

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title: Who Are You?**

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### **Scripture:**

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#### **Romans 5:20b, 6:7, 11-14**

<sup>20</sup> The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,

<sup>7</sup> because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

<sup>11</sup> In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup> Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

**Transcript:**

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Hello to all of you here. Those of you online, thank you so much for joining us. Great to have you here on this really cool sunny day.

Roman 6 is the scripture. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means. We are those who have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer? For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. In the same way, count yourself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master because you're not under the law, but under grace.

So, the Apostle Paul says an interesting thing in that text. He says that when Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our sins, our sin was crucified with him so we are now dead to sin. Oh, really? Seriously? Because I don't particularly feel dead to sin. Do you feel dead? Anthony, do you feel dead to sin? Jake did... No. No. Anthony, a little bit, but Jake, we really know, super not dead to sin, right? I mean, I've made progress over the years, but I still sin. Sin is like my spiritual gift. I'm just really good at it. So, I don't feel like sin is particularly dead in me. I mean, maybe it has a low grade fever, but not dead yet.

Think about your sins. You online, you here, the things you do over and over again. You know they're hurting you. They know it's hurting other people and yet you can't stop doing it. Maybe it's a lack of patience that damages relationships because you're irritable and angry sometimes. Maybe it's lust that objectify other people and just kind of drives you crazy constantly, or holding grudges that make you bitter and poison other relationships, an addiction and all the damage that does. A few verses after the ones that I just read the Apostle Paul says "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do, that I keep on doing." Oh, I am so glad that verse in the Bible because that describes me, and I'm pretty sure it describes you too. And maybe you try really hard to clean up your act and you have some success, but it just kind of only goes so far.

Kind of like a story one of you sent me about a man named John, and he goes to visit his grandfather, and the first morning the grandfather made breakfast, and John looked at the

plates, and it was like there's kind of film of grease on it. And so, he said, "Grandpa, did you wash these plates?" And the grandfather said, "Yep, just as clean as cold water can get them." And then for lunch, kind of the same thing, bits of dried food on the plate, and John said, "Are you sure you washed these plates?" And the grandfather said, "Yep, just as clean as cold water can get them." Well, later that night, John wanted to go to the store, but his grandfather's dog was in the way and growling at him. And so, he said, "Grandpa, your dog won't let me get to my car," and so the grandfather shouted, "Cold Water, lay down." Yeah, I thought that was hilarious.

Maybe is that how you feel, right? You try to clean up your act, but it only gets as clean as cold water and your own efforts can get it, which isn't very much. And you ask yourself, "Why do I keep doing this? Why do I keep sinning? Why can't I stop? How long till my soul gets it right?" Well, there's hope because, see, Jesus loves you just as you are, not as you should be, not some future version of you, not when you get it all together, Jesus loves you just as you are, and he also loves you enough not to leave you there because he not only forgives us, he transforms us. We talked about forgiveness last week. This week, we're talking about the transformation process, and the theological word for that is sanctification, the process by which we become more like Jesus.

We're in a series on kind of the basics of Christian theology, and there are three theological words you need to know, and more importantly, not confused with each other. The first is justification which we talked about last week. Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins which mean we are forgiven, justified. God doesn't even remember our sins, he says. You can think of it this way. Justified means just as if it had never happened. Second word is sanctification, the process by which we become more like Jesus. And the third word is glorification where we are finally perfected after we die and go to heaven. Now, here's the important thing about these three words. Don't look to one to do for you what only the other can do.

So, for instance, a lot of times we look to our sanctification to justify us. Man, if only I work really hard and get rid of these sins, then God is going to accept me. God's going to love me. That's looking to your sanctification to justify you. It doesn't work. If Jesus is your leader and forgiver, you are forgiven. That's the end of the story. No hidden fees, no caveats, full on, full stop, fully forgiven, period, end of sentence, no further discussion, don't even bring it up anymore. You are forgiven. Salvation is received, not achieved.

However, your justification doesn't sanctify you. The Holy Spirit does that and it is a process. It is a lifelong process, and it's not fully complete until we go to heaven, but we can make huge amount of progress here on earth and get free of the behaviors that hurt us, hurt other people, wreck our relationships and have more meaning, purpose, and joy. I saw a meme a while back

that said, "Treat yourself like I-5. Never stop working on yourself no matter how inconvenient it is for others." Right? Like that section near the Tacoma Dome that's been being constructed since Jesus was a baby? Always be working on yourself.

The mark of the Christian is progress, not perfection. The mark of a Christian is progress, not perfection. Are you becoming more like Jesus? Okay. That's the theology of sanctification. That's the what. So what, or more importantly so how, how do we engage in this process. Well, I'm going to give you kind of some general kind of principles and guidelines for how we engage, cooperate with the Holy Spirit and sanctification. I'll give you some general principles, and then at the end, real specific, four action steps.

So, general principle number one of how we die to sin, first, lose your small ambitions. We come to Jesus with unbelievably small ambitions. We want a little peace. We want him to help us achieve our life goals, a little inspiration so that we feel better, but the passage today says, "If we have been united with Jesus in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his." In other words, you have no idea what happened when you became a Christian. Do you know the power that flows through you? If you know Jesus, the Holy Spirit is in you, and the power that raised Jesus from the dead flows through you and is available to you to help you rise above sin.

The author, C.S. Lewis compares it to living in a house that God has come to remodel, and we think that means he's going to repair a leaky faucet, maybe a new coat of paint, but then we get alarmed when he starts tearing stuff up in our lives and knocking down walls, and Lewis says he's building quite a different house from the one you thought of, throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage, but he is building a palace which he intends to live in himself. And if we let him, he will make the feeblest of us into dazzling, radiant, immortal creatures, pulsating with such energy, joy, wisdom, and love that we cannot now imagine. The process will be long and in parts painful, but that is what we are in for, nothing less. Jesus wants nothing less than to make all things new, and that includes you and me. Lose your small ambitions.

Second, learn to hate your sin, not hate yourself because of your sin, not beat yourself up over your sin. No, no, no, no. And not hate other people's sin. Stop judging other people because they sin differently than you do. Hate your own sin because it does enormous damage. Paul says, "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase?" That is such a human question, right? Ooh, this is cool. I like this justification stuff. Since God likes to forgive so much, I know what I'll do. I'll just keep on

sin to give him more things to forgive because he likes it so much. See, it's really for him. I like to sin. God likes to forgive. The world is admirably arranged.

Paul says "By no means," exclamation point, emoji, emoji, emoji. Don't you know that when you offer yourself to someone as obedient slaves, you are slave of the one you obey, whether you are slaves to sin which leads to death or to obedience which leads to righteousness? Don't you know that when you sin, you are making yourself a slave to sin? Sin says, "Jump in." You say, "How high?" You think you're free, but you're enslaved, and it just leads to death. Death of relationships because our sin hurts people. Death of our self-respect. Death in our culture because if we're gossiping about each other and just being self-centered and trying to get our own way, it's going to make our schools and our homes and our churches and our whole country miserable because we're hurting each other because that's what sin does.

Sin feels good for a little while, but it leads to death, or as a country music song puts it, funny how falling feels like flying for a little while, right? And then it's... splat. If it's greed that is driving you, you will work yourself to death with all kinds of anxiety trying to get more money. If it's lust, it owns you and it bosses you around and it pushes you around, and this makes you constantly feel agitated. If it's placing your identity in school or work, rather than in God, you'll be filled with anxiety, always trying to earn approval. Now, money, sex, career, approval are all good things. They're good things. They're not bad things unless we make them ultimate things without which we think we can't be happy and then we are enslaved.

So, ask the Holy Spirit to help you hate your sin by showing you the damage it does, just to see the damage it's doing. And when other people critique you or when other people say, "This is how you hurt me," don't get defensive, but instead take it to prayer and say, "God, is this who I am?" Because you see, we can all sort of admit that we all sin in a general sort of a we all sin kind of way, but when it starts to get specific, we squirm. For instance, as parents, every parent I know, as parents we all say, we all know, I know that because of my sin, I'm going to hurt my kids. We can admit that. But it's another thing when they get a little bit older and present us with the itemized list, right? And then we start to get defensive. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you hate your sin.

Third general principle. Remember who you are. See, back then to sanctify, something meant to use it for what it was designed to do. So, for instance, a pen is sanctified when it's used to write because that's what it was made for. A car is sanctified when it's driven. Kale is sanctified when it's scraped into the trash because that's what it was made for. Tragically, some of you, that's the only thing you're going to take out of this sermon. Sanctification is becoming the people God made us to be. It's not becoming someone else. It's becoming who God says you already are and who he made you to be. The text says, "For we know that our old self was crucified with

him so that we no longer be slaves to sin." Sin was once your master. It owned you, but no longer. You've been set free from sin. Because of Jesus, you have passed from the service of sin into the service of God so act like it.

I remember once reading about how elephants that are used to give rides to people, the way they train them is they put them on a leash and tie the leash to a pole so the elephants can only walk around and around in a circle. Eventually, they take the leash off, but the elephants continue to just walk around and around in a circle because that's what they're used to. They don't realize the leash has been removed. So, they just keep with their own pattern. Oh, you so get the analogy, right? We have been freed from sin, but we're so used to it, we just keep going around and around and around.

Paul says, "Consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Consider yourselves dead to sin is another way of saying remember who you are. You are no longer a slave to sin. You are a child of God. And back then, when slaves were freed and they were often freed which is how is different than American slavery, back then when slaves were freed, they could look their master in the eye and ignore every command because they understood their new status. Do you understand yours? How we act is influenced by who we think we are and what we think we're capable of doing.

This week, my wife and I have been watching the Olympics and Nathan Chen, the figure skater in the Olympics, and he was the first person to land five different types of quadruple jumps in competition. And so, my wife is now trying to figure out a way to connect him with our oldest daughter so they can get married. In fact, she started to refer to Nathan Chen as our future son-in-law. You laugh, but she is determined. So, when you see it on Twitter, just remember, you heard it here first. But that's not my point. Here's my point. We were talking about how just even 50 years ago, you could get a gold medal with a couple of double jumps and maybe one triple. But when Nathan Chen landed five quadruple jumps, now everyone is doing multiple quad jumps in their program.

The human body did not change to make that possible. What changed was who we thought we were and what we thought we were capable of. Who you think you are shapes your actions. You are dead to sin, so live like it. Take up the authority God has given you and say to sin and temptation and the devil, "You are no longer the boss of me, so get you gone," because there is enormous spiritual power when in the name of Jesus, we rebuke the temptation and the lies. And then finally and forth, cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Sanctification isn't trying harder.

That's legalism and it doesn't work. Maybe you'll curb a behavior or two, but you're not really getting at the root of the problem because usually the heart of the problem is a problem with the heart, and God gives us a new heart. He says in the Bible, "I will give you a new heart. I will

remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit in you and move you to be careful to keep my laws." When we experience Jesus' love, it moves us to want to do what God says to do.

So, ask the Holy Spirit to help you experience Jesus' love. Don't try harder. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you experience Jesus love, and then cooperate with the ways he's trying to sanctify you and mold your character because every moment of every day is a chance for him to shape your character. When you win and when you lose, when you get what you want and when you don't, when someone criticizes you and when someone praise you, when you're suffering, when you are in times of joy, all of those are an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to shape your character so cooperate with him. Lose your small ambitions. Hate your sin. Remember who you are. Cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Those are some general principles to engage in the process of sanctification.

So, now for this week, four really specific actions to steps, and I'm grateful to Pastor Annie for giving me these four words all beginning with a letter R. When you find yourself sinning this week, because you will and so will I, do these things. First, repent. That means to just stop and acknowledge that what you just did was a sin rather than pretend it isn't, and then learn to hate it and turn away from it. The passage we read today talks about crucifying our sin. We don't really crucify our sin so much as we try to tame our sin. Oh, I can handle it. I'll just do it a little bit. I can control it. It's not that bad. That's like putting a lion on a leash. You think you've got it under control, but it's way stronger than you. So, ask the Holy Spirit to help you put that sin to death. Repent, acknowledge, it's sin and repent and put it to death, and the next three Rs help you do that.

Third or second, receive Jesus' grace. Don't beat yourself up about it. No guilt parties. No shame fests. You're forgiven. Jesus loves you. Receive it. The more you feel love, the more you're going to want to do what he says. Third, rebuke the lie. Behind every sin, there is a lie. Behind greed is the lie that unless I get more, I'm not going to be happy and I'm not going to be secure. Behind gossip is the lie that if I join these people talking about this other people, this other person who's not here, then this group is going to accept me more and I'll feel more included and I'll feel more part of a community, when the reality is gossip erodes community all over the place, which means you're never going to be accepted because guess who they're talking about when you're not there.

And there's one lie that's behind every single sin, like the uber lie, the meta lie, and it's that God isn't good. First lie, serpent to Eve that God's commands are meant to wreck your life and keep you from having fun as opposed to steer you to what's going to bring you life. God loved you enough to die for you. That means his commands are meant not to ruin your life or make you

miserable, but to bring you joy. Repent, receive Jesus' forgiveness, rebuke the lie, and then finally, replace the sin with things that bring life.

There's an old story about a man who says, "It's like I have two wolves inside of me, a good wolf and a bad wolf, and they're fighting it out," and someone says, "Well, which one wins?" And he said, "Whichever one I feed." So, feed the good, starve the bad. Prayer, worship, scripture, community, life-giving community. Nobody gets sanctified by themselves. We need each other to encourage each other and pray for each other, hold each other accountable, serving others in ways that bring you life and joy because when you are full of good things, sin just becomes less interesting.

There's a man I know, I'll call him George who in his mid-20s was not a Christian, and he was just a very selfish person, very self-centered, always talked about himself, never asked about anyone else, always wanted people to do things for him, never did things for others, right? He would do little things, like take the best room in the apartment that he shared with some other guys, a lot out-of-control drinking, and the real issue was he was just self-centered, and that is one of those sins we just ignore in our us, right, in ourselves. It's not a headline sin, adultery, murder. It's not a headline sin. Selfish is the kind of sin we just ignore, right? We just blow past that every day.

But it was just is ruining his life. It was killing his relationships. He'd lost friends over it. His long-time girlfriend broke up with him because he was take, take, take, and no give, give, give at all, and of course, it was making him miserable. Lack of joy, no real deep friendships, which is part of why he kept drinking so much to just fill the boredom. Well, George had a friend, a Christian friend that would sometimes invite George to his Bible study, and George would say, "Bible study, why would I want to go to a Bible study?" And this Christian friend would always quote Proverbs 27 and he'd say, "Well, you need it because as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Every single time he invited him to the Bible study, he said, "Iron sharpens iron. You got to come."

So, finally, George decided to try the Bible study to see what all the metallurgy imagery was about, and what he found was a community of men who accepted him just as he was, not as he should be, but who loved him enough to challenge him and call him up to be his better self. He found a community of men that lived a lifestyle different than his that he really liked. They invested in each other. They all did some kind of service to people in need. They were way more adventurous than his drinking buddies who just always wanted to get drunk all the time. These guys would do things like go to the Andes Mountains to dig a well or build a house to show people that Jesus loves them.



They were being transformed. One guy got over a pornography addiction. Another guy worked through emotional scars that his dad had given him, and over the course of several years, years, George changed. He started to see the relational carnage that his selfishness was doing, which helped him hate his sin, which helped him turn to Jesus as his leader and his forgiver. He stopped getting drunk because it wasn't interesting anymore. It wasn't fun anymore. He started treating people better, actually doing things for them rather than expect that they do things for him. And he replaced the sinful behavior with life-giving things. He repented. He received Jesus' grace. He rebuked the lie. He replaced the sinful stuff with life-giving things.

The thing he liked to do the most, he volunteered to help coach a high school football team, and he just loved the guys on the team, loved being able to mentor them and help steer them to make better decisions than he'd been making, and over the course of several years, he changed. His life got bigger. His relationships got better. The change was so visible, his old girlfriend came back because she could see the change in him and they ended up getting happily married. Did he become perfect? No. Did he make progress? Tons. Does he have more joy? Way more joy. And that can be true for you and for me.

So, this week, repent. Receive Jesus' grace. Rebuke the lie. Replace the sin with things that bring life. And then one more R, remember who you are. You no longer a slave to sin. Oh, sin may win some temporary battles, but it will not win the war if you know Jesus. I mean, sin may get in some good jabs, but it is not going to knock you out because you are in the process of becoming more like Jesus, and Jesus is going to guarantee that you get there. Sin has no real power over you. Oh, it pretends it does, but it doesn't really because it was crucified with Christ. So, now a new life is possible. A new king is on the throne. You serve a different master, and you salute a different Lord. Who the son sets free is free indeed. You're a child of God, that's who you are.

Jesus, help us to live as though that is true because it is. And Lord, we bring our sin to you, and we lay it at the foot of your cross and we say, "Crucify it. Crucify it. We want it dead. We don't want it in our lives anymore." Lord, you set us free. You have broken the power of sin. You have broken the power of addiction. You have broken the power of shame. You have broken the power of guilt. You have set us free. Now, Holy Spirit, help us live in the freedom you died to give us. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Icebreaker Question:**

- If you could eliminate one regular daily chore from your life forever, which one would it be?

**Opening Question:**

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:**

- What do we learn about God (e.g. traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions - Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:**

- Sanctification is progress towards becoming who God designed us to be. Looking back can you see evidence of your own progress? Where in your life can you see that Jesus loved you just as you were but too much to let you stay there?
- How can you put sin to death in your life this week? How can you invest in the things that bring life?

**Closing Question and Application:**

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing Group Prayer:**

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.
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