

When in Rome: God's Free Gift

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[0 : 00] So welcome here for this Sunday, June 7th. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here. This morning we're continuing in our sermon series, When in Rome, and we're making our way through the book of Romans.

We're, hopefully, for your sake and mine, we're uncovering some of these timeless truths that we find there, that are as true and relevant for us today as they were when Paul first wrote them and spoke them.

So our passage for this morning, let's just get right after it, is Romans 6, 22 and 23. And you're thinking, ooh, that's pretty short. And I hope you were paying attention last Sunday.

These two verses were at the very end of our passage from last week. So have I lost my mind? No. I want to zero in. I want to really focus on these two verses, and you'll see why.

Romans 6, 22 and 23, go ahead and flip there, or you can hear the audiobook version here. For now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

[1 : 11] Say it with me. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And if you remember when our friend Alfred was with us last Sunday, I did what I often do, and I read something and paused just to see if the congregation responded. I said, for the wages of sin is, and it was fairly silent except for Alfred who said, death! And we all quaked in our boots a little bit.

But we knew that Alfred knew that verse, which still is very awesome to me. So actually, the final two verses, as I said, from last Sunday's passage are these that we're looking at, and I want to unpack it more.

So our sermon this morning is titled, God's Free Gift. And the passage that we've just heard, particularly verse 23, is often used to suggest that eternal life is a gift.

It's something that's given when someone believes in Jesus Christ and the gospel, right? We know that. It's a gift that requires nothing from the one who receives it to deserve it.

[2 : 30] Does that make sense? It requires nothing from us except belief in Christ and the gospel. We don't deserve it. And yet, here we are. So it's true that in other, also true in other places in the New Testament, we learn that eternal life is, John 17, 2 and 3 says, it's a present possession.

And it's enjoyed, something that John says is enjoyed now by the Christian. It involves a relationship that's made possible by knowing God and Jesus. It's a feature of something that Jesus himself refers to in John 10, 10, as the abundant life.

He talks about that in John. And as I just mentioned, salvation isn't deserved or earned. Titus 3, 4 to 7 suggests it's not something to which we are entitled.

But, as Hebrews 5, 9 points out, salvation and eternal life do require obedience. We've talked about that a bit in our series already.

The gospel of Jesus Christ involves a lot more that must be obeyed. And that obedience stems not from obligation, but from gratitude and love for what we have been given.

[3 : 53] But then in the context of Romans 6, as Paul describes it, the gift of eternal life is not a present possession, from Paul's view. It's something received at the end of our lives, and that's how many of us would view it.

It's received not without effort, so that's consistent with what we've just heard, but it's the result of a holy life. So, again, we don't behave the way we are called to behave out of obligation or checking boxes.

I mean, many of us come to church and think, okay, that's my church box for the week. Check. But it's more than that, right? So, out of this love and gratitude for what we've been given by the Lord, we are called to live a holy life.

So, as we consider this a bit more together, let's look at some of the details that we can learn about eternal life. Well, first of all, how is eternal life given?

Well, it's given by dying to sin. And we've talked about that quite a bit already in past sermons. But as we've been reminded in the last few weeks, a person who dies to sin then should no longer live in sin.

[5 : 07] So, for something that we've been freed from, we don't want to, as I also shocked Alfred with last week, be like a dog that returns to its vomit, right?

I think he gasped and I said, I know, right? But it's a shocking image, right? It's a shocking statement, but it makes sense. So, we don't want to return to a sinful life when we have been freed from it.

For anyone who has died to sin has been freed from its power over them. Does that make sense? So, how else is eternal life given?

Well, in baptism. How and when does someone die to sin? Well, fortunately, Paul explains that for us. A person who dies to sin is baptized into Christ's death.

And then also united with Jesus in the likeness of his death. Now, you may have heard that phrase related to Christ as well.

[6 : 10] The likeness of his death. It's a familiar biblical phrase, but what does it mean, right? I even thought to myself, I think I know what it means, but I don't, like, what, is there more depth there that I'm missing?

So, one commentary I read said the phrase means that Christians spiritually share in Jesus Christ's death. And that's symbolized by baptism.

Symbolized there through baptism, putting to death their old sinful nature so that they can live a new resurrected spiritual life.

We die to our own old sinful selves so that we can be freed from slavery to sin. Does that make it more clear? The likeness of his death.

So, those who have died to sin in baptism have been set free from sin. Do you feel set free? You can. Lean into the feeling of being set free because you're no longer a slave to sin.

[7 : 18] As the song goes, you are a child of God. Romans 6.22 also tells us how God's free gift of eternal life is given. So, let's look at this now.

Eternal life is given to those who have become slaves of God. We talked a bit about slavery and its traditional context and traditional meaning and then what it means to become slaves to God.

So, as we've recognized, through Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin, right? We can all agree on that. Earlier in chapter 6, Paul states that we have died to sin and its power over us.

We have a new life in Christ. I'm going to get an amen sign that I just, there you go. Feel free, feel free to say amen when something strikes you.

And if it doesn't strike you, let me know. So, we're to resist sin and its tendency to pull us away from God. Does that make sense? So, we've been freed from it.

[8 : 26] Nice. We've been freed from it, but that doesn't mean it doesn't still tempt us, right? I don't know about you, but I get, old sin taps me on the shoulder and goes, hey, remember that time?

Or it says, oh, come on. It wasn't that bad. And forgiveness, am I right? And we talked about that last week as well.

Forgiveness in Christ is not a free pass to keep on sinning. Just keep sinning was the title of our sermon last week. So, here's the really good news.

We don't have to resist the temptation of sin under our own strength. Amen. The Holy Spirit lives in anyone who gives their life to Jesus.

We know that to be true. And the Spirit will give you the strength you need to resist. To repent, which means to do differently after, right?

[9 : 26] We've looked at that concept in the past. Repentance is not just saying, I'm sorry, and then we go back to the vomit, as it were. But to be freed from it so that we repent, and repentance means do differently after.

So, we turn and go in a different direction through the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. So, once we're no longer slaves to sin, do you remember what we're now slaves to?

And, thank you, Kathy. I believe Kathy is knitting, and she answered more quickly than anyone. So, there are some duties, right, that come with that, and we've considered them before.

Romans 6.13 tells us, We are to present ourselves to God as alive from the dead. We've been made new and set free in Christ.

I don't know about any of you, but the idea of being made new, and I feel not so new as an older model sometimes, it's a good feeling to have that spiritual newness available to us.

[10 : 35] We're to present ourselves as instruments of righteousness to God. And we've become slaves of righteousness through obedience to God.

And that kind of commitment stems from, remember, gratitude and love, not obligation. As slaves of God, we're now to be obedient slaves of righteousness, and in that, seeking to be holy.

Why? Because the God we serve is holy. From verse 22, we learn that eternal life will therefore be given to those who have the fruit of holiness.

So, while we were once slaves to sin, people who followed selfish and sinful impulses in our lives, we've been set free to pursue righteousness.

As Romans 6.21 suggests, where our lives once produced fruit that only leads to death. We've become slaves of righteousness for the purpose of pursuing holiness, producing fruit, then, that speaks of changes and renewed lives.

[11 : 54] Then finally, from verse 22, we learn that for those who have the fruit of holiness, eternal life is given at the end of life, right, as we talked about at the beginning.

God's free gift of eternal life is given at the end of our lives because we've died to sin, become slaves to God, and produce the fruit of holiness in our lives.

See the progression there? So, I want to suggest some things that we can recognize about God's free gift. of eternal life when it comes at the end.

Some translations say everlasting life, and you've probably heard that. King James, New King James, use everlasting life. But it's the same expression translated eternal life in the NIV, verse 23, which is the translation I generally use on Sundays.

Paul speaks also of our future hope given at final judgment. God often spoke about it in the gospel. Sorry, Jesus.

[13 : 03] Different part of God there. Jesus often spoke in his ministry about this in the gospels. It was a consistent message also of Paul in his theology and his writing, and we've heard it.

We heard a bit about it in Acts, and we'll hear about it again when I consider more of Paul's writing down the road, maybe, taking suggestions.

So, eternal life, then, is the life we will live with God when we pass into the next page, the next chapter, of God's story for us.

I officiated a funeral of Linda Barker, a dear lady who is a member of Braemar for ages. She's a dearly loved person in our church.

And it's sometimes a struggle, even for us as Christians, to be hopeful in the midst of a grief-framed, grief-permeated, almost, event like that.

[14 : 05] But we can have hope. Paul also has said, and you know this as well, I'm going to have to paraphrase, I think, that we don't grieve as people who have no hope, because we have hope in Christ.

And not just at a funeral. You have hope in Christ every moment of every day. So, from a deeper dive in the context of Romans 6, 22 and 23, we've seen this morning that eternal life is given to those who have been set free from sin.

It's given to those who have become slaves of God. It's given to those who have the fruit of holiness evident in their lives.

It's given at the end of life. So, it seems like there's a lot of requirements on that list, maybe. If there are things that God requires of us, then how or why can eternal life truly be a free gift?

Have you ever wrestled with that? It's a good question. Eternal life, friends, can be considered to be free because it requires the kind of kindness and love and mercy and grace of God for it to even be possible at all.

[15 : 34] Even though we obey and pursue what God asks of us, we still have not earned or are somehow entitled in any way to this gift of eternal life.

So, do we sincerely want to receive God's free gift? Well, if we say yes, and I hope you do because say it with me, then we really need to ask ourselves and be honest about some things.

Have I been set free from sin by dying to it in baptism? Have I become a slave of God, presenting myself as a servant of righteousness?

Am I really bearing the fruit of holiness in my life? Or is there still some rotten fruit on display that I need to ask God for his help with and maybe even surrender to him again?

My friends, let Jesus be the author and source of eternal life for you as you humbly submit to and obey him.

[16 : 47] Amen.