

Life: An Identity You Must Embrace

December 16, 2013

- *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Dec. 29 focuses on Romans 6.*

I cringe when I see God's grace being taken for granted. The words are all different, but the subtext is the same:

"So I cheated on my husband. It doesn't mean I'm not a good Christian."

"It's not my fault people get offended by the way I speak to them. It's just my personality."

"That's church. This is business. It's different."

"I haven't been in church in 30 years. But I walked the aisle when I was a boy. That should count for something."

"Sure the Bible says this is sinful, but it also says not to judge. You're judging me by calling me a sinner."

"Well, you know what they say—Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven."

We are redeemed

It's true: Christians aren't perfect. But we are more than "just forgiven." We are redeemed. God didn't purchase us back from our slavery to sin so we could cling to our chains. By God's grace, we have received a new identity as sons and daughters of God. Our new identity should be visible in how we live. God's grace is too precious to treat with contempt.

God's grace came at great price—the blood of Jesus. Jesus didn't die to leave us as we are but to make us like him. He changed our identity and

brought us from death into life. Because Jesus died to sin, we now live with him (v. 8). For the Apostle Paul, saying Jesus died to sin means that in his death Jesus defeated death and destroyed sin's power (v. 9).

While Jesus lived as a man, there was a sense in which he was under the power of sin because he lived in a world influenced and controlled by sin. He resided in sin's territory. Sin had power over the world around him, but Jesus never sinned. Death released him from sin's power.

When Jesus arose from the grave, he was not restored just to physical health but raised to a resurrected life. He was no longer a part of the world sin controlled. He had died to sin; sin had lost its power and authority over him.

Dead to sin, alive in Christ

Through our unity with Christ, we share in his victory over sin. Paul says we should "count" ourselves "dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11). The word "count" has connotations of math and logic.

Paul is saying we should consider the evidence and recognize what already has been done for us. The victory already is accomplished. Sin no longer has authority or power over us. In Jesus, God "rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Colossians 1:13).

Sin has no place in the life of the believer. Grace is not an excuse to continue to sin. God's grace meets us where we are, but it doesn't leave us there. Grace always transforms. Salvation means our spiritual reality has changed. We no longer are citizens of the kingdom of darkness but of the kingdom of God. Our world still languishes under the power of sin, but sin no longer has authority over us (v. 14). We share in Christ's resurrected life.

Although sin no longer is our master, sometimes we act like it is. Slavery was part of daily life in the Roman world. Some scholars estimate as many as a third of the population were slaves. It was common for people to sell themselves into slavery in order to pay off debts. As believers, we are free in Christ. When we continue to sin, it is as if we have sold ourselves back into slavery. Instead of serving God, we continue to serve our old master—sin (v. 16).

We either serve sin or serve God

As we read this passage, we must understand that Paul does not see any reality in which we are our own masters. Our value of independence and individualism make it a hard concept to grasp. We see ourselves as rulers of our own destinies, but Paul paints a picture of a world where everyone serves somebody. Either we serve sin, or we serve God. There are no other options.

As Christians, we should walk in the spiritual freedom we have received. Paul tells us not to present the members of our body as instruments of sin. The power of sin still wages war against the almighty God, and when we choose to sin, we surrender our bodies, minds and emotions as weapons in the battle. We must choose instead to surrender all we are and all we have to God, serving him as our rightful master (v. 13). True freedom comes in surrendered service to God.

God's grace frees us to serve him. No longer slaves of sin, we are now slaves of righteousness (v. 18). We learn to walk in righteousness by obedience. Living out Christ's commands helps us learn what it means to walk rightly before God.

This means we not only reject sin; we also learn to embrace truth. Cultivating purity helps us resist the sensuality of our culture. Choosing generosity helps us escape the snare of greed and materialism. Creating an

atmosphere of love and honor makes it impossible for hatred and envy to flourish. Living in obedience to Christ's commands helps us embrace our identity as servants of God.