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Romans

But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. Romans 6:22

As so often occurs in the apostle's writings, "but" is introduced. It is given as a stark contrast from the previous thought in 6:20, 21. Reflecting on all three verses will allow for a fuller comprehension of this contrast -

"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life."

What was once true is no more: The bonds which confined us have been removed. The sin that infected us with corruption is replaced with holiness. The master who assured only rewards of punishment has been exchanged for God who rewards with grace and love. What once condemned us is swallowed up in salvation. Everlasting life has replaced eternal death. All of this is tied up in "but." It is the glory of calling on Jesus Christ as Lord.

We have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God. Because of this, one could ask, "Isn't this then exchanging one type of bondage for another?" No. The answer is because God is infinite. In Him, there is no true confinement. Being a slave to God means sharing in His infinite stream of love, grace, mercy, truth,

and holiness. There is no bondage where there are no bounds which limit our movement. Becoming a slave of God is to become the freest being of all.

Jesus told us this in John 8:34-36 - "Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.'"

Life application: Because we have believed and stand justified, we should behave and become sanctified. Of what use is the old self? Of what use is sin? It is bondage and confinement, but in Christ is freedom and expanse. Live now as if eternity has been realized in you, because it has.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

The term "gospel" which equates to "good news" implies that there is bad news. The concept of being "saved" implies that there is something to be saved from. These are truths that are clearly and carefully laid out in the Bible. The creation and fall of man are recorded to show us that there is a problem which needs to be fixed. The Bible then shows the on-going process of working toward that fix. Here in the last verse of Romans 6, we see as clearly as can be presented, the contrast between the bad news and the good news, the state of loss and the salvation from it, and also the way that these things are realized.

"For" treats the following words as an axiom - "the wages of sin is death." The Bible proclaimed it right at the beginning and this rule has never changed; it is as if it is set in stone. There is nothing unfair or arbitrary about this. It is simply the way it is. In Ezekiel 18:4, it says, "The soul who sins shall die." This is what Adam was told and it is what every person who takes God at His word confesses. Nothing more than what is promised comes about - sin equals death. It is the exact and just punishment for the offense.

"Wages" are what is earned. We go to work and we expect to be paid. They are not grace, but are rather the just payment for a given work.

"Sin" is a missing of the mark. It is not meeting a set standard, but rather violating that standard. Sin can be inherited, such as when Adam sinned. His sin has been transferred to every person who was born of man; his unrighteousness is imputed to each of us. Sin can also be committed. Any violation of God's standard is sin and any infraction of God's law breaks the entire law (James 2:10).

"Death" is what results from sin. It stands in opposition to life. This is the bad news. We have earned our wages and the sentence has been executed. We have received death because of our sin. The death noted here is "spiritual" in nature. Physical death is merely a result of spiritual death. This is certain because when one is "born again" it is spiritual in nature. We are already physically alive and, unless Jesus comes first, we will physically die. Therefore, the death is spiritual and the "born again" life is also spiritual.

Despite this bleak situation, there is a resounding note of hope as the word "but" is introduced. "But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." This little word "but" brings in a contrast to what was just noted.

"The gift." Wages are earned; a gift cannot be earned. If one attempts to pay for a gift, it is an offense to the giver and it negates the nature of the gift. Therefore, this is something which cannot be earned by our merits or labors. It is an act of grace. Adam Clarke states it this way, "A man may Merit hell, but he cannot Merit heaven."

"Of God" indicates the source of the gift. An individual's personal effort is the source of his wages. Man believed the lie of the devil and then took action by his own will. He ate (his work); he died (his wages). In our "but" God has done the work and has offered it to us; His work and His gift.

"Is eternal life" this contrasts death and it shows very precisely that one (death) is just as enduring as the other (eternal life). If one doesn't receive the gift, then the death is eternal. This is the only obvious conclusion to the matter. If the life which is granted is eternal, then the death which is earned, if not reversed through the gift, will likewise last for eternity.

This superlative gift which God offers is found "in Christ Jesus." One is either "in" Christ or they are "not in" Christ. The Bible offers no other path to God and it excludes any other path to God. There is no such thing as "Christianity plus." It is either/or. If God were to allow any other path to reconciliation apart from the cross-death of His Son, then it was the most pointless gesture ever made. To be "in" Jesus then can be explained by His own words in John 14:6 - "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Jesus' statement is exclusive of any other remedy. There is nothing arbitrary about it, nor is it unfair. Fair is getting what one deserves and therefore "fair" is death. This is our just desserts. Grace bestowed upon one and not another isn't unfair; it is grace. Jesus explains this in His parable of Matthew 20:1-16. To be "in Christ" is to have received God's gift. To not be in Christ means to receive the earned wages.

Concerning those who are "saved" prior to the cross, such as Abraham. Their salvation looked forward to the work of Messiah; ours looks back on it. But all who are saved come through Christ Jesus and none come apart from Him.

A point about gifts must be made. A gift is something that is offered and which must be accepted. If, as Calvinists teach, one is "regenerated" in order to believe, then they are saved before they are saved; it is no gift at all. The Bible never teaches this doctrine. Instead, it teaches that man is fallen and dead spiritually. We can do nothing to revive ourselves from this dead state. But it is a category mistake to say that we can't "see the gift" and receive. We may be spiritually dead, but we are not mentally dead. We see the good, we receive the good, and are then regenerated to spiritual life. A forced gift is no gift; forced faith is not faith; and imposed grace is not grace.

The final portion of Romans 6:23 states "our Lord." Christ Jesus isn't "a" Lord, as if there were others. Christ Jesus isn't a created being to whom we fall in praise and adoration, thus committing another sin by denying God the glory that He alone is due. Christ Jesus is God. He is the Incarnate Word of God. He is the full expression of God in a form that we can understand. He is "Lord."

Romans 6:23 is a verse which will never be fully exhausted in how it can be discussed and contemplated. It demonstrates the immense wisdom of God, the glory of Christ, and the beauty of reconciliation through the gift of His life, death, and resurrection.

Life application: Take time to memorize this verse and to think on it from day to day. Always be ready to cite and explain it so that others can grasp the wonder of the gospel message; our Good News.