slavery to righteousness instead of a slavery to sin.

He points out how radical it is by referring to the old days that you used to live in verse 20, "When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness." And being a slave of sin is really being a slave to the attitude that sin expresses. The attitude that sin expresses is, there is no God. There is no loving Father who cares one bit about me. In fact there is, behind this universe, a mindless power who is hardly even aware of my existence. That's an attitude of sin and you remember all of us lived in that at one time. At one time all of us here in the theater felt, "Yeah, there's nothing behind this universe but some mindless kind of power that has no purpose or no meaning and certainly if he has any meaning or any power, he has no purpose or power over my life", and we felt that we were on our own.

We felt that either a diabolical devil was behind the universe guiding the main stream of the historical life of the world but certainly not that he had any interest in our lives and you remember that results in a certain kind of attitude. When you think that way, you feel you have to make your own way through life, don't you? I mean you're responsible for your own life. Nobody else is going to look after you so you better look after yourselves and you know what happens. You begin to dedicate yourself completely to food, shelter, and clothing -- that becomes the all important thing in your life. You feel if there's no power behind the universe that's interested in me, then I'd better look after myself and that's what old Paul means when he says you remember, "When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness." That's right. You remember we became slaves to that whole attitude.

Did you have any choice over which subjects you chose in school when you had that attitude? You didn't. You went straight for the subjects that would provide not the greatest value you would be to society but the most lucrative career that you could find. You know when you begin to take that attitude towards the Creator of the universe, that he is not interested in you, it automatically results in an attitude of slavery to self that chooses even your school subjects on the basis of how much food, shelter and clothing they will get me.

You know what works out in jobs. When you don't think primarily of what job would be most useful to society, you go for the job that will bring you in the most dollars and will make you the most secure person that you can be. You know how many of us even here in the theater have chosen medicine not from a viewpoint of helping our fellows, but from the point of view of the fees that doctors got when people came to see them and so often it has been that when we were slaves of sin, we were not at all free to do anything but go the way sin said and that's what Paul is saying.

He is saying of course, that that's the kind of slavery that is needed to righteousness. In that you need to treat God the same way when you begin to take an attitude of righteousness towards him. What is righteousness? It's an attitude that believes that there is a dear loving Father that knows you by name and that loves you with all his heart and that knows exactly where you are at this present time in your life. And that knows how your body feels at this moment and he knows what is going to happen to you tomorrow and he knows what you're thinking deep down in your heart this moment and he knows you and he has your name written in his own heart and he loves you and he will not let you fall, that's an attitude of righteousness.

What Paul is saying is, the only way you can live is to be a slave to that attitude -- whatever happens, whatever comes, whatever takes place, however circumstances may urge you to believe something different, he says, you have to be a slave to that attitude. Even when the bank account is non-existent, even when you failed the third course this quarter, even when the home is falling apart and there's nowhere to go home to after this term ends, even when you don't know where the next piece of clothing is coming from, Paul says, you've to be a slave to righteousness. You've to be a slave to the attitude that there is a loving Father who knows when a sparrow falls to the ground and treasures you much more than many sparrows. You've to be a slave to that attitude even when everybody says you're stupid, you're wrong, the whole world's falling apart, Paul says, you've to be a slave to that attitude. You've to obey it, whatever. You've to obey it immediately and instantaneously, and he says, you remember, that's the way you used to be when you were slaves of sin, when you were slaves of the other attitude.

Brothers and sisters, honestly that is the way through. Here's where you and I get into trouble. We

begin to behave as people who aren't slaves. We think of slavery as something repulsive. We forget that being a slave is an attitude inside in your heart that regards a certain person as your master. Slavery is not simply being an automaton. It is taking a certain attitude to a person as your master and slavery can be a beautiful thing. What we often see is only the repulsive side of slavery and so we come to a situation in the middle of the day, where God's Spirit is guiding us to do something and we refuse to act as slaves. You remember how a slave acts? He obeys his master immediately even if he isn't sure whether the thing is right or wrong. He obeys his master instantly. He gives him automatic, unquestioning obedience. That's where we come into difficulties. Instead of giving that movement of the Holy Spirit within us instantaneous obedience, we begin to debate it and discuss it as an equal and that's where we begin to back off; doesn't matter what it is, loved ones.

Brothers, doesn't matter if it's the whole business of lust, doesn't matter if it's the whole business of picking up the wrong magazine, doesn't matter sisters, if it's the whole business of talking about somebody else or criticizing them. There's a moment when the Holy Spirit whispers inside and at that moment God asks us to come into instantaneous slavish obedience and if you do, you find that you come into freedom, perfect freedom and that's what Paul is saying. Perfect freedom comes from a slavish instantaneous obedience to the Holy Spirit. Really dear ones, it is a good way to walk, honestly. You know I'm as strong as any of you are on freedom, I'm for freedom -- but you know that what we come into and what we call freedom is not freedom at all. It's a slavery to self all the time. You check back on the things that you've done in your life, and it's just a trail of things that you've done in slavery to self.

You take a certain seat because it's comfortable for your body. You eat something in the restaurant because it's what your body wants. You're in slavery to your body and slavery to self. You take certain attitudes in conversation in slavery to your own need to establish a reputation. You say certain things quickly and cleverly to make a certain impression on people because you're enslaved to your need to be thought of as important or significant. You crack a certain joke at a certain time that's wrong because you want to create a certain kind of impression for self on others.

You know that what we talk about as freedom is not freedom at all. It's slavery to self again and again. What you find when you come into slavery to the Holy Spirit is, he brings you into real liberty and real freedom and you're at last free to be yourself and free to be what God has made you. So you can see, loved ones, the importance of the submission angle and how important it is not only to come to a willingness to die to self but a real willingness day-by-day to give slavish instantaneous obedience to the Holy Spirit and he would save us from a lot of messes if we do that. Let us pray.

Holy Spirit, would you show us where we, ourselves, are not living that kind of life? Where we're carrying on too many debating contests with you? Where we're discussing things too often before we obey you? Holy Spirit, thank you for showing us that this debating and discussing and then acting in alignment with your will because we agree with you, is not obedience, it's just agreement.

Holy Spirit, show us this morning that obedience is often doing what you tell us even if we don't understand why and even if we're not absolutely sure. Holy Spirit, we trust you to begin to bring us this coming week into an instantaneous obedience to you. When you say in the morning, get up, to get up. When you say to speak, to speak; when you say to get down to study to study; just to do that.

Holy Spirit, we trust you to lead us into this slavery that is perfect freedom and liberty, freedom

from self and freedom from the domination of our old “I”. We trust you to do this with each one of us this week for your sake Lord Jesus, that we may live justified lives for your glory. Amen.