

GOD BE THANKED

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin,
but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

Romans 6:17

REVIEW

Last time we examined this charge that all of us in our natural state have been “servants of sin.” We saw that to be a servant of sin means to be in bondage to it, slaves to it, having no will independent of it, wholly under its control, lacking power to resist it, subject to its demands, moved by its dictates no matter how low and contrary to what is right, controlled, used, driven, dominated, and manipulated by the insurmountable power of sin. “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do,” Jesus said to the unredeemed in John 8:44.

We saw that our servitude to that cruel master, sin, occurs on many levels:

1. Obvious addictions of which even we are aware but unsuccessful in breaking: gambling, wrong eating, drinking, smoking, drug abusing, game-playing, internet surfing
2. Less obvious (at least to ourselves) and socially more acceptable addictions: worrying, fearing, distrusting, coveting, envying, complaining, gossiping
3. Self-assertion at the cost of whole-hearted, happy living for the glory of God: seen in all the classic illustrations of disobedience in the Scriptures, from Satan to Adam and Eve to Moses.

We saw that this woeful condition of slavery to sin not only plagues all the human race as we are born into this world (“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” – Ecc. 7:20), but we also saw that the condition degenerates through time. The sequence described in Rom. 6 is: uncleanness → iniquity unto iniquity → fruitlessness → shame → death.

And we saw that this characterization of all of us as “servants of sin” by nature is no obscure, fringe doctrine, but a foundational truth repeated throughout the Scriptures. Indeed, going back to John 8:34, we see Jesus' words, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”

But the real take-away from Romans 6:17 is not what we have been, but what God has made us. There is a profound truth here about God: God transforms servants of sin. He transforms them into servants of righteousness. God is the Great Transformer.

We know this, yes? Do we not know that, if redeemed, we have been changed, we are being changed, and one day we will be changed yet all the more? And that all this changing is to be done “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.” (Zech. 4:6)?

1. Have been changed – “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (II Cor. 5:17) With this change has come a new standing before God, new hope, new potential, new purpose, new power, new profession, new perspective, new perception, new passion, new pain, new pleasure ...
2. Are being changed – “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Rom. 12:2) Yes, a new mind, the mind of Christ, progressively being forged in us by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God. We no longer see people from a human point of view. We see souls,

spirits, heaven, hell, transience & eternity. We see with increasing clarity the vanity of the praise of men and the value of the praise of God. We see the wisdom of laying up treasures in heaven not earth; counting all trials to be joy, all persecution to be blessing, all earthly gain to be dung, the death of saints to be precious and the route to fullness of joy!

3. Will be changed – “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (I Cor. 15:51-53) Our change into the image of Christ will be complete. “We shall bear the image of the heavenly.” (I Cor. 15:49) We are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's son (Rom. 8:29). “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:2)

Truly, friends, we have a Transforming God. See it in nature. God takes ...

1. Dust and makes it a man.
2. Rock and makes it a fountain
3. Water and makes it wine
4. Rod and makes it a divider of the sea
5. Desert bush and makes it a fuelless torch
6. Fig tree and makes it a curse
7. Jawbone of an ass and makes it a weapon to slay a thousand
8. Rib of a man and makes it a woman
9. Foal of an ass and makes it a secure ride for a Savior
10. The vomit of a dog, the slop of a hog, or a grave of bones and makes them proverbs
11. The vilest sinner and makes him white as snow

Yes, we have a transforming God. We are talking about Jehovah. The self-existing one. The one who needs nothing and can do anything. “I form the light, and create darkness,” He says. “I the LORD do all these things.” (Isa. 45:7)

He can do whatever He wants with His creation. One of His names is Jehovah-Rapha. The Lord who heals: the One who can transform all bitter waters into sweet (Ex. 15). There is no malady that God's people can experience – whether the malady be physical, emotional, intellectual, willful, or spiritual; whether it be financial, medical, or mechanical; political, educational, environmental, domestic or international, temporal or eternal – there is no malady but Jehovah-Rapha can transform it into good.

There is a balm, there is a healing, for the abused, confused, rejected, self-hating, ashamed, frightened, lonely, abandoned, worried, fragile, burdened, bewildered, bruised, battered, worn-down, distraught, lowly, or lost soul. We have a transforming God.

You see, we are studying today that God is to “be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”

We call upon the Spirit of God today to answer that prayer we find in Eph. 1:18-19: “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.”

How might the Holy Spirit thus enlighten us? At least in part by a review of what He has done in the past. Again, here is a remarkable truth, a profound truth, about God: God transforms servants of sin. He transforms them into servants of righteousness. God is the Great Transformer. See . . .

1. Sarah, barren until 90 – but God transformed her into the mother of nations (Gen. 17:16)
2. Rahab, a pagan harlot – God set in the honorable lineage of David and our Lord
3. Slave girl to Gen. Naaman's wife – became a testifier to God's healing through prophet Elisha
4. Elizabeth, barren till well stricken in years – God made her mother of the greatest man ever born
5. Samaritan woman, had 5 husbands and other men – yet the Lord gave her doctrine on worship
6. Mary Magdalene, possessed of 7 demons – honored to be first to see the resurrected Christ
7. Rhoda, girl at a prayer meeting – became announcer of God's miraculous deliverance of Peter
8. Jacob, deceiver, rascal till 97 (age when wrestled) – changed to Israel, winner with God
9. Gideon, poor, hiding, least in his house – God made him judge to deliver his people
10. Jephthah, illegitimate birth, kicked out by half-brothers – God made a judge mighty in victory
11. David, watching sheep while brothers warred – became mightier warrior than King Saul
12. Solomon, son of conniving mother – became Jedediah (beloved of God) and wisest ever
13. Nebuchadnezzar, intensely proud, pagan – acknowledged God's everlasting dominion
14. Artaxerxes, pagan king over known world – funded rebuilding walls of Jerusalem
15. James and Jude, unbelieving family members of Jesus – became 2 writers of the Bible
16. Zacchaeus, hated tax collector – gave half of all to the poor, paid back harmed 4 times
17. Apostles, bungling, unperceiving, afraid – God made brave martyrs to the last
18. Paul, zealous hater of Christians – God made His greatest, humble, brave spokesman

Oh, we have a transforming God. God be thanked! God be thanked! “Ye were the servants of sin, but have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered you.”

DISCUSSION

1. If you are a Christian, then God has initiated in you a process of transformation. Describe the changes that have already occurred in you, are occurring now in you, and shall occur one day in you.
2. Illustrate where Jehovah-Rapha has provided healing in your life or others' (including in the Bible).
3. Study Ephesians 1:17-18. What can you tell others about the hope of God's calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of His power to us who believe?
4. Tell others why you are thankful this morning.