

## Lead to holiness

Hello everyone. In the last message, we examined deeply the meaning of baptism. Because Jesus Christ died once in exchange for the atonement for our sins, we are spiritually born again as a new life. Our old self is dead and we are living under the reign of grace of Jesus Christ. So, today we are going to learn about how we live this born-again life. Perhaps there is someone here who had a quarrel with a partner yesterday. Even after being baptized, we Christians may commit various sins and fall into temptation. We would like to think about how to deal with the problem of sin in our daily lives.

Look at verse 12. "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires." 'Evil desires' here refer to the nature of sin in us. For example, today you went home blessed after worshiping at the church. However, you got emotional over something and got angry with your children, hurting them. We know that true Christians struggle from this kind of sin nature. The apostle Paul also said in Romans 7:24, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (24). The Apostle Paul is a leader of such spiritual excellence that he had even been to the third heaven, yet he felt miserable as he struggles with his sins in daily life. If the Apostle Paul suffered this way, we should not be surprised to struggle even more.

Look at verses 13 and 14. "Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness (13). For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace (14)." The point here is that we are the ones who are subject to sin or offer ourselves to God. It is also important that we respond in faith to the grace and love of God who saved us. The Apostle Paul repeats in verse 15. 'What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!'

Now we can say "Yes! God, I offer myself to You as an 'instrument of righteousness'". We have made a decision toward 'sanctification'. This decision is our faith. See verse 16. "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? Before we were saved, we were slaves to sin. In John 8:34 Jesus said. "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." I am sure we all have experienced this. When you start hating someone, you hate them all day long and it is hard to leave that thinking. You are a slave to the sin of hatred. But we have become slaves to obey

and serve God by believing in Jesus Christ. 'What? We are God's slaves? I don't want to be. I refuse.' You may say, "No, I don't want to be God's slave. If we consider the historical background, we can see that being a slave was not just about being used forcibly. Some Roman slaves were given wealth and status, and they served their masters. If the master was a man of character and rich, it was a guaranteed job for life. Fathers in the Showa period in Japan were employed for life in major Japanese companies and were very happy, providing for their families and educating their children. Nowadays, job reform is taking place and lifetime employment is gradually disappearing. The word 'slave' sounds bad now, but it is a very happy form of employment, depending on the employer.

So, what is God, our Master, like? This is, needless to say, the One who sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world for our sins, died in our place, and gave us eternal life. God is the Master of love itself, who gives even His life without sparing. Imagine that you are His slave. In Matthew 20, the master of the vineyard is mentioned. This master was a man of love who gave the same wage to the workers who came just before the vineyard closed. If you are a slave of this God, you will want to obey and adore him.

And what are the consequences of slavery to sin and slavery to God? First of all, the result of slavery to sin is death. For example, there was an angry father who was overwhelmed by his emotions. He scolded his wife and children unreasonably at home. If this kind of anger continued for years and his wife became depressed and his children also ran away from home, such a result means "death. On the contrary, we have become slaves who serve God obediently. The result is righteousness. Righteousness is all the blessings we have studied so far in Romans. We are forgiven of our sins, receive eternal life, become God's children, receive an inheritance of Abraham, receive the Holy Spirit, live as a holy people, and eventually resurrect with Jesus Christ.

Another word that comes to mind is the expression 'lead to'. The goal of our faith is to 'come to righteousness'. We are in the process of 'reaching to righteousness', but we have not yet become righteous. But God is making us righteous ~~eventually~~. This is God's will for us. God's will to "make us righteous" is absolutely at work. But it takes time and experience for many to reach righteousness. We can find this process of leading to righteousness in the Israelites' life in the wilderness that lasted 40 years after the miracle of the Exodus.

Exodus 19:5-6, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession (5). Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites (6)." This is the Word given to the Israelites two months after they fled Egypt. Immediately after God saved them, He calls the Israelites a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But what was the reality? The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for more than 400 years, and

unfortunately, the nature of slavery still remained in their hearts. So, when they got a little bitter in the wilderness, they grumbled and complained a lot. Imagine that. As slaves in the parochial world of strict leaders, they might have been lazy to avoid the eyes of their superiors because they wanted to have it a little easier, or they might have lied or blamed their fellow slaves because they were afraid of being beaten unreasonably. There was not a shred of "holy nation" to be found in these Israelites. But God leads them up in hope. God trains the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years until they become a holy nation.

However, the people couldn't understand the hope of God to them. They resented and blamed their leader, Moses. "We had it easier in Egypt. Life in the wilderness, we don't want it. Where is God?" People had been freed from slavery in Egypt, but they had forgotten God's grace. Throughout the book of Exodus, the situation continues where God's plan does not mesh with the people's complaints. God does not bend to His will to His people in this situation. God does not bend to His will, saying, "Almost there, almost there." He will lead the people of Israel to become a holy nation.

Ten years ago, I went through a hardship in Vancouver that I had never experienced before. I was spiritually thirsty because of the hardships I was going through, and I was desperate to go to a worship of a famous pastor. The pastor at that time said. "Suffering is a blessing for all of you." I thought to myself. 'You should try suffering, too. It's not easy to say such a thing.' Perhaps my heart was discovered, but the pastor said, "I am going to give a suffering to you now. We will pass the hardship to the one on the right!" And instantly I avoided the body to the left of me so as not to receive the suffering. ^^ It was a funny experience and I still laugh about it. I wonder how many months after this event. I went to the food bank and found a strange frozen bird in one of the items they gave me. What do you think it was? It was a quail. My mother and I laughed and cried, "Was Vancouver a wilderness? God our father gave a quail!" It was a nostalgic experience, and now I think it was a blessing that I could only experience when walking in the wilderness with God. Now I think I have grown a little more in my faith because of suffering in Vancouver.

Christianity is not only about healing illnesses, family happiness, peace of mind, or success in life. These may or may not be there. But our life of faith is to respond to God's will, to grow up into His image and become a holy people of Him. We are to grow to the point where we can have an equivalent love relationship with God. **Isaiah 41:8 says, "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend."** God calls Abraham His friend. God wants us to be His friends, too. I was surprised when I learned of God's will. I was also thankful that God has hope for me when I have little hope for myself. Please look at **verses 17-19. "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your**

allegiance (17). You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (18). I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever – increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness (19)." The Apostle Paul says he had explained it easily up to now, but it may have been a bit difficult to us. By the way, I want to mention ~~about~~ that 'the pattern of teaching' means the gospel. And he could give us all kinds of examples, such as instruments of righteousness, slaves of righteousness, slaves of God, etc., but simply put, he's telling us to live a "holy life." You know this "holy life" is sanctification. Then, what is a holy life? In Romans 12, you will find specific examples of holy life, such as 'brotherly love, forgiveness, reconciliation, and helping others, so please look forward to it.

So, then what is a holy life? Is it to not drink or smoke, to work hard in church, or to be a missionary or pastor? These are also aspects of holy living, but holy living is more about daily life. Jesus teaches us about this in simple terms. It appears in the 13th chapter of John's Gospel. Just before Jesus was crucified, he washed the disciples' feet. He filled a bucket with water, wrapped a towel around his waist, and washed the feet of his beloved disciples one after another. Jesus washed the feet of Judas, the disciple who was selling Him hours later.

When it was Peter's turn, he said, "Jesus, no! You shall never wash my feet!" Peter would have been embarrassed to put his dirty feet in front of Jesus, and he would have hated for everyone to see them. When you wash your feet, dirt inevitably comes out, so there is no way to hide it. I once had a foot-washing ceremony at the church and I hadn't been prepared for it. ~~and~~ I didn't like it, like Peter. In response to Peter's reaction, Jesus said. "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." The act of washing feet is a necessary part of the relationship between the sinner and Jesus, the Judge. When Peter was told that, he panicked and said, "Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well." To this, Jesus replied, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; and their whole body is clean."

In the first half of Romans 6, which we learned about last time, the Apostle Paul used baptism as an example of living a new life with Jesus Christ in death. This baptism means that Jesus has already washed our bodies. And we who have been saved should live a holy life as instruments of righteousness, slaves of righteousness and slaves of God, right? This is called the sanctification process of washing our feet daily.

Look at verses 20-21. "When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness (20). What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death (21)." The Apostle Paul repeatedly tells us that slavery to sin leads to death. Last, look at verses 22-23. "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result

is eternal life (22). For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (23)." The Apostle Paul gave a good word for the church in Rome for already bearing the fruit of a holy life. We, too, have reaped many fruits in the past after we believed in Jesus. You have brothers and sisters who are evangelizing, participating in Bible studies and worship services. Sharing the gospel and evangelizing are part of a holy life. I also believe that persevering in faith, raising children, taking care of your family, and caring for your parents are also a part of living holy lives. And, obeying the Word of God is also part of a holy life. Last year I tried to reconcile with my father and met him again after 18 years, and now I talk to him every week on social media, which I think is a miracle. Like this, we can confess that these fruits are not of our own strength but from God. The result of these holy lives gives us "eternal life at last. Eternal life gives us joy, hope, contentment, and freedom through our daily life.

But this holy life must be an inspiration in our very lives. Jesus showed His disciples that He loved them to the end, even just before He died. In a certain church, they elect church officers every year. At that time, I heard that the pastor secretly calls the children of those he wants to be on the board and asks them, "What is your father like at home? What about your mother?" We can pretend to live a holy life in church and in front of others, but at home our sin nature comes out easily. As saved people, we have to contend with our own sin nature, but thankfully God has sent us a helper. Please look forward to Romans 8, where we will read more about the Holy Spirit who helps us in our sanctification.

Let's pray together. Our loving Heavenly Father! Thank you for saving us and raising us up to be a holy people. We see that the current hardships are also God's plan to raise us up to be a holy people. I thank you for that and for God's hope for us. Holy Spirit, guide us so that we may understand this love of God and pray daily to become a holy people and have loving fellowship with God. I pray in the name of Jesus who died and rose again for us. Amen.