

Romans
Whose Slave Are You? (Part 5)
Romans 6:15-23
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Well, this morning I invite you to turn one last time to Romans 6 as we end our journey through this great chapter. As you're turning, let me just say this week I was contemplating, I mentioned to the elders this morning, it's hard for me to believe this, but it was 14 years ago this month that I had the privilege of coming as your pastor. And I just want you to know that it has been an amazing 14 years, really, as I said to the elders, a 14 year honeymoon. You guys have loved me and my family. You have responded to the truth. You have served each other. You have made what I do and what the elders do here a great joy. I want you to know that I love you and pray for you, and it is just such a privilege for me to be here. And Lord willing, I plan to be here for a long time in the future if you'll have me, but that is just the joy of my heart, to be with you.

Romans 6, if you were to ask the average person on this planet about man's spiritual journey, you would get a lot of different answers. But I think of the seven billion people who inhabit this planet, the most common answer would go something like this, "Well, you see, the world's great religions really are just different paths to the same place. Each of them starts at a different trailhead and each takes its own unique path up the mountain. But eventually, when life is over and the story is told, all of the world's religions essentially end up at the same summit of the same great mountain. We're all ultimately pursuing the same God. And we end up, whether it's described as heaven or paradise or nirvana, those terms are essentially different ways of describing the same place and the same destiny." That, I think, is the most common view of fallen mankind on this planet.

But understand this, that was not Jesus of Nazareth's view. In the conclusion of His most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord drew a shockingly different picture of man's spiritual journey. He essentially said, listen, forget the illustration of a mountain surrounded by countless trailheads, all leading to the same summit, leading ultimately to God. Instead, Jesus said, no, it's not like that at all; all religions, all paths, start in just one of two places. He said, there are only two gates. There's the wide gate. By describing it as wide, Jesus was in essence saying, it's easy to get on it. In fact, you don't have to do anything to go through the wide gate, you've already gone through it just by virtue of being a fallen human being. But you can also go through the wide gate by pursuing the false religions on this planet, by pursuing the false ideologies and philosophies of man. You can go through the wide gate by claiming some aberrant view of the Christian faith, the true knowledge of God. You can also go through the wide gate by professing falsely the true faith that is revealed in Scripture. So there are a lot of different ways to go through the wide gate.

But Jesus said there's only one other gate and it's the narrow gate. Why does He describe it as narrow? He describes it as narrow because it's hard to find. In fact, He says, "few there be that

find it.” Why is that? Among all the noise and the clutter of the false religions saying, here’s the way, here’s the gate, it’s really hard to find the narrow gate. It’s also hard to fit through, because you can’t go through it with anyone else. You can’t go through the gate that leads to life with your parents or your grandparents. You can’t sort of fit through with other people’s faith. Nor can you take any baggage through it. You can’t take your own works, your own effort, your own righteousness; it’s a narrow gate. In fact, it’s so narrow that it’s one person, Jesus Christ. He says, “I am the door.” That’s it. Every other gate leads to a different road. In fact, Jesus goes on to say that, from those two gates, there are two paths leading in opposite directions, and those two divergent paths eventually arrive at two completely opposite destinations. That’s exactly the point that Paul makes in our text this morning.

Now, let me remind you of the theme of this paragraph that we’re studying, the paragraph that begins in verse 15 of Romans 6 and runs down through verse 23. Essentially Paul says this, true Christians are no longer slaves of sin, but have instead become slaves of God, and therefore our lives look entirely different. And because of this, because of this change, you need to understand that our relationship to sin, every person’s relationship to sin, matters. In fact, as we began to see last week in verses 20 to 23, Paul says there are eternal consequences of our relationship to sin.

Let’s read this section again, Romans 6, beginning in verse 20; you follow along. Paul says,

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now as we noted last time, this paragraph is telling us, listen, you are either serving sin or you are serving God; there is no middle ground, sin or God. And you are either on the path of sin or you are on the path of righteousness. And if you look carefully at your life, you can tell which path you’re on. If your life is marked by increasing obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ and His Word, growing sanctification, growing likeness to Jesus Christ, then you are on the path of righteousness. If your life, on the other hand, is marked by increasing obedience to the demands of sin, increasing patterns of sin in your life, then you are on the path of sin. And which path you’re on tells you which gate you entered. And discovering which road you’re on now will tell you your ultimate destiny.

Now as we saw last time, Paul compares these two ways or these two roads, but he does so by describing them as two kinds of slavery. He’s really still outlining these two basic realities, two gates, two paths, two destinies, but he does so under the comparison of two kinds of slavery. Starting, as we noted last week, with the slavery that leads to death, in verses 20 and 21. Verse 20 says it’s slavery to sin. That’s what this is about, “For when you were slaves of sin, you were

free in regard to righteousness.” Before Christ you were a slave of sin and that slavery brought absolutely no benefit. Notice verse 21, “Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed?” Paul doesn’t give an answer. Why? Because there is no answer; the benefit was absolutely nothing. And that slavery ends in eternal death. Verse 21 says, “For the outcome,” literally the Greek word is “the end,” the end of that path, “is death.”

The second kind of slavery in verse 22 is the slavery that leads to life. This is the other path. This path is entered by the narrow gate. Notice, this slavery is slavery to God, verse 22, “But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God,” and it brings a lot of benefits, but the benefit that Paul mentions here in the context is “sanctification.” If you’ve really been saved, if you’ve really been made a slave of God, then God does what He promises to do in the new covenant, He causes you to walk in His ways. There is sanctification, you are having that reality. And then this path ends in eternal life, verse 22, and the outcome, the end, of this slavery, “is eternal life.” Those are the two slaveries.

Now today we come to one of the most famous verses in all of Scripture, Romans 6:23. You probably, if you’ve been a Christian any time at all, you’ve memorized this verse. It’s famous in the history of the church. In fact, Charles Spurgeon, speaking of Romans 6:23, says it is, “A Christian proverb, a golden sentence, a divine statement of truth worthy to be written across the sky. Here you have both the essence of the gospel and a statement of that misery from which the gospel delivers all who believe.” If you’ve been alive anytime at all, you know that this verse is part of what was once called the Romans Road. The Romans Road was just a series of verses from the book of Romans strung together that were often used to share the gospel. Early in my life, this was a path I followed.

But this verse has a context and taken in its context this verse explains, and this is what I want you to see this morning, verse 23 explains the ultimate reasons behind these two eternal destinations. Verse 23 is a kind of summary. It’s a summary of verses 20 to 22 that we looked at last time. It is also a climax of the entire paragraph. So let’s look again at this famous verse, verse 23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Now before we get into this verse in detail, let me just make a couple of general observations. They’re obvious, but not so obvious to many people. First of all, it’s clear from this verse that there are two eternal destinations. There really are two eternal destinations. In other words, there is no annihilation of the soul; man doesn’t cease to exist at death. Jesus Himself affirmed the reality of an eternal heaven and an eternal hell, so either Jesus was wrong or He was right, but the reality that He said such a thing cannot be questioned. Secondly, we can make the general observation that there are only two eternal destinations. There’s no purgatory. There’s no other place. No, there are these two destinations, eternal death or eternal life.

A third observation brings this much closer to home, and I don't think we think about this enough, but let me put it as directly as I can. As I put it to myself this week, it may be for you in 70 years or it may be, God forbid, in 70 seconds, but the moment your body dies, the moment your heart stops, the moment that body you inhabit stops, the real you who lives in that body will awaken in one of those two destinations. Now let that sink into your soul for a moment. This is not legend. This is not pretense. This is reality. The moment your body stops functioning, the real you will awaken in one of these two eternal destinations. It's so important that we make sure we know which of those destinations is ours.

Now I want you to notice as we begin to look at verse 23, I want you to notice how Paul connects this verse with what came before it. Notice he begins verse 23 with that little word for. In other words, this verse is Paul's explanation of why one kind of slavery ends in eternal death and the other ends in eternal life. The other thing I want you to notice is the contrast, and this is the key to the verse. Notice the key contrast is between wages on the one hand, and wages are what? They're earned. And a free gift on the other hand. And what distinguishes a free gift? It's received. Earned, received. Earned, received. How do people end up in one of these two eternal destinations? It's either earned or it's received.

Let's look at it more carefully. First of all, I want you to notice the first half of the verse, and let's summarize it this way, "All people," everyone, "earns death as a payment for their sins." All, you, me, everyone, earns death as a payment for their sins. Verse 23 begins, "For the wages of sin is death." In the Greek text it's even simpler, there's not even a verb. It just says, "For the wages of sin death." "For the wages of sin death." We were all born in the first half of verse 23. In fact, let me put it this way, if you do absolutely nothing you will spend the rest of your life in the first half of verse 23 and your eternity as well. This is just the reality for everyone.

Now, notice what Paul says. The Greek word translated wages originally referred to a soldier's rations or a soldier's pay. As Greek continued to develop, by the first century, this word spoke generally of all wages, all pay, all compensation. But I think here in context, Paul is using it in a very specific way. You see, the picture in this paragraph is of a slave master paying an allowance to his slaves. And if sin is your master, then the allowance you get is death. That's what he pays. That's what you can expect.

Now notice Paul refers to the wages of sin, singular. He's using this word sin in a collective sense, speaking of sin in the general reality that we are sinners. It's like when we say, "What do you get paid for your work?" Work is used in the collective sense, it means all those hours that you contribute to your work, you get paid for it, but work is used collectively. The same thing here, "the wages of sin is death," "the wages," collectively, "for our sin is death." But technically, the rest of Scripture makes it clear that we are not judged merely collectively for our sins, but rather we are judged for our sins individually, for individual sins, for sins plural.

Go back to chapter 1 and notice verse 32. Here Paul is talking about pagans. He's talking about people who don't even claim to worship the true God, who've made up their own gods. And he says in verse 32, "they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice," notice this, "such things," plural. What's he talking about? Well, if you go back to verse 28, and you read down through verse 31, there's this lengthy list of sins. And Paul says, those who commit these sins, plural, "are worthy of death."

Then in chapter 2 he comes to the religious and specifically those, like the Jews in the first century, who claimed to worship the true God but didn't really know Him. Also, it could be people attached to the Christian church, but weren't really Christian. So people who claimed to worship the true God but really don't know Him, and he says in verse 2, "We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice," again, notice the plural, "such things," sins, plural. "But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things." In other words, when religious people look at pagans and go, "Can you believe they do that?" But then we do the same things, commit the same sins, do you think, "that you will escape the judgment of God?" So the judgment of God, the wages of sin, isn't just on sin in the collective sense, it's on our individual sins.

And notice verse 6 of chapter 2, God "WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON," at the judgment is the context, "ACCORDING [*to what?*] HIS DEEDS," plural, individual sins. That's why in Revelation 20 you have a picture at the judgment of the books being opened, the record of human lives being opened, and people are judged according to their deeds, plural. "The wages of sin is death." We could also say it's equally true, the wages of sins is death. And look again at what we get paid for this sin or for sins, "the wages of sin is death." Sin or sins, either way you want to say it, they deserve death. God's justice demands death for our crimes.

Now, by using the word wages here, Paul is making a really important point. He's saying sin demands our death just as our work demands that we get paid. Imagine for a moment that you were to work a month for your employer and he didn't pay you. Would that be just? No, of course it wouldn't be just. You earned that pay. There was an agreement and you deserve to be paid that amount that was promised you. There's justice involved in that. That's Paul's point. Just as it would be unjust not to pay a worker what he earned, it would be unjust for God not to pay us what our sins have earned.

On the fringes of Christianity, I won't say evangelical Christianity, it's really more liberal Christianity, but unfortunately there are those who call themselves evangelicals who would say this, there's a growing concern with saying that Jesus suffered the justice of God for sinners on the cross. They don't want to say that. They want God just to forgive. God can just wave His hand and forgive. Listen, Paul is saying, if God just waves His hand and forgives without His justice being met, then God is what? Unjust! What would you think of a human judge who knew that the defendant was guilty and yet just decided to forgive him? You'd say that's not

just. The same thing is true for God. But God is just, and death has always been what God has paid for sins.

Go back to Genesis 2, and you remember in verse 17 He says to Adam, “from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it [*What?*] you will surely die.” Ezekiel 18:4, “all souls are Mine,” God says, “and the soul that sins, it shall die.” The soul who sins will die. Death, this is the just payment for sins. Now, sometimes death can refer to physical death. It does that back in chapter 5 when Paul says, through Adam’s sin physical death came upon all men. Other times, this word death can be used of spiritual death like Ephesians 2:1, where Paul says that in our sins we were dead spiritually to God.

But I don’t think either of those are meant primarily here because, notice in verse 23, Paul compares and contrasts two final destinations. He’s looking into the future and he contrasts this death, whatever it is, with eternal life. So here, death, in verse 23, means eternal death. It’s what John the Apostle calls, in Revelation 20, “the second death which is the lake of fire.” It is eternal punishment. This is simply an unchangeable law of God’s moral universe, “the wages of sin is death.” It’s required of God’s justice. The soul that sins will die spiritually, physically, and eternally, “the wages of sin is death.”

Now here is where a lot of people who aren’t Christians get confused and even those who profess to be Christians. They get confused here because they begin to think and reason on their own, and they think like this, “Okay, so the wages of sin is death. How many sins does it take to earn eternal punishment?” And then they think, “Okay, well is it possible that, yes, I’m a sinner, I know I sin, but is it possible that if I also do good things and I do enough good things, that God will cancel out my sin and the wages that my sin has earned?”

This is an utter misunderstanding of God’s justice. This is not who God is. How does God declare Himself to be? How does He spell out His justice? Listen to God’s self-revelation in Exodus 34. He says, I “will by no means leave the guilty [*What?*] unpunished.” God says, it is my very nature that I cannot “leave the guilty unpunished.” I cannot be unjust, that’s contrary to My very nature.

You come to the New Testament and here’s how Paul puts it in Galatians 3:10, he says, “as many **as** are of the works of the Law.” That is everybody who’s trying to be made right with God by their obedience to God, by their good works, by their own efforts. If that’s you this morning, listen to what Paul says, he says, they “are under a curse.” If you’re trying to be made right with God by your own efforts, you’re under a curse. Why? Well listen to what he says, he quotes the Old Testament, “CURSED IS EVERYONE,” that’s everyone, that’s all-inclusive, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.” In other words, it’s not enough to be mostly good. It’s not enough to be just barely 51% good, as if somehow that’s going to weigh out. No, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE LAW.”

James puts it this way in James 2:10, he says, “whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.” Think about that. If you could keep every command in Scripture and just break one, in the eyes of God, you would be guilty of having broken them all. By the way, in context in James 2, guess what that one sin is that causes you to have broken all of them, prejudice in the heart. All you have to do is simply exercise prejudice in your heart and in the eyes of God and His justice, you have broken His law. Don’t think of His law like, you know, jellybeans in a jar that you can sort of spill out a few and you’ve mostly kept the rest of them. No, think of God’s Law like a chain, and if you break a link, you’ve shattered it. Break God’s law once and you’re under its curse, the curse of death, “the wages of sin is death.”

By the way, Jesus explains what this really means, “the wages of sin is death,” He explains it even more thoroughly. I want you to see it. Turn to Matthew 25, Matthew 25. At the end of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus describes a future judgment. It’s called the judgment of the nations or the judgment of the sheep and goats. It’s probably a judgment that happens at the end of the tribulation period with those who survive the tribulation, and there they are judged. But what I want to see is verse 46 because Jesus here describes these two destinations in a powerful way. He says in verse 46, “These,” that is, the wicked, “will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Jesus, notice, uses the word eternal in both cases; it’s the same Greek word. In other words, however long eternal life lasts for the righteous is how long punishment lasts for the wicked; eternal punishment, eternal life. So in other words, we could paraphrase Paul this way, “The wages of sin is eternal punishment.” That’s really what he’s saying.

Now if you struggle with that, I understand that from a human perspective. I mean, after all, how could 20 years of sin, or 40 years of sin, or 60 years of sin, or 80 years of sin on this planet, how in the world can that deserve eternal punishment? It’s a question we’ve all asked, right? How does that work out?

Well, there are a couple of answers; there are others, but I’ll give you two. First of all, we can say that it merits eternal punishment because the greatness of the one sinned against determines what penalty is just. This is true even with human law. Think about this, compare the penalty of your being disloyal to your friend with the penalty of your being disloyal to your government. If you’re disloyal to your friend, that might cause an end of your friendship. If you’re disloyal in the ultimate sense to your government, it might cost you your life; that’s called treason. Well, what’s the difference? The difference is the one sinned against.

Well imagine the gravity and seriousness of our sin when it is against the greatest person in the universe, God the Creator. How serious our sin must be. You know, if you’re tempted to think lightly of your sin, and we all are, just consider this, God cast Adam out of the garden and plunged all of us into sin and death for one sinful act, just one. And what was that sinful act? He ate a piece of fruit that God said, “you may not eat.” That’s it. You say, “Well, why?”

Listen, every sinful thought, every sinful word, every sinful act we commit, they are filled with a world of sin. Think about Adam's case. In Adam's case, eating a single piece of fruit that God had forbidden from him showed Adam to be guilty. Think of all the sins that were involved in that one act. There was rebellion, rebellion against God's clear command. There was pride, he knew better. There was lust. There was ingratitude, selfishness, a failure to love God, a failure to love Eve, a disregard of God's goodness and grace in all that God had provided for him and everything else in the garden, a violation of God's holiness, and ultimately, unbelief. And I'm just getting started. Seriously, we could go on. In that one sin there was a world of sin. And the same thing is true for us. In every sin you and I commit, it's not a simple act; it's filled with evil.

Our sin also deserves eternal punishment; because if we're not redeemed and we end up in hell, we will continue to sin eternally. Understand, sinners who go to hell don't repent. There's remorse, there's regret, but there's no repentance, and there's no heart change. In fact, every sinner there will continue to sin in rebellion against God their Creator to the extent that they're able to, at least in their minds. If you doubt that, just read the book of Revelation. You remember, those in the tribulation period who have the judgments of God poured out on them, who know it's the judgment of God, how do they respond? Do they repent in sackcloth and ashes? No, Revelation says they blaspheme God. That's exactly what it will be like in hell, they blaspheme God.

So the wages of sin is death, deserved eternal punishment, eternal separation from God. Do you understand? I plead with you today if you're not in Christ, do you understand what this really means? This is you, this is your story. The moment your body stops working, this is where you'll be, forever banned from the presence of God with all of the misery and suffering that that banishment brings.

You know, most people simply don't believe that's true. Oh, they may say they believe it, but they don't really believe it. Why? Because they sin in this life and nothing really bad happens, no lightning falls from the sky. And you know, the first time you sin, you wonder if something's going to happen, and nothing happens. And then you get used to it, you grow accustomed to it, and you think that's how God acts. They begin to think that sin doesn't really cost anything. That is such a gross misunderstanding of what's really going on.

I mean, imagine for a moment that you started a job that promised you to be paid every two weeks. And after the first week, when you hadn't been paid, you said to yourself, "Well that's it, I am quitting this job because I'm never going to get paid." You would never do that. Why? Because you know there's a payday scheduled. You know it's coming.

The fact that you haven't yet experienced God's judgment for your sin means absolutely nothing, because it's still not God's payday. It's coming, but it's not here yet. There is a payday for sin some day; it is written into the code of God's moral universe as surely as gravity is written into the physical universe. In fact, go back to Romans 2, Romans 2, and notice verse 4, this is where

most people live, most unbelievers. He's talking to unbelievers here, and he says, you know what you're enjoying right now? The riches of God's kindness, His tolerance, His patience. He says, do you think lightly of those things? Don't you know that what you're experiencing right now doesn't mean God doesn't hate your sin, it doesn't mean judgment's not coming? No! It means that God intends His kindness toward you to lead you to repentance. But because you've totally misconstrued what's really going on, because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, Paul says, "you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Payday someday is coming. Verse 6, God "WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS."

Please understand this, God is kind, He is patient, He is loading your life up right now. If you're not in Christ, He is loading your life up with goodness, with His grace, with His patience, and that's His desire for you to come to repentance. It's His calling you to repentance. But it does not mean that payday isn't coming. You will stand before God, and if you're not in Christ, you will get paid for your sins. God has a perfect record in His own omniscience of every thought you've ever had, every word you've ever spoken, every act you've ever committed, and payday is coming. Apart from Jesus Christ, you and I will get exactly what our sin has earned; "the wages of sin is death," eternal punishment. And if God doesn't intervene, that's what we've all earned, it's where we will all end up. But thank God that's not the end of the story.

You see, there's a second destination, and in the second half of verse 23, Paul explains the ultimate reason that some arrive there. Let's describe it this way, a few, a few, a remnant they're often called in the Bible, a few receive eternal life. How? As a free gift through Jesus's work. Now look at verse 23. Look first at the first half again, "the wages of sin is death." Now we've studied verses 15 to 22, we've learned so much about the contrast between sin and righteousness, so that if you had never heard the second half of verse 23, you might well expect Paul to say this, "the wages of sin is death and the wages of righteousness is eternal life." You might expect him to say that. And you know what? If Paul believed that we could be justified by our own efforts, by our own righteousness, by our own goodness, that's exactly what he would've written. But it wouldn't have been the true gospel.

Notice what Paul does say in verse 23, "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life." Notice the contrast, "the wages of sin is death," we earn eternal punishment. But those who end up in heaven don't get there because they've earned it or deserve it. No wage is mentioned in the second half of verse 23, "but the free gift of God is eternal life." The Greek word translated "the free gift" is a word you'll recognize, it's the word *charisma*. It means literally, a gift of grace, that which is freely and graciously given. Or, as it's translated here, "a free gift."

Paul's already talked about this, go to chapter 4. Chapter 4 verse 4, as he talks about Abraham's example he applies it to us in verse 4. He says, "Now to the one who works, his wage is not

credited as a favor, but is what is due.” If you work for your justification, then if you get justification, it’s your wage. Paul says, that’s not how it works at all. Verse 5, “But to the one who does not work,” no human effort, no wages, but instead the one who simply “believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Or verse 6, we could put another way, “God credits righteousness apart from works.” And then he uses David and his sin as an example.

He comes back to this gift in chapter 5. Chapter 5 verse 15, he’s talking about the fact that our legal representative is no longer Adam. If you’re in Christ, your legal representative is Christ. And with Christ, here’s what you get, verse 15, “But the free gift,” that comes with Christ, “is not like the transgression,” that Adam committed. “For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more,” what Jesus did is so much greater because, “the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.” It’s a free gift. It’s a free gift. It’s a gift of God’s grace. In other words, it’s a gift you get when you deserve exactly the opposite; that’s what the word grace means. It’s a gift you get when you have earned exactly the opposite; you’ve earned death, but He gives you life.

Notice back in verse 23 of chapter 6, what’s the free gift we receive by grace from God? The free gift of God is eternal life. I touched on this last week. What is eternal life? Eternal life is more than just life that lasts forever. Unbelievers will live forever in eternal punishment. Eternal life is life of a different kind. It’s life that enables us to know God. John 17:3, “This is life eternal, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” It’s the ability to know your Creator. It’s also the joy and the fulfillment and the glory that comes with that, and someday it’s to share His glory. When we see Him, “we will be like Him,” 1 John 3 says, for “we will see Him as He is.” That’s eternal life and that’s just the beginning. Free gift.

If you’re here this morning, understand this, you’ve earned eternal punishment. The only way you will ever get to heaven, the only way you will ever enjoy eternal life, is by a free gift that’s given by God.

Notice the final phrase that Paul adds in verse 23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life,” notice this, “in Christ Jesus our Lord.” I love that. It turns out that eternal life is earned; just not by you, but by Jesus Himself. Because we are “in Him,” that’s what Paul says here, because we are “in Him,” because God has appointed Jesus as our official legal representative, I get the credit for what my representative does, and God’s justice against my sins has been completely satisfied through the death of my representative. This is how He satisfied the justice of God on my behalf. He received the wages I earned because He became my representative.

Go back to chapter 3, chapter 3 verse 24, we are “justified,” we’re declared to be right with God, “as a gift by God’s grace.” But how can God do this? It’s “through the redemption which is in

Christ Jesus.” That’s a general expression for the fact that God, in Christ, purchased our redemption. He bought us. That’s why we’re no longer slaves of sin but slaves of God. Jesus paid for us with His own life, His life in exchange for ours. He earned our salvation by virtue of His full and complete obedience to God’s law and His full satisfaction of God’s justice against every one of our sins. God credited every one of my sins to Jesus as my legal representative, and then on the cross, treated Him as if He had committed every one of my sins. And then He credited Jesus’s perfect obedience to me and now treats me as if I had obeyed in that way.

In the picture of Romans 6:23, let me describe it this way, Christ got my paycheck and I got His. He got my paycheck and I got His. Verse 23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” Death we earn, eternal life is pure grace. And how does it become ours? It becomes ours, notice, if we are “in Christ Jesus.” What does that mean? It means you are united to Jesus Christ by faith. What does it mean to be united to Jesus Christ by faith? Look at Romans 10, Paul explains. Romans 10:8, at the end of verse 8 he says, let me tell you the message of faith I’m preaching. Here’s the faith I’m preaching, verse 9,

that if you will confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Verse 13, ““WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.””

Listen, I don’t care what you’ve done. I don’t care what sins you have committed. The wages of your sin is eternal punishment, but the free gift of God in Jesus Christ is eternal life. If you will confess Jesus as Lord, today, right where you sit, if you will believe in your heart that He has accomplished these things, that He’s everything He claimed, then you will be rescued, you will receive the free gracious gift of eternal life. I plead with you to call out to Him even now where you sit.

In the Lord’s Table we celebrate Christ’s complete satisfaction of God’s justice for us. We celebrate the fact that Jesus received the paycheck that we had earned and He paid our debt in full. As the men come, let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for what we have studied together this morning. Thank You for the clarity of the gospel in this short but powerful text, “For the wages of sin,” my sin, our sin, “is death, but the free gift of Yours is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” Father, I pray for those of us who are in Christ, help us never to get over what you have done for us in Him, that He got our paycheck and we get His. May we worship You. May we love You. May we tell others about this incredible news. And Father, I pray for those here this morning, and I know there are some and my heart is so heavy for them, that this morning You would open their hearts to believe.

And now as we turn our hearts to the Lord's Table, Lord we confess our sins to You. We don't want to come to celebrate our Lord's victory over sin while loving sin, while cherishing sin, while clinging to some sin in our lives; and so, Lord, we confess every one of them that You make us aware of, in our own souls, even now. And Father, we seek Your forgiveness and cleansing in Christ. May we worship our Lord with clean hands and pure hearts. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.