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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

I would like to make a statement in light of what's happening in our nation. I would like to request that there not be any response to what I say. I don't want any applause, boos or hisses or whatever the case might be. After I read this statement, I want to pray.

"During these days of moral crisis, I call upon Christians everywhere to pray for President Clinton and his family. We're instructed in I Timothy 2:2 to pray for those in authority that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. I also request that all Christians be willing to forgive our President as he has requested. Jesus said in Matthew, 6:14, "If you forgive men their sins against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive yours." I further admonish the church to seek to restore our brother who has fallen. According to Galatians 6:1, which says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently, but watch yourselves or you also may be tempted." However, to forgive and restore a fallen brother can never remove the consequences of one's personal sin. Our Congress has initiated an impeachment process to address this issue. In order to avoid the ongoing embarrassment to our nation that a full impeachment process would produce, I respectfully request that President Clinton resign from office. This request certainly does not reflect the desire of every member of our church, and it is in no way politically motivated. It is the position of a single pastor who deeply believes that God wants the church, not the media to be the moral spokesman for America.

Let us pray:

"Father, we do want to pray for our President and for his wife, and his daughter, Chelsea. I pray that during this time of crisis you will surround them with strength and preserve their family. We also pray for our President that he will do what is right in your eyes. He will do what is right and best for our nation at this time. Deliver us, Lord, from pious, judgmental attitudes because every one of us stands before you as sinners, saved by your grace. Lord, I pray for those leaders in Washington who are facing this deliberative process, and we pray that you give them wisdom as well. Dear God, I pray that as a nation we might corporately repent of our sin, and that we might understand that you have called upon the church to lift up the light of truth and righteous. Forgive us, Lord, when we fail in these areas. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen."

It's no mistake that I plan my messages a month in advance, and today as I am talking from Romans 6, the entire topic is about sin, about being a slave to sin. The biggest mistake any person listening to me today will make is to apply what I say in this text to President Clinton, because by doing that you are eliminating yourself from the application process. Instead, I want you to pray today that the Holy Spirit will take this message and apply it to your own heart.

Let's see what the apostle Paul, has to say about sin beginning in Romans 6:15-23.

Once again he repeats the question he posed in verse 1. "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to

someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin.” He uses the word “slave” eight times. “which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness. But, thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin, and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms [the issue of slavery] because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”

The apostle Paul is going to use the issue of slavery to simply illustrate and demonstrate how sometimes people can be in bondage to sin, and then how we need to be in servitude to God. When you talk about slavery, the only image many of us have of slavery is antebellum slavery in the South, Uncle Tom’s cabin. But, that’s not really the historical backdrop against which Paul is writing. In the Roman Empire there were millions of slaves, and we would call these people indentured servants, bond slaves, people who were often so close to the family members we have many historical records of a slave literally being adopted into a family and becoming the legal heir of the leaders of that family.

Paul said you used to be slaves to sin, now you are slaves to God. We want to look at both sides of the coin.

I. WE WERE ONCE SLAVES TO SIN

First of all, we were once slaves to sin. That speaks about our life before Christ. A Christian’s life can be divided the same way history is divided. We are all familiar with the terms, B.C. and A.D. Our calendar is divided B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (anno Domini, the year of our Lord). For every individual who has trusted Christ, you have a personal B.C. and a personal A.D. There was a time in your life you lived B.C. (Before Christ). There were two B.C.s in my life: Before Christ and Before Cindy and both of those are very significant to me. But for every one of us who have trusted Christ there is also an A.D. I’m living in the year 36 A.D. Why? I have been a Christian for 36 years.

1. Before Christ, we followed the urge of our evil desires

What was your life like B.C.? Paul gives us three characteristics. Number one, we followed the urges of our evil desires. He says when you obey sin; you are a slave to it. Who determines what’s right and wrong? We grow up hearing all kinds of different examples and analogies. I remember when I was a child, I grew up watching cartoons like most everybody did. Have you ever seen cartoon characters presented with right or wrong, good or bad? They’ll have some little angel perched on one shoulder whispering in the cartoon character’s ear, “This is the right thing to do.” But, perched on his other shoulder there would be some little red devil whispering in the other ear telling him to do the wrong thing. Sometimes, we think that’s how good and evil

operate. Some people think it's like as the American Indian described it, "I find that within my heart there are two dogs. There is a black dog telling me to do wrong, and there is a white dog telling me to do right." Someone says, "Well, which dog wins the fight?" He says, "The one I feed the most." There are a lot of different pictures of what is right and what is wrong. What the apostle Paul, is trying to say here is the reason we do bad things is because we are bad to the core. Naturally, all of us have these sinful urges.

Do you all remember the comedian, Flip Wilson? His famous line was, "The devil made me do it!" It's interesting to me in the book of Romans, which has more to say about sin than any other book in the New Testament; Paul says absolutely nothing about Satan or the devil. The only time he ever mentions Satan is in the last chapter 16:20 when he says, "The God of peace shall soon bruise Satan under your heel." That's all he has to say. Instead, Paul says the reason we sin is because we have these sinful desires calling us to sin, and we just obey them. He says your master is whoever you listen.

Many of you know I came from Birmingham eight years ago. Overlooking the city, perched on Red Mountain there is a very exclusive dinner club called, "The Club." But, the people in Birmingham call it THE Club, with the emphasis on THE. It's a very exclusive club and we were sometimes invited there by church members. I'll never forget one lunch I was having there with a man in our church. As we were eating before we got into a conversation, I was looking through the windows out into the parking lot. I was amazed because there were six or seven limousines, and standing outside the limousines were six or seven chauffeurs who were talking to pass the time. I noticed a certain distinguished-looking gentleman walked out the front door of THE Club. I couldn't hear what he said because there was glass separating us, but he raised his hand and he said something. Immediately one of the chauffeurs whipped his head around, literally ran and jumped in a limousine, drove it up to the front steps, jumped out, opened the door and let the guy in, and they drove off. Do you know what I learned without a doubt from that little scenario? Only one of those chauffeurs responded to the man's call. The only one who responded was his servant. Do you know what Paul is saying? He is saying, "Listen, the voice that you listen to in life. That determines who your master is. The call you answer to reveals whose slave you really are." And he says, "If you give in to the call of sin, then sin is your master. But if you give in to the call of God, God is your master." That's the first thing he says. We follow the urges of our heart Before Christ.

2. Before Christ, we were victims of evil habits

Number two; before Christ we were victims of evil habits. I'd like for you to look at verse 19 again. Those of you who have not been here for a while I'm a Bible preacher. I just dig in and concentrate on the text itself. So, look at the last half of verse 19. He's talking about evil habits. "You used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity" that means all kinds of wickedness but, look at this. "and ever-increasing wickedness." It's the idea of a habit. Once you get in it, you get worse and worse and worse. Let's talk about habits for a moment. We're all familiar with habits. You know what a habit is? A habit is a tendency or a behavior you practice so often you hardly even think about it. It becomes a part of your routine. Now, there are some good habits, aren't there? In fact, Hebrews 10:25 says going to church is a good habit. Don't get out of the habit of going to church which is a good habit. This means if you are in the habit of

coming to church on Sunday morning, you don't wake up and decide depending on the weather or how you feel, you're just going to be there. You're going to gather together with God's people. That's a good habit. I would say exercise is a good habit to get into; hugging and kissing your mate every day at least once is a good habit to be in as well as flossing every night before you go to bed. Those are great habits to be in.

But there are also some bad habits, and something about bad habits he uses the word "ever-increasing wickedness" that causes a person to spiral downward. I call it the "gravity of depravity." Once you start doing these things it gets worse and worse and worse. For instance, what about a drug abuser? What about a heroin addict? We've all seen or known of people who take heroin and inject it straight into their veins. Every one of those heroin addicts would tell you, they didn't start out sticking a needle into their vein. They started out smoking a marijuana cigarette. Then, maybe that failed to give them a "high" anymore, so they increased the thrill. They went to crack cocaine, but that still wasn't enough so they went to heroin. Then, they found themselves having to increase the frequency between the hits. That's that "gravity of depravity." That's that downward spiral. There are thousands, and probably tens and hundreds of thousands of men who are in bondage and are slaves to pornography. They are actually in bondage to it. How do you think it started? Do you think it started with some filthy movie? No, it probably started with some little "girlie" magazine that they bought "just to read the articles." Before long that didn't thrill them enough so they found they had to get more and more deviant. More and more depraved. You see, that's what he is talking about. That's the slavery of sin. It binds you and you get worse and worse.

You say, "Well, pastor, you haven't named my sin yet." Well, name your own poison. Let me ask you. Is there any habit you have in your life right now that is impure, unclean or displeasing to God? Any attitude, any act that when it calls your name, you come running You answer that. Well, the Bible says you are a slave to that sin. That's what Paul says.

3. Before Christ, we were under a death sentence

There a third thing he says about how we used to be: Before Christ we existed under a death sentence. All that means is, he says in verse 21 is, "The only benefit of this kind of life is death."

Go with me down to Huntsville or to some other penitentiary where there are people on death row. Can you imagine what it would be like to be on death row? Where the only thing you have to look forward to is death. Talk about a hopeless existence! Maybe you can make a few appeals through the courts, but as far as you know your deadline literally, the day of your death is steadily approaching, and you are there under a death sentence, and there is nothing you can do about it. The Bible says for people outside of Christ it's not that they are going to die; they exist right now under a death sentence. Now, when the apostle, Paul, was writing to Timothy, he was talking about a lady who had some sexual problems it could be said of men as well as women, but this is what Paul writes. He says, "She who lives in sin, is dead while she lives." You know there are a lot of people who are out there partying saying, "Man, this is really living!" No, it is not living it is just existing. The only way you live is through Jesus Christ. Do you know why that is? It is because God has established in the fabric of the universe certain immutable, irrefutable laws, and one of the laws of God is this. The soul that sins is going to die! Write it

down. "The soul that sins is going to die!" That's what the Bible says. You say, "Uh oh. I'm in trouble because I've broken that law. I'm a sinner." Well, that's a good place to start.

You don't break God's laws. You are broken *on* God's laws. If you decide you want to climb up to the top of the steeple on this building and jump off. You don't break the law of gravity. All you do is demonstrate it. The same is true of the soul that sins that shall die. You say, "Well, that's hopeless. What can I do? Sometimes even in physics where there is one law in existence, there is another law that can counteract it or overcome it. For instance, there is the law of gravity that I just referred to. Has anybody in this room ever been in an airplane or a helicopter? What did you do? You overcame the law of gravity by applying another law the law of aerodynamics and it was the law of aerodynamics counteracted the law of gravity. So, there's the law of sin and death in the Bible, but there is also according to Romans 8, "the law of life and liberty" that overcomes the law of sin and death. To put it in terminology that everybody can understand Jesus is your only airplane. He is the only way you can get away from that law of sin and death.

If some of you have been insulted by the fact that I said you are a slave to sin, well you are in pretty good company. The most religious people of Jesus' day were terribly insulted when he made a statement like this, "You'll know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They were offended because those are words to people in bondage. Look at the text of John 8:33.

II. WE ARE NOW SERVANTS OF GOD

"They answered him. We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been slaves of anyone! How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus says exactly the same thing Paul says in our text. "I tell you the truth. Everyone who sins is a slave to sin." Is there any attitude or any behavior that has you in bondage, and whenever it calls your name, you follow? Well, it doesn't have to be that way. Because there is good news on the other side of the coin: We used to be slaves to sin, but number two we are now servants of God. I could use the word "slaves" of God because that's the very word that Paul uses but you see in the New Testament the word *goula* is interchanged between servant and slave. So, what I want you to understand is that when you become a Christian, you are still a slave, you are still a servant, but you have a different master. You have changed masters. Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6? He said, "No man can serve two masters." Somebody said that the justification that no man can have more than one wife. "No man can serve two masters." He's not talking about marriage though. He's talking about loyalty and allegiance. You have to choose your master.

1. We are free to obey God's truth

Here's the good news. Let me describe how every one of us who are in Christ is "set free." Number one, we are set free to obey God's truth. Look at verse 17 again. "Thanks be to God though you used to be slaves to sin," you did something about it "you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted." Look at that word "form" there in verse 17. It's a word that was used meaning a "mold into which hot metal was poured to form some kind of an image, some kind of a picture." What that means is what you believe is important the "form" of our belief is very important. Let me just see if I can explain that. Some people say, "It really doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere in your belief." Have you ever heard

that? "As long as you are sincere in your belief." That is just not true. You think about those people who were involved in that tragic Heaven's Gate cult a few months ago. Did you know they sincerely believed a space ship was going to come down and take them away? They so sincerely believed it they gave all their possessions to that cult. They so sincerely believed it they followed the teachings of that leader blindly. They so sincerely believed it they even committed suicide! Those people were sincere. They were sincerely wrong, and now they are sincerely dead. Don't you believe it when somebody says, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere." You have to believe the truth of God's word.

I'm going to give you the truth. Are you ready? The truth is for every Christian listening to me you have been set free from sin. You say, "Well, I still don't feel like it. I'm having as much trouble as anybody in the world. How can you say I am free?" I am not saying you are free. The word of God says you are free from sin. You say, "Why am I still having these problems?" That's wrong thinking. Have any of you ever been to a circus? Outside a circus tent, there will be a full grown elephant that will be restrained with a tiny chain attached to a little wooden stake driven about a foot into the ground. The first time people see that, they say, "That's ridiculous! That animal is so strong at any moment he could jerk that little wooden stake out of the ground and roam freely. Why does he just stay there?" Those of you who have studied it know that in circuses they train an elephant by putting a large metal collar around its foreleg, then they attach a thick chain to it and then they take an iron stake and drive it deeply into the ground when that little elephant pulls and tries to get away, he can't get away. It's hopeless. It's fruitless. It's futile, and it even hurts so, before long he just quits sometime in the process they change the big huge chain into the little bitty chain, and the iron stake into the wooden stake and the elephant doesn't know the difference. So, that elephant is not chained by a wooden stake, he's chained in his own mind.

So what am I trying to say? There are some of you Christians who still are involved in some habits and some patterns of behavior that are wrong, and you feel like you are still chained to them. You have to start thinking differently. You have to start claiming and believing and insisting you are free from that sin. You claim the freedom that is yours in Christ Jesus. You start walking in that freedom. You are free to obey the truth now. Before you were a Christian you were only free to do what you wanted to do; now you are free to do what you ought to do.

2. We are free to serve God because we love Him

Here's the second thing. We are now free to serve God because we love him. In John 8:31 Jesus said, "If you hold my teachings you are really my disciples. Then you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." The truth is now the reason we serve God is because we love him, not out of a sense of obligation or duty. Why did you come to church today? Did you come to church today because your parents made you, or your spouse made you? Did you come out of sense of obligation? If you did, you came for the wrong reason. You should come to church because you love God, and you want to worship God. Why did you bring an offering today? Did you bring an offering out of a sense of obligation, or duty, it's just a good thing to do, or a tax contributions credit? Or, did you bring an offering because you say, "Boy, our church is going to go under if I don't give my money." Those are absolutely the wrong motives. But, if you brought

an offering to the Lord today because you love God, and because you want his work to go forth, that's the right motive. The reason we serve God is because we love him.

I like what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1. He says, "Though you have not seen him" talking about God "you love him. And even though you do not see him now" which means we will see him later "you believe in him and you are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." What God wants you to do is to break free from the bondage of sin, and to submit yourself and become a slave, a servant of God. That's not such a bad proposition when you think about it.

In fact, look at Deuteronomy 15:16 for just a moment. If you don't know where that is it's Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy it's the fifth book in the Old Testament If you get to the "J" books, Joshua, and Judges, you have gone too far. In the Old Testament a Hebrew slave only had to work 6 years. In the seventh year he had to be set free. He became a free man, but God added a little qualification here that the slave could decide to be a slave forever. It's one of the most beautiful pictures in the Old Testament. God says, "But if your servant says to you 'I do not want to leave you because I love you and your family', and he is well off with you, then you take an awl" that's a pointed, metal hole puncher "and you push it through his earlobe into the door." You don't leave him hanging there. What that means is you just use the most available piece of wood to punch a hole in his ear Keep reading there "and he will become your servant, your slave for life. Do the same for your maid servant." I thought about wearing one of those fake gold earrings in my ear here today in the pulpit. I didn't think about it very long because I knew some of my older friends would have a heart attack if I did. This is not advocating that anybody pierce their ears. This was a Jewish practice, but it was a practice they followed when someone said, "I'll be your slave forever."

They would say, "Here, pierce my ear", and they would wear according to the Talmud in their right ear an earring upon which was the insignia of that family. They identified themselves as the property and the servant of that family, similar to branding cattle like we do in Texas. He said, "Listen, I am going to be faithful as a servant forever because I love you. Go ahead and put a mark on me. I am not ashamed to tell everybody I'm your slave."

The spiritual truth of that is this. If you haven't already done it, every one of you who names the name of Jesus needs to come to a place where you make the same transaction with God. You say, "God, I love you so much, I want to be your slave. I want to be your servant for the rest of my life. I want to visibly, publicly show everybody that I am your slave because I love you, not because I have to because I love you.

3. We are free to enjoy a lifestyle of holiness

Well, there is one final thing we are free to do. Number three: We are free to live a lifestyle of holiness. We are free to live a lifestyle of holiness. Verse 22 says, "Don't forget the benefits of sin are death, but the benefits of a life that has been set free say you can live a life of holiness." That does not mean perfection. The King James version says, "Sanctification." That's not a word that means "a state you can attain" but it is a process which you are involved in all the time. It means you and I ought to be different. When somebody looks at me and they look at you, we

ought to be different than people who are not Christians because of our lives. That's what the word "holy" means. It means "different. It means "distinctive". It means "separate."

To me, one of the biggest problems facing Christians today or those who claim to be Christians is that you are free, but you are still living like you are slaves.

CONCLUSION

One of my favorite presidents was Abraham Lincoln. On September 22, 1862, Abraham Lincoln did a very brave thing. He had the courage to back up his convictions. He issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which stated and proclaimed all slaves on American soil were free. It's kind of interesting that not one slave was freed when he made that Proclamation. In fact, one year went by. Two years went by. Almost three years went by and still not one slave had been freed. But, those of you who know your history know that on April 14, 1865, Abraham Lincoln was attending Ford's Theater when an assassin slipped up behind him and shot him in the head. He died the next day, April 15, 1865. When Abraham Lincoln died, the Emancipation Proclamation was still nothing but a statement on paper. Not one slave had yet been freed. It wasn't until December 18, 1865 almost 6 months later that Congress ratified the Thirteenth Amendment to our Constitution prohibiting slavery. Then, and only then was it officially put into effect. The sad thing history tells us is that even though almost everybody in America knew about the Thirteenth Amendment about, there were some slaves who when they learned they were free, they walked away, and gave birth to that Negro spiritual we all love, "Free At Last, Free At Last, Thank God Almighty, I'm Free At Last !" The sad thing is there were thousands of slaves who never left their masters. Many of them died in slavery simply because they refused to walk out and accept the freedom they had been given. You say, "How sad." Well, it's almost as sad to me that there are many, many Christians who Jesus Christ has proclaimed to be free not only that he went to the cross and died to enact your freedom and now you can walk out and you can say in all faith, "Free At Last, Free At Last, Thank God Almighty, I'm Free At Last" The sad thing is so many Christians are still remaining and choosing to live in a spiritual bondage. Are you free? You are free. Walk in your freedom. Claim your freedom in Christ.

OUTLINE

I. WE WERE ONCE SLAVES TO SIN

Before Christ, we:

1. Followed the urge of our evil desires (v. 16)
2. Were victims of evil habits (v. 19) existing under a death sentence (v. 21)

They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendents and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" *John 8:33-34*

3. Were existing under a death sentence (v. 21)

II. WE ARE NOW SERVANTS OF GOD

We are free to:

1. Obey God's truth (v. 17)

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." *John 8:31-32*

2. Serve God because we love Him (v. 18)

Though you have not seen him, you love him: and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. *1 Peter 1:8*

3. Enjoy a lifestyle of holiness (v. 22)