



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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October 6, 2013

Pentecost 20

Sermon Text: [Romans 6:15-23](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [1 Chronicles 29:1-2, 10-18](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 27](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 6:15-23](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 17:1-10](#)

The Believer Grows in Christian Character Christians Do Their Duty

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

I have a feeling that the words I just read to you from Romans 6 are kind of hard for a lot of us to grasp. It's not how we talk about ourselves. Before every sporting event when you sing the National Anthem, you don't sing the "land of the slaves," do you? We sing "the land of the free and the home of the brave." But if you paid attention, that's not what our God said. Our God is kind of telling us that we, as Americans, pride ourselves in our freedom. We are rugged individuals who pull ourselves up by the bootstrap so we can live the American dream and all those kinds of things. Our God is saying that isn't quite how it works. In reality, he's saying every single person that has ever walked the face of this earth is a slave. They either belong lock, stock and barrel to sin and live under Law, or they belong lock, stock and barrel to God and live under Gospel. You and I aren't used to thinking about things that way.

We definitely aren't used to acting that way. What I mean is this. For all your life, why do you do most of the things you do? You kids here, if mom or dad tells you to go clean your room, why do you do it? Do you run and hug mom and dad and say, "Thank you for the opportunity to serve you because I want to show you just how much I love you"? Or do you slouch your shoulders over, shuffle your feet and go down to your room and do a half-baked job and say, "Is that good enough? Can I quit now?" You do it out of fear of punishment, right? You do it so your parents won't punish you, not because you love them and not because you want to thank them because they take care of you and give you food and drink and all you have. It's not because they are a gift that God gave to you. You do it because you don't want punishment.

You get a little bit older and go to school. Why do you do the homework you do? Is it so you don't get a bad grade and get yelled at by mom and dad? Or do you do it because you can't wait to use the gifts the good Lord gave you and you want to put them into practice?

If you're working someplace, do you work at your job with all your heart as though you're serving the Lord? Or do you work a little bit differently when the boss is watching and when he isn't?

We live most of our life under Law, under fear of punishment. If you're married and your spouse asks you to do something and you say "Yes dear" with a smile on your face, are you doing it because you really love them and want to do it, or because you just don't want to have a discussion about why you need to do this right now? We operate so much of our life under Law, under the fear of punishment, that when our God comes to us and says, "Hey! Guess what guys! You aren't slaves of the Law anymore! You've been set free from the Law. You now live under grace. Don't be motivated by Law. Don't act that way anymore," we kind of look at God and think "What in the world are you talking about?" That's not how we live our lives.

However, there is no denying that's how God wants us to live our lives, doing things under Gospel, under his love, under his grace, not because we have to, but because we want to thank the Lord who has set us free from sin. We want to do this duty he lays before us as a way of showing our love to him. That just sounds weird to your ears, doesn't it?

You can understand what Paul is saying to the Romans because he has just told them, "You who believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have been set free from the Law. All the demands of the Law have been met for you by Jesus. He lived perfectly in your place. You are no longer under the Law." But he knows what we who have a sinful nature are going to hear when we hear that message. We aren't going to hear that now we can serve God. Instead, our sinful nature is going to scream and jump up and down and go, "Alright! Now we can do whatever we want because God will forgive us anyhow, because Jesus did it all in our place! Now we can sin even more and he'll forgive us!" So to counteract that natural reaction that our sinful nature is going to be screaming in our ears, Paul tells them, "You were once a slave to the Law. Don't go back to it. Don't do things because you have to, and don't think because you've been set free from the Law you can go on sinning. Absolutely not! If you offer yourself to sin, you are going back to being a slave to sin. So instead, since you've obeyed from the heart the pattern of teaching you were transferred to" (which is another way of saying "you've believed the Gospel message about Jesus"), "offer yourself to Jesus, not to the Law. Don't do things because you have to. Do things because this is how you say thank you to the One who has set you free."

All those times that we do the right thing for the wrong reason (because we have to), those are still sins before our God. And Jesus paid for every last one of them. He lived perfectly in our place and then he died as the punishment for all the sins you and I have ever committed or ever will commit. God has blessed us with the Holy Spirit to believe that truth. Now he says, "Live for me."

But it's a struggle! That's now how we are used to thinking about things. If we aren't struggling, my guess is we're probably giving in to our sinful nature too often and we're just saying, "It's okay. God will forgive me." Really, we're offering ourselves back to the Law instead of to the Gospel. I think that's kind of natural for us. I think we do it a lot in this sense. Here's what I mean... sometimes we do the right thing, but we do it for the wrong reasons.

The Lord has blessed me with most of the time a pretty quick mind. Replies come to my mind really quick. Hopefully most of the time my mouth shuts up and doesn't say all of them that I think because there are sometimes when people are really, really irritating and annoying and I've got 15 things I could say, not just to rebuke them as the Lord would have me rebuke them, but to do it in a way that actually hurts them. Do you know what I'm talking about? Not just rebuking them but digging in and inflicting a little pain with your words. You know the difference, don't you?

Well, here's how warped we are as sinners. Sometimes when all those 15 things go through my head and I don't say any of them, I'm thinking, "Boy, that's pretty good. I didn't say any of them. God's lucky to have me on his side. I didn't say any of those things that would have been sin." But the whole time, haven't I just sinned against my God in my thoughts? I haven't belonged to my God lock, stock and barrel in my thoughts, have I? I've fallen short. I've sinned. I've killed Jesus in my thoughts at that point in time. So sometimes we do the right thing but we still aren't doing it for the right reason. We are still doing it out of fear of what blowback we'll get from it and because we know we shouldn't, not because we love God. In our thoughts we've often embraced the things God has told us not to do, and it's so natural for us.

Look at that example that Jesus used in the Gospel. Any of you here really enjoy having someone sin against you in a way that hurts you seven times in a day? Do you look forward to each and every time saying "I forgive you" without some bitterness in your heart? Without some anger in your heart? Without some "what the heck is wrong with you" in your heart? There isn't any of us that want to do that naturally, is there? Yet God says that's our duty. That's how we show love to him because he loved us first. When you realize how hard it is for us to be patient and loving and kind and all these things our God tells us to do... even when people sin against us he said "That's your duty"... it really highlights all the more God's love for us in Christ, doesn't it?

Think of how perfectly patient Jesus is with you every time you're impatient with someone else. Think of how much Jesus is willing to forgive you when you are unwilling to forgive someone who has hurt you. Think about that for a minute. Even when we think we are doing better than Joe Blow over there, we're still so far short of Jesus. He still loves us. He still forgives us. He still patiently instructs us so that we grow in our faith, so that we do our duty and do it for the right reason (because we love him). That's absolutely and positively amazing! Yet, because you and I are sinners, we are often tempted to take that for granted as though that's what he is supposed to do and we are just going to keep going on our way and live under Law and offer ourselves to sin. Then once again he forgives us.

God's love for us in Christ is just absolutely amazing. When we stop and take the time to look at our lives in the light of his Law and see that we're misusing his Law and we're twisting it around and we want others to obey it but we don't want ourselves to obey it, we see just how sinful we are and we see just how amazing God's love is for us that he forgives us. Then that makes us want to commit ourselves all the more to this struggle. And it is a struggle! The struggle is not to live under Law, not to do the right thing just

because we have to, but to do the right thing because we want to. We want to show love for God by being the best employee we can be. We want to show love for God by being the best student we can be. We want to show love for God by being the best spouse we can be. We want to show love for God by maybe, from time to time, completely and absolutely amazing our parents and throwing our arms around their legs and say, "You bet ya! I'd love to clean my room!" And actually meaning it.

That's a character trait worth developing, but the only way you're going to develop it is with constant contact with his Word, not your thoughts, not your ideas, not your idea of what is best for God's kingdom, or your idea of what is best for this congregation, but what God says. And let God transform your thoughts, your words and your actions. How cool would that be? Amen.