

Romans 6:12-23

The Free Gift

Main idea: Salvation is neither a wage to be earned nor a burden to be obeyed. It's a gift to be received and enjoyed.

I read a story about a mean old man who lived in Louisiana. He lived just north of the swamps, but he himself had a beautiful plot of land that included a large pond on the edge of his property. He even fixed it up so that there were picnic tables and peach trees all around the pond, and it just looked like the perfect place to go swimming.

Well, one day, some ladies on vacation from out of the state were passing by his property on their way to go to the beaches of New Orleans, and they noticed his beautiful pond. And they thought, "This is even better! We don't need to go to the public, crowded beaches of New Orleans! We can just swim in this private pond!"

So they knocked on the farmer's door to get permission, and he said, "No, I'm sorry. My pond ain't for swimming! Go in there and you'll be sorry!" Not satisfied with that answer, the women asked again. "Please, we won't bother you, it will only be for a little while, and then we'll be gone!" But the farmer just kept saying, "My pond ain't for swimming! Go in there and you'll be sorry! Besides, I've got to leave to buy some food for the animals."

So the farmer left, and the women said to each other, "Hey, let's just sneak in while that mean old man is gone." But once they snuck in, they realized they forgot their bathing suits in the car, so they decided to just go skinny dipping real quick for the experience. Well, the farmer came back right away and saw what they were doing. So he grabbed his lawn chair and sat down by the edge of the pond with the food he had just bought from the store. When the women noticed him, they shouted, "Okay, we get the point! We'll leave as soon as you go you go back in the house!" To which he replied, "Oh, don't mind me! I just came down to feed the alligators."

Because the women misunderstood the old man, it didn't turn out so good for them.

There are many misconceptions and misunderstandings about what Christianity is and how to receive salvation. A lot of people think God is just a mean old man who wants to keep us from having fun. They think that Christianity's rules are just pointless, and that we should be able to just live however we want.

In fact, I think even most Christians misunderstand Christianity. So often, we think Christianity is primarily something we do, or it's something we need to do in order to earn God's favor. But that's not what Christianity is at all!¹ So this morning, we're going to look at two misconceptions about Christianity, and allow the Scripture to correct us.

¹ Isaiah 42:21, Romans 8:3-4

We're going to begin with Romans 6:12-14. Turn there with me. And please stand for the reading of God's word.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:12-14)

The word of God for the people of God. *Thanks be to God.*

This passage reminds us first that salvation isn't a wage to be earned.

Imagine three brothers were asked by their dad if they would like to earn a trip to the candy store by helping to rake leaves. They gladly agreed and quickly got to work. The youngest of the three, however, who was only three years old, wanted to help, but made more of a mess than anything. Anytime the older boys got a pile of leaves raked up, the youngest would run through the pile and scatter many of them again. So they yelled at their little brother, "You're not helping! You're not going to get candy!" So their little brother got sad and sat down to cry.

When their dad came out a while later and saw the job done to his satisfaction, because he wasn't expecting perfection, he told all three of the boys to get in the car to go to the candy store. The youngest brother immediately stopped crying and jumped up to go to the store with a big smile on his face. The older two were a bit upset, though, because they didn't think their little brother helped enough to get candy. So their dad explained to them, "Maybe, but I'm sure he's also right now most grateful to be going, because he recognizes it as a gift."

You know, we like earning things. It makes us feel proud of ourselves. And when we earn something, we can hold our heads up high, knowing that we stood on our own two feet, and we don't owe anything to anybody. And that's a good thing in this life. It's good to be responsible and to earn your own living.

And it's good to serve God. But we can't earn salvation by doing that.²

While encouraging us to serve God, our passage this morning says two things about how we do that. In verse 12, it says that we've been brought from death to life, and in verse 13, it says that we're not under law, but under grace.

Being brought from death to life reminds us that we're not the ones who did that. A dead person can't just decide to get up. But God, who raises the dead, can give us life even though we were dead in our trespasses and sins.³

² Ephesians 2:8-9

³ Ephesians 2:4-5

And when it says that we're not under law, but under grace, it reminds us that we don't serve God because the Old Testament laws command us to. Our motivation for serving God isn't the law, but His grace.⁴ Salvation isn't a wage to be earned.

We tend to think of Christianity as a bunch of laws to be obeyed, and therefore hell as like a prison if we break those laws.⁵ And hell is, of course, like a prison. We do the crime, we do the time.⁶ But we take that illustration too far if we think we're capable of avoiding hell if we just don't do the crime. Like we can be good enough in obeying the law, so that we don't deserve hell.⁷ Maybe all those other sinners deserve hell, but not me, because I'm obeying God! Right?

But the problem with that line of thought is that we've already done the crime.⁸ We've all already allowed sin to reign in our mortal bodies. We've already presented the parts of our bodies to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, and we've all obeyed sin's passions. And we can't undo that.

We can't undo the fact that we've broken the law, so we shouldn't treat Christianity as if it's another law that we need to obey. Because if it were, we'd just break that one, too! No, we're not under law, but under grace.

That means that all is forgiven. Grace isn't dependent on what we do, but on what God has done.⁹ God came down in the form of a man, Jesus Christ, and He lived the perfect life that we fail to live, and died in our place, being our substitute, so that we would receive salvation as a free gift.¹⁰ Salvation isn't a wage to be earned, so we need to stop thinking that we need to do something in order to get it.

So when Paul instructs us now to live a different way, he's not making it a law, but something else. Verse 15.

What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. (Romans 6:15-19)

⁴ Romans 6:15-16

⁵ 1 Peter 3:18-20

⁶ Matthew 5:25-26

⁷ Psalm 14:1-3

⁸ Romans 3:23

⁹ John 3:16

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

This passage reminds us second that Christianity isn't a burden to be obeyed. Number one, salvation isn't a wage to be earned, and number two, Christianity isn't a burden to be obeyed.

Slavery has been a horrible injustice for almost all of human history. When we say that someone is a slave, we're saying that they weren't given the choice as to whether they would obey or disobey: to work or not work. Slaves were forced to work. Under most laws throughout history, slaves had absolutely no rights.

It's estimated that even today, there are around 40 million people who are currently forced to be slaves.¹¹ About half of them are doing forced labor, but many are also sold in forced marriages or as sex slaves.

And obviously, as Christians, we ought to condemn all forms of slavery today because all people are made in the image of God.¹² Slavery is a horrible injustice.

Which makes this passage so incredibly interesting. Because not only does Paul compare being lost to slavery, but he also compares being found to slavery.

It's not shocking to compare our lives before we knew Christ to slavery, because the Bible describes us as totally depraved. We were slaves to sin. We didn't have a choice in the matter. We sinned because we were enemies of God.¹³

But it is shocking that Paul describes us as slaves even after we came to know Christ. We're no longer slaves to sin, but to righteousness. We ought to have the mindset that we don't have a choice. We ought to live righteously because we've been transferred out of the kingdom of this world, and into the kingdom of God, so that we would worship and serve the King.

But the difference that I want you to notice is that we're to think of this new slavery not as a burden, but as a joy. Look at verse 17.

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart (Romans 6:17a)

So we don't serve God reluctantly, but from the heart. We don't serve God because we're forced to, but because we want to. We're to see ourselves as His slaves, and yet as His eager slaves. We want to please our Master, because He's good to us, and He loves us, and our Master even laid down His life for us to show us His great love.¹⁴

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_the_21st_century

¹² Genesis 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 7:21

¹³ Romans 5:10

¹⁴ Ephesians 6:5

It's like if I were to give you a billion dollars as a gift, absolutely no strings attached. You'd be pretty happy, right? And then what if in a few days, I was out of town, and I called you up and said, "Hey, I heard your neighbor could use help paying their water bill this month. It's like \$70. If I was in town, I'd take care of it, but I can't make it back in time. Could you help your neighbor for me?" You'd be like, "No problem!" Right? I'd think that you'd be happy to! Maybe you can't meet every need, but I asked you to meet just this one, and I'd hope you be honored to represent me to your neighbor.

You see, Christianity is not a burden to be obeyed. We love because God first loved us.¹⁵ We can't earn His love, and yet He freely gives us His love by grace. And, therefore, verses 20-23.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 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. 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. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:20-23)

You see, salvation is neither a wage to be earned nor a burden to be obeyed. It's a gift to be received and enjoyed.

Billy Graham told the story about how he once drove through a small town on his way to preach at a large event, and he was stopped by a policeman because he was speeding. Graham admitted his guilt, but was told by the officer that he would have to return to the small town to appear in court, because that was the law.

When he appeared in court some time later, the judge asked, "Are you guilty, or not guilty?" When Graham pled guilty, the judge replied, "That'll be ten dollars -- a dollar for every mile you went over the limit."

Suddenly the judge recognized the famous minister. "You have violated the law," he said. "The fine must be paid, but I am going to pay it for you." He took a ten dollar bill from his own wallet, attached it to the ticket, and afterward took Graham out and bought him a steak dinner! "That," said Billy Graham, "is how God treats repentant sinners!"¹⁶

You see, not only does God pay the fine for us through Jesus's death on the cross, but He blesses us far more than we deserve.¹⁷

We tend to make Christianity about something we do. And it's true that God calls us to do things.¹⁸ But that's not really what Christianity is. It's not about what we do, it's about what Jesus has done for us. Salvation isn't wages for a job well done, but a gift from our heavenly Father.

¹⁵ 1 John 4:19

¹⁶ Progress Magazine, December 14, 1992.

¹⁷ Psalm 145:9

¹⁸ Micah 6:8

And if that gift doesn't make you want to do things, then I'm not sure you quite understand the gift.

I'm sure when Billy Graham was bought a steak dinner by the judge, Graham probably couldn't shut up about it. I'm sure he kept telling people at the restaurant, "This judge is amazing! He paid my fine and bought me steak!" And I'm sure Billy Graham gladly paid the tip to the waitress, probably more than \$10, not because he had to, but because he wanted to rejoice in the gift that was given to him.

Maybe the idea of trading in one kind of slavery for another doesn't sound all that appealing to you. I can understand that.

But the kind of slavery that Paul is suggesting we have with God isn't a burden, but a joy. It's not forced on us, but something we gladly choose because it's the way that we rejoice in our salvation.

I read a story about a husband and wife who didn't really love each other. The husband was very demanding, so much so that he prepared a list of rules and regulations for his wife to follow. He insisted that she read them over every day and obey them to the letter. Among other things, his "do's and don'ts" indicated such details as what time she had to get up in the morning, when his breakfast should be served, and how the housework should be done. After several long years, the husband died.

After a period of healing, the woman fell in love with another man, one who dearly loved her. Soon they were married. This husband did everything he could to make his new wife happy, continually showering her with love. One day as she was cleaning house, she found tucked away in a drawer the list of commands her first husband had drawn up for her. As she looked it over, it dawned on her that even though her present husband hadn't given her any kind of list, she was doing everything her first husband's list required anyway. She realized she was so devoted to this man that her deepest desire was to please him not out of obligation, but out of love.

You see, I think the reason we so often don't obey God is because we have all these misconceptions about Christianity. We think Christianity is a burden to be obeyed instead of a gift that we can rejoice in.

God isn't this mean old man in the sky just waiting for us to slip up so that he can watch us suffer. God gives us good gifts to bless us, and tells us to stay away from all the bad things that will harm us.

¹⁹ I mean, that pond in Louisiana might look great at first, but if it's full of alligators, we shouldn't jump in! It's not going to end up so well for us.

In the same way, sin leads to death. In this passage, Paul describes death as the fruit of sin and the wages of sin. In other words, death is the natural result of our sin. Because we sin, we die. Just like how God told Adam, when you eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall surely die.²⁰

¹⁹ James 1:15-17

²⁰ Genesis 2:17

But the fruit of becoming a slave to God is sanctification. As you obey God, God transforms you from the inside out. He's preparing you for heaven, where we'll be completely transformed, and never even desire sin ever again.²¹

But don't for a second begin to think you earned that in some way. We pursue righteousness only because Jesus lived righteously, and then died in our place. We all earned death as the payment for our sins, but Jesus earned life for us, and then gave it to us as a gift. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Do you really believe that salvation is a free gift? You can't earn it.

Jesus offers Himself to you. Receive Him as your Savior, resting in His salvation, and begin to rejoice in Him as your Lord.

²¹ Isaiah 35:8-9, 1 John 3:2