



Sermon Transcript

April 11, 2021

50 Days of Spiritual Growth

Present Yourself

Romans 6:15-23

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on April 11, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text
Romans 6:15-23

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you now know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Introduction

Last Sunday, we began a journey that we are calling **50 Days of Spiritual Growth**. It is taking us from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday, which happens to be Sunday, May 23. Each Sunday, during these eight weeks, we will be walking through Romans 6-8. Why Romans 6-8? Because this section of Romans has a lot to say on what it looks like to live the Christian life. This section of Romans reminds us that the gospel has the power to change our lives . . . today!

We began our journey last Sunday in the first half of Romans 6. Paul began his conversation on spiritual growth by making an appeal to our minds. How you think about this issue of spiritual growth is important. Do you remember the question that was asked at the beginning of Romans 6? *“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”* Another way to ask that question is to say, “If I am saved by grace through faith, does it really matter how I live?” “If God’s grace has me covered, can I live any way I want?” Paul responds to this question as strong as he possibly can. He says, *“By no means!”* It does matter how we live! And so Paul responded to this question by addressing their thinking. He asked, *“Do you not know . . . ?”* He is implying here that this is something you ought to know. He is implying that how you think about this issue is important. You ought to know that if you have been united to Christ through faith that just as Jesus rose from the dead, you have been raised to a new life. *Don’t you know . . .* a relationship with Jesus will change your life.

So he appeals to the mind . . . he appeals to our way of thinking and he calls us to *“Consider it so . . .”* He says in verse 11, *“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”* “Consider it so!” That is what we want to do each Sunday during the **50 Days of Spiritual Growth**. Each Sunday we are going to rehearse four affirmations. These affirmations are truths that we are speaking to ourselves and in doing so—we “consider them so.” We consider them to be true. Each Sunday, you will see these truths reinforced throughout Romans 6-8.

I am accepted in Jesus

I am free from the power of sin

I am not alone, I have the indwelling Holy Spirit

I have authority over the kingdom of darkness

This morning, Paul moves from the mind to the will. He calls us to be active in our spiritual growth. Several times in our passage this morning he says *present yourselves*. He says at the end of verse 19, *“present your members as slaves to righteousness*

leading to sanctification.” This implies that we are to take an active role in our spiritual growth. There is something for us to do. The word “*present*” is the same word used in Romans 12:1 where Paul says, “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present [offer] your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*” This is such an important verse in the flow of the book of Romans. Romans 12-16 lays out for us in very practical terms the things we are “to do” as we live our faith. Paul begins Romans 12 with what he says in Romans 6, “*present yourself to God.*”

This is why we are introducing you to the book *The Common Rule* during these **50 Days of Spiritual Growth**. The four daily habits and the four weekly habits are designed to help you “*present yourself to God.*” We are not suggesting that these eight habits are the “be all and end all” of spiritual habits. Some of these habits may be helpful to you and some of them may not. That is not the point. But if it is not these habits, what habits will you use to shape your heart towards God and others. If it is not these habits, there have to be other habits that form your heart around the things of God. To be inactive when it comes to your spiritual growth is not an option. Paul says, “*now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*” It is a call to be active in your spiritual growth.

As we seek to be active in our spiritual growth, I want to zero in on that phrase, “*present yourself.*” I just want to ask four simple questions about this command. Who? What? Why? How?

Who? Who is to Present Themselves?

Who? Who is to present themselves to God? In this passage, Paul is speaking to people he describes as being *under grace*. He says in verse 15 that “*we are not under law but under grace.*” The contrast between *the law* and *grace* is a major theme throughout the book of Romans.

When you see *the law* in this context, Paul is referring to the Old Testament Law. Think of the ten commandments when you think of *the law*. These commandments reveal to us the righteous character of God and what it is that God commands of us. So in one sense, you could just list these ten commandments and be challenged by them. “You shall have no other gods before me . . . You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain . . . Honor your father and your mother . . . You shall not murder.” You might even think, like the rich young ruler

who came to Jesus, that you actually keep these commandments. But then Jesus comes along and starts peeling back the layers of these commandments and you quickly discover how far you fall short because of the attitudes and the desires that live inside of us. Or, just take the way Jesus summarizes *the law* with that famous call to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. And again, *the law* does what it is designed to do. It is designed to reveal your sin. It is designed to reveal your need for a Savior. The law cannot save you. We will see in a couple of weeks that the problem isn't with God's righteous law. The problem is the sin that is in us. So this is why Paul says in Romans 3:21 that there is "*the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law . . . the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*" We are made right with God through God's grace. This is what Paul is acknowledging in our passage this morning. We are under grace.

So notice the question that emerges at the beginning of our passage this morning. It is similar to the question we heard Paul ask last week. He asks in verse 15, "*What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?*" Since we are not under law do we need to worry about the ten commandments? Does it matter if I struggle with lust or give into anger or nurse a grudge or covet what I don't have? I mean, after all, we are under grace, are we not? Again, Paul responds rather strongly against the idea that grace allows us to sin freely. He says, "*By no means!*"

In fact, the opposite is true. Grace impacts us in a way that empowers us to follow the commands of God. At the end of our passage from last week, verse 14, Paul says that *sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.* That word *SINCE* is a powerful word. SINCE you are under grace, sin no longer reigns over you. In fact he says in verse 17 that we now *become obedient from the heart.* We now want to obey the commands of God. It is now our desire to follow God. Granted, it is a life long journey. But what was once a duty has now become a choice. Why? We are under grace.

This is always a good place to start whenever we are calling the believer to action—to *present yourself.* We tend to have no problem saying that we are saved by grace. But then we are quick to think that we grow in our faith through "works." But our spiritual growth—our sanctification—is also a work of God's grace. He will complete what he has started, Paul says in Philippians 1:6. But, as Paul indicates in our passage this morning, being under grace doesn't mean that God doesn't call us to act. But it is an action that flows from grace. I like the way Dane Ortland puts it. He said, "There are two ways to live the Christian life. You can live it either *for* the heart of

Christ or *from* the heart of Christ. You can live *for* the smile of God or *from* it. *For* a new identity as a son or daughter or *from* it. *For* your union with Christ or *from* it.”¹ Do you get the point? If you are under grace, you already have the smile of God. If you are under grace, you are already in Christ. If you are under grace, you already are a son or daughter of God. This is why our first of four affirmations is “I am accepted in Jesus.” It is because of the incredible grace of God through Jesus, I *present myself* to God. That is what we were doing this past week with our kneeling prayer. Those WHO present themselves to God are those WHO are under grace.

What? What do we present?

When Paul calls you to *present yourself* what is he calling us to present? He is calling us to present our *obedience*. He begins by telling us that we are all obeying something. There is no such thing as a “free-agent” when it comes to how we live our lives. Something is always mastering you. People may deny that to be true, but it is true. For some, it may even be their own independence that is controlling them, giving them the illusion that they are not mastered by anything. But ironically, their commitment to their independence becomes the very thing that controls them and it enslaves them. This is why Paul uses the illustration of slavery to make his point.

Now I know that the notion of being a *slave to obedience* (vs. 16), a *slave to righteousness* (vs. 19) and a *slave to God* (vs. 22) may be a bit off putting or even jarring to your senses, especially when we think of slavery and how it was practiced in our country. But even Paul seems to wince at his use of slavery as an image to illustrate his point. He says in verse 19, “*I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations.*” He knows that most illustrations break down at some point. But, nonetheless, this image of *slavery* does get the point across. We all worship something. Keller says, “whatever is the source of your meaning and satisfaction in life is what you are worshiping . . . If you are living for them, you *must* have them or you lose your purpose in life . . . You get uncontrollably anxious or angry. If anything takes them away, you can lose the will to live. If you fail to achieve them you may fall into unending self-hatred. That is why they are ‘eating you alive.’”²

That is the point that the novelist David Foster Wallace made in his commencement speech for Kenyon College in 2005. Keep in mind, he was not a Christian, but he was keenly aware of human nature. He said this: “In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is no such things as . . . not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice

we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of god or spiritual thing to worship . . . is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough . . . Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure, and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age starts showing, you will die a million deaths before they plant you . . . Worship power—you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart—you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.”³

By using the imagery of slavery, Paul is making the claim that we all worship something. We are all “a slave” to something. And so for the one who is *under grace* you are a slave to obedience. For the one who is *under grace* you are a slave to righteousness. For the one who is *under grace* you are a slave to God. It is the same thing Paul says in Romans 12:1. When he calls us to *present our bodies as living sacrifices*, he says that *this is your spiritual act of worship*. So when Paul says *present yourselves* he is reminding us that we have a new master and we are called to pursue obedience to the commandments of God.

There was a Puritan by the name of John Owen who wrote what has become a classic on the topic of temptation and sin. And used a phrase that we don’t hear much about anymore, but I think it would be good to bring it back to the forefront of our minds. He talked about the “mortification of sin.” Do you know what that means? It means that you “put it to death.” It is what Paul says in Colossians 3:5-8. “*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them [enslaved]. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.*” That is what it looks like to be a *slave to obedience*. It is not just addressing the fruit of our sin. But it involves attacking our sin at the root. My anger may be the fruit of my sin, but my desire for control is at the root of my sin. Wallace said that these things we worship are often unconscious to us. They are habits! Some of the habits we will introduce in this series are designed to address some of those unconscious habits that draw us away from God and others.

I am afraid the reason why the “mortification of sin” sounds so foreign to us is because we tend to be casual about our own sin. Perhaps we are casual about our sin because we have a faulty understanding of what it means to be *under grace*. At

the end of the day, we may not be far off from the person asking the question at the beginning of our passage. And so Paul reminds us that we are really *slaves to obedience*. If there is anything we need to hear from this point it is that we are called to be active. Paul says in verse 19, *“Present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.”* This is what leads to your spiritual growth. What is your next step of obedience?

Why? Why are we to Present Ourselves?

Paul gives us good reason why we are to present ourselves as slaves to obedience and righteousness and to God. It is because of the fruit. He contrasts the fruit that comes when we are enslaved by our sin to the fruit that comes when we are enslaved to obedience and to God.

What is the fruit of slavery to sin? Look what he says in verses 20-21. *“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.”* That is exactly what John Owen said. He said, “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”⁴ He went on to say that if we fail to deal with our sin, it actually weakens and darkens our soul. It zaps you of spiritual strength. It leaves you with no comfort. For example, it may in the short run feel good to be angry with someone who has wronged you and to pay them back in some way. But in the long run, what will happen? Disintegration. Anger can hurt your body. Anger can hurt your relationships. It can destroy your whole life.⁵

But notice the fruit when you present yourself to obedience and to God. *“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”* Now all of a sudden, this kind of slavery does not seem oppressive. Instead, it actually leads to freedom. This is something that our world doesn’t understand. Freedom is found in the constraints that God has placed upon us. Why is that? It is because he made us and he knows what is best for us. This is why in the Bible, the idea of obedience to God is couched in these terms: “Choose life!” Do you really want to live? Do you want a life that can withstand the storms of life? Build your house on the rock! Jesus said that is the person *who hears these words of mine and does them*.

I like the way Keller illustrates this. He says to imagine a five-year-old driving a car. It is horrifying, in fact I thought I saw it happening when my daughter was about that

age. It is nothing but trouble. Why? The car is not designed to be driven by a five-year-old. Keller says, “When God says, ‘Here are the Commandments, the moral directives: Don’t lie, don’t be selfish, don’t bear false witness, those directives come from your designer. And therefore, they aren’t busywork. To break them is to violate your own nature and to lose freedom, just like the person who eats the wrong foods and ends up in a hospital.”⁶

It seems so contrary to our culture to suggest that you find ultimate freedom in taking on the constraints that come in submitting to a master—to Jesus. In fact, ironically, that is one reason people resist Christ. They want to be free! But remember, no one is a free agent. And in the end, their master—whatever it is—money, looks, success, intellect—exploits them. But not Jesus! How can I make such a claim? “In Jesus God says, ‘I will adjust to you. I will sacrifice for you. First I will give up my glory and immortality in becoming human in the incarnation. Then I will give up all light and joy and my very life in the Atonement.’ And he was nailed fast to the cross so he could not move. How is that for giving up your freedom? . . . He sacrificed his independence for you, so you can sacrifice yours for him. And when you do, you will find that it is the ultimate, infinitely liberating constraint.”⁷ *If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.* Why present yourself to obedience and to righteousness and to God. Because this is how we were designed to live and in him is true freedom.

How? How do we Present Ourselves?

On one hand, I could say, “Stay tuned!” The rest of Romans 6-8 tells us how. But there are two things here that I can give you to consider.

The Gospel: As you are active in your faith and present yourself to obedience, remember that the power is in the Gospel. *Sin has no dominion over you SINCE you are not under law but under grace.* This is the point Paul is making in verse 17. “*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.*” The standard of teaching that we are committed to is anchored in the gospel. When Paul tells Titus to *teach what accords with sound doctrine* he doesn’t give a list of things to believe. I am not saying that what we believe is not important. But *what accords with sound doctrine* in Titus 2:2 addresses how we live. It is being *sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love and in steadfastness.* That is the bi-product of the gospel.

When you do your kneeling prayer, speak the gospel to yourself. Affirm that you are accepted in Jesus. Affirm that *“God has delivered you from the domain of darkness and transferred you to the kingdom of the beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* When you are overcome with worry, identify what you are believing that is not true and remind yourself that God is with you. When you are finding it hard to forgive, remind yourself that God has forgiven you. The call to *present yourself* is a call to get your strength from the gospel.

Daily Present Yourself: This is a daily habit. I think this is why the kneeling prayer three times a day is so important. When Paul says *“so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification”* he is using the present tense which implies that this is ongoing. This is a daily thing you need to do. John Owen said it this way, “Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work: be always at it while you live; cease not a day from this work.” Then he says, “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”⁸

This is the point of the habits. These daily and weekly habits are there to help you present yourself to God on a regular basis. The call is for us to be active. Paul concludes this chapter with a very familiar verse. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Conclusion

Present yourself as a slave to obedience. Present yourself as a slave to righteousness. Present yourself as a slave to God.

You are under grace and therefore you are accepted by Jesus.

You are called to obedience and you have power over sin through Jesus.

True freedom is found in the constraints that come from these habits.

Consider the gospel to be so and let it empower you to embrace these habits that shape your heart for God and for others.

“So now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.”

¹Dane Ortlund *Gentle and Lowly* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020) 181

²Tim Keller *Making Sense of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016) 111

³David Foster Wallace, quoted in Keller, 110-111

⁴John Owen *Temptation and Sin* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958) 9

⁵Keller, 115

⁶*Ibid.*, 115

⁷*Ibid.*, 116-117

⁸Owen, 9

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COMMUNITY
GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. How are you doing with the first two daily habits?
Kneeling Prayer 3x a Day—Framing your Day in God’s Love
Sharing a Meal Once a Day—Making the Table your Center of Gravity

What are you learning about God and yourself through these habits?

Diving Into The Word

2. Read Romans 6:15-23

You are a slave to something. How will this help you next time sin tempts you?

How would you use this passage to answer someone who says to you: *“I don’t like Christianity because it restricts my freedom.”*

How would you use this passage to answer someone who says to you: *“Why do you bother to obey God, if he already accepts you?”*

Can you think of examples from your own past, or in the lives of those you know, of how slavery to sin is a kind of “death”?

Taking It Home

3. What is one thing you are taking from your study?
4. How would you like to keep the gospel in front of you this week?