

XLII. Romans in Biblical Perspective

The Gospel of God

“Then and Now”

Romans 6:20–23

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As we start in our study, I want to read a couple of key verses of where we are in this study. This is the Word of God, which is inspired, infallible, inerrant and eternal. Romans 6:11-14, 20-23 says [11] *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus* (that was a command). [12] *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.* [13] *Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.* [14] **For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace** (this is a promise).

[20] *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.* [21] *But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.* [22] *But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.* [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Our family vacations were usually met with, “Okay, Daddy. What cemetery are we visiting this time? What battlefield are we going to walk through? What historical site are we going to get to?” my very patient children would ask. I can’t forget my patient wife. It has been very interesting to watch a double major math and chemistry (my wife) get married to a double major history and Bible (me). It's been an interesting 50 plus years.

Also, I have had the opportunity to take people on discipleship tours where we go to historical sites – we go to the site to get insight while you're on site, and then things begin to kind of come alive. I not only try to find the material that helps me understand the event in that location, but one of the things I love to find are what we call these then and now books. In other words, you go to those sites and you either have drawings or pictures of what it was like then and now you have a picture of what it looks like now – then and now. Maybe you've seen them. One of my favorite then and now books, is the one I have for Israel, where they show you what overlays the history of it now. I also have the then and now books on World War II places in Europe and the battlefields and on the Civil War. One is able to see the picture then and now.

Well, that's the Christian life – what we were then and what we are now with the anticipation of what we will be – then, now. That is exactly where Paul concludes Romans 6. I don't know of another section of Scripture more important to understand the Christian life than Romans 6, 7, and 8.

I also know of no chapter in the Bible more foundational and more essential to the Christian life than Romans 6 that talks about union with Christ, being united to Christ. We're in Christ and Christ is in us. Paul has given us his heart of the Gospel. He is eager and unashamed to preach it. It is the power of God to raise dead sinners.

It is the righteousness of God to clothe us and make us acceptable to God. It alone provides the solution to that which is our universal issue where every single human being born of Adam, and

that is sin. How can we be saved from our sins when we are dead in our sins, and rightly under the judgment of God, because of our sins?

Paul gives us Good News – the Gospel. There's the power of God that raises sinners from spiritual graveyards. There is the righteousness of God that not only declares we are innocent because Jesus paid for our sins, but we are accepted because His righteousness has been given to us and we are accepted in the Beloved. Paul, in this exposition of the Gospel, anticipates the two Gospel errors that have been present ever since the Gospel was first preached and recorded in the Scripture. One is the heresy of nomianism or legalism. That is, we are saved by our works and then there is the heresy of antinomianism or libertinism that says “Well, if I'm saved by grace, it really doesn't matter how I live, does it?” Paul has answered both of those very succinctly, very carefully, very profoundly and very pointedly. He says “are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” If God's grace is greater than our sin, do we pervert that into saying, ‘well, if God's grace is greater than our sin, then I'll just sin a lot to get a lot more grace. In fact, I'm doing God a favor with my sin.’

Yesterday I was doing some work on the Today in perspective podcast for next week. When I played football, I used to have what I used to call a Mike Simpson moment. Mike Simpson was the biggest, the meanest, most agile and most hostile member of the East Mecklenburg Eagles football team and he seemed to look for me. There have been on more than one occasion that I took a Mike Simpson moment which was a hit from him, and it would knock the breath out of my body. In fact, right now, I remember one in particular and I'm losing my breath thinking of it right now.

I had one of those Mike Simpson moments this week. I picked up a survey by a reputable company, and there were two things that stood out. It was a survey of evangelical pastors in which 40% said there is no such thing as inerrant, absolute truth. Is there any wonder why Christians can't think and why we do not have Christian world and life views? Then unsurprisingly over 40% attributed salvation to living a good life – salvation by works.

So, the next time you think Paul doesn't need to take the time to warn us against nomianism – works salvation – just remember that survey. We constantly want to pollute the gospel by putting our hands on it. I am not saying Christians don't work. No, we work and we were saved to do good works, but our good works don't save us.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* [9] *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Can you get any plainer? Now we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, but we don't bring our works to the cross or in place of the cross, we bring our works because of the cross to Him who went to it to save us from our works, which are sin, with His works, which is perfect righteousness.

The other error we have is antinomianism or libertinism – if God's grace is greater than my sin, I'll just get a lot of sin and God will have to give me a lot of grace. No, He doesn't have to give me a grace at all. That's why it's called grace. It's unmerited favor. It's a sovereign act of God.

Sanctification is a work of God's free grace. The other day I was in a discussion, in a forum on this, when the guy says, “why did our Westminster fathers repeat themselves so unnecessarily?” You can almost hear the sarcasm as we now look back at those fathers with the sense that we're somehow smarter.

Free grace – isn't grace in and of itself, free, unmerited.

Why do you have to put the word free there? It's called repetition and redundancy. The reason

they put free there was because we keep trying to make grace about us instead of about God's glory. So, they're finding ways with adverbs and adjectives to make sure you understand the noun. It's God's free grace. It's not merited. With what we do we don't allow God to save us, add to God's salvation, or enable God to save us. When He saves us, we then care about what we do not because what we do saves us, but because we love the Savior who saved us with what He did and that brings us to this particular text as Paul dismantles two heresies.

In the meantime, he gives us the template of Gospel life and Gospel discipleship – know, be, do. Paul intentionally does not give us any Gospel commands until Romans 6, why? It is because he's laying the foundation for the life we live based upon the salvation we have through the life that Jesus lived and the death He died.

He wants us to know who we are in Christ. We're in Christ and when Christ died to sin, we died to sin, and when Christ rose to God, we rose to God. When Christ died for our sins, we died with Him to sins. When Christ rose, we rose with Him in order to live a life that bears worship to God, and that bears a witness to the grace of God. He wants us to understand and know.

When Paul uses these rhetorical questions to dismantle these gospel heresies, he ends by saying 'Do you not know?' Well, here's the answer. No, Paul, they don't know, because if they did know, they wouldn't be asking that question. That's why discipleship begins with teaching. That's why Paul will then say in Romans 6, you have become formed by that standard of teaching. You've been molded by God's Word. You've been put into the mold and pressed into the mold of God's Word so that you will not be pressed into the mold of the world. This is so heavy on my heart I can hardly stand it. You will never be able to resist the mold of the world, until you know God's mold for you revealed in His Word. It's being molded by the world that you're able to say 'no' to the mold that the world is pressing upon you through the entertainment world, through journalism, through government, through educational systems. It's all around you incessantly, every single day.

This is why Paul will say in Romans 12:2, [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.* Most of us don't want to take the time to renew our minds. I had someone ask me this week, 'why do we deal with doctrine? Can't I just have some practical steps?' Most of us think the Christian life is changing the techniques of life. God changes your heart with His Word and that's why the life has changed. We have to be pressed into the mold of God's Word. No. You have to know and then when you know, you know who you are, now you're ready to do for until then we think we are what we are by what we do instead of we do what we do because of who we are in Him.

When His saving grace gets a hold of us, here's what happens. We are set free, but we aren't set free to go free, we are set free to go to Jesus and follow Him who sets us free. The Bible tells us we leave the slavery to sin and its death to lovingly become the servants and slaves of Christ for life. because we live in Him. Let's look how Paul brings us to a summation in Romans 6:20. The reason he starts with the word 'for' is it has to do with the previous verses I read in the beginning of this study and so what we are about to look at is a distillation, a summation of what he's been saying previously.

Romans 6:20-21 says [20] *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.* [21] *But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.*

I was an unbeliever but praise God, I was taken to church and heard the gospel so the restraining hands of God's grace that eventually became the redeeming work of God's grace in

my life was at work in my life, but when I would wake up, I didn't wonder how I could seek righteousness as an offering of praise to God. Then pre conversion I was free regarding righteousness. It never crossed my mind not even once how I could change my life, my decisions, and do things differently for the One who made a difference in saving me. I never thought about that because I had another thought – I was enslaved to sin and therefore sin, self-absorption, self-promotion, self-aggrandizement, self-reliance, and self-fixation began to rule and reign which is what governed the life every day.

Then Paul asks a question in the next verse (Romans 6:21). I love the way Paul uses questions. Notice, prior to conversion we work hard at sinning without shame, shamelessly sinning against God and what fruit did we get from it?

It may be a momentary exhilaration in the sin. Here is what else comes with it; despair. Last week, when my wife and I were on vacation one evening we sat on a porch and at this bed and breakfast, and there was a couple that sat behind us. For an hour and a half, this guy argued that money buys happiness. I remember his famous line that pierced through the evening, disturbing my tranquility. His line was ‘Have you seen anybody frowning, driving a Lamborghini?’ My thought was “I will take you to the upper echelons of celebrities, power and influence. Then go see the price tag on how many therapists they hire, the toys that they have to buy, trying to distract themselves from meaninglessness.”

What did you derive from sin? It may be a momentary exhilaration. No, what we derive is what Ecclesiastes tells us we're going to derive and that is it's all emptiness, the blowing of wind, and vanity. What would we sell our soul for? We think we may gain the world, but actually what we gain is emptiness. So in our slavery to sin, what was the payback for our sin at those times of which we're now ashamed? The end of those things is death; the death of dreams. Again, as my wife and I were recently away just doing some processing and everything, I looked at my own life and I looked at those years of rebellion, the death of an athletic career, the death of academics, the death of relationships, the death of dreams, the death of despair, all of that.

That's what sin gave me - death. I try to remind myself of that as a believer every time the temptation of the world comes to awaken the old man within me – “Harry, that choice brings death.” It can bring the death of a ministry, the death of a relationship, the death of a marriage, the death of a family. Sin brings death and in our enslavement to it, we weren't thinking about righteousness, we were thinking about sin.

In other words, Paul is saying in pre conversion there were tracks in our life that were the evidence that we were dead in our sins and those tracks are sin, despair, death and discouragement. The best we can hope for is a momentary exhilaration or distraction from our meaninglessness with the toys we amass and the places we go, but no vacation ever does it. We need another one. We need a bigger one. No house ever does it. We need another one. We need a bigger one. No toy ever does it. We need another one. We need a bigger one. The world keeps selling it and we keep buying it when we're enslaved and dead in our sins. But when we are saved, there are new tracks that are laid down. Those tracks don't save us. Those tracks are the evidence of salvation.

Romans 6:22 says [22] *But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.* In other words, we lived Exodus 21. Exodus 21 says that when a man is in indentured servitude at the end of that servitude, the master who sets him free that there are those who are so amazed at the kindness, the grace, the integrity and the benevolence of the master, that when they set them free, they don't walk away with that freedom.

They go to a door post where a nail is driven through their ear and a ring is placed, and they become voluntarily, relationally the servants of that master who set them free. That's the picture of what happens to every authentic Christian. They're not set free to be what they want to be. They're set free to be what Christ calls them to be, and they're set free to rise up and follow Thee. When we are set free by Him became slaves to Him.

Christ does not put the ring in our nose. He puts the ring in our ear because we hear Him from His Word and follow Him who speaks to our hearts. That's what He has called us to and that's what we are now in Christ.

Just as there are tracts of death and sin in our lives prior to our conversion, there are now tracts post conversion as we see in Romans 6:22. This verse uses the word sanctification and that means we want to know Bible terms and Bible concepts so that we can **know** who we are and can BE (Know-Be-Do). That then gives us a foundation for what we **do**. The Gospel is the foundation, the formation and the motivation of the Christian life. So now we're learning something about salvation by grace, alone through faith, alone in Christ alone.

Here's what we're learning. The Gospel is the power of God, and the righteousness of God. When God comes into our life to save us, to set us free, and to deliver us, He first delivers us from the power of sin. That's why we love the Gospel for it's the power of God. It's greater than the power of sin in my life. I'm dead in my sin. Can somebody bring me from the spiritual boneyard to life? Praise God. The answer is that Christ, by the power of God, through the Spirit of God and the Word of God causes us to be born again and that is regeneration. The new birth is not the reward for believing in Jesus. The new birth is the act of God's grace that sets us free so we can and will believe in Jesus. That's what he told Nicodemus in John 3. You can't see or enter the Kingdom of God until you are born again.

As I come to Jesus and are set free, now, I not only have the power of God but I have the righteousness of God where my sins are gone and I have His righteousness and I'm now innocent which is justification. So, I've been set free from the power of sin in regeneration. I've been set free from the penalty of sin in justification, why? To set me on the road of sanctification which is eradicating the practices of sin in my life and where does that end? In glorification where He removes even the presence of sin for all eternity and we're with Him. That's where we are now. Every one of you reading this who know Jesus as Lord and Savior by grace, have a new heart – you have been born again. You have a new record – you've been justified. You have a new family for you have been adopted into the family of God, and you are now growing in grace, sanctification, putting off the old man, putting on the new man imperfectly but intentionally through seasons of up and seasons of down. But overall, the trajectory is Him perfecting us as we grow, not for grace, but in the grace and knowledge of Christ until we get to be with Him eternally – glorification and there will be no sin.

There are two things I won't do in heaven, one of which I want to do less now, and one of which I'm going to do more now. In heaven, I won't sin and I want to do less now on the way. In heaven, I can't lead anybody to Jesus, therefore, I want to do more evangelism now on the way there, but He is doing this work in you. This is the Gospel of grace and now the fruit of the Gospel of grace is sanctification where you are set apart to Christ, that you belong to Him and the end is glorification, eternal life.

Then Paul gives us a summation in Romans 6:23 which says [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* This is verse we use to teach bridge to life and how to evangelize. I think this verse is a foundation stone and a capstone.

The wages of sin is death. What does sin earn for us in life? Death, despair, chaos, destruction and now physical death, spiritual death, and then eternal death under the judgment of God then comes in this verse, the greatest word in the Bible... 'but' the free gift of God – life, eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Savior, Lord and He is our Master. He set us free to follow Him from now into all of eternity.

Here's your take away. The distinction between authentic Christianity and synthetic Christianity (man's fabricated Christianity) is that Christians have not simply learned to do different things. There is a place for sermons on best practices consistent with Christian doctrine, but what you need is 16 ounces to the pound of sound doctrine to have a sound life. Then you don't ask questions like 'Shall we sin that grace might abound?'

We need to know the Word of God. The Christian life is not like simply learning to do different things, but that God's grace has made us different. Different things are what we do because God has made us different. Our life that has different things comes from our heart and a highway to our heart is through the mind where God's grace by His Spirit and His Word come through the mind to the heart and is displayed in the life.

God's grace makes a difference. God's grace is the difference. That's the difference. Not that we've got a better technique for life, in fact, our technique makes no sense. Some of you who love Jesus said, "I'm not going to rob God today in worship. I'm going to bring His tithe" and you brought His tithe as an act of worship today, and then you tell the world, "Hey, this is great.

Did you know my 90% is greater than 100%?" And they think that is stupid but you just trust the Lord because He has made a difference. When we when we say 'no' to sin, the world thinks that's stupid. When we pray that our children will love Jesus and follow Him even if it takes them to mission fields and not to a posh Penthouse executive suite, the world thinks that's crazy. We do different things because we think different things and it's because God's grace has made a difference and that's what makes us different.

It's not just we memorize different techniques. It is God's grace that has made the difference and now you have been set free. Not yet has the perfect come. Satan is defeated but he's not destroyed. The Kingdom of God is here, but not in its consummation. The kingdom of darkness is defeated, but it has not yet been destroyed. Then I was under sin, now we are under grace and the dominion of sin has been broken. We're not under law. We're under grace. God's grace makes a difference in us on our heart.

The Gospel message and its component in the Bible is all you need to know to get converted., but to be an authentic Christian, you need the whole Bible. What did Jesus say? Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20. [19] *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the*

age.” We are to make disciples, teaching them to observe all that He has commanded. You need the whole Bible to be a whole Christian.

We need to know so that we can be what God's grace has made us to be.

Then we do what we do, because God's grace has made the difference, has made us different and it is God's grace that is accomplishing it. Then we won't ask questions like 'Shall we sin that grace might abound?' We ask questions like this; 'How can it be that now my God would die for me?' Then what people will see in the company of God's people is a different people.

Titus 2:11-14 says [11] For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.

We don't do these works to be saved but for our Savior. He purifies for Himself a peculiar people, a different people for His own glory and that becomes their joy. The authentic life of a Christian is not one that has experienced the love of Christ to go do what I want to, but the love of Christ that sends me to do what Christ calls me to do., because that's what I want to do. I do it because I love Him who first loved me. Those words would have never come out of my life except for God's grace. God's grace makes the difference.

So, I leave you with this question. Do you want this Savior who makes a difference? I am not offering you in Christianity a coaching technique of five easy steps to a different life.

I offer you Jesus and He makes a difference. When God's grace makes a difference, it makes it different people. The result is our sanctification. The end is eternal life. I invite you to that company of people. Please join me in prayer that the world might see us as different people – happy and holy for Christ, not angry, not worldly, not self-absorbed., but they might see a happy company of those who love to pursue holiness, not for salvation, but for their Savior. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Holy Spirit, I acknowledge all of the inadequacies that I bring to this task, but I thank You that it is not the preacher but it is You.

So, Jesus, please speak and give ears to our hearts that we might hear You and follow You and the glory of the God of grace might become the heartbeat of our life. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.