

## 33, The Gift of God

*Romans*

By Pastor Max Doner

**Bible Text:** Romans 6:23

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“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

People often scoff at the idea that there is a God, or at least they scoff at the justice of God, because there is so much pain and suffering in the world. They ask, “How can there be a just God when there is so much injustice in the world?” They see disease and war and famine and genocide and accidents and earthquakes and tsunamis and fires and a whole variety of other tragedies, and they cannot believe that a good and a just God would possibly allow such things to happen if He had any control over things at all.

The problem with such thinking is that it has it all backward. It entirely fails to take into account the sinfulness of mankind, the evilness of that sin, and the punishment and retribution that sin deserves. People, because they minimize or dismiss the evil of the sinful human race and therefore view humanity as basically good, believe that people, on the whole, deserve far better than what they personally experience. They erroneously believe that if God were really just, the condition of the human race would be enormously better than what it is: war and famine and accidents and earthquakes and all of the other evils that humanity experiences would all be gone.

But the fact is that just the opposite is true. The proper question is not: “If there is a just God, why are things as bad as they are?” Rather, the proper question is: “If there is a just God, why are things not far worse than they are?” Why is so much sin permitted? Why is so much evil unpunished? Why is so much wickedness allowed to flourish without retribution? If there is a just God, why does the human race exist at all? Why has retribution not been carried out against sinners to the full extent which they deserve?

Our text answers that question and tells us the wonderful news that God has provided a means to supply not what we deserve, but what we need. What we deserve is the wages of sin which is death. What we need is eternal life. When God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden, God said to Adam, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” We all know what happened, don’t we? Adam and Eve both ate of the tree contrary to God’s command. And the human race should have terminated at that point if we got what we deserved and if God dealt with us only in the realm of justice.

People cry out for a just God; they don’t know what they are asking for. If God dealt only in justice, we would all be in hell. But the good news is that God has dealt with us on the basis of grace without sacrificing His justice in any way. In doing so He has provided a way to supply, not what we deserve, but what we need. What we deserve is strict justice; what we need is free grace. This He has given to us in the person of His Son. Let us consider this message.

In considering the passage before us, let us notice first that **a solemn fact is declared**. It is this: “The wages of sin is death.” This is indeed a solemn fact. We are all familiar with the concept of wages. Wages are what are owed to us when we perform work for our employer. He pays us for doing his bidding. When we work for sin and perform sin’s bidding, we are paid as well. When we commit sin, what we have earned and have coming to us is death. Death is the paycheck that sin produces.

Sin is the transgression of God’s law. When we fail to do what God’s law commands, or when we do what God’s law forbids, then we have sinned. The predictable thing about sin is that it always pays its wages. No one goes un-

compensated for serving sin: it always pays out death. People, nations, marriages, and cultures die because of sin. “The soul that sins, it shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:20) The reason for all the things that lead to and bring death is that sin is constantly paying its wages, and it continues to have many willing employees.

Everyone is the willing servant of sin. All have fallen short of God’s character and standards. The reason none are exempt from death is that all have gone into the employment of sin, and all are recipients of its wages. In this is revealed the perverseness of the human heart, that it would serve a master that deals in nothing but death and destruction.

Our natures are so fallen and corrupt and twisted that we continue to serve a master that abuses and destroys those who serve him. Imagine serving an employer who sent you home every payday with a good beating and a handful of monopoly money. How long would you continue to serve such an employer? People quit for a lot less abuse than that. Yet this is exactly what sin does! Those who serve it are continually injured and destroyed by it. Their health, kids, marriage, and finances are all ruined by sin, and the only benefit they get is a little counterfeit thrill of excitement which is temporary at best and only has the appearance of happiness which never can be exchanged for true happiness.

God says, “He that sins against me wrongs his own soul: all they that hate me love death.” (Proverbs 8:36) This is the reason why we need to be saved not only from sin but also from the perverted nature that would willingly serve such a master in the first place and go on serving him even though sin continues to deal destruction and death to us on a continuous basis. Like the alcoholic who continues to imbibe liquor even as it destroys his liver and his brain, we continue to imbibe sin even as it works death upon us.

This is the solemn fact declared. Because of our sin we deserve to die. We will die. We can do nothing to stop ourselves from dying in every respect: physically, spiritually, and eternally. This death that sin pays out will not only destroy our bodies on earth, but will also destroy our souls in hell. Eternal death, which is separation from God forever, will be the final paycheck of sin. Eternal misery and ruin and sorrow and torment in the flames of hell make up the severance package

that sin gives us as it sends us off into the retirement of eternal darkness and damnation. But thank God that the verse does not stop with this solemn fact.

Let us notice, secondly, that **a precious promise is given**. It is this: “The gift of God is eternal life.” We are all familiar with gifts. They are items given to us which we do not deserve, but which someone else out of a desire to bring blessing into our lives has decided to bestow upon us. No one owes gifts to us. If they give them to us, it is an act of grace and unmerited favor on their part. The good news is that God has determined to give a gift to us who deserve no gift from Him. What we deserve is death. However, God has determined in His grace and mercy to give us, not what we deserve, but what we need. He was under no obligation or compelling necessity to give us this gift of eternal life. But out of His goodness, love, mercy, and grace, God has determined to bestow upon us the gift of eternal life.

When we look at this gift which He has determined to bestow upon us, we see that it is a *sovereign* gift: He gave it out of His own free will and self-determination.

It is a *gracious* gift: There was nothing in us that merited it or drew it out of Him.

It is a *suitable* gift: It meets our deepest need in the most perfect fashion possible.

It is a *lasting* gift: Its benefits will go on throughout all eternity.

It is a *free* gift: There is nothing we can do to earn it nor is there anything we need to do to earn it.

Best of all, this gift is the gift of *life*: A condition of perfect and peaceful union and fellowship with God both now and in eternity. We are freed from service to sin which pays us destruction and death. We are freed from a corrupt nature that desires that which destroys us.

The gift of eternal life imparts to us a *new nature* so that we now desire to forsake sin and follow righteousness. We become changed people with a new heart, with new desires, and with new motives.

The gift of eternal life imparts to us a *new relationship with God*. Instead of being under His wrath, we are under His smile, adopted into His family and embraced by His love. We no longer see Him as a frowning judge, but as a smiling Father.

The gift of eternal life imparts to us a *new future*. We will enjoy not only the blessings of this life, but also the blessings of eternity to come—the benefits of heaven forever where we will have eternal rest and peace and joy and contentment.

A new nature, a new relationship with God, and a new future are all the result of the eternal life that God gives to us. He gives it to us as a free gift. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift! We must understand that eternal life is really eternal. It is indestructible. It is infinite in its duration. It is unchangeable. It is incorruptible. We will never lose it. We cannot lose it. No one and nothing can ever take it away from us. Jesus said, “I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (John 10:28) That is a marvelous gift indeed! A gift of infinite value and worth, precious and priceless beyond measure!

Now the question arises, “How is it that we, who have earned by our sins the wages of death, can be given instead the gift of eternal life?” Who will receive the death we have earned by our sins? Sin’s wages must be received; they cannot be refused. This brings us to the third great truth declared in our text.

Let us notice, thirdly, that **a perfect means is supplied**. The means by which it is possible for us to receive this gift of eternal life and to escape the wages of sin which is death is through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to escape death which we so richly deserve, and to obtain life which we deserve not at all. He has made it possible by His work of substitution.

When Jesus came to this earth, He was born as a man and He lived a sinless life. He never committed one single sin and therefore He was not subject to the wages of sin. He never earned death and was therefore not subject to death.

On the contrary, by His perfect life, He had earned the right to eternal life. Just as sin earns the wages of death, so perfect righteousness earns the wages of eternal life. Jesus was perfectly righteous and He had His paycheck coming of eternal life.

Now here is the stunning part: Moved with love and compassion, Jesus traded paychecks with us! He took our wages and gave us His wages. He took and experienced in Himself the death that we should have received. He gave to us and we experienced the eternal life that He had earned for himself. He selflessly gave to us what He had coming and took to Himself that which we had coming. By this means the claims of justice against our sins was fully paid and therefore the gift of life could be freely given. “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” (1 Peter 3:18) The sins that He suffered death for were not His own. They were ours. The life we obtained was not our own. It was His.

Now the compelling question that arises is this: Who is it that obtains this gift of God made possible by Jesus Christ our Lord? Is it all men without exception who will have the gift of eternal life? It is not. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” (John 3:36) The difference between those who are still under the wages of sin and those who are not is that those in the first category reject the Son, but those in the second category believe on the Son. Christ only exchanges paychecks with those who believe on Him as their savior and with no one else.

Paul describes himself and all those who have the gift of eternal life as those who have Jesus Christ as their Lord. If Jesus Christ is not your Lord, then you do not have His gift of eternal life. Those who have Jesus Christ as their Lord believe in Him, submit to Him, obey Him, and follow Him. They have surrendered the totality of their lives and wills to Jesus Christ. It is these people, and these people only, with whom Jesus has traded paychecks. To His people, Jesus is not just *a* lord but rather their own *personal* Lord.

Let us examine ourselves with reference to the position that Jesus holds in our own lives. Is Jesus Christ *my* Lord? Does He run my life? Do I strive to do what He

commands me? Have I given up self-will and am I determined to do His will and no other will? Am I no longer my own but His without reservation? Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” (John 6:47) The one we must believe in to gain eternal life is Jesus Christ the *Lord*. Those who give a general nod in the direction of an historical Jesus are not those who believe unto everlasting life. But rather, it is those who get up every day and say, “Lord, what will you have me to do? Not my will, but thine be done.” When a temptation arises that makes us choose between God’s will and our own will, we follow the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we make that choice and take the action that He requires of us, we have reason to say that Jesus Christ is our Lord.

Well, we have now seen that it is only by the grace of God that things in this world are not far worse than they are. Things in this world are actually way better than we deserve for them to be. It was a mercy of God that the tsunami in the Indian Ocean *only* killed 200,000 people and not two million people or several billion as happened in Noah’s flood. The tsunami was a warning to the rest of the billions of people on the earth that they need to prepare for the Day of Judgment. The reason why things on this earth are not far worse than they are is because God is in the process of giving to His people the gracious gift of eternal life. He is therefore delaying for a time the full execution of His strict justice against sin.

We are now in a period of grace, but it will not always go on. Today is the day of salvation. Noah preached for 120 years. That was a period of grace wherein people could have repented and gotten on the ark. But there came a day when the door of the ark closed and the time of grace and salvation was over.

That day is coming for us. We do not know when it will be, but for everyone it will definitely be in the moment of their own personal death which could take place at any time. Soon, all those who are not saved from death by believing in Jesus as their Savior and Lord will receive their wages in full without remission or remedy. Let each of us receive the gift of eternal life now while there is time! And let us do so by receiving Jesus Christ as Lord. This gift is freely offered to repentant sinners who will cast themselves upon the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy

and for salvation from death. Jesus said, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

The question that stands before each human being on the earth is this: “Are you still the recipient of the wages of sin, or have you received the gift of eternal life?” The difference is in whether you have or have not believed in Jesus as Lord. Jesus demands no less than total, wholehearted capitulation to Him, to His will, and to His lordship. This is what constitutes saving faith.

Yes, we will not be able to always perfectly maintain that commitment and we may temporarily fall into sin. But the habit, characteristic, and theme of our life will be to serve Jesus Christ as Lord. Do His will and not your own. Trust in His merit and work to save you and not in your own. Saving faith involves a transformed life, not just an intellectual acknowledgement of the facts about Jesus while we go on in sin.

May the Lord help us to receive the gift of eternal life by receiving the one in whom that life resides, and receive His gifts in receiving Him. You will not have His gifts without having Him. It is not enough to want the gift of eternal life without wanting Jesus. You will not have one without the other, but if you have one you shall have the other. Determine to receive the gift of eternal life by receiving Jesus. Receive him now. Receive Him before it is too late. Receive Him as your Lord and Savior. Pray and ask Him to save you from your sins and to give you the gift of eternal life.