



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Before & After

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Romans 6:20-23

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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.

(Pastor prays)

Before and after. Before-and-after pictures are useful if not sometimes disturbing. They typically show the effects of some dramatic event or the extent of some significant change.

The picture of Abraham Lincoln before he was President and the picture of him after four years of Civil War show the effects of that nation-changing event. Sometimes if you are going to restore a classic car you will take before-and-after pictures to show the extent and drama of the restoration. Often if a company is selling a weight loss product, they will show you the before-and-after pictures of someone who had great success with that product. The before-and-after pictures are there to show you the intensity and maybe the value of some event or some product or some person, in an effort to convince you of its effect.

I think that's partially what the Apostle Paul is doing in these four verses in front of us. He has centered our hearts on the power and the effect of the Gospel. That is more than just information and historical fact. The death of Jesus on the cross for sinners has effect. It's not just fact, it's power. And that power is seeable, touchable and tangible. The change it brings is discernible and dramatic, creating a "then and now"; a before and an after. And today, even as

we take The Lord's Supper, we celebrate what God's grace has done for us in the cross of Jesus. Grace.

Grace is Worth You Celebrating

This passage is broken up into before and after the cross. Let's look at the before.

Don't glorify a graceless past

Here in verse 20, Paul starts by looking back on our pre-Christian days. Verse 20 says, "and when you were slaves of sin you were free in regard to righteousness"; back to a grim freedom, an empty freedom, a poisonous freedom that satisfies the senses but depletes the soul. Be careful you don't look back at the bad old days and call them good.

You were slaves to sin and free in regard to righteousness. That's a strange phrase to describe our pre-Christ days. What does he mean by that? Let me see if I can get at it. Free in regard to righteousness is free from the love of God, the power of God, and the influence of God. You were delusional in your self-determinations. You were free. You didn't feel any need to live a life pleasing to God or in fear of God or even acknowledging God. You were free; deaf to God's right demands and unconcerned about His word, unprovoked by His law and unimpressed about judgment. Even if you respected the church and thought nice things about God, you were incapable of responding to His call and dead to His will for your life. That is free in regards to righteousness.

This is why it's foolish to preach morality and moral reform to sinners. Because people can't change unless God does the changing. Until He does, and until you are made to see the glory of grace in God in Jesus's life and death on the cross, you are free in regard to righteousness, but it's a diluted freedom. Diluted because you think you are free to do whatever you want, but in reality, you were a slave to doing whatever sin told you to do and what you thought you could get away with. Before Christ, you were free in regard to righteousness with no obligations to honor God with your life. You had no sense of loyalty to a God that loves you. In that freedom, you had a morality of your own making and your own desires. And when there was a conflict between your desires and your morality, you didn't have to bridle your desires. You could just change your morality because it was yours and you were free in regard to righteousness. You were free. You had no love of holiness, no sense of God's authority over you, only His deserved

support under you. I think that's what Paul means when he describes our lost state by saying when you were slaves of sin you were free in regard to righteousness.

He develops it even more in verse 21 as he makes us look back at our graceless past. 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.*

What fruit? What did your life before Christ amount to? What eternal value or consequence did it have? Jesus said you will know the tree by its fruit. And just as a good tree produces good fruit, a bad tree produces bad fruit.

And according to verse 21, there are things of which you are now ashamed but back then you weren't. To be without shame is the mark of a sin-dominated life. When you came to Christ at the cross, you started seeing sin for the evil thing it is and your past sinful life for the shameful thing it was. And in light of all that, if you are a believer in the perfect life of Jesus and His death on the cross for your sins, and you have been saved by *grace* alone through *faith* alone in *Christ* alone, don't glory in your graceless past. Instead I want you to consider some things.

Consider the greatness of the guilt that's been lifted off of you. Consider the riches of the glory that has been conferred upon you. Consider the freeness that you now live in. Consider the price that has been paid to purchase you. Consider the love that God the Father has for you in Jesus. Consider these things and then judge what should be the frame of your minds and don't glory in a graceless past. Instead ...

Celebrate a Grace-Filled Future

You have probably already seen it in verse 22. See that little phrase, "but now." It indicates a dramatic and glorious change. Paul uses it all throughout his writings to display the dramatic and beautiful change that Jesus brings. Ephesians 2:12-13 says, ¹² *remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.* ¹³ *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

What is the dramatic "but now" in verse 22 pointing to? Look at it. That we have been set free from sin. We don't free ourselves, we don't snap out of it, we don't get our act together, we have been *freed*. We were *passive* and God was *active*. We were *chained* and He *unchained* us,

and the cross is the very key that unlocks us. And the more you think about God's grace, the more you love it and run to it because it's taking you somewhere.

Verse 22 says, the fruit you get is sanctification and its end is eternal life. You are going somewhere. It goes like this: You hear the Gospel. The Gospel is that God is good and holy and created everything—including mankind, all of us in this room. You were created in the image of God. That image of God within you and me has been disfigured by our own sin to the degree that we are separated from God. Jesus Christ, who was fully man and is fully God, lived perfectly, earning righteousness that you and I can't do. Then Jesus took the wrath of God in the place of sinners. The wages of sin is death, and Jesus died on the cross for us. Then God raised Him from the dead, He ascended into heaven, and He sits at the right hand of God and rules the entire universe.

We can never work our way to Heaven, but the work of righteousness has been done in Christ. The work of salvation has been done in Christ, so what is left for you is to believe. To believe means turning from sin, knowing that it is wrong, and turning to Christ, believing that Jesus saves. And then you are awakened to your sin and need for a savior and by grace you repent and believe in Christ alone. Sanctification starts. You start to develop and grow and change and learn. You get stronger over time as you read the Word and worship and pray. You start getting victory over some besetting sin or desire. You cope with trouble, you endure, you become useful to the Kingdom of God and you get a sense of security, a genuine equilibrium. You get a deepening humility and gratitude for God's constant provision and you will one day breathe your last breath and receive your heavenly reward and eternal life. We celebrate a grace-filled future here on earth and forever in Heaven. I'll close with a short third point.

Live in a grace-filled now

Verse 23 is an unforgettably glorious sentence. Look at the contrast in the verse. In verse 23 the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life. The contrast is constantly kept in front of us. Death is *earned*, life is *given*. Wages of sin is death. Not a pain will be inflicted on a sinner that isn't deserved. Sinners in Hell will be treated just as they deserve to be treated. I can think of nothing worse than being treated for all eternity in the way I deserve to be treated. Hell is a mercy vacuum with no advocate, no help, no heroism. No man or woman can be so foolish and wicked as the one who is willing to reap the proper wages of sin. And the good news

is that Heaven is as good as Hell is bad and it's the gift of God. And it's found in that all important phrase in verse 23. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.

In Christ Jesus our Lord, in Christ Jesus we are forgiven. In Christ Jesus we are made righteous. In Christ Jesus we are loved. How do we get in Christ? We have a repentant faith in Jesus, His perfect life and atoning death on the cross.

Grace is worth celebrating. Don't glorify a graceless past. Celebrate a grace-filled future. And live in a grace-filled now.

(Pastor prays)