**Life under God’s grace**

**March 27 2016**

Key Verse: 6:11,14 “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”

There are three stages of Christian life: 1- justification when we accept Jesus as our personal saviour, 2-sanctification the process of growing to holiness, and 3-glorification where we live with Christ in the kingdom of God in our perfect spiritual body. Justification is one time thing but sanctification is a continuous process for us to grow in Jesus’ likeness. In the process of sanctification, to know God’s amazing grace and to understand His principle of victory and holiness enable us to live a victorious new life in Christ. Romans 6 deals with these crucial questions: How shall I live the Christian life? How can I have victory and dominion over sin? What must I do to live a life that is pleasing to God? Instead of following God’s principle, people in general follow various self-improvement techniques and self-discipline techniques. People try confession of sin (which is good and right) but the confession does not seem to stop the sinning and they fall into the sin-confess-sin-confess cycle (constantly confessing their sins but never able to forsake their sins). In Romans 6 Paul teaches us the spiritual truth regarding a victorious life in Christ’s resurrection power: by faith we need to count ourselves dead to sin on the cross with Christ and by faith we live a new life in Christ under God’s grace.

**First, “Shall we continue in sin?”** Look at verse 1, “*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase*?” Some who don’t understand well about God’s grace try to justify their sins by saying, if a person is not saved by how good he is and if a saved person cannot lose salvation because of how bad he is, then why can’t he continue in sin to show everyone how gracious and forgiving God can be to His wicked child?" This is a distorted way of understanding God’s grace. In fact we have sinned sufficiently already, the depths of our sins and wickedness have reached enough and there is no need to add sin upon sin to magnify God’s grace. One definition of Grace is getting what we don’t deserve and not getting what we do deserve. Through Jesus’ obedience and righteousness, we get what we don’t deserve which is salvation and we don’t get what we deserve which is eternal condemnation. The truth is the more we realized the depth of our sins that put Jesus on the cross the more God’s grace is magnified. It is not about how much more to sin to realize or experience more grace from God. From the previous Sunday messages, we could see and understand God’s grace through Jesus’ sincere love and care for Judas the betrayer and Peter the big mouth even before they realized their own selfishness, rebellion, unbelief and pride. Instead of condemning them, out of His sincere love, Jesus gave them a chance to repent. The fact is those who know the grace of God in truth do not use it as a license to sin. When we experience God’s grace personally, we are filled with gratitude and in fact compelled to live for the will of God who makes a way for unworthy sinners to have a new life in Christ.

**Second, Died to sin and alive in Christ.** Paul answered to the question of “shall we continue in sin?” with an absolute NO. Look at verse 2 "*By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”* After we believe in Christ there are two things happen to us: our death to sin and a new life in Christ. Paul doesn’t give us a comment like “you need to die to sin” referring to our struggle to put sins to an end. This is more of a fact which is like “I, (Wah Paw), DIED TO SIN!" with a past tense. It is not something that will happen but it is something that has already happened 2000 years ago when Jesus took the fundamental human sin including my sin on him and died on the cross. The root part of our sin becomes dead by the time we receive Jesus as our saviour. Having faith in that fact, we can have confidence that sin has no power over us. What happens after God put our sin to death? The believer's death to sin involves our UNION with Jesus Christ as Paul explains in verse 4 “*we were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*” Paul explains our new relationship with Jesus through the parable of baptism. Our going under the water represents our death to sin and emerging from the water represents our new life in Christ. We can see God’s wonderful grace here. Not only He defeated the power of sin through Jesus, He also makes a way for Christians to have a new life in Christ’s resurrection power. Christ died, and in Him we died also! Christ was raised up from the dead and in Christ we were raised up also. In this union Christ becomes wisdom for us and this overcomes our spiritual blindness and ignorance. In this union Christ becomes righteousness for us and this overcomes our guilt and condemnation. In this union Christ becomes sanctification for us and this overcomes our corruption and pollution. In Ephesians 4:24, the new man was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness. Therefore, upon becoming Christians there is no way that we continue to enjoy sin because of Christ’s dwelling within us.

**Third, No longer slaves to sin**. Look at verse 6 “*For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been set free from sin*.” And again Paul explains our position to sin in a different way by explaining our old self on the cross. What is the "old self" or “old man”? The old man is my old life in Adam characterized as having a nature that is opposed to God, and this nature can be characterized by bitterness, unbelief, wrath, anger, corrupt, evil speaking, unforgiving spirit and so on. Moreover, the old one refers to the SELF LIFE being rebellious toward God and His truth desiring to live a self centered life style. It is important to know that the old man is a very hard headed stubborn man! He will never change but ever and always corrupt! The old man will never improve himself. The old man will never reform. He is irredeemable! Those who try to conquer the old man will never win! How then does God deal with the old man? God does not change the old man. God does not transform the old man. What did God do with our old self? The answer is in verse 6, "*OUR OLD MAN WAS CRUCIFIED WITH HIM.*" God put the old man, who takes control over our life and soul, to death with Jesus on the cross. My old man which is my sin origin was plucked out and put to an end forever! It is not something that I do, it is something that God has already done! In this way, Jesus fulfilled the requirements of laws by taking our place for God’s judgement. Law is required where there is sin. Since we are dead to sin we should no longer be susceptible to laws which put us under its bondages of pressure, guilt, anxiety and insecurity. If we don’t claim the victory over sin, we are put under its bondages as much as we allow. God’s purpose for us is to live like a freeman under His grace serving His purpose on the earth before our glorification in heaven is realized.

**Fourth, Count yourself dead to sins and alive in Christ.** What do we do after we believe the facts of our dead to sin and freedom from the slavery of sin? Look at verse 10-11, “*The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” This is the great news of Jesus’ resurrection power which we could claim to overcome the power of sin in every moment. However, in day to day experience, we feel like our old man often seems very alive and healthy as if no transformation has occurred. It is because we are still dwelling in our fallen nature body which is vulnerable to satanic harassments and the corrupt system of this world. The more we resist our sins the more we become tired, helpless, and despair for there is no way that our fallen natural can win over the power of sin. So in verse 11, Paul teaches us that we are to count on (to reckon) the spiritual truth of our dead to sin and our new life in Christ’ resurrection power. For example, when we get angry, we count ourselves dead to the sin of anger and by faith believe in the power of Christ to enable us to respond to the situation according to His will. Sometime, we may not experience the power of Christ within us immediately but the obvious overwhelming sense of failures to the power of sin. From one pastor I’ve learnt that we must not go by our experience of failures. We must go by what God has said (the FACTS!). For we do not die to sin by our experiences: we did die to sin in Christ’s death. The more we count on to those facts, the more we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to overcome temptations and live a life that is pleasing to God. It is not a simply mental exercise but it is more about the practical acts of our absolute surrender of our SELF and our total reliance on the power of Christ to transforms us to develop His characters of holy and loved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience.

**Fifth, Not under law but under grace**. Look at verse, 14 “*for sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.*” When Paul says the believer is not "under law but under grace" he is referring to sanctification (the believer’s progress in holiness). As I’ve mentioned above, Law is required where there is sin. Jesus already put the power of sin to death and frees us from the burden of Laws. With this newfound freedom we serve God joyfully with no pressure under God’s pure grace. When Christ becomes our righteousness and justification, we are free from the demands of laws. Our actions and deeds are not defined by the laws but grace. In that sense God’s glory is revealed either in our failures or success. When we fail, we no longer live under the condemnation because we know that we are accepted not because of our performance but because of what Jesus has done. When we accept losers like us instead of condemning them, from our own experience of God’s acceptance, we learn to accept their limitation and lift them up. When we live under grace we are free from the fear of being judged and the sin of judgemental. When we appreciate God’s forgiveness, mercy, and grace to this unworthy sinner, we show our appreciation of God by showing His forgiveness, mercy, and love practically to others. We glorify God with our actions, attitudes, and deeds it is because this is the least thing we could reveal our gratitude for His initiation to love and save us. When we allow Christ work in our lives we could even go beyond what laws requires because we work not to keep the laws but to please God who is above the laws. Believing in this fact, we have endless possibility of spiritual growth every moment with Christ’ resurrection power in our practical life.

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| LAWS | GRACE |
| Man’s works | God’s working |
| Trying and struggling to measure up to God’s standards (which sinful man can never do) | God bringing me up to His standards (which God by His grace has done in Christ) |
| Fosters a spirit of self-righteous boasting: "Look what I have done!" | Fosters genuine humility with all boasting excluded: "God gets all the credit!" |
| Bondage: I CANNOT | Deliverance: GOD CAN! |
| God demands life and love  ("THOU SHALT . . . THOU SHALT NOT"). | God provides life and love  ("CHRIST LIVETH IN ME"). |

I used to be a very proud and self-righteous person who had no mercy over a person I assume as weak. I tend to depend on my strength and good deeds in my service to people and God. Outwardly I looked polite, charming, and with well manners but inside I was filled with self-righteousness, pride, and condemnation of others. I have no mercy toward people I assumed as morally corrupt or undisciplined. The last few years, God caught me by surprise to reveal himself to me. In the process of revelation, he was holding my hands and guiding me to the right direction. In my spiritual journey with Him, instead of trying to battle with my sinful natures of pride, condemning heart, and self-pity for losing myself, I learn to know more about Jesus and find out what kind of person He is. I like to learn His attitude and characters in dealing with public sinners and religious leaders. Jesus’ lifestyle reflects my position before him which puts me to shame. I’ve realized that all the good things that I boast about myself is nothing before God but it is just a filthy rug. According to God’s holy standard and justice, I’ve realized that I am as worthless as someone whom I assume as pathetic. I am as much as in need of God’s mercy and forgiveness as others whom I assume as worst sinners. This experience makes me humble and enables me to see my need for Jesus in my daily life. His presence in me strengthens me to go through God’s sanctification with joy and gratitude. Now I have a better understanding what it means when people say “by God’s mercy and grace I have the privilege to become the children of God not by our work and righteousness.” Living in that gratitude and holding on to the resurrection faith I open myself to the His work of sanctification until I bear Jesus’ Holy images.

In the previous message, we studied God’s grace that set us free from the power of sin and give us freedom to life as a new life in Christ. In this message we will study Paul’s teaching on how to walk practically in the freedom Jesus has given us in Christian life.

First, Use your body part as instrument of righteousness

When we put our faith in God and His word, we are set free from sin. This is God’s grace. The victory which we have in Christ does not mean that we have no battle to fight. In fact the battle has just begun. In verse 13 Paul taught us what the believers must do in their daily spiritual battle. Let’s read verse 13 “Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.” In this verse any part of yourself mean the parts of our body such as ears, lips, eyes, hand, mind, and so forth. Paul taught us to use our body as instruments of righteousness. The instrument can be better translated as weapons. The parts of our body are weapons in the battle for righteous living. When the parts of our body are given over to righteousness they are weapons for good. When they are given over to sin, they are weapons for evil. To present our body parts as powerful weapons for righteousness, we must present ourselves to God as being alive from the dead. In the previous message, we’ve learnt that the moment we believe in Jesus Christ as our saviour, we have to believe that the old man who had dominion over us is gone. Now as a new man, we become the weapons of righteousness to live for the One who has given us new life.

As a new creation, we yield to God’s will as the Lord’s Prayer states “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. Only when we yield to God’s will then, we can yield our physical body to God as instruments of righteousness. For instance if our tongues have been yielded to God and taken up by the Holy Spirit they become the weapons in prayer, in testimony, and in preaching. Only when I yield to God’s will then I can diligently use my fingers to search for the website that will help me with my spiritual growth, or follow up and write to encourage or comfort my friends with the word of God. Otherwise, by habit I will yield to sin and fail to live victorious life over my laziness and easy going mentality by wasting my precious time browsing internet aimlessly. Thus, although Jesus has set us free legally, if we yield our bodily appetites to the service of sin, we live a life of defeat, discouragement and imprisonments. As the previous message and last week message emphasize only when we yield to God’s will, our mind can be transformed in the likeness of Jesus that will result in our actions and life style that enable us to live a victorious life over sin by the help of the Holy Spirit in our daily spiritual struggle.

Second, “slaves to righteousness” (15-23).

In this part Paul encourages us to become slaves to God that will lead to righteousness and holiness. In the verses 15-23 the word “slave” is repeatedly used. This word “slave” has the connotation of belonging to or being on the side of. In Paul’s time one third of the population of the Roman Empire was Roman citizens and two thirds were slaves. So Paul used a slave master relationship to demonstrate the concept of our relationship with God. In verse 16 Paul reminds his readers of a very simple principle. YOU ARE A SLAVE OF WHOEVER YOU OBEY! Whatever you present yourself to obey, you become its slave. If I obey SIN, I am a slave to it. If I obey God, I am slave to God. The good news for Christian is that we are set free from slavery to sin through Jesus Christ already. We just need to have faith on what Jesus has done for us and claim freedom, power, and victory over sin broadly and live new life to sever our new master Jesus. To make it clear I want to share the illustration by D.L. Moody as follows.

It is about an old black woman in the South following the Civil War. Being a former slave, she was confused about her status and asked: "Now am I free, or am I not? When I go to my old master he says I ain't free, and when I go to my own people they say I is, and I don't know whether I'm free or not. Some people told me that Abraham Lincoln signed a proclamation, but master says he didn't; he didn't have any right to." Therefore when Abraham Lincoln and the U.S. government free the slave, they have to do five things to help slaves to take advantage of their freedom; know about the proclamation, believe it was true (reckon, count on it); claim their freedom: pack their bags, etc., refuse to be a slave--live as a free person; count on all the power of the legislature of the U.S. to stand behind them.

This is exactly the place many Christians are. We have been, legally set free from our slavery to sin, and given the power of Holy Spirit to live victorious life over sin, yet some of us are unsure of that truth. As a consequence, we Christians continue with our habitual sin and become forever slave to the old master SIN rather than live as a free person with resurrection power under God’s grace. Galatians 5:1 states "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” The believers in Christ needs to stand fast in the liberty and power that Jesus grant us and serve our new master who will lead us further into progression in holiness and righteousness.

Third, The Wages of Our Services

Similar to our physical world, in the spiritual world, we will reap the wages based on who we serve. Please read verse 21-23. “21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” What do we get as a consequence of being slaves to sin? Some get headache, feel ashamed, do not feel life as worth living, feel meaningless, dismay, and get disharmony with closed people, family members, and suffer from hopelessness. After all the outcome of all those things is death. However, by serving our God who gives us the new life, we need not to look back, and dwell on our guilt, our mistakes, our shame or frustration because Jesus paid it all, we are forgiven and we are set free and most of all the precious gift of eternal life is already given to us through Jesus. When we were in Adam, we gradually slipped deeper and deeper into sin until the fruit of death came. But in Christ, we have been set free to grow in holiness and righteousness. As we offer ourselves to God as his slaves, we reap the fruit of holiness and receive as a gift, eternal life.

Conclusion

God's grace is wonderful. God's grace changed us from a servant of sin into a servant of righteousness. We are not under the law, but under grace, we serve God with thankful hearts and obey the gospel with our whole hearts. Most of all we serve Him with joy and freedom with the assurance of our salvation in Christ. A few years ago, Dr Henry gives a clear demonstration of a Christian life under God’s grace by using the example of a figure skater. As for the figure skaters like Yuna Kim or Patrick Chan, regardless of how much they practice or how good they are, they still need to be very careful and conscious every second to reach the standard set up by the judges to get the award. Even for the audience, I was not at ease when I watched their performance worrying they would fall down or make a mistake. But if they know that they received the first prize already, they will feel free from pressure and dance joyfully. In the same way, those who live under God’s grace do not need to fear or worry about failure, being condemned, or judged because we are already given the award through the performance of Jesus Christ already. Now having the assurance in the prizes, under God’s wonderful grace, let’s dance freely, beautifully, peacefully, gracefully in our spiritual life for God’s glory.