

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Broadcast Date: 19 October 2003

No. T0288

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A Look at Romans: Romans 5:12 - 6:23

In July, I took a French visitor to the Discovery Museum in Newcastle upon Tyne so that she could learn some of the city's diverse history. In it there's a very interesting section called "Newcastle through the ages" which traces its development from Roman times to the present day. It shows how life in Newcastle has been shaped by its origins – its dominance by the Romans, the Vikings, the Normans and others, as well as its frequent encounters with the Scots.

In today's talk, we trace the sinful history of mankind back to the first man, Adam. As we do this, we'll discover God's wonderful provision, the Gospel, through the second Man, Jesus Christ. Christians can live victorious lives through Him, the Lord, in this world which is so dominated by the tyranny of sin.

Because of the Bible chapter divisions, it's easy to miss the fact that Paul starts a new section at Romans 5:12. He has shown that the Gospel so completely answers the needs of sinners that it results in believers being reconciled. That is, they have been brought back to God, from the distance of enmity and of death, through our Lord Jesus Christ. To quote verse 8 "...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us". This reconciliation enables us to joy in God, to worship Him in a living and true way.

At verse 12 Paul changes subject - from sins to sin. Sin is the root of all mankind's problems. It's the tree from which the fruit, sins, grow. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." As a father, not only do I recognise my bad points coming out in my children, I also notice my own father's in me! Here in verse 12, it's not my father or my grandfather but the father (or head) of the human race, Adam. Paul explains that the whole of mankind has inherited this legacy, sin, from Adam, the first man. God created him and he fell into sin. His progeny is the human race. Therefore it's necessary for Paul to explain how fully and completely the Gospel addresses this issue and its consequences. He does this by focussing on the "one Man," Jesus Christ, in verses 13-21.

Paul contrasts the legacy believers receive from Christ, with that inherited from Adam. He does this in a comprehensive way, covering every angle of legal argument. That's why the language is so precise, and appears to be repetitious - even complicated at times. (I would suggest that you read this chapter after the broadcast in a modern version of the Bible, such as the New International Version, to get the overall meaning.)

In general, then, we have the character and effects of the two contrasting acts of these two "Heads", Adam and Christ. The results are highlighted throughout this section by the repeated words "through (or by) Jesus Christ".

First of all there was Adam, the first human being, from whom we all originate. He committed **one** trespass when he broke the divine command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as stated in Genesis 3:17. This deliberate offence constituted all mankind sinners and brought in the terrible reign of sin and death. We know from history that this is true. We also know from experience that it's so very true! (Notice that the Gospel is founded on the literal account of creation and the doctrine of the fall of man, as described in the book of Genesis. The Bible is true from the very first verse!)

On the other hand there is, by contrast, Jesus Christ (the second Man, the last Adam). He makes believers righteous in life by His **one** act of righteousness when He "became obedient to death - even death on a cross". So now in the Gospel era it's grace which reigns supreme over sin and death! (Here the word "reign" carries the idea of being a "king" in victory, with overall power and with great glory).

From verses 13-14, we learn that death reigned from Adam to Moses, in the era before the law was given, proving men to be sinners even though they didn't trespass like Adam. That is, technically speaking, sin wasn't imputed, or charged, to them. (Just at the end of verse 14, Adam is seen as a picture of the racial Head, Christ, who is the originator of the Christian race of people.)

The first sentence of verse 15: "But the free gift is not like the offence" is a title over verses 15-19. From 6:23 we learn that this gift is eternal life. The rest of verse 15 shows how much better this gift is than all that we have derived from

Adam. A sense of the abundance of the grace of God reaches to us. It permeates this section with the repeated words “much more” in the contrasts between Adam and Christ.

Verse 16 states that God’s gift brought in the only effective way of putting things right after the one sin of Adam had introduced an ongoing state of universal condemnation.

From verse 17 we learn that, whereas the outcome of Adam’s act is that none escapes the terror of the king “Death”, by contrast, those who accept the gift - **they** reign in life like kings through Jesus Christ!

The consequences of the actions of Adam and of Christ are described in verse 18 in their bearing towards all men. Adam’s one sin leaves every human being exposed to God’s judgement and condemned - none is excluded. But Christ’s one righteous act enables God to reach out to all: so that He “might have mercy on all” (11:32).

Verse 19 says that although Adam’s disobedience caused the whole of the human race to be sinners, Christ’s obedience makes all believers to be right with God.

Verses 20-21 conclude the teaching by showing that the advent of the law only made matters worse because, by breaking these commandments written on stone, the whole of mankind was shown to be no different from Adam. His trespass was repeatedly repeated! The more stated rules there were, the more they were broken! Don’t we know this to be true? If we see a boundary line we always want to step over it! But grace super abounds in this situation. Asserting its royal power, it conquers sin and its natural consequence, death. Only **grace** can bring eternal life which is available through Jesus Christ our Lord.

One final point about this section of Romans 5 – there’s a bracket after verse 12, which closes at the end of verse 17. Thus verses 18-21 are the direct legal conclusions of the statement made in verse 12. The whole chapter is like a judge summing up a court case.

Imagining such a court case, we could think of 6:1 as being the opening question from the media outside the courtroom as the believer leaves it and walks away justified. With videos and tapes rolling, the first assertion under the glare of the lights would be: “Apostle Paul, aren’t we correct in saying that Christians should continue sinning - because you’ve stated this enables God to supply wave after wave of grace?” Notice the dismissive retort from Paul in verse 2: “Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” The second, more deceptive question would be: “But Paul, isn’t it you who insists that Christians aren’t under law but under grace? Surely this means they’re free to live as they please?” That receives the same treatment “...Certainly not!” in verse 15.

Having introduced the concept of sin, Paul is now able to expand the teaching of the Gospel through chapter 6 to show the freedom that believers gain from the power and the practice of sin. With the victory cry: “...sin shall not have dominion over you”, verse 14, he explains the process by which this victory becomes a personal reality for you and me.

First of all, the question must be asked: What is sin?

- The scriptural answer is found in 1 John 3:4, “...sin is lawlessness”. It’s throwing off all divine restraint to do as I please.
- We’ve seen from chapter 5 that it’s the governing force by which the world of mankind has been ruled ever since the Fall.
- We experience it every day as the controlling power in the world causing men to go against God in every aspect of life.

Next I need to recognise that it’s alive within me! “But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me”, 7:17. Sin dwells in the spiritual part of my being called the flesh, and it operates through the members of my body causing me to commit sins by my thoughts and by my actions.

Now we can look into chapter 6 to find out how each of us can be delivered from its influence. This process is described by three key words. In the New King James Version these are:

1. Know
2. Reckon, or count (New International Version), or consider (Revised Standard Version)
3. Present, or yield (Authorised Version and Revised Standard Version), or offer (New International Version).

Know

- There's a serious issue at stake, yielding either to God or to sin. Verse 16 confronts believers with this stark choice because obedience means slavery! "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?"
- In verses 3-4 Paul wants us to realise the significance of baptism. For New Testament believers, this meant total immersion that is, going under the water and coming out again. Christians not only declare allegiance to the Lord by being baptised, but we're to understand that it also means death with Christ. As was stated in verse 2, His place is our place. That means we were with Him in death and burial. The old way of life is cut off, the intention being that believers should live the new life, in association with the Lord Jesus, who has been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.
- Verse 6 informs us of what happened when we were joined with Christ in His death on the cross. "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." Our old man is descriptive of the kind of people we were before conversion to Christ. In the Crucifixion, God has given His verdict of our former ways, when sin characterised us. "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead", Colossians 2:11-12. By these means God has rendered my body inactive as an instrument which sin can use.
- Furthermore, resurrection has placed Christ beyond the reach of sin, outside its domain. "Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God", verses 9-10. Linked with Him, I'm also in the same position because I'm alive to God in Christ Jesus as verse 11 asserts.

Reckon

The next step in the process of gaining victory over sin, is to assess our situation using this knowledge of our association with Christ in His death and resurrection. "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts", verses 11 and 12. "Likewise" means in the same way as the Gospel teaches us.

The word "reckon" means to calculate, to consider in our hearts and minds, our position from the Gospel's viewpoint. Paul teaches here that we're dead and buried with Christ and placed in a new life, where we need not serve sin, because we're "in Christ Jesus" - the Man alive out of death. By dying He confronted sin in its own realm, death, and dealt with it, once and for all time. By being resurrected He showed He had defeated it. He was liberated from sin in this world and He now lives forever to God. If I do the calculation God's way, I arrive at the correct answer - I'm also "dead indeed to sin" because Christ's way out of this world is also mine, through my death with Him. His life is also mine!

Consideration of this teaching of "knowing" the meaning of obedience, baptism, the cross, and resurrection, leads to these conclusions:

1. We were "slaves of sin", verse 17.
2. God dealt with sin once for all when Christ died to it, as we have learnt from verse 10. 8:3 states that God exposed and condemned it in the sacrifice of His Son at the cross.
3. We have been discharged from the realm of sin: "But now having been set free from sin", verse 22, "for he who has died has been freed from sin", verse 7.
4. Verse 22 then states that the result is that we have become "slaves of God". "And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness", verse 18.
5. Our transfer into the realm of grace occurred when we believed the Gospel: "...you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered", verse 17.

Present

The attitude of yielding, or offering, our lives to God is the third step in the process of gaining victory over sin. Paul exhorts us to do this immediately we've reached the conclusions just stated. In verse 11 we've been told to "reckon". Next verse 12 commands: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts." Then verse 13 urges us to "present yourselves to God". We're to make ourselves available to God, for His service. That's because our old man has been put away in death, and we're now alive towards Him. This is the only practical

answer to Paul's rhetorical question in verse 2: "...How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

The tense of the verb "present" in verse 13 suggests that it's a once, but on-going, commitment we make. To paraphrase verse 13, "Don't keep on yielding (no never, ever!) your members as instruments of unrighteousness to be at the disposal of sin, but once for all time, and always, offer yourselves to God. Why? Because you're alive to Him from the dead and your members are to be instruments of righteousness to God, in His service." Paul returns to this exhortation in verse 19: "...For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now [once for all time] present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness." He stresses the necessity of "presenting" once more in the opening part of the practical section of his letter, where he explains the way believers are continually changed. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God", 12:1-2. Have you ever offered yourself unreservedly to God to obey and to serve Him as a slave would his master? Such a committal is additional to that made when trusting Christ for salvation.

The process: know-reckon-present releases us from sin to be serviceable to God. It's for holiness, that is, for practical sanctification. Serving God is a worthwhile pursuit! Chapter 6 ends with the comparative rewards of serving sin or God. "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death...For the wages of sin is death", verses 21-23. It's the only payment that sin ever makes! But to those who obey the Gospel and decide to serve God, as slaves of righteousness, the reward is: "...fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord", verses 22-23. That means God gets pleasure from believers who dedicate themselves to serve Him. And they have the enjoyment of fellowship with Him, the Father, and Jesus Christ, His Son.

To summarise our talk about this new section of Paul's letter to the Romans, 5:12-6:23:

1. We've traced sin's terrible history from the Fall as described in 5:12-21.
2. Our attention has been drawn away from Adam to Christ, and to the new life He brings for believers.
3. Chapter 6 is about deliverance from sin's power. It's available to Christians, enabling them to live for God in a world which is ruled by sin.

There's just time to say that we're leaving our studies in Romans for the time being. But we'll continue them again in March 2004, God willing. Then we'll learn more about victory over sin and over self, and the provision of the Holy Spirit as the power for Christian living, from chapters 7-8.

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