

Romans 6:1-23

Sanctification- Our Response to the Universal Good News of the Gospel: *"Dying to Sin in Order to Become Slaves of Righteousness"*

Our text today marks a significant turning point in Paul's presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus far, as it concerns the gospel, Paul has given us two major building blocks.

The first building block is sin. In Romans 1-3, he gives us the bad news first. Before you can be saved you have to understand that you need saving and that is what the bad news is about. For all have sinned, both Jew and Gentile, and all are guilty and without excuse. No one can claim ignorance on the Day of Judgment because God has revealed himself to all, either through the witness of creation and the impression of himself upon our human conscience, or through the writings of Holy Scripture, and for many of us both. So we are all without excuse.

Sin, which simply means to miss the mark, alienates us from God and thus we stand in need of reconciliation and redemption because we are spiritually dead. This leads us to Paul's second building block which is justification. Meaning how is it that dead sinners be redeemed from their alienation can be reconciled back unto God? Paul's answer is Jesus Christ. Jesus does three things for sinners so that that they may be redeemed.

- First, he lives a sinless life not for himself but for sinners. God requires perfect righteousness but we are not righteous so He sends his Son into the world to live a righteous life for us on our behalf so that his righteousness can cover our unrighteousness.
- Second, because God is holy and sin must be given its due penalty, the Son dies in the place of sinners so that the wages for our sin can be paid, not by us or upon us, but by the Son and upon the Son. **"He who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God."** Christ bears for us the penalty of sin, we are declared innocent by God, and we leave God's courtroom as free and forgiven people.
- Third, God raises his Son Jesus from the dead, body and soul, forever conquering the power that sin and death has over us, so that we too might be raised from the dead, both body and soul, on the last day. It is a complete redemption.

This is what God has done for us in Christ in order to save us and what we must do in response to this saving grace is simply embrace it, sincerely trusting in Jesus Christ and what he has done for us so that we may be saved. Faith alone is the vehicle to receiving our redemption and when faith happens we are born again by the Spirit of God.

But these two building blocks lead to a potential problem and that leads us to the third building block that Paul lays, which we shall call sanctification. This third building block is given as a response to a potential problem that may arise in someone's mind when they hear Paul's teaching that we are saved and reconciled unto God by Christ alone through faith in him alone.

Paul, if it is as you say it is, that no man can be declared righteous before God by keeping the works of the law and that faith in Christ alone is all we need to do in order to be saved then I guess that means we can do what we want, right?

Wrong. Paul says in the text that no we do not go on sinning so that grace may abound (v. 1) and we do not sin simply because we are under grace. (v.15)

To the contrary, when we were baptized into Christ we were baptized into his death so that we may die to sin and be raised to a new kind of life just as Christ himself was raised from the dead (v.3-4). That is one way Paul answers this potential objection to the gospel he is presenting but the primary way he answers that objection is through the imagery of slavery.

Let's turn back to Romans 1 and look at the very first words from the pen of Paul. The apostle Paul began his letter to the Romans the same way he began many of his letters. He referred to himself as a slave of Jesus Christ.

That language, understandably speaking, is revolting to the American mind because of our past history with slavery; therefore the Greek word for slave is often rendered in English as "servant," especially when the word is referring to a follower of Jesus. Consequently, the beginning of Paul's letter to the Romans is translated as **"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God."**

Translating it as servant in the English works because a slave is a servant, but it is still a weak rendering of the original Greek because the word servant softens what we are getting into when we become a disciple of Jesus.

You may be asking what does this have to do with our text this morning. Verse six answers that question. In that verse Paul says, **"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, and that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."**

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness.? But thanks be to God that, though, you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (v.16-18)

But now you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap is holiness, and the result is eternal life. (v.22)

What Paul is saying there is that before we were justified, saved, reconciled, and redeemed unto God through faith in Christ (and what he did for us) we were all slaves to sin. Sin was our cruel taskmaster bringing death and alienation to our lives. That reality is what created our need for

salvation but when we came to faith in Christ and were saved we were set free from this bondage unto death in order to become slaves to a new master.

So this means that the freedom that Christ accomplished for his people in his life, death, and resurrection simply changed who we were enslaved to. As Bob Dylan once sang, "You gotta serve somebody." When we were outside of Christ we were enslaved to our sinful nature but when we came to faith in Christ we became his slave so that we might become slaves of righteousness and that is what truly sets us free.

Jesus said in John 8:34, **"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin but if the son sets you free you are free indeed."**

That is the difference between being a slave to another human being and being a slave to the eternal Son of God. The human taskmaster is a sinner and is often abusive and does not have the best interests of his slave in mind but Jesus is sinless and he is setting us free from power of sin so that we might be fully committed to his way of life so that we might live free that which kills us. When he becomes our Master and we his slave he does what is best for us by setting us free.

So what all of this means for us is that we been justified (made right with God through faith in Christ) in order to be sanctified (made holy); therefore thinking that we are free to do and live our lives as we please when we come to faith in Jesus is not an option. When we trust in him we are set free from our slavery to sin and self in order to become slaves of righteousness, so that we might live as a free and redeemed people. In short, Christ has saved us so that we might become his new creation. **"If any man is in Christ he is a new creation! Behold the old is gone and the new has come."** (II Cor. 5:17)

It cannot be overstated that becoming a slave of righteousness has nothing to do with our justification (we are saved solely on the grounds of what Christ has done for us as received by faith) but it does have everything to do with our sanctification. The inevitable fruit of a truly converted life in Christ is this desire to grow in holiness unto God and die unto sin. Now we shall see next week, that dying unto sin and becoming slaves to righteousness is not always easy and it is never perfect in this life, but it is a work that God quickens in our lives and inevitably must happen and continue to happen because again it is the inevitable fruit of someone who is in Christ. As Jesus said, "A good tree will produce good fruit." (Matt. 7:17).