

## XLIII. Romans in Biblical Perspective

### *The Gospel of God*

“Sin’s Wage? God’s Gift?”

Romans 6:23

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As we start in our study, I want to read a couple of key verses that will bring us to Romans 6:20. This is the Word of God, which is inspired, infallible, inerrant and eternal. Romans 6:1-6, 15-16, 20-23 says [1] *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? [2] By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? [3] Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

*[5] For if we have been united with Him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [6] We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.*

*[15] What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! [16] 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**?*

*[20] For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. [21] 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. [22] 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. [23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

It is not hard to know what Paul’s desire is in writing the epistle to the Romans. He tells us in Romans 1:15-16, [15] *So **I am eager to preach the gospel** to you also who are in Rome. [16] For **I am not ashamed of the gospel**, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* Then in Romans 16 Paul says, I am anticipating being with you so that the very Gospel of God, which he then owns my gospel (vs 25), is to be proclaimed. He clearly understands this essential message in the Scripture, because the gospel is the foundation, formation and the motivation of the Christian life.

Paul has shown us that there is a Holy God and His wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished and we are sinners. We do acts of unrighteousness; we do our sins against the glory of God. We fall short of the glory of God, and our sin has rendered us spiritually impotent as well as sinfully indicted. We are in a predicament of the judgment of God for all eternity and we have no resources and no ability to address that situation in and of ourselves. We are dead in our sins and rightly under the judgment of God.

Then comes that wonderful word, ‘but’ in the Bible that God who is holy, is also gracious, and God has made a way whereby His Holiness is affirmed and His grace is manifested in that He has made a way to save sinners, and the justice of God is satisfied. It is satisfied through His Son Jesus, where Jesus comes into the world and takes upon Himself humanity.

When He goes to the cross, He receives our judgment on that cross for all of our sins of thought, word and deed. Jesus drinks the cup of God's judgment in order by His righteousness to give us the cup of life ever more in Him. According to these opening chapters of Romans, He has emancipated us from the power of sin, the penalty of sin, and now He is emancipating us progressively from the practices of sin. One day He will emancipate us from the presence of sin. In fact, there will be no ability to sin.

We are now in the section of Romans 6, 7 and 8, and it's unmistakable, it's sharpened focus and its purpose is to tell us the Gospel life of a Christian – the everyday life, once we've been given a new heart. Paul said the Gospel is the power of God and the righteousness of God. Once by the power of God, He has given us a new heart – regeneration, we've been born again. Once He has given us a new record, because when we're born again, we now have the gift of faith whereby we lay hold of Christ who is our hope, and then Christ, the One who takes our sins away, gives us His righteousness. So now we have justification where we have been emancipated from the power of sin and sin will have no dominion over us. We have been emancipated from the penalty of sin and there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We are being emancipated continually, unevenly, imperfectly, but progressively from the practices of sin.

Paul is giving us a handbook on Gospel Discipleship for those with a new heart and a new record he lays out our new life for us and he gives it to us in Romans 6, 7 and 8. Romans 6 gives us the template and the foundation. Romans 7 helps us understand why and how to deal with remaining sin in our life that the Bible calls indwelling sin or the old man and how to deal with that. Then Romans 8 goes to the positive side of it to tell us how to, by the Spirit, walk in the newness of life. This whole foundation is given in Romans 6 And one of the ways that Paul helps us is by using these lawyer questions. I guess Paul didn't waste time studying under Gamaliel in his law practice in the early days prior to his conversion for every good lawyer asks questions and no lawyer asks a question that they don't know the answer to or at least they shouldn't. So Paul asks some questions to sharpen our focus.

If I'm saved by grace, through faith and it's not my works that saved me, that means I can go do anything I want to, right? No, and Paul goes right to that issue with that question; shall we sin that grace may abound? He brings an anathema and then he brings the Gospel template for the Christian life. Three times Paul says, 'Do you not know?' And then he says, 'Consider yourself dead to sin and alive unto Christ. Then he gives you the theology of baptism as your baptism is a declaration that you are in Christ, that Christ is in you. You're united to Christ. So when He died for our sins, then we died with Him to sin. When He was raised to God, then we were raised to the newness of life. Now if we are united with Him, then we are dead to sin and sin no longer is over us. We are not under law. The weight of the law has been dealt with because He has dealt with the curse of the law and His obedience has given to us all the blessings that come with obedience to the law. It's not our work that saves us. Our work creates the issue and the problem. Our righteousness is like filthy rags but Paul tells us that Christ's work on our behalf is sufficient. Now know and be.

Paul gives the first commands in Romans 6. Consider yourself dead, the sin and the life to God in Christ (vs 11). Know that you have a new heart, a new record, a new life and a new home that you are headed to in Christ by grace, through faith. Now understanding your freedom, use your freedom to willingly out of love walk right back into a servitude because the One you obey is the One whom you serve. Jesus set me free, but I have not been set free to follow me for I've been set free for me to follow Thee. I gave you the picture from Exodus 21 that when the

slave was freed out of love to the master, they could go to the door post where a nail was put in the ear and a ring. The Christian life is not a ring in the nose, dragging us around, it's a ring in the ear because we hear our Savior's voice and we follow Him. We are the bond servants of love to Christ who has loved us to set us free. Think of it this way. God Himself has saved us from Himself.

John 3:16 says [16] *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* God Himself, when He saves us from our sins, actually and ultimately God Himself is saving us from Himself and the wrath of God that is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. Because when Christ went to the cross, God's wrath against our sins was revealed against Him who took our place. Now we who have been set free have been set free from sin's power, dominion, guilt and shame and there is no condemnation. Now there is justification. There is no spiritual death. Now there's regeneration. We now give ourselves to what this text calls rightly, sanctification – a set apart life, out of love, where we obey the One who has set us free. Our obedience does not save us. Our obedience is an act of love, gratitude and worthy praise to the One who did set us free. That's what the foundation, the formation and the motivation of the Christian life is.

Before I start doing, I need to know from God's Word in Christ who I am with my new heart, my new record, my new life, my new family. I also need to be that, consider that, believe that and trust that I don't have to sin. I still have sin living in me, but I don't have to live in sin. I can trust that and I can now have all fears in my life diminished except that glorious life-giving blessing of the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. All other fears can be dismissed. Yes, I'm in a broken world and there are concerns and things, but I can be anxious for nothing. Perfect love casts out all fear. As I know, be and understand this I'm now ready to do what God calls me to do because I'm not trying to do it to get saved. I'm doing it to be His. Sanctification is being set apart with a new life. Regeneration is having a new heart. Justification is having a new record. My life is not perfect but being perfected out of love to Christ who first loved us. Now let's get started in our text for this study.

Romans 6:20-21 says [20] *For when you were slaves of sin (prior to your conversion), you were free in regard to righteousness.* [21] *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.* Just think contrast here. Before I was a Christian, according to this text I was a slave to sin and I was free from righteousness. I had no burdens, no desires and no pleasure in righteousness. My pleasures that I thought were pleasures were in sin and rebellion against God. What did I get from that? Well, I get a moment of exhilaration in my rebellion against God but the fruit that comes from the root of sin is death, so my sin ends up death. Then Paul slips something in there. What I once took pleasure in, I now look back and am ashamed. I am now unashamed of the Gospel and I'm ashamed of those sins. I cannot tell you what it means to know that my shame, guilt and condemnation has been removed for I've been set free. Now, what does that lead me to?

Romans 6:22-23 says [22] *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.* [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* I once fell short of glory but now my new pleasure in life is to do for my Savior, not for salvation. Jesus, didn't set me free to go do my own thing. He set me free out of love to do what He has called me to do. The fruit of this life is sanctification – a set apart life. Regeneration is once and for all. You don't get born again multiple times. Justification is once and for all. Sanctification is a continued process until glorification, which will be once and for all.

I am now growing not for grace but in and by grace for Him as I give my life, as I present myself to Him. Did you hear that language? Present myself to him. There are some words in your Bible that are so wonderfully jam packed with multiple implications - multifaceted words. The word 'present' in the Bible is a worship word. We're going to eventually get to Romans 12:1 which says *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* They presented sacrifices, and in the Old Testament they're dead but in the New Testament they're living – present the living sacrifices.

Then it's also war and language. Present arms – present the members of your body – your tongue, your mouth, your feet, your hands, your resources, everything that God has entrusted to you, present it now to Him, so that you are ready to do war against the remaining sin inside and the remaining sin outside. The word present has a third vocabulary implication. You present yourself as a witness in a courtroom.

Think of three W's when you think of present. You have been saved for a lifestyle by grace to God, for His glory of worship, of war, and of witness to the world. In worship, praise God from whom all blessings flow for salvation is from the Lord, praise His name forevermore. It is of Him, from Him through Him, and now to Him in our lives. There is nothing more important than gathering with God's people to praise Him who made us, who saves us, who sustains us for His glory. In the heart of an authentic Christian this is embraced. Now, will there be providential hindrances in a fallen world? Absolutely, will in my sanctification, I lose sight of that and other things get more important to me than the praise of God in the midst of His people? Yes, that will happen. but the overall call is worship – gathered worship and life style worship. I Corinthians 10:31 says *[31] So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

I'm also at war but praise God the war has been won. I will have some battles. I have sin within me and sin outside of me for there sin in the world. I want God's redeeming grace to save sinners and I want God's common grace to restrain sin and retard it until Jesus comes again. I also want Him to make me an instrument of that in my home, in my life, in my marriage, and in the public arena as well.

Thirdly, I want to be a witness. God's people do different things because they're different and the reason we're different is because God's grace has made the difference in us. God's grace has given us a new life, a new heart, a new record. We're a people of joy. Yes we are in a broken world and there is going to be time for mourning, going to be time for grieving, but even our grief and mourning is informed by the joy of the blessed hope that we have in Jesus Christ. We're a people who pursue sanctification.

Then Paul brings an interesting word, the word righteousness. We didn't care about righteousness before we were converted but now that I'm converted, what should I be thinking about? Righteousness in life. God's people ought to be concerned about righteousness but as soon as I say that I know exactly what you're thinking; you feel a certain revulsion to that, a certain recoil for that, because there is something out there that we are warned never to embrace. That is self-righteousness. We must hate the arrogance of self-righteousness, but God saved us to pursue righteousness, not for salvation and not originating from ourselves, but originating from His grace for our Savior.

Hebrews 12:14 says *[14] Strive (pursue) for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.* That word pursue means to set an ambush. Ambush holiness in your life. Set a trap for holiness in your life, without which no man shall see the Lord.

As soon as I say self-righteousness, what word comes to your mind from the New Testament? I would say the word 'Pharisees.' As soon as I think of this I think of the parable Jesus told about the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke.

Luke 18:9-14 says [9] *He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: [10] "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11] The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. [12] I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' [13] But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' [14] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."*

According to Jesus the tax collector went down to his house justified but it doesn't mean what the tax collector did saved him. That means the tax collector's life is an evidence that he has been justified by grace alone through faith, alone in Christ. The Pharisees life of self-righteousness, self-aggrandizement and self-promotion is the evidence that he is still in his sins and it's all about him. Jesus makes this interesting statement in Matthew 5:20 which says [20] *For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* Now, what does that mean? Well, one thing it could mean is who provides for us, according to the Gospel promises, a righteousness that exceeds the self-righteousness of the Pharisees? Jesus. So it may be pointing to justification, right? It may be pointing back to Romans 1:16 and 17 which says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it **the righteousness of God** (not the righteousness of Pharisees) is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

It may be that we do what the Pharisees do, but we do it for a different reason and a different way. The righteousness of Romans 6:22 in sanctification, which has nothing to do with justification and that's all secured in Jesus righteousness, but has everything to do with the evidence of justification, which is the pursuit of righteousness and it's different than that of the Pharisees. So, which is Paul talking about? You have to have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of sanctification that flows from what you know about your justification. Is it a righteousness of doing because you know who you are? Or is it simply referring to the righteousness provided in justification through Jesus? I think it's both.

I want to try and make this a little clearer about how I think it's both in this sense. I believe that the righteousness of justification is impeccable, and it is the righteousness of God that is given to us, imputed to us in justification. But I also believe that we who were free in regard to the pursuit of righteousness prior to our conversion, now out of love to Christ, are pursuing righteousness post conversion. What we're not doing is pursuing righteousness to be saved. Think of it this way. Did the Pharisees study the Bible? Absolutely. Did the Pharisees tithe? Yes. Did the Pharisees evangelize? Yes. Did the Pharisees pray? Yes. Do you evangelize? I don't think the righteousness that we're supposed to do is different than the categories they were doing, but it is different in terms of why and how we do it. I find it interesting that the Pharisees whom Jesus calls the children of hell, would engage in Biblical categories more intentionally than we who are the children of God.

The last survey I saw about the Evangelical Church showed how many tithe and the percentage of those who tithe was 4%. I don't think the key to avoiding the self-righteousness of

the Pharisees is avoiding God's call to not rob Him. I think it's because we do it for a different reason, in a different way, and for a different purpose. The Pharisees were Bible students. Jesus said to them 'You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, but **they bear witness of Me**' (John 5:39). I don't think the key to not being a Pharisee is to quit studying the Bible. I think it is to study the Bible for a different reason. We don't search the Scriptures to find a pathway for us to save ourselves because we think that we can save ourselves. We search the Scriptures to find what they avoided, which was Jesus. We ought to be searching the Scriptures, not because we think we are the key with the Bible to save ourselves, but because we want to know and hear our Savior.

The Pharisees prayed. They prayed to be seen. They prayed to themselves. I don't think the key to avoiding Pharisee-ism is not to pray. I think it's to pray to God and when it's time for private prayer, we go to the closet. When there's time for public prayer, we lift up holy hands everywhere. I think it was 12 years ago, the elders' heart desire here at Briarwood said we want every member to be sharing with Christ. So, we came up with the Bridge to Life training based on Romans 6:23 so that our people here could be trained in evangelism. The Pharisees would travel land and sea just to make one convert.

Early on in our series on Romans I recommended the commentary by R.C. Sproul on Romans and he makes a point that the Pharisees were convicting people to hell. He also said, "I don't think I'd get on a plane to go to California just to lead one person to Christ, but shouldn't I? I have a speaking committee that tells me where I'm going and one of the measurements is how many people are going to be there. Pharisees would go just to get one. Should we be any less evangelistic than them?" Should we have a different message? Yes! Should we have a different motivation? Yes! Should we have a different reason? Yes! We don't want to make people children of hell in our evangelism. We want to bring the Gospel of saving grace in Christ who will bring them to Heaven. But would we go across the street just to talk to one? Would we share the Gospel? I'm sharing with you thoughts of conviction as I've finished up Romans 6.

The Bible tells me that we are pursuing holiness, sanctification and righteousness, and I am to be a worshiper, a warrior, and a witness. My righteousness, praise God in justification exceeds the Pharisees because I have the righteousness of God, but the righteousness that I'm called to do in life for the praise of my God as a worshiper, a warrior and a witness, should it not have a different motivation, a different purpose, but should I not be engaged in evangelism, prayer and in the Word? It's a burden on my heart, because I know the world is going to press you into its mold unless you get pressed into the mold of the Word of God.

If you read about the Reformation there are 168 steps from Calvin's front door to Saint Peter's Cathedral, and five mornings every week there would be more than a thousand people for a one-hour lecture. I can't remember which commentary I read it from but it made the point that Calvin's commentaries had no introduction, no illustration, no joke, there's nothing but Bible exposition. At five and six in the morning, thousands of people are coming. No wonder the face of Europe was changed! Go and see what people did in the Great Awakening to hear God's Word preached. There is in the movement of God a hunger for the Word of God. We search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. Let's now get to the conclusion of this text.

The last verse in Romans 6 is a contrast. Romans 6:23 says [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* The contrast goes from the wages of sin with the contrasting word 'but' to the gift of God is eternal life. We use this as an evangelism verse and it's okay but I think it does double duty. I think it's a discipleship verse as well for it's in a discipleship chapter. I need to remember when sin had dominion death reigned

in my life. Now grace has dominion and now life can reign in my life – not a self-righteousness, but a grace produced righteousness that is an act of worship to God, an act of war against sin, and a witness to the world, which is my takeaway. Come to Jesus for He'll make a difference in your life.

We do different things, because we're a different people, and it's God's grace that made the difference. We pray to God, not to ourselves. We evangelize to bring men and women to Christ, not to hell. We tithe to the praise of God not to be seen by men. We search the Scriptures not to be saved, but to know and follow our Savior. We are by God's grace called to this contrast – wages, not we get a gift. Sin, no, we get grace from God because of God. Death, physical death, spiritual death, everlasting death – no, we get everlasting life. In discipleship If I give sin a place without thinking and don't kill it, it's going to end up killing me. It may kill my marriage, my family, my witness or my ministry. Sin brings death, praise God, I'm converted and have a new heart, a new record, but in sanctification, I say 'God help me hate sin' because sin has consequences in the life of a believer if it is not mortified, killed and righteousness has blessings that attend as God's Spirit allows us to follow Jesus for His glory.

So here is this glorious truth that we have a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees, in justification and it's the righteousness of God. We have a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees in sanctification for it's a pursuit of righteousness for the glory of God, not for the glory of ourselves. One day we will have a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees in heaven when we will be like our Savior. There is no minimum wage for sin. It's a maximum wage, death. Today, if you're not in Christ, I plead with you to flee everlasting death in hell. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God without Jesus (Hebrews 10:31). I offer myself to you or anyone else in this congregation who you might be more apt to be drawn to or would like to converse with. Come to Christ. Why will you die under the judgment of God in the everlasting torments of hell? Come to Christ that you may walk in the newness of life on the way to heaven.

For those who know Christ who has delivered us from everlasting death, spiritual death, and we've been born again, let's walk in the newness of life. Perhaps you are thinking right now, "Pastor, I got some sins I'm dealing with." Praise God, because we're going to Romans 7 to find out how to deal with them, but right now, commit yourself to deal with them because you love God who frees you from sin's penalty and power. There is no minimum wage for my sin and there is no maximum gift. Have you had a Christmas where everyone is going to exchange gifts but you are limited to spending a certain amount on the gift? You don't have to worry about that because God's gift is unfathomable, indescribable and there is no maximum limit to the gift of God's grace. It's everlasting. It's eternal. Eye has not seen here, ear has not heard what God has reserved for us as His people (I Corinthians 2:9).

I would like to confess this to you. In light of Romans 6, I'm not as a Christian where I ought to be and I'm not where I want to be but I praise God. I'm not where I used to be, and the best is yet to come. I'm not yet what I'm going to be, and I'm not yet where I'm going to be, but I'm united to Him and the Gospel is not a mulligan in life. The Gospel is not a second chance. The Gospel is a sure bet. The gift of God is eternal life, and He who began it will it in you (Philippians 1:6). Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You so much for this glorious chapter – Romans 6. Lord, I confess my inability to get to all of it, but I know

where our inadequacies are seen, Your strength prevails. So please take these glorious verses that we've learned that are Gospel truths so that we know the Gospel is our foundation, so we be the Gospel as our formation and so that we do the Gospel because it's our motivation for Jesus who saved us by what He did for us, what He's doing in us, and what He's doing through us. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.