

Sermon on Romans 6:12-23/Matt 10:40-42
Sunday June 28th 2020

Well we are continuing to study Romans and yet again we have some deep teaching. In a discussion last week, someone said that they felt that we have too much teaching on how much God loves us and not enough on issues such as sin, discipleship, and holiness. Well our studies in Romans address all these issues. Of course there has to be a balance and that balance must always err on the side of preaching the Good News of God's love for us and the forgiveness of sin and restoration of relationship with our loving heavenly father through His loving mercy and the death and resurrection of Jesus. We love God because He first loved us and our motivation for wanting not to sin and to become Holy should flow directly out of the knowledge that we are loved, that we have been forgiven and because we desire more than anything to become more like Jesus. We have to understand too that we can do none of this on our own. We have all sinned, we will all sin again, although hopefully less than we did before we received His Grace and the help of the Holy Spirit. We are made righteous (that is morally right and upright) only by the righteousness of Jesus, we are Holy only because he is Holy and we are in Him and he is in us and because he has and will always forgive our sins and restore us to His righteousness and holiness. That of course brings us right back to Paul's question at the very beginning of chapter 6. Where there is sin, God's Grace, through the sacrifice made by Jesus on the cross for the sins of the world, abounds. "What shall we say then," Paul asks, "shall we go on sinning so that Grace may be increased? By no means"! The infamous Russian Monk Rasputin taught exactly this, that because forgiveness and Grace are freely available, then the more we sin, the more grace we receive. So he positively encouraged people to be immoral and to sin. This is of course to entirely miss the point and it is this misconception that Paul is debunking.

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The powerful point that Paul has been making throughout chapter 6 is that now that we belong to Jesus, now that we have committed our lives to Him and been brought back in to a right relationship with God, we belong to Him and we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. We are one with Jesus who is perfect and without sin and citizens of a Kingdom where there is no sin. How can that be since we are sinful people? It is a mystery of faith. It has to do with the Spiritual exchange that takes place when we believe in Jesus and commit to following Him. We are given new life, a fresh start. In verse 11 we heard last week, Count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. Paul goes on to describe it like this, we are brought from death to life. We were dead in our sinful life but now we are alive in Jesus. We are no longer under the law but under Grace. Law and Grace are opposing principles of the old and new orders of Adam and Christ. To be under the law is to accept the obligation of it and to try and keep it, but because we all failed to keep the law we came under it's curse and condemnation, which was death. To be under Grace is to acknowledge our dependence on the work of Christ for our salvation and so to be justified (remember, He makes it just as if I'd never sinned) rather than condemned and so we are set free. In our new life in Jesus we experience the peace and freedom that comes with being made right with God, having a clear conscience and having a foretaste of what it will be like to be fully Holy and righteous one day. If we have really experienced this, then when we do wrong things, think wrong things, say wrong things, we are painfully aware that we are grieving God, letting Jesus down. And we have the Holy Spirit in us who will gently and sometimes, to be honest, not so gently, convict us that we have done wrong and need to repent. Of course we can and do sometimes wilfully choose to ignore the promptings of the Spirit and even as Christians we are able to numb our

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consciences if we persist in our sin for long enough. This of course does us nothing but harm. If we want to grow in our faith, become closer to God, hear the Holy Spirit speaking to us more clearly, become more like Jesus, then we have to keep short accounts with God. Repent often and as soon as we are aware that we have sinned in any way. We should ask God to show us if there are things in our lives that we need to change. Attitudes or beliefs that are not right. We need to make sure that we are not holding on to bitterness or unforgiveness or that we are lashing out in our hearts and minds because we are feeling hurt or slighted. We need to be willing to allow others to speak into our lives. Accept correction graciously. I sometimes ask John to remind me if there is something I am prone to saying that I know I shouldn't or an attitude that I am prone to taking that just isn't gracious and Godly. We need to be careful how we think and speak about other people, even people we don't know. I have said this before, words are powerful, even the words that we think. We can use our words and our thoughts to judge, to condemn and in effect to curse others, it is one of the traps we fall in to so easily. Or we can be people of peace who use our thoughts and our words to bless and heal and build people up. Humility is somewhat despised in our modern society. We are expected to push ourselves forward, big ourselves up, at the very least consider ourselves to be as good and as deserving as everyone else. As is so often the case, the values of the Kingdom of God are the exact opposite. Jesus says that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. The Psalmist said, I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

We know that we can't do these things on our own, but we have been given the Holy Spirit to help us to grow in holiness, in goodness and gentleness and kindness and self-control. But the Holy Spirit cannot help us to grow in any

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way at all if we do not make the effort ourselves. It's a partnership and it is a life-long journey. Sometimes it is hard. Sometimes we will slip and fall. Sometimes we might feel rebellious. It's ok, God loves us, There is nothing we can do to make Him turn His back on us. The good news is that sin and death have lost their hold on us, even if we sometimes forget and act as if they haven't. When we turn again to God and remember His loving kindness towards us and remember what it is like to want to please Him, when we repent and turn away from our sins, then we are restored and returned to the way of righteousness. We should pray that we will grow in our desire for holiness. Remember as well that our greatest weapon against temptation is the Word of God. When Jesus was tempted in the desert, He defeated Satan with words from scripture. If you don't read it regularly and let it become ingrained in you then you will have little defence when faced with temptation to sin! We need to read it every day, to study it, we need to ask God to help us to understand it and to show us how to apply it to our lives. We all need reminding of these truths regularly, unless of course there are some of you who have cracked it and never, ever sin, and are not in the least bit proud of how good you are. I will let Paul have the last word: "What benefit did you reap at that time from the things that you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of god is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. I am actually going to read that again in the Message version, which is a paraphrase written by Eugene Peterson.

As long as you did what you felt like doing, ignoring God, you didn't have to bother with right thinking or right living, or right anything for that matter. But

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do you call that a free life? What did you get out of it? Nothing you're proud of now. Where did it get you? A dead end.

But now that you've found you don't have to listen to sin tell you what to do, and have discovered the delight of listening to God telling you, what a surprise! A whole, healed, put-together life right now, with more and more of life on the way! Work hard for sin your whole life and your pension is death. But God's gift is real life, eternal life, delivered by Jesus, our Master.