

## Present Yourself to God

(Romans Session 19)

### Romans 6:18

And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Once again, Paul is speaking sequentially. And in this verse he lays out a basic assumption: before a person can become a slave of righteousness—which is a highly desirable reality to experience, by the way—before you can be a slave of righteousness, you must first be set free from sin.

Now I'm including us in with these folks that Paul is writing to. We must not lose sight of the fact that we are part of the audience he is addressing. You need to make the assumption that you are on a par with them.

These Roman believers were just regular Christians, same as us. And the thing is, deeply spiritual experiences are not reserved for the spiritual giants who appear on the scene every so often.

There are those times when a Moses or a David or an Elijah comes along, and thank God for that. But as important as those types of individuals are to the life of the church, Paul isn't writing to them about these things.

He's writing to the rank and file of the church. Average people who are faced with the challenge of living out their faith in a rough and tumble world. He is writing to you.

Do you believe that this morning? When some Christians read the Bible, they feel like they are reading someone else's mail.

Oh, I know—it's addressed to them, not to you. But remember, these writings of Paul were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and they were intended for all Christians for all generations. All of it. Every bit of it.

And understand this please—these letters were inspired by the Spirit of God with you specifically in mind. Someone says, "No, I don't believe that. There are too many people down through the years, and I'm just one little person in this vast number of humanity.

Alright then, let's talk numbers for just a minute. A few years ago a group of researchers at the University of Hawaii decided to calculate how many grains of sand there are on all the beaches and deserts on our planet.

Using a couple of assumptions regarding the average size of a single grain of sand, they did some calculations and came up with a number. According to them there are  $7.5 \times 10^{18}$  grains of sand. That is, seven quintillion, five quadrillion grains of sand in all the beaches and deserts on Earth.

7,500,000,000,000,000,000

Now keeping that number in mind, I want us to read a couple of verses from Psalm 139:

### Psalm 139:17-18a

17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!

18 If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand...

OK, so that's the divinely inspired tally of God's thoughts towards one individual. That's a lot of thoughts.

God is a fast thinker, so let's say that each thought took only one second. At one thought per second, how long it would take to think 7.5 quintillion thoughts? 31.7 billion years.

You see, when it comes to God, you just have to take the limits off. He is infinite in so many ways. So, was He able to envision you and your life when inspiring the words of Scripture to be written? He was, and effortlessly so.

Which is why you must learn to see yourself in the Bible. Your situation, your concerns, your sorrows and your joys are all addressed through the words that appear on these pages. None of it was written without you in mind.

And let me put it another way: this book—God's Word—it is God's love letter to you. Not *only* to you. But most *definitely* written to you. And that you can take to the bank.

What I'm saying is that Paul's words to the church in Rome apply to you across the board. Get that fixed firmly in your mind. What Paul just said to the Roman Christians is custom made for all us California Christians as well.

And he said this:

**Romans 6:18a**

And having been set free from sin...

His assertion here is framed in the past tense. He's stating it as an existing reality. That you as a Christian, as a functioning part of the body of Christ, have been set free from sin.

Now just to clarify, at this point in the book of Romans Paul is not dealing with the idea of forgiveness. That was already dealt with earlier. At this point he's talking about whether or not sin has the mastery of your life.

And he states unequivocally that you have been set free from that. You have been set free from sin..

Alright then, So this is where I must ask a very relevant question:

***"If I have been set free from sin, how come I still have such a terrible struggle with it?"***

That is the point of our study today, and it will remain so over the next month or two in this study. Paul will lead us through the topic step by step.

This is not a quick fix. Paul is very thorough, and in the process of covering these chapters we will discover a solid doctrinal basis for dealing with sin. In the only way that works, I might add.

As a matter of fact, Paul begins to deal directly with this issue in the very next verse.

**Romans 6:19a**

I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh...

So he says our flesh is weak. The flesh. That becomes an interesting theological concept later on in the book. But at this juncture, Paul is simply using the word "**flesh**" to denote the physical side of our

nature. But as we will see a little later in Romans and also in passages we will reference over in Galatians, Paul attaches some additional meaning to the word "**flesh**", where he speaks of it in a way that is similar to the way he utilized the word "**sin**" earlier in this chapter. Depicting it as a mysterious inner resistance that we must grapple with.

As an example, look over at **Galatians 5**.

**Galatians 5:17**

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

But at this point in **Romans 6**, he is just talking about our physical being, our body. Nothing beyond that.

Let's look at the verse in its entirety.

**Romans 6:19**

I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

So he's speaking of the members of your body. And taken as a whole, he's saying to present your body as a slave of righteousness for holiness.

In a parallel fashion, he speaks of something similar in the opening verse of **Romans 12**.

**Romans 12:1**

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.

Now he's making a very different emphasis over there in chapter 12, speaking of presenting your body as a living sacrifice. But even in that context, he means for the word "**flesh**" to be taken literally, meaning our bodies.

And so it is here in **chapter 6**. At this point in time, Paul is simply conveying the idea that there is an inherent weakness or infirmity in our bodies that gets in the way of our service to God.

And it's that weakness, that susceptibility to temptation and sin, that causes him to address the struggle in the way that he does.

It's not very sophisticated. It's not all that spiritual. It's just very practical.

For the moment he's setting all of the nuanced and spiritual language aside, and he's simply saying to present your body before the Lord and say, "**Here it is God. Today, my body will be a servant of righteousness.**" That's it.

Mind and soul are separate considerations at the moment. The primary emphasis here is to make sure that the body is presented as a slave to righteousness.

Now that may sound a little weird, because we all know that it's the soul that's the most important part when it comes to serving God.

But we have to keep in mind that Paul is being sequential in his presentation of the gospel. This is an early step in the journey, and he'll get around to the rest of what makes us tick before long.

I suppose we should understand that it's pretty fundamental for a person wants to have their soul in a good place with God, to make sure that their body is included in effort.

As an example, let's take a look at one of the more obvious applications of this principle. In **1 Corinthians 6**, Paul is addressing the problem of sexual sins amongst Christians.

The city of Corinth was the wild west of the ancient world, and immorality was rampant, to put it mildly. And right at the outset of this passage, Paul makes this unexpected observation.

#### **1 Corinthians 6:13b**

**...Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.**

Now I understand the first part of that statement easily enough. The body isn't for immorality, the body is for the Lord. "**Right Paul, we get that. We must use our bodies to serve the Lord.**"

But that being said, what in the world is he driving at in the second part of that passage?

"...**The Lord is for the body.**" It's a parallel statement. It seems that Paul is saying that somehow—in the same way that our body is for the Lord—the Lord is for our body.

Really? In what way? To make us stronger? Or healthier? Or what?

For one thing, we need to do away with the notion that for Christians, the body is a minor consideration. Because our bodies are obviously fallen, we tend to view them as of secondary importance. The soul is all that really matters. That's where all the spiritual stuff happens.

Listen to what he says a couple of verses later.

#### **1 Corinthians 6:15a**

**Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?**

Now I had to stop and mull that one over. I've always viewed myself—my personality, my identity, my soul—I have always viewed that aspect of myself as what makes me a part of the body of Christ.

But Paul is also applying it on a physical level. Looking at things from that perspective, our bodies are of major importance when it comes to serving the Lord.

So getting back to Romans, Paul is emphasizing the importance of aligning our view of your body with the Scriptures. And in that line of thinking, we are to consciously present our body to God as a slave of righteousness.

Over the years, I've heard lots of preachers talk about putting on the armor of God. To consciously go through the list that Paul gives us in **Ephesians 6**, and piece by piece pray as you start your day a prayer of clothing yourself in that armor.

But for the life of me, I can't recall a single time where a preacher has talked about this aspect of things—presenting your body as a slave of righteousness on a daily basis. I think it's something we should do.

So Paul continues on with his reasoning.

#### Romans 6:20

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

When you were a slave of sin as a non-Christian, you didn't have to give much thought to doing the right thing. You did what you wanted, and that was your right. No strings attached.

Which is what most folks view as living free. Do your own thing. To your own heart be true. Go for the gusto.

The Apostle Peter takes that approach to task, and he doesn't pull any punches.

#### 2 Peter 2:18-19

18 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.

19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

"Speaking great swelling words of emptiness." Oh, they talk about being free. But their words are all empty. Because sin makes promises that it can't deliver on. And these evangelists of an ungodly lifestyle are lying through their teeth.

It's so hypocritical. These loud and proud talkers speak of being free. But they themselves are slaves of something. And it's not just sin, either. Peter says, "They are slaves of corruption."

Now when the Bible uses the word "**corruption**", it's not applied in the way that we usually apply it, associating corruption with politics.

You know, being on the take, accepting bribes, and so on. No, when the Bible uses that word, what is being described is decay. Rot. As in what happens to a corpse.

So what is he getting at? These big talkers who speak great swelling words, who make big promises, their own lives are slowly rotting away. Literally being eaten up with decay from the inside out.

Sin begins to eat away at a person's heart and soul. Driven by powerful inner urges—terrible habits and addictions—with all sorts of out-of-control emotions. Peter makes this pronouncement:

#### 2 Peter 2:19a

...by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

The word translated "**overcome**"? The original Greek word means, "**Made less**".

Sin is the great thief of potential. And all the phony promises we embrace can never protect us from experiencing that, if we turn a deaf ear to God's Word.

As this kind of life progresses, the decay begins to become noticeable. Relationships deteriorate. The good times aren't so good anymore. One bad decision after another takes its toll, and before long the chickens start to come home to roost.

Opportunities are squandered, dreams are shattered, and hope morphs into cynicism and ultimately depression and even despair.

Freedom. That's what they promised you. Do what you want the way you want, and don't let God or religion hinder your freedom.

Sounded good at the time. But where does it end up? Everyone on that path ends up being overcome by the natural outgrowth of a life lived in rebellion to God. They become slaves to the things that are destroying them.

Paul is reminding his readers that they've been saved from these kinds of things.

#### Romans 6:21

21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

That's perhaps one positive thing that comes from being saved out of a hedonistic lifestyle. It gives you a perspective.

You've experienced enough deadness on the inside, and you've seen the dead end up ahead.

That kind of history can certainly give a person the perspective to be very grateful for their new life in Christ. Which Paul acknowledges in the next verse.

**Romans 6:22**

**22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.**

Set free from sin. Not sinless perfection. But headed in the right direction, and the domination that sin once held in your life has been broken through your connection to Christ.

One last point to make, and I'll let you go. It harkens back to last week's message, and I just want to make sure that everyone understands how these things work.

None of this stuff is automatic. If you want to experience freedom from sin, there is work involved. Acts of your will, choices to make, all of that.

We must not expect to be carried along on an irresistible wave of grace. Our commitment and our involvement are absolutely required.

And so this being set free from sin...we must ask, where does that come from?

Paul points that detail out to us, if we will look back to **verse 17**.

**Romans 6:17**

**But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.**

The first half of the sentence spells out the predicament we were in. "***...though you were slaves of sin.***" That's all of us, before we came to Christ. No exceptions.

And where did that change, when did it change, how did it all start to get turned around? It happened when we responded to Christ and did what we knew we were supposed to do.

And what were we supposed to do? We began to live out being a part of His Body by connecting to the body of Christ which is the church. When we began to become rightly related to God's people. Look at the second half of the verse.

**...yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.**

The turnaround doesn't really begin until we are delivered to the doctrine.

As I pointed out last week, Paul isn't saying that the doctrine was delivered to us. He's saying that we were delivered to the doctrine.

We were handed off to the source of that form of doctrine, which is the Body of Christ or the church. And with a heart that was truly engaged, we began to absorb what was offered to us there.

This change of direction is described with crystal clarity in **Acts chapter 2**.

**Acts 2:42**

**And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**

That's how the doctrine—the teaching of Christ, the teaching of God's Word—gets the job done. In the context of fellowship with the church, and taking the big step that Paul describes back in **Romans 6:17**:

**Romans 6:17b**

**...you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.**

How were we delivered to the doctrine, to the teaching that Paul speaks of? It was by the sovereign work of the Spirit of God that you were delivered. Special delivery, that's what I'd call it.

You got set in the midst of whatever fellowship that got you started on this journey. And you took it to heart, you applied yourself and took the idea of growing in the Lord seriously.

And in the midst of all of that happening, you began to experience the old domination of sin losing its grip and you were set free.

Not yet in a state of sinless perfection. But an honest and heartfelt attempt was made, and it got you to moving in the right direction.

Nobody breaks free from sin on their own. Nobody can navigate these struggles successfully outside of serious commitment to the body of Christ and a work of discipleship in their own life.

We need each other. And we need to understand that this doctrine that we've been delivered to? It only has power in our lives if we set ourselves to learn and grow day by day. In concert with like-minded believers.

And Paul wraps it up with these famous words:

**23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.