UNASHAMED · STUDENT GUIDE

From Start to *Finish*

ROMANS 6:20–23 · CHATTANOOGA VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

Where is your life actually headed, and who's getting you there?

> [20] *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.* [21] *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.* [22] *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.* [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

SERMON NOTES

01 Where We All Started

vv. 20–21

Everybody starts at the same starting line: enslaved to sin. And "the end of those things is death." Being a good person doesn't change the track you're on. It just changes how you look going down it.

02 What Changed

v. 22

"But now…" We didn't free ourselves; we have been set free. God took us off the track, and now there's finally fruit: sanctification, God's lifelong work of making us more like Jesus.

03 Where We Finish

vv. 22b–23

Same word, opposite destination. Sin pays exactly what it owes. Eternal life can only be given. You didn't earn your start. You won't earn your finish.

WHAT'S YOUR BRADFORD PEAR?

Our church cut down its Bradford pears and planted maples. What's something in your life that looked great when you "planted" it, but isn't producing anything good? What would cutting it down at the base look like?

GO DEEPER

"FREE IN REGARD TO RIGHTEOUSNESS" (V. 20)

Paul is being ironic. When sin was in charge, you were "free" — free from the one Master who leads to life. That's the freedom the world advertises: no rules, nobody to answer to. It comes packaged with slavery to sin.

WAGES VS. GIFT (V. 23)

"Wages" was the word for a soldier's regular pay, earned and owed. "Free gift" (*charisma*) comes from the same root as the word for grace. Death is wages. Life is a gift. If you could earn it, Paul would have called it wages.

TELOS: "END" (VV. 21-22)

The Greek word *telos* means destination, the place something is headed all along. Paul uses the same word twice: the *telos* of sin is death; the *telos* of sanctification is eternal life. Same word. Opposite destinations.

JUSTIFICATION VS. SANCTIFICATION

Justification is an act: God declares you righteous because of what Christ has done. It happens once and it's finished. **Sanctification** is a work: God actually changes you, one degree at a time (2 Corinthians 3:18). They always go together, but they aren't the same thing.

HONEST QUESTIONS

IF SIN IS SO BAD, WHY DOES IT FEEL GOOD?

Because it's supposed to. A Bradford pear looks amazing for two weeks every spring, and that's why people planted them. Sin always looks good when you plant it. Paul doesn't pretend otherwise. He asks a better question: what is it actually *producing*, and where does it end (v. 21)?

IF I'M SAVED BY GRACE, DOES IT MATTER HOW I LIVE?

That's the exact question Romans 6 started with (v. 1 and v. 15), and Paul's answer is "By no means!" — basically, "Let that never happen." Good works don't make you alive, the way fruit doesn't make a tree alive. But a living tree grows fruit.

ISN'T "THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH" KIND OF HARSH?

Wages are what you've earned. Paul isn't describing God being random or cruel. He's describing where sin was always headed: separation from God, who is life itself. The shocking part of verse 23 isn't that sin pays death. It's that God gives life to people who never earned it.

I KEEP STRUGGLING WITH THE SAME SIN. AM I EVEN A CHRISTIAN?

Struggle isn't proof God has stopped working on you. A lot of times, it's proof that He hasn't. Sanctification is one degree at a time, and "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion" (Philippians 1:6). If you honestly don't know where you stand, don't guess. Talk to a pastor or leader you trust.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

Name one thing you've been trimming back instead of cutting down. Tell one person you trust about it this week — a parent, a leader, or a Christian friend — and ask them to check in with you.

ON YOUR OWN: THINK IT THROUGH

1. "Sin always looks good when you plant it." Where have you seen that be true in your own life?
2. Verse 20 says slaves of sin are "free in regard to righteousness." When have you wanted that kind of freedom? What did it actually give you?
3. Do you ever feel like your "car" is different — better built, more religious, more respectable than someone else's? Why is that tempting?
4. Where can you see God changing you "one degree at a time" right now, even in something you're still struggling with?
5. Which do you lean toward: going back to "collect" from sin, or trying to earn God's approval? What would living like your finish is a gift look like this week?