

You are Delivered! (Sanctification)
Ephesians 4:1-6
Argyle – 10/1/17 – Implications of Our Life in Christ

Introduction to Scripture

Last week Bryan talked about being chosen first recently in a pick- up soccer game. That reminded me of playing kickball at recess when I was in elementary school. Unlike my athletic friend, I was never chosen first or second or third... In fact, in what was a pretty accurate reflection of my athletic talent at the time, I was always chosen last or next to last. I think that is one of the reasons that I am so overwhelmed that God has chosen me to be a part of his family.

Aren't you glad that our acceptance by God is not based on our abilities or our works or anything else that has to do with us? We are chosen by God solely on the basis of his grace. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8 & 9)

Today is the third week in a sermon series we are calling “Implications of Our Life in Christ.” We are looking at what it means practically speaking that we believe in Christ and have a relationship with him. In his book entitled *Prayer* (picture) Tim Keller has a section entitled “Being Rich, but Living Poor.” As Christians, we have blessings in Christ that many of us don't understand and experience. Keller illustrates that using Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in chapter 3 where Paul prays, “I

pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ..."(Ephesians 3:17) Do you know that Jesus loves you? I think most of us would say, "Yes, I know that Jesus loves me." But have you "grasped" how wide and long and high and deep is Christ's love for you? His Jesus' love for you something that influences you every day? What we are talking about in this sermon series is not just knowing, but "grasping" the implications of our life in Jesus.

In one of this sermons, Jonathan Edwards talked about the two ways of knowing that honey is sweet. We can know it with our rational minds or we can know it with our sensing tongues. We can know that honey is sweet because people tell us it is sweet and we believe them. Or, we can know that honey is sweet because we have tasted it. It is good to know that we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, as Bryan talked about last week. But it is better to taste what it means to be justified to know that "we accepted by God."

So, this morning we move on to talk about the second of four primary implications of our life in Christ in hopes that we will grasp what it means to know and follow Jesus. These four primary implications are...

1. We are accepted
2. We are delivered
3. We are not alone
4. We have authority

Last week we talked about our acceptance in Christ. The theological word for this is justification. Today we are going to talk about the fact that in Christ we are delivered. The theological word for this is sanctification. We'll be starting our exploration of this theme in Ephesians 4. (Read) (Pray)

Introduction

When I first started thinking about this sermon a few weeks ago, I immediately thought of Paul's exhortation here in Ephesians 4 - "Live a life worthy of the calling you have received." When you and I come to faith in Jesus Christ we are justified by God. Because of our faith in Christ's death and resurrection, our sins are forgiven, we are declared righteous in God's sight, we are adopted into God's family and we are seated in the heavenly realms with Christ. In other words, we are accepted! Richard Lovelace defines justification as "...the perfect righteousness of Christ reckoned to us, covering the remaining imperfections in our lives like a robe of stainless holiness..."

Since we are accepted by God in Christ, we need to live lives that are worthy of that position. The Bible doesn't have to tell us that. It just seems logical to most of us that it ought to be that way. For instance, if we have a Christian boss, we expect her to treat us better than a non-Christian boss. If we have a Christian student, we expect him to be more honest than a non-Christian student. We expect our Christian neighbors, friends, family members to be better people. Why is that? Isn't it because we expect a Christian to live a life worthy of the calling they have received? We

expect Christians to act like Christians. But sadly, that is not always the case. In order for us to live lives that reflect who we are in Christ, we need to understand three important things.

The Depth of Indwelling Sin

The first thing we need to understand is the depth of indwelling sin. Paul wrote to the Romans, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ...¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ...For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ...What a wretched man I am!”(Romans 7:15-20)

I am so grateful for Paul’s transparency here, because he describes what we sometimes experience. On the one hand, we don’t do the things we know we should do and want to do, but on the other hand we do things that we know we shouldn’t do. This is not the end of the story for Paul, but it is an important place to pause.

Why is it that we sometimes don’t do what we want to do, but do the things we don’t want to do? The simple reason is the depth of indwelling sin in our lives. When you and I became Christians, our sinful nature wasn’t surgically removed. We naively expect that in becoming Christians, our desire to sin will disappear. It doesn’t. The pride we had before we became Christians is just as strong as the pride we have after we became Christians. The same is true for our lust, greed, envy,

selfishness, hatred, etc. Why is that? Paul gives us the answer in these verses. He said that his struggle to do good things and not to do bad things was because of “sin living in me.” If we are going to make any progress in living lives worthy of the calling we have received, we need to understand the depth of the sin that lives in us. Otherwise we are going to be continually blindsided by our sinful tendencies and the sinful tendencies of others. And we will fail to apply the spiritual resources necessary to rooting this sin in our lives. We will try and try and try, and fail and fail and fail.

We Have Been Delivered

As I mentioned before, these words in Romans 7 were not the end of the story for Paul. After declaring “What a wretched man I am!” he went on, “Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25) The second thing we need to understand in order for us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received is that we have been delivered.

In the quote from Richard Lovelace that I shared earlier he was actually describing the difference between justification and sanctification. Whereas “...justification is the perfect righteousness of Christ reckoned to us, covering the remaining imperfections in our lives like a robe of stainless holiness...,” “...sanctification is the process of removing those imperfections as we are enabled more and more to put off the bondages of sin and put on new life in Christ.” In

justification our sins are covered by the righteousness of Christ. In sanctification, those sin are actually removed. I want you to notice something very important in Lovelace's definition. It is the word "enabled." One of the things we often fail to understand is that our sanctification is just as dependent on God's grace as our justification is. We know that is 'by grace we have been saved through faith.' Well it is just as true that it is by grace we are being sanctified through faith. We are "enabled" by God to remove those imperfections in our lives. We will be talking about how God enables us over the next couple of weeks, but the first step in that enabling is to recognize that we have been delivered from the power of sin.

This principle is explained to us Romans 6 where Paul talks about the symbolism of baptism. We say that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are "outward expressions of an inward reality." The waters of baptism outwardly symbolize that inwardly we have died to our old lives and been raised to a new ones with Christ. Admittedly that is easier to see in baptism by immersion where a person is lowered into the water and then raised up. Paul wrote, "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ...If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." (Romans 6:3,5-7) By believing in Christ, we have been freed from the power of sin over us. Our sinful

nature has not been removed, but it no longer has power over us. We have been delivered!

Then why do we struggle so much with sin? I had it explained to me like this when I was a young Christian. It is like there are two fields side by side - God's field and Satan's field. Before we were Christians we were working in Satan's field and under his control. So when we were tempted to be self-righteous or to gossip about someone or to look at pornography, we had little power to resist. When we became Christians, however, we switched fields. We are now working in God's field. Yet, we are still tempted by the same things we were tempted by before. It is as if Satan is yelling at us, "Get back over here and do what I tell you to do." But he has no power over us, but if we fail to grasp the fact that we have been delivered, we give in to his temptations.

Richard Lovelace writes, "It is not enough to tell believers, 'You are accepted through your faith in Christ.' We must tell them also, 'You are delivered from the bondages of sin through the power of the indwelling Christ.'" In order for us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received, we need to grasp that we have been delivered from the bondages of sin.

The Desire of God for Our Lives

The third thing we need to understand in order to live lives worthy of the calling we have received is the desire of God for our lives. After urging the Ephesians to live lives worthy of the calling they had received, he went on to describe

some of what that would look like. He wrote, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” God desires us to be humble, gentle, patient, loving and unified.

In a couple of his letters Paul used the metaphor of taking off soiled clothes and putting on new cloths as a way of illustrating the behaviors and attitudes that God desires for us to get rid of and the ones he wants us to live out. I am not going to take the time to read those passages because I have no doubt that if I were to list the things Paul talked about, you would know which category to put them in. For the most part it is not ignorance about what God desires for us that keeps us from living the Christian life. It is a failure to understand the first two things we’ve talked about today that hamper our spiritual progress.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion this morning let me remind you of the depth of indwelling sin in our lives. When we became Christians, we didn’t lose our greed, and lust and pride. They are pretty deeply rooted in us, so we must take them seriously and apply the spiritual resources that God has provided for ridding our lives of them. But even though sin still lives in us, it no longer has power over us. We have been delivered from the power of sin and thus “enabled more and more to put off the bondages of sin and put on new life in Christ.”

And so we come to the Lord's table this morning to be reminded that we are accepted by God not because we are good people or have done good things, but because of the shed blood and broken body of our Lord Jesus Christ that these elements represent. We need to know that we are accepted if we are going to have the courage and strength to live out the calling we have received from God. We, also, need to know that we are delivered if we are going to have the hope and faith to live lives worthy of the calling we have received. (Pray) (Invitation)