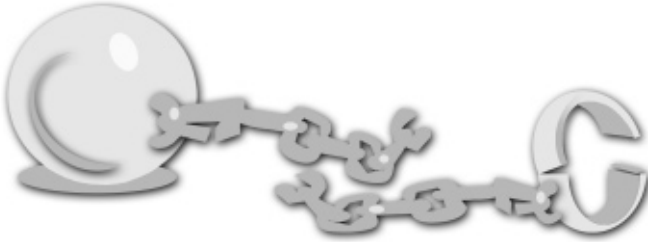


Victory Over Sin



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 6, 1 John 1:8–2:1.*

Memory Text: “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (*Romans 6:14*).

Having just expounded on justification by faith, apart from the deeds of the law, Paul then proceeds to answer the obvious question: if works can't save us, why bother with them at all? Why not just keep on sinning?

Chapter 6 is his answer to this important question. Paul here is dealing with what commonly is understood as “sanctification,” the process by which we overcome sin and more and more reflect the character of Christ. Yet, the word *sanctification* itself appears nowhere in Romans. (The word *sanctified* occurs once, in Romans 15:16.)

Does this mean that Paul has nothing to say about what commonly is understood by sanctification? Not at all. He simply does not refer to it by that term.

In the Bible “to sanctify” means “to dedicate,” usually to God. Thus, to be sanctified is often presented as a past completed act. For example, “all them which are sanctified” (*Acts 20:32*). The sanctified ones in this definition are the ones who are dedicated to God.

But this biblical usage of “sanctify” in no way denies the important doctrine of sanctification or the fact that sanctification is the work of a lifetime. The Bible strongly endorses this doctrine, but it generally uses other terms to describe it.

This week we'll look at another side of salvation by faith, one that easily can be misunderstood: the promises of victory over sin in the life of one saved by Jesus.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 14.*

Grace Abounding

In Romans 5:20, Paul makes a powerful statement: “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” His point was that no matter how much sin there is or how terrible the results of sin are, God’s grace is sufficient to deal with it. *What hope that should bring for each of us, especially when tempted to feel that our sins are too great to be forgiven!* In the next verse, Paul shows that though sin has led to death, God’s grace through Jesus has defeated death and can give us eternal life.

Read Romans 6:1. What logic is Paul dealing with here, and how, in the verses that follow, does he respond to that kind of thinking?
Rom. 6:2–11.

Paul follows an interesting line of argument in chapter 6 as to why a justified person should not sin. To begin with, he says that we shouldn’t sin, because we have died to sin. Then he explains what he means.

Immersion in the waters of baptism represents burial. What is buried? The “old man” of sin—that is, the body committing sin, the body dominated or ruled by sin. As a result, this “body of sin” is destroyed, so that we no longer serve sin. In Romans 6 sin is personified as a master who rules over his servants. Once the “body of sin” that served sin is destroyed, sin’s mastery over it ceases. The one who rises from the watery grave comes up a new person who no longer serves sin. He or she now walks in newness of life.

Christ, having died, died once and for all, but He is now alive forevermore. Death can no more rule Him. So, the Christian who is baptized has died to sin once and for all and should never again come under its dominion.

Of course, as any baptized Christian knows, sin doesn’t just automatically disappear from our lives once we come up out of the water. *Not being ruled by sin isn’t the same as not having to struggle with it.* We have a daily, moment-by-moment battle to keep reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive unto Christ. Though the promises of victory are there, we must claim them—by faith. We always must remember, too, that God’s grace abounds, even when we sin. If not, what hope would any of us have, even after being baptized?

What has been your experience with the power of sin in your life, even after baptism? What choices are you making that allow sin the power over you that it shouldn’t have, despite all the promises we have in the Bible for victory over it?

Sin Personified

What admonition is given to us in Romans 6:12?

The word *reign* shows that “sin” is here represented as a king. The Greek word here translated “reign” means, literally, “to be a king” or “to function as a king.” Sin is all too willing to assume the kingship of our mortal bodies and dictate our behavior.

When Paul says “let not sin . . . reign,” he implies that the justified person can choose to prevent sin’s setting itself up as king in his or her life. This is where the action of the will comes in.

“What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 47.

The Greek word in Romans 6:12 translated “lusts” means “desires.” These desires may be either for good things or for bad; when sin reigns, it will make us desire the bad. The desires will be strong, even irresistible if we fight against them on our own. Sin can be a cruel tyrant, one who never is satisfied but who always comes back for more. Only through faith, only through claiming the promises of victory, can we overthrow this unrelenting master.

The word *therefore* in this verse is important. It goes back to what has been said before, specifically to what has been said in verses 10 and 11. The baptized person is now living “unto God.” That is, God is the center of his or her new life. The person is serving God, doing what pleases God and, therefore, cannot serve sin at the same time. He or she is “alive unto God through Jesus Christ.”

Go back over the quote from Ellen G. White in today’s study. Notice how crucial the concept of free will is. As moral creatures, we must have a free will, the power to choose right and wrong, good and evil, Christ or the world. Over the next 24 hours, try to keep track consciously of how you are using this moral free will. What can you learn about your use, or abuse, of this sacred gift?

Under the Law?

Read Romans 6:14. How are we to understand this text? Does it mean that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding on us? If not, why not?

Romans 6:14 is one of the key statements in the book of Romans. And it's one we often hear, usually quoted in the context of someone telling us Adventists that the Seventh-day Sabbath has been abrogated.

Yet, that's obviously not what the text means. As we asked before, how could the moral law be done away with and sin still be a reality, because the moral law is what defines sin? If you were to read all that came before in Romans, even in just chapter 6, it would be hard to see how, in the midst of all this discussion about the reality of sin, Paul were to suddenly say, "Besides, the moral law, the Ten Commandments, which defines sin, has been abolished." That makes no sense.

Paul is saying to the Romans that the person living "under the law"—that is, under the Jewish economy as it was practiced in his day, with all its man-made rules and regulations—will be ruled by sin. In contrast, a person living under grace will have victory over sin, because the law is written in his or her heart and God's spirit is allowed to guide his or her steps. Accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah, being justified by Him, being baptized into His death, having the "old man" destroyed, rising to walk in newness of life—these are the things that will dethrone sin from our lives. Remember, that is the whole context in which this verse appears, the context of the promise of victory over sin.

We should not define "under the law" too restrictively. The person who supposedly lives "under grace" but disobeys God's law will not find grace but condemnation. "Under grace" means that through the grace of God as revealed in Jesus, the condemnation that the law inevitably brings to sinners has been removed. Thus, now free from this condemnation of death brought by the law, we live in "newness of life," a life characterized and made manifest through the fact that, being dead to self, we are no longer slaves to sin.

How have you experienced the reality of a new life in Christ? What tangible evidence can you point to that reveals what Christ has done in you? What areas are you refusing to let go of, and why must you let them go?

Two Contending Masters

Read Romans 6:16. What point is Paul making? Why is his argument very black and white here? That is, it is either one or the other, with no middle ground. What lesson should we draw from this very clear contrast?

Paul comes back to the point again that the new life of faith does not grant liberty to sin. The life of faith makes possible victory over sin; in fact, only through faith can we have the victory that is promised us.

Having personified sin as a king ruling over his subjects, Paul now returns to the figure of sin as a master demanding obedience of his servants. Paul points out that a person has a choice of masters. He can serve sin, which leads to death, or he can serve righteousness, which leads to eternal life. Paul doesn't leave us any middle ground here or any room for compromise. It's one or the other because, in the end, we face either eternal life or eternal death.

Read Romans 6:17. How does Paul expand here on what he said in verse 16?

Notice how, interestingly enough, obedience is linked to correct doctrine. The Greek word for "doctrine" here means "teaching." The Roman Christians had been taught the principles of the Christian faith, which they now obeyed. Thus, for Paul, correct doctrine, correct teaching, when obeyed "from the heart," led to the Romans becoming "servants of righteousness" (*vs. 18*). We sometimes hear that doctrine does not matter, just as long as we show love. That's a very simplistic expression of something that's not so simple. As stated in an earlier lesson, Paul was very concerned about the false doctrine to which the Galatian church had succumbed. Thus, we need to be careful about statements that somehow denigrate the importance of correct teaching.

Servants of sin, servants of righteousness: the contrast is very stark. If, after baptism, we sin, does this mean that we are not truly saved? Read 1 John 1:8–2:1. How do these texts help us understand what it means to be a follower of Christ and yet still subject to falling?

Fruit Unto Holiness

Keeping in mind what we have studied so far in Romans 6, read the rest of the verses (19–23). Summarize on the lines below the gist of what Paul is saying. Most important, ask yourself how you can make real in your life the crucial truths that Paul is addressing. Ask yourself, too, what are the issues at stake here?

Paul’s words here show that he fully understands the fallen nature of humanity. He talks about the “infirmity of your flesh.” The Greek word for “infirmity” means also “weakness.” He knows what fallen human nature, left on its own, is capable of. Thus, again, he appeals to the power of choice—the power we have to choose to surrender ourselves and our weak flesh to a new master, Jesus, who will enable us to live a righteous life.

Romans 6:23 often is quoted to show that the penalty for sin—that is, the transgression of the law—is death. Certainly sin’s penalty is death. But in addition to seeing death as sin’s penalty, we should see sin as Paul describes it in Romans 6—as a master dominating his servants, duping them by paying them off with the wages of death.

Notice, too, that in his development of the figure of the two masters, Paul calls attention to the fact that the service of one master means freedom from the service of the other. Again we see the clear choice: one or the other. There is no middle ground. At the same time, as we all know, being free from the dominion of sin doesn’t mean sinlessness, doesn’t mean we don’t struggle and, at times, even fall. It means, instead, that we are no longer *dominated* by sin, however much a reality it remains in our life and however much we must daily claim the promises of victory over it.

Thus, this passage becomes a powerful appeal to anyone who is serving sin. This tyrant offers nothing but death as payment for doing shameful things; therefore, a reasonable person should desire emancipation from this tyrant. In contrast, those who serve righteousness do things that are upright and praiseworthy, not with the idea of thus earning their salvation, but as a fruit of their new experience. If they are acting in an attempt to earn salvation, they are missing the whole point of the gospel, the whole point of what salvation is, and the whole point of why they need Jesus.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Victory Appropriated,” pp. 105, 106, in *Messages to Young People*; “The True Motive in Service,” pp. 93–95, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*; “Appeal to the Young,” p. 365, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3; pp. 1074, 1075, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6.

“He [Jesus] did not consent to sin. Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. So it may be with us. Christ’s humanity was united with divinity; He was fitted for the conflict by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And He came to make us partakers of the divine nature. So long as we are united to Him by faith, sin has no more dominion over us. God reaches for the hand of faith in us to direct it to lay fast hold upon the divinity of Christ, that we may attain to perfection of character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 123.

“At our baptism we pledged ourselves to break all connection with Satan and his agencies, and to put heart and mind and soul into the work of extending the kingdom of God. . . . The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are pledged to cooperate with sanctified human instrumentalities.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1075.

“A profession of Christianity without corresponding faith and works will avail nothing. No man can serve two masters. The children of the wicked one are their own master’s servants; to whom they yield themselves servants to obey, his servants they are, and they cannot be the servants of God until they renounce the devil and all his works. It cannot be harmless for servants of the heavenly King to engage in the pleasures and amusements which Satan’s servants engage in, even though they often repeat that such amusements are harmless. God has revealed sacred and holy truths to separate His people from the ungodly and purify them unto Himself. Seventh-day Adventists should live out their faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 404.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Though we have all these wonderful promises of victory over sin, the fact is that we all—even as born-again Christians—are aware of just how fallen we are, how sinful we are, and how corrupt our hearts can be. Is there a contradiction here? Explain.
- 2 In class, give a testimony about how Christ has changed your life.
- 3 However important it is that we always remember that our salvation rests only in what Christ has done for us, what dangers arise if we overemphasize that wonderful truth to the exclusion of the other part of salvation: that of what Jesus does in us, to transform us into His image? Why do we need to understand and emphasize both these aspects of salvation?

The Pot Sellers' Discovery

by BENJAMIN SCHOUN

Some Adventist pot sellers traveled from village to village across northern Madagascar selling kitchenware. One Friday afternoon they arrived at a village and asked someone whether there was an Adventist church in the village. “No,” the person replied.

“Does anyone in this village worship on Saturday?” they asked.

“Yes,” the villager answered. “They meet in a house just up this road.” The pot sellers followed the villager’s directions and found a house with a sign that read, “The Seventh-day Keeping Church.”

The pot sellers knocked on the door and were welcomed into a room crowded with 50 people who had gathered for a worship service. The members squeezed together to make room for their visitors, and the service resumed. Soon the pot sellers realized that the worship service looked and sounded like an Adventist meeting. But who were these people?

When the meeting ended, the visitors asked the worshippers where they had learned to worship as they did. “We are Christians,” the leader explained. We listen to a radio program that teaches the Bible clearly, and we now keep the Bible Sabbath and prepare for Jesus’ soon coming.”

“What is the name of the radio station you listen to?” the pot sellers asked. The answer came back, Adventist World Radio. The leader explained that the believers knew that the radio station was owned by Seventh-day Adventists, but they hesitated to use that name until they learned what they must do to become Seventh-day Adventist members.

The pot sellers told the congregation that they were Seventh-day Adventists and promised to notify the district pastor of this new congregation.

When the district pastor learned of the group meeting on the mountainside, he arranged to hold meetings and organize a new company of believers. A woman donated land for a church, and today the believers in Andravainambo worship as Seventh-day Adventists. A lay pastor continues teaching them and encouraging them to share their faith with others in their region.

Your mission offerings support Adventist World Radio’s ministry around the world.

Benjamin Schoun is president of Adventist World Radio. Ramanantsalama Berjoséclin is the district pastor who now cares for this group.