

Slaves

Romans 6:19-23

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity, July 15, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There are only two states of being in this life for a human being. And both of them are slavery.

The one state in which a human being may exist is in slavery to impurity and lawlessness.

Impurity are those things which lead to death. It is impurity in one form or another that kills us. That is why even in our modern world, people insist on cleanliness. In fact all people to one degree or another or in one form or another insist upon cleanliness. The reason is that all impurity leads to death.

But since a human being enslaved to impurity is not able to see his master clearly, God makes it clear by saying, "impurity and lawlessness." One is not enslaved to impurity while not at the same time enslaved to lawlessness. To be enslaved to the one is to be enslaved to the other. If one is enslaved to impurity, one is also enslaved to lawlessness. Impurity leads to death. That means that lawlessness leads to death. To lead a lawless life is to lead a life that ends in death.

When a human being is enslaved to impurity and lawlessness, he has no choice but to obey them. They will punish him if he does not obey them. Therefore he has to obey them. Just as an earthly slave must obey his master so also anyone enslaved to impurity and lawlessness must do what they say. He has no choice.

When a human being is enslaved to impurity and lawlessness, he is not allowed to obey another master. He is not allowed to submit to another master. He cannot escape from the master that he has. If he tries to obey another master, impurity and lawlessness will punish him. If he tries to escape from impurity and lawlessness, they will ruthlessly pursue him. For a human there is no escape from these masters. For anyone who is enslaved to them is trapped.

When a human being is enslaved to impurity and lawlessness, the result is more lawlessness. Lawlessness does not simply hang about in a static way. It gets worse and worse. It makes things worse and worse for the one who is enslaved to it. Lawlessness increases its lawlessness in the heart and thinking of the person enslaved to it.

The end result of a life enslaved to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness is death.

The other state of being in which a human may find himself is slavery to God and to righteousness.

Since God is righteous to be enslaved to God is to be enslaved to righteousness. On the other hand if one is enslaved to righteousness one is also enslaved to God. The two are inseparable even though they are distinct.

If a person is enslaved to righteousness, he has no alternative but to obey the desires of righteousness. He is not able to obey the desires of any other master. He cannot obey the desires

of impurity and lawlessness because he is a slave to righteousness and to God. Righteousness and God will not permit him to be a slave to impurity and lawlessness. The slave of God does what God wants him to do. The slave of God cannot obey other gods. Just as an earthly slave cannot obey other masters, so also the slave of God cannot obey other gods or other masters of any kind.

If anyone is a slave to righteousness, he will do whatever righteousness tells him to do. He cannot do otherwise. He is a slave to righteousness.

Righteousness is summed up in the law. The law is the eternal righteousness of God. If someone is a slave of righteousness, he will have no other gods. The reason that he will have no other gods is that there are no other gods to have. The one who is a slave to righteousness will not take the name of God in vain. He will remember the worship day. He will honor his father and his mother. He will not murder. He will not commit adultery. He will not steal. He will not give false testimony against his neighbor. He simply won't. He has no alternative but to do things that way. He is a slave of righteousness.

He will not serve impurity or lawlessness. The reason that he will not serve impurity or lawlessness is that he cannot. Just as a slave of one master cannot serve another master of whom he is not slave so also a slave of righteousness cannot serve the master of impurity or lawlessness. They are not his masters. He cannot serve them. He can only serve righteousness.

For the slave who serves righteousness the end result is holiness. The translations call it sanctification and that is ok.

Holiness is that characteristic which God has in Himself. All other characteristics are characteristics in which God is perfect or limitless and human beings are limited and finite. For example human beings know some things. God knows everything. Human beings have some power. God is all powerful. Human beings are present in one location at a time. God is present everywhere all of the time. Human beings love. God is love. And so on the list goes. When it comes to holiness, holiness is the characteristic that God is in and of Himself. It is not like we are holy, but He is all holy. Only God is holy. If we are holy, it is because God has made us holy and like unto Himself.

Therefore the slave who serves God and righteousness becomes holy. The result of his life is holiness. The result of his life is likeness to God as it was in the beginning when God created us to start with. He created us in His likeness. The end result of serving righteousness in slavery is holiness and likeness to God as it was in the beginning.

That being the case the end result of slavery to God and to righteousness is life. Just like impurity leads to death. Holiness leads to life and not just any life, eternal life.

So there are two states of being for a human.

The first is slavery to impurity and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness. The end of which is death.

The second is slavery to righteousness and God leading to holiness. The end of which is eternal life.

There is no other state of being.

It is like my uncle's two room shack in the hills north of Atchison. You can only be in the kitchen or in the bedroom and God help you if you need to go to the bathroom. There is no other room to be in.

That means that you are either a slave to impurity and lawlessness on the one hand or a slave to righteousness and God on the other hand. There is no neutral state of being from which you can decide which state of being into which you wish to enter. There is no attached third room or hallway from which you may decide into which room you may enter. There are only two rooms. If you are a slave to impurity and lawlessness, you are not a slave to righteousness and God. If you are a slave to righteousness and God, you are not a slave to impurity and lawlessness. Or as Romans 6 puts it when you were slaves to sin you were liberated from righteousness and free from it. So also when you are slaves to righteousness, you are liberated and free from sin. Or as Luther puts it: the human is a beast of burden ridden of either God or the devil.

There is no neutral gear from which you may shift into lawlessness or unrighteousness. There is no objective standpoint from which you may consider your options. You are already either a slave to the one or a slave to the other. You are already aimed at either death or life.

And how does one cease to be a slave to lawlessness and become a slave to righteousness? One must die. That is the only way to be released from slavery. Oh, someone could buy you out of slavery, but that is the subject of another sermon. In Romans 6 the way out of slavery is death.

If a slave to lawlessness dies, lawlessness can no longer command that slave. If lawlessness can no longer command that slave, then that slave is no longer a slave to lawlessness. If that slave is no longer a slave to lawlessness, then that slave has become a slave to righteousness, there is no other state of being in which a person may be.

God will compare this to marriage in Romans 7. If a woman takes another man while her husband is alive, she is an adulteress. But if her husband has died, she has been released from the law of marriage and if she takes another man, she is not an adulteress.

In a similar way, if you are a slave to lawlessness and impurity and you die, then you are no longer a slave to them. You have been released from the law of impurity and lawlessness. You are free to serve another, righteousness and God. The key is to have died. And the key is to die before you die because once you die it is too late.

When did you die before you died? You died before you died when you were baptized. The reason that you died when you were baptized is that you were baptized into Christ. To be baptized into Christ, is to be baptized into His death. You were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death. But if you have died, you have been released from your slavery. Since your slavery as a fallen human being was to lawlessness and impurity, your baptismal death released you from those things and made you slaves to God and to righteousness leading to holiness and its end, eternal life.

And so the capstone of Romans 6 is accurate: the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God, in this case baptism which puts you to death and raises you again, is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.