

BEING THEN MADE FREE FROM SIN

When is a sinner no longer a sinner? That's a good question, and we're going to find out what the Bible has to say about it. We're looking at a pivotal passage of scripture in Paul's letter to the church at Rome, about the wonderful transformation that takes place in the heart of a sinner who comes to the Lord Jesus.

Romans 6:16-18 "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."

Now, being saved is more than just escaping the penalty of Hell. There's a reason that the penalty of Hell is deserved to begin with, and that reason is sin.

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death..."

Isaiah 59:1-2 "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

In other words, it isn't that God doesn't want us to be saved; He does. But, you see, God is absolutely holy. And man, in his sin, cannot reach God. So it became necessary for something to be done to remove the guilt and the account of our sin. Of course, that's why Jesus died. He became a vicarious sacrifice, meaning He died in your place and He died in my place, so that our sins could be forgiven. The crucial question is, when does that happen? When is a sinner made free from sin? When does he move from the state of sinful condemnation to sinless salvation? It isn't a mystery, because Paul declares it very plainly in Romans 6.

A sinner must be forgiven of his sins before he can be saved. Someone might argue that we can never really be free from sin. In fact, that's become a pretty popular way of thinking, that as long as we live, we are perpetual sinners. But, nothing could be farther from the truth. While we'll always be human in this body, and always be subject to temptation, and sometimes, yes, commit sin and fall short of God's mark from time to time, there is a difference between committing a sin in ignorance or human weakness, and on the other hand, living in or remaining in sin. Paul not only teaches us that not only can we be free of sin, but that we must.

Romans 6:1-2 "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

The Bible says that we must be made free from sin to appear before a holy God. Salvation is not some arbitrary decision on the part of God, based upon whether or not He likes us. The Bible is clear about the fact that God loves every person, and wants everyone to be saved. Jesus said in the following passages:

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son..."

John 10:10 "...I am come that they might have life."

John 5:40 "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

So, He came to us, that we might have life. But, He also says that we must come to Him in order to receive it. So, how do we come to Jesus? When are we washed? When are we forgiven and made free from sin's fetters? When you answer these questions, you'll also find out at which point a man is saved in Christ Jesus, because no man can be saved until he is free from the bondage and guilt of sin. That freedom is only by the grace of a merciful God, and not based on any worth or merit of our own (Ephesians 2:8), but there must be a point at which a man is no longer in sin and is declared righteous and free from the sins of his past. When is that point?

Paul said in the text that the man who is saved, was a "*servant of sin*" but is now a "*servant of righteousness*" having been "*made free from sin*" (Romans 6:17-18). Paul illustrates a transition by using the word "*then*." What is he talking about? Someone may say that a man is made free from sin the moment that he believes in Christ. Is that what Paul was talking about? Look again at verse 17.

Romans 6:17 "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you."

Did Paul say, "*but ye have believed from the heart...*"? No, you won't find the word 'believe' in that passage. Belief is the cause of what Paul is talking about. We certainly can't be saved without believing in Jesus.

John 8:24 "...for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

Belief is absolutely essential, but is it all that there is? Are we then made free from sin, when we believe?

James 2:19 "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

You see, the devils believe the truth; they just don't submit to it. Paul preached before sinful King Agrippa and in his persuasive appeal to the king, he asked him if he believed.

Acts 26:27-28 "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

The word 'believe' can be used in different degrees. It can simply mean *to assent to a fact*, but more comprehensively, *to yield to the one believed*. Consider the interesting sentence construction in Mark 16:16.

Mark 16:16 "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Jesus was giving the great commission to His disciples and this is what He wanted preached. Notice that belief and baptism are made conditions by our Lord for salvation. Someone in protest might say, "Why didn't Jesus say that he who believeth not AND is not baptized shall be condemned?" Friend, it's simply because belief envelopes the obedience that results from it. In other words, baptism is the immediate manifestation of belief. Jesus didn't have to include both in the last phrase because baptism would avail nothing to the man who doesn't believe. As one man said, regarding an unbeliever and baptism, he couldn't if he would, he wouldn't if he could, and it wouldn't do him any good if he did.

Let's look at the account of the Philippian jailer. You'll remember that Paul and Silas were being held in jail, singing and praying when the earthquake happened and shook the doors of the prison loose.

Acts 16:27-31 "And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

What did it mean for the jailer to believe? We find out in verse 33 that "*the same hour of the night,*" he was baptized. So, belief means more than just mentally assenting or accepting a fact.

Someone else might say that they believe they were made free from sin when they said the sinner's prayer. Let's look again at Romans 6:17. Did Paul say, "*but ye have prayed from your heart, being then made free from sin...*"? No, that's not what he said either. In fact, have you ever read where one person responded to the preaching of the gospel by reciting anything that the Bible calls "The Sinner's Prayer?" You know, friend, there is no such thing in the New Testament. There's not one single example of gospel conversion recorded in the book of Acts that says that any person was ever told to pray a prayer to receive salvation, to become a Christian or to be made free from sin. Those who ARE Christians are told to pray for the forgiveness of their sins, but the sinner outside of Christ is never told to do so, and there is not one example of anyone saying such a prayer in order to be saved. Perhaps you were told by a preacher or by someone else that to come to Jesus, you need to accept Christ into your heart by saying such a prayer. But look again at our text.

Romans 6:17-18 "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."

Paul makes the delineation not at the point of mere belief, but at the point of obedience. He said they had "*obeyed from the heart...being then made free from sin...*" Sometimes we run into a bit of a buzz saw with some folks when we place obedience and salvation in the same sentence. Most preachers today will tell you that salvation comes first, then comes obedience, but Paul stated it the other way around. He says that you obey, then you are made free from sin and become servants of righteousness. That's in harmony with what he wrote in Hebrews 5:9 as well.

Hebrews 5:9 “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;”

Now we don't earn anything in obedience, don't mistake the point. But the Lord has made gospel obedience the condition of receiving the free gift of salvation. Any free gift must be received, and we receive Christ's gift in faith that is manifest in obedience. We obey the form of doctrine delivered, as Paul says, and then become free from sin. We don't obey the form of doctrine because we're already free from sin—we obey, then become free from sin. Remember too, that becoming free from sin is not something that comes after salvation. It must happen in order for salvation to take place, and we're made free by the efficacious sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His blood that was shed on Calvary. But it is received at the point where we obey from the heart the form of doctrine that Paul is talking about.

Let's explore that “*form of doctrine*” that Paul refers to. It's something we submit to, not merely believe. It isn't something we get or receive in our hearts. He says that it's something that we do. It's an action of obedience. He also says that that act of obedience is not a mere ritual, but a response of faith and repentance, a conscious decision from the heart. (That's why the notion that babies are born in sin and must be baptized to be eternally saved is wrong. An infant can't do anything from the heart or from an understanding and willing mind.) Paul says freedom from sin comes when we obey and submit from the heart to “*that form of doctrine which was delivered you.*” What is a form? We talk about a form when we pour concrete. You prepare your site and dig footers as you prepare a form. You pour concrete into that form, and a concrete slab takes on the shape, dimensions and depth of the form. If you bake a cake, you mix the batter and pour it into a pan, and it comes out looking exactly like the pan that you baked it in. So, you see, Paul is talking about a mold or likeness. The renowned New Testament scholar James MacKnight said, of this verse:

A form (*tupos* in the Greek) is “a mold into which melted metals are poured to receive the form of the mold.”
(from MacKnight On The Epistles)

That's interesting because you might say that faith and repentance are produced by gospel conviction, and that melts one's heart or spirit so that it might be poured into God's mold/form and made into what God desires of it. That's a powerful illustration that Paul uses here: We are poured into the mold/form of the doctrine.

So what's the doctrine Paul speaks of? He says it was “*delivered you.*” Here's what he said to the church at Corinth:

I Corinthians 15:1-4 “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also now received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

He says, “*the gospel that you received...the gospel wherein ye stand...the gospel by which ye are saved...*” that gospel, that teaching, was the fact that Jesus died for our sins, was buried and arose again the third

day. Is that not the very crux of the gospel? Paul said that it is. So let's look at the Romans to whom Paul was writing our text. What did they obey that was in the form/mold/likeness of the gospel, the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus? Did they pray a prayer in the likeness of His death, burial and resurrection? Did they merely believe in the likeness of His death, burial and resurrection? Look back at Romans 6:3-5.

Romans 6:3-5 "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: "

There it is! These believers DIED to their sins in baptism, they were BURIED with Jesus in baptism, and they ROSE from the watery grave of baptism to walk in newness of life! That means that baptism is much more than just 'an outward show' of a past inward transaction. Paul didn't say that we were planted in the likeness of our death and our resurrection from sin, but His death and His resurrection. In other words, raised from baptism to a new life, just as Jesus was raised from the tomb to live forevermore. Baptism is something besides a church ordinance for people who have already been saved or freed from sin. Paul says they obeyed from the heart that likeness of the gospel, or the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, being then made free from sin. That helps us to understand a number of other statements made in the book of Acts. Remember in Acts 22, Saul of Tarsus had met Jesus on the Damascus road and gone into the city. He, having been made blind, waited there for the preacher Ananias that Jesus said would come to him, to restore his sight and tell him what to do to be saved. You recall what Ananias told him? Paul recounted it in verse 16.

Acts 22:16 "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

You say, surely the literal water in baptism doesn't wash our sins away? Oh no, that's not what the Bible is talking about. The blood of Jesus is the only thing that washes our sins away, but the question is, where was that blood shed?

John 19:34 "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water."

His blood was poured out in His death. So, where does Paul say that we unite with His death? In our death to sin, which takes place where? In baptism. That's why Peter said this, in Acts 2:38:

Acts 2:38 "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."

Have you done that? Have you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, being then made free from sin? Before we can see God, before we can ever inherit Heaven, our sins have to be forgiven. They have to be remitted, and Paul tells us that it is a wonderful thing that our sins can be forgiven!