

Will It Be Mercy and Grace? Hebrews 4:16

I am going to be spending the major portion of our time this morning in the book of Romans, chapter 6. If you will, mark that chapter, but first I want to draw your attention to the words of **Hebrews 4:16**. It is there that we find these words: *“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

Do you know the difference between mercy and grace? It has been said that mercy is God not punishing us as we deserve for our sins, and grace is God blessing us despite the fact that we do not deserve it. God’s mercy is when He does not punish our sins as we deserve, and God’s grace is when He blesses us in spite of the fact that we do not deserve it. Would you say that a person is blessed if he or she receives both mercy and grace?

Would you say that? If so, then consider again the words of **Hebrews 4:16**: *“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* That’s what every one of us need, and need it desperately, although sometimes we aren’t even aware that we need it. We need it more than we need to keep breathing! That’s why I ask this morning, *“Will It be mercy and grace?”*

But we need to ask another question, which is, *“Will it be mercy and grace, or what?”* If not mercy and grace, then what else is there? It is when we see the alternative that we begin to realize how desperate our need really is.

I wish we had the time, which we don’t, but I wish we had the time this morning to really get into the book of Romans in order to get a good feel for what Paul was saying in those chapters leading up to chapter 6. Suffice it to say; in these chapters Paul makes it clear that mankind—which includes all of us—has a sin problem. In **3:23**, Paul writes that *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* Because that dreadful pronouncement is irrefutably true, Paul tells us that all of mankind has fallen under the sentence of God’s wrath.

However, in these chapters of Romans, Paul also makes it clear that God has a solution for that problem. God has put into place a plan of salvation; a plan that offers those under the wrath of God both mercy and grace. That plan is predicated upon the sacrifice of God’s own Son; a sacrifice that was foretold in both the prophets and in the Law of Moses. This plan for the forgiveness of sins becomes applicable, not on the basis of keeping the Law of Moses, but on the basis of faith.

Incidentally, it is important to keep in mind that for the apostle Paul, saving faith is not just something you believe. Saving faith is a set of beliefs that manifests itself in obedience to the will of God. If one is not obedient to God, one really does not have faith in God regardless of what they claim. Paul begins and ends this great letter speaking about *“the obedience of faith,”* (1:5; 16:26). Regardless of what one claims to believe, if obedience to the will of God is put off

or accomplished only in part, that is not faith. In **Matthew 7:21**, Jesus said, “*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*” In James 2:19, James speaks about the demons who also believe in the one God, but I don’t think James was suggesting that demons have saving faith.

By the time we get to the 6th chapter of Romans, Paul will show us that the obedience of faith manifests itself in a Christian’s dying to the practice of sin. Let’s quickly consider the things found in this chapter.

The chapter begins by Christians being reminded that when they were baptized into Christ—which is something that Christ had commanded, John 3:5, Matthew 28:19, and Mark 16:16—they had died to sin. Now, that is not the death to sin sometimes spoken of in connection with repentance. It is true that repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of practice with regards to sin, but Paul’s argument is that our death to sin came when we were baptized into Christ, not before. In **verse 3** he says that when we were *baptized into Christ, we were baptized into his death*. In **verse 4**, he says “*we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death.*” Do you see that? I hope you do and that you understand that. We died to sin when we were joined with Him in the likeness of his death. It was then and there that we were washed of our sins by his blood; not sometime before that, or sometime after that.

Then notice that Paul also says in **verse 4** that we were raised to walk in newness of life. Well, let’s think about this *newness of life*. What does that mean, what does newness of life look like? Beginning in about verse 12 or so, Paul tells us that it means that we no longer let sin reign in our mortal bodies. We no longer let our passions control our actions. Other versions use the word *lusts*, or *evil desires*. In **verse 13**, he says we must not present the members of our body to sin as instruments for unrighteousness. Sin is anything that is an offense to God, whether it is something we do, or do not do. You can sin just as much by what you do not do and you can by what you do. Paul says Christians must not present the members of their body to sin. Instead, we are to present the members of our body to God as instruments for righteousness.

Then for the rest of the chapter, Paul essentially tries to exhort Christians to be done with sin. In **verse 20**, he reminds them of where they came from. He says, “*When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.*” That is, they felt no obligation or constraint to live righteously. But, he says, “*What fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?*” “*Where was that getting you?*” he asks. Then he answers his own question. Those things were leading to death, weren’t they? That was the inevitable fruit, or outcome of presenting the members of your body to sin, of being controlled by your passions, your lusts or evil desires. However, now that they had become Christians—**verse 22**—now that they had been set free from sin, the fruit they are getting is leading them to sanctification, which means holy living, and that leads to eternal life. That then is what Paul summarizes for us in our text—**verse 23**—*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

Remember that mercy is God not punishing us as we deserve for our sins, and grace is God blessing us despite the fact that we do not deserve it. Romans 6:23 speaks of both—what is deserved and what is not deserved. Understand this lesson and you will understand why the gospel really is good news. It is the greatest news you and I will ever hear!

In Romans 6:23, it is important to see that there are three great contrasts:

- First there is the contrast between *wages* and the *free gift*.
- Second there is the contrast between *sin* and *God*. If you will go back up to verse 13, you will see that sin and God are the two Lords we can choose to serve. We choose sin by becoming instruments of unrighteousness, and we choose God by becoming instruments of righteousness.
- Third, there is the contrast between *death* and *eternal life*.

Each of those deserves our attention, and we could easily devote an hour of study to each of those. However, for the sake of this lesson, and the time we have, our focus is going to be upon the contrast between wages and the free gift.

Paul wrote, “*the wages of sin is death*.” Sometimes we take from that, that if people get what they deserve for their sins, they will suffer eternal death. Apart from the grace of God that is true, even though I don’t believe that is what Paul was saying. If the contrasts set forth in this passage have any significance, Paul was not simply saying that death is the wage one earns when they sin.

You have to keep in mind, that in this context, the word *wages* is contrasted with the phrase, *free gift*. The word *sin* is contrasted with the word *God*, and the word *death* is contrasted with the word phrase *eternal life*. So Paul is not talking about death being the wage for sinning, although that is true. Instead, in this passage Paul is talking about death as the wages sin pays. I know that sounds like the same thing, but there is a fine distinction to be made, and I don’t want you to miss Paul’s point. Paul is talking about the difference between being a servant of God, or being a servant of sin. He is contrasting what sin pays, and what God gives.

Suppose you have two job opportunities. One pays almost nothing, in fact it costs more than you get. Although it appears easy, maybe even fun, at least at times, eventually it will kill you. The only reason why you are even tempted to take the job is because there are so many people working there. There are very few people working at the other job even though it pays a fabulous six-figure salary, and has benefits that are just indescribable. How difficult can it be, really, to decide which job you are going to take? That’s what Paul is saying there in the latter part of chapter 6.

In the context Paul has been talking about being a slave. You are a slave to sin or you are a slave to God. There isn’t any third alternative. Everyone is either a slave to sin, or a slave to God. Actually in verse 19, Paul apologizes for using this crude analogy but he was trying to get his point across. The issue is, how well do these two masters—sin and God—pay their slaves? Sin rewards you with death, and God rewards you with life, eternal life!

We have a problem with this whole idea of wages and free gifts, don't we? We find it hard to accept the idea of a free gift. We are more comfortable with the idea of wages. A wage is something you earn. We don't like the idea of free-loaders, of people not working. So be careful in this verse because you have to rethink some things if you hope to understand what Paul is saying. A gift is something you don't earn; it is something given to you. Wages are something that you are owed. You can take someone to court if they do not pay you what you are due. A gift is not like that; it isn't something you are owed. You can't take anyone to court for not giving you a free gift.

Now the amazing thing, most people don't get this. They never see what Paul is talking about there in verse 23. They might agree with it to some degree, intellectually perhaps, but they don't get it. They really don't believe it much. Emotionally, many people see it the other way around. They see sin offering them many gifts; gifts of pleasure, of fun, of excitement, of unimaginable riches. All the demands of sin seem like good things. Its enslavement feels all too much like freedom to people. They are free to think anything they like, say anything they like, do anything they like. When they present the members of their body to sin, they feel liberated. This shows how insidious and deceitful sin is. It makes people think those feelings and pleasures are the wages. It feels like they are getting gifts, liberated to do whatever they want to do. How can it get any better than that!

Whereas, for many people, God doesn't seem to offer people anything fun or exciting. His rewards all seem like pie in the sky. Righteousness seems like heavy chains that must be borne everywhere you go. There is no freedom. You can't do this, you can't do that. That is why it is so important that we understand Paul's point here in verse 23 about wages vs the free gift.

As we said, a wage is something you earn. In this case, Paul says the wage is death. It isn't all the so-called pleasure, the excitement and freedom to do whatever one wants to do. Those were just hooks, or snares to entice people to present the members of their body as servants of sin. Without realizing it, often times until it is too late, sin takes life from us. Sin's demands begin to deplete the life of people. Hours, days, weeks and eventually years are lost, gone forever. Life and health are lost. Sometimes relationships are lost. Sin drains us; it doesn't restore our souls. It takes but it really doesn't give. And once it has fastened itself inside of one's soul, it takes and takes and takes, until there is nothing left to take. Every sin costs us, even though we may not realize it. Someone has said, *sin is like a vampire that gives its victims a high every time it takes another pint of blood from them. They think, "How good this feels! How exciting and fun! This is really living" not realizing that they are really moving closer and closer to death.* Paul calls death the wages sin pays because in the end, people really will get what they deserve, what they have earned.

On the other hand, eternal life is pictured as a free gift. And again, we don't get that! How can it be free when it feels like so much is expected of us, required of us? Well, the truth be told, anything and everything that is required of us is nothing more than what is just and fair. After all, God is the Creator, we are the creature. Surely he has the right to do with His creation what pleases Him. Is it too much for Him to expect us, who have been made in His image to be loving

as He is loving, holy as He is holy, forgiving and patient as He is forgiving and patient? Is it too much for Him to expect us to be good and kind, and careful with our words, to be merciful and compassionate? Is it too much, when in light of the fact that mankind has so miserably failed in all of these things, and has put themselves into an incredible debt, that He gets to determine just how we are to respond to His offer of forgiveness and salvation? Is it too much to expect that we must do things His way?

Do you remember the parable of the unprofitable servant in **Luke 17**? In **verse 10**, Jesus said, *"So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"* You see, nothing that the Lord requires of us is burdensome or unfair. The only reason we might think so is because too often the tempter has our ear. Remember, slaves didn't receive wages. They worked, and if their owner or master was kind and generous, they received what they needed for life. If he gave them anything else, it was always a gift. Not expected, not deserved, a gift!

So Paul says, here's the deal:

- What will you receive? Wages or a free gift?
- Who do you want to serve? Sin or God?
- What do you want? Eternal death or eternal life?

Please understand, by death Paul means eternal death, an eternal existence away from the presence of God and everything that is good. An eternal existence spent in a torment so horrendous that it can only be described as prepared for the devil and his angels. That's what people will receive for what they have done in this life. If they have persisted in presenting the members of their body to sin, one day they will receive what they deserve. They will know neither mercy nor grace.

On the other hand, those who have chosen to put their faith in Christ, and to practice what Paul calls the obedience of faith, and have tried to present the members of their body to righteousness, they get both mercy and grace. They won't get sin's wages because they were not a slave to sin. Instead they were a slave to righteousness, and because of that, they don't get wages of any kind. They get something they don't deserve. They receive a free gift, the gift of life that is eternal.

For some people, most people actually, the clock is ticking and their time is quickly running out. For others, not many perhaps, just a few, but for some, their clocks are also ticking, but their time of life is not running out. An eternity of life stretches before them.

We have a choice to make, and it isn't just a choice we make one time. It is a choice we must make every day, and sometimes, several times a day. Will we choose the obedience of faith that results in our being servants of God and then receiving the gift of eternal life, or will we choose to disobey and fail to obey God, letting sin become our Lord, and one day receive sin's wages, which is eternal death? For sure, most people do not realize the threat of eternal death hanging over them; they do not comprehend that the wrath of God is destined to fall on all

those who do not seek, and find God. It is our call. Will it be mercy and grace, or the wages of sin? I hope you have answered in your heart and that your answer is mercy and grace.

If you wish to respond to the Lord this morning for any reason, will you come while we stand and sing!