

Eternal Life—The Gift of God

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Romans 6:23

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Now I want you to open your Bibles to the book of Romans chapter six. I am having a real throat struggle. I am very concerned that you will be able to hear me. It may be that having to listen more carefully that you will listen more carefully. Perhaps this difficulty on my part will lend emphasis to the message this morning. Perhaps that's why in the providence of God that I am afflicted, that you might have to strain to hear and in straining to hear you might hear more quickly.

But let me read my text, Romans six verse 23. "For the wages of sin is death. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

I wish to make five observations in introducing my message today. The first of which is this. If I die in sin and Christ said, "If you die in your sins you cannot come where I am." But if I persist in my rebellion against God, if I persist in my transgressions and iniquity, if I persist in my unbelief and die in my sins, then my condemnation is a condition that I deserve and that I have earned. That is what it is saying. "The wages of sin is death." If I persist in my rebellion and unbelief and I perish and God sends me to hell, it is a condition and a state that I deserve and that I have earned. But if I live eternally, if I share the joys and blessings and inheritance of the saints, it is the free gift of God.

The wages of sin, what I deserve is what I earn. And what I earn is what I deserve. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift, the free gift of God is eternal life."

So if I persist in my rebellion and unbelief and I die in my sins and forever I am banished from the presence of God I deserve it. I have earned it. It is a condition and state that I have earned myself. But if I am admitted into the presence of God it is not by works of righteousness which I have done, it is the free gift of God's grace.

All right, secondly. Death in sin and condemnation and separation from God is the result of a deliberate effort on my part. The wages of sin. That's what wages are. Wages are something that a person has worked for. He put forth a deliberate effort. He has put forth a deliberate effort to earn these wages. So death, death is a result of a deliberate effort on my part, a willing, deliberate effort on my part and life is the results of a deliberate effort on God's part. The wages of sin is death, but the gift...and that gift, though free, cost somebody. That precious gift, that valuable gift, that unspeakable gift, the gift of God's love, redemption is free to you, but it cost God his Son and it cost his Son his life and

cost the Lord Jesus humiliation and suffering. Yes, it was an expensive gift, a priceless gift. But it cost a high price.

So condemnation and death is the result of something I have done, a deliberate effort on my part. But salvation and eternal life is the result of something that God has done. It took a deliberate effort on his part.

All right, thirdly. Condemnation is the wages of my guilt. Salvation is the gift of his grace totally and completely. Condemnation, if I go to hell it is my fault. If I go to heaven it is God's fault. If I perish in my sins, it is a result of my guilt. If I live eternally, it is the gift of his grace, totally and completely.

Fourthly, there is nothing...now listen to this. There is nothing that will keep a man out of heaven. Listen carefully. There is nothing that will keep a man out of heaven, but his own unwillingness to receive Christ.

You say, "Preacher, have you thought about that a while?"

A good while. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "You will not come to me that you might have life." And the only thing that will keep a man out of heaven is an unwillingness to bow to the claims of King Jesus, to submit to the royal claims of the Son of God. They are righteous claims and they are just claims and they are eternal claims and they are God given claims and they are rightful claims. And some day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord. But the thing that keeps you out of God's grace and out of God's glory and out of God's heaven is your unwillingness right now to bow to his righteous claims. You will not come to me that you might have life. It all boils down to that. It is sin that...against which the canons of heaven are turned. It is sin that God hates. It is sin, Barnard said, that God hates worse than hell. It is sin that damns a soul. But it all boils down to one great sin. They could not enter in because of what? Unbelief, unbelief.

Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.

There is nothing that keeps a man out of heaven but his unwillingness, his unwillingness to bow to the claims of King Jesus, to receive the Son of God.

But, there is nothing that keeps a man out of hell, but the sovereign will of God. That's right.

You say, "How do you reconcile that?"

Well, you don't have reconcile friends, you know. They are not enemies. There is nothing that keeps me out of heaven but my unwillingness to bow to Christ. But there is nothing that keeps a man out of hell, but the sovereign will of God.

Except the Lord of the sabbath had left us a seed, a remnant, a handful we would be like Sodom and Gomorrha. Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed in John 17, "My Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am. My will, my will."

It is not of him that willeth. It is not of him that runneth. It is of God that showeth mercy.

Your will will keep you out of heaven. But your will will not keep you out of hell. Your will will keep you out of heaven, but the only thing that will keep you out hell is God's will. Your will will keep you out of heaven, but your will won't take you to heaven. That's so. That's so. We are not called to explain the gospel. We are called to proclaim it. We are not called to explain the gospel. That's the Holy Spirit's business. I can preach the gospel. I can't reveal it. The gospel is a mystery.

Somebody said, "I preach the gospel so simple that a little child can understand it."

You haven't preached any gospel. There is nothing simply about the gospel. The gospel is profound as the wisdom of God. And it has to be revealed.

But that's the fourth thing. Now the fifth thing is this. The fifth observation and listen carefully. Physical death, spiritual death, eternal death all came by man's sin. The wages of sin is death. It all came by man's sin. By one man sin entered this world. By one man, by Adam's will, by Adam's fall, by Adam's transgression, by Adam's rebellion sin came into this world and death by sin and so death passed upon all men for all have not have sinned, sinned. When Adam rebelled against God I rebelled. When Adam sinned I sinned. And physical death, spiritual death, eternal death, all death, all decay, all corruption, all defilement came by man's sin. All life came by Christ's obedience. All life came by Christ's obedience who is our life.

What I am saying is this. We can take the full blame for our distress, the total complete responsibility for our distress now and eternally for our condition, for our wicked hearts. We can't stand like Adam and say, "The woman which you gave me..." Or like Eve, "The serpent which you made..."

No, sir. We have to stand and say, "It is I who am guilty. I have sinned."

We can take full responsibility and full blame. And foolish is the man who does not do it. For all of our distress and all of our calamity is our fault while almighty God has all the credit and the glory and the praise for anything good that happens to us either here or eternally.

And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. It is not I, but Christ that liveth in me.

Herein lies the source of all error in theology. Listen to me. Herein lies the source of all error in theology. It doesn't matter who the preacher might be, an old puritan or a young modern liberal. All error in theology comes from one of these two sources. Either an at-

tempt to make God less than he is or an attempt to make man more than he is. Now you think it over. I don't care what the error is. All error in theology comes from one of these two places: either an attempt to make God less than he is, to diminish his glory, to deny his glory, to dilute his glory or to make man more than he is.

And I will tell you we are in a famine. I see some signs of life. I see God is pleased to do something. I see God raising up here and there. David and I were talking about it last night. A young man here and a young there who dares to believe God, who dares to preach the Word. And unless the Holy Spirit is pleased in this day to raise up some preachers who have learned in their hearts these things who God is, sovereign, almighty, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, a God of truth, righteousness, a God who is love, what man is, depraved, defiled, dead in trespasses in sins, who Christ is, what he did, why he did it, how God can be just and justify the ungodly, where he is now, the ascended, exalted, risen Lord. Unless God raises up some preachers who have learned these things in their hearts—and this is where they must be learned—because I cannot teach you what I do not know. I cannot lead you in a path that I have not walked. I cannot tell you things that I have not been taught. And raises up some preachers who dare to proclaim these things in no uncertain terms, God needs to raise up in our day some preachers who care not what men pay or what they say, who care not for men's praise and who care not for their criticism. But more men have fallen to the temptation of praise than have ever fallen under persecution. For every one man who has been trapped by Satan through poverty, 10 have fallen through popularity and possessions. That's right.

I don't fear persecution. I fear prosperity. And unless God is pleased in our day to touch the heart of some young Elisha or some young Timothy and raise up to speak to this generation men who have learned these things in their hearts that who God is and who man is and who Christ is, we are going to keep on, keep on offering salvation to men who are not lost. That is what we are doing. We are trying to get folks saved who aren't lost. Or we will keep on offering Christ to men who do not need him. Or we will keep on offering life to men who are not dead. Or we will keep on offering grace to men who are not guilty. Or we will keep on offering heaven to folks who wouldn't appreciate it. And keep on crying peace, peace, when there is no peace.

Paul said in our text, verse 23, "The wages of sin is death." Jonathan Edwards said this. "All men right now at this present time, not in the future, not tomorrow, not after the judgment, all men by nature are under the sentence of death for all have sinned and come short of God's glory. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one, not a few of the most wicked, the harlot, the drunkard, the adulterer, the thief, the murderer, all we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way."

That's our problem. Our problem is our will, our way, our wishes.

Psalm 14:1-3. Turn over there and let's read this together, Psalm 14:1-3. "The fool, the fool hath said in his heart, 'No God, no God for me, no Lord for me, no sovereign over my life.' They are corrupt. They have done abominable works. There is none that doeth good. The Lord look down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any

that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside. They are altogether become filthy, stinking is the word. There is none that doeth good, no not one.”

But more than that. Edwards went on to say, “All men are under the sentence of death, but all men deserve to be condemned.”

Now, brethren, this is the place that we must be brought by the Holy Spirit if we are really sincerely going to look to Christ for his mercy and grace. We must not only see our condemnation, but we must be able—now watch this—and I made this statement before and it is so important. We must not only see our sins and our condemnation. But we must justify God in condemning us. We must justify God in condemning us.

I am not saying that we will want to go to hell and want to be separated from Christ. And I am not saying that we will rejoice in being separated from Christ or that we will rejoice in the wrath of God. No. I don't want to go to hell. I will be honest with you. I don't want to be banished from God's presence. I don't want to perish. And I could not possibly rejoice if God sent me to hell. But here is what I am saying. I am saying if he does I have to say he did right. That's what David said, “That thou mightest be just when you condemn, righteous when you speak.”

Jonathan Edwards says, “All men deserve to be condemned.” No man deserves to be saved. No man deserves God's mercy. God is not obligated to any creature. We deserve to be condemned. The divine law offers no plea on my behalf. The divine law says, “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them. What the law saith it saith to them that are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and all the world become guilty.” Divine justice must consent to my condemnation. The divine law consents to my condemnation and divine justice consents to my condemnation.

Our Lord gave a parable. He said a man was walking through his orchard and he came to a tree. And his husbandman was with him, his foreman. He came to a tree. He said to the foreman, he said, “That tree has been there three years. There is no fruit on it. I have come here the first year, the second year, the third year looking for fruit on this tree. There is no fruit on the tree. Cut it down. Why cumbereth it the ground?”

And the foreman looked at him and said, “My Lord, give it one more year. Let me dig around it. Let me dung it. Let me work on it. And then, my Lord, if it doesn't bear fruit, you cut it down.”

And let me tell you something. When the judgment and justice and law of God looks at me, fruitless, Christless and says, “Why does he cumber the ground? Cut him down,” only one voice can plead, only one voice can petition, only one voice can speak on my behalf and that's the Lord Jesus.

“Lord, let me...let me do something for him. And then if he doesn't bear any fruit you can cut him down. But give him to me.”

That's all [?] I deserve to be cut down. I deserve to...why do I cumber God's ground? Have you ever think about it? Why cumbereth I the ground? And I am just living by his grace. That's all. I am living on the plea of my intercessor. I am living on the cry and the call of my advocate. That's all. My own mouth would offer no plea on my behalf. If I justify myself, my own mouth would condemn me.

But Edwards goes on. He says, "All men are under condemnation. All men deserve to be condemned." Now listen. "All men are already condemned."

Now you need to think about this. And the average preacher doesn't know this. Men are not on probation. Men are not on trial. The trial is over. Did you know that? We are condemned already. He that believeth not on the Son of God is condemned already.

Christ came not to condemn the world. Why? Because the world was already condemned.

The average preacher preaches as if these babies over here in the nursery are born in a neutral state. No, they are not. They are born in sin. They are born enemies of God. That's right. They are born enemies of God.

I was shapen in iniquity. I was conceived in sin. I was brought forth speaking lies. I was estranged from the womb. To be saved is to be made alive. To be damned is to be left alone. That's all.

Think about that now. To be saved is to God...is for God to make me alive. All God has to do to damn me is to leave me alone. I am already condemned. You don't have to do anything to go to hell. You don't have to do anything to be condemned. You are condemned already. He that believeth not on the Son, the wrath of God abideth, not shall abide, not will abide, not might abide, abideth on him. And men have no power or ability to lift that sentence of condemnation.

"Oh, preacher, you are preaching a message with no hope."

Well, I'll tell you this. If it is up to me or you there is no hope. If it is up to any strength or energy or arm of the flesh there is no hope. The wages of sin is death. Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can the leopard change his spots? Neither can you do good that are accustomed to doing evil. In the flesh no man can please God. By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.

These are final words. Without God, without strength, without Christ, without hope.

Oh, but wait a minute. Hold on. Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, death, continual death, eternal death, just death, death, but, but, but..." Oh, I tell you, that's a beautiful word. The wages of sin is death. Tell the world the wages of sin is death. But, Peter? Satan hath desired thee. Oh, what an announcement. Peter, Satan hath desired thee. He has picked you out. He singled you out from everybody. He wants to sift you like a man

sifts the wheat. He wants to put you over the strainer. But I have prayed for you. Oh, boy. That makes that a whole lot different, doesn't it? That makes it a whole lot different. But.

You are no match for him, Peter, no way. You can't handle him. Even Michael wouldn't contest with that character. But I prayed for you. Scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would dare to die, but God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. We were all following the prince of the power of the air, fulfilling the lust of our flesh in the pride of life and the pride of the mind and the lust of the mind. We were children of wrath even as others, but God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us.

Yeah, the wages of sin is death and I have earned every penny and I deserve every cent. And the justice of God and the law, God and the holiness of God and the righteousness of God demand that I receive it. But, but.

God has a different plan. The gift of God, not earned, not bought, not merited, not sought. The free gift of God, the gift of God. It is all the gift of God. The heart that desires it is the gift of God. I will give thee a new heart.

You say, "But I want to be saved."

If you do, God enabled you to want to. That is of God, too.

Who maketh you to differ?

The repentance that leads to it, the goodness of God gave you that. The hand of faith that reaches out, that's the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast. The perseverance that clings to it. That is the gift of God. It's all the gift of God.

From alpha to omega, from beginning to end, he is the author and finisher of our faith. The gift, the wages of your sin is death, death, death upon death. But the gift of God, he planned it, he provided it, he purchased it, he applied it, he preserves it, he will crown it. The gift of God is what? Eternal life.

Now I am not talking about the length of it, though it is every lasting. When we speak in the Scripture of eternal life we are talking more about the quality of it, David. Everybody is going to live forever.

You know there is mineral life, plant life, animal life. And they all...that's a living thing. But they can be annihilated. There is no crime in killing an animal or cutting down a rose because those things are temporary life. They die. They are annihilated. They are gone. They disappear. But when God made Adam he made him in his own image and the Scripture says that life was breathed into him by God and he became a living soul. God didn't breathe monkey life in the sense that he became a living soul. But Adam did. Adam was made in God's image. And as God can't die, the life of God can't die. And

God gave man life and that life came from God. And it is a part of God. That's all we can explain it. And therefore even men, even the angels that sinned, they can't die. They can't be annihilated. Man, you out there. Everybody, here is a living soul. You can't die.

Oh, your body can die, but your soul can't die. And the soul, you see, the body returns to dust from whence it came, but the soul goes back to God who gave it. And it has got to live on eternally, infinitely. It can't die.

So this eternal life which is the gift of God is the life of God, the nature of God. It is the righteousness of God. It is the holiness of God. It is a life over which sin has no power, over which disease has no power, over which death has no power. It is eternal life.

And, brethren, it is a present possession. He says, "Now are we the sons of God, right now."

But now watch this in closing. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. And here is the most important part. It is through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has no mercy, God has no grace, God has no blessings, God has no benefit for any sinner except through Christ. God will not—listen to me—God will not speak to nor will God be spoken to by any son of Adam except through the mediator Christ Jesus. There is no way for a sinner to communicate with God except through Christ. God will not be heard, nor will God hear except through Christ. God has no dealings with a sinner except in judgment and justice and condemnation, except through Christ.

But Christ, the love of God is in Christ. No one is able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. The foundation on which we build is Christ. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ. The door is Christ. I am the door. The way is Christ. I am the way. The truth is Christ. I am the truth. The light is Christ. I am the light. The atonement is Christ. By whom we have received the atonement. Peace is in Christ. Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Life is in Christ. In Adam we die. In Christ we are made alive. Righteousness is in Christ. The end of the law, the goal, the consummation of the law is the righteousness of Christ. Christ is the goal of the law. Heaven is to be with Christ.

Everything God has for me, everything God has for you is in Christ. He is my hope. He is my refuge. He is my righteousness. He is my foundation. He is my mediator. He is my life.

The wages of sin is death. But, but the gift of God is eternal life, a life of glory, a life of holiness, a life of happiness. It is through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we give thanks for these words of truth, precious promises about our precious Lord and his precious blood that cleanseth us from all sin. Anoint the Word by the power of thy Holy Spirit and make it effectual for thy glory and for our good. And bless David as he ministers to the congregation this evening and bless the meeting and look out in Fairmont, West Virginia according to thy blessed will for the glory of thy dear Son we pray. Amen.