

## Introduction

Back in 1967, Thomas Harris wrote a best selling book that is still widely read today. It's titled *I'm OK; You're OK* and is about a form of psychotherapy called transactional analysis. I'd like to make two observations in that regard. First, most of us aren't OK. And second, we can be through Jesus. Those are the observations and what I'm going to preach about today. Turn to Romans 6:1-7.

## I'm Not OK

I'd like to start by defining what it means to be OK. It means to function as we were made to, with love, peace, and joy being pervasive and habitual in our persons and lives. They're our defining qualities, the ones that dictate our thoughts, feelings, and acts. We consistently think, feel, and act pursuant to them. That's what it means to be OK.

In those terms, the vast majority of people aren't OK. Love, peace, and joy aren't their defining qualities. Listen to what Harvard psychotherapist Robert Coles writes about that: ***"I've seen plenty of arrogance and selfishness in the supposedly gentler professions – snobbishness or self-importance and meanness or hardness of spirit in doctors, in the clergy, in educators, in the so-called arts, and certainly, among us in my own branch of medicine, the psychoanalytic psychiatry. The labor leader, the political reformer, the egalitarian theorist, the medical healer, the minister or priest, the college teacher, even the moral philosopher or wise novelist are in the end all flawed human beings, not less in jeopardy as they go about their lives than those out there in the marketplace."*** Cole is right. The vast majority of people aren't OK.

The problem is they don't realize they aren't. I talked about denial a couple of weeks ago. Denial is a defense mechanism that we use to avoid painful truths about ourselves. Novelist Albert Camus said it well. We live in hiding from ourselves. We act in what he called "bad faith" so

that we don't have to face the truth about ourselves.

One of the ways that we act in bad faith is by generalizing. That is, in my view, the most commonly employed of all defense mechanisms. We avoid the truth about ourselves by looking only at the forest and not the trees that make us up. We look at ourselves in general not particular and are able to deny our weaknesses, flaws, and sins as a result.

There's an old saying that "the devil's in the details." That really is where we see the truth about ourselves – in the details. By details, I'm talking about the motions, the inclinations, the urges that are in us, the ones that condition how we act and respond to the people and events around us. The devil really is in those details.

My wife Jill and I, for instance, decided to go to the Target store after we ate dinner one night. It bothers me to go somewhere and leave the kitchen in disarray. I commented, therefore, that we should clean it first. But that doesn't bother her and she replied that she'd prefer to go, get back, change clothes and then clean it. So we did what she wanted.

I confess though. I didn't feel all that much love, peace, and joy that we did. What I did feel was a little bit annoyed and resentful instead. But the Holy Spirit convicted me about that and I was ashamed. What kind of a person am I anyway? I should be glad that my wife got her way instead of mad that I didn't get mine.

The moral of the story is that the devil really is in the details. Those details show us that most people aren't OK.

But don't despair. There's good news. Maybe we aren't OK but we can be and Paul tells us how in Romans 6:1-7.

### **What Makes Us Not OK**

The first thing he does here is to identify what makes us not OK. It's revealing. He uses the word "sin" a total of five times in verses 1, 2, 6, and 7. That's what makes us not OK.

In 1979, the celebrated Bishop, J. Fulton Sheen, was asked to address the annual National Prayer Breakfast in Washington DC. The

audience of course was comprised of national and international leaders, many from Washington DC itself. It was an elite crowd but that didn't bother Bishop Sheen. He stepped to the microphone and enthusiastically greeted them with these words, "*Welcome, fellow sinners.*" It was an uncomfortable moment. Everyone squirmed a bit. But it was true.

That's why people aren't OK. They're sinners. The Bible teaches us what sin is. It's an independent power that resides in us and disposes us to evil. It inclines us to think, feel, and act contrary to love, peace, and joy. We don't get what we want because someone else gets what he or she wants – and resent it. We love but aren't loved in return – and feel frustrated. We get criticized – and criticize right back. We see our competitor succeed – and envy him. We are accused – and angrily defend ourselves. We lose our job – and panic. We don't get the promotion we deserve – and bitterly complain. And on it goes.

Why do we think, feel, and act in those ways? It's because sin, as an independent power in us, inclines us to. That's why we aren't OK.

### **What Makes Us OK**

But thankfully we can be and Paul tells us how. It's through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Notice in verses 3, 4, and 5 that Paul mentions the death of Jesus. Did you ever wonder why the Bible and Christians make so much of that? Think about it. We normally focus on the lives not the deaths of great people. That's because their contributions lie in their lives not their deaths. But that isn't the case with Jesus. He is the only great figure in human history whose death contributed just as much as His life did. There's a reason for that. First, He died on the cross for our sins. Father God actually regarded Him as having committed them. Second, He paid the penalty for our sins that we should have paid. Father God also actually treated Him as having committed them. His wrath came against Him. It was a supernatural death in other words.

But Paul doesn't just mention the death of Jesus. He mentions His

resurrection as well in verses 4 and 5. On the third day after the Romans crucified and killed Him, the Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead. He was dead in His body on Friday. He was alive in it on Sunday. His bodily existence ended on Friday. It began again on Sunday.

The death and resurrection of Jesus together are the single greatest contribution to humanity in general and to you and me in particular that has ever been made. Why? It's because they're able to make us OK.

### **How It Makes Us OK**

Paul tells us how they do that in verse 4 and the words, "***newness of life.***" That's how they make us OK - by giving us newness of life.

Dallas Willard explains what "life" is in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. Life is the ability of something to reach "beyond" itself and use powers that aren't located in it. A seed, for instance, is alive. It has the ability to reach beyond itself to take in heat, energy, and moisture from the soil and eventually the sun itself.

Plants have life and so do animals. But the highest form of life on earth of course is human beings. Using our abilities to perceive, move, think, value, and decide, we can access and use the powers in the material world around us in astonishing ways. Thus, we fuse atoms together and meet our energy needs. Or we develop relationships with other people and meet our social needs. Accessing and using the powers of our material world enhances what we're capable of being and doing.

Now look at the word "newness." Jesus' death and resurrection make available to us a new life. This new life isn't about the material world around us. It's about the spiritual world around us. By spiritual world, I mean the presence and powers of the triune God.

Please know this. People apart from Jesus are dead to that world. An analogy helps explain it. Mickey Mantle can no longer hit home runs. Carl Sagan can no longer investigate the cosmos. Heath Ledger can no longer act. Just as they're dead to the material world, so those apart from Jesus are dead to the spiritual world. They cannot reach beyond

themselves and take in God's presence and powers.

But we were made to do so, which is why those who don't aren't OK. We've all seen plants that weren't getting enough food, light, or space. They were alive but in a deformed and weakened state. They weren't OK because they were deprived of something outside themselves they needed. It's the same way with people apart from Jesus. They aren't OK because they're deprived of something outside themselves that they need – the presence and powers of God.

But Jesus' death and resurrection give us newness of life, spiritual life. We're able to reach beyond ourselves and take in the presence and powers of God. Doing that in turn makes us OK. It gives us what we need to have pervasive and habitual love, peace, and joy.

A follower of Jesus was having problems with her husband's vindictive ex-wife, who did everything she could to disrupt their lives. But by drawing on God's presence and power, she was able to love and forgive her. ***"I have a calmness about things,"*** she said, ***"that I couldn't have drummed up myself."*** She was exactly right about that. She couldn't have drummed it up herself. Her calmness came from outside her not inside her as she reached into the spiritual world.

So that's what Jesus' death and resurrection make available to us – newness of life. They enable us to reach beyond ourselves and take God's presence and power into us, which makes us OK.

## **Getting OK**

So let's do just that. Let's reach beyond ourselves and take God's presence and power into us.

Notice that I said "beyond ourselves." I mention that because one of the most influential forces in both the culture and church today is the self-help movement. Self of course is the focus of the self-help movement. The idea is this. Be satisfied with yourself. Respect yourself. Believe in yourself. Love yourself. Think positive thoughts about yourself. You'll be OK if you do. But I've been there and done

that and can tell you, ***"No, you won't."*** Here's why. Self-help says that the cure for what ails you lies inside you. But as we've already seen today, it doesn't. The cure lies outside you in the presence and powers of God. So reach beyond yourself and take that. Doing so requires two things, each of which I want to briefly explain to you.

First, we must decide to follow Jesus - to arrange all of our affairs around being with Him and learning and doing what He says. Something supernatural happens when we do and Paul tells us what that is in verses 3-5. He talks about baptism here, which he explains is an "end times" event. Being dunked in the water and raised up from it symbolizes that we've been united with Jesus and the powers of His death and resurrection, that is, the powers of the age to come. Deciding to follow Jesus, in other words, makes His presence and powers available to us.

Which leads us to the second thing. We must undertake mental and bodily activities that actually take His presence and powers into us. I can tell you what those activities are: solitude, silence, fasting, study, worship, prayer, celebration, fellowship, and Bible memorization. Those who undertake those mental and bodily activities will take in the presence and powers of Jesus. Those who don't won't. It's as simple as that.

Listen to a testimony about fasting for instance. A follower of Jesus says: ***"I came back from the fast with a clearer sense of purpose and a renewed sense of power. The anger that I unleashed at my wife and children was less frequent and the materialism that was squeezing the life out of my spirituality had loosened its grip."*** That testimony is indicative of what happens when followers of Jesus undertake the mental and bodily activities I mentioned. The presence and powers of Jesus gradually transform them. They make them OK.

## **Conclusion**

I close this morning with a personal question that all of us need to ask and answer. Am I OK? Decide to follow Jesus. Undertake those activities. The answer will eventually be "yes" if you do!