

ashamed of? Those things result in death! *"Result in death" – our choices, influenced by the Holy Spirit or not, are either upbuilding and lifegiving, or the opposite, spiritually deadening.*

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

"Result is eternal life" – eternal life is an unearned gift of God (v.23) that comes simply and plainly through faith in Christ; the transformation of being born spiritually, John 3:3, 16. Our destiny is settled then, but something which is not a

condition for new birth nor an instant change in new birth, but set in progress, is sanctification, as the Holy Spirit has more and more of us. Those who have been justified will increasingly show it in their lives by growing in holiness, Hebrew 12:14.

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

"Wages... gift of God" – the two allegiances contrasted, one building up the debt of sin that brings progressive spiritual death, the other a one-time release into eternal life which comes as a gift.

• **For further study** read Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5-7.

REFLECTION Christianity is all about the relationship with God which gets us living His way, not a religion with a set of rules which show us when we're not. That means it's about freedom to make good choices, rather than having to follow a framework where the choices have been made for us, which is how formal religion sets it out. That's what Paul means when he says you are not under law (vv.14-15). He means not trying (and often failing) to keep to an external framework – but under grace, set free from sin (vv. 18 and 22) and free to choose to "obey from the heart" as we follow Christ in our new allegiance.

Feeling compelled to live selfishly and independently, with all the moral blurring of the lines that implies, is not freedom. But neither is being held by rules and religious requirements. That is also a bondage and a form of rebellion, because it denies the priority of knowing the Father through Jesus who has made this new way of life for us through taking on Himself our sin.

If we live as though the institution has made it right for us, we are saying we don't need Jesus, and we don't need to work at that relationship and daily seek the Spirit's guidance in making good choices. That, says Paul, is a path that leads to death and a slavery we need to renounce, to choose to live in the freedom Christ has won for us.

QUESTION *This is an anxious, confusing time when many are asking spiritual questions and wondering where God is in it. How would you explain God's grace in your life, and being able to make good choices for Him?*

PRAYER Lord, as we come to You in Jesus, we admit confusion from the many voices speaking, the news and opinions and daily briefings. And, if we are honest, we may seek hope in these things first, rather than trying to hear Your voice in the clamour. Help us to hear You afresh, to make good choices for you – and to honour those you bring across our path who are speaking Your word and bringing Your truth at a time we so badly need it. Amen.

The Living Word, on Wednesday for the following week – www.thelivingword.uk

See also

www.glowweobley.com – join others in the latest suggested prayers for our community
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The Living Word

www.thelivingword.uk PRINT EDITION

Bible readings for Sunday, June 28, 2020, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **June 28**

Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: **When the Lord's message comes, choose to hear it**

Jeremiah 28:5-9 – God's word may go against popular opinion

Matthew 10:40-42 – To look after the messenger is to welcome Jesus

Romans 6:11-23 – Be free from sin's pull and fervent about God

and also Psalm 89:1-4, 14-18

Jeremiah 28:5-9 – God's word may go against popular opinion

People don't always want to take on board what is true

5 Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD.

"Replied to the prophet Hananiah" – a false prophet who claimed to speak with the same authority as Jeremiah and directly refuted what Jeremiah had said, Jer. 27:16-22, and 70 year prediction, Jer. 25:11.

6 He said, "Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD'S house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon.

"Fulfill the words" – the Law's test, Deut. 18:20-22.

7 Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people:

"Nevertheless, listen" – Jeremiah would have liked Hananiah's prediction to be true, but knows that this is a deception.

8 From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms.

"The prophets who preceded" – Hananiah's predictions of peace and prosperity were not consistent with the proven Hebrew prophets like Amos, Hosea, Micah, Joel, and Nahum.

9 But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognised as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true."

"If his prediction comes true" – a popular message was easy to give and so had particular need for testing. Hananiah died soon after, vv.15-17.

REFLECTION There were always so-called prophets at court with a 'better' message than Jeremiah, and we know the frustration he struggled with at times. It wasn't just the full-on rejection of the words from the Lord he had heard and considered carefully. It was the destiny of his people who seemed bent on their own destruction – and it was as if he was the only person to see it. Still, his call was to be faithful to God, and to what he heard God say. He had to be that mouthpiece – and persuade his hearers to consider the truth, even if it wasn't what they wanted to hear. In the OT those anointed to speak out for God were a select and small number, even counting the unnamed or unrecorded prophets who we come across in the stories. Today, post-resurrection, and with the Holy Spirit known and welcomed in today's

church, we are all learning to hear God's "now" word and we may find ourselves sharing our understanding with others. Who hasn't known the temptation to change the message a bit and tell people what they want to hear? But the right way, honouring God, is to gently and lovingly share what He has given you. And be prepared to be wrong, allow space for disagreement – and not take it personally.

QUESTION We remember the OT prophets' predictions. What else did they bring?

Matthew 10:40-42 – To look after the messenger is to welcome Jesus

There's a blessing for receiving the person the Lord has sent

40 "Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes Me, and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes the One who sent Me.

"Welcomes you, welcomes Me" – the amount of respect for an ambassador was a measure of the respect for the sender. Christ lives in His people, who go out in His name. How they are received or rejected, is how Christ is received.

• **For further study**, see Matthew 18:5, 25:45; Luke 9:48; 2 Cor. 5:20.

41 Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous

person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.

"Whoever welcomes a prophet" – those who support and look after God's people are welcoming not just them, but the Good News itself – and will receive spiritual blessing.

42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is My disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

"One of these little ones" – Jesus' followers were mostly not of much social standing.

• **For further study**, see Matthew 5:3, 18:1-5, also 6:5, 23:5-12.

REFLECTION Honouring the people the Lord brings across your path is an important kingdom principle. Jesus states it plainly here. We dare not be disdainful of a Christian brother or sister sent to us. To do so is to dishonour the One who caused someone to visit, or another to move into the neighbourhood with their gifts. In the first century, the church's teachers moved around to share their teaching, and to be welcomed and put up safely was vital. The way they were treated said a lot about the way the message would be received – and the same holds true today.

QUESTION Who has the Lord brought to where I live or work, or my church fellowship? And what is the Lord bringing through them?

Psalm 89:1-4, 14-18	
1 I will sing of the LORD'S great love forever; with my mouth I will make Your faithfulness known through all generations.	14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.
2 I will declare that Your love stands firm forever, that You have established Your faithfulness in heaven itself.	15 Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim You, who walk in the light of Your presence, LORD.
3 You said, "I have made a covenant with My chosen one, I have sworn to David My servant,	16 They rejoice in Your name all day long; they celebrate Your righteousness.
4 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.' "	17 For You are their glory and strength, and by Your favour You exalt our horn.
	18 Indeed, our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

Romans 6:11-23 – Be free from sin's pull and fervent about God

To stay on the sinful path leads to death and denies the gift of life in Jesus

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

"Count yourselves dead to sin" – first step in living free from sin's pull is thinking about ourselves in a new way, recognising that sin's power was broken the moment we gave our life to Jesus. The old self, that liked its own independent and selfish way of living, has died, vv.2-7.

"In Christ Jesus" – Paul's way of expressing our oneness with Christ. An enabling, practical description, not just a theological one.

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

"Do not let sin reign" – second step in defeating sin is being intentional about practising right attitudes and actions, free to choose and able to say 'no' to temptations, judgments and resentments that don't fit with new life in Jesus.

13 Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to Him as an instrument of righteousness.

"Offer yourselves to God" – third step is to resolve before God every day not to help the author of sin e.g. not offering ears to hear or entertain gossip, nor the tongue to participate in it.

14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

"Not under... law but... grace" – the law of Moses under the Old Covenant was an external, rule-based system. It pointed out sin, without any help in dealing with it. The New Covenant in Jesus puts the sense of right and wrong in a regenerated, sensitised heart, or inner guidance, where the Holy Spirit enables good choices.

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!

16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient

slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

"Come to obey from your heart" – early church believers knew the life of the Spirit and its freedom. They practised a different sort of obedience, an intuitive "from the heart" kind which was responsive to God.

"Used to be slaves to sin" – Paul, writing to the church in Galatia, warned them against constructing a religion of rules which cancelled out the freedom of choosing to live for God, and relying on His leading. This is returning to a system that condemns, rather than growing in what is lifegiving.

18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

"Set free from sin" – rather than slaves to sin, v.16. Slavery in the ancient world was about being owned, and the obligations of who (or what) owned you, whether rebel-against-God sin, or the obligation, or motivation, that came from being 'owned' by righteousness.

19 I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.

"Human limitations" – a fair paraphrase of sarx, flesh. Paul is attempting to describe in everyday human life terms, something discerned spiritually, which he knows is inadequate. The believer in Jesus is released from the bondages of the old life, now free to make good choices and grow in Christ and holiness, or sanctification.

20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now