

WHEN JESUS APPEARS THERE WILL BE NO MORE SIN Romans 6-8 (especially 7:24-25 & 8:29-30)

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE: For what do we pray in the fifth request? In the fifth request (Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors), encouraged by God's grace, which makes it possible for us sincerely to forgive others, we pray that for Christ's sake God would freely pardon all our sins. **SKIT:** One sister borrows a McDonald's happy meal toy from another sister. The other sister borrows an heirloom doll from their mother. The other sister cuts the hair of the heirloom doll, colors on the face with a magic marker, cuts the dress. When her mother discovers it she asks to be forgiven and her mother forgives her. The first sister takes the head off the happy meal toy. When the other sister discovers it she asks to be forgiven. The other sister does not forgive her but tells her mom to punish her. The mom expresses her shock at her other daughters unforgiving heart. Q & A.

INTRODUCTION

During this Advent season while we remember the first arrival of Jesus as a baby born in a stable and laid in a manger, we are considering five of the things that will be true when he arrives the second time. Last week we rejoiced in the fact that when Jesus comes again there will be no more death. Today, we are going to rejoice in the fact that when Jesus arrives the second time, there will be no more sin. It is not difficult for everyone sitting here to feel the wonder and greatness of living in a world where there is no more death and thus no more of the physical misery that leads to death. However, it is another thing to persuade us that living in a world where we do not sin is a wondrous reality. In order to persuade us the beauty of this fact we are going to take a tour of Romans 1-8.

I am going to outline Paul's argument in Romans 1-8 while fixing particular attention on the beginning of chapter 6, the end of chapter 7 and the middle of chapter 8. To give adequate attention to everything that Paul says in Romans 1-8 would take several years of sermons. So when I say I'm going to give an outline, I mean it. My ambition is to cause every Christian in here to rejoice in the mighty work of Christ on your behalf and to stoke your anticipation of that glorious day when sin will be no more. In addition I hope to give reasons to those of you who have not yet trusted in Christ to do so as you see the beauty of his saving work.

Paul spends most of the first three chapters of his letter to the Christians living in Rome describing the human condition. He shows that all human beings by nature, from the moment of their conception are sinners. Whether religious or not, whether Jewish or Gentile, whether poor or rich, people of every race and culture and nation refuse to be impressed with God or be grateful to him for his abundant goodness but instead find creation to be the source of our joy and give the reverence due to God to our own strength or to false gods we have made up in our own imaginations. Paul persuasively proves that my greatest problem and your greatest problem is our own sin and God's just anger against us for our willing rebellion against him and his laws. He demonstrates that our guilt and God's just anger against us cannot be removed by our own efforts. If you are pulled over for speeding you will not be able to persuade the officer to not write you a ticket or the judge to not make you pay the fine by talking about all the ways you have kept the law or done good things. There is a fixed, just penalty for speeding and the only way to satisfy the demands of the law is to pay the fine. In the same way God's good and just sentence against all sin is eternal punishment, separation from him and his goodness in hell. There is nothing you can do or decide to escape that punishment. That is the sad and sober conclusion that Paul asserts in Romans 3:9-20. "There is no one righteous, not even one... there is no one who does good, not even one... Therefore, no one will be declared right with God by obeying God's law, rather through the law we become conscious of our sinfulness."

In Romans 3:21 through the end of chapter 5 Paul explains how it is that hell-deserving sinners are justly forgiven of their sins and made perfectly righteous and thus fit for heaven. He answers the main question that

haunts the entire universe: how can a good and holy God reward wicked criminals like us with eternal happiness in heaven? The answer to that question is that God pardons our sins and counts us righteous not because of anything that we do or decide but entirely on the basis of what Jesus has done and decided. Jesus obeyed God's law perfectly, never sinning. Then he willingly offered himself in our place by dying the death that we deserve upon that cross. Therefore, God justifies everyone who trusts in Christ. God is not a crooked and perverse judge when he welcomes a wicked sinner like me into his family and rewards me with eternal life because he punished my sins when he killed his son upon that cross and he credits the obedience of Jesus to my account and thus justly considers me righteous. This is the big idea of the letter to the Romans and the central truth that makes the gospel of Jesus good news: I am justified by faith in Christ. That is, God forgives my sins and treats me as a person who has always obeyed his laws not because of anything I have ever done or decided but because of what Jesus has done and decided.

Romans 6 begins with the question that everyone who really understands this gospel always asks. If I am made right with God, not because of anything I do and if the greatness and the glory of God is revealed in his justly forgiving me through Christ then why should I care about how I live my life? My sins cannot disqualify me from heaven and my obedience cannot make God like me, so why bother seeking to obey God? Paul's answer to that question in Romans 6:2-10 is the beginning of his explanation of how Christians now relate to sin and how we will relate to sin in eternity, after Jesus returns. As we saw last week it is because we are in Christ that we can be certain that one day we will be raised from the dead physically. However, the fact that we are in Christ also guarantees that I will no longer sin when Jesus returns. What I intend for us to see in Romans 6-8 is what difference it makes that every Christian already shares in the resurrected life of Jesus.

MAIN POINT

Every Christian already shares in the resurrected life of Jesus so that...

I. Now we consider ourselves dead to sin (Romans 6:1-14)

Notice in Romans 6 that vv. 2-10 are a statement of facts. Every Christian has died to sin. We were buried with Christ into death so that just as he was raised from the dead we too might live a new life. We have been united with him in his death and we will just as certainly be united with him in his resurrection. Our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with. Because Christ has risen from the dead he can no longer die, death no longer has any power over him. He has died to sin and now lives to God. But then in vv. 11-14 we are given several commands which are based upon these facts. Look at v. 11. In the same way that Christ died to sin and now lives to God we are to count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God. If I am a Christian I am to think about myself in this new way: I've died to sin and I am alive to God. Therefore, because that is true, I am to no longer let sin reign in my mortal body so that I obey its evil desires.

So why is it that I will not go on sinning? Why will I seek to do the will of God? I will resist sin and seek to obey God because I know that I, through my union to Jesus have died to sin and am now alive to God. I have a new life, with a new master and new ambitions. I am now going to use my body, not to serve sin, not as an instrument through which sin is able to manifest its ugly presence but as an instrument through which God might reveal his righteousness, his goodness. I used to be a slave to sin. When sin spoke, I obeyed. That no longer is my condition. I no longer have to obey sin's voice for I have been set free from sin and for God through my union with Jesus. As Paul says in v. 14, sin is no longer my master because I am not under law but under grace. My relationship to God has nothing to do with my obedience to God's law but is entirely determined by his gracious work on my behalf through Christ.

My thinking, my feeling, my speaking and my acting is now a response to and motivated by this amazing grace of God given to me in Christ, not a result of my seeking to obey a list of rules and regulations. I successfully resist the commands of sin and live a life of righteousness as I count myself dead to sin and offer my body to God as an instrument of righteousness. The assumption of this passage is that sin yet remains a powerful, though defeated enemy. Sin is my old slave master whose voice through long acquaintance is very familiar and

can still exercise sway over me. However, due to the death and resurrection of Jesus and my union with him through faith, sin is my ex-slave master. I have been removed from his domain and do not need to listen to him anymore. The more I consider myself united to Christ and thus dead to sin and alive to God the less sin's voice will have power over me.

John Murray in his commentary on this passage describes sin's relation to the Christian by comparing our situation now to the situation that existed in Germany at the end of WWII. There came a point in the war when the German army and air force were truly defeated. Hitler was dead and the leadership of Germany could no longer control their army and thus the people they had enslaved were free. However, throughout Germany there still were units of the army and air force still in operation. They still could do damage to the Allied forces. Their power to harm and to control in any significant way was vastly curtailed in comparison to the power and sway they held when the German state was still intact and fully operational. Prisoners were walking away from concentration camps, underground resistance forces were operating with impunity, Allied forces were taking over cities and setting up courts and running the country even while these remnants of Germany's power still resisted and controlled certain portions of the country. In a similar way, sin's dominion over us has been shattered by Christ's death and resurrection. While there are yet remnants of sin in us that we must resist and which can still do us harm, we are not under its control as we once were. We have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God.

Every Christian already shares in the resurrected life of Jesus so that...

- *Now we consider ourselves dead to sin*
- *And so that...*

II. Now we hate our sin (Romans 7:14-23, 25b)

After describing the fact of our freedom and telling us how to experience that freedom in our daily lives in chapter 6, Paul moves on in chapter 7 to deal with several important and related subjects about which I cannot comment. What I want to draw your attention to is the end of the chapter, beginning in v. 14. There is a significant difference of interpretation of vv. 14-23. Some people say Paul is describing the experience of a non-Christian, religious Jew such as he was prior to becoming a Christian. However, the majority of Christian interpreters throughout most of Christian history have viewed these verses as Paul describing his experience as a godly, mature Christian who is counting himself dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. I agree with this way of reading this paragraph. JI Packer has written extensively about this passage and he says, "Paul is not telling us that the life of the 'wretched man' is as bad as it could be, only that it is not as good as it should be, and that because the man delights in the law and longs to keep it perfectly his continued inability to do so troubles him acutely. . . . The 'wretched man' is Paul himself, spontaneously voicing his distress at not being a better Christian than he is..."

So we have here a description of "normal" Christian living. It is the regular experience of mature Christians that we don't do the things we want to do, we don't do the good we really want to do but we do the things we hate to do, we do the evil we do not want to do. It is important to note that Paul is not saying that he is not doing the sinning as if sin is some alien power in him that possesses his body and for which he is not accountable. As he clearly says at the end of v. 25 he is the one who serves sin through his body just as he is the one who agrees with the law of God in his mind. I still willingly do the evil I do not want to do is Paul's dilemma and it is mine as well as it is the dilemma of every Christian.

My children can tell you how I sometimes get mad at them and become harsh and demanding and accuse them of being terrible lazy people when they do not do what I want them to do right when I tell them and in exactly the way I want. They can testify that these angry outbursts are more common when I'm feeling under pressure to get work done by a certain time. God's law condemns my anger and my attitudes and my words and my actions. It calls my anger murder. It commands me to not exasperate or embitter my children but to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. It commands me to gently correct my children. My anger and my

harsh language are evil because they are disobedience to God's will. I hate it when I act like that. I hate the anger I feel against my children and I hate the unkind, harsh words I use. I want to be gentle and kind when I correct my children, not a bully. I hate my attitudes and behavior, not my children's not performing according to my standards. According to v. 16, the fact that I hate this way of relating to my children is evidence that I agree with the law of God. I condemn myself for my sins just like God in his law condemns me for my sins. This is evidence of the fact that I belong to Christ. The evidence that I have a new heart and that I share in the resurrection life of Jesus is not that I never sin but that when I sin I take God's side against my sin. A non-Christian does not take God's side against his sin. If I were a non-Christian I would hate my children's behavior, not my own. Christians, as Paul says in v. 22, delight in God's law and thus hate it when they disobey God's law. We call our disobedience evil. Non-Christians do not delight in God's law but delight in getting their own way. Non-Christians justify their breaking of God's laws. Christians mourn the fact that they are not as good as they want to be. Our hearts are full of grief that we do not love people the way we ought and that we do not delight in God and his ways but find our happiness in the pleasures of sin and this world.

It is because we share in the resurrection life of Jesus that we do resist sin. We count ourselves dead to sin and offer our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. We fight our sin and seek to live as those who have been set free from sin's dominion and are now slaves of God. However, in this life, we will never be completely free from sin. We will listen to sin's voice and do the things we do not want to do. We will not do the good we want but the evil we do not want, we will do. It is the fact that I hate the evil I sometimes do that proves that I share in the resurrection life of Jesus.

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III. Now we long for the day we will be free from sin (Romans 7:24-25a)

How does Paul respond to the fact that he is not as good of a Christian as he wants to be? In v. 24 he calls himself a wretched man. He cries out for deliverance from this body of death. The use of the word "wretched" is not an accident. This word is used in the Greek translation of the OT in several psalms where the psalmist is lamenting his sins. Listen for example to Psalm 38:4-6, "For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness, I am wretched and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning." This is part of the Christian experience. My sins weigh heavy upon me. I hate the fact that I keep sinning. Listen, I don't hate the fact that other people sin. I hate the fact that I sin.

So I, along with Paul, long for that day when I will be released from this body of death. Paul isn't saying that his body is evil, he simply recognizes that sin expresses itself now through this body. Whether it is through my evil thoughts or my evil emotions or my evil words or my evil actions, my sin is expressed through this body which is going to die. It will die because of God's curse against sin in this world. This body will die because I am a descendant of Adam, the man of dust. Paul recognizes that at some point in the future this body of death will end. He will be rescued from this condition of sinning through this body in the future. And, as he says in v. 25, this release will occur through Jesus. This is what he longs for, that day when Jesus will free him from this terrible experience of doing what he hates to do.

Here are some questions that each of us need to ponder. Do I view myself as a wretched man, a wretched woman because I sin, because I am not the Christian I want to be or do I view myself as a wretched person because others sin against me or because I'm not living my best life or I don't have the job I want or I'm single or my parents won't let me do what I want? Do I long for that day when I will be delivered from this body of death, this body that is the agent of indwelling, remaining sin and sin no more or do I long for a better husband

or better children or more money or a healthy body? Christians do feel distressed and dissatisfied by our present condition and we do long for a better day but our distress is caused by our sin and our longing is for that day when we will no longer sin.

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IV. One day we will not be able to sin (Romans 8:18-30)

In Romans 8:18-25 Paul describes the glorious freedom of the children of God that will be experienced when Christ returns. Then in vv. 26-28 he describes how we now live in hope for that day. The HS helps us to pray and God promises that everything, all our sufferings and our sins and our victories, is being used by God for our eternal good. Then in vv. 29-30 he gives us reasons for why we can be sure that God is working out everything for our good, why enduring all things in hope through faith in Christ is not a vain hope. Again, I do not have time to deal with every glorious detail in these verses but I want you to see the end that is promised to us. In v. 29 we are told that in eternity past God decided to love us, to know us as his own people. Before he made the world he loved us. Because he loved us he determined in advance that we would be conformed to the image of his Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. He did this so that Jesus would be supreme and preeminent and admired by us, his brothers. The main thing I want you to see is that God determined, before he made anything, that every person who loves him and is called according to his purpose, that is everyone who trusts in Jesus, will be conformed to the image of his son.

Then in v. 30 we are told how it is that God conforms us to the image of his son. All those that God decided in advance to love and then decided in advance to conform to the image of his son, he called. By called, Paul is referring to God's effectual call. Just as Jesus called to four day dead Lazarus, "Come out," and dead Lazarus obeyed his command, so God commands all those dead sinners whom he predestined to believe the gospel and they believe. The power to come out, to believe is in the command. All those he called, he justified. He, through Christ's life, death and resurrection pardons and declares perfectly righteous everyone whom he predestines and calls which is the same as everyone who believes in Jesus. Finally, and the main thing I want you to see, God glorified all those whom he justified.

To be conformed to the image of the Son of God and to be glorified are synonymous terms. We already know that part of this conformity to Jesus, this glorification is a reference to our being given resurrected, glorious bodies like his. However, in light of the amount of attention that Paul has given in chapters 6 and 7 to the fact that those who belong to Christ have died to sin and live to God and hate their sin and long for the day when they will be free from sin and in light of what he says in the first half of chapter 8 that it is God's will that the righteous requirements of the law will be fully met in us and that the sons of God are those who are putting to death the misdeeds of the body, it cannot be but that this conformity to the Son, this glorification is also our taking on the nature of Christ who is not able to sin. Can the resurrected Jesus, who is now seated at God's right hand ever sin? Absolutely not. Why not? Jesus will never sin because he does not want to sin. There is no desire in him for sin. Thus, as we are going to be made in his image on that day when we are glorified, that is receive our resurrected bodies, we also will not be able to sin because we will not want to sin. The sin that now remains within us will be eradicated and only the new heart, given by the Spirit, which has God's law written on it, will remain in us. We will be fully conformed to his image not only in the immortality of our bodies but in the morality of our character. We will, like him, live to God without exception because we share in his resurrected life. Sin will be no more because we will have left behind our fallen nature and will have only the nature of Christ when we come to live with him in the new heavens and the new earth.

No more will we be angered and hurt by the slights and thoughtlessness of others. No more will we fear what others think about us. We will not fear walking up to a group of people and engaging in conversation with them. No more will we want what others have and be overcome with jealousy at the good fortune of others. No more will we fear the future. No more will we hoard and guard our stuff. No more will we be harsh and demanding and petty. We will be free with our expressions of affection for others. We will be generous with our time and resources. We will gladly express our admiration for others and encourage them without thinking about how they will respond to us. We will not care if we are not noticed or appreciated by others. No more will we judge the motives and actions of others and act as though we can read their hearts and minds. No more will we pronounce judgment on those who do not conform to our standards. What a day is coming when we will be free from these evil thoughts and evil emotions and evil words and evil actions. How we praise and honor our Lord Jesus for obtaining such a glorious future for us by his suffering the death we deserve for these sins and giving us this new nature that longs for that final day of freedom from sin when we will live always and only to God.

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