

BIBLE STUDY: ROMANS #6

Scripture of Lesson: Romans 6: 1~23

1. We are dead to sin and alive to God: v. 1~14

In Chapter 5 Paul affirmed that we are made righteous before God through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ through our faith in Him and this salvation comes to us by God's grace only, not on any good works that we may have done. Sin and its effects came to all humanity through the sin of Adam, the first man. But forgiveness of sins and salvation come to us through the victory that Jesus Christ won on the cross and over death. Now, in Chapter 6 Paul writes about our life's motive and direction as well as our status before God. We are made new persons because our sins have been forgiven and we stand before God as new-born children. When the prodigal son came home, his past was forgiven, cleansing and new clothing as well as a new ring on his finger—symbolizing a new covenant with the father—made him a new person in the father's household.

Paul writes in I Corinthians 5:17, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* We attest our faith in Christ as our Lord and willingly take the step of baptism, through which our past is buried as our body is submerged into water and then we are raised as new beings in Christ so that we now can *"walk in newness of life."* [v. 4]

Our sinful past life has been nailed to the cross as Christ's body was nailed so that we are born again as free beings, liberated from sin [v. 7]. In the past life we used to serve our carnal body and sinful nature. Now we would not want sin to rule over us, both our body and mind, but rather yield all our members as tools of righteousness for God [v. 13]. When we live with such dedication and spirit, our lives become sweet smelling savor to God.

"And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." [Eph 5: 2]

In my own personal experience I became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 2008. After the swearing-in ceremony with many other brand new American citizens before a judge in Alexandria, Virginia I came home and took out my South Korean passport. I cut it apart because I wanted to make a clear demonstration of the change to the American citizenship. I put my past identity to death because I now had a new citizenship. When a person professes to become a Christian, he/she puts her past identity as a sinful person who lives for himself/herself and now declares a new identity as a child of God.

The step of baptism makes such a declaration. I was baptized by immersion in a river close to my hometown by Mr. Merlin Howlett, the Canadian missionary who had brought the gospel to me. He took hold of my body, placed it gently into the water so that my whole body was immersed in the river water for a few seconds, then raised it up above the water. This ceremonial burial in water and being raised out of the water symbolize our death to our sinful past and being raised into a new life in Christ Jesus [v. 4]. So we should consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God [v.11]. Such a complete change that is characterized by death and resurrection of Christ must occur in every Christian. This is the entry into a salvation life but it is not the completion of it.

Discussion topic: If the gospel of Christ has brought us into a new life in Christ, is sin still active in our lives or are we gaining victory over sin in our daily journey of faith?

2. Transformation from slave of sin to slave of God: v. 15~23

In the first century of the Roman Empire, there were many slaves—most of them from Rome's conquered lands who were made slaves by the Roman military to serve Roman citizens of stature or wealth. As you know slaves were not free people—their lives existed for the pleasure and benefit of their owners but not themselves. So there were basically two classes of people—free citizens and slaves. In God's sight we are either slaves to sin or His children, who voluntarily choose to be His servants. The prodigal son, upon his repentance, wanted to be one of the servants in his father's household:

But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."' [Luke 15: 17~19]

There was a provision in the Mosaic Law about becoming a slave voluntarily. Every Hebrew slave had to be let go free after serving a master for six years. Complete freedom was to be given to such a slave. He would no longer be a slave. However, if such a slave loves his master, the master's household and chooses to remain as a slave to his master, he could be taken before the judges to confirm his willful choice. Then the master would pierce his ear against the door post of the house as a blood mark of the choice he made. Then he would serve the master forever [Exodus 21: 1~6]. The willing choice that we make today as Christians to become slaves to God is very much like the choice a Hebrew slave would have made in days of the Exodus journey. The choice is totally voluntary and willful. It is a love-motivated choice, requires a public affirmation of the choice made and a notable mark both on the body and on the house he would serve in blood. Then the person would devote himself/herself in eternal service of love and dedication to the Lord. What a beautiful picture of servanthood!

At this point let us ask ourselves who we are serving. Do I serve the Lord God or my old self? When we profess our faith in Christ and voluntarily dedicate our life's purpose to following the example of Jesus, we are slaves to God's righteousness [v. 18]. But when we continue to pursue and fulfill our own interests and desires, we are in fact dead to God but are slaves to sin. Now that we have been studying the Bible for close to a year and have come to know something about God's will and the gospel of Christ. Some of us may have been drawn to the call of the gospel to some degree. Yet if we do not take the step of confessing Jesus as our Lord and Savior and continue to serve our own nature, we remain as enemies to God. *"The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* [v. 23]

So, do I forsake my old sinful life, leave it behind as buried forever, and rise to walk with Christ in His true light, or continue in my old life as I have been? This is a serious question each of us needs to ask and be honest about it.

Discussion topic: When you heard the call of the gospel, did you hear the clear call to repentance? How did you respond to the call to repentance? And what change happened to you? Share your experience with others.