

**070107 Wages and a Gift 22/01 January 7, 2007GG**  
**Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"**

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**Wages and a Gift**

*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Ro 6:23)*

In this verse Paul logically punctuates the points that have claimed his focus through the last several chapters. We often hear Bible teachers quote this verse with no reference to its context whatever. However, in the common reference to the passage as part of the "Romans road" piecemeal roadmap to salvation claimed by advocates of this interpretation, one's salvation relies specifically on following the roadmap. The passage rejects such an interpretation. Does Paul teach that salvation is the result of our reading and following a roadmap? No, he writes that it is the result of a divine gift from God through the Lord Jesus Christ, not through our ability to read and to follow a roadmap? This populist interpretation neglects the most basic point that Paul makes in the verse.

How do you distinguish wages from a gift? Is there a difference between a gift and a proposition? If we earn salvation by something that we do, even if God "pays" us more than our labor deserves, we are forced logically to conclude that salvation and condemnation are both based on the same premise, wages. Paul contradicts this conclusion. The basis for man's final and eternal condemnation is consistently based in Biblical teaching on man's conduct. He earned his just sentence of eternal separation and condemnation from God the righteous Judge. However, Paul categorically distinguishes the process by which we receive eternal life from the basis on which the wicked shall be finally judged. From Paul's specific teaching in this verse, we readily conclude that eternal life comes to us in a manner quite distinct—in fact opposite—from the basis of eternal condemnation. One is the result of conduct, wages earned and deserved. The other is the result of a gift bestowed.

The Greek word translated gift in this passage emphasizes the point that Paul makes.

a verbal noun from *χαρίζομαι* (*give*) (Strong's 5486); denoting *what has been given, gift*; (1) as the result of a gracious act of God *gift of grace, favor bestowed, benefit*, with the meaning varying according to the context:57

Many folks who teach salvation by human participation, by our following the "Romans road," redefine the word "gift" as a mere "offer" of salvation that man must accept or reject. This definition of the underlying Greek word refutes such an interpretation. What our friends who teach salvation by following the "Romans road" actually teach from this text is that God sets before the unregenerate sinner a proposition, an offer, but distinctly not a gift as defined by the word that Paul used.

One of my first assignments when I began my secular career in accounting was to compute and process the payroll for my employer. Most of the workers in this firm were paid on an incentive basis. The harder they worked and the more production they completed the more they were paid. When I first received this assignment, a number of these workers challenged my computations of their pay. No doubt they wanted to be sure that I understood the company's policy as it related to their production. As I sat down with them and reasoned through my calculations with them, they soon were comfortable that I understood how to compute their pay correctly. From that time on I seldom had to explain the basis for a pay amount—except when occasionally I really made a computational error, and then I gladly processed the correction.

We correctly associate wages with what a person earns—what he/she works to gain. There is a specific and equitable corollary between the work invested and the wage earned. In this summary verse Paul

makes the point clearly that the final sentence of judgment and eternal punishment of the wicked will be based on actual conduct, wages earned and deserved for what they did.

“...but,” Paul wants us to understand clearly and without doubt that the basis for man’s sentence of condemnation is not the same as the basis on which the righteous shall be taken into eternal and joyful fellowship with God. Paul distinctly puts “wages” and “gift” in contrast with each other. In this verse they become logical opposites in his reasoning.

The only reasonable conclusion to draw from this contrast leads us to the comforting conclusion that our eternal salvation does not rely on our decisions, on our choices, or on our actions. What we possess in heaven will not be measured by what we did here on earth, but by what our Lord did on our behalf and freely gave to us. Friberg’s definition lays the emphasis in the correct place. Our salvation is “the result of a gracious act of God....”

This dialogue, especially viewed as a punctuating summary of Paul’s refutation of the false charge laid against him at the beginning of the third chapter, logically addresses that false charge. As he responded to that false charge, Paul covered the broad landscape of Christian theology. For Paul, the whole of Christian truth is interlocked and logically related, not piecemeal links of a chain yet to be constructed by the linking and welding of the pieces together. Paul’s perception is that the chain of our eternal salvation is wholly assembled and complete. It does not lack even one contribution from us. It is not an offer or a proposition that we must accept. Friberg’s emphasis that the word translated “gift” emphasizes a “gracious act of God” affirms a wholly God-centric view of our eternal salvation, while the “Roman’s road” perspective emphasizes a wholly man-centric view of eternal salvation.

When Paul’s critics charged that he put too much emphasis on God and divine grace, he accepted their line of reasoning and turned it back against them. If God manages the universe as a cosmic puppeteer, causing or manipulating every event that occurs, then we must reach a startling but logical conclusion regarding man and sin—God, not man, is responsible, so God, not man, should be judged for the presence of sin in the world! The absurdity of such an idea should have shocked Paul’s critics into an immediate reconsideration of truth.

As we consider the Roman letter in terms of the criticism leveled against Paul in the third chapter, we can interestingly sum up essentially every teaching regarding man, God, and salvation in terms of Paul’s analogy in our study verse of either wage or gift. Here are the errant views that exist, condensed to their logical expression in the wage-gift analogy.

1. Both sin—and its ultimate penalty—and salvation are divinely caused. Therefore both sin and salvation are gifts of God. Paul rejects this idea by the distinction between the two; the punishment for man’s sin is a deserved wage, while the enjoyment of eternal life is the result of a divine gift. This errant view leads one to conclude that God is ultimately responsible for both sin and salvation, the core error of the view.
2. 3. Both hell and heaven are the result of what man does. Thus both heaven and hell are the result of wages, what man did to gain either. This error is perhaps the most common error that has historically surfaced in the Christian culture.
4. 5. There is a distinction between sin and its just punishment and salvation, but only in the degree to which one is deserved and the other is not. This error forms the basis for the idea that salvation is a synergistic or cooperative venture in which both man and God must “do their parts” to successfully accomplish the individual’s salvation. Advocates of this view explain Paul’s analogy of “gift” by merely saying that we must do something in order to gain our salvation, but that God responds to our meager contribution by bestowing far more on us than our effort deserved. Whether we set the equation with God doing ninety nine percent and man doing one percent or with God doing fifty per cent and

man doing fifty percent, the logical concept remains. We must make our contribution, and—contingent on our contribution, whatever the percent in the whole salvation equation—God will respond with His contribution.

6. Paul rejects all of these flawed ideas in favor of a crisp distinction between the two final sentences against mankind on the Day of Judgment. Those who hear the verdict, “Guilty as charged—Depart!” will receive the just consequences of what they did, a true wage earned by their investment and recorded on the “payroll timecard.” Those who hear the welcomed, “Come ye blessed of my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you...” will enjoy that verdict based wholly on an undeserved and unearned gift, the glorious result of “a gracious act of God.” When Jesus used the term “inherit” in the passage mentioned ([Mt 25:34](#), he taught the same truth that Paul affirmed in [Ro 6:23](#), but with one added feature. Eternity with God is both a divine gift *bestowed* and a divine inheritance *bequeathed*!

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