

# **The Gospel as it Really Is: *Romans simply Explained***

## **Let's talk about Sanctification**

**Romans 6:1-23**

**June 8th 2025 MHC & MPC**

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### **Introduction—an off day**

Two months ago, Lando Norris, the British F1 driver, qualified a disappointing sixth for the Bahrain Grand Prix. He was so frustrated by his poor performance: “It’s like I’ve never driven a Formula 1 car before.” Normally Norris is an excellent driver; last weekend he came second in the Spanish Grand Prix, but in Bahrain he had an off day.

If you have been a follower of Jesus Christ—even for a short time - you will know the frustration of *spiritual failure*; of thinking something, saying something, doing something that you know is not pleasing to God.

Failure is often followed by sadness because a believer finds that their relationship with sin has changed forever: they hate their sin, they don’t want to sin, they mourn over it, confess it and repent.

Today in our unfolding of Paul’s letter to the Romans and to every church, we begin a two and a half chapter long section about becoming holy, about sanctification.

- 2.5 chapters to prove that we are all sinners,
- 1.5 chapters to explain the Good News, that God took the initiative and through Jesus Christ his Son provided a righteousness that he gives to us as a free gift! And all we must do is to believe the Gospel!
- Half a chapter to outline the rich blessings of salvation, Peace with God, the Hope of Eternal Life, a new perspective on our suffering in this world, a deep knowledge of God's love for us, plus total security in this world and the next
- Then, last week— half a chapter to explain the mechanism, for want of a better word, by which Salvation can come from One Man to billions—God works on the principle of federal headship—just as one man Adam caused ruin to all mankind, so through One Man Jesus Christ, God brought righteousness and blessing to multitudes—to everyone who will believe
- And now 2.5 chapters, 6 through to chapter 8, to explain sanctification.

### **Four Sanctification Truths**

Before we delve into this new section of Romans, we’re going to stand back and talk generally about “sanctification.”

## 1) What does sanctification mean?

What does the big word “Sanctification” mean? Well Sanctification is about becoming more and more becomes progressively holy , day by day, year by year, decade by decade. The word comes from the Latin word Sanctus which means “holy”, so sanctification is the process of becoming more and more holy, more like God, more like Jesus, as the years roll by.

If you met a Christian the day after they believe, their lives would, no doubt, be characterised by many of their old sins, their old ways of living, they would not yet be very “sanctified.”

But 10 years later, 20 years, 50 years later, you would find—you should find! - that same believer, not perfect by any means, but more holy and more like Jesus in their character, than the day believed.

## 2) Sanctification is not like Justification

You can't always use a graphs to express spiritual truths, but they can be very helpful here.



Red line: the very moment anyone truly believes in Jesus Christ they become instantly perfect in the eyes of God: that's what justification by faith means. God gives them his righteousness which makes them perfect in his sight, once for all. It is a wonderful gift:

*The vilest offender who truly believes  
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives*

We don't contribute anything to this righteousness, to justification, it is 100% a gift from God. It is reckoned to our account, it is imputed to us as a gift. And it never changes, we're always 100% righteous in God's eyes. Can I say this: if you've had a Norris day or a Norris week, you are still 100% perfect in God's eyes! Do you believe that? Will you believe this? What an amazing Gospel!

That's justification by faith, the gift of eternal perfection.

In daily life, in practice, however, a believer is not perfect. We still, to our great sorrow, think, speak and do those things we know to be wrong. That's happened this past week, perhaps even this very morning!

But here is the wonderful thing: little by little God is making us made holy: this, the blue line, is sanctification. We never get to perfection in this short life, but the general trend is upward all our days. And unlike justification, which is God's work alone, sanctification is both our responsibility and God's mighty work:

*“continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, (you take sanctification seriously) for it is God who works in you to will and to act (God's power is working through you) in order to fulfil his good purpose.” (Ph. 2:12-13)*

Yes God is at work in you, powerfully, by his Spirit, but you are not a puppet, God wants you to be engaged in the process of your sanctification, he wants you to actively put away your sin and turn to righteousness.

### **3) Sanctification is one of the marks of genuine faith**

In the third place—this morning's sermon, remember, is a general talk about sanctification—in the third place, sanctification, we must say, is a mark of true faith.

If we meet a Christian who thinks or says “I know this thing is wrong in my life, I'm not very forgiving, I get drunk every weekend, I steal from my workplace, whatever, but I have no intention of giving it up, I'm going to keep on sinning,” well that person is *either* lacking in their understanding of sanctification, that *could be* the case. It could be that they were never taught well in the formative years of their Christian faith—but when this is pointed out genuine believers say “I need to change.”

Or that person, who refuses to acknowledge that things must change, is *not* a genuine believer.

*“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” (James 2:26)*

*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ Matthew 7:21-23*

People who talk the talk but don't in the end walk the walk are false believers. It really is as simple and as stark as that.

The Gospel of God's marvellous Grace changes our whole lives, little by little, line upon line. Are you and I being transformed in our minds, hearts, day by day, year by year, decade by decade? Are we true believers?

Finally, in the fourth place,

#### 4) Sanctification is about indwelling sin

Why do we *need sanctification*, why do we *need to become holy*? Because sin still lives inside us, all the way until we die or until Jesus returns and we are given new holy resurrection bodies.

I'm reading a book by the historian Will Durant, "Heroes of History." Durant assumes that human nature, the way human beings are, is the product of a long evolutionary battle of survival.

So for example, the reason for male lust (I don't know how he explains female lust) is because back in the hunting stage of human history women far outnumbered men. So many men died pursuing wild game or warding off enemies that numerically men had to take more than one wife and this is where lust came from! How wrong can a writer be? But if you get your creation story wrong, your starting point, then your understanding of human nature will be all wrong too.

Sinful desires are not the product of evolutionary history but stem directly from the fall of Adam and Eve, described in Genesis 3.



The Bible teaches that when Adam and Eve were created they were morally perfect, represented by the first circle. Not a single bad thought, word or deed poisoned Eden's pure air.

And that is what you and I will be like in the world to come, fourth circle. We'll be perfect. We will, possess new bodies which have no inclination to sin:

*Sin, my worst enemy before,  
Shall vex my eyes and ears no more;  
My inward foes shall all be slain,  
Nor Satan break my peace again*

But **after Adam and Eve disobeyed** God, they became sinners, second circle; sin is represented by the grey. They suddenly found unforgiveness and hatred, pride and greed in their hearts—which was never there before!

Do you remember, for example, how, all of a sudden realised they were naked, the moment they ate the forbidden fruit. And tried to cover themselves with fig leaves and hide from God in the trees?

Where did that come from? The moment they disobeyed God Adam and Eve became sinful. Human sexuality, like every other part of human nature, was corrupted by the fall of mankind. (Paul made it clear back in Romans that one of the surest signs of fallen human nature is sexual twistedness.)

Fallen mankind, the world of unbelievers, are not devils, however. So we must leave a thin white band around the inner core of sinfulness, can you see that? God restrains evil in this present world, unbelievers can show kindness and gratitude; they can help their neighbours, they give money to charity. God restrains evil in this world. This world is not hell.

But the *dominant inclination* of every human being born in the world after Adam, is towards sin. This is very unpopular teaching today, both in the church and outside. People like to believe that everyone is essentially good, but the Bible says that we are all born sinners.

But, circle three, when *we are converted to Christ*, something remarkable happens. God gives us a new heart! That was the promise of the Old Testament: *“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.”* (Ezekiel 11:19). And it is the experience of every believer: *“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* (2 Corinthians 5:17) *“In my inner being I delight in God’s law”* (Romans 7:22)

This is our new identity! We’re new people. But, while we are in this world, though we have been given a new heart, we also still possess an old sinful nature, see the sliver of grey around the edges? We call this indwelling sin, or the flesh, or the body of sin or the old self.

And this old self wants to do wrong, it pulls us down, drags us under, makes us feel sometimes as if we’ve never driven a formula car before in our lives, we’ve never been a Christian, we’re clueless disciples.

Sanctification, what Paul now turns to in Romans 6,7 & 8, is the believer learning how to deal with this grey circle, this indwelling sin. How, with the help of the Holy Spirit we can do battle with our sin, put it to death and grow in holiness, from year to year, and decade by decade.

These four truths will prepare us for what Paul is going to teach in the next section of Romans, chapters 6 to 8, where we will learn:

- That united to Jesus Christ in his death, the power of sin has already been decisively broken, once for all! Praise God!
- United with Jesus in his resurrection we have all we need to live a new life in the power of the Holy Spirit! Praise God!
- It will be a battle, no doubt about that; in which we are called to stop presenting our bodies to wickedness and to offer them instead to God and to righteousness.
- But no believer needs to despair! For we are on victory’s side!

Paul will end this whole section with the triumphant words:

*“If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

May the Lord instruct us this morning and by his Word and through his Spirit empower us to lives that are being sanctified day by day, to his praise and glory. Amen.