



Sermon Transcript  
Easter Sunday  
April 4, 2021

50 Days of Spiritual Growth  
Jesus Changes Your Life . . . Today!  
Romans 6:1-14

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on April 4, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com)

**Sermon Text**  
**Romans 6:1-14**

<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup> We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

<sup>10</sup> For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

<sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

<sup>12</sup> Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

## Introduction

This morning we begin a journey we are calling **50 Days of Spiritual Growth**. It is a journey that will take us from today—Easter Sunday—to Pentecost Sunday, which is Sunday, May 23. During these eight weeks, we are going to walk through Romans 6-8.

I wonder if there is anyone sitting here in silent protest this morning because this is Easter Sunday. This is the climax of Holy Week. This is the climax of all four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. You came this morning—some of you this is your first Sunday back in over a year—and you came to hear a sermon on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. I mean, that is what we do on Easter Sunday! This was the central message of the early church and it remains the central message of our faith. *“He has risen! He has risen, indeed!”*

Matthew tells us that when the women came to the empty tomb that first Easter Sunday, they were greeted by an angel who said to them; *“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”* This changes everything. This is the Jenga piece that if you remove it from our faith, the whole thing crumbles. So you came here this morning to reaffirm this central truth of our faith and to celebrate what Paul says at the end of his chapter on the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15. Because Jesus rose from the dead, Paul says with great confidence, *“Death is swallowed up in victory.”* And then he grabs death by the collar, looks it in the eye, and he taunts death—he trash talks death! *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? . . . thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* This is our eternal hope. Or as Jesus said to the sister of Lazarus, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”* “Yes! That is what I came to hear and celebrate this morning”, you may be saying. “What are you doing launching a series on **50 Days of Spiritual Growth** on Easter Sunday, of all Sundays?” And furthermore, what does this have to do with the resurrection of Jesus?

Let me assure you that the resurrection of Jesus has everything to do with our “spiritual growth.” This is exactly where Paul starts his instruction on spiritual growth in Romans 6. He says in verse 4 that because Jesus rose from the dead, we have the power to *walk in newness of life*. In other words, like Jesus, we too have been raised to a new life. In verse 9, it is Paul’s knowledge that Christ rose from the dead that ensures him in verse 11 that he is now *“dead to sin and alive to God.”* And then he ends this section

in verses 13 and 14 by asserting that because Jesus rose from the dead, we too *have been brought from death to life* and therefore sin has no dominion over us. In other words, it is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead that ensures us that Jesus has the power to change your life . . . today! The hope of the resurrection is not just hope for after we die. Don't get me wrong, I love being able to say at the grave of one who has departed in Christ, "In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, we commend to Almighty God our brother/our sister and we commit his/her body to the ground. Earth to earth. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust." What a great and certain hope. But the resurrection of Jesus also brings hope for today! Jesus changes your life . . . today, in the here and now!

At the beginning of the book of Romans, Paul talks about the need for this kind of change. In the first three chapters, he makes the case that all of us . . . every single one of us, are trying to make our way through this life and we are struggling. At the heart of our struggle is this quest for freedom. Individual freedom is perhaps the highest value of our culture. The cheers begin to emerge from the crowd when the Star Spangled Banner hits that line . . . "O'er the land of the freeeee." Here is what "freedom" has come to mean in our culture. We are free to self-choose and self-identify our own truth and this includes the absence of any limitations or constraints that might be put upon us. "That is freedom!", so we say. "I am free!" But absolute freedom is an illusion. And yet we pursue this freedom and we grab it and live by it and in the end we are left empty and anxious and unfulfilled. Paul says in Romans 1 that this quest for freedom—to shake free of the "constraints" that God puts on us, leads us to foolish and darkened thinking. It leads to the mess we make of life." St. Augustine used a phrase in Latin that described the mess we are all in—*messa peccati*. (Sounds like an Italian dish. If you ever see *mesa peccati* on the menu—avoid it!) It means "mess of sin." You are not free. Life is filled with constraints. Ironically, it is these constraints that actually bring true freedom.

In Romans 3-5, we discover how Jesus came into this world to set us free from our sin. Can I put it this way? He came to set us free from the bondage that comes from trying to find freedom apart from God. Isn't it interesting to observe how Jesus sets us free from ourselves and our sin and the consequences of it. He humbles himself for our sake. He sets aside his power—his freedom—and he dies for us. At infinite cost to himself, Jesus emptied himself and took on the form of a servant and he died for our sin. He modeled for us what he taught—he walked his talk. Didn't he say, "*If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give it up for me, you will find it.*" That is the opposite of what our culture of freedom tells you. But if you really want to

be free, Paul says in Romans 4, you need to humbly turn in faith to Jesus. Freedom is found in looking outside of yourself. It is found in looking to the resurrected Jesus.

Mark Lilla said that as a teenager he flirted with Christianity. But then he came to the story in the Bible where Jesus said to a learned man by the name of Nicodemus, “*You must be born again.*” Lilla wrote, “Jesus seems to be telling Nicodemus that he must recognize his own insufficiency, that he will have to turn his back on his autonomous, seemingly happy life, and be reborn as a human being who understands his dependency on something greater. That seems like a radical challenge to our freedom. And it is.”<sup>1</sup> And for this reason Lilla rejected Jesus. But what he failed to see is that faith in Jesus is not the antithesis to freedom. Rather, it is the very thing that sets you free!

Tim Keller said that this is how our relationship with God works. When we see how “Jesus saved us at infinite cost to himself, how he emptied himself of his glory and took on a humble form to serve our best interests, it creates a grateful joy that inwardly moves us to want to please him, know him and resemble him. Our happiness gets put into his happiness, **and serving him becomes our perfect liberation.**”<sup>2</sup> That is true freedom! This is what propels us into Romans 6-8. Because Jesus rose from the dead, if you turn to him in faith, he will change your life . . . today!

### **It Starts with a Question**

Our journey through Romans 6-8 starts with a question. I wonder if this seems like an odd question to you or not. “*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?*” This question emerges out of the end of Romans 5 where Paul affirmed that God’s grace runs deeper than our sin. So if that is the case, should we keep on sinning so that we can get more grace? That is the question. It seems like an odd question. And yet, here is how that question is asked today. “If I am saved through faith, does it really matter how I live my life?” It is a question that simmers in the background of our evangelical culture because of our emphasis on the need for conversion. Because Paul says in Romans 4 that we are made right with God through faith in Jesus, we call people to repent of their sin and turn in faith to Jesus. We get excited—appropriately so—when a person professes faith in Jesus. But should we expect that with conversion comes spiritual growth? As long as someone prayed a prayer or made a profession of faith, does it matter how they live their life?

Paul’s answer to that question is pretty emphatic. It sure does matter! He says, “*By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it.*” Bonhoeffer famously called such an

idea “cheap grace.” Romans 6-8 is Paul’s response to this question. And it is here where we learn about the doctrine of sanctification. That is just another word for “spiritual growth.” It is the work that God does in us to make us more like Jesus, to make us holy. And at the same time, we are called to cooperate with what God is doing. It does require commitment on our part. Richard Lovelace said that “the attempt to be justified through faith in Christ without commitment to sanctification, is illegitimate and impossible.”<sup>3</sup> That is the same thing Paul was saying in response to this question. If you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you can anticipate that Jesus will change your life . . . today.

Before we take our first step into Romans 6-8, I want to acknowledge that our sanctification—spiritual growth—is a lifelong process and can seem painfully slow. At times, it feels like you are not seeing the kind of change you would like to see. Why do I still wrestle with certain temptations and challenges? I think John Newton—who wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace*—put it well. He described sanctification this way.

I am not what I ought to be.  
I am now what I want to be.  
I am not what I hope to be.  
But still, I am not what I used to be.  
And by the grace of God, I am what I am.

With that in mind, I want to highlight three thoughts for you this morning as we begin our **50 Days of Spiritual Growth**.

Don’t you know?  
Consider it so!  
Let’s go!

### **Don’t You Know?**

In response to the question at the beginning of Romans 6, Paul says in verses 3-5, “*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united in a resurrection like his.*”

*Do you not know . . .?*, Paul asks. Don’t you know, what? It is interesting to me that he would ask this question in a way that implies they should know what he is talking about. They should know the significance of what it means to be united to Jesus in his death,

burial and resurrection. And yet, as I was preparing for this sermon, I discovered that this is a relevant question to ask followers of Jesus today, as well. Our union with Christ is so central and so important to our faith, that in his writings, Paul refers to it 164 times. And yet, numerous theologians have observed that it is one of the most neglected truths of our faith. Perhaps we “don’t know” that we have been *baptized into Christ Jesus . . . buried therefore with him . . . in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life*”, or at least, what it means.

Through faith, we are united to Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Therefore, by being united to Jesus, Martin Lloyd-Jones rightly says, “if you are in him, what is true of Him is true of you.”<sup>4</sup> It is like a child riding “piggy-back” on the work of Jesus. That means because of your union with Christ, his victory over sin and death is now your victory. The power that raised Jesus to life is the power you have to live a new life.

It is like when the UConn women win the NCAA tournament. The common refrain I hear around here when that happens is “We won!” Well, “we” didn’t do anything. Trust me, what you wore, where you sat, what you ate . . . nothing you did contributed to the win. But their win, became your win because that is your team. So it is, and even more so, with Christ.

Paul uses our baptism to point to this truth. I said it many times during a baptism service. The word “baptism” can mean to “immerse.” But it also means “to change identity.” For example, in 200 B.C. there was a man by the name of Nicander who had a recipe for making pickles. He said that the vegetable should be first dipped (bapto) in the boiling water and then baptized (baptize) in the vinegar solution. The second use of the word not only referred to immersing it, but the process that caused the cucumber to undergo a permanent change and thus become a pickle.<sup>5</sup> So the word “baptize” can also picture for us the transformation process, the transformation from a cucumber to a pickle. And once it becomes a pickle it can’t go back and being a cucumber. So it is with us. We “have been baptized into Christ Jesus.” We have been transformed from a child of Adam, once imprisoned by the penalty and the power of sin; but, through our union with Jesus, we are now united to Christ in his resurrection and so we can now walk in the newness of life. We can’t go back to the old way.

Philip Schaff wrote what is considered the standard eight volume set of the history of Christianity. He starts with the Apostles and takes us all the way through the Reformation. He gives great insight into the practice and belief of Christianity just a

few centuries removed from Jesus Christ. In his second volume, he writes about how baptism was observed by the early church. He noted that in the fourth century, as we learn from Cyril of Jerusalem, the baptism candidate would stand in the vestibule of the baptistery, with the face towards the west, and the hand raised in the repelling posture, they would renounce Satan and their old way of life. By this gesture, the candidate is saying that he or she will no longer live their life apart from the rule of God. They are making their vows and stating their promise. Schaff goes on to write, “This act of turning from sin and turning to God, or of repentance and faith, on the part of the candidate, was followed by an appropriate prayer of the minister, and then by the baptism.” Then the creed was repeated by the candidate as he faced the east, towards the light.<sup>6</sup> They were now pledging to walk in the newness of life.

Clearly, through the picture of water baptism, the candidate is giving illustration to what has already taken place in their heart. They “have been baptized” into Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. *“Don’t you know . . . you have been raised with Christ and so we are on a journey to walk in the newness of life. As we begin this 50 Days of Spiritual Growth we do so with the conviction that because of the resurrection of Jesus, we have been raised to a new life and Jesus is changing our lives . . . today!*

### Consider It So!

In verse 6, Paul says that there is something else we should know. He says, *“we know that our old self was crucified with him.”* What does he mean by that? There are a variety of opinions. One popular way to take it is to say that Paul is referring to our old sin nature that has been dealt a death-blow, but it is still there and it does battle with our new nature in Christ. And so this sanctification process—this quest for spiritual growth—is represented with this internal battle we feel between the old and new nature. I don’t think that is what Paul is saying here. I like what Douglas Moo says about this passage. He said the *old self* is not so much the old nature, but instead it represents our former head—Adam. Sin was passed down to us through Adam. And when we come to faith in Christ, our tie to Adam as our head is severed and now we have a new head that we live under—Jesus. We will see this developed further next week when Paul says that we are no longer slaves to sin, but we are slaves to Christ. We have a new head.

Paul captures the same idea in Colossian 1:13-14 when he says that in Jesus *we have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of the beloved Son.* Did you catch that? We no longer belong to the darkness. We now belong to Jesus. Do you know that? It is like getting a new boss at work. That old boss is no



longer calling the shots for you. He or she is not here anymore. The former boss no longer has any authority over you. You have a new boss you are accountable to. So it is with Jesus. *“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”* “No way!” *“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”*

Notice how Paul applies this truth in verse 11. Since his old self is crucified with Christ and that the life he now lives he lives unto God . . . Paul says, “consider it so.” It is another way of saying, “remind yourself of this.” I no longer belong to the *domain of darkness* . . . so consider it so. I now belong to Jesus . . . so consider it so. So instead of exhibiting the deeds of the flesh, things like—enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy and the like—I demonstrate the things of the Spirit, namely love, joy, peace, patience, kindness . . . and the like. Why? I belong to Christ . . . consider it so. Look what he says, *“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”* This is important!

One of the important features of **50 Days of Spiritual Growth** is that every week we are going to affirm four things to be true. Each week we will recite them out loud together. In other words, we are going to “consider it so.” In fact, when you practice your kneeling prayer this week, I want to encourage you to affirm these four statements—at least once day—that demonstrate that in Christ you have a new head.

***I am accepted in Jesus:*** This is always the starting point for sanctification. You are not doing these things to earn God’s smile. If you are in Christ, you already have his good smile. You are discovering what he heard Tim Keller say earlier on in the sermon, “You have a grateful joy that inwardly moves us to want to please him, know him and resemble him. Our happiness gets put into his happiness, **and serving him becomes our perfect liberation.**”

***I am free from the power of sin.*** Because of the resurrection of Jesus you are able to walk in the newness of life. You are not just freed from the penalty of sin. But you are free from its power. Jesus did not just reverse the curse of sin and death in your life, but he also reversed the course of your life.

***I am not alone, I have the indwelling Holy Spirit.*** This series will take us to Romans 8 and it is here where we see the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Remember, we end this series on Pentecost Sunday, and the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit. We are not alone in this journey.

*I have authority over the kingdom of darkness.* I am not helpless against the temptations I face or the attacks of the enemy. We have all we need.

**I am accepted in Jesus**  
**I am free from the power of sin**  
**I am not alone, I have the indwelling Holy Spirit**  
**I have authority over the kingdom of darkness**

Consider it so!

### Let's Go!

Notice how Paul ends this section with a call to action. It is a call to commitment. Since we are united to Christ in his resurrection and raised to a new life . . . Since our old self is crucified with Christ and we have a new head . . . there is something for us to do. There is a commitment for us to make. *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”*

Saying “no” to sin and “yes” to God is not a matter of will power. It is the outgrowth of the habits we form. I wonder, if when you heard about these eight habits if that sounded a bit stuffy, a bit too constraining for you to consider. I am not suggesting that these eight habits are the end all of end all of habits. Some of them may not be the thing you need to address the principle that is being addressed and there is flexibility in all of that. But don't forget where freedom is ultimately found. It is found in embracing the constraints that cause our hearts to be formed to loving God and loving others. And strangely, these acts of submission lead to freedom.

Take the habit of kneeling prayer three times a day. The goal is not to check off some great accomplishment that might fill you with a sense of spiritual pride. Rather, the goal is to frame your day in God's love. By midday, we often know the ways we have already come short or the aspirations we had for the day are already unreachable. We measure ourselves by these things—failing or succeeding. This midday prayer is a reminder that my identity is in Jesus and that is the source that allows me to rest in God's love and trust him through the challenges.

So . . . Let's go! Embrace this habit of kneeling prayer and let your heart and mind be

formed towards God and others. *“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”*

## Conclusion

I invite you to join us for these **50 Days of Spiritual Growth**. I invite you to join us no matter where you are in your own spiritual journey. This endeavor is worth it because I know that Jesus will use it to continue his work in you. How can I be so confident? *He had risen! He has risen, indeed!*”

*Do you not know . . . just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

*So you also must **consider** yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. **Consider it so!***

*Lets Go! For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

---

<sup>1</sup>Mark Lilla “Getting Religion” *New York Times Magazine* September 18, 2005

<sup>2</sup>Tim Keller *Making Sense of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016) 113

<sup>3</sup>Richard Lovelace *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove: IVP) 102

<sup>4</sup>D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans The New Man, Exposition of Chapter 6* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972) 52

<sup>5</sup>James Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IVP, 1986) 598

<sup>6</sup>Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910) 248

**Sermon Title:** Jesus Changes Your Life . . . Today!  
**Sermon Text:** Romans 6:1-14  
**Sermon Date:** September 27, 2020

COMMUNITY  
**GROUPS**

## Getting To Know Me Questions

1. How are you doing with Habit #1 - Kneeling Prayer 3x a Day?

Discuss the challenge there is in forming habits. How is this habit helping you to “frame your day in God’s love?”

## Diving Into The Word

2. Read Romans 6:1-2. Where do you think such a question would come from? (see Romans 5:20-21) What is Paul communicating with his strong response?
3. Read Romans 6:3-5. What encouragement do you gain from our union with Christ? What is the implication for living the Christian life?
4. Read Romans 6:6-11, Colossians 1:13-14. What difference does it make to know that Christ is now your head? What does it mean to “consider it so . . .”?

Consider it so—how do these four affirmations help you live under Christ.

I am accepted in Jesus  
I am free from the power of sin  
I am not alone, I have the indwelling Holy Spirit  
I have authority over the kingdom of darkness

5. Read Romans 6:12-14. What is ours to do?

## Taking It Home

6. What is one thing you are taking from your study?
7. How can you encourage each other in living out the habits of the *Common Rule*.