



Make Me a Captive, Lord

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #38

Romans 6:15-23

David Sunday

May 1, 2016

Happy anniversary, New Covenant Bible Church! It was six years ago on May 2, 2010 that two churches came together into this building and formed a new church called New Covenant and those of us who were there then signed that church covenant that is back in the foyer. Many of you have joined us since then and become a part of what God is doing here. We are going to have a big celebration in in 2020 for the tenth anniversary, but today, as we do on every anniversary Sunday, we want to pause and say thank you. Thank you to God and to His people for what He has done in our midst. And this anniversary being our sixth, I have six things that I want to give thanks to God for.

1. As Kate and I were thinking about what are we most thankful to God for at New Covenant, she mentioned how our church covenant reflects the way gospel doctrine forms a gospel-ized culture. And we were giving thanks for how you, as a people, really seek to embody the grace that God has shown us in Christ, in the way that you love one another and in the unity that you have with one another. We rejoice in how good and pleasant it is for brothers and sisters to dwell in unity. Thank God for that.
2. We thank God for the makeup of our church family. We did a study a while back and discovered that we have about an equal number of very young people and middle-aged families and senior saints. Those three categories are almost equal. I'm not sure which one I fit into—the young or the middle-aged—but we all are mingling together beautifully and sharing life together. It's such a joy to see older saints teaching, mentoring and enjoying life with younger believers. I was doing premarital counseling recently for an upcoming wedding and the couple met with an older couple in our church and both of them reflected so joyously on the way their lives were impacted by one another. So we just rejoice in the makeup of the church.

3. This is a church with a robust view of the redemptive value of suffering. In the past six years, we have seen a lot of illness, disease, heartache, death and loss of loved ones. One of the things I appreciate about our church is that we see that God can do wonders. He does miracles. He relieves us of suffering. But we also understand and teach each other to embrace that God works redemptively in the midst of our pain and that we are not to shrink from it. We are to embrace His work in our lives through pain. To quote our dear friend, Jan Stern, we've learned to gaze at God and glance at circumstances. I'm so thankful for how this church embraces that and helps one another, ministering to one another through suffering.
4. I'm thankful for your love for God's Word. No one ever says to me, "David, you need to tone down the preaching of God's Word." No one ever says to me, "You shouldn't talk about that." Instead, you have an eagerness to hear the whole counsel of God and I hear that spilling out in your prayers together. I hear you praying Scripture. I hear it in our Bible studies and Care Groups. I'm so thankful for the love for the Word that is evident in every layer of this congregation and pray it will continue and never grow dull.
5. I'm thankful for the missionary culture of this church. We are people who have a lot to learn about listening to and loving our neighbors and how we can make disciples of people in our communities. I think we can all feel our own great weakness, but I hear in you a desire to be missionaries in our culture. I am also very grateful for your eagerness to send missionaries around the world to unreached people groups to share the gospel. And I'm grateful that every time we talk about advancing our missions efforts, it is met, not with resistance, but with rejoicing and eagerness. Thank God for our missionaries who are serving unreached people groups right now in different parts of the world and how faithful they have been to that. I'm so glad to be part of a church that has this commitment.
6. Finally, I want to thank God for our leaders. I'm thankful that there is not a single personality in the leadership of this church who desires to be the center of attention. I'm grateful for our deacons who labor so diligently to minister to the needs of the saints, who do it behind the scenes, who equip and engage others to minister. So many of you have received care from them. Thank God for our deacons and their ministry. Thank God for our Center for Gospel Care, offering skillful and wise counsel

by Frank, Karen and David. Each of them perseveres, patiently loving God's people. Thank God for our administrative team and their dedicated service: for Reba, who served for so many years; for Donna in the office; for Bob who works so hard as custodian here. Thank God for our elders, for their humility and shepherding of this flock. I know that I am shepherded by them and helped by their care. They are the type of men to whom I want to open my heart and life, inviting them in for further growth and accountability. I am confident in their care for you, because I know how well I have been cared for by them. I'm so thankful to work with our fellow pastors, Dan and Dan, and hopefully, by God's grace, Patrick soon. It is a joy to serve together with this team. So praise the Lord for what He is doing in this church.

What should we ask Him to be doing in the days to come? I believe Acts 9:31 presents us with a beautiful vision of what we should be seeking God for at New Covenant Bible Church. There is only one way that I want it to multiply and grow and that is if we are living like these people were in the book of Acts; only if we are experiencing what they were experiencing then. If we are not doing Acts 9:31 in our life together then we shouldn't grow or multiply. But if we are living in the grace of this verse, then may God be glorified and Christ magnified as our church multiplies in ministry to our neighbors and to the nations.

Let's read Acts 9:31 together, then pray and turn to Romans 6 to see how it helps us live as Acts 9:31 describes. Acts 9:31 says this:

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

(Acts 9:31a)

I think we can say that these last six years have had peace and we've been built up. There's been a lot of gracious ministry that God has done here. It's all been by His grace and for His glory. He's built us up. And now, what do we want to see continue happening here? It's this:

And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

(Acts 9:31b)

I like making strategies of how God could bring us from where we are to where we could be. Back in 1974, Michael Green was speaking at the Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization and asked this question: "Why don't we see anywhere in the book of Acts a man-

made strategic plan for evangelizing the world?" Why don't we see that in Acts? His answer was, "They didn't have a strategic plan. But they had this: the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit."

What does it mean to walk in the fear of the Lord? It means to be humble, teachable, open to correction, laying our lives before God's searching gaze in His Word, and saying sincerely what we prayed before the Word was opened to us today: "Speak, O Lord. Shape and fashion us into your likeness." It means saying to God, "We dread doing anything that would displease You; we delight in walking in the path of Your commandments. We want to live in a way that honors You, for You are a holy, holy, holy God and we stand in awe of Your glory." Walking in the fear of the Lord means opening your life up to other brothers and sisters and saying, "I need you to speak into my life words of correction, encouragement, exhortation. I want my life to be conformed to the revelation of God in His Word. I want you to help me where you see that adjustments are needed. I struggle with various things and want to share these with you, asking you to pray that I would be changed to become more like Jesus. To walk in the fear of the Lord, means to be open, grateful and easily bendable, because you want to please Him. They were walking in the fear of the Lord and they were walking in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said to His disciples before He died and rose again and then ascended to the Father: I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

(John 14:18 KJV)

And he did! He came at Pentecost and the whole church experienced His presence, even though He was at the right hand of the Father, they experienced His nearness. They experienced His grace and His power through the Holy Spirit. They were living under His gracious gaze, forgiving one another, being reconciled to one another and experiencing the comfort of His gospel in their lives. No one was in need because they all cared for one another so greatly. That church was being multiplied, not by developing some great master plan, but by walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. I'm so grateful we don't have to choose one or the other. We want to be a church where we experience comfort, joy, peace and sweetness in the gospel, but we don't have to forsake the fear of the Lord to do that. We want to be a church that really fears the Lord, where God is present and where we tremble before Him, but where we don't have to let go of joy, peace and comfort because we have holy awe of God. We can rejoice with trembling before Him and we need to pursue both.

I want to lead us in prayer on our sixth anniversary and while I'm praying, I want you to think of one thing you are very grateful for God doing in this church. God loves to bless grateful people. Let's thank Him for what He has done. If you are visiting today, I hope you will come back and be part of our church, making it even better. If you are part of this church, would you pray right now with me and say, "Thank you, Lord for New Covenant Bible Church and for what You have done here." Let's ask Him to do even more as we pray.

Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to be part of a body of believers who have gone through many dangers, toils and snares, people who have recently been born into Your Kingdom. We are grateful, Lord, that we can experience life together with this group of believers. Thank You that of all the people on earth and all the eras of history, you have allowed us to live here, right now, in 2016, in Illinois, with these people. We say with the Psalmist, as for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones in whom is all My delight. Help us to delight in one another, to love one another. Thank You, Lord, for giving grace that we might live in the manner our church covenant describes, forgiving one another, exhorting one another, encouraging one another, seeing the gospel advanced to our neighbors and nations. Thank You Lord, for the missionary impulse and efforts of this church and for those who choose to faithfully labor around the world right now. People like Ruth Dougherty, Gary and Jamie Boniface and so many others who are laboring in difficult places, persevering for the gospel to advance.

Thank You for Your Word that dwells richly in us and for the hunger that we have to hear it preached, taught, prayed and discussed. We pray, Lord, that our hunger for Your Word would grow more and more. Thank You for those who serve as leaders of this church. We pray that You would keep them delighting in You. Keep us all in awe of You. Keep us all humbled before Your feet, Lord. Keep us all saying, "Christ must increase. We must decrease." Enable those who serve here in leadership to truly be servants and equippers of the saints, so that we all together might do the work of ministry. Lord, we praise You for what You did in the book of Acts and we pray for that here. We want to be a people who are walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Then and only then we pray that we would by seeing more disciples born into your Kingdom, disciples being made and developed amongst our children. We pray that we would multiply, Lord, by investing in other churches being planted here in our own region. We pray that we would multiply by seeing missionaries sent to the farthest ends of the earth and unreached people groups—like the Rajong people in Sumatra—being reached for the gospel and the church being established there. Lord, we ask for all of this in the name of Jesus

and pray that You would show us more now from Romans 6 on how to walk in the fear of You and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let's turn now in the Bible and look at two points in Romans 6. We've been here for two weeks and this is our last week in this chapter. We are going to read verses 15-23 with Acts 9:31 in our minds and I'm going to ask simply how does this text help us, as God's people, to walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. It does so amazingly well. Let's worship God as we hear His Word from Romans 6:15-23:

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ 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 lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How does this passage help us walk in the fear of the Lord? It's a passage that is poised, designed to incentivize us to live in the fear of the Lord. We see in this passage that we are to walk in the fear of the Lord by resisting sin's enslaving power and it tells us how we do that.

Walk in the Fear of the Lord

Beware of any idea of grace that causes you to take sin less seriously. The effect of knowing that God is a God Who is rich in grace and mercy, Who gave His Son so that we could be

set free from the condemnation of sin, should actually cause us to take sin more seriously, for we know what it cost our Savior to deal with our sin.

But Paul says, "*What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?*" A person could be saying, "Now that I am free from sin's dominion, now that sin can no longer dictate my life, that sin can no longer send me to hell. What is so dangerous about sinning anyway?" Paul wants us to understand thinking this way is an abuse of the gospel. God's Word is very clear to us in this passage that your moral decisions, Christians, matter greatly. The way you live your life matters. Yes, God has mercifully cancelled the condemnation of hell that our sins deserve. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). That is an amazing, wonderful truth, but it's also true that we are not free. We are not absolved from the painful consequences that sinful choices will bring into our lives.

Think about what happens every time you give yourself over to sin. Maybe someone says something about you that really irks you, really annoys you, really makes you feel like you're being put in a bad light, and you feel that strong desire to defend yourself rising up in your heart. You want vindicate yourself, so instead of giving yourself over to God in that moment and saying, "Okay, Lord, You've already justified me in Christ and I thank You that Your opinion of me is what matters most," you give yourself over to that anger and say something vindictive. Does it feel good? Momentarily. But then what happens? If you belong to Jesus, it doesn't make you feel better. It brings sorrow, regret, remorse, shame and self-hatred, which ironically lead to more sin. That's the progression sin exacts whether you are a believer or an unbeliever.

Sin has consequences and enslaves us. When we give in to sin, we increasingly become enslaved. Paul is talking about slavery here in verse 16: "*...if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey...*" Slavery to sin leads to death. Jesus himself taught us this in John 8:34 where He said, "I tell you the truth. Everyone who sins is a slave of sin."

Someone has paraphrased verse 16 like this: "Offer yourselves to sin and your existence becomes a living death." Paul is not suggesting here that it is possible for believers in Jesus to lose their salvation. But he is saying, very directly, that sin always leads in the direction of death. Sin always brings the shadow of death. Or think of it this way: sin is never going to lead you more fully into the abundant life that Jesus came to give, is it? Sin's never going to bring you more delight in God and in the gospel. Sin's never going to encourage more love for obedience.

Sin is never going to lead you in the direction of life, but will lead in the direction of death. If you give yourself over wholly to the enslavement of sin, the result is eternal death.

This passage is warning us, incentivizing us, to consider the dreadful consequences of sin and telling us that everyone is a slave to something. No one is neutral. No one is totally on their own. No one is a master to themselves. We've got two choices: either we can be enslaved to sin's domination, which is how we are all born, or we can be a slave to God and His righteousness. It's one or the other. There's no third way here. There's no neutrality. We can't be both a slave to sin and a slave to righteousness, because no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). Paul wants us to consider the dreadful consequences of letting ourselves be enslaved to sin and I think he states it so clearly in verses 20-21. Slavery to sin is freedom from righteousness. Do you see that in verse 20?

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

In other words, "You gave no thought to living a life that was pleasing to God and directed by His righteous will. That wasn't in your wavelength. You weren't thinking about living righteously before God." And where did that lead? Paul says in verse 21:

But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death

So slavery to sin is freedom from righteousness, but it leads to shame and results in death. We see it again in verse 23: "*For the wages of sin is death...*" That word there for wages is a specific word that is used of a Roman soldier's assistant's pay. They would give him just enough to eke out a meager existence. And that's what sin does—it gives you death, not just in one lump sum, but daily doses of death. The wages of sin is death—a daily deposit of death.

Paul says think about this and it will make you cry out to God, "Oh, God! Keep me from sin. Don't let me give myself over to sin. Don't let me walk enslaved to sin. Keep me on the straight path. Help me live a disciplined life, because the dreadful consequences of sin remain even when I have been freed from sin's condemnation." And if you haven't trusted in Jesus and aren't united to Christ by faith, this is telling you where your life is heading. This is the trajectory that your life is on.

C.S. Lewis said something like this: "Now if I were only going to live 70 years, there are a good many things that wouldn't be worth bothering about. But I'd better take them very

seriously if I am going to live forever.” So let’s say my bad temper or my jealousy are gradually getting worse. So gradual that over 70 years it would be tolerable. You know, 70 years of grumpy, jealous, mean-spirited me. I can live with that for seventy years. But what if I’m going to live for a million years? What if I’m going to live forever? What would it be like to be given over to my jealousy or my anger if it were to increase for a million years? Then it would be an absolute hell. In fact, Lewis said, “If Christianity is true, hell is the precisely correct term for what it would be.” Because, you see, sin progresses:

*For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity
and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness...*

(Romans 6:19b)

Sin is never satisfied to just have a piece of your life. Sin never just takes a bite out of your soul. Sin is not a vampire who wants just an ounce of your blood. Sin wants all of you. It will take over. It enslaves and leads to more and more and more lawlessness. But through Jesus Christ, we’ve been set free from sin’s dominion, not so that we can go on giving ourselves over to sin, but so that we can be free to walk in obedience to God’s commandments. We praise Him because He set us free to walk in the path of His commandments. This is liberty to walk in obedience to Him. This helps us walk in the fear of the Lord and this is the implication of the gospel.

Walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit

Secondly, how does this passage help us walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit? By presenting ourselves willingly as slaves to the God of all grace. That’s Who He is. Verse 17 teaches us the good news that it is impossible for a true Christian to utterly and ultimately be a slave to sin.

Sometimes you wander, because you can sink back pretty far. But once Jesus has set you free from the prison house of sin, He will never let you be held captive there again. If He needs to get you out of there He will send in the spiritual Special Forces. It might not be pretty and it might not feel good, but your Savior will do whatever He needs to do to extricate you from the grip of sin’s slavery. If you are His, if He has ransomed you with His blood, He will keep you free.

The reason we will not ultimately and utterly be enslaved by sin is because Jesus has done something in our hearts that makes it impossible for us to give ourselves over to sin’s

enslavement any longer. We can't stay there, as Christians, because of what Jesus has done in our hearts. What is it that He has done in our hearts that makes it impossible for us to stay there? It is a beautiful word called 'conversion.' We've been converted. A transformation has occurred. Verse 17 shows us the dynamics and inner-workings of conversion. There are four parts to it.

- There's a standard of teaching to which we have been committed. So this is where conversion starts. It starts with a specific message which has content. There's a form to this message. It's the same message that is reaching people in South America and Africa and Asia and throughout the world today. It's the same message that reached people in the first century A.D. The standard of teaching is the message about Christ. It's the gospel. It's the old, old story of Jesus and His love. Paul is saying that we've been entrusted to this standard of teaching. We've been placed into the hands of the gospel. It's not that the gospel has been entrusted to us in this passage. We've been entrusted to it so that the gospel and Christ, Who is at the heart of the gospel, can do His gracious work on us. The gospel is living and working us over. It is dynamically changing us from the inside out. God puts us into the hands of Christ and His gospel to shape and fashion us into His likeness. It's the first thing that happens with conversion.
- Secondly, conversion changes our hearts. We see in verse 17 that we *"...have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed..."* Before the Spirit does His transforming work on our hearts, we can know things about the gospel intellectually and can superficially experience a kind of moral conduct that might look like Christian conduct, but when we are converted, this is what happens. Our hearts change so that now we want to offer ourselves wholly to God. We think, "Slavery?! This doesn't feel like slavery! This feels like love! I want to be His completely." When you're married to someone you love and who loves you, does it feel like slavery to be with her? No, it's delightful, because your heart is given over.
- Thirdly we become obedient. The message comes, the standard of teaching comes, the Spirit takes the message and works on our hearts and convicts us so that we want to offer ourselves wholly to God. He becomes the One we are living for. We see this in verse 17: *"...you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed."* It's impossible for the gospel to penetrate our hearts and for our hearts to remain unchanged. This is the whole purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans. Way back in Romans 1:5, Paul was writing this *"...to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name..."* This is why I'm writing this letter, so that you will trust in Jesus and out of that trust in Jesus, you'll live an obedient life.
- Then the last thing that we see with conversion is that all the glory goes to God, because God is the One Who accomplishes it. Conversion is a gift of God's grace and that's why Paul begins verse 17 with this exclamation: *"...thanks be to God..."* He's

converted us! Look at this description of conversion. Every one of us needs to ask, "Have I been converted? Is this my experience of Christ and His gospel? Has my heart been changed so that I want to walk in obedience to Him?" Because when people are converted, this is what happens: "...*having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness*" (verse 18). There you have it. One or the other. You're either enslaved to sin or you are enslaved to righteousness. Conversion makes you a slave to righteousness.

Now Paul realizes this analogy of slavery is insufficient, so he almost apologizes for it in verse 19. He says, "*I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations.*" In other words, "Listen, I have something really important that I need to tell you. I want to convey to you something about your new relationship with God and the only way that I can adequately describe it is through a metaphor that is problematic—the metaphor of slavery."

Here's what is good about the slavery metaphor. It describes for us, as nothing else can, total allegiance. Total loyalty. The total sense of belonging to someone that should characterize us as having experienced the grace of God in Jesus Christ. . It describes the way we should yield our lives completely to God for accountability. But after that, the analogy falls apart, because slavery to sin is cruel. Slavery to God is gracious. Slavery to sin is bondage. Slavery to God is freedom. Slavery to sin is forced. Slavery to God comes from the heart as you give yourself voluntarily to Him because He has changed your heart. Slavery to sin develops into more and more impurity and increasing lawlessness. Where does slavery to God lead? Verse 22: "*But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.*"

There is no comparison. Sin is bad slavery. Sanctification is good slavery, sweet slavery. This is slavery that sets us free. This is what conversion brings us into. We become slaves of God and His righteousness. And that's good news. Just as sin spreads and deepens and advances, and we hate it and don't want it, that shouldn't be what we are ultimately focusing on. What we are ultimately to focus on in this passage is that just as sin spreads, so does righteousness and holiness leading to eternal life. If sin can become addictive, so can holiness and righteousness. You can get addicted to increasing holiness. There is a progression here as well. The more you practice the holy life as a follower of Jesus, the more it increases. What a beautiful truth.

Let's end with verse 23. "*For the wages of sin is death...*" When you present yourself as a slave to sin, you ultimately get what you deserve. You get shame and death. But when you

present yourself as a slave to God and His righteousness, here's what you get: He pays all your debts to sin. He freely gives you what you could never earn or deserve and then He gives you sanctification. He sets you apart as holy and gives you a free gift—eternal life in Jesus Christ your Lord. That's not something you can get for yourself. It's a gift of God. Sin doles out death. God graciously gives holiness, righteousness and, eternal life. So our response to Him should be, "Make me a captive, Lord. Take all I am, all I have, and make me Yours."

I remember a little song I learned in junior high that has been in my mind ever since. It says, "I'm Yours, Lord. Everything I've got. Everything I am. Everything I'm not. I'm Yours Lord. Try me now and see. See if I can be completely Yours. I want to give it all to You."

As a result of our conversion our chains are gone. Our hearts are set free. Confirm your consecration to God by giving yourself over to Him and praying, "Lord, I am willing to receive what You give, to lack what You withhold, to relinquish what You take, to suffer what You inflict, to be what You require." That's consecration. He's given all for you. Would you want to give Him any less?

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