

The Discipleship Project-Summer 2017

Series 3: The Masquerade of Sin

A series by Eugene Wilson

Series Big Idea: Because Satan masquerades the destructive nature of sin, we must be honest with ourselves about the carnage sin brings.

Lesson 3.2: The Pleasure of Sin

Lesson Big Idea: Although sin initially appears to be attractive, ultimately righteousness produces a greater reward.

FOUNDATION

Scripture Focus: Hebrews 11:24–26 (PPT)

Author Kent Crockett, in his book addressing *Biblical Solutions to Everyday Problems*, tells how two construction workers had taken a lunch break and had opened up their lunch boxes. One of them looked inside his box and said, “Not baloney again! I can’t believe it. I hate baloney. This is the third time this week I’ve had baloney. I can’t stand baloney!” The other one said, “Why don’t you just ask your wife to make you something different?” He replied, “I don’t have a wife. I made these myself.”

Although we may not readily recognize it, we are personally responsible for much of what we do not like about our lives. Crockett states, “The fact is, most of the baloney in our lives we put there ourselves. If we ever want life to be any different from the same old baloney we keep serving ourselves, then we must break out of doing the routine.”

How do we break out of the routine? How do we rid ourselves of destructive things? The answer may seem simple, especially when what we are doing is something we don’t like. However, it is seldom easy. People are prone to repeat the same thing over and over again even when they do not like the results their actions are producing. Moreover, it is even more difficult to break free from things that bring us pleasure.

How do we shun or turn away from pleasurable things, attractive things, things we enjoy, and reach for what is far better? The Word of God offers insight into this quest through the example of Moses. The Bible says he chose to “suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25, KJV).

Let’s look a little deeper into this fascinating story of the life of Moses.

FRAME

It would be an injustice to go any further without acknowledging a very important aspect of the story of Moses. We should not start in Hebrews 11, the chapter of faith. Instead, we must begin with a baby boy placed in a basket and left by the riverside. This is the beginning of the life of Moses as told in Scripture.

The children of Israel were in captivity, and Pharaoh, upon hearing a prophecy

concerning a baby who would one day deliver God's people from bondage, sought to destroy the child. Not knowing which baby boy it was, he ordered all Hebrew baby boys killed. Miraculously, Moses' life was spared when he was discovered floating in a basket by Pharaoh's daughter. She took him home with her and adopted him as a son. Hence, **Moses grew up living in Pharaoh's house.**

Consider the benefits of being an adopted son. He was no doubt given the full rights and benefits of a son and, as such, enjoyed the pleasures of living in Pharaoh's house.

- **What are some of the benefits Moses may have had in living in Pharaoh's house?**

A person might think such things would deter Moses away from having anything to do with his family of origin. But, as our story reveals, it did not.

To fully understand the dynamics of this riveting story of Moses, one must first understand this simple, yet crucial, factor. Although his upbringing afforded him the opportunity to be trained by world-class experts in nearly every discipline, Moses was a Hebrew, and he knew it. There is no way for us to know how much of an impact this had on him, but we know it was significant. Moses knew he was not an Egyptian even though he dressed like an Egyptian, spoke like an Egyptian, and lived like an Egyptian. He had it made as much as anyone could have had it made back then. He experienced the finer things of life, and, no doubt, he enjoyed them. Yet **he was fully aware that he was a Hebrew.** (PPT) (PDG)

What influences the shaping of a life? What elements are most crucial? Is it nature? How about a person's experiences? How about a person's environment in which he or she is raised? These factors, and others like them, are all crucial in the shaping of a life. But perhaps most importantly is the understanding of who we are, or perhaps even better, whose we are. Is there the possibility that **Moses' understanding of who he was is what ultimately shaped his life?** It certainly seems so.

- **In what ways did Moses' knowing who he was (Hebrew) help to shape his life?**

Support for this claim is found in Scripture. The Bible clearly establishes who we are. Paul writes in I Corinthians 6:19–20, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (NKJV). (PPT) Paul, in these verses of Scripture, maintains that **whose we are is foundational to establishing what we will do.** Paul lays claim to the fact that we are not our own. Instead, we are God's. And as such we are not left to decide what we will do and how we will act. Quite the contrary, we are God's and as such we are to glorify God in all we do.

- **In what ways does our knowing who we are shape our lives?**

It would seem this knowledge of who he was—that is, where he came from, his origin, his values—was the ultimate factor in shaping Moses’ life and, consequently, the decisions he made. We see this in his handling of the Egyptian who was mistreating a Hebrew. It was this understanding of who he was and where he came from that caused deep-rooted feelings to surface at the sight of injustice. It was not just because someone was being mistreated that anger arose within Moses. It was not just a desire for justice that drove him to take a stand. Instead, it was the fact that an Egyptian was mistreating a Hebrew. Although he had been raised in Pharaoh’s house and had no doubt been influenced by the Egyptians, nothing could shake the fact that he was not an Egyptian; he was a Hebrew.

Likewise, we live in a world that is quite different from God’s kingdom. But we are not of this world. We are not our own. We are His. Hence, our knowing this should impact the decisions we make. We should not allow this world, its systems, or its way of thinking become our way of thinking. (See Romans 12:2.) **(PPT)** This world should not dictate the decisions we make. Who, or whose, we are should be the deciding factor in our decisions.

- **Does knowing who you are influence your decisions? Why or why not? If so, give an example?**

We should not overlook or downplay, however, the power or appeal that pleasure has on our lives. Some might maintain that sin is not fun, but that is not always true. **Some sins are pleasurable.**

- **Why is pleasure something humans will do almost anything to experience?**

But the **pleasure of sin is short-lived.** **(PPT) (PDG)** Its pleasure is fleeting; it is here today but gone tomorrow. It appears Moses understood the fleeting nature of pleasure. The writer of Hebrews states that Moses chose “to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25, NKJV). **(PPT)** Some translations, such as the New International Version, refer to it as the “fleeting pleasures of sin.” The meaning is clear—the pleasure Moses rejected would have only lasted for a short time.

Like the first sin, many sins are appealing because they are pleasurable. Genesis 3:6 states, “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate” (NKJV). **(PPT)** The Hebrew word for good in this verse is *towb* (tōbe) and can be translated as tasty, pleasing, or desirable. The allure of the first sin was the fruit looked tasty, pleasing, or pleasant to the eye. One cannot help but wonder if Eve would have partaken of the fruit if it had not been pleasing to the eye. We may never know, but we do know the fruit was pleasing to the eye and that was certainly a contributing factor.

Unlike Eve, who chose that which was pleasurable and pleasing to the eye, Moses rejected it. He did not allow the pleasures of sin to keep him from doing what was right.

Neither should we, but it is often what we do. Which causes me to ask, *How can we make sure we choose otherwise—that we reject the pleasures of sin and choose what is far better?*

- **What can we do to make sure we choose wisely and reject the pleasures of sin for something better?**

It appears **one of the reasons we are prone to choose the pleasures of sin as opposed to the alternative is because we are focused on the immediate (PPT) (PDG)—** what is in the moment right now.

- **Why are we prone to look at the immediate rather than the future?**

Moses had two choices. One choice was pleasurable and the other would result in suffering. Yet Moses chose suffering instead of pleasure. Why? An influencing element, according to Hebrews 11, is that **Moses was able to look beyond the immediate**. This is what faith is about. Faith is not about looking at the immediate and making a decision based upon what is happening in the moment. Faith is about making the right decision in spite of the present. It is about trusting God even though the present looks unfavorable.

- **Give an example of how faith was instrumental in your making a right decision.**

Our struggle with choosing right gets complicated when we begin comparing immediate pleasure with the immediate alternative, which in Moses' case was suffering. We must not be consumed with the immediate gratification of our flesh. Instead, we must recognize the value of the eternal in all that we do.

Interestingly, the Scripture does not describe the suffering Moses would endure as fleeting or seasonal. It simply states that he chose suffering instead of choosing the pleasures of sin. But **not only did Moses reject the immediate allure of sin—pleasures now—he also rejected pleasures that were sure to come.**

Moses would have ended up being Pharaoh. But he rejected it. Moses did not know how everything was going to work out. He just simply knew the right thing to do, so he did it. And according to Hebrews 11, he did it by faith. In other words, he trusted God with his future. He had faith that God was going to take care of his future. He trusted God's plan and purpose for his life even though he did not fully understand what it was at the time. Through faith he understood that by choosing righteousness, he had chosen the better reward.

- **What role does faith have in our making decisions in light of the future?**

The pleasures of sin are short-lived. They will come quickly to an end. Getting drunk may be fun in the moment, but the hangover in the morning is not. Exploding in anger may feel good in the moment, but dealing with the aftermath does not. Participating in

gossip and slander may make a person feel important for a moment, but it is short-lived. Lasting much longer are the results of poor decisions—feelings of inadequacy, a destructive self-image, and a growing dislike of almost everything and everyone.

In contrast to the fleeting pleasures of sin, **righteousness produces a reward even when our decision to reject the pleasures of sin places us in the midst of suffering.** (PPT) (PDG) I Peter was written to an audience who was experiencing suffering, and their suffering was going to get worse. But Peter wrote in I Peter 1:8 that through faith we can partake of an “inexpressible and glorious joy” (NIV). Regardless of life’s circumstance, there is joy in living for God. There is joy in His presence. When we receive His Spirit, we experience a joy unlike any other. It is an unspeakable joy, a joy that surpasses happiness. It is greater than happiness. Happiness is based upon happenings, and everything that happens may not make us happy. Joy, however, is not based on what happens; it is a spiritual thing that transcends the natural. We can live in the midst of chaos and still have joy.

- **In what ways should joy impact our decision-making?**

Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit. (See Galatians 5:22–23.) It is a lasting joy. There is no lasting joy in the works of the flesh, however. (See Galatians 5:19-21.) Paul explains in Galatians 5:21 that those who do the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. But those who exhibit the fruit of the Spirit will. Furthermore, **the deeper we go in our love and commitment to God, the more joy we can find.** Even the poor and weary still find joy in God’s presence.

Sin may initially appear to be attractive, but its pleasures are fleeting. And the aftermath of sin is everything but pleasing. Sin leaves a person destroyed. In contrast, righteousness always, inequitably, produces a greater reward.

FINISH

Wayne Jackson, in an article appearing in the *Christian Courier*, titled, “He Forsook the Treasures of Egypt,” presents an interesting view. He asks, “Do we really appreciate the sacrifice that Moses made when he cast his lot with the people of Jehovah?”

Jackson tells of Howard Carter, a British archaeologist, who had been doing excavations for several years in the Valley of the Kings near Luxor (Thebes), Egypt. “His labor had been fruitless, and he was on the verge of abandoning the project. Then, in November of 1922, Carter came upon one of the most remarkable finds in the history of archaeological exploration. He discovered the tomb of the Pharaoh, Tutankhamun.”

King Tut, as he is known by most, reigned for just a few years—seven to nine years—before dying at about eighteen years old. Thus, King Tut, as Jackson writes, “was a thoroughly obscure and very unimportant ruler. Also, his abbreviated reign was in the declining days of Egypt’s glory. In spite of these circumstances, the treasures of Tut’s tomb were fabulous beyond description.”

Jackson shares Carter’s description of his initial view into the antechamber (which is just outside the burial room), which housed many of Tut’s treasures:

[A]s my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues, and gold—everywhere the glint of gold.

Jackson continues,

A magnificent array of some five thousand artifacts was subsequently discovered. There were golden beds, gold-covered chariots, carved walking sticks and bows with inlaid gold, and a throne, encrusted with gold, silver and jewels.

When the king's burial chamber was finally entered, a stone sarcophagus was discovered. It contained three successive coffins of amazing workmanship fashioned in the ruler's likeness. The innermost was solid gold (over six feet long). Also, in a nearby room four small gold coffins containing Tut's visceral organs were found in a chest of alabaster stone. One of these (fifteen and one-half inches long) was estimated to be valued at \$250,000.

Another object within the tomb was a portrait mask of solid beaten gold (weighing twenty-three pounds) inlaid with semiprecious stones; it covered the head and shoulders of the mummy. It was fashioned by goldsmiths just after the young monarch's death, and presents an exact likeness of how he appeared when he died. These discoveries certainly illustrate the ancient saying that in Egypt "gold is as common as dust."

Think about it. If the tomb of a young, obscure, short-lived Pharaoh could produce such splendor and beauty, think about the wealth of the really great pharaohs like Ramses II. It would have no doubt been astonishing.

This is what Moses forsook for suffering? Well, yes, and then again, no, not really. Moses looked beyond the immediate, beyond the suffering, and made a decision based on more important matters. Although Moses may have given up much, what he inherited was of far greater value than all he forsook.

Did he choose right? Yes, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Forty years after making his decision, Moses returned to lead God's people out of their bondage, and for the next forty years of his life, Moses experienced God in profound ways. He witnessed miracles in the deliverance of God's people from Egypt, and he was a key component in many of them. He drank water that came from a rock. He was used in the parting of the Red Sea waters. He is the only person in the Old Testament who is said to have known God face-to-face. He even appeared with Elijah to Jesus and the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Today he is a revered person of Christian faith and is known by the Jewish culture as their greatest leader. Because Moses rejected sin and what could have been the kingship of Egypt, he was given a far greater reward.

We are confronted with decisions every day. Most do not carry any lasting weight or significance, however, some matter a great deal. How will we decide? What criteria will we consider? What matters most to us—immediate gratification, or something long-lasting? We can make the right decision when we view our choices in light of the future

rather than the present.