Preaching Series: Eight Factors in Life Transformation
Sermon Title: Obeying God and Denying Self

Text: Romans 6:15-23

Introduction: **Nita Friedman** is not the type of person you would imagine to be involved in a police pursuit. Still, that's what happened on **U.S. highway 95** after the police chief of **Bonners Ferry, Idaho**, a man named **Mike Hutter**, tried to stop her for reckless driving. Hutter flipped on his lights and siren, but instead of pulling over, the 66-year-old woman pulled away. Police pursued the woman through two counties. The chase didn't end until after the State Police put a spike strip in the road in front of Friedman's car. Amazingly, after driving over it, the woman tried to keep going, but with three flat tires escape became impossible, and she surrendered. **What astounded law enforcement officers was that throughout the entire 15-mile chase, Friedman never went over the speed limit**. Once, she even stopped behind a vehicle that was making a left turn! While running from the law, Nita Friedman attempted to give the appearance that she was keeping it. **It's kind of like** the female pastor who faced expulsion from her church. She vowed she had not violated her denomination's trust, but acknowledged that she was living with her lesbian lover. **It's like** an acquaintance of mine who proudly proclaims that he observes the highest standards of integrity as a follower of Christ, yet candidly admits to filing false tax forms to the IRS. **It's like** when a believer prays for God's will to be done and then insists on having his own way. **It's like** concealing sin in one's hearts while offering worship. **Those of us who make such compromises might be tempted to argue some theology in response to them**. We know they are wrong, but what they hey! God has already cast our transgressions as far as the east is from the west (**Psalm 103:12**), and He promises to remember them no more against us (**Hebrews 10:17**,) so why not indulge a few compromises if they make life easier? After all, ***Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven***!

Context: In Romans chapter six, the Apostle Paul addresses this kind of mentality in the church by considering two questions and providing two answers. In **the first part** he takes on those who are asking, **"ARE WE TO CONTINUE IN SIN THAT GRACE MAY ABOUND?"** *To put it another way, "Is it God's plan for Christians to sin as much as we want so that He will receive greater glory each time He graciously forgives our offenses?"* Though some were advocating this position, Paul's answer is very clear…"***by no means***!" **He then details some important truths that argue against a believer's license to sin that include**, **(1)** our death to sin…it is inconsistent with our new nature in Christ; **(2)** our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection; **(3)** our commitment to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God; **(4)** and the offering of ourselves to God.

Now in the second half of this chapter, Paul addresses an additional question that's a little different from the first. **ARE WE TO SIN BECAUSE WE ARE NOT UNDER LAW BUT UNDER GRACE**? Notice, that while the first asked, "***Should a Christian go on sinning that grace may***

abound?" the second asks "***Can a Christian go on sinning because he's already been forgiven***?"

This morning we will seek to tackle the latter question as we continue in our series, "***Eight Factors in Life Transformation***." This is based on a study performed by **Lifeway Research** of 1,000 pastors and 4,000 churchgoers in North America regarding the attributes they believe convictional Christians share in common. So far we've covered, **(1)** ***Unashamed*** – which measures how open believers are in living out their Christian faith in the world and in the church. **(2)** ***Exercising Faith*** by trusting in God's perfect plan for your life while encountering trials and suffering. **(3)** ***Sharing Christ*** out of love for unbelievers; and **(4)** ***Serving the Lord*** by using our gifts and abilities for Kingdom purposes; **(5)** and ***Building*** (*meaningful*) ***Relationships*** in the church. **(6)** ***Bible Engagement***; **(7)** and ***Seeking God***, but today I invite you to join me as we consider the last one …. **(8)** ***Obeying God and Denying Self***. As I alluded to earlier, some people might wonder why obedience and self-denial are so important when we've already been forgiven of our sin by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Let's consider our passage from **Romans 6:15-23** and see what the Apostle Paul says in response to those who hold to this misguided assumption.

I. **Identifying the Issue of Obedience** (**See Romans 6:15-18**). Verse sixteen begins with a simple question: "***Don't you know***?" It is Paul's way of saying, "**I can't believe you don't know this**!" What is he talking about? There are two kingdoms in this world. Everyone is a part of one or the other and serves in the role of a slave. Why? **Because human beings are made to be mastered**. We need to serve someone or something. Now the thing about a slave is that he has no free time, but is subservient to his master twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Here Paul wants us to recognize that there are only two possible masters when it comes to the issue of spiritual slavery.
   A. ***Some are Slaves to Sin***. This is a reference to those who the Apostle John says in **1 John 2:15** are in the world and love the world. The world is under the dominion of Satan (**See 1 John 5:19**). Those who live in this kingdom are controlled by the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life (**1 John 2:16**). **The lusts of the flesh** describe the perversion of normal human desires so that a person becomes enslaved to the pursuit of evil. **The lusts of the eyes** are caused by a love of beauty, says **John Stott**, without a love of goodness resulting in covetousness (*i.e. a lack contentedness that creates a hunger for more*). **The pride of life** is human arrogance that defies God and seeks to rule in His place. These attributes are what define a slave to sin.
   B. ***Some are Slaves to Obedience***. These are people who have come under the authority of Jesus Christ and seek to obey Him as Lord of their lives. They have been purchased by Christ out of slavery to sin and into His kingdom. This is what we describe as a person's CONVERSION EXPERIENCE. **It is an act of self-surrender that leads to a radical obedience to the Lord**. All believers used to be slaves to sin, but have been set free to become slaves of righteousness. So Paul answers the question he stated in verse fifteen by arguing that **the deliberate choice of a believer to return to sin rather than obey Christ indicates a**

lack of understanding regarding what it means to follow Him. In the book of Numbers, we're told that after God delivered His people from slavery to Pharaoh, the Israelites expressed the desire to return to Egypt and work again as slaves. This they chose over obeying God and taking the land promised to their father, Abraham. Do you remember what God did in response to their defiance? Did He allow them to return? No. Instead, He took away the blessing from all of those who refused to walk in obedience and handed it to the ones who would forty years later. You see the Lord never blesses disobedience in His people. Why? **Because obedience is what identifies God's people as His own**. Either we're a slave to sin or a slave to obedience.

II. **Clarifying the Choice of Obedience** (**See Romans 6:19-23**).

A. ***What does the Choice of Sin Bring***?

1. Slavery to Sin (**See Romans 6:19**—*impurity and lawlessness*). When you yield yourself to sin, you become its slave. This is what Jesus says in **John 8:34**, "*I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin*." A slave is someone who is not able to do whatever he would like. He has to do what is commanded of him. A slave to sin is controlled by his fleshly desires. Have you ever noticed what happens when you tell a lie? You must tell another one to cover up the first, etc. I know of one man who, when he finally was caught in his lies, admitted to telling forty-two to cover the first one. **Those here who have suffered or are suffering from addictions know exactly what I'm talking about**. You have no sense of self-control, but are compelled to pursue the sin.
2. No Shame (**See Romans 6:19-20**--*ashamed*). Every one of us can look back on our lives at something we've done for which we're ashamed. Shame is the awareness of having done something bad that caused real damage to others. It is not the burden of those who are enslaved to sin. Paul says that it is Christians who look back at these kind of sinful behaviors and feel shame, not unbelievers. **Illustration:** Shame, as you know, is a painful emotion caused by a strong sense of guilt (**See 1 Corinthians 1:27**). I remember when my dad, all my siblings and I forgot my mother's birthday. My mother always made a big fuss about ours, including letting that special person pick what he or she wanted for dinner that day. However, one year on June 6th, we were so into ourselves that we did not remember it was mom's birthday. We discovered how bad we had messed up when, toward the end of the day, she walked out of her bedroom, and with tears in her eyes sang, "***Happy birthday to me***." No matter what we did, we knew we wouldn't be able to make up for our own self-centeredness and neglect of my mother. I'm sure you have your story of shame, too. Shame is a healthy emotion in that it is focused on feeling remorseful for past behaviors. It doesn't imply
3. Death (**See Romans 6:21-23**). Death here is not just physical. It is spiritual as well. It is a moral darkness that comes over the person who chooses to live as a slave to sin. As one preacher puts it, "***The daily payment for sin is daily death***." This death, this life of darkness, is noticeable and it makes it difficult to see the light.

B. ***What Does the Choice of Obedience Bring***?

1. Slavery to Righteousness. Just as we used to offer the parts of our body in slavery to sin, now we have a new way of living. We desire to please God.
2. Holiness. This is the result of a believer's good choices. He is no longer suffering under slavery to sin, but makes choices that clearly identify him as not of this world, but under the authority of Jesus Christ.
3. Eternal Life. Those who refuse to submit to Christ are in jeopardy of suffering eternal death, but those who come out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of God have life to the full and life eternal.

The Transformational Discipleship Study: In Lifeway's survey regarding the **eight factors they say are essential in life transformation,** thirty-three percent agree with the statement, "***A Christian must learn to deny himself/herself in order to serve Christ***." Interestingly, forty-five percent disagreed in spite of Jesus' clear instruction in **Matthew 16:24**. When it comes to confessing sin and seeking to reestablish fellowship with God on a daily basis, only sixteen percent said this was their practice. Nearly a quarter of the respondents twenty-three percent indicate that they rarely or never confess sin and seek forgiveness (**See 1 John 1:9; Proverbs 28:13**). Here's one more statistic for you. Just over half fifty-two percent say they try to avoid situations which might lead them to be tempted to think or do immoral things. **So what did they discover?** A surprisingly high number of professing Christians do not find obedience, confession and repentance to be all that important in their Christian lives. I can only speculate as to why: Perhaps they're thinking just like some of those in the church in Rome. ***Once you're in the kingdom, it doesn't really matter how you live***! The survey did reveal that **certain actions lead to higher scores** when it comes to obeying God and denying self. These include **(1)** attending a worship service; **(2)** choosing to obey God when it will likely cost you something; **(3)** being discipled in one's faith; **(4)** reading the Bible or a book about the Bible; and **(5)** praying daily, especially for unbelievers.

Applications:

1. ***If you're enslaved to sin stop making excuses***. You cannot blame your sin on your past or present circumstances. Sin is a willful decision on our part to live a self-centered rather than Christ-centered life. Take responsibility for yourself.
2. ***If you're enslaved to sin admit that to God and others.*** Confess that your life has become unmanageable and that are powerless to overcome this sin on your own. Be honest about the exact nature of your struggle. Don't hide anything.
3. ***If you're enslaved to sin turn to the Lord and receive His mercy and grace***. Through faith in Christ, you can be forgiven and you can receive the power to conquer any sin that holds you in slavery to it (**See Ephesians 3:20**). Part of this step involves reconciling with any that you have injured by your decision to live a self-centered life.
4. ***If you're enslaved to sin join with other believers who aspire to holiness***. By seeking God together through His word, prayer and true Christian fellowship, you can set a new course for your life that doesn't include this particular sin.

Conclusion: As we have observed, everyone is a slave either to sin or to obedience. May I give you a word of caution as we conclude? Just because you experience freedom from a sin that has enslaved you, doesn't guarantee that you will never succumb to it again. You must continue to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ daily and deny yourself if you want to maintain your freedom. In their **Pulitzer Prize-winning book**, ***Half the Sky***, **Nicholas Kristof** and his wife **Sheryl WuDunn** report on [the] worldwide slavery [in sex trafficking], telling stories of girls who had been kidnapped or taken from their families on a ruse and then sold as sex slaves. These girls, many under ten years of age, are drugged, beaten, raped, and forced to sell their bodies night after night. **Kristof reports that it is far more effective to crack down on the perpetrators than to try to rescue the victims**. That is because rescuing the girls from external slavery is the "***easy part***," but rescuing them from the beast within, such as the drug addictions that cause them to return or the shame they feel, is enormously challenging. They keep returning to their abusers. **Take the story of a girl named Momm, a Cambodian teen who had been enslaved for five years**. When she was rescued, Momm was on the edge of a breakdown—sobbing one moment, laughing hysterically the next. She seized the chance to escape, promising she'd never return. Kristof drove the girl back to her village. As soon as Momm saw her aunt, she screamed, and leapt out of the moving car. A moment later, it seemed as if everybody in the village was shrieking and running up to her. It was nearly ninety minutes before the shouting died away and the eyes dried, and then there was an impromptu feast. **Truly it was a great rescue—and there was singing and dancing and celebrating, but it didn't last long**. Early one morning not long after Momm left her father and her mother without a word and returned to her pimp in Poipet. Like many girls in sex slavery, she had been given methamphetamine to keep her compliant. The craving had overwhelmed her. No doubt she thought, *I just have to have this or I can't go on*. Perhaps she imagined she'd be able to escape after she got it, but even if she didn't, she had to have it. Freedom is not one-time decision, but an on-going choice. It's learning to deny unholy desires each and every time you're tempted. It's learning, as Paul says in **Romans 13:14**, to make no provision for the flesh and its lusts by clothing yourself with Christ. So, **if you're tired** of being enslaved to some kind of immoral behavior…**if you're tired** of confessing the same sin and asking for the Lord's forgiveness over and over again for the same sin, then let today be the day when you become a slave to righteousness, when you once again aspire to holiness and reap life, abundant and eternal.