

Sermon Sanctification as fruit

Romans 6:12-23

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Today we look again at the urgency to stay away from sin and to live for God. The former american president Jimmy Carter has always been an active member of his baptist church. I came across a good quote from him about sin.

We have a tendency to condemn people who are different from us, to define their sins as paramount and our own sinfulness as being insignificant.

Today's sermon is about me, not about someone else. How can I live for God? What does he want from me?

1. The Facts: From death to life

Last week we saw in Romans 6:1-11 how the Gospel of our Lord does not point at the laws of God for helping us defeat sin in our life; our way is not the way of law, but the way of grace through Jesus Christ.

God saved us from drowning in the ocean of sin, and guilt, by pulling us into the ark of Jesus Christ. That is actually what our baptism did. Our baptism, which we accepted from God with faith and thankfulness, took us out of the world of darkness, and placed us into the world of God.

These are the plain facts; you live in the world of God; you participate in his kingdom, because God pulled you out of the water and he gave you new life.

Because God blessed us so amazingly we desire to obey him. But this does not happen easily. It is a tough job, to obey God. That is why Paul, in the part from his letter we read today, begins with an encouragement to the Christians in Rome: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions."

Even people who are part of the church, of Gods new people, even people who have received eternal life - still have to be told - live for God, not for yourself.

In verse 18, Paul says: "You have been set free from sin, and you have become slaves of righteousness."

In verse 22, he says it slightly different: "you have been set free from sin, and you have become slaves of God."

These are the facts in our Christian life. We are no slaves of sin. We are able to live for God. We are servants, slaves of God and of righteousness.

It is great to let this fact sink deep into our mind and heart. You are a servant of God. These are the facts. You are not a servant of sin, of yourself, of evil. You are a servant of God.

God is your owner. The apostle Paul presents God as our slave master. That does not worry us. To be owned by God is a great thing. He takes good care of you, and he is powerful to do this well.

When things in your life do not go as you wished, do not despair. God is your owner. he will take care of you. But as He is the owner of the house, and of us, He can tell us, slaves, what to do.

2. Our action: Present yourself as a servant to God

The reason why Paul presents God here as our owner, is because he wants us to live for God. "Present yourself as an instrument, as a weapon, for God and for righteousness, and do not use yourself as an instrument for sin", Paul tells those Roman Christians.

We have a choice to make, every day, and many times in the day. Do we use our life, our possessions, our time, for the sake of God and his righteousness, or do we just mess up all the time, thinking of our own needs first, living for our own pleasures?

Paul says, "Present your members, that is, your whole body, your whole being, present yourself as a servant to God."

What does this mean? Present yourself? Think of the slaves in a house... Early in the morning they present themselves to the master of the house. "Here we are sir, to do your will and nothing else. You own us, we do as you say."

So how can we present ourselves to God, to obey him? Let me be very practical. Like those slaves, it is not bad to present us to God at the beginning of each day. "Here I am Lord, to do your will." Many Christians have made it their habit to begin the day with prayers, to present themselves to God.

Praying for people, for the church, for your country has impact on how you talk and act in regard to the people you meet with.

In the beginning of the day we ask ourselves, before God, 'what can I do today that is in line with the will of God and with righteousness. Pray for those you will meet, pray for the unexpected events of the day, pray for your work, for your friends and family.

Praying for people helps you move away from your own personal inclinations and attitudes to those people, and it helps you to adopt the viewpoints and attitudes of God toward those people.

Another way to present yourself to God, is also to listen carefully to what he has to tell you. In the Anglican church we have our daily Morning Prayers; we pray and we also listen to different parts from the Bible each morning.

Presenting ourselves to God entails understanding our faith well. Paul writes in Rom 6:17 that we were once slaves of sin but we have "become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed."

Even the earliest church had a 'standard of teaching' that all members committed to. A sort of summary of the faith and of the life people were expected to live. It is not enough to read from the bible a bit here and a bit there - it is also important to have a good grasp of the full will of God. To know who God is and what he wants from us.

[We have to know our Master in order to present ourselves to serving Him each day. That is why after summer we will on Thursday evenings begin with a new series of teaching - the Anglican catechism. What is it that we really believe? We will listen, study and discuss how this impacts our life, because we want to present ourselves as servants to God and to righteousness.]

To present ourselves to God, we must also evaluate ourselves. Do we really serve Him? Do we struggle to do His will and his will alone? Or do we mess around too much?

Yes, we mess around. Much.

We say unkind words to people. That is sin.

We do not help a person in need.

We do not care about hundreds of death sentences that are unjust. We keep our mouth shut and that is sin.

We do not help prisoners with a glass of cold water.

We always look at other women with lust. That is a sin.

We cash our good salaries and we do not help others with what we have.

We react to hard when our kids do not behave well.

We are jealous of others who have more.

We cheat with exams.

We look down on others. That is sin.

We gossip.

We do not speak to others of the Gospel.

We know what God wants from us and we did not do it.

We curse people in traffic.

We do not pray, we do not read our Bible. This is sin.

We have many idols that are more important than our God.

We are racists; we look down on people who are not like us.

We do not care whether Muslim Brotherhood people rot in prison.

We prefer to keep our mouth shut about the injustices of our new government.

We know God wants us to not skip our church meetings, but we do.

3. The result - our sanctification

Lord, forgive us our trespasses. And help us to present ourselves as an instrument, as a weapon for righteousness. Lord, help me to present myself each day for serving you.

Many Christians get shocked when they see real sins in their own life, or in the life of other Christians. Why be so surprised? As if we will ever be perfect before we enter into God's palace in eternity.

We are all in a process - a process that may at times seem to go very slow. A process of sanctification, of becoming ever more holy. That process starts when we present ourselves as instruments to God.

This is a decision we have to make and it needs our will. The will to live for God alone. To love people and to serve our Lord. that is how we are sent into the world after this service. We go into the world to love and serve the Lord. And God through his Spirit helps us.

In Rom 6:19, Paul says: "Present your members as slaves to righteousness, leading to sanctification." If you present yourself to God, this process of becoming more holy begins. That is what we need. That is what we desire.

I like to underline, that this idea of sanctification, of becoming more holy, is not for women only. It does not make you just sweet and soft, and it is also not the same as just praying a lot and reading bible all the time.

Becoming more holy means to live more in accordance with the will of God - and surely, that includes prayer, and knowing the Word of God, and it includes helping old people cross the street, and also being nice to your neighbours.

But it also includes speaking against injustice. It also includes taking care of God's world, of nature, of animals. It may mean that you have to stand up for the rights of people who are now in prison.

It included for many of us to speak out against the injustice of Meriam, a Sudanese mother in prison for her faith. But I will also speak out against the injustice that that was done this week to Rena Netjes, a Dutch Christian who worked in Egypt as a journalist. She was this week sentenced to 10 years in prison because she drank a cup of coffee with a few journalists of AlJazeera.

God is interested in all of life. He is interested in all of your life. And he calls us to present ourselves, to stand before him and say - here I am Lord, send me into your world, to do your will.

A final word about this concept of presenting oneself to God. This is actually also language from the Old Testament, where people had to present their sacrifices before God.

We do not come to God with sacrifices, an animal, some money, some things. We come to him with ourselves. We are the sacrifice for God.

If we present ourselves as a sacrifice to sin - the result is death.

But God freely gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ, and that is why we present ourselves now as a sacrifice to Him.

Paul pushes this issue strongly, and we must take it seriously. In Romans 12:1-2 he says,

I appeal to you [...] brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to

this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that [...] you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let us present ourselves to God as a sacrifice. Do not live in accordance with the normal habits of this world, but live for God. That is the real worship our God desires from us.

Amen