

Sunday, May 29, 2022 | Church Words

Romans 6:15-23 | "Sanctification"

A couple weeks ago, we started a new series called "Church Words." Often, people who have been in church awhile use language that is unfamiliar to new believers and unbelievers (i.e., "gospel," "justification," "propitiation," etc.). And sometimes, even the Christians who use those words don't fully comprehend their significance. In this series, we will use the book of Romans to help us better understand some commonly used "church words" and their application to believers.

In week 1, the first church word we defined was "gospel." The Gospel is not only good news that can save you; it is also good news that will keep you. It is good news to the sinner because it tells them that they can be saved despite their actions. But it is also good news to the saint because it tells them that they are still saved regardless of what's occurring around them.

In week 2, we define two church words: "justification" and "propitiation." We were in Romans 3:21-26, which is the very heart of the book of Romans. In this passage, Paul does not simply tell you the point of the Gospel; he explains the very mechanism (i.e., how it works) of the Gospel. And the question he sought to answer there was not, "How could God punish humanity?" Instead, the real question he sought to answer for his audience was, "How could God save humanity?" And the answer to that question is all too surprising because Paul showed that the unjust are made just by God's proclamation and because Christ paid for our sins on the cross. What a remarkable thing for God to pay the price of his own character and freely offer such a gift as that to us.

In week 3, Pastor Bob explained the concept of reconciliation. Though we were God's enemies, we became reconciled to God, becoming the children of God through Jesus Christ. As such, we've also been given the ministry of reconciliation, whereby we try to tell others about the atoning work of the Lord.

Last week, we unpacked the church word "baptism." Paul explains that the Christian, more than anyone else, not only has every reason to resist sin (think of who had to die for our sin), but they are also the only people on the planet who can do so. Using the mode of Baptism, Paul shows that, spiritually speaking, we are no longer slaves to sin in the same way that a person who's been resurrected from the dead is no longer bound to the grave. In Jesus, we've been liberated and set free from the bondage of sin and death. Thus, those who've been baptized into Christ have been given the ability to resist evil because they've become dead to sin.

Before we begin, I want you all to take the *Play-Doh* and make something and then pass it to your neighbor. We'll come back to it at the end.

Today, we'll be looking at "sanctification." As you know, Paul began chapter 6 by asking the rhetorical question, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" Likewise, Paul asks another rhetorical question in his pursuit of correcting any misunderstandings that might've arisen from his teaching. And so, Paul asked, "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" This question was also in response to verse 14 where Paul said that "sin will have no dominion over [us], since [we] are not under the law but under grace." And while that is a truth worth celebrating—it lays the very foundation for the Christian walk—if we're not careful, ***liberty in Christ*** can be twisted into a ***license to sin***. Thus, rather than encouraging us to follow God, knowing we are not under the law but under grace may, ironically, might encourage us to disobey. The level to which our flesh can twist the good news is remarkable.

In essence, Paul wanted to give voice to the false conclusion that because the law has been satisfied by Jesus on the cross and because his righteousness has been attributed to us, what's the point of obeying God at all? Readers of Romans might've been tempted to think something like this: "Since salvation is by faith and not through works of the law, why work as if we were still under the ethical obligations of the law? Jesus did it all for us, right? If we're already saved despite what we've done, why resist the urge to sin? We're still going to heaven anyway." Even though Paul's question is rhetorical and thus does not need an answer, this conclusion is such a perversion of the Gospel that Paul cannot help but say: "Absolutely not!" And what's the reasoning behind such a response? In a word, sanctification.

READ: Romans 6:15-23 (ESV)

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

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.

Before explaining what sanctification is, Paul uses the metaphor of enslavement to demonstrate that all of us obey one of two masters:

- i. Obedience to sin's power makes us slaves to unrighteousness leading to lawlessness and eternal death.

READ: Romans 6:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

During this time, slavery was an option for those who might've been in financial difficulties.¹ And while it wasn't common, slaves could serve more than one master. Inevitably, this led to conflict with the slave caught in the middle as each master vied for his/her obedience. It was a classic case of a conflict of interests. Presumably, Jesus might've been playing off this faulty arrangement when he said in Matt. 6:24, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." However, the principle that both Jesus and Paul raise here is that there is no such thing as human autonomy.²

There has *never* been a human decision made within a perfect vacuum. *Everyone everywhere* is being influenced by *something* or *someone*. There are always external forces or circumstances that influence our decisions. This is not to say we do not have a free will. We do. We freely choose our own paths. But what do not choose is the consequences of those choices. And the results of those choices prove which of those two masters we are obeying; either sin leading to lawlessness and eventually death, or God leading to sanctification and ultimately eternal life. We'll explain the latter of those two options in point two.

¹ Peterson, David G., *Romans*, The Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary, (Bellingham, WA; Lexham Press, 2020), p. 274.

² Moo, Douglas, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), p. 397.

Now, let me be perfectly clear. Paul is not, nor am I, preaching you must be leading a sinless life in order to know that you're saved. Sadly, Christians still sin. The contrast is between **occasional** relapses of judgment—something the saved experience from time to time, even Paul (cf. Rom. 7:15-20)—and **perpetual** relapses of judgment—something only the unsaved experience. If you make it your habit to sin repeatedly—i.e., habitually, continually, nonstop, etc.—without pause or even a bruised conscience, then, rest assured, you are not the servant of God but a slave to sin. There is no middle ground.

This is why Paul explained...

READ: Romans 6:20-21

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.

Anytime a saved person either looks back on their past life or commits a sin, the Spirit makes them feel ashamed for what they've done. Contrary to popular belief, shame is a good thing if it leads one to repentance. We should feel bad when we disobey. Quite literally, the conscience of a Christian cannot bear the thought of their mistake, so they immediately turn to God, acknowledging their sin, asking forgiveness, and, hopefully, learning from their mistake.

But what about the non-Christian? What do they feel? Not shame, but pride (cf. Rom. 1:32). Many in this world mock our faith thinking themselves genuinely free. As Karl Marx famously asserted, "Religion is the opium of the people." Unbelievers would characterize us as addicts who, week in and week out, come to worship just to get our "fix." And in their disdain for God and his teachings, they live a life of excess and self-centeredness. They take the gifts, time, and resources that have been given to them and waste them away in pursuit of their own happiness.

What unbelievers do not realize is that in rejecting God's rule over their life, they have invited another ruler to rule over them: sin. As Schreiner put it, "Those who think that freedom is attained by jettisoning obedience to God opt for sin as their lord."³ And sin is a far more cruel and far more vicious taskmaster than God. A life of "liberty" full of sins and bound by the shackles of wickedness is free of only one thing: Jesus Christ. Thus, it is true that those who reject the Gospel are free to do as they please. But what awaits them at the end of such life is not life but death. And they will only have themselves to blame at that moment. They're the

³ Schreiner, Thomas R., *Romans*, Second Edition, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2018), p. 331.

ones who've worked towards this end. And they've earned their reward (i.e., "For the wages of sin is death...).

The more we obey sin's power, the more our lives are decayed, whose end is eternal death.

- ii. Obedience to God's power makes us servants to righteousness, leading to sanctification and eternal life.

READ: Romans 6:17-19 (ESV)

¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

I love how Paul assumes that his audience has already "become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which [they] were committed." Remember, the book of Romans was not written to unbelievers but to believers. And, notice that they weren't given the "standard of teaching" (though that's true); instead, they were given over ("committed") to that "standard of teaching." As the clay is given over to the potter and transformed into something useful, we are given over to the teaching of God and transformed into something holy.

But the Christian life is only truly, analogous to itself. Any time we try to liken the Christian walk to something else, some facet of the Christian walk is lost. This is what Paul means when he says in verse 19, "I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations." Using the enslavement metaphor to describe Christian service is less than ideal. To be sure, he's not apologizing for using it, nor was Paul wrong in using it. But sometimes, we must use illustrations that help us understand one specific aspect of the Christian walk even though we know there is no perfect explanation of the Christian walk other than a Christian's walk.

So, what aspect of slavery was Paul trying to illustrate? Obedience. Paul wanted to show that, in the same way that those enslaved to sin have to be obedient to their master, those who are "enslaved" by God are obedient to their master. The Christian is compelled by the teachings of God and the Spirit who lives within us to live a life characterized by righteousness, not unrighteousness. Or, as Paul put it, "just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."

Presenting yourself as a slave to impurity makes one "unsanctified" or what Paul calls "lawlessness." To be in a state of lawlessness is to live by no law at all. And lawlessness leads only to one thing, more lawlessness. In contrast, those who present themselves as slaves to righteousness are not led to lawlessness but "sanctification," which is the process through which we bring our lives in alignment with God's standards for living.

The more we obey God's power, the more our lives are renewed, whose end is eternal life.

So, what's the takeaway?

READ: Romans 6:22-23 (ESV)

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.

Sanctification is the molding process by which the teachings of God transform slaves of sin into servants of God through the practice of obedience.

EXAMPLE: Take Play-Doh you were given earlier and make it into something new.

Origen Adamantius, a third-century pastor and apologist, in his commentary on the book of Romans, describes our transformation from slaves of sin to servants of God like this:

"Once your feet ran to the temples of demon; now they run to the church of God. Once they ran to spill blood; now they run to set it free. Once your hands were stretched out to steal what belonged to others; now they are stretched out for you to be generous with what is your own. Once your eyes looked at women or at something which was not yours with lust in them; but now they look at the poor, the weak and the helpless with pity in them. Your ears used to delight in hearing empty talk or in attacking good people; now they have turned to hearing the Word of God, to the exposition of the law and to the learning of the knowledge of wisdom. Your tongue, which was accustomed to bad language, cursing and swearing has now turned to praising the Lord at all times; it produces healthy and honest speech, in order to give grace to the hearers and speak the truth to its neighbor."⁴

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Bray, Gerald, *Romans*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament, Volume 6, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 164.

Video Description

Church Words | Week 5 | "Sanctification"

TEXT: Romans 6:15-23

In our passage today, Paul is disputing four common misconceptions that might've arisen from his teaching (cf. 6:1, 15; 7:7, 13). We tackled the first last week, and now we'll explore the second. And Paul expresses this next misunderstanding by asking, "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Unsurprisingly, the answer to this rhetorical question is identical to the first: "Absolutely not!" Why? In a word, sanctification. After all, **sanctification is the molding process by which the teachings of God transform slaves of sin into servants of God through the practice of obedience.**

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: