

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – March 13, 2015

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ

⁶ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

The Believer under Grace and the Problem of Habitual Sin

- 1) Last week as we entered Chapter six, we learn another great truth from Paul. He declares that God, through the death of Jesus, not only died *for* us, but we also died *with* Him.
- 2) That is a great truth. When God says He set us free from the life of Adam and linked us to the life of Christ, He really did just that!
 - a) Though for quite a long time after accepting Jesus as Lord our feelings will tell us differently, God wants us to understand that we have the power to live the life of Christ here and now.
 - b) Sometimes it takes us a long time to believe this because we don't necessarily *feel* like we have that power. The truth is stronger than our feelings. More and more we enter into the realization of this tremendous thing---that we can be as *selfless* in Christ as easily as we were *selfish* in Adam.
- 3) Conversion is about having our eyes opened to the Gospel truth. That is not what Paul is speaking about here. Paul is speaking about "*regeneration*" about receiving a *new life* as a gift from God.

Outline of Romans

1. **Paul's credentials**
(1:1-1:18)
2. **Justification by Faith (1:18-11:36)**
 - a. **Sin – the "need" for Salvation**
 - 1) of Gentiles (1:18-2:16)
 - 2) of Jews (2:17-3:8)
 - 3) universal need for Salvation (3:9-20)
 - b. **Justification by Faith - the "Provision" made for Salvation**
 - 1) God's Righteousness through Faith (3:21-31)
 - 2) Abraham as an Example (4:1-25)
 - c. **Freedom - the "Result" of Salvation**
 - 1) Freedom from Wrath (5:1-21)
 - 2) Freedom from Sin (6:1-23)
 - 3) Freedom from The Law (7:1-25)
 - 4) Freedom from Death (8:1-39)
 - d. **Jew and Gentile - The "Scope" of Salvation**
 - 1) God chooses to save Believers (9:1-33)
 - 2) Israel trusted their own Righteousness (10:1-21)
 - 3) Jew and Gentile can have Salvation through Faith (11:1-36)
3. **The Transformed Life (12:1-15:13)**
 - a. In relation to overall conduct (12:1-21)
 - b. In relation to civil authority (13:1-7)
 - c. In relation to fellow man (13:8-14)
 - d. In relation to weak brethren in the Body of Christ (14:1-15:13)
4. **Concluding remarks, instructions and benediction (15:14-16:27)**

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- a) This is not a self-improvement program. All our vows and promises and resolutions will end in failure because none of us can enter into this new life in Christ on the basis of our self-determination.
 - b) It is pure gift. We receive it from God. God breaths this new life – a new attitude, a new way of seeing the world, a changed relationship to the old self, etc., into us. We must be *open to receive it!*
 - c) Jesus says we must be “born again” and this comes only as a gift of grace.
- 4) We enter it by surrender. Day by day, as we come into situations of stress and pressure and temptation in our circumstances, we are invited to surrender ourselves to God: *“Lord, I surrender myself to You this day. I invite You to sit on the throne of my life. Shape my desires and my thoughts according to Your will. Give me strength to let go and step down to make room for You.”*

How to Walk in This Freedom

- 1) First, Paul tells us not to offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to Him as an instrument of righteousness.
 - a) Our members are the parts of our body - our ears, lips, eyes, hands, mind, and so forth. The idea is very practical:
 - i) "You have eyes. Do not put them in the service of sin."
 - ii) "You have ears. Do not put them in the service of sin."
 - iii) "You have thoughts. Do not put them in the service of sin."
 - b) “Instruments” could be better-translated as “weapons.” The parts of our body are weapons in the battle for right living. When the parts of our body are given over to righteousness, they are weapons for good. When they are given over to sin, they are weapons for evil.
- 2) Second, Paul instructs us to enlist our members (eyes, ears, lips, hands, mind, so forth) in the service of righteousness.
 - a) As in any warfare, the side with superior weapons usually wins. (The notion of the one with superior production also holds, since God's love is inexhaustible and renews itself daily in the life of the believer.)
- 3) But what about when the appetite is strong and we are seemingly weak before it?
 - i) Reginald (see sidebar previous page) had the power to leave his prison cell anytime he wanted to by simply gaining mastery over his appetite – the one thing he refused to do.

Prisoner of our Appetites

Belgium 1361. Two brothers, Edward and Reginald, fight for the throne of their father. Edward wins, but rather than putting his brother to death, he constructed a curious imprisonment in the castle of Nijenbeek.

A room in the castle was literally built around Reginald – a room with only one door. The door was not locked, the windows were not barred, and Edward promised Reginald that he could regain his land and his title any time that he wanted to. All he would have to do is walk through the door of his imprisonment.

The obstacle to freedom was not in the doors or the windows which were of customary size, but with Reginald himself. Being grossly overweight, he could not fit through the door, even though it was of normal size. All Reginald needed to do was diet down to a smaller size, then walk out a free man, with all he had before his fall.

However, his younger brother kept sending him an assortment of tasty foods, and Reginald's desire to be free never won out over his desire to eat. Some would accuse Duke Edward of being cruel to his older brother, but he would simply reply, "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills." But Reginald stayed in that room for ten years, until Edward himself was killed in battle.

Sadly many Christians never know the freedom they have in Christ. They have been set free from the *penalty* of sin, but still live under the *reign* of sin.

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Not a Self-Improvement Program

- 1) A few years ago this group studied the Ignatian Rules for Discernment of Spirits. At that time we learned the difference between spiritual consolations and spiritual desolations, and why spiritual desolations can be so dangerous to us. (see inset)
- 2) **Why is spiritual desolation so dangerous?** Because when we are in spiritual desolation we want to get away, to escape, to stop the experience of desolation. In these times we are vulnerable to run to our escape mechanisms – pornography, alcohol, drugs, video games, addiction to exercise, procrastination, womanizing, or any other escape outlet that is triggered. For Reginald it was tasty sweets.
- 3) In times of spiritual desolation we are at the doorway of serious sin. Our “backdoors” as I call them, get activated and we are in real danger of being seduced to flee from God’s presence to some supposedly “safe” comfort in sin. This is what Paul is teaching about when he instructs us: *“¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.”*
- 4) How? Ignatius says there are four ways: (First Rules, Six)
 - a) prayer,
 - b) meditation,
 - c) much examination of our conscience,
 - d) or through little acts of courage (he calls it acts of penance).
- 5) **Prayer** – Often we have little or no energy or desire to pray in desolation (after all, it’s the enemy’s goal). Sometimes all we can get out is a plea for help:
 - a) “Lord, things are pretty tough right now, help me.”
 - b) Desolation has us feeling very far from God. Simply turning to Him in prayer brings us back into contact with Him. It puts us in proximity where we might regain a little trust in the Lord’s help.
 - c) If we are overwhelmed by desolation, we often won’t stop to think and to make a choice to pray.
- 6) **Meditation** – Not meditation in a general sense, though meditation is always good.
 - a) Rather Ignatius is saying that in our times of meditation the enemy will seek to disrupt us and cause us to quit. For example – If my time of centering prayer is noisy, loud and restless, and I am ten minutes into my normal 20 minutes of centering and I want to quit and give up, Ignatius says don’t stop.
 - b) He invites us to call to mind and think about the truths of faith, or a passage of scripture that will support us in our difficult time.
- 7) **Much Examination** – The tendency when spiritual desolation comes is to flee, to run away into distractions, indulgence in some way, gratification, sensual pleasures or some other escape: heading to the refrigerator, flopping in front of the TV, or more harmful things – “to offer our members to sin...”

Spiritual Desolations

In Spiritual Desolations we may experience:

- 1) Darkness of the soul – a time where there is no light, no hope, no way out
- 2) Disturbance in the soul – times of great interior noise and anxiety, fears, doubts, without hope, without strength, without confidence
- 3) Movement to low and earthly things – when we find attraction in base things, not necessarily sinful things, but we are attracted to lower things rather than to higher spiritual aims
- 4) Disquiet from various agitations and temptations – these seem to be so powerful and so strong that we cannot even stop to imagine that we have the power in Jesus to resist them, and we may not even desire to resist them

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- a) Ignatius echoing St. Paul says, that as best we can, stop fleeing when desolation comes. Rather, stop and confront it with the spiritual weapons. Stop – examine it, see what's going on, and see if you can find the root cause of it. Think of these two contrasting experiences:
 - i) Myself-in-desolation (in the experience)
 - ii) Myself-reflecting-on-myself-in-desolation (stepping outside my experience to examine it)
 - b) Can we see how big a step it is from the first statement to the second statement?
 - c) There is great power in being to pause in the middle of the experience in order to step outside of it, and peering back into it, to ask ourselves, "what's really going on here?"
- 8) **Suitable acts of penance** (i.e. small acts of courage)
- a) Instead of heading to the fridge, or the internet, or the liquor cabinet, Ignatius invites us to exercise a small act of courage: face the desolation and take it on in some small way, asking the Lord for His assistance.
 - b) It is an act of courage to look desolation in the face and to confront it, no matter how subtle or lightly we may do this. What works for you will be different than what works for me.
 - i) I use verses from Psalm 119 to help me when I am tempted by a too-powerful-to-be-simply-admiring-a-gorgeous-woman impulse. If I feel like I am about to trip over the internal boundary line, I try to recall "Purify my thoughts according to your word," or "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according your word" or "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."
 - ii) When we do flee into some indulgence or gratification – what is waiting to greet us on the other side? More desolation...now often accompanied by accusation.

Not Overcoming Life; Life as We Overcome

- 1) We don't particularly care for this answer as given to us in 1 Corinthians 10:13: *"¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."*
- 2) Our new life in Jesus does not mean that we are delivered from adversity, but rather that we are delivered in adversity. There is a difference. We are promised tribulations, suffering, and temptations, but also promised that *"if you say, 'The Lord is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, ¹⁰ no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent"* (Psalm 91:9-10) – "tent" being that place where you are at one with God. Ignatius shows us four practical ways to make the Lord our refuge in times of temptation.
- 3) Paul is teaching us that God does not give us overcoming life; He gives us life as we overcome.
- 4) God has provided a way out for us in the face of every appetite. It is the way of surrender – of acknowledging that we are powerless before it, and asking God to be our strength in our weakness so "sin shall no longer be your master..."
 - a) "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9

Discussion Questions

- 1) In what ways does the teaching of St. Ignatius offer practical helps to living out Paul's instruction?
- 2) Why is prayer often the last place we will turn when confronted with powerful spiritual desolations?
- 3) In your own words explain why grace is not a self-improvement program.