

The Journey of Sanctification  
A Sermon for July 2, 2017  
Romans 6:22  
Lansdowne UMC

We're continuing our series on the book of Romans in the second half of chapter 6. And over the past few weeks, we've been looking at images that Paul uses to describe this fancy word: justification. If you're going to substitute one word for justification, the best word is probably pardon. But how does that play out and how does Paul describe it? Two weeks ago, we saw how Paul talked about justification as the move from being God's enemies to being at peace with God. Last week we saw Paul talk about justification as participating in Christ's death and resurrection so that we become dead to sin, but alive to God.

And this week, Paul is going to talk about justification using a different metaphor. It's probably the most challenging metaphor that he uses. There is one verse in particular that seems to capture the thrust of the whole section. It's Romans chapter 6, verse 22:

But now that you have been *freed* from sin and *enslaved* to God,  
the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life.

This week, the overarching metaphor that Paul uses is hard for our modern ears. I'm guessing it wasn't easy on ancient ears, either. The image Paul uses is that of a slave changing owners. Paul himself confesses that the analogy is far from perfect-- he says he is speaking in human terms. But this is the point that Paul is trying to make: before our justification, sin is our master. Sin is our Lord. We are obligated to do

what it wants. “But now,” Paul says... and when he says “But now” you can usually expect that some good news is coming. “But now, you have been freed from sin.” Christ has broken the chains that kept you enslaved to sin. As he says in Colossians 1:13, “[God] has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.” Before justification, Sin is your master. Once you are Justified, Paul is saying, God is your master. Jesus is your Lord. You’ve been transferred.

In Paul’s vision, there is no in between. There is no being your own Master. If God isn’t your Master, then Sin is. But if God *is* your Master, then Sin isn’t. And in one of the great paradoxes of Christianity, the way to freedom is to have God as your Master. Deciding to try to find freedom apart from obedience to God is essentially the same as choosing Sin as your master.

In other words, those who have been justified are freed *from* bondage to sin, but freed *for* obedient service to God.

So again, Paul says, “But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God *the advantage you get is sanctification.*”

I know this can feel like a vocabulary lesson, but we need to know about this word “sanctification.” As John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, says, justification is what God does *for* us, but sanctification is what God does *in* us. Put another way, if Justification is the first half of the gospel, then sanctification is the second half of the gospel.

Sanctification means becoming holy-- becoming like Jesus. Wesley said that “at the same time that we are justified, ... in that very moment, sanctification begins.... We are enabled “by the Spirit” to “[subdue] the deeds of the body,” of our evil nature; and as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God. We go on from grace to grace, while we are careful to “abstain from [every form] of evil,” and are “zealous [for good deeds].”

Sanctification was so important to Wesley that he thought that the Methodist view of it was the principal reason that God raised up the Methodists.

But why would we want this thing called sanctification? Here’s one way to look at it. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 “this is the will of God, your sanctification.” We pursue, hope for, and expect sanctification because it is what God desires for us. Sanctification is the means by which we grow to live out the great commandments of Jesus to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is the life to the full that Jesus died to bring.

To get to this point, we need transformation. With all of that bible and theology in the background, how does this transformational journey of justification and sanctification actually play out in real people? To try to answer that question the Barna Group, an evangelical Christian research organization, surveyed more than 15,000 randomly-selected people over a 6 year period. Through that, George Barna identified what he called 10 “stops” along the journey of transformation-- or 10 places that people get to and then stop. They’re laid out in his 2011 book, “Maximum

Faith.” I’m going to read these “stops” to you. (Now would be a good time to make use of [the chart](#))

1. **Stop 1 is Ignorance of the concept or existence of Sin.** 1% of adults never register that there is a thing called sin. That’s where they have stopped on their journey.
2. **Stop 2 is Aware of and indifferent to sin.** 16% of adults know about the concept of sin, but either don’t believe it’s a real thing or something that’s at all significant. Sure, they might be able to say that certain actions may be categorized as sinful, but they are not concerned about it.
3. **Stop 3 is Concerned about the implications of personal sin.** These are the people who ask the “what if” questions. What if there were a God who was offended by sin. What if sin really does negatively impact my life. 39% of adults hit the “what if” questions and never move beyond them.

So between stops 1, 2, and 3, that’s 56% of the adult population who have never confessed their sins and asked for Jesus to be their Savior. My goodness that statistic should compel us into mission.

4. **Stop 4 is those who Confess sins and ask Jesus Christ to be their savior.** These are the people who (quote) “pray the sinner’s prayer” but who never commit to being part of a church. I affectionately call this stop “settling for cheap grace.” That’s 9% of adults.
5. **Stop 5 is Committed to Faith Activities.** These are those people who decide to grow in their knowledge of God, in their relationships with other Christians, and in their service to others.

24% of adults make it to this point and stop. They go no farther. I would say that most of these individuals are unaware of the possibility of anything more.

6. **Stop 6 is to Experience a prolonged period of spiritual discontent.** This stage may begin to manifest itself with boredom, or with questioning the purpose of the church. Those who are attentive to God's work might find themselves needing to admit that they have grown complacent spiritually, having made little progress in becoming more like Jesus for some time. In other words, they have neglected God's work of sanctification. They've been given by God a *Holy Discontent*. They recognize they're praying as they know they should. They're struggling with the same sins as they were months or years ago. Some people who are confronted by this stage and don't move forward either leave the church, thinking that it is hollow, or else they realize that moving forward will be costly and they turn back. They decide that God is not worth the price, and they settle in at an earlier stop. 6% of adults make it to this stop and never go any farther.
7. **Stop 7 is to Experience personal brokenness.** Those who jump headfirst into a deeper level of commitment with God end up having to confront the depth of their own sinfulness and self-reliance. The Holy Spirit searches the depths of their hearts-- their hidden thoughts and their motives-- giving them with a sober view of their desperate need for God. 3% make it this far, but never go farther.
8. **Stop 8 is Choosing to surrender and submit fully to God: Radical Dependence.** Having gained a posture of spiritual poverty, this is the person who says, "Lord, to whom shall I go? You have the words of eternal life." This is the point where, by

God's grace, we submit ourselves fully to God's purposes. We've heard sermons about picking up our cross and following Jesus, but this is the point where the abstractions fall away and we actually find ourselves needing to sacrifice. Submission to God becomes our lifestyle. 1% of adults come this far and stop.

**9. Stop 9 is Enjoying a profound intimacy with and love for God.**

The paradox of the gospel is that when we lose our lives for the sake of the gospel, that's when we find life. Just as the prodigal son returned to be a servant in his Father's household, we come to God as willing, obedient servants. But when we do that, we find ourselves welcomed as *children* into the household of our Heavenly Father. The favor that God shows us is indescribable, and our whole lives become oriented toward loving God more and enjoying God's love. 0.5% of adults come this far, but stop.

**10. Stop 10 is Experiencing a profound compassion and love for humanity.** Those who make it to stop 10 understand in the depth of their being that God's love is not for them alone. They're able to see others the way that God does-- in desperate need of justification and sanctification. 0.5% of adults make it this far.

Again that's George Barna 10 Transformational Stops. Clearly, this is a very simplified roadmap. Rarely do we progress steadily through all the stops in order. This is simply a tool that might help us think about where we are and where God could take us. It's not meant for any one of us to take and apply to those who might be around us. I don't think John Wesley would mind, though. If we try it on him, we'll see it fits like a glove. After being a busy Christian for many years, he had an encounter with Moravian Christians which drove him into a period of *holy discontent*. He saw that the Moravians had something that he did not.

His self-reliant missionary work in America left him broken. Then back in England, following all that Holy Discontent and brokenness, he surrenders to God, puts his faith in Christ as if for the first time, and finds the love of God poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit. He goes on with a zeal to bring salvation to others that could only be powered by a profound love for humanity. And as a result of all of this, he preaches not only the need for justification, but also for sanctification.

Isn't it interesting that stops 1-5 are roughly the journey to justification, and stops 6-10 are the journey to sanctification. 89% of people never make it beyond stop number 5, "committed to faith activities." And that means that only 11% have spent any serious time at all wondering if there is more-- asking God, "Isn't there more to a relationship with you than praying for forgiveness and bringing a dish for the potluck?"

It's also worth noting that these "stops" are more practical observation than biblical necessity. God is not bound to march people through steps 3 through 10. What I think is really interesting, though, is that the researchers found that people who do manage to get to Stops 9 and 10 (profound love for God and humanity) have been gone *through* Stops 7 and 8-- brokenness and surrender. Now, from the Bible's point of view, stop 8, choosing to surrender and submit fully to God belongs back with stop 4, confessing Jesus as savior. For example, it would be very biblical for someone to jump right from stop 3 to stop 7. Their concern for sin turns into brokenness, at which point they surrender their life in service to Jesus and find salvation in Christ. This is what the scripture is talking about today. Becoming freed from Sin and enslaved to God brings sanctification.

Sanctification is our calling. It is the point. Profound love of God and profound love of humanity is the ultimate goal of the Christian life. Transformed people are used by God to transform the world. Make it to stop 10, and you are fulfilling Jesus' greatest commandments. Fall short of these, and you're not living the fullness of the Christian identity. You're not living the abundant life that Jesus came to give us.

We don't get there on our own. John Wesley helps us to understand that every step we take along this journey is a work of God's grace. Even before someone believes in God, God works in their life. That's called prevenient grace. God puts people in our lives who tell us about this thing called sin. From that point, we can resist God and stay indifferent to sin (stop 2) or we can become convicted of our sin (stop 3) and take the next step to ask Jesus for forgiveness (stop 4). That movement is the work of the Holy Spirit. It's God's grace.

It's God at work when we realize the Christian life demands a response, and so we get involved in the church (stop 5). Then as the work of sanctification begins, God works to unsettle us, to make us long for a real relationship and not just some transactional exchange. God's grace puts us into a season of holy discontent, where by God's grace we recognize our desperate need for God and are broken of our self-reliance. By the Spirit's power we surrender fully to Christ, and go on to experience a love for God and a love for humanity that words cannot express.

Lots of people apparently think that God is done with them once they join the church and begin to participate in it's activities. But as you can see, these people have only come half way. God's just getting started. If



they're attentive, God is going to put into them that desire for more. Sometimes they'll think that the "more" they desire is more information-- more bible knowledge for example-- or more activity. In reality, though, God drawing them into is a deeper relationship of Christ-like love. It's a costly relationship-- a sanctifying relationship.

Do you have a profound love for God? Do you have a profound love for humanity? If not, then don't stop at being active in the church. God's got more for you, and the best of the gospel is the rest of the gospel. Lean in to God's work in your life. We need to let ourselves get unsettled. For this is the will of God: our sanctification. Amen.