

The Different Drum
Romans Summer Sermon Series – July 1st

Series: Extreme Makeover
Text: Romans 6:12-23

A sermon preached by Rev. Dr. Stacey D. Jones on July 1st, 2007 at
Northminster Presbyterian Church.

Today we continue in the sixth chapter of Romans as Paul goes into more detail on the question he posed at the beginning of the chapter: *What shall we say to this? Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound?*

You will remember that the "this" to which Paul refers is the grace of God. In the first five chapters Paul has made his case that we are saved by God's grace and God's grace alone. Of all the things I have said from the pulpit, the following statement has caused the most email dialogue seeking clarification. There is nothing we can do that will make God love us more or that will make God love us less than God loves us at this very moment.

This has been a new concept for some of us which has been difficult to grasp for some. That is not surprising since we live in a world where it is hard to imagine that you really can get something for nothing. However, while grace is a free gift from God, it is not cheap. God paid a high price to be able to offer unconditional love: the sacrificial death of His son, Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Because God was willing to accept the death of Jesus as payment for our sin, the gift of love which He offers is free, but not cheap.

Last week we were invited by the scripture to live our lives as a grateful response to the grace of God which we have received in Jesus Christ. However, as clear as I have tried to make that message, there are some for whom it is still a difficult message to understand.

One of my colleagues, who was preaching on today's text which is about creating the right environment for the grace of God to overflow in us, told a story at a meeting we were attending which illustrates how difficult it is for people to hear and accept such a message. For visual effect, four worms were placed into four separate jars. The first worm was put into a jar of vodka. The second worm was put into a jar of cigarette smoke. The third worm was put into a jar of chocolate syrup. The fourth worm was put into a jar of good clean soil.

He went on to preach about nurturing the right environment for faith to grow, and at the conclusion of the sermon, the pastor reported the following results: The first worm in alcohol – Dead. The second worm in cigarette smoke – Dead. Third worm in chocolate syrup – Dead. The fourth worm in good clean soil - Alive. So then he asked the congregation, *"What can you learn from this demonstration?"*

A little old lady in the back, who had clearly missed the point of the illustration, quickly raised her hand and said, "As long as you drink, smoke and eat chocolate, you won't have worms!"

A NEW PARADIGM

In the second half of the sixth chapter Paul answers his own question: *What shall we say to this? Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound?* His answer again: BY NO MEANS. Yet that is easier said than done, isn't it? Self-centeredness, anger, bigotry, lust, greed, and the all the other sins of commission and omission seem to be part of the human condition. So how do we change our behavior that may well have become ingrained in our lives?

Paul suggests a new paradigm: instead of avoiding things that are wrong, focus on doing things that are right for the right reasons. Instead of living by the letter of the Law, live instead by the spirit of Grace.

Any of us who have raised children know that the worst way to change the behavior of a child is to tell them that they cannot do something. Tell any child that they will be punished if they behave in a certain way, they are most likely to test the limits by behaving exactly in the way you have described. I love the way I've seen some teachers work with children's behavior. They will say, "Thank you, Randy, for raising your hand when you want to ask a question," or "Thank you, Don, for not running in the halls." It is so much easier to respond to a positive instruction rather than a negative instruction.

In his commentary on this passage, Stuart Briscoe reminds us that the Puritans used to say it this way: *"God does not take away the ability to sin; He gives us the power not to sin."* He goes on to use the example of a remote control on a television set. *"If television sets were made without on/off switches and we were chained to our seats in front of them and our eyes were held open by mechanical means,*

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we would have no option but to watch everything on the screen. But we all have the option to watch or not to watch. It requires the simple choice to change the channel or turn off the set. In Christ we have been given an 'off' switch—the ability to say no and the instructions to do it." (Briscoe, Stuart, "Romans," Communicators Commentary, pp. 136-137)

This is what the grace of God does for us in Paul's mind. It puts the choice back in our hands. When we were living under the letter of the Law thinking either that we could earn God's favor or that what we had done was so bad that God could never love us, sin had a foothold in our lives. There was no freedom to choose because we were either legalists or hedonists. Grace gives us the freedom to choose again.

As a young woman, Frances Havergal, author of the hymns, "Take My Life and Let It Be" and "Like a River Glorious," had a very quick temper—the kind that would explode. Afterward she would be mortified and confess it to the Lord. But then she would lose her temper, again and again.

One day after a particularly bad explosion, she threw herself down by her bed and wept. She prayed, "Lord, must it always be so? Will I always have this temper to keep me humble before you?"

While she was on her knees, the Lord injected a verse of Scripture in her mind: "The Egyptians whom you have seen today you will see no more forever." God spoke these words to Moses when the Egyptians pursued the Israelites to take them back into bondage. Havergal related the verse to her temper and the way in which Satan wanted to use it to pull her into bondage. She saw that God could take her temper away. She asked, "Lord, could it be forever?"

It seemed to her that the words came back from the Lord, "Yes. No more, forever." Her sister said that from that day Frances Havergal never again lost her temper. She believed God, and God did a miracle. God gave her an off switch for her anger as she was willing to accept His grace rather than trying to control her temper on her own. *Citation: J. Oswald Sanders, "How Do You Love?" Discipleship Journal (March/April 1981)*

THE DIFFERENT DRUM

Paul's whole message in chapter six has to do with marching to the beat of a different drum. In our culture today we are surrounded with drumbeats which are designed to distract us from the most essential things in life. Paul calls these distractions the sin because they keep us from giving our full allegiance to God. We worship at the altars of wealth, political power, social prestige, sexual gratification, and we lose sight of what is really important in our lives. Paul says we are to listen for the drumbeat of a different drum calling us to live our lives fully and completely instead of following the drumbeat which leads to a dead end.

I recently read about a man whose story is becoming an inspiration to me. He has Multiple Sclerosis, and he has had it for most of his adult life. Multiple Sclerosis is a disease of the brain which affects the neuromuscular system, and my friend knows that if he misses a day of exercise because he knows that if he doesn't keep re-patterning his brain to move his legs, he will be so crippled that he will wind up in a wheel chair. So every day he is lifting weights and doing the treadmill and the elliptical machines just to be sure he can keep going for as long as he can until the Lord calls him home. He knows that if he does not exercise, his brain will forget to fire the message to his muscles to keep on going, and he will become a cripple. So he says, *"I take my medicine, I say my prayers, and I do my exercise so I can keep on going. If anyone can tell me a fourth thing I should be doing, I will happy to listen."*

This person could allow bitterness, anger and frustration to be the dominant drumbeat in his life. Instead he believes that God has called him to do something with his life in spite of his disability, and he listens to the beat of a drum which gets him up and to the YMCA by 6:00 a.m. every morning, and he goes back later in the day to exercise with his wife just so he can stay healthy.

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This is what Paul believes happens when we accept the grace that God wants to offer us. It is a re-patterning of our brains. We listen to the beat of a different drum. We aren't doing it to earn brownie points with God. We do what we have to do to stay healthy, and we don't do it out of guilt. We do it out of gratitude for the gift of life which has been given us by the creator of the universe.

I received an email the other day from a friend who knew I was preaching on Romans. Now I don't share every email I receive with you. My policy is that if I have received it twice, it is probably making its way around the internet and you don't need to hear it from me. This is one I have only received once, and I think it is a fitting summary of the first six chapters. See what you think.

The Maker of all human beings is recalling all units manufactured, regardless of make or year, due to a serious defect detected in the primary and central component of the heart. This is due to a malfunction in the original prototype units, code-named, Adam and Eve, resulting in the reproduction of the same defect in all subsequent units. This defect has been technically termed, "Subsequential Internal Non-morality," or more commonly known by its technical term, S. I. N., as it is primarily expressed. Some other symptoms: 1. Loss of direction. 2. Foul vocal emissions. 3. Amnesia of origin. 4. Lack of peace and joy. 5. Selfish, or violent behavior. 6. Depression or confusion in the mental component. 7. Fearfulness. 8. Idolatry. 9. Rebellion.

The Manufacturer, who is neither liable nor at fault for this defect, is providing factory authorized repair and service free of charge to correct this SIN defect. The Repair Technician, Jesus, has most generously offered to bear the entire burden of the staggering cost of these repairs. There is no additional fee required. The number to call for repair in all areas is: P-R-A-Y-E-R. Once connected, please upload your burden of SIN through the REPENTANCE procedure. Next, download ATONEMENT from the Repair Technician, Jesus, into the heart component.

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No matter how big or small the SIN defect is, Jesus will replace it with: 1. Love. 2. Joy. 3. Peace. 4. Patience. 5. Kindness. 6. Goodness. 7. Faithfulness. 8. Gentleness. 9. Self control.

Please see the operating manual, the B.I.B.L.E. (Believers Instructions Before Leaving Earth), for further details on the use of these fixes. WARNING: Continuing to operate the human being unit without correction voids any manufacturer warranties, exposing the unit to dangers and problems too numerous to list and will result in the human unit being permanently impounded. For free emergency service, call on JESUS.

Grace. It is the thing which helps us re-pattern our brain. We respond to grace, not to Law. Out of thanksgiving for the gift of grace we have received, we order our lives to give praise and honor to God. Which is why Christians say, Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.