

Death & Life, Wages & Gift

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm one of the pastors here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. It's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

This morning we're continuing our series in the book of Romans. The book of Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD. It's called Romans because it is written to the church in the city of Rome and it is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection.

If you've been with us you know that we are in chapter 6. We're finishing that chapter today and chapter 6 has one primary question which is this. If God's grace is real, why do I still have to live a life of holiness?

If God has forgiven me my sins, why can't I do whatever I want? To that one question, you'll remember Paul has three different answers.

His first answer, and this is what we looked at in verses 1 through 14, is this. To continue in sin as a Christian doesn't actually make sense because you cannot be both dead and alive at the same time.

[1 : 1 5] You're alive because of your union with Christ. What's true of Christ is true of you and so when Christ died, you died to the power of sin. When Christ was raised from the dead, you have newness of life through the Holy Spirit.

So that's answer one. Answer two, it doesn't make sense why would a freed slave go back to his former master?

If you've been in slavery, you've been set free, why would you go back? And continuing in sin, as we saw last week, is miserable. It is a type of slavery. Then the final answer, the answer we're going to look at today, is this.

It doesn't make sense to continue in sin. Why would you do something that kills you? Why would you do something that leads to death?

So we have three answers. Answer one, it doesn't make sense because of your union with Christ. Answer two, it doesn't make sense. You're no longer a slave to sin. Answer three, sin leads to death.

[2 : 2 0] Why does God's grace mean that I can't just sin more? Why would I obey? Why should I obey? That's the question we're continuing with this week. I invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter six.

We're going to start at verse 20. You can turn in your worship guide. You'll find it on page seven. And remember as we come here that this is God's word. Proverbs chapter 30 verse five tells us every word of God proves true.

He's a shield to those who take refuge in him, which is why we read now starting at verse 20. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death. But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

[3 : 40] Our Father in heaven, we do thank you again for this church that you've established here. We thank you for your word that you've given to instruct us and guide us.

We thank you that we are united with Christ. What's true of Jesus is true of us. That you freed us from the bondage and slavery of sin. You've rescued us from death and brought us to life.

We ask that you would, by your word and your Holy Spirit, stir in our hearts this morning. You remind us of those truths. You'd grow us in our love for you, our obedience to you.

And most of all, you'd show us Jesus. That we would see his great glory and beauty and power and love. We'd follow him in faith. We ask these things in his mighty name.

Amen. In the early 2000s, a movie came out called Thank You for Smoking. And the movie tells the story of a man named Nick Naylor, who is a lobbyist or a spokesman for big tobacco.

[4 : 53] And his goal is this, to convince the American people that cigarettes are harmless. And they're harmless in two ways. They're not addictive. And they won't kill you.

Of course, Nick knows this isn't true. At the very beginning of the movie, he tells us this. I earn a living fronting an organization that kills 1,200 human beings a day.

So he knows what he's doing isn't true. And yet he continues doing it. There's several storylines in the movie. Maybe one of them is his fight, his battle against this senator from Vermont who wants warning labels put on cigarettes.

He wants not just the text label you might see today. He wants the skull and crossbones put on it. And he wants in all caps the word poison. And so there's this showdown at this congressional hearing.

And this doctor comes and testifies. And the doctor says this. The skull and crossbones means one thing. Poison. Thus, the message is quite clear.

[5 : 54] Like any other product that carries the branding, if you take it, you will die. Paul, in this passage, is putting the warning label on sin.

He has three arguments, as I've told you. And so if you've been with us for a while, you're tracking with those three arguments. Maybe the previous two were not convincing to you. Maybe you thought, well, union with Christ.

Christ died to sin. He rose to new life. Whatever. Maybe you thought, well, sin doesn't really feel like slavery to me. It feels great. So that argument doesn't convince me either.

So if those have not moved you, Paul comes in with his final and greatest argument. And he's really blunt. Sin will kill you. He is putting the skull and crossbones warning label on sin.

And he's telling us it is a poison. Now, the movie I told you about, it's a comedy. And it's a comedy because it's kind of ridiculous in the modern day to try to convince people that smoking has no risk to it.

[7 : 04] So that's the root of a lot of humor throughout the movie. Other things, however, are not always so obvious. And we're picking up the argument of that from last week.

Romans chapter 6 verses 15 through 19. You may remember verse 19 says this. Present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

Verses 20 through 23. Follow up on that to answer the question why. Why is it that you should present your members as slaves to righteousness?

Well, verse 20 tells us, begins it, says, For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So Paul's still on this idea of slavery, his second argument.

And you'll remember, as we've discussed many times now, there are two powers and only two powers that control and direct your life.

[8 : 07] You can serve God or you can serve sin. You can serve God. You can serve sin. Whichever one you serve will rule you.

Sin offers misery. God offers freedom. So there's two slaveries. There's a slavery that leads to death and a slavery that leads to life.

Different people use different words to explain this way of thinking about there being a power that controls the center of your heart. Martin Lloyd-Jones talks about what governs or controls or directs or dominates your heart.

John Murray talks about what has authority or mastery over your heart. What Paul is saying here in verse 20 is exactly this. Free from righteousness means that when you were a slave to sin, righteousness did not direct or control or master your heart.

You were free from the reign of righteousness. So verse 20 is kind of repeating what has come before. Thank you. It's a little bit of a review.

[9 : 21] But it's important for us to review that because it is tempting when we think of Christianity to think of it as a moral code. Okay, I was living by one type of moral code.

Now I become a Christian. I'm living by another. And that is part of the truth. Right? That's not wrong in a sense. It's incomplete, but it's not wrong. There is an ethic to the Christian life.

But the whole truth is this. It is not fundamentally or primarily that you are living by a new code. It is fundamentally and primarily that you have a new heart.

It's going back to what we saw in Ezekiel chapter 36 in the Old Testament. That you had a heart of stone. God has taken that and replaced it with a heart of flesh.

And I'm telling you what we've looked at over and over again now in the book of Romans. If you are a Christian, there is a supernatural power at work in you.

[10 : 21] You are not merely called from one way of life to another way of life. No, you have been taken from death to life. You were dead in your sins and trespasses.

You are now empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit. Ephesians chapter 1, which I've told you about many times and I will remind you of again next Sunday. The same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

That power is at work in you. If you belong to him. That power empowers you to live your life for God's glory.

It enables you to do the right thing for the right reason. It's what Jesus tells us, John chapter 8. If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

That takes us then from verse 20 to verse 21. Paul says this, he's continuing his argument. By what fruit, but what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?

[11 : 31] For the end of those things is death. What Paul is saying is this. When, before you were a Christian, and you were living however you wanted to live, what was it doing for you?

How was it helping you? How was it serving you? Whatever it was, it wasn't good. As you look back on your life before you were a Christian, and you think about the way that you were living and thinking, you're ashamed.

You could be ashamed because you were doing sort of scandalous, wicked things. Maybe you were living kind of an upright moral life. Maybe you didn't have any scandal, but you were pursuing wrong things for the wrong reasons.

Maybe you're doing glorious good things. Maybe you're doing the right things, but you're doing them for the wrong reasons. Maybe you're captured by worldviews and philosophies that are destructive and make no sense.

I've told you many years ago, I told you the story of a friend of mine who had a little bit of a dramatic conversion to Christianity, and after he became a Christian, he went, he opened up his web browser, and he went to all the pages that he had bookmarked.

[12 : 46] So he looked at everything he'd saved, that he wanted the pages he wanted to return to. There wasn't anything scandalous there, but he looked and he thought, what was I thinking? These are pages with ideas and philosophies and movements that I actually abhor now.

Why did I ever find any of that attractive? Why was that appealing to me? We could say, with Paul here, those are things of which he was now ashamed.

And my whole orientation of my entire heart and life has changed. So why would you keep serving sin?

Why would you keep serving something of which you're now ashamed? If the results were bad, why would you go back to it?

There's that old saying, fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Don't get fooled again by sin.

[13 : 56] Don't get fooled again by sin. It takes us to verse 21.

It's not just that they were ashamed. It's not just that this previous life did not provide the fruit they were looking for. It's actually even worse than that. That previous life leads to death.

This is verse 21. For the end of those things is death. Now there are two ways for us to think about this death. We could think about it as death right now as you live life in this world.

I'm not going to repeat everything from last week, but you'll remember we talked about how miserable slavery to sin actually is. When you realize that if you present yourself to sin, it will rule over you.

You actually don't have life and peace when you serve those things. So that's one way we can think about the death that sin leads to. The other way, and this is the way we must think about it, is that Paul here is talking about death in the future.

[15 : 04] Paul is reminding us that when we die, there are two options. We can go to heaven or we can go to hell. Hell is a place where there is nothing good from this world.

In hell, we do not experience God's presence, at least not his presence in the sense of his goodness. And it's very critical that we understand this.

What is confusing, I think, for many people, what allows them to fall asleep to the reality of eternal judgment is this, that as you live in this life, whether you recognize God or not, you enjoy his gifts.

So Matthew chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says this, he says, the sun rises on the evil and the good. And then he says, the rain falls on the just and the unjust.

What Jesus is saying there is this, whether you believe in God or not, right now, you enjoy his good gifts. Everything good that you experience in this life, it comes from God and his presence.

[16 : 14] You love the mountains? Guess who made that? God did. You appreciate sunshine every day? Guess who provides that?

God. You enjoy food? Who is it that sustains the earth? It's God. And so now, you can enjoy God's gifts without recognizing the giver.

You can actually insult the giver. You can say he doesn't exist. And you still live in his world. The sun will still rise on you. The rain will still fall.

If you reject the giver, if you reject God, one day, all the gifts are removed. One day, all that's left is hell.

Which, in a sense, is a fitting punishment, right? You've said you don't want God. Well, hell's the place where you don't have him. But you don't have the good things you have now.

[17 : 27] That's the death Paul is talking about. He's saying that's where sin leads to. That's the end of the path. You keep rejecting God. You are going to end up in a place of eternal torment after your death where none of God's gifts exist.

Yesterday, we had a beautiful funeral for Sue Stoner. Beautiful for many reasons. One of them is that we can rejoice in her faith in Christ. We know that she is experiencing God's goodness.

happiness. Now, there's a book that came out a number of years ago called 12 Rules for Life. And if I ever write a book called 12 Rules for Life, one of my rules is going to be this.

You need to go to funerals. And the reason you need to go to funerals is this. It reminds us of death. It forces us to look death dead in the eyes. And what we do in this life, so much of our life, is distracting ourselves from the reality of death, avoiding thinking about it, if funerals kind of, they force us to look at it once again.

It reminds us of this. There are two places. Every one of us, unless the Lord returns, will die one day. You will have a funeral.

[18 : 51] And what will happen to you after your death? You will either go to heaven or you will go to hell.

You will either follow the path of sin, rejecting God, and get finally what you ultimately have been asking for, or you will follow the path of life.

Paul tells us here, the fruit, this is verse 22, that leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. And so Paul's not just reminding us of this sobering reality of hell.

He's actually writing to believers, remember? He's writing to the churches in the city of Rome, and so he's also writing to remind them of heaven. That's the reminder of verse 22. Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

So remember, verse 21, he asks, what was sin doing for you? Sin was leading to shame. Verse 22, what is righteousness doing for you?

[20 : 04] Righteousness is leading to sanctification and eternal life, which is Paul's way of saying this, you are becoming more like Jesus now, that's the sanctification, and your future will be with Jesus forever, that's eternal life.

You're becoming more like Jesus now, that's the sanctification, you will be forever with Jesus in the future, that's eternal life.

And so a very simple way of thinking about heaven and hell is this, hell is the removal of God's presence, the removal of all his good gifts. He's present in the sense that he's judging you, but he's not present in the sense of his mercy and his goodness and his love.

In fact, it's a place of punishment. Heaven is the opposite. Heaven is the fullness of God's presence. You experience a taste of God's goodness now, you will experience experience all of God's goodness in the future.

It's going to be a place unpolluted by sin. Revelation chapter 21 tells us it's the place where God wipes every tear from our eyes.

[21 : 24] And so Paul's saying, of course you obey. Of course you live a life of holiness. You are living into the future, your future. And then in case it's not clear, he wraps it up here in verse 23.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And the word for wage here, the Greek word, is the word used to talk about what a soldier is paid.

Some people say this is the daily rations that a soldier receives. I think some of you know about getting paid as soldiers. It's your W-2 income.

You work for sin, you serve sin, sin's going to pay you, it's going to give you a paycheck. That paycheck is going to look like death. You earn death, your wages get paid out.

We all know this, actions have consequences. You may not experience those consequences now, they do catch up with you at some point. Of course, we all experience this, right?

[22 : 31] There's consequences to the ways we treat our body and our money and our relationships. And Paul's telling us, hey, there's consequences that are true of eternity as well.

So sharp contrast, though, there's wages, that's what sin pays out. You earn the death that comes from sin. Righteousness, though, you don't earn righteousness. Righteousness. Doesn't say the wages of righteousness is eternal life.

No, what does it say? The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

How do you enjoy this new power? What do you need to do for the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead to be at work in you?

What is it you need to accomplish to spend life in eternity full of God's goodness and his presence unpolluted by sin?

[23 : 38] You have to accept the gift. You don't earn it. You don't prove yourself. No, you actually admit that you can't.

That you admit that you need Jesus to die the death that you deserve. You need his life, his righteous life credited to your account.

So my job this morning is very simple. My job this morning is to look you dead in the eyes and ask you to consider your death.

When you die, will you go to heaven or will you go to hell? Will you be separated from all of God's goodness and his gifts?

Will you finally get the end result of the way you've been living your life? You said you didn't want God. Well, that's how it's going to end up. Or will you accept the free gift?

[24 : 47] Will you receive what God offers? Are you serving sin or God? Will you go to heaven or hell?

If that's something you're unsure about, pages 17 and 18 of our worship guide at the very end, we go into much more detail about what it means to be a Christian to follow Jesus Christ in faith.

I want you to see how this verse ends though. It says, in Jesus Christ, our Lord. That's the very end of verse 23. We've seen this in language before.

Remember earlier in the chapter, Paul talked about being baptized into Jesus Christ. So at the very end, the last verse, chapter 6, the last phrase of the last verse, Paul goes back to union with Christ.

This gift happens as what's true of Jesus is true of you. This gift happens as you are connected to him, that in his death you died to the power of sin.

[26 : 02] in his resurrection you live with newness of life. It's a gift because of what Jesus did.
It's a gift because of his death and his resurrection. That's what we celebrate at Advent, which is the season that we're in right now, is that Jesus came and he came to set us free. He came to set us free from the slavery of sin. Remember, we've talked about its power, that he's broken in his death. He came to give us the gift.
So that's what we're going to sing right now. Remember, Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day to save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray.
Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, we do praise you and thank you that the gift of eternal life is a free gift. We ask that you'd be at work now by your spirit searching our hearts and our minds that we would look death straight in the eyes.

[27 : 14] We wouldn't glance at it or turn away, but we would ask the question of where we're headed. Following sin to death or you to righteousness. Father, we ask, thank you for that gift.
we ask that you'd be at work drawing our hearts closer and closer to you, growing in faith and love for you and one another. We ask these things in Jesus' name.
Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. Bluetooth Bluetooth