

029 Are You Enjoying the Benefits of a Truly Liberated Lifestyle? *Romans 6:11-23*

When someone immigrates to a new country, or goes as a missionary to a foreign place, they do everything they can to absorb and assimilate into that new culture.

They take language classes (e.g. Newspaper clipping from 1951 describing learning Arabic en route to the Holy Land).¹ They spend as much time as possible with the people, learning how they act and how they think. They learn to appreciate the taste of new foods and adapt to new ways of doing things. And over time their patterns of life begin to match those of the new culture.

That illustrates what Paul is talking about in this chapter. When a person is born again, he/she is launched into a new realm of existence. He/she is part of a new community, a citizen of a new kingdom. And so he/she begins the process of changing habits and patterns to fit the new life he/she has chosen.

Romans 6:11,12 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*

In our last two messages we learned the glorious truth that believers have died to sin, as symbolized in baptism.

From the moment of conversion the new believer stands justified. He/she is saved from the penalty of sin the moment he/she accepts Jesus as Savior. And now begins the life-long process of acculturation – what theologians call sanctification.

Don't jump to the conclusion that ***being dead to sin*** means we will be perfect in this life. We won't be perfect until we are transformed fully in Christ's presence. Until then we are "*works in progress.*"

Remember the 70's bumper stickers: **PBPWIMGIFWY?** Meant to elicit a query, response was "*Please be patient with me, God isn't finished with me yet.*"

Analogy: purchase some farm acreage. You get moved into the main house, but the rest of the land needs to be prepared for cultivation.

Timber to be cut, roots to be pulled; other places brush and weeds; some rocky ground. Gradually gain more and more ground that you can work and put into production.

Eventually someone driving by might comment, "*Look at what they've done! I can hardly recognize the place!*"

So it is with our salvation. We have been purchased by Christ. He moves in and takes up residence within us, and is there to stay. He promises never to vacate the premises. But there's still quite a bit of clean up work to be done on both the inside and outside to make us presentable. The conversion project is a life long process.

As Oswald Chambers writes, "*we have to be continuously converted all the days of our lives. . . In every setting in which we are put, the Spirit of God remains unchanged and His salvation unaltered, but we have to 'put on the new man' . . . Our natural life must not rule, God must rule in us.*"

He concludes, "*There are whole tracts of our lives which have not yet been brought into subjection, and it can only be done by this continuous conversion. Slowly but surely we can claim the whole territory for the Spirit of God.*"¹

The former owner of the property no longer holds the deed to your life! You have been liberated from its tyrannical rule.

But sin doesn't give up easily. Even though it can't repossess you, it will use every trick in the book to try and keep you from enjoying all the benefits of your liberated lifestyle.

The old landowner keeps dropping around for a visit, subtly suggesting that maybe you don't need to clean up this or that part of the ground. "*Just leave that bit of trash. It's not doing any harm. That over there doesn't really look that bad, now does it? It kind of fits in with the neighborhood, after all. You don't want to make the other landowners ashamed, now, do you? Or come across as being better than they are?*"

Notice that Paul uses the term ***mortal*** to describe the body. Mortal means subject to death. The first man and woman were created as immortal beings. God had warned them that the consequences of eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil

¹ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (The Classic Edition), Barbour Publishing, 1935, December 28th devotional.

would be death. And the day that they disobeyed they, and all their offspring since, became mortal.

Since mortality is an effect of sin, it too must be eradicated, and it will be at the resurrection. **I Corinthians 15:53, 54** *For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”*

God created us with bodies, souls and spirits. All are integral to our being who we are. Our redeemed souls can't just abandon our mortal bodies, leaving them behind as something worthless, letting sin continue to rule in them.

Our bodies too must be redeemed from both sin's guilt and sin's dominion. **I Corinthians 15** describes the consummation, the final 100% total victory. But the process begins now.

It is inwardly, in the soul, that we died to sin. The power of Christ's death broke the chains that bound us and set us free from condemnation and wrath, and the glorious light of the glory of God flooded the inner chambers of our heart.

But it doesn't take us long to discover to our dismay that a battle still rages in our outer part. We still need to oust and exterminate the lingering remnants of sin's reign in our bodies.

The inward dethronement of sin was accomplished for us by Christ (as we saw in the passives in the previous verses). But now, we are invited to participate in the process of ousting sin from our bodies.

Let me draw an analogy. Shortly after we bought our house on Brookline Avenue 14 ½ years ago, we discovered we had cockroaches. Big ones and small ones – lots of them. (Probably rode in using opened cereal boxes which had been in storage). We called an exterminator, and with his help became a roach free house.

But we continue to have the perimeter of our property, the outside of our house, and our garage sprayed bimonthly, because the roaches would like nothing better than to move back in.

Romans 6:13,14 *Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin*

shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Our bodies with all of their organs can either be tools for good or tools for evil. Sin wants to use the members of our body for unrighteousness. Before we became Christians, that's what they were used for. But now that we have died to sin they have a higher purpose.

Paul's imperatives are direct. Could be translated “*quit offering the parts of your body to sin!*” We are now new creations in Christ, and our bodies as well as our souls belong to him.

Choosing who to offer our bodies to is not an impulsive, emotional decision of the moment, but an intelligent act of the will based on the knowledge we have of what Christ has done for us and who we are in him.

We remember that we are not our own, we are bought with a price.

We remember that now God resides in us, our bodies are God's temple, designed to be used for his glory.

He offers us the privilege of putting our bodies at his disposal as tools for building his kingdom, and as weapons for fighting his enemies.

These hands are now available for doing God's work. These feet are to take me where God directs. These eyes will read and these ears will listen to God's Word. This tongue will pray and praise and proclaim the goodness of God.

Romans 6 hinges around two questions. Paul began with the question, “*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*” The answer was a resounding “*No! By no means! No way! You shall not and you must not!*”

Paul asks another question in verse 15, and answers it the same way. All the rest of the chapter is an explanation of why not.

Romans 6:15 *What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!*

Romans 6:16 *Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness.*

Romans 6:17, 18 *But thanks be to God, though you used to be slaves to sin you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

Romans 6:19 *I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body to slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.*

Slaves do the bidding of their master. They are his instruments; he uses them to accomplish his desires. Before our emancipation, we could not refuse sin's authority; but now that we have been liberated we do not have to obey it's orders.

My children used to respond to one another with the phrase, "who made you boss over me?"

When sin tries to order us around like it used to, need to say, "you're no longer the boss over me. I don't have to do what you want me to do any longer!"

Romans 6:20, 21 *When 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!*

The unsaved person is free – free from righteousness! But his bondage to sin only leads him deeper into self-destructive slavery that makes it harder and harder to do right.

Although there are eternal consequences of eternal death or life, we can't overlook the fact that we also need to consider the present aspects of death and life. In fact, (as James Boice points out), in this context it may well be that here Paul is particularly concerned with the effects of sin and righteousness in *this* life, and not with the life to come.

The word he uses for wages (*opsonia*) in **verse 23** was used of the daily food ration given to Roman soldiers for their service. It doesn't refer to a large payment paid at the end of a soldier's period of service, but instead something that was doled out to him day by day.

As we saw in **Romans 1** God's wrath isn't just something to be meted out in the final day of judgment, but is presently being

poured out against men and women, as seen in the downward life-path of those who reject him.

As psychologist Karl Menninger points out in his book *Whatever Became of Sin?*, the long term consequences of sin are self-destruction. He suggests that this self-destruction is observable in each of the "deadly" sins.

For example **pride** destroys relationships. It causes us to look on other people as possessions to be amassed, exploited, or controlled.

Lust (which embraces all sexual sins) weakens loyalty, undercuts trust, and destroys integrity.

Gluttony destroys the body – in whatever form it appears, whether as overindulgence in food, drink or drugs.

Anger destroys other people, whether by physical violence or by verbal assault.

Sloth destroys opportunities and ambition.

Envy, greed, avarice and affluence destroy contentment.

Waste, cheating, stealing, cruelty . . . (we could go on and on with the list) all are sins, and they are all destructive.

Do you recall the story of the prodigal son from **Luke 15**? This young man who had it all decided he wanted freedom, so he left home to "find himself" – to live it up and enjoy himself and do whatever he wanted, answerable to no man – especially his father.

But his rebellion only led him deeper and deeper into slavery. He was the slave of wrong desires. Then he became the slave of wrong choices, wrong habits, wrong friends, wrong deeds. And finally he became a literal slave slopping pigs. He wanted to "find himself," but ended up "losing himself." What he thought was freedom turned out to be the worst sort of slavery. It was only when he returned home and submitted to his father that he found true freedom.

The father in the story of course represents God.

Romans 6:22,23 *But now 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.*

It is a great paradox of the Christian life that we are freed from the slavery of sin to become slaves to God.

There are numerous contrasts between two masters. A major one is the remuneration for service. One slave master, sin, pays wages. The other slave master, God gives gifts.

The Bible teaches that you cannot earn your salvation. Salvation is not the “wages” for being a decent sort of person, living a good life, being kind to others. No, it is a *gift*. The Greek word is *charisma*, which means a “free gift.” It is something totally unearned and undeserved. It was the word used when on a special occasion – maybe his birthday or the anniversary of his accession to the throne – an emperor would hand out a free gift of money to his army. It wasn’t something they earned it was a present, a gift of the emperor’s kindness and grace.

As John Piper observes, “*coming home to God – being indentured to God as our master – is the true slavery for which we were created. It’s the one true slavery because God really owns us. He made us, and therefore he owns us. When we do what he tells us to do, he owes us no wages. Owners don’t pay their possessions wages in a true slavery. And there is only one true slavery in the universe: our slavery to God. Only God owns human beings ultimately. So to be enslaved to God is a homecoming to our true master.*”²

Receiving wages implies that someone needs our work, and so needs to recompense us. The one true Master of the universe has no needs, and therefore he never pays wages. To those who trust him, he only gives gifts. That is why his *yoke is easy* and his *burden is light*.

But sin is a different sort of master altogether. It is interloper. It was never meant to be the master of those whom God created. Human beings were created to serve God, not sin.

Sin is a very deceptive and manipulative master. His demands all seem pleasant. No one sins out of duty, rather sin exercises its power by promising pleasure. So when we obey sin, it may feel good – feels like freedom.

But sin drains us. It takes, and does not give. It takes, and takes, and takes, and takes again. Every time you sin, life is being sucked out of you.

In the end we really will deserve what sin pays. We will never deserve eternal life, that’s always a free gift. But we will deserve the wages of sin, and the cruelty of this master sin is that the sum of all his wages is death. That’s the wage you earn for giving in to your desires.

Sins lure and deceive and lie and drain and ruin, leaving us sick and guilty before the judgment of God.

The ultimate meaning of death for the slaves of sin in Romans 6:23 is not just ceasing to exist, but eternal conscious torment under the just and holy wrath of God.

But all God’s slaves go into eternity with God as their giver. I don’t know everything that will be in heaven, but one thing that will not be in heaven is boredom. His mercies and his joys will be new every morning, the blessings flowing from the river of God will never decrease, because the source is infinite. By definition infinite means it can give away forever and never get smaller, never get less. Eternal life will be the never-ending action of God to makes us ever-increasingly happy in all that he is for us in Jesus.

Paul ends chapter six with a reminder that the reason it is possible for God to be gracious to us, the reason he can give the gift of salvation to us, sinners that we are, is *through, by, or in Christ Jesus our Lord*. We must never forget that we are saved from sin and its penalty only because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

And that raises a final question, a personal one. Are you in Jesus? Is Jesus your Savior, your Lord, your Master? There are only two possible answers: “yes” or “no.” He is either your Savior or not. Asking him into your life is where the truly liberated life begins.

¹ We sailed to Jordan in 1953 aboard the Elin Horn, a Norwegian freighter. There were 12 passengers aboard, including Mom, Dad and myself (I was three years old). Accompanying us was an American Nurse and a native Arab missionary S.N. Agu’igal. Mom wrote “Brother Abu-igal is helping us to learn a few sentences in Arabic. It is a difficult language and they have sounds that I cannot make. Bob is doing better than I but b God’s grace I shall learn too. Bro. A says Bruce is the best of the crowd for the learning.

² John Piper, *The Free Gift of God is Eternal Life* (message on Romans 6:23 preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN, as posted on DesiringGod.org).