

## Wheelersburg Baptist Church 4/28/02 Brad Brandt

### Romans 6:19-23 "Incentives for Holy Living"\*

Main Idea: In Romans 6:19-24, God's Word gives us some incentives for holy living. There are three important reasons why we should live holy lives.

I. We should live a holy life because of our calling (19).

A. We have been called from sin.

1. Because sin is like cancer, we need more than a casual cut back.

2. We need to practice radical amputation.

B. We have been called to holiness.

1. Make sure you're connected to Christ.

2. Make sure you're pursuing holiness, not happiness.

3. Make right choices in the use of your body.

II. We should live a holy life because of the change that's occurred (20-22).

A. We used to be slaves to sin (20-21).

1. We were free from righteousness.

2. We did what was shameful.

3. We were doomed to die.

B. We are now the slaves of God (22).

1. We can experience victory over sin.

2. We can experience holiness in life.

3. We can experience eternal life.

III. We should live a holy life because of the consequences (23).

A. Sin's wage is death.

B. God's gift is life.

The Bottom Line: How can we win the war with sin?

1. We must receive God's gift.

2. We must live in light of God's gift.

Billy Sunday, the baseball evangelist and reformer, never spared himself nor those he wanted to help in the vigor of his attacks on sin. He thundered against evil starting in the Gay Nineties through the Great Depression. He preached Christ as the only answer to man's needs until his death in 1935.

"I'm against sin," he said. "I'll kick it as long as I've got a foot, and I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist. I'll butt it as long as I've got a head. I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth. When I'm old and fistless and footless and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to Glory and it goes home to perdition."

From listening to Billy Sunday, you might get the idea that dealing with sin is warfare. It is. We've been learning this month how to win the war within, the war against personal sin. It is a constant battle, one that will not end until we see Christ.

Which brings us to a vital question. *Is it worth it?* Is it really worth it to live a holy life?

We live in a world where many, even those who call themselves Christians, don't think it is. I heard about a book on how to cheat that's been circulated on eastern college campuses, a book which students have made somewhat of a bestseller.

As followers of Christ, we deal with the question continually, "Is it worth it to try to live a holy life?" Is it worth it to be honest on your timecard when others fudge on theirs? Is it worth it to pay full price for computer

software when you could save a whole bunch of money and just copy someone else's? Is it worth it to be honest on your tax returns when nobody will probably ever know about that extra income anyway? Is it worth it as a teenager to keep yourself pure until marriage when your "peers" ridicule you for being old-fashioned and pious? Is it really worth it to live a holy life?

The answer is an emphatic YES! It is worth it. But sometimes we need an encouraging reminder. How do we know it's worth it? Did you realize the Bible gives us reasons to be holy? It does. In fact, the Christian life is very "reasonable." The Scriptures offer us both commands and reasons. God's Word tells us both *how* to live, and *why* to live that way (which is, by the way, a good principle for parents to keep in mind with children—tell them what and why as often as possible—that's what our Heavenly Father does with us).

There are good reasons why we should live holy lives. What are they? We're going to find out this morning as we wrap up our study of Romans 6. In Romans 6:19-24, God's Word gives us some powerful incentives for holy living. There are three important reasons why we should live holy lives.

### I. We should live a holy life because of our calling (19).

Last week, we learned from verses 15-18 that we must meet two obligations if we are to be set free from sin in our personal lives. First, we must not rationalize—that's verse 15. We must not excuse sin in our lives. Second, we must recognize the truth—that's verses 16-18. The truth is twofold. Truth #1, all people are slaves (I may be a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness, but I am a slave nonetheless). And #2, all who are in Christ have experienced a change. The change is that I was enslaved to sin, but have been delivered from sin and have become a servant of righteousness. Practically speaking, that means I am not free to do my own thing, but I am free to do what is right. We have been set free from sin so we may serve Christ.

Which raises an important question. "Why?" If it's so hard, why would a Christian *want* to live a holy life? That's the issue addressed next in Romans 6. Why should I be holy? Here's reason #1. It's because of our *calling*.

Paul explains in verse 19, "I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves." The KJV rendering goes like this, "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh." What does Paul mean? He seems to be apologizing for something. What would that be? He explains why he used the analogy of slavery to depict the Christian life. "I put *this* (his teaching about how to overcome sin) in *human terms* (that is, by using the illustration of slavery) because you are weak in your natural selves."

Slavery was common in the Roman Empire. Many Christians were slaves, and the letter of Philemon reveals that freedom was a prized possession and difficult to obtain. Certainly, Paul's reference to slavery to illustrate a point could be misconstrued.

Remember how the religious rulers were incensed when Jesus suggested they were slaves of sin? The dialogue went like this in John 8:31-34, "If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered Him, We are Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man. How can you say, You shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Whoever commits sin is the servant [slave] of sin."

If the slave illustration could be offensive, why then did Paul say he used it? He says he did so, "because you are weak in your natural selves." Paul doesn't elaborate on the nature of his readers' weakness. Perhaps they were intellectually weak (that is, they needed a blunt illustration like this so they could grasp the point). Perhaps they were morally weak and needed a shocking reminder of the audacity of compromising with sin.

People, including Christians, are at different levels of ability to handle truth.

A good teacher doesn't *dump* the truth of God's Word on people. He *ministers* truth to them in the most

meaningful way, in a way that will connect with them. A good teacher not only exegetes the Word, but also exegetes his audience.

Like Paul did. He put this spiritual truth "in human terms" for the good of his readers in Rome.

Now, what exactly did he say? He used the slave image to show that as Christians we have a special calling in two senses, as explained in verse 19.

A. We have been called from sin. "Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness."

Notice the contrast between what *used* to be true of us and what is *now* true. Paul begins with a description of our pre-Christian days. What was true of us before we came to know Christ? We were slaves to sin. What did we do with our bodies? We offered the very parts of our bodies to our master, sin.

What was the result of our service to "Master Sin?" Paul says it led to "impurity and to ever increasing wickedness." The KJV translation is "to iniquity, unto iniquity." The phrase points out the progressive (actually regressive) nature of sin.

Sin always leads to more sin. Impurity leads to ever-increasing wickedness. Sin doesn't stay constant, and the reason is self-evident--sin doesn't satisfy. The sin-fantasies that thrill a person today are boring tomorrow, so he demands more and bigger sin.

Years ago when the western U.S. was being settled, roads were often just wagon tracks. These rough trails posed serious problems for those who journeyed on them. On one of these winding paths was posted a sign which read: "Avoid this rut or you'll be in it for the next 25 miles!"

Sin is like cancer. It spreads. It increases. It's impossible to dabble in it. So drastic action is needed.

1. *Because sin is like cancer, we need more than a casual cut back.* Here's the casual-cut-back approach to sin. A person says, "Instead of watching six unwholesome videos this month, I'll cut back to only two." Another example, "Instead of drinking every night this coming week, I'll taper off my sin habit to just two nights." But that kind of thinking underestimates the cancerous nature of sin. If we're going to get rid of sin, we need more than a casual cut back. According to Jesus...

2. *We need to practice radical amputation.* What's radical amputation? It's what the Savior said to do in Matthew 5:29-30, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

Someone has said, "Bad habits are like comfortable beds--easy to get into but hard to get out of." That's why drastic action is needed, not a casual cut back but radical amputation.

And here's the good news. In Christ, we *can* get rid of sin. Why? We've been called from sin! We've been delivered from the chains of the old life. We're no longer slaves to our passions. We can be different, and (don't miss this) we **MUST** be different. Why? Because not only have we been called FROM sin, but secondly...

B. We have been called to holiness. Notice carefully our new responsibility at the end of verse 19, "So now offer them [the parts of your body] in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness."

I'm struck by the fact that this isn't an option, but an imperative. In our pre-Christian life, we were slaves to impurity and we yielded our members to increasing wickedness. But now, in our Christian lives, we are slaves to righteousness and we have the responsibility of using our bodies in a way that leads to holiness (that's sanctification).

Here's the climax of Romans 6. Grace is not to be abused, but cherished. How do we show we cherish the grace of God? By living holy lives.

This is fundamental. The goal of the Christian life is holiness. If we doubt that, we need to realize that God established this goal before He ever created the universe (not to mention us!). Consider Ephesians 1:4, "For He (God the Father) chose us in Him (God the Son) before the creation of the world to be HOLY and blameless in his sight."

Our holiness is related to God's choice and call. He has chosen and called us to be set apart *from* sin (that's purity) and set apart *unto* Himself (that's consecration).

Now the million dollar question. How can we be holy in our lives? Allow me to suggest three practical steps.

1. *Make sure you're connected to Christ.* To change you must be in Christ. Next, if you want to be holy...
2. *Make sure you're pursuing holiness, not happiness.* I'm talking about having the right purpose in life. God called us to be holy, not happy. Is that what you want? There are many things in life that may not make us *happy*, but will contribute to our *holiness*. Things like trials, for instance. If you are in Christ, you have the potential to be holy, to overcome sin. But you must *want* to be holy, more than anything else in your life. That's step 2.

By the way, notice the progressive nature of holiness. Just as sin leads to more sin, so the more you use your body for right purposes the more you grow in holiness.

When a person says, "Well, I tried that once, but it didn't work," right there's the problem. Holiness isn't something you "try" once. It's a gift you receive and then put into practice the rest of your life. Which relates to step 3...

3. *Make right choices in the use of your body.* This includes the very *parts* of your body. "Offer them [the parts of your body] in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness." Holy living boils down to right choices.

Someone has well said, "No one gets holy in a hurry." There's no room for being passive here. If we want to grow in holiness we can't sit back and rest in past right choices, "Well, I used to be in the Word. I even taught Sunday School for fifteen years." That's good. When was that? "Um, I guess it's been over five years ago now." So what are you doing with your body *now*? To be holy we must make right choices in the use of our body *now*.

I saw Romans 6 illustrated during a hospital visit once. It happened while I was waiting in a hospital waiting room. From the box in the corner of the room, MTV was blaring its sensual programming. I wanted to turn it off, but noticed four people already in the room who were watching the TV—two young ladies, a young man, and a man who was about 70 years old. I looked at their eyes—they were glued to the screen. I looked down and tried to read, and then finally, when the others left the room, I changed the channel. I was reminded of the enslaving power of sin. Sin is enticing and luring. Sin sucks you in.

Listen. We will never be holy if we don't remember our calling. We've been called from sin and called to holiness. We need to remember that and live accordingly. There's a second reason we should live a holy life.

II. We should live a holy life because of the change that's occurred (20-22).

Paul uses the same analogy of slavery to contrast what we are with what we used to be.

A. We used to be slaves to sin (20-21). Verse 20 takes us back to what was true of us before conversion, "When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness." Then the apostle poses this rhetorical question in verse 21, "What benefit [KJV 'fruit'] did you reap at that time from those things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!"

Sin used to be our master. What was true of us in those days? Three things.

1. *We were free from righteousness.* Verse 20 indicates that before we became a Christian, we did have a type of freedom, a limited freedom. From what were we free? Righteousness. Paul's not saying that non-Christians can't do good things. They can do "good" things—in man's eyes. But they can't do good things in *God's* eyes. Their problem is that they lack righteousness.

That's what Romans is all about, isn't it? God is holy and demands righteousness. From birth, we lack righteousness (1:18). We can't earn righteousness, but must receive it (3:21-24). God's righteousness is available to us only in the gospel of Christ (1:16-17).

There's the first thing that was true of our pre-Christian days. When we were slaves of sin, we were free from the control of righteousness.

2. *We did what was shameful.* Let's take a moment to break apart verse 21. First, notice it's plural ("ye" in the KJV), as Paul is talking to all his Christian readers in Rome. Then realize this is a rhetorical question, one which drives home the obvious. Next, consider the word "benefit." It's a word that can mean "result, product, gain, or advantage." Here's the idea. Paul is saying, "Remember your pre-Christian life. Remember how you used to live? Remember the things that used to be so important to you before you met Christ? What benefit are you reaping from those things now?"

And notice his description of those pre-Christian activities—"the things you are now ashamed of." Think of the things you did before Christ saved you. What kind of fruit did a sensual, self-centered life bring you? For some, the fruit is a destroyed liver, or a broken marriage. For others the fruit may be a sexually transmitted disease, or a trail fragmented relationships.

Isn't it shameful to think about how we lived before Christ changed our lives? J. B. Phillips paraphrases, "You blush to remember." And if so, why would we dabble in it now? If self-centered, sensual living produces that kind of fruit, why not surrender your body totally to God—for *holy* purposes?

By the way, in our culture we've lost the biblical sense of *shame*. We're not ashamed of sin anymore. Opra makes a talk-show about it, the sit-coms make comedy out of it, and the result is that in our society shame has been siphoned right out of sin.

This is key. A mark of a true Christian is that he's ashamed of his past sin (not proud of it). Granted, he delights that he's forgiven, but he's still ashamed of his sin.

J. Vernon McGee shares an interesting observation in his commentary on Romans, "I receive scores of letters from young people who were formerly known as 'hippies' and have turned to Christ. They are ashamed of that old life." Then McGee gets personal, "When you drop into sin, does it break your heart? The difference between a child of God and a child of the Devil is that a child of the Devil just loves doing what the Devil wants done. But to the child of God it is a heartbreak."

Does your heart break when you sin, not because you got caught, but because you knew God was grieved? Are you ashamed of sin? When sin was our master, we were free from righteousness and did what was

shameful. Thirdly...

3. *We were doomed to die.* Notice the sober climax at the end of verse 21. "Those things result in *death*."

Do you like to drive on toll roads? I don't. I don't like the feeling of getting on a road and knowing it will cost me to get off of it. Earlier this month I traveled to Harrisburg, PA. I avoided the toll until the final 15 miles. It cost me 65 cents to drive on it and get off.

A life of sin is like a toll road. As a non-Christian you're zooming down the road mile after mile, doing your own sinful thing, and thinking you're getting away with it. What you fail to realize is that there's a toll that must be paid to get off the road. Guess what the toll is? For the end of those things is death—spiritual destruction.

It's a great tragedy to see what is happening to hundreds and thousands of young people in our day whose lives are being destroyed by drugs and alcohol and illicit sex. The tragedy is that all the while as they chuck God's moral absolutes and think they're pursuing the "free life," they're forgetting the high toll of sin. The truth is they are actually enslaved and destroying themselves.

And that's what we *were*. We used to be slaves to sin. What are we now?

B. We are now the slaves of God (22). "But 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."

Why should we live holy lives? The answer is because a change has occurred. We used to be slaves to sin, but that's no longer true. Now we are slaves of God.

Here's where the analogy breaks down and why Paul apologized for using the slave analogy. It's almost unthinkable to use the same term "master" to refer to both sin and God, for God is a very different kind of master than sin was. Our former master, "sin," devastated our lives. But our new Master, the Lord, offers us three wonderful benefits. As slaves of God...

1. *We can experience victory over sin.* That's what verse 22 says. We have been "set free from sin." Because of Christ's death and resurrection, we are free from sin's penalty. But this verse says more. We have been *set free* from sin. Paul's not talking about perfection—as chapter 7 will make clear. He is indicating we have the power not to sin. We can experience victory over sin.

Do you know what that means? We can face every day with confidence. Every one of us who knows Christ need not be battered down by sin. We can be overcomers. Here's a second benefit. As God's slaves...

2. *We can experience holiness in life.* According to verse 22, having become slaves to God, "the benefit you reap leads to holiness." In Christ we can live a holy life. This isn't just for a few elite Christians, either. This is the norm. Paul is talking to every believer who read this letter in Rome. And to those who would later read it, including us. As slaves to God, we are free to live a holy life. In addition, we are entitled to a third benefit.

3. *We can experience eternal life.* Verse 22 concludes, "And the result is eternal life." John 17:3 indicates that eternal life is something we both possess and anticipate. The term "eternal" speaks to both quality and quantity. If you are a Christian you have available to you a quality of life unknown to your lost neighbors. What's more, it's just the beginning. What you have in Christ will never end. You are guaranteed a life to come, *eternal life!*

How do these benefits apply to living a holy life? Like this. The next time Satan tempts you to sin and he whispers in your ear, "Why not go ahead and sin? It's no big deal. After all, you're under grace, and God will forgive you," what should you do? According to Romans 6, we need to say, "God forbid!" We have incentives

we must use in our rebuttal of Satan's temptation. What are they? One, we must choose holiness because of our calling. Secondly, we must choose holiness because of the change God has worked in our lives. That's why we need not and must not give sin a foothold in our lives.

As if that weren't enough, God kindly gives us a third reason to be holy in verse 23.

### III. We should live a holy life because of the consequences (23).

The familiar verse 23 reads, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in [or 'through'] Jesus Christ our Lord." This is a great verse, yet please notice something. We often use this verse in evangelism (it's part of the "Romans Road") and usually apply it to the lost (and it certainly does apply). May I remind you, however, that the context of Romans 6 is Christian living, and the subject is sanctification not justification. Romans 6:23 contains a warning for the saved (after all, this letter was written to Christians).

"There is a sin unto death," John wrote in a letter designed to help Christians have assurance of their salvation (1 John 5:17). In the Old Testament, Samson would not yield himself to God but preferred to yield to the lusts of the flesh. What was the result? It was death (Judges 16). To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep (1 Cor 11:30)."

Every Christian needs to ponder this. If I as a believer refuse to surrender my body to the Lord but choose to use my body for my own sinful purposes, I am in danger of being disciplined by the Father, and this could mean death (see Heb 12:5-11).

I must never forget that there are two clear, distinct options in life.

A. Sin's wage is death. "For the wages of sin is death." Why is that? Because the devil is a paymaster, and he makes sure his subjects get their due. On the other hand...

B. God's gift is life. "The gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul uses two military words here. For "wages" the Greek term is *opsonia*. *Opsonia* was the soldier's pay, something he earned by his service to his commander. It was something that was due to him and could not be taken from him.

For "gift" Paul used the Greek term *charisma*. *Charisma* was a totally unearned gift which a soldier would sometimes receive. For instance, on special occasions, such as the emperor's birthday or the anniversary of when he became leader, the emperor would hand out a free gift of money to the army. The soldiers had not earned it; it was a gift they received because of the kindness of their Majesty.

The symbolism is clear. Sin is like an emperor that pays its subjects what they've got coming to them, what they've earned—and the wage is death. But God, by contrast, does not pay wages, since no man can put Him in his debt. God extends a gift to those who serve Him, and the gift is nothing less than eternal life.

My friend, the point is this. There are two lives from which to choose. Paul calls them two slaveries. By natural birth, we are slaves to sin. By supernatural birth, we become slaves to God. Jesus put it this way. There are two roads in life. One is broad, and the other is narrow. The broad road leads where? To destruction. It's the narrow road that leads to life.

That's the ultimate reason we should live a holy life, because of the eternal consequences. Sin pays a costly wage. Thankfully, our Savior paid that debt for us. We who have received God's grace-gift possess eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Is it worth it to live a holy life? It sure is. It's worth it because of our calling, the change, and the consequences. It is worth it to be holy. I exhort you, in light of these reasons, to say no to sin and yes to Christ.

I'd like to conclude our series by asking the same question with which we began it...

The Bottom Line: How can we win the war with sin?

The answer is clear. The overcoming life is God's gift. We don't accomplish it on our own strength. We don't pull up our bootstraps. Instead, simply put, we must do two things.

1. *We must receive God's gift.* The gift of God is eternal life. The gift of God is the life God offers *in Christ*. To really live you must know Christ. You must receive God's gift. Have you done that? Have you accepted this amazing gift? If not, I invite you to do so right now. And if you have, you need to do something else.
2. *We must live in light of God's gift.* We who are in Christ must daily choose to live like it. We are no longer slaves to sin—so let's live like it. We are slaves to God for righteousness—so let's live like it. All to the glory of God and His amazing grace!