

HABITS THAT ROB OUR JOY

Romans 3:24

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I'm not sure how many of you younger folks know what a phonograph was, because they went out of style in the mid-70s. It was another name for a record player. In order to broadcast quality sound, your record player had to have a high quality phonograph needle to pick up the purest tones and transmit those clear tones through the speakers.

During the days of quality record players, I was a hyperactive junior high student who had real difficulty sitting still and keeping quiet in class. One day we had just been given our flu shots at school. Shortly after I had gotten mine, I headed off to Spanish class. While the teacher was explaining some nonsensical aspect of Spanish grammar, I got antsy. I wanted to be outside playing sports and burning off energy rather than learning Spanish. My hyperactivity showed up in chatting with classmates that were close by. Suddenly, my teacher had had enough of my disrupting the class so he called out, "Bonner, were you just vaccinated with a phonograph needle?! Be quiet!"

All my life, I have struggled with being a listener rather than a talker. Since I came to Christ, God has been working on making me a better listener, but I still struggle with it. That's why every time I come across these words in **James 1:9**, they grab my attention. "**My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.**"

I'm thankful to Jesus that although I have not fully learned how to be "**quick to listen**," I have seen God do a work in my life, making me a better listener. Yet still to this day, when I leave a social gathering of some kind, I reflect back and see moments that I could have said less and listened more. And when I do see those times, I often wonder if I will ever perfect the art of listening.

Have you ever felt that way about some habit or character flaw in your life? Do you really get down on yourself when you do? If so, in our text for this morning, we are given a key component of the Gospel that can give us some relief as well as hope that God will eventually bring about the change in our lives that both we and He wants. We can find freedom from the power of sin that seems to so easily control our lives.

If you want to learn what that component is, I invite you to turn in your Bibles to **Romans 3:21**.

While you are turning there, let me set the context of our study for those who have not been with us recently in our study of **Romans**. We find ourselves in the middle of a major section of the book. **Chapter 1** states the theme of the entire book, the Gospel. We learn from this first chapter that the Gospel possesses the power of God to transform our lives.

But then, after that brief introduction, the Apostle Paul embarks on a voyage that deals with the greatest need of the human heart, the need to be rightly related to God so that we can live our lives to the fullest as our Creator has designed.

In the beginning of this section, Paul explains a problem caused by the human race. We have rejected God by ignoring Him and suppressing the truth about Him and exchanging His truth for a lie. As a result, the human race has been under the curse of God's wrath. And that produces a big problem for us. Because of our sin, we are separated from the only being who can give us direction and healing.

In the next segment, Paul, like a prosecuting district attorney, goes on to prove that we as human beings are not only guilty and deserving of God's wrath, but we have no hope or ability on our own to rectify our condition.

So, beginning with our paragraph of study for this morning, Paul introduces us to the Good News of the Gospel, which is God's only solution to our problem of sin and our separation from God. There is no other solution to the breakdown of the relationship between God and us than the Gospel. There is

no possible reconciliation between human beings apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's read the passage as a whole, quickly review what we covered last week, and then move forward. We read:

**²¹But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

Last time, I told you that there are four very important, key expressions found in these verses. If we are going to understand this paragraph, and thus the Gospel, we must understand these four expressions, which are not commonly used today. The four expressions are: **“the righteousness of God,” “justified,” “redemption,”** and **“propitiation.”** Each one of these terms are worthy of a sermon in and of themselves, but I'm trying to get it done in three.

Last week we learned that because God is righteous, full of goodness and integrity, and the source of all that is right, when He reaches out to the human

race with a plan to solve our problem of facing his wrath due to our rejection of Him, His plan is a perfectly righteous, got-it-all-together, nothing-missing plan that will rescue us and transform our lives. So, when we read the expression, “**the righteousness of God**” in these verses, it refers to God’s perfect character out of which he deals faithfully with us to perfect us.

Our text makes it clear in **verse 21**, that the Source and the Originator of this plan is God and God alone. This plan, the Gospel, begins with God and ends with God. As we saw in **Romans 1:24-3:20**, we human beings bring nothing to the table. We are hopeless and helpless without this righteous plan of God. We are incapable of repairing the spiritual rift between ourselves and God, brought on by our ungodliness and our rejection of Him.

At the center of this plan is Jesus, the Savior, and His work on the cross. Jesus did all the work, and all we have to do is believe and put our complete confidence and trust in what He did. That it is sufficient to bridge the gap between a holy God and unholy humans. When we do that, **verse 24** tells us that God “**justifies**” us. Last time we learned that to be justified means to be declared righteous, acquitted. Thus, we are made right with God. We are made acceptable and completely approved by God, even though presently we still sin and tend to wander away from Him.

Due to a time constraint last time, I could not finish this point, so allow me to apply one finishing brush stroke to this picture of justification. In **verse 24**, Paul adds the clarifying statement that God’s justification comes to those who put their trust in Christ as a “**gift**.” Some translations use a better term, I think, than the NASB. For instance, the NIV says we “**are justified freely by his grace**.” The NKJV says “**being justified freely by his grace**.” The word “**freely**” is what the NASB, ESV, and others translate as “**gift**.”

The Greek word translated here for “**gift**” is different from the common word so often translated as gift in the New Testament, the word we most often see as “**grace**.” The term used here for “**gift**” or “**freely**,” as in other translations, carries with it a rich meaning. It refers to something good or bad that comes to a person without a price. In other words, justification is not something you can buy or earn.

This word “**freely**” or “**gift**” also refers to something that happens to you without a cause. For instance, I said that this term refers to something good or bad that comes to a person. In our text, it refers to something good. But in **John 15:25**, we read of an occasion where it refers to something bad. There it speaks of Jesus’ enemies’ action toward Him. We read, “**They hated Me without a cause.**” Or, “**They hated Me freely.**”

The point of this word as it concerns our text is that you can’t do anything worthy enough to be justified before God. There is no human cause or effort that says that God should justify you. Justification is a gift, freely given to us by God without any cause of our doing. You were not justified because of anything you did or did not do, but solely upon having put your trust or confidence in the performance of Christ on your behalf. There is absolutely nothing in us that can recommend us to God. Later in this chapter, we learn that because of this move of God on our behalf, we have no room to boast of how good we are or of even how much faith we possess. It is a work of God.

Last time, we closed with this point concerning justification: Because of my justification in Christ, I am deeply loved; I have been completely forgiven, fully accepted, and finally and forever approved by God. Regardless of my past life, my life now and forever has worth, and I have an eternal purpose.

There is still more in **verse 24**. The remainder of the verse uses the third key term that explains how a righteous God is able to acquit us of our sin and declare us acceptable, worthy, approved, and affectionately welcomed to Him in love. Let’s look at **verse 24** again. “**And [we Christians] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.**” That which made our justification possible was Christ’s righteous action to redeem us.

The term “**redemption**” explains the actual legal/financial transaction that made justification possible. This term originally was a commercial word that basically meant “loose or untie or deliver or free something.” In New Testament times, it was a term used in slave markets to describe people who had been in chains, and who were not free to act as they wanted to. These people were forced to obey their masters’ demands. Then someone came

along, purchased them for a price, loosed them from their bondage of chains, set them free from their previous master, and delivered them to a new life.

As this term “**redemption**” is used in the scriptures, it carries with it three very important ideas.

The first idea has to do with people being redeemed or freed from something, namely, from the slavery of sin and the power of sin to control their lives. It might be outwardly seen as the sin of overeating, sexual addiction, workaholism, or such self-centeredness that one does not know how to listen. For any sin that seems to control or dominate our life, Christ brings the power to free us from that bondage of sin, so that it no longer controls us. It is not that we may never sin again, but that it does not control or enslave our lives. **Revelation 1:5** says, “**Jesus Christ . . . released us from our sins by His blood.**”

To help us get a better understanding of how this freeing through redemption takes place, I’m going to go back to some diagrams I used in August. I call them “the circles.” If you would like copies of these diagrams, I can make them available to you. Please don’t try to make notes on these right now, because you won’t be able to keep up. Just listen, and if you want copies, I’ll make them available to you.

The Bible teaches that humans are made up of three parts. Each person has a body, soul, and spirit. The body is obvious. It is that visible portion of your being.

The soul and spirit are not so obvious, because you cannot see what they are and how they function. They are both invisible. If you notice, the colors of the two circles for soul and spirit are different, to demonstrate that they are different from the body in that they are invisible, whereas the body is not.

In addition, the soul and the spirit share three attributes in common. Both the soul and spirit possess the same intellect, emotion, and will. I try to represent this by the dotted lines. These lines indicate that the soul and spirit share certain things in common, but they are not the same.

The soul refers to that which makes up your personality. By personality, I mean those unique experiences, talents, likes, dislikes, giftedness, and leadership styles that make you, you.

Your spirit, however, is that part of you that makes you uniquely different from any other part of God's creation, specifically the animals. For instance, an animal has a body and a soul. If you have ever had a horse or cat or dog, you know that they each have their own personality and unique abilities and quirks. They even demonstrate that they have emotions. But according to the scriptures (**Genesis 1 and 2**), that which makes a human unique in comparison to animals is that God breathed His breath of life or His Spirit into us to make us alive, both physically and spiritually. Our spirit is what enables us to be linked with, to commune with, God, who is spirit. This unique ability to commune with God is not something the animals or plants possess, because God's Spirit does not reside in them. Because you possess the Spirit of God, you are different than the rest of His creation, because with God's Spirit in you, you bear the very image of God.

In addition, your spirit is the control center of your being. It is the key to who you are. If I were to correctly describe who I am, I would say that "I am a spirit who has a soul that lives in a body." Once again, the key to who I am is my spirit.

When Adam and Eve were first created, their spirits were spiritually alive because they were linked with God's Spirit. With this linking, God enabled them to be and do all that God commanded. But when Adam and Eve sinned, God removed His Spirit from their spirits, and thus their spirits died spiritually. When sin entered the world, God's Spirit was removed from the control center of our being, and as a result, our spirits died spiritually, but our spirits still existed. But without Jesus, our spirits are powerless, "**dead**" so to speak, to live as God has commanded us to live. We could know about Him, but we could no longer commune with Him. We were dead or cut off.

Into the void of God's Spirit, something else took His place and controlled not just our spirits, but our souls and body as well. This thing is what the Bible calls the "**flesh**." I try to demonstrate this flesh entering our whole being with these lines that cross through all three circles.

To clarify, the term “**flesh**” is used in two different ways in the Bible. Sometimes it is used to refer to one’s physical flesh, the skin and meat or muscle of your body. The second use of “**flesh**” is what we are dealing with here. If I were to say, “My flesh controlled me,” or “I was acting out in the flesh,” I would be using the term to refer to the human propensity or drivenness to attempt to function apart from God or as if God does not exist. The Bible calls this acting out in the flesh “**sin**.” This will become very important for you to understand, if you are going to properly interpret and understand **Romans 6-8**.

When Adam and Eve sinned, their identity became one of being sinners. Apart from Jesus Christ, we are sinners. We are controlled at the very center of our being by the flesh. As a result, the flesh influences and ultimately controls our whole life. In short, we are powerless to defeat sin. We are a slave to sin.

But, when we invite Christ to be our Savior, He comes into us; His Spirit joins our spirit, and as a result of Christ’s redemption of us, our spirits are now free from the control of the flesh and are empowered to live as God has called us to live. As a result, we are given a new identity. The scriptures call Christians saints. We are new creations in that we now have the power of Jesus living in us to enable us to overcome sin in our lives.

However, as you can see by the lines, we still have the flesh tempting us in our physical body and soul. And as a result, we can and still do sin. But now, as a believer with Christ in me, I have Christ’s power to overcome the temptation of the flesh, if I want to. The more I learn about who I am in Christ, I am the lesser affected by sin’s enslavement of me. And day by day, as I seek after Jesus, by His grace I am being transformed to be more like Christ. I’m not this hopeless sinner who will always be the way I was. God is at work transforming my life.

Different from the non-Christian, the Christian can experience true freedom from bitterness toward a parent who may have sexually abused them. He can have freedom from food, drug, or gambling addictions. And he can be free from always having to be defensive about his ideas or actions.

But we can only experience that freedom if we truly understand that we have been set free. But that is not always easy. Why? Because we have an enemy named Satan. He is a deceiver and a liar and wants nothing more than to destroy our lives by keeping us blind to the truth about the finished work of Christ and the true freedom that Christ brought to us through His redemption of our lives. The flesh and sin are no longer the Christian's owner or slave master. Jesus is our Master, if we choose to let Him rule in our lives. As we choose that, moment by moment, we are no longer held captive, trapped, or enslaved by our previous addictions or our bitterness. We have been set free.

Neil Anderson, in his excellent book *Living Free in Christ*, uses the following illustration of the reality of that freedom and the attempts by the forces of darkness to keep the believer ignorant. On December 18, 1865, the Emancipation Proclamation, which became the 13th Amendment to our constitution, abolished slavery in the US. Hence, on the 19th, in reality, there should have been no slaves. But many still lived as slaves, because the truth of the Emancipation Proclamation was kept from them. Other slaves knew the truth but chose to still live as the slaves they always had been. Anderson says:

Now suppose several plantation owners were devastated by the Emancipation Proclamation . . . yet their chief spokesman slyly suggests, . . . “Keep your slaves from learning the truth, and your control over them will not even be challenged.”

But one cotton farmer asked, “What if the news spreads?”

“Don't panic. We have another barrel in our gun. We may not be able to keep them from hearing the news, but we can still keep them from understanding it. They don't call me the “father of lies” for nothing. We still have the potential to deceive the whole world. Just tell them

that they misunderstood the Thirteenth Amendment. Tell them that they are going to be free someday, not that they are free already right now. Someday they may receive the benefits, but not now.” . . .

Years later, many slaves had still not heard the wonderful news that they had been freed, so naturally they continued to live the way they had always lived, as slaves. . . . Then one day, a former slave heard the good news and received it with great joy. He checked out the validity of the Proclamation and discovered that the highest of all authorities had originated the decree. Not only that, but it personally cost the authority a tremendous price so that slaves could be free. The slave's life was transformed. He reasoned that it would be hypocritical to continue living as a slave, even though his feelings told him he still was. Determined to live by what he knew to be true, his experiences began to change dramatically. He realized that his old master had no authority over him and did not need to be obeyed. He gladly served the one who set him free. [*Living Free In Christ*, p. 56-58]

The reality is that each of us has been tempted to be controlled by sinful practices in our lives and old habit patterns we had developed before we came to Christ. But just as real as the old habit was is the truth that in Christ, we now have the power to live as we ought and want to live. Through redemption, Christ has opened the door and freed us from the control of sinful

patterns in our lives. He has given us a way out. No longer can we be controlled by evil influences when we understand that we are free.

So the first basic idea of redemption is that we are freed from something, the controlling power of sin in our lives.

The second basic idea of redemption is that people are redeemed by something, namely by the payment price of the blood of Christ.

Jesus said in **Matthew 20:28**, “**Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.**” Peter, in **1 Peter 1:18-19**, writes, “**Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold . . . but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.**” The blood here obviously refers to the death of Christ.

There is one additional thought about the extent to which Christ’s death paid for our freedom: When Jesus was on the cross, His final words just before he died were, “**It is finished.**” Like the term “**redemption**,” the word for “**finished**” is also a financial term used in secular business that refers to a debt being paid in full. Christ death paid it all. It is finished. Nothing needs to be added. Everything that was needed to pay for our release from the penalty and control of sin in our lives was paid for.

The third concept that redemption includes is that we are redeemed to something, namely to a state of freedom under God. This is not a freedom to do whatever we please, but a freedom to do what we were created for, to serve Him. We human beings were created to always serve someone, namely, God. As a Christian, you can choose to serve Satan or Jesus, but you will serve somebody. But it is only in serving Jesus as our Creator and Master that we find our wholeness, peace, satisfaction, and true freedom to be who we were created to be. In **Revelation 5:9-10** a song is being sung to Jesus about His redemption of our lives. It states:

**You [Christ] are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,
because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased**

[ransomed/redeemed] **for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve God, and they will reign on the earth.**

We were saved to serve Him.

Look at one more passage: **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**. I challenge you to take this verse and look at it once a day for the next week. Think about its implications for your life. Paul writes:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you [That means all of you: your mind, emotions, will, body, soul, spirit, reputation, personal possessions, goals, dreams, business, and all that pertains to you or your life.] **have been bought with a price** [By Whom? God. Who owns you, then? He does!]: **therefore glorify God in your body** [or in all that you do].

In **1 Corinthians 7:22** we read this: **“For he who was called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedman; likewise he who was called while free is Christ’s slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.”**

The Good News declares that now, because we are redeemed, we have the freedom to live as slaves of God and to experience life, rather than slaves of sin. Before we trusted in Christ, we did not have that power in the core of our being to change or be transformed. But now we do and are in the process of being transformed by Christ. That’s why Christians can kiddingly but

truthfully ask each other, “Please be patient with me. God is not finished with me yet!”