

Romans 6:12-23

Headway

June 25, 2023

There is a progression that is a part of my life these days. It has to do with I-70, mainly heading west toward St. Louis and beyond. There is Dayton, Indianapolis and Terre Haute, Columbia and Kansas City, Missouri, and the long expanse of Kansas and eastern Colorado that leads to Denver. One destination leads to the next, and like a ship on the sea, one might call that drive, making headway.

One can turn around and reverse the order, it is quite reliable. I am sure most of you travel different roads that lead to different destinations and are just as reversible. Of course, I have left out some of the smaller towns like Richmond, Indiana and Effingham, Illinois, Abilene, Kansas and Limon, Colorado, but one can look at a map to learn all the possibilities.

What one *cannot do*, is head west on I-70 out of Columbus and get to New York without some very intentional re-routing. And if one wants to avoid St. Louis or KC or Abilene, the best advice would be to choose a different Interstate, I-70 connects to Dayton and Indianapolis and all the rest like it or not, it is part of the reality of our world these days.

Other aspects of our lives are not so certain. Unexpected and winding journeys occur. One never knows when a new friend will show up or a new opportunity, or a crisis of some kind. Life has that quality about it that makes it interesting and

sometimes confusing and sometimes devastating. Even so, there is still an, “as you sow, so shall you reap,” quality about life, that for all the deviations, remains true.

In reality, the Golden Rule, for instance, hints at this experience. “Do unto others as you would *have them do unto you*,” means that if one is unkind, or dishonest, or excessively selfish, the chances are good that one will experience the same from others. I don’t believe that karma is a real thing, it is just just a word we use for superstition, but I notice myself trying to sow goodwill, hoping to get it in return.

For instance, I like to watch golf on TV sometimes, mainly the LPGA, and I have a set of favorite players that I root for, hoping they will do well and win. But I have learned that it is a bad thing to root *against* anyone. I never want someone to miss a putt or hit a wayward tee shot so that one of my favorite players can win. It is bad luck to root *against* anyone. It will turn into someone rooting against me; bad karma.

Or simple things like opening doors for people, or when I’m driving letting others enter into traffic. I do that, not just to be nice, but to accumulate a reservoir of goodwill so others will open doors for me or let me into the flow of traffic. It brings good karma (or whatever it is), if it is not real, then I don’t worry about it because doing a good deed or a kindness never hurts.

And so we come to the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, in which Paul is trying to teach about the mystery of the human relation to God and telling about the progression of things. Let me say that the illustration Paul uses, that of slavery, is uncomfortable in our historical context because of its legacy, and our attempts to overcome the lingering ramifications associated with it.

Speaking of ourselves as slaves sounds pretentious, like we understand what it was like for those who actually suffered American chattel slavery. I don't think we understand that. It is not the main point here.

Paul offers a kind of road map; a spiritual road map. There are two progressions that lead to two destinations. Paul is convinced that because of the gift of God we each have a narrow band of freedom to operate, and can choose that to which we will submit. On the one hand there is obedience to righteousness. On the other hand there is disobedience.

There are, as it were, two ways, one that leads from obedience to holiness to eternal life; the other that leads from disobedience, to unrighteousness, and then to death.

Based upon a broader reading of scripture, it is possible to expand; to say that in life, every person is encountered by God. In that encounter there are two responses; the way of faith, which becomes humility and leads to repentance, obedience, the development

of high character; lives characterized by love and compassion; peace, hope, joy, and finally eternal life.

The other is the way of unbelief, which is proud in the arrogant sense and unrepentant, disobedient, lacking character, selfish and greedy, willing to disregard a neighbor's well-being, often characterized by anger, fear, and finally eternal death.

The message of the gospel is that in one way or another all of us have set off down the path of life but have headed in the wrong direction, stand in need of some serious re-routing, beyond our capability. But thanks be to God, we have been rescued, set free for the sake of service to God. This rescue is the miraculous gift of God, not a human accomplishment, to be accepted by faith . . . and the arrival at the destination is as sure as Denver. This is the great mystery of grace.

Along the way there are sometimes delays, sometimes detours, there is the putting off of the old life and its ways and the putting on of the new. Sometimes old attitudes and judgments, habits, and the like, are shed because they are not compatible with the new life of service to God.

At every step of the way, God accompanies us; protecting, teaching, guiding, strengthening, growing us up to salvation, so that in the end we become mature, ready for every good work.

The journey on I-70 is a metaphor of the journey of faith, which takes place wherever we are, even if we remain in the same geographical space all our lives. The destination is life. Think about what the concept of life means to you.

It is summer, warmer outside, green, full of color and light. Summer is wonderful illustration of what being alive is because everything is alive all round us. Keep in mind that the difference between winter and summer is nothing, set next to the reality toward which it points . . . The wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal life. The spiritual life can be thought of as making headway towards the destination, of eternal life.

It seems like there should be a doxology here, so let me borrow from the end of Paul's long discourse . . .

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?”

“Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?”

For from God, and through God, and for God, are all things.

To God be the glory forever! Amen.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)