

**FRONT WHEEL DRIVEN FAITH Romans, Chapter 6 Fellowship  
Church 2008-06-22**

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who have died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will not have dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are the slaves of the one you obey, either of sin, that leads to death, or of obedience, that leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to

greater and greater iniquity, so now present yourselves as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So then what advantage did you then get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:1-23

For thirty years I drove cars that were rear-wheel driven. Either the engine was located in the front with a drive shaft to the rear wheels or the engine was in the rear and drove the rear wheels. Then in 1981 I bought a car that was front wheel driven. The engine was in front and was connected to the front wheels, and you were pulled down the road instead of being pushed from behind.

“So what!” you say, and I more or less said the same thing.

But then my son came home from college, drove the new car, and was very pleased.

“You will really like this new car. The front wheel drive is more fun to drive, handles better on the road, and is safer.”

I am not sure I was convinced; my only interest was economy in gas consumption and repairs.

What real difference is there between being pushed down the highway and being pulled down the highway?

And then I was startled to find that when driving in the rain, and later when driving in snow, it really is possible to have more control over a front wheel driven car.

And so we come at last to the apostle Paul and the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter to the Romans.

He had been writing to the Romans about justification by faith, the good news that God freely forgives us and through Jesus Christ has set us right with God by faith alone.

There is nothing we can do to earn the love of God, to set ourselves right with God, to be forgiven by God except to accept the gift.

Then he poses the question that was on the lips of many then, and maybe even more now, “Should we (won’t we) continue to live in sin so that God’s grace will increase?”

A Frenchman is supposed to have put it this way, “The world is admirably made. God loves to forgive, and I love to sin. The world is wonderfully made.”

If you take away fear, guilt and the need to earn a reward or blessing from God, what is left to make you behave yourself?

The unearned love and free grace of God makes a lot of people very uncomfortable.

If people are not driven by fear and guilt and hope of reward what is going to keep them on the road – on the straight and narrow way – won’t they be in the ditches all the time?

We are used to being rear wheel driven people.

We know all about being pushed through life.

For all too many of us our character is shaped by the push or drive or motivation that we get from fear of punishment, guilt and shame, or the hope of reward.

What gets us out of bed every day is the fear of what others would think if we don’t, feelings of guilt we would have if we didn’t, or the hope of some benefit that will come our way if we do.

If all those drives are taken away won’t life as we know it stop and break down completely?

The theological form that this question takes is: **Does grace undercut law?**

What really motivates or powers the moral life? What makes us act the way we act and think the way we think and feel the way we feel?

If these powerful forces that push us through life – and in some cases push us around in life – are taken away, what will happen?

Won’t life just fall apart?

**Fear is a powerful force in life.**

How much of what we do is motivated by fear of what will happen if we do not do it?

This was brought home to me nearly 50 years ago by something that happened around a marshmallow roasting fire in the park in Menlo, GA.

One of the little boys squatting around the fire said, "Boy, that fire is hot!"

And Spooky Martin (he had been born on Halloween night) replied, "But not half as hot at it will be if you die and go to the bad place!" All the little boys nodded solemnly in agreement.

Our fears may take a different and less dramatic shape, and yet be just as real.

There is the fear of the opinions of others that exerts so much pressure, especially if you are talking about the opinions of peers. There is the fear of being different.

Years ago I was visiting in the Reed home and June, the mother was in the kitchen bleaching her daughter's hair while her two sons sat on the floor, one had just gotten braces on his teeth and the other had straps on his legs to straighten them.

June looked up from what she was doing and said, "Someday we will all look exactly alike, and it will be our own fault."

There is also the fear of our own inability and incompetence. Ira in the "Miss Peach" comic strip years ago was asked, "Tell me, Ira – what about life frightens you the most?" "Realizing that my future is in the hands of a hopelessly incompetent fool – namely me!"

It seems obvious that in two areas of life fear does not work very well: Children who live in fear because they are abused end up becoming abusers, not people who are sensitive to abuse and fear.

Fear of punishment is not a deterrent to capital crime...long ago in England when they hanged a pickpocket the other pickpockets had a field stealing from the spectators who had gathered for the hanging.

The same is true where faith in God is concerned.

Someone said, "Scared religion may be some religion, but it is not much religion."

Faith that is based on fear is not a faith based on the good news that Jesus came to proclaim and to make possible.

Paul is clear about this; we do not have to be afraid where God is concerned.

God is for us, not against us.

God stands along side us, not over against us.

The good news is that we do not have to be pushed through life by fear, and certainly not by fear of God.

We can be pulled through life by faith in the God who loves and cares for us and has proved this by sending Jesus.

When you disengage the power of fear to force you to do good, you do not stop the movement of the moral life.

You simply engage the power of faith that pulls you forward into the Christian way of life.

The God of love is to be loved and not feared, and is to be obeyed because we love God (God loves us and we love God), not because we fear God.

God who loves us and has proved that love in sending Jesus sets us free from fear.

### **Guilt is also a powerful force in life.**

Feelings of guilt are a powerful engine pushing us to live a moral life as a way to ease the pain of guilt.

Forty years ago a young woman in the church I was serving lived across the street from us.

One spring we were making plans at the church for the Vacation Bible School, and I asked her to be the director that year.

I was a little surprised at how readily she agreed to do this, until I later learned the reason from my wife.

In a conversation with Patty she said that she had been asked to be the director and had said yes because "I had played bridge three times that week (if anyone deserved that break it was her with a husband and four small children), and Bill could have asked me to do anything and I would have said yes."

A few years ago someone wrote a book with the title **How to Be a Good Jewish Mother.**

Some mothers from almost any religious tradition could have written it...it did not have to be Jewish.

Any time you have used phrases like

"If you loved me you would..."

"After all I have done for you, you surely will..."

"Just think of all the times I have..."

you are being “a good Jewish mother” no matter what your faith or your sex.

**And** you are using guilt to motivate someone to act the way you want them to act.

The good news is that you do not have to be pushed around by guilt. Paul called it justification by faith, which means that God forgives us freely, no strings attached, and no requirements necessary.

Jesus was sent by God and has taken the initiative to set us right with God and others and ourselves.

We have been declared not guilty before the judgment bar of God.

But this is more than a courtroom judgment, a declaration of not guilty.

It is a change in relationship, but also a change in the person who has been forgiven and reconciled to God.

It is a change so deep and radical that Paul can call it a death and a resurrection.

The person who trusts in Jesus Christ, says Paul, has been changed by his death and resurrection.

In fact, the death and resurrection of Jesus brings about a death and resurrection in us and of us.

The cross and resurrection are not just events for us; they are events in which we are involved.

We are changed from living a life in which we have to do the will of God to earn God’s forgiveness to a life in which we want to do the will of God because we have been forgiven.

Instead of being pushed by guilt, we are pulled by grace and love.

We can shift from the rear wheel drive of guilt to the front wheel drive of grace because of the good news we have in Jesus Christ.

### **Hope of reward is also a powerful force in life.**

Just think of all the things that we search for, work for, and pour out our lives for: wealth, health, peace of mind, friendship, security, and even heaven itself.

The drive to get all these things move life along, get us up and moving every day, and push us through life.

Who can deny that we have often been driven to reach these goals, win these victories, or secure these blessings in life?

Paul's great insight and the good news that he proclaimed was that all these are gifts from God in Jesus Christ.

We need to do nothing to gain them, and being obsessed with gaining them can almost assure our losing them.

Life is more a gift of God than something we make or earn.

The gospel was the message that we cannot earn the grace or love of God; that is a free gift of God.

Paul says that God has moved us from a world in which we earn wages to a world in which we receive gifts.

In the seventeenth century a Spanish poet wrote these words that seem to catch up the whole message of Paul on this topic:

I love you, Lord, but not because I hope for heaven thereby,  
Nor yet for fear that loving not I might forever die;  
But just because you all mankind upon the cross embrace,  
And for us you bore the nails and spear and manifold disgrace.

Paul is building on the teaching of Jesus that we do not have to worry about what we need in life.

God will provide for us whether we are taking about the material or the spiritual needs of life...and the two cannot be easily separated.

Food and clothing, faith and hope, forgiveness and new life – all these are, in the long run, more a gift of God than something we must worry about and work for.

God gives these gifts!

It changes the whole focus of life if we can believe this.

Is your life rear wheel driven or front wheel driven?

Are you being pushed through life by fear, guilt and anxiety?

Or are you being pulled through life by faith, grace, and hope?

To put the question the way Paul puts it here, are you dead to sin and alive to God?

If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that we are four wheel driven people.

Some of the time we are pushed through life, and some of the time we are pulled through life.

It seems to me that one way to measure our growth as Christian believers is this: am I making progress in disengaging the rear

wheels and engaging the front wheels where my faith and life are concerned?

We can be sure that growth in our faith involves moving from pushed to pulled people, from being “have to” people to becoming “want to” people.

Paul recognized that it would be a great change in life to have that happen.

He said it is like being dead and coming to life!

And that is good news!