



**TOUCH POINT**

## The Sin of Wages is Death – Touchpoint for June 28, 2023

**Romans 6:12-23 (The Message)** <sup>12-14</sup> That means you must not give sin a vote in the way you conduct your lives. Don't give it the time of day. Don't even run little errands that are connected with that old way of life. Throw yourselves wholeheartedly and full-time—remember, you've been raised from the dead!—into God's way of doing things. Sin can't tell you how to live. After all, you're not living under that old tyranny any

longer. You're living in the freedom of God.

<sup>15-18</sup> So, since we're out from under the old tyranny, does that mean we can live any old way we want? Since we're free in the freedom of God, can we do anything that comes to mind? Hardly. You know well enough from your own experience that there are some acts of so-called freedom that destroy freedom. Offer yourselves to sin, for instance, and it's your last free act. But offer yourselves to the ways of God and the freedom never quits. All your lives you've let sin tell you what to do. But thank God you've started listening to a new master, one whose commands set you free to live openly in his freedom!

<sup>19</sup> I'm using this freedom language because it's easy to picture. You can readily recall, can't you, how at one time the more you did just what you felt like doing—not caring about others, not caring about God—the worse your life became and the less freedom you had? And how much different is it now as you live in God's freedom, your lives healed and expansive in holiness? <sup>20-21</sup> As long as you did what you felt like doing, ignoring God, you didn't have to bother with right thinking or right living, or right anything for that matter. But do you call that a free life? What did you get out of it? Nothing you're proud of now. Where did it get you? A dead end.

<sup>22-23</sup> But now that you've found you don't have to listen to sin tell you what to do, and have discovered the delight of listening to God telling you, what a surprise! A whole, healed, put-together life right now, with more and more of life on the way! Work hard for sin your whole life and your pension is death. But God's free gift is real life, eternal life, delivered by Jesus, our Master.

**Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.**

[Jim is using the "Revised Standard Version" translation of this Bible passage for his Touchpoint.]

*"For the wages of sin is death"*

Boy, how many times did I hear that growing up...

*"For the wages of sin is death"*

It seemed to be everywhere. Not just in the churches, but on any street corner where an itinerant preacher was crafting his trade. Sometimes on billboards by the side of the road.

*"For the wages of sin is death"*

It hung like a guillotine over all of life.

*“For the wages of sin is death”*

So you can imagine my surprise when I was in my mid-twenties, in seminary, and I discovered that there wasn't a period at the end of that statement... *“For the wages of sin is death,”* ... but a comma!

WOW... who'da thunk?

And what followed were these words:

***“... but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

That's kind of important, don't you think?

***“... but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

I mean, it's kind of like having your boss say, “I can't pay you what you earned today... but I will give you the winnings from my first-place ticket in the Mega Millions lottery.” That last part would be kind of important, don't ya think?

So how come I didn't hear that line, *“But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,”* as often as I heard, *“For the wages of sin is death”*?

No, I'm serious, how come I never heard that pounded out from the pulpit in my early childhood? And how come I still don't hear it very much today?

How come, in my very early youth, all I remember is someone looking and sounding like Darth Vader saying...

*“For the wages of sin is death”*

Why is it we are so afraid of grace? Why is it we can't handle it? Why is it we are so suspicious of it?

Why are we so quick to jump on people with what they deserve, but not imagine or envision anything beyond it?

Now, when I usually read this or hear this, the two words played off each other are ‘death’ and ‘life.’ *“The wages of sin is DEATH, but the free gift of God is eternal LIFE...”*

But I want to look at two other words that Paul plays off each other. Two other words he contrasts: ‘Wages’ and ‘free.’ *“For the WAGES of sin is death, but the FREE gift...”*

And I want to focus on these because if we just see this text as some future life issue, I think we miss out on an important issue.

How do we understand life... how do we approach life?

Is it from a wage mentality or a free mentality?

Is it a law mentality, or a grace mentality (to use traditional Lutheran terms)?

What is your approach, my approach, our approach to life?

We are so locked into this reward and punishment, earning, wage mentality that we simply cannot imagine a different way of living. It simply dominates our lives, our relationships, our theology.

I know the text reads, *“For the wages of sin is death,”* but I think we could just as easily say, *“For the sin of wages is death.”* And by that I mean that the sin of our wage, reward and punishment mentality in all the aspects of our lives, especially our relationships, friendships, and theology... the sin of our wage, reward and punishment mentality leads to such brokenness and death that we can't even recognize grace when it hits us in the face.

Or if we do recognize grace, we reject it as being dangerous, untenable, subversive.

Paul speaks to that when he says, *“Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?”*

Obviously, he's heard the argument we all have when you talk of the totality of God's grace and forgiveness: *“Well, if God is going to forgive me, why don't I just keep on sinning?”* That is the only possible response from those living under the law and reward and punishment mentality.

Here's how you know you're living in law and not in grace: If your first response to hearing about unconditional love, grace and forgiveness is, *“What can I get away with?”* or *“Then why should I be good?”* ... If that's your first response, you're still living by the law.

*“If God is going to forgive me, why don't I just keep on sinning?”*

I don't know... Why don't you just hit your head with a hammer and keep hitting it? I mean, if God isn't going to punish you for doing that, why don't you just keep doing it? God will forgive you, after all.

*“Well, if God is going to forgive us, why don't we all just keep on sinning?”*

Really, we are now going to blame the sin of the world on the gospel. We are now going to blame the sin of the world on God being too gracious... Really!!!

WOW!!!

That would be like a husband caught having an affair, saying it's his wife's fault. And when you ask him why, he says, *“Well she said in her vows she would love me for better or WORSE... so, I mean, she was almost asking me and inviting me to have an affair. After all, if she's going to love me for worse, why wouldn't I just do more of the WORSE so she can love me all the more?”*

I mean, how does one respond to that other than, *“You just don't get it.”* Or, *“I really feel sorry for you.”* Actually, *“I feel incredibly sorry for your wife and all those in a relationship with you.”*

Or perhaps we should simply respond as Paul did... *“You are no longer under the law. You are under grace.”*

To live under the law is to live under the mentality of the reward and punishment, earning, and wage system. That's what the law is based on. Getting what you deserve, what you have coming to you, what you've earned. You know, reward and punishment.

But that way only leads to death. Any relationship that is based on scorekeeping is a relationship of death. Any relationship based on reward and punishment is a relationship of death. Any relationship based on only getting what you deserve will not flourish and live, but will die.

In other words, any relationship based on law is a dead relationship... a relationship of death.

Now, can those relationships be functional? I suppose so. We encounter them in the workplace all the time. But seriously, do we want the deepest relationships of our lives to be transactional, like our workplace? Is that what you want from your deepest relationships and connections?

But Paul says you and I are no longer under that. We are under grace.

Now to be under something means that it is bigger than us. It is over us. We don't have a choice in the matter. We don't have a say. It simply stands over us. It is a done deal.

Perhaps why we run from grace is because we understand all too well that grace is the death knell of us. Grace is the death knell of our reward and punishment, earning, wage mentality of life. Grace is the death knell of our self-justification and scorekeeping of ourselves, and others.

And so, grace is the death of us and our death-dealing way of life.

So, here's what's weird. Grace then becomes life. If grace is the death – the end – of our death-dealing ways, then grace is life.

If grace is the death of death, then grace is life.

Perhaps this is what Paul is talking about when he writes in our passage, “... *but present yourselves to God as one who has been brought from death to life...*”

Present yourselves as one who no longer lives under the law of scorekeeping, reward and punishment, and wages – under the way of death – but as one who is alive in grace.

This is who you are. You live under grace. There really isn't that much more to say.

You live under grace. And you are dead to the death-dealing ways of the law. It no longer applies to you. So stop applying it to yourself and others.

Hear it again. You live under grace. And let me pound this out from this pulpit for you so you will hear it loud and clear:

**“... the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

And if hearing it isn't enough, then I invite you to come to this table and see it, touch it, and taste it.

You see, in the night in which Jesus was betrayed he gathered around him a betrayer, a denier, and a bunch of cowards.

And here is what he DIDN'T do: HE DIDN'T LAY DOWN THE LAW!!! And he didn't lay down the law because they didn't live under the law.

No, he gave them his very self. He gave them his grace and forgiveness. He gave them his body and blood.

WHY?

So they would know in this night, and in all the days and nights of their lives...

... they were under grace...

Just like you and me and the rest of the world!

UNDER GRACE!!!

**Amen.**

# *Spirit in the Desert*

## **Opening Song**

### **Be Still**

(London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

### **You Lord Are In This Place**

(Keith Duke)

You Lord are in... 1)...this place. 2)...my heart. 3)...my mind. 4)...my life.  
Your presence fills it. Your presence is peace.

## **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **In the Arms of God**

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

*Refrain:* Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care.

Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

*Refrain*

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your souls true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

*Refrain*

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

*Refrain*

## **The Meal**

### **The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)**

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

## **Benediction**

### **Sevenfold Amen**

(The Emmanuel Quartet)

Amen.