

Pay Day!

Delivered From the Kingdom of Sin – Part VI

Romans 6:21-23

Introduction

It was late summer, in the year 1914, when Earnest Shackleton left England with twenty-seven other men. They set sail on a ship named *Endurance* and planned to disembark at some point, and literally cross Antarctica on foot.

By January of 1915, when their ship was within one hundred miles of land and of the location where they had planned to begin their journey on foot, the ship became trapped in ice. The ice pack, in which they were literally stuck, began to carry them further and further away from land.

Shackleton and his crew lived on the ship, stuck fast in the ice, for eight months. Finally, the ice snapped the ship apart like an old tree limb and the ship sank. For five more months, they lived on the ice pack using supplies salvaged from the ship. For more than a year, they suffered terrible conditions, while floating along helplessly on their prison house of ice.

That next spring when the ice began to thaw and melt around them, Shackleton and a few men were finally able to set sail for help, in lifeboats they had saved from their ship. They eventually reached the nearby island of South Georgia. A few months later, Shackleton sailed back to that ice pack and rescued the remainder of the men.

Shackleton never accomplished his goal of crossing Antarctica on foot. In fact, not much later, he died at the age of forty-six, on the island of South Georgia.

One author made three comparisons between Shackleton's ice pack and sin. They include:

- sin will take you farther than you ever wanted to go;
- sin will keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay;
- sin will cost you more than you ever wanted to pay.

While Shackleton was a prisoner on that island of ice, he recorded this conclusion, "[The ship] is pretty near the end . . . and what the ice gets, the ice keeps."ⁱ

Man! What the ice gets, the ice keeps.

What about sin? What sin gets, sin keeps!

Contrasts in Romans – Enslaved to Sin or Enslaved to God

That has been the message of Romans, chapter 6. You are either enslaved to sin and, if you belong to sin, you will belong to it forever, or you are enslaved to God and, if you belong to Him, you will belong to Him forever.

Look back at Romans, chapter 6, verses 21 and 22.

Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

Throughout this letter, Paul has been contrasting different things. He has talked about:

- two ways;
- two gospels;
- two Adams;
- two masters;
- two “slaveries”;
- two kingdoms.

Contrast of benefits or fruits

Then, in the verses 21 and 22, there are several more contrasts. Paul begins by talking about two kinds of benefits or fruits. That is the literal word used in the beginning of verse 21.

Therefore what benefit [fruit or “karpon”] were you then deriving . . .

Notice the word again in verse 22b,

. . . having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit [fruit or “karpon”]. . .

Paul contrasts two kinds of benefits or fruits. There is the fruit of sin, in verse 21, and the fruit of salvation, in verse 22. The fruit of sin, Paul tells us, is death; the fruit of salvation is life.

Contrast of consciences

Paul also, by the way, mentions a word that has all but disappeared from our consciousness as a culture. In verse 21, there is the word “ashamed”. He writes,

. . . things of which you are now ashamed . . .

Again there is an implied contrast between the conscience of the world, which is not ashamed of their sin, and the conscience of the true believer, who is ashamed of his sin. One of the greatest evidences of true conversion is that a person stops being an advocate of sin and becomes ashamed of sin.

Romans, chapter 1, revealed the downward digression of a perverted society. It ends with the climactic characteristic of a culture run amok with sin. This is when society as a whole, defends sin and the sinner; when it applauds deviant behavior; when it brags about tolerance for perverse acts; when it justifies inventions of evil; when it encourages manifestations of pride and ego; when it gloats about infidelity, selfishness, and brutality; when it says greed is good and deceit is acceptable, as long as you

do not get indicted; when it encourages materialism as the new religion and makes possessions the new gods made of wood, stone, plastic, chrome, and steel.

Paul summarizes a society that is enslaved to the kingdom of sin, in Romans, chapter 1, by writing in verse 32,

. . . although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

The world knows it is guilty and Paul references their intuitive, God-created knowledge of good and evil. However, enslaved people cannot admit that they are anything other than free, lest their guilt penetrate their shield of unbelief. Their guilt cannot cause them to bend their knee before a Creator God.

Paul wrote to the Philippians that the unbeliever actually glories in their shameful deeds. In chapter 3, verse 19, he writes,

[Their] end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame . . .

Yet, how tragic is their frantic pace of unsatisfying sin, as they rush into more and more sin which only produces more and more guilt.

One actress made daily headlines with her lesbian affair with another actress. Later, however, she left that woman and married a man. The same actress confided to a reporter not long ago, that she had been abused by her father from the time she was a toddler until she was around twelve years of age. She said, “I did a lot of things in my life to get away from what happened to me. I drank, I smoked, I did drugs, I was promiscuous, I did anything I could to try and get the shame out of my life.”ⁱⁱ

While the actress ran from guilt and shame, yet only added to it, her friends, the press, and the rest of her culture and its tabloids said, “Everything you’re doing is great and wonderful and acceptable and sophisticated and progressive and right.”

The prophet Jeremiah described his culture as having lost the ability to blush (Jeremiah 8:12). Society no longer blushes over their iniquities.

The word of God never says to run from shame. It says to accept your shame; accept the fact that you are indeed guilty, and bring your guilt and your shame to the cross of Christ, which highlights and magnifies the grace of God.

You are to pray like Ezra, who experienced revival. He wrote in chapter 9, verses 6 and 8,

. . . O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens. . . . But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving . . .

Ladies and gentlemen, regardless of what the world would tell you to run from, to try to cover up, and to try to ignore, never underestimate the godly power of shame. Paul says that shame over sin happens to be a fruit of true salvation.

Parents, as you raise your children, part of your instruction includes the reality of shame. You might say, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” or, “Shame on you!”

Teach your children the value of godly shame.

I could not help but think of the often repeated and evidently true tale that was reported in the *Christian Century* by Lloyd Steffen. The story is of the time King Frederick II, an eighteenth century king of Prussia, was visiting a prison in Berlin. The prison inmates tried to prove to him how they had been unjustly imprisoned – all except one inmate who sat quietly in a corner, while all the rest of the inmates protested their innocence. Seeing him sitting there oblivious to all the commotion, the king asked him what he was imprisoned for. He replied, “Armed robbery, Your Honor.”

The king asked, “Were you guilty?”

“Yes, Sir,” he answered, “I deserve my punishment.”

The king then turned and gave an order to the guard, “Release this guilty man . . . I don’t want him in jail corrupting all these innocent people.”

In the same way, the one who admits his guilt and shame discovers the grace of God and the release from the prison cell of sin.

Contrast of “pay day”

Now Paul comes to the climax of his contrasts, with one final, all encompassing statement. Look at verse 23.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Twenty-one words in my English translation; nineteen in the Greek. This one phrase has been memorized by millions of children in Sunday School – it has been a key verse in gospel tracts and studies for centuries. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, in the late 1800’s, called this verse the golden sentence of truth worthy to be written across the sky.ⁱⁱⁱ

I would agree. This verse summarizes the entire gospel of Paul’s first six chapters of Romans.

Look, as well, at all the contrasts:

- wages versus a free gift;
- sin versus God;
- death versus life.

The bad news of the gospel

This great statement begins with the bad news. Jonathan Edwards was right, a few centuries ago, when he said the gospel must be revealed as bad news before it can be good news.^{iv}

The wages of sin is death! Paul pulls no “punches”. The unforgiven sinner will be paid one day. In fact, the idea of this verse is that the unredeemed are paid every single day, with one great balloon payment at the end of life.

I get that idea from the Greek word for “wages”. It is the word “opsonion” (οψωνιον). It refers to the daily food ration given to a Roman soldier. It was the daily currency for being in the Roman army.

Sometimes Roman soldiers were paid in salt. This served as a valuable currency which he could trade in the market place for food. We get our phrase, “an employee needs to be worth his salt” from this ancient practice.

The soldier got paid. Paul says that the unbeliever will get paid too!

The unbeliever will indeed, physically die one day and the word of God talks about the second death – eternal separation from God in the lake of fire. In this verse, however, Paul is actually referring, not only to that ultimate separation from God, but the actual daily experience of death.

Pride puts relationships to death with its selfishness and arrogance. Lust destroys virtue and, spreading like cancer, it further destroys integrity.

Addictions, whether food or drink or drugs, are ultimately self-destructive. Sloth destroys opportunities and ambitions. Envy destroys contentment. Greed destroys nobility.

Sin is a thief – it never gives; it only takes. Sin has:

- stolen true religion from God;
- taken the supernatural out of Christianity;
- erased authority from the Bible;
- voted God out of education;
- erased morality out of literature;
- taken virtue out of art;
- taken ethics out of business;
- stolen fidelity from marriage;
- erased honesty from employment;
- voted truth out of politics;
- written creation out of science;

. . . and on and on and on!

The wages of sin is death . . . right now!

And, there is more. Upon physical death, there is the balloon payment, the final “pay day,” which is eternal death. Eternal death is an existence that is described in the Bible as being so hideous that mankind has tried to ignore it; so terrible that many Christians do not want to believe it and preachers do not want to discuss it. It is everlasting hell.

Ravi Zacharias recently said,

The Scripture makes it clear that man is condemned eternally. Hodge, in his theology, says there is no Greek word more emphatic for “eternal” than the one used of hell in the New Testament. Leon Morris [in his Greek companion] says the word for “eternal” applied to an age that never ends. Another commentator wrote in his book, A Universal Homecoming, that sixty-four times the same Greek word used to describe the eternity of hell is used to remind us of the eternity of heaven. Hell is an eternal, unending, physical, real [state of] separation from God [just as heaven is an eternal, unending, physical, real state of union with God.]

Talk of hell has disappeared. Hell as a future home, has become some uncomfortable experience on earth; a figment of the imagination. The Bible, however, says it is real.

Look at the description of hell in Revelation, chapter 20, verses 11 through 15.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Charles Spurgeon described the horror of this lake of fire with these words,

There is a real fire in hell, as truly as you have a real body – only it will not consume you, though it will torture you. Your body will be prepared by God in such a way that it will burn forever without being consumed. With your nerves laid raw by searing flame, yet never desensitized for all its raging fury, and the acrid smoke of the fumes searing your lungs and choking your breath, you will cry out for the mercy of death, but it shall never, never, never come.^{vi}

It is no wonder that Dante wrote in his *Inferno*, “These words are inscribed over the gates of hell: ‘Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.’”

What sin gets, sin keeps!

You might say, “That’s not fair.”

My friend, perhaps you could argue that it would not be fair for God to throw you into hell without at least warning you that that is where you are headed. Well, Paul delivers the warning in this verse, when he says, “the wages of sin is death”!

The good news of the gospel

Now, that is the bad news. Are you ready for the good news? It is in Paul’s next statement in verse 23.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So, choose your master! Will it be sin . . . or the Savior? You can choose your master today, but you cannot choose the consequences. Sin will give you everlasting hell. The Savior will give you everlasting heaven.

How do you get this gift? Paul writes that it is, “the free gift of God”.

By the way, he did not say “wages” did he? Why? Because you do not get heaven as a paycheck; you cannot earn heaven. You earned hell by sin; you get heaven as a gift.

In other words, the only place you can work your way in, is hell.^{vii}

You cannot work your way into heaven, it is a free gift.

By the way, the Greek word for “gift” is the word “charis,” which is translated throughout the New Testament as “grace”. The phrase could literally be translated to read, “but the free grace of God is everlasting life”.

Grace, in the New Testament, is a word which refers to you and me receiving something we do not deserve. However, “the wages of sin is death”. We are all going to die at least once, and because we have all sinned – we deserve to die!

The believer will not experience that eternal death; the believer will go straight to heaven. Why? Because he deserves it? No. Because God, demonstrates His grace toward those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

That is why this verse ends with that critical phrase,

. . . in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God’s grace does not come through Confucius, or Mohammed, or Krishna, or Mary, or Joseph Smith, or Buddha. It comes solely through that perfect Lamb of God who came into the world to seek and to save those who were lost. It comes through Jesus Christ.

Throughout this letter to the Romans, Jesus Christ has been the theme. In Romans:

- 1:4 – the gospel of God has been delivered through the power of Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead;
- 3:24 – God’s grace is through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

- 3:26 – God is the justifier of the one who comes by faith in Jesus;
- 4:24 – we are counted as righteous, having been raised in Jesus our Lord from the dead;
- 5:1 – we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;
- 5:9 – while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; much more then, having now been justified by His blood we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him;
- 5:17 – those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through Jesus Christ;
- 6:11 – even so, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

And now, in verse 23, we have,

. . . eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As we are told in Acts, chapter 4, verse 12,

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Deny it and die. . . forever!

Believe it and live . . . forever!

Conclusion

Jan Davis, a professional veteran parachutist, was involved in a dangerous sport called BASE jumping. This sport involves leaping off of fixed objects such as cliffs and towers. It was while BASE jumping that she fell to her death a couple of years ago.

I read about Jan’s death. She and others were jumping off a 3,000 foot high granite cliff in Yosemite National Park in California. She and the other jumpers knew that BASE jumping was, and is, illegal in Yosemite National Park. The law was adopted because there had already been six deaths in that very park. They were there protesting the park’s jumping restrictions and, ironically, were jumping to prove that the sport was safe. They knew the risks and knew the law, and they ignored the warning.

Jan Davis paid with her life when her parachute failed to open properly. She fell for nearly twenty seconds before hitting the rocks below. Her husband was filming her jump; it was all caught on tape.

In a similar way, many people today, perhaps even you, believe they can ignore the warning, that

somehow they can violate God's law of life and death.^{viii}

You are still falling; you have not landed yet upon the unbending, unwavering, holy justice of God. Sin will:

- take you farther than you ever wanted to go;
- keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay;
- cost you more than you ever wanted to pay.

There is still time to experience His "charis," His grace; this free gift of eternal life.

The Philippian jailer asked the apostle Paul, as recorded in Acts, chapter 16, verse 30b,

... what must I do to be saved?

Paul answered, in verse 31,

... Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .

That answer has not changed.

Several years later, before the apostle Paul went home to heaven, he wrote the answer this way,

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ignore Him . . .

violate Him . . .

refute Him . . .

disbelieve Him . . .

and face eternal *hell*.

Accept Him . . .

embrace Him . . .

receive Him . . .

believe Him . . .

and face eternal *heaven*.

Believe in Him today, my friend, and on that coming "pay day," you will not experience the final wages of sin, but will experience the heavenly reality of grace. And you will live forever in that kingdom of our Savior, having been delivered eternally from the kingdom of sin!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/8/2003 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Caroline Alexander, *The Endurance*, 1998, <http://www.preachingtoday.com>, 2003, Knoph.

ⁱⁱ *Actress Heche Says Sexual Abuse Made Her "Insane"*, <http://www.preachingtoday.com>, 2003.

ⁱⁱⁱ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: Volume Two* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1991), p. 705.

^{iv} Jonathan Edwards, "Religious Affections," *Christianity Today*, vol. 30, no. 11.

^v Ravi Zacharias, "The Lostness of Humankind," *Preaching Today*, tape 118.

^{vi} Charles R. Swindoll, *Tale of the Tardy Oxcart* (Word Publishers, 1998), p. 267.

^{vii} David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 374.

^{viii} Jonathan Mutchler and Kiley Russel, *Associated Press* (Oct. 23, 1999).