

Lesson 35 - THE SERVANTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS *Romans 6:17-18*

(6:17) - What does it take to save sinners from their sins? According to God's Word, there are three things that must be accomplished and settled before salvation can be complete and assured for sinners. Not one of these three things can be accomplished and settled by fallen, sinful people. All three are sovereign and powerful works of God by His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ.

(1) Sinners must be LEGALLY JUSTIFIED and LEGALLY freed from sin before God. This was accomplished and settled by the Lord Jesus Christ in His obedience unto death as the Representative, Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. Having the debt of all their sins imputed to Him, Christ died in their place to satisfy God's justice for their sins. He established an everlasting righteousness that God has imputed to them for their right standing in His sight. This is the legal freedom describe in *Romans 6:3-7* (see Lessons 31 and 32). This is the GROUND of the salvation of God's people and the SOURCE of spiritual and eternal life for them.

(2) Sinners must be SPIRITUALLY LIBERATED from the darkness and deception of Satan and their own sinful and fallen human natures that keep them from seeing the glory of God in Christ and believing in Christ for all salvation, righteousness, eternal life, and glory (*2 Cor. 4:4-6*). This is the work of Christ IN them by the power of the Holy Spirit in their new birth (*John 1:12-13; 3:3-7*). This is when the Holy Spirit brings them under the Gospel and imparts spiritual life bringing them to knowledge of and faith in Christ, as well as repentance of dead works and idolatry (*Php. 3:3-9*). This spiritual liberation is described in *Romans 6:17-23*. It is the FRUIT and assured RESULT of the grace of God based on the righteousness of Christ imputed to them.

(3) Sinners must be SPIRITUALLY PRESERVED unto glory by the grace of God. This is a work of God in Christ by His Spirit Who indwells God's people continually and causes them to persevere in believing and following Christ (*Php. 1:6; 2:12-13; 1 John 2:19-3:9*). This too is the FRUIT and assured RESULT of the grace of God based on the righteousness of Christ imputed to them (*Rom. 8:33-39*).

Legal justification cannot be attained by the works of sinners. Neither spiritual liberation nor preservation can be attained by the works or wills of sinners. It is all of God in and by Christ! Here in these verses the apostle is speaking of our SPIRITUAL LIBERATION in the new birth, and he attributes it to God alone - "**BUT GOD BE THANKED**. Every facet of salvation is of the Lord, not of man. It is by HIS sovereign and free grace, and based on the merit of the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whenever men claim that salvation (any part of it) is conditioned on sinners, they pervert and corrupt the true Gospel of Christ wherein the righteousness of God is revealed.

"That ye were the servants of sin" - Gratitude to God for this salvation is to be given in light of what we are by nature due to our fall in Adam, our spiritual death in trespasses and sins, and our many, many personal sins that have plagued us all of our lives. "**Servants of sin**" here describes unregenerate unbelievers. These are the same as the "**natural man**" in *1 Corinthians 2:14* who "**receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.**" They are the same who are by nature "**dead in trespasses and sins**" and who are by nature no different than the "**children of wrath**" (*Eph. 2:1-3*).

"But ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" - IF we stay within the context of Biblical revelation, obedience "**from the heart**" has to be obedience from the NEW HEART given by the Holy Spirit in the NEW BIRTH (*Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:26; Rom. 2:28-29*). The "**heart**" involves the mind, affections, and the wills, and the new heart is given in the new birth along with spiritual eyes and ears to see and hear the

truth of the Gospel of Christ savingly (*John 3:3-7*). Apart from this invincible working of the Spirit in regeneration and conversion, there will be no obedience **“from the heart”** because the natural, sinful heart will not desire or believe God’s truth (*Gen. 6:5; Psa. 53:1-3; Eccl. 9:3; Jer. 17:9-11; Matt. 15:19*).

“That form of doctrine” - This refers to the teachings of God’s Word, specifically the Gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, which reveals the righteousness of God. This is God’s provision of righteousness by Christ for the salvation, justification, and eternal life of all whom He chose and all for whom Christ died. The word **“form”** refers to the pattern of truth set forth by God in His Word. In *2 Timothy 1:13* we find the same root word used here in *Romans 6:17* where Paul wrote, **“hold fast the form (pattern) of sound words.”**

Here it means the pattern of the message of salvation which God has set down by which we judge the truth over lies. Some believe this refers to a stamp that is made as in to “cast a die.” When people say, “The die is cast,” they mean that something has been made which cannot be changed. This stamp is an identifying mark, a badge which is worn by all servants of righteousness, for they are all made from the same mold. The die had already been cast by God when He chose them in eternal, unchangeable, electing love and sent His Son to die for them and establish a righteousness whereby He could be just to justify them. The Holy Spirit finds them, then digs them out of the pit of false religion and false refuges, and melts them down to cast them and mold them according to God’s cast as identified by the **“doctrine of Christ”** (*2 John 9*), the Gospel of God.

“Which was delivered you” - The Gospel doctrine is most certainly **“delivered”** (given) through preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit (*Rom. 1:16-17; 10:13-17; 1 Cor. 1:17-21*). But the sense of this phrase is more properly translated as the doctrine “to which you were delivered” or “committed.” It states that all of God’s chosen people will be, by God’s providence and power, delivered up to, brought under, and committed to the true Gospel. God does not give the gift of faith in Christ and true repentance under the preaching of a false gospel. Salvation can only come by means of God’s truth preached and revealed by the Spirit (*Matt. 7:15-20; John 8:32*).

(6:18) - “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” - The word **“free”** here means **“liberated”** **“from sin.”** When the Holy Spirit, under the preaching of the Gospel and in the new birth, gives God’s people spiritual life, knowledge, and faith, they are literally *liberated* from sin, and they become **“the servants of righteousness.”** Before faith in Christ, we are all **“servants of sin”** no matter how we walked either in religion or immorality as the world sees it. Everything we were and did before faith is to be repented of in light of salvation by God’s grace in Christ (*Php. 3:7-9*). This is what keeps the natural man in his lost state. He does not want to repent of that which he by nature highly esteems (*John 3:19-20*). To be a servant **“of righteousness”** is not just human morality or religion. It is believing in, trusting, and following the Lord Jesus Christ Who is the Lord our Righteousness. It is clinging to Him for all salvation and fighting the warfare of the Spirit against the flesh as motivated by grace, love, and gratitude. It is to be a willing, loving bondservant of Christ, seeking to obey Him, not to be saved and not to establish our righteousness before God by which to be justified in His sight. But it is serving Him because of what He has already freely given us by His grace through the righteousness of Christ freely imputed to us and received by God-given faith. In short, a servant of righteousness is a true believer who can say with the apostle - **“I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day”** (*2 Tim. 1:12*).