

Justification by Grace Through Faith

by Bob Utley

The sermon emphasizes that justification by grace through faith leads to a transformative relationship with Christ, calling believers to live a life of holiness and discipleship.

Duration: 30:50

Scripture: Romans 6:1

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Sanctification"

Description

This sermon delves into the concept of dialectical pairs in spiritual truth, emphasizing the need to balance truths like predestination and free will, assurance and perseverance. It challenges the notion that Christianity is solely about a one-time decision, highlighting the importance of living a lifestyle of discipleship and sanctification. The focus is on Romans 6, discussing the believer's freedom from sin's power through Christ and the call to live a life of holiness and obedience.

Transcript

I believe that God has given me to share with you, but I must admit I'm a little nervous about it too. I believe that all truth, spiritual truth, comes in dialectical pairs. One reason that we have misunderstood the Bible is because we tend to be Greek in our thinking.

We tend to place things in the categories of either-or, A or B. I think the Bible is written in a different perspective. The analogy I like to use is that all the highways out in West Texas have two bar ditches on each side and a barbed wire fence beyond that. And it looks like that God presents truth in two radical pairs to help us move between those two truths to stay on the road.

And it matters very little if you're in the right ditch or the left ditch. And quite often in theology we say, well, the Bible says it right here, that settles that. No, no, it does not settle that.

We have to find out what else the Bible says on the same subject to get this dialectical balance before we can speak. Most, if not all, truths that we hold dear come in these dialectical pairs. Predestination, free will.

Assurance, perseverance. It is one of these pairs that I want to talk about today. And my great fear is, since I am hitting the other side of the pair that you're used to, that you're going to misunderstand what I'm saying.

I know you'll be uncomfortable with what I say. But you need to hear it. Evangelical Christianity, of which we are a part, has emphasized the need to trust Jesus Christ in repentance and faith.

And I think that is so biblical, and I think that is so true. But also, we have unfortunately left the message right there. And we have implied that Christianity is a decision.

And that is heretically false. We've sometimes been guilty of preaching, only believe, only believe, trust Christ. But my friends, if we leave it there, we have missed the major emphasis of the New Testament, which is not come and make a decision, but come and be a disciple.

For Christianity is not a decision, no matter how meaningful or charismatic or emotional or dynamic. Yes, it starts with a decision, but it issues in a lifestyle relationship. It is this lifestyle relationship theme that I want to emphasize today.

I love to preach on justification by faith. It is the theme, it's the heart of the Reformation, it's the wonder of God's love in Jesus Christ, freely given with no strings attached. I love, I love, I love to preach on that.

That's really what's talked about in Romans 3.20 through 5.21, the freeness of the gift in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The beginning in chapter 6 verse 1 through chapter 8 verse 39, the corollary, the dialectical pair, the paradoxical balance of the freeness of the gift is fully emphasized. I am going to attempt with every ounce of energy I have to preach with as much fervor the truth of Romans 6 as I love to preach the truth of Romans 3.20 through 5.21. And the more I do, the more uncomfortable you're going to become because you have not heard this side.

It is not emphasized in our church. It is often relegated to a side issue and moved off the stage of biblical revelation. I challenge you to hear clearly what I say today and to see if it truly is in chapter 6. You were given an outline of Romans when you came in.

I told you last week, a week before last, that I felt like God was leading me to preach through several chapters. Romans 6 has two questions that dominate the thought, a question of verse 1 and a question of verse 15. They are very similar, but they are slightly different.

Because this emphasis is so needed to balance the imbalance of evangelical Christianity, I've decided to preach twice on Romans chapter 6. So this week I'll preach on Romans 6, 1 through 14 and deal with question number 1, and next week I'll deal with the rest of the chapter, beginning with the question that's found in verse 15. This dialectical tension that is obvious, I think, in all Christian truth is really picked up on here, and chapter 6 picks up on the statement that Paul makes in chapter 5, verse 20. It goes like this.

Then law crept in to multiply the offense. Though sin has multiplied, yet God's favor has surpassed it and overflowed it. So somebody, thinking about this, that where sin abounds, grace does much more abound, got the idea that, therefore, if God got a kick out of forgiving sin, we ought to really give God a kick.

If God's grace is seen against human sinfulness, I'm going to really show God's grace in my life. Of course, this is an antinomian or libertarian view. It's a view that says I want heaven and I want to put it in my pocket and I want to take it out and look at it every now and then and check it, make sure I have it, and then I want to live my life the way I want to live my life.

What is our conclusion then? Are we to continue to abide with, to continue to embrace sin so that His grace may multiply? One of the problems of preaching the freeness of salvation in Jesus Christ is that we

forget that although it's free, it costs God an unbelievably high price. And once we fully understand the price that God had to pay for our free salvation, our free salvation takes on a brand new worth and a brand new cost. And so here is someone who likes to say, well, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, so therefore now that I know I'm a Christian because I prayed the sinner's prayer, that I can go out and live any way I want to and it won't make any difference.

And if God enjoys forgiving sin and He's magnified in His grace, boy, He's really going to have somebody to magnify in me. And Paul's only response to that is this very rare optative mode in Greek where he says, may it never be. King James says, God forbid.

It's something of a horrible statement that a Christian saved by the death of Jesus Christ could have the audacity, the misunderstanding, the absolute radical bad attitude that now that I'm saved, I can really enjoy my life in sin. In verse 2, Paul describes what he feels like is the answer to this unbalanced truth when he says, since we have all ended our relation to sin, how can we walk or live any longer in it? And look at verse 6, same thing. For we know that our former self was crucified with him to make our body that is liable to sin inactive so that we might not for a moment longer continue to be slaves for sin.

Look at verse 7. For when a man is dead, he is freed from claims of sin. Look at verse 12. Sin must not continue to reign over your mortal bodies.

Look at verse 14. For sin must not any longer exert mastery over you. This chapter is going to use the analogy of baptism to show what Paul believes is the way that Christians deal with sin.

And of course, verses 1 through about verse 14 have the present tense in sin, continues to sin, which speaks of our old nature in Adam. How do we deal with this old man once we become a new creature? And what it's basically saying is that we believe that baptism is a picture. There are several pictures.

The washing away of sin is one biblical picture. But another biblical picture is that when you go under the water, it's like if you died to the old life, and coming out of the water, it's like you're alive to the brand-new life of God. It's a double picture.

It's a picture that Jesus died for you and came back to life. It's a picture that somehow you participated in that death with Christ, and now you're alive forevermore. And so it's a dual analogy.

And it's an analogy that you have died. So Paul picks up on this idea of death to say that once somebody dies, they don't have any more debts. They're not a slave of anyone after they've died.

Death solves all of life's bills due. So it comes to say that we have died with Christ. And so our relationship to our Adamic nature, our relationship to Adam, has been severed.

I think it's very true. We talked about it last week. We are not sinners because we sin.

We sin because we're sinners. We have all been affected in Adam. We all are rebels against God, but Jesus in his great love for us died for us while we were yet sinners, and he gives back to us as a free gift to whosoever will complete forgiveness in his finished work.

And so the Bible presents it in terms like this. The old man has passed away and therefore all has become new. It's saying there is a death, a death to the old life.

And what Paul is saying is if there's a death to the old life, then we do not have to sin anymore. Before we were saved, we had no real choice. We could struggle with sin, we could pray about sin, we could even grieve over sin, but we had no choice whether to sin or not.

We were locked into Adam, we were locked into sin, and our lives reflected that. But now that we've trusted Christ, now that we've symbolically been baptized into his death, we are no longer in the place of having to sin. We now have the option.

We now have the freedom. We've now been set free from the slavery of sin and death, and we've been set free to serve God. And that's the analogy that he's drawing all the way through chapter 6. As a matter of fact, let's look down, if we could, at verse 4, where it explains this so well.

Let's pick up at verse 3. Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into union with Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Look at verse 4. So through baptism we were buried with him in death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, so we too should live an entirely new life. For if, first-class conditional, since we have been grown into fellowship with him, this word means jointly participating with, planted together, we shall have fellowship with him by sharing a death like his. Sharing a death like his.

My goodness, what a strange way to put it. Not only are we dead with him, but look at this. Surely we shall share a resurrection life like his.

For we know that our old nature, our former self, our body of sin was crucified with him. What does that mean, that I was crucified with Christ? It's part of two very wonderful passages, one of which you know so well, and I hope you'll write this right over verse 6 where it says, we were crucified with him. The first one is Galatians 2.20, and the second one is Galatians 6.14. You know the first one so well.

You could quote it with me, and I hope you will. For I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live.

Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Now chapter 6, verse 14.

But may it never be mine to boast of anything but the cross of Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. But the glaring problem of the church today is not that we have been crucified to the world. The problem is the world is alive and well in the lives of modern American Christians.

Our life is characterized not by the things of God, but by the things of the world, the things of self, the things of possession, the things of me and mine. And God help us, as we have died to sin, and the problem is that I'm not sure we know we have died to sin. And our lives do not reflect that we walk with him.

The only difference in our culture most of the time between those who claim to know Christ and those who don't is where they park their car at 11 o'clock on Sunday. God help us. At 6, Christians wonder why they're individually powerless and their churches are empty.

It's because we've compromised with the world system. We claim to know Christ. We claim to trust in him, but our lives have no distinct quality of holiness.

This is the balancing doctrine we call sanctification. The Bible teaches that when we're saved, we're both justified and sanctified. If you want a couple of scriptures, it'd be 1 Corinthians 1.30 and 1 Corinthians 6.11. Both of those happen as an instantaneous act because of our relationship with Christ.

We're made right with Christ and we are holy. This is saying, basically, that because we are holy, we need to move on into personal holiness. Now, Baptists for years and years have emphasized that when you're saved by Christ, that settles it.

No matter what you do, your sins are forgiven and once you're saved, you can't be lost. It's a wonderful truth of the freeness of salvation in Christ. It's a wonderful, wonderful summary of Romans 3.20 through 5.21 that everything we have, we have in Christ and we have it as a free gift of God and whosoever will may come and I love that, but my friends, there is another major truth and that is if you know him, you've got to walk in him.

If you know him, your life has to be different. Your dreams, your plans, your goals cannot be the same after you've met Christ. There's going to be a progressive Christ-likeness where there was a positional Christ-likeness.

This passage is teaching us and I think so wonderfully so that we are not slaves to sin any longer. King James translates in verse 6 so poorly. It says that we have died to sin, but that's not true at all.

All of us could confirm. There's no way that since we've been saved, we've died to sin. The problem is sin is all too alive in most of us.

I want to read verse 6 out of this 26 translations. It has King James and from the pool of 26 draws other translations. Listen to some of the different ways that this phrase in verse 6 has been translated.

King James, that the body of sin might be destroyed, another one. In order that the sinful body might be made powerless, another. In order that the body, the stronghold of sin, might be rendered powerless, another.

In order that our sinful nature might be neutralized, another. In order that our body, which is the instrument of sin, might be made ineffective and inactive for evil. The picture the Bible gets us is that Jesus has potentially dealt with a sin problem in the life of a Christian.

A few years ago, I, with you, just enjoy my television so much. I enjoy watching news and sports and movies and all of that. Well, I came into my living room, turned on my TV, and nothing happened.

I thought, well, given up the ghost, time to get a new TV. Called a repairman. Now, a repairman costs 50 bucks to knock on your door, right? The guy walked over to my TV, looked behind it, plugged the TV set in, and turned it on.

My kids had unplugged the TV. I didn't even know it. I thought the TV was bad.

What Jesus Christ has potentially done by his victory over the powers of evil is that he has potentially pulled the power plug of our old sin nature. Now, my TV worked perfectly, but it couldn't work without the power source. Now, what this is saying is that Jesus has theoretically, theologically, pulled the power source of your old self, of your sin nature.

He has made sin ineffective, inoperative, powerless. But God help us, my friends. You and I keep plugging the sucker back in.

And not because we have to, but because we want to. Sin in the life of the Christian is not a must. It's a willful, open-eyed rebellion against the will of God for their life.

And the problem of once saved, always saved is it seems to give us a license to do it. Well, I'm okay. No problem.

Every time we choose to rebel against God, there is a problem in our relationship with him. And we continue to plug that old nature back in and back in and back in in our life. Yes, I believe this chapter is teaching sinless perfection.

Yes, I believe it is the will of God that Christians never sin. Yes, I believe that sanctification is possible in the finished work of Christ just as justification is possible in the finished work of Christ. We've been so afraid of that because we know we all sin and we don't know how to handle our sins.

And so we claim that being perfect or Christ-like is impossible. I submit to you that it is possible. Now, Romans chapter 7 will teach us that practically speaking all of us will struggle with sin until we die.

No way to get out of that. But I want you to know the reason we struggle with sin is because of us, not because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. Potentially we are Christ-like in his finished work just as we are potentially saved in his finished work.

But we don't like that because that puts the boogaboo of sin right back where it should be, on you, on me. I sin because I want to. God help me.

And evangelicals who make salvation a one-time act somewhere in the past that's cut off from their daily walk with Christ, in my opinion, make a grave error. Yes, we ought to preach assurance and turn right around and preach the goal of God for every Christian is Christ-likeness. We may not reach it, but we have no right to abrogate the goal.

This chapter, I think, in its strongest terms possible, in verse 7, is saying we used to be slaves to sin, but we have been set free. We are no longer slaves to sin. We do not have to sin.

We sin because we love it so. Notice in verse 11. So you too must consider yourselves as having ended your relationship to sin, but living an unbroken relationship to God.

This is a very powerful verse because Paul gives us one of the answers for how Christians are to live above known sin. You don't have to worry about unknown sin. You don't have to pray about God forgive me for what I did and I didn't know.

I guarantee you if you don't know it, he doesn't hold it against you. We're responsible only for the light we have. Our problem is not that we sin so much in ignorance.

Our problem is we sin so much in light. This is saying to us that we must come to the place. Now, mine says consider yourselves.

I think King James has reckoned. It goes back to chapter 4, verses 4 and 9 where Abraham was counted as the word, the counting term, counted righteous. Why? Because he believed God.

Now, in the ancient world, they didn't add figures down. They added figures up. This word literally means added up.

Come to a conclusion. Check the total. One way I think that we can deal with sin, listen to me, is that we realize that we've really been set free.

No, we don't have to sin anymore. And we know that everything that's needed for us, for salvation and for Christ-like maturity has been given us as a free gift in Jesus Christ. And because we know that, we reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God.

You see, that's just a mental act. It's a mental act, but it changes the whole perspective about our world. It's not like you can do this and it'll be okay.

I want to tell you, I think what happens is we think that God's going to get us. And so part of our childhood, we turn to legalists. If I spit or dance or chew, then God's going to give me cancer and on and on.

We get beyond that finally. But I want to tell you what has helped me more to deal with personal sin in my life than anything else, and it's not that God doesn't have a big dick. It's that I finally come to the place to realize that when I sin, I break Daddy's heart.

And I don't want to break the heart of someone who loved me enough to send his only son to die in my place. And we have to draw a line and very clearly say, no, it's not just the way I am. No, it's not the way my mother made me.

No, it's not my education. No, it's not my DNA. No, it's me.

I've got a problem. This is not right. I don't care who's doing it.

I don't care what kind of rationalizations I might make. But this is stepping over the line of a willful act of rebellion against a God who loves me. And once I make that decision, once I draw that line clearly, then I know that when I step over it, it's an open, known rebellion against God.

And when it gets in those terms, then I can deal with it. Then my love for him will hold me back. It's when I try to rationalize it and make all kinds of excuses for it and say, well, it doesn't really matter.

It matters. Sin in the life of the Christian is why Baptists talk more about assurance and have less of it than anybody I know. It's why your neighbors haven't been impressed with your life.

It's how Baptists can keep enough religion just to get intoxicated or been vaccinated against the case of the real thing and try to remain somehow socially acceptable. We're playing games with God while trying to live lives that have obvious sin and rebellion and claiming we're saved by faith. And I want to tell you, that kind of life will rob you of joy, rob you of the assurance of your salvation, rob you of effective witnessing, rob you of power in your church.

Sin, known, unconfessed sin in the life of the Christian will destroy that person emotionally. It continues. In verses 1 through 11, it basically talks about our position in Jesus Christ.

We call it positional sanctification. That's what 1 Corinthians 1.30, 6.11 is all about. When we're saved, we're sanctified.

But, folks, there's another truth there, and that is called a progressive sanctification. I like to call it possessive. That which we are in Jesus as a free gift of God needs to become ours in Christlike living.

That which is ours, free in Christ, needs to become ours by possessing that position in the way we live in the priorities of our life. Now, that's what 1 through 11 is. It's that position.

And then verses 12, 13, 14 is this new life, this progressive sanctification. Listen to it. Accordingly, sin must not continue to reign over your mortal bodies so as to make you continue to obey their evil desires, and you must stop offering to sin the parts of your bodies as instruments for wrongdoing.

These are both present imperatives in Greek with a May article that means stop an act already in process. Paul is talking to Christians who are letting sin reign in their bodies. He's talking to Christians who are giving their bodies over to sin.

And they know it, and they seem to be trapped in it. This word reign goes back to chapter 5. It talks about the reign of sin, the reign of death. My friends, who is reigning in your lives? Who is reigning? We have been set free.

Yee-haw! Free! Free, free, free! Sin does not have control over us anymore because of Christ. But we're living bound, bound, and we're free. Who reigns in your life? Does God and righteousness and holiness or does sin and self and rebellion and materialism and on and on? Somebody's reigning.

But I want to tell you, they don't have to. Everything we need has been given us in Jesus Christ. The problem is we love a life that's half God.

Give God Sunday, the rest belongs to me. This is a great deal. It's also a sick deal and an unchristian deal and an unbiblical deal and a powerless deal and it'll rob you of your joy eventually.

You were made to serve God. Your bodies were made to be instruments of righteousness, not of wrongdoing. You have been freed from the power of sin.

Verse 14, For sin must not any longer exert mastery over you. And now you are not living as slaves to the law but as subjects to God's grace. My friend, I think we've played games long enough.

Our homes are in trouble. Our witnesses are in trouble. Our assurance is in trouble.

And we wonder why. What we need more than anything is to recognize our standing in Jesus Christ and repent and confess the known areas of rebellion and to yield our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Oh, but how we love to play games.

Well, I'll get it straight, the revival. Christianity is a lifestyle, not an emotion. Christianity is a daily walk, not a decision.

Christianity is a relationship with Jesus Christ that issues in Christlike living, period. Where are you? Where are you? What does God want for your life? You can't play games anymore. Paul has put his finger on the problem.

The finger is that we like to sin, but we don't have to. We've been set free. And now you can claim that in Jesus Christ.

You can turn those areas that you know are not pleasing to God over to him. You can ask him to forgive you and cleanse you. You can ask him to fill you with the Holy Spirit.

You can ask him that Christ would show through your life to others, and we can make a real impact on Tyler, or we can keep playing this stinking little game of religion on Sundays, and we'll remain powerless and trapped by our own sinful lives. You are free to reign in your life.

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