

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 6:2 - 23 (NIV)

²⁰When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²²But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Theme: What Would You Rather Have?

What would you rather have, what you have earned or a free gift? The answer to that question probably depends on what you have earned and what the gift is. When you look back at your work and see that your deeds have earned something very bad, you would probably say, "I'll take the gift." If the gift itself is "priceless," you would probably also choose it.

That is the choice that we have in this text. When we live to serve sin, the reward is very bad. It is death. When we serve God, the gift is eternal life. Although sin sometimes seems like the better choice at the time, God is always the best choice because His gift is the greatest gift that was ever given.

I. What happens when we serve sin?

At first it can seem very appealing to serve sin. Paul writes that when we are slaves of sin, we are free from righteousness. That means that we can do whatever we want. We never have to worry about doing or saying the right thing. We don't care about what anyone else says about what we do. We never think about how this will affect someone else. We never even think about how this will affect our future. The only thing that concerns us is that it feels good right now.

There are so many temptations that try to enslave us to sin today.

- We might see something that we really like, but we don't have the money to buy it. We have all kinds of ways to get around that. We might just take it. We might promise to pay for it in some way, and never really intend to pay for it. (When my father had his gas station, I remember customers who always charged to their account, but never paid. When their credit was cut off, we never saw them or their money.) It is very tempting to try to get things that don't belong to us. Sometimes we look for an excuse to take them, and at other times we don't even care.
- There is also the temptation to be mean to other people. We say things behind their back. We might be nasty right to their face. It feels good to belittle them and make fun of them. We might even enjoy getting someone into trouble.
- There are temptations with regard to alcohol and drugs. Drinking a lot at a party until the early hours of the morning might seem fun until you have to get up for work at 7:00. Drugs are very enticing until you get hooked on them. Those who push them might even seem like your friend at first.
- Today there are also so many temptations with regard to sexual immorality. It almost seems to be prudish to be chaste until marriage. Why wait? Why even commit to marriage? You can have all the pleasures without the responsibilities of marriage.

In our modern society we have worked hard to free ourselves from righteousness. In some respects, it seems a lot more fun to serve sin than righteousness.

But eventually there are consequences to serving sin. Eventually we are ashamed of those things. Paul asks, “*What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?*” Years later do you look at that night when you were drunk or high on something as the “good old days?” Do you look back with pride at how you used to pick on a certain kid at school? Do you remember some of your former relationships fondly along with their consequences or do you wish that it never happened? Do you have something, which every time you see it, it reminds you of how you stole it? The consequences of doing what feels good at the moment are never good. Generally, we end up hurt more than the person that we were harming. We live in regret and shame. You might say that we even become very pitiful.

The biggest consequence to sin is death. Paul puts it clear in verse 23, “*The wages of sin is death.*” When we serve sin, we receive the reward for sin, which is death in the fullest sense of the word. Death came into the world through sin, and all people will die because of it. But the wages of sin is especially eternal death in hell. It is to live separated from God and all of His goodness. It is to live among those who serve sin. It is what is earned when we live to serve our sinful desires. The best example of hell that I have ever heard is that an Irishman is sitting in a row of tables with wonderful pots of Irish stew in the middle. However, the spoons are too long. They can only be gripped at the end, and you can’t reach your mouth. They live in misery and hunger while smelling the stew right in front of them. In heaven, on the other hand, you see the same picture, the same tables, stew, and spoons. However, the people are feeding each other.

II. That shows the blessing of serving God.

It is through Jesus Christ that we are made righteous and holy. Paul writes about this in the chapters, which are before our text. In those chapters he uses the words “righteous” and “justification” several times. (By the way, they are both the same word in the Greek.) In 3:24 Paul writes, We “*are justified freely by [God’s] grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*” In 4:25 he writes, “*[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*” Paul probably expresses it best when he writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” We are sinners who have deserved death by our deeds. The wages of our sin is death, but God has been gracious to us. He sent His Son into the world to bear our sins on the cross. He took our death on Himself. He suffered our punishment, so that we could have His righteousness. Our righteousness is not earned. It is a gift of God through Jesus Christ. This gift is given through faith in Him when we are baptized in His name. Earlier in this chapter Paul says that in baptism we died to sin and were raised to a new life in Christ. When we are baptized into Christ, our service to sin ends, and we are raised to serve God in holiness and righteousness.

In Him our lives reflect His holiness and righteousness. We no longer live to serve our sinful desires, but the God who has saved us from our sins. In Galatians 5 Paul reminds us of the acts of the sinful nature. They are the kinds of things that I mentioned before, “*sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition,*

dissensions, factions²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.” But then he goes on to describe the fruit of the Spirit, *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control.”* Christ has called us to love one another as he has loved us. In Ephesians 4:32 Paul writes, *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as God in Christ forgave you.”* Our forgiveness doesn’t give us a license to sin all that we want to. It gives us a rebirth in which we desire to serve God and our neighbor as God has loved us. While we live on this earth, none of us are perfect. We still fall into temptation, but it grieves us and we repent of those sins rather than enjoying them.

God’s gift to those who serve Him is eternal life. Paul writes in verse 23, *“But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Death is what we earn because of sin, but eternal life is not earned. It is God’s gift through Christ. He gives us life to the full now. We live in the peace of His forgiveness, in the confidence of His blessing and deliverance, and in the joy of seeing how God has work good in our lives to bless others. This is a gift that will last for all eternity. Yes, our bodies will one day die because of sin, but they will also be raised from the dead. The day that Jesus returns will be the most magnificent day for Christians. Our bodies will rise from their graves. We will see the Lord returning in all of His glory. We will be taken to the home of righteousness where we will live in the goodness and holiness of God forever. Rather than looking to the past with regret. We can look to our future with great anticipation through Christ our Savior.

When you think about it, it is not even close in deciding to receive what we have deserved or what God wants to give to us as a gift. The temptations of this world give a moment of pleasure and an eternity of regret. God’s gift of righteousness through Christ gives us hope and peace now and an eternity filled with His joy and love. As Christians we thank God that He doesn’t give us what we deserve, but the best gift of all through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

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