

The True Gospel

Romans 6:1-4

October 30, 2022

When digging deep into Scripture, as we have been doing, it is beneficial to occasionally step back and understand where we are and how we got here. Today's passage deals with helping people see that presuming on God's grace by continuing to live in sin is inconsistent with being a Christian. The epistle to the Romans is all about the gospel and how it impacts the life of the person who believes in Christ. This letter was written to people who had heard of Paul but had not met him, so he introduces himself as "a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." (Romans 1:1) He then reveals the purpose for which he is writing to them. He desires most of all that the Romans understand the gospel, "For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Romans 1:17)

Gospel means good news, and Paul knows that before a person can understand the gospel as being good news for those in Christ, the person must first understand the bad news for those not in Christ. So, after revealing the good news in verse seventeen he reveals the bad news in the next verse: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." Paul declares that God has revealed Himself in creation (Romans 1:20) and in the conscience (Romans 2:15), so man has no excuse for rejecting the truth of the gospel. The Jews thought that their status of being Abraham's descendants guaranteed their acceptance by God, but in Romans 2:6,11 Paul makes it clear that God does not show partiality to Jews.

In Romans 3:21, Paul begins to introduce the concept of justification by faith. In Chapter Five he introduces imputed righteousness, where the earned righteousness of Christ is credited to the believer and the earned penalty for the disobedience of the believer is credited to Christ. Paul states this most distinctively in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Now in Chapters 6-8, he introduces sanctification, where the believer becomes more like Christ in the manner in which he lives. For the person who receives Christ, the gospel will have a real impact on his life. Anyone who claims to be a Christian must experience a radical change in their life!

I. Dead to Sin (vv. 1-2)

The theme of Chapter Six is a comparison of death and life.

- Born slaves (v. 1a)

Slaves are in bondage to their master because the master owns them. Everyone born through human means is born a slave to sin. He is a child of Adam, he possesses Adam's sin nature, and consequently, he is under the wrath of God. Since our inherent nature, or bent, is toward sin, Paul asks the rhetorical question, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" He answers this question himself with "By no means!" Starting in verse 12 he commands us to not let sin reign in our mortal bodies and obey its passion. We are not to present ourselves as instruments for unrighteousness, for then we remain in our bondage to sin. On the other hand, we are to present ourselves for instruments of righteousness, then sin will have no dominion over us. We are either slaves of sin, which leads to death, or slaves of obedience, which leads to righteousness. (Romans 6:16) 2 Peter 2:19 warns us, "For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved."

- Set free in Christ (v. 1a)

Before being born again, we were slaves to sin, but now we have been set free. We ask, what are we freed from? The answer is: freedom from the power of sin, freedom from the bondage of the world, and freedom from the devil. Though our translation uses the word, *servant*, in Romans 1:1, Paul in reality was a *slave* (*doulos*) of Christ, and this form of slavery leads to true freedom. Jesus said in John 8:34-36, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Prior to being born anew we had no power to resist sin. In John 3:3, Jesus told Nicodemus, this rabbi, teacher of Israel, that he had to be born again if he was to see the kingdom of God. This new birth is solely a free gift from God. Titus 3:5 explains this gift in the following way: "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." Now that we have the Holy Spirit living within us (John 14:17) we are free from bondage of sin, we are able to have victory over sin, and can have a true desire for holiness.

In Ephesians 2:2, Paul described the believer before being born again as "following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." These forces of darkness are highly organized demons and they are all around us. Ephesians 6:12 explains that "...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." We should not fear or despair; we know that God is sovereign over all things, including demons and the spiritual forces of darkness. Believers are set free from being enslaved to the world's system, its philosophies, ideas, idols, entertainment, etc. We are set free to worship and serve a loving master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 2:1, Paul characterizes us prior to being born again as “dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked”. Dead people have no power to wrestle against or resist anything but, if we are born again, we can stand firm in the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-18). Believers are engaged in spiritual warfare daily, moment by moment, but we are not alone; “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Romans 8:26) and “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John 2:1) Before being saved everyone is a captive and slave of the devil. However, we are released from the enslavement to Satan because Jesus Christ has come into the world, bringing light where there is darkness. John 1:9 declares that Jesus is the true light and John 1:5 assures us that the darkness cannot stand against the light of Christ. The Light shows us both the evil of the world around us and the narrow path that God lovingly establishes for us. The Light frees us from the bondage of the world, so that we are no longer forced to submit to the world’s system.

There is only light and darkness, there are no gray areas. We are either with the Lord or against the Lord; we are either serving God or serving Satan; we are either in the family of God or the family of Satan. Paul instructed Timothy regarding his demeanor as a servant of Jesus Christ: “And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26) Paul is saying that when God grants repentance to an unbeliever, leading to a knowledge of the truth, they escape the snare of the devil. God takes believers out of the family of Satan and adopts them into the family of God. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.” (John 8:44a) This is the harsh reality of all who are not in Christ. True freedom comes when “He [God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13-14)

This section of Scripture begins with Paul asking the question “? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” The idea of this is not only illogical, but it is also a theological impossibility. When God transfers a person from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Light, this person no longer seeks to please his former master; his new nature only wants to please his new Master. There is a dramatic change in the person who is truly converted, for when we see our sin-nature and its results, and we desire to live differently. Christ sets us free from being led by the flesh, the world, or the devil. God sets us apart and begins the process of sanctification.

The process of sanctification, or being set apart unto God, begins with an imputation of Christ’s righteousness, but continues as impartation. Initially the righteous nature of Christ is credited to

us, but increasingly righteousness becomes our own nature. We cannot continue in a lifestyle characterized by sin when we have the righteousness of God imparted to us. While there will be advances toward righteousness as well as backsliding, the true believer will be on a path that leads to being made more like Christ. Paul describes the overall process of this in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Sanctification cuts us away from the flesh, the world, and the devil and sets us apart unto God.

Our sanctification, with its past, present, and future aspects, helps us see the sin in our life, how to make holy choices, what tempts us to sin, what we need to flee from, etc. There are two phases to the process of sanctification: positional and progressive. Because we are positionally sanctified, we can approach God boldly; God declares us holy; we are called saints; we are joint heirs with Christ. All of this is past tense, and God does not change His mind. Our heart, mind, will and affections are set apart to God. When we go through periods of doubt and feel that God has forsaken us, we need to remind ourselves that God sees us as His beloved children, set apart and holy. Take heart! Jesus said that He would never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

The second phase, progressive sanctification, results as we work with (or cooperate with) God to actually become more holy. This process is aided as we are actively involved in fellowship with other believers, keeping in mind that iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17). We all need encouragement and accountability, and these factors help separate us from our sin and move us along the path of holiness. When we look back at our life, we should be able to see who we were and who we are now. We should see a dramatic difference in our thought pattern and in our actions, a dramatic difference in every aspect of our life in some way. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." This transformation by the Lord results in our becoming more like Christ and less like the world. There is no standing still in the process of sanctification; if there is no change, the person who claims to be a Christian is really a non-believer.

The Christian walk is messy and difficult. We are putting things off and putting other things on (Ephesians 4:22-24 & Colossians 3:9-10), and this is a ripping away. We see our flesh and we want it removed, but it is challenging. While justification and positional sanctification are the same for everyone, progressive sanctification is vastly different for everyone. Some Christians read the Bible, others don't, some study the Bible only for knowledge, others for application. If we know little of the truth of Scripture and how to apply it, we are not going to change very much. Some Christians initially grow rapidly in sanctification, then slow, others start slow then

grow rapidly. Many variables affect progressive sanctification, and the path is different for everyone, but the final state for all is glorification. In 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, Paul discusses the result of building our life on gold, silver, and precious stones (great progressive sanctification) versus building with wood, hay, and straw (little progressive sanctification). Both paths will result in glorification, but the better choice leads to greater peace and joy now and a greater crown to cast before the throne in heaven. (Revelation 4:10)

II. Baptized into Christ (v. 3)

In verse three, Paul chides his readers with, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” In essence he is asking, do you not remember what you were before you believed the gospel? and do you not understand what God has done for you now? have you forgotten your baptism? When you were baptized by immersion, you were baptized into Christ’s death. In God’s mind, when we were baptized, we died with Christ and our old nature is now dead.

III. Raised to New Life (v. 4)

When Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised to newness of life. Coming up out of the water symbolizes our spiritual resurrection. This being raised to newness of life is where the rubber meets the road. Understanding what we have been set free from; understanding what we are sanctified unto; it is illogical; it is irrational; it is a theological impossibility to remain unchanged from our old nature. Here is the point: Being baptized into Christ’s death and raised in His resurrection is not a metaphor – it is an actual reality in the life of a believer. 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us we are a new creation; Revelation 2:17 tells us we have a new name; Ezekiel 36:26 tells us that God gives us a new heart and a new spirit; Romans 14:17 tells us that we have new fruit, righteousness, peace, and joy; and John 14:27 tells us that we have the same peace that Jesus had when He walked on the earth. Because of the transformation that takes place in a believer, it is impossible that sin will dominate his life. Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Yes, believers will continue to sin, but our desire now is for holiness. When we recognize sin in our life, we are quick to confess and repent. Yet, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to

overcome sin. This is the life-long process of sanctification. Though we still sin, we are so bonded to Christ that He is our life. (Colossians 3:4) Paul said in Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." And Galatians 2:20, he said, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." In other words, Christ lives out His life in the believer, so, when God looks at us, He sees Christ!

Meditate on the following Scriptures:

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." (Romans 8:13)

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." (Colossians 3:1-11)

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:1-2)

Selah:

1. How much do you hate sin in your life? What are you doing about it?
2. What is your greatest weakness?
3. What sin(s) have you overcome in your life?
4. What does your baptism mean to you?