

The Free Gift of Eternal Life
Romans 6:20-23

Intro

A recent article in Forbes magazine entitled “Do Not Underestimate the Ignorance of the American Eater” - reveals a few somewhat startling statistics

The article begins with a first grader’s statement in a report from the Journal of Agricultural Education:

“My mommy told me bread comes from an animal. I don’t know which animal.”

Lest we chalk that quote up to a cute, kids-say-the-darndest things sound bite - the article continues by reporting a recent online survey - their findings?

- An estimated 16 million American think that chocolate milk is brown because it comes from brown cows - pop. of OH
- 40% of California 4-6th graders don’t know that hamburger comes from cows
 - 1990s Dep. of Ag study found that 20% of adults don’t know
- The most popular fruit? Orange Juice
- The most popular vegetable? French fries and potato chips

WaPo explains that the situation is dire enough that a kindergarten-level lesson has been written to teach, among other things that milk comes from cows, not the grocery case

Yes, my friends, these people walk among us

Arrived here unaware of chocolate milk or hamburgers - my joy to serve you in a way you didn’t expect - won’t be ignorant - you can hold your head high next time you go grocery shopping

When it comes to understanding how the grace and works - how grace and acts of obedience to God function together - there is much ignorance and confusion as well - far greater ramifications for our lives than ignorance about chocolate milk

In his book *True Spirituality: How to Live for Jesus Moment by Moment*, Francis Schaeffer says that the reason why many Christians fail to have fruitful lives is because of ignorance about how justification and sanctification works in our lives - “we may have never been taught the meaning of the work of Christ in our present lives” and one may have been taught and may believe, among other things that:

- A Christian is saved by faith but then left to live his/her life in their own strength
- Having accepted Christ that it does not now matter how we live
- We must pursue a second blessing of the Spirit which would make us perfect in this life - but one waits in hopelessness for this blessing - Keswick, higher life, let go and let God

- He/She may have never been taught that there is a reality of faith to be acted on consciously after justification

The first 5 chapters of Romans Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit has laid out the reality of justification by faith alone - imputed righteousness received with empty hands but starting in chapter 6 he explains the meaning of the work of Christ in our present lives - the life of faith lived out in faithfulness. Theologians - justified by faith alone but that saving faith is never alone but always accompanied by obedience to God

In v. 20-23 Paul lays out a meta-narrative - the big story of the Christian life he does so to teach us how grace and works function in the life of the Christian - so we would not be ignorant - so that we would be informed and faithful - that we would live in the good of grace and fueled by that grace we would be those who purposefully, passionately pursue the will of the Lord

Paul locates our lives in the reign of God's grace and described

1. Our Past
2. Our Present
3. Our Future - In doing so teaches us why and how we should live faithful lives under the reign of God's grace

I. Our Past (v. 20-21)

- A. v. 16 the spiritual principle - whatever or whomever you serve is your master and you are their slave
 1. If you present yourself to sin then you are a slave of sin - regardless of what you profess
 - a) We have seen throughout chapters 5 and 6 that apart from a supernatural act of divine, sovereign grace - we all are slaves to sin - born with a bent away from God and towards sin
 - (1) Doesn't mean we can't do anything that is good - corruption - self-interest
- B. v. 19 - just as you once presented your member - your selves - to impurity and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness - so now - just as - so now present your members - your selves to righteousness leading to sanctification - growth in godliness
 1. The imperative - a call for action and obedience - 20-23 we are given the basis for the command - indicative - imperative - indicative
- C. V. 20 - when you were slaves to sin - pre-conversion - you were free - hmmm...slaves but free - how where we free - in regard to righteousness - free will in the sense that freely chose sin instead of righteousness
 1. No felt, pressing need to pursue righteousness, no sense of obligation - sure a little embarrassment or guilt here and there - not an abiding sense that I have an obligation to serve God - the Creator who makes a rightful claim on my life.
 2. "I am free from your restrictive biblical Christianity" - It is a felt freedom - actual slavery (to sin)
- D. V. 21 You were free from a felt obligation to pursue righteousness - no internal sense of responsibility to live according to God's righteous will - BUT what fruit were you getting from that freedom? Death

1. The biblical principle of sowing and reaping

For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. (Romans 7:5)

2. Physical / psychological effects of sin
 - a) My old friend dead at 37 from heroin overdose
 - b) Maybe not big, gnarly sins - coveting, materialism, bitterness, anger, deception, hurting others
 - c) Make good things into ultimate things and create idols that we worship, are enslaved to, and as they let us down, we experience shadows of death
 - d) Tim Keller
 - (1) If you are enslaved to approval, you will constantly experience self-pity, envy, hurt feeling, inadequacy
 - (2) If you are enslaved to success, you will experience driven-ness, fatigue, worry, and fear
3. BUT far more dreadful - Ultimately this is eternal death = hell of God's judgment against us in our sin
 - a) Knowing this - every Christian looks on their sin - now "ashamed" - ashamed at what we've done, who we've done it against because the fruit is death - the end of that way of life was death
 - (1) Smarter than all that rubbish?

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. (Proverbs 14:12)

E. Application

1. We do well to consider our sin as shameful - to not only be ashamed of what we were before conversion - to even cultivate a real, and abiding sense of the shame of living in sin - it is an important piece of our growth in godliness - sanctification - to abhor and treat with contempt the shameful sin that wars against our soul - not to be played with
 - a) Ordinary testimonies - own what the Bible explains about us - just as enslaved to sin as the 68-year-old hardened murderer
2. There is an appropriate and godly shame - but God never intended that we live under condemnation but to turn in our shame for sin to God in Christ and to hear him speak the word of love and pardon in the gospel - no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus
 - a) Those of tender conscience - don't need to tell you that shame is appropriate - Living in shame and condemnation? Lay it upon Christ

[62] I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, [63] that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD." (Ezekiel 16:62-63)

- (1) Christ has atoned for all you have done or will do - arise my friend from shame and into security in Christ - out of condemnation and into Christ's forgiveness
- (2) Brings us to our second point

II. Our Present (22)

- A. Our past was a dreadful harvest of death as a slave to sin - who we were - no matter how put together or seemingly morally upright - That is who we were - BUT NOW - BUT NOW
 - 1. You have been set free from sin and become slaves of God - you were enslaved to sin and now set free from sin - 2 OPTIONS - gotta serve somebody - transferred to the service of the King of the universe - slaves of God
 - a) "set free" - not "but now that you have managed to escape" or "but now that you negotiated your freedom" or "but now you have earned your liberation - SET FREE from outside ourselves
 - b) Someone has set us free - that someone is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ - amazing because in our sin he is the offended party - our sin is ultimately against him

Illustration: Prisoners on death row - we have heard the cell door keys jangle as the prison door is opened and to our utter astonishment - standing before us is THE KING! "I have payed your price, I have ransomed your soul for my own - in my own blood I have paid it. YOU ARE FREE! And we fall down at his feet in grateful worship - what is your will my Lord?

- B. v. 22 Whereas before in our slavery to sin we sowed sin and reaped death - on death row - but there's TV and food and a bed to take a nap in - sufficiently distracted so as to not perceive the reality of coming destruction
- C. Now in our slavery to God we get a different sort of fruit - we sow righteousness and reap sanctification - actual growth in godliness - incrementally conformed to the image of Christ - and that way of life leads us to "eternal life" - its end is eternal life
 - 1. Hmm...does this mean that sanctification - growing in godliness - is how we earn eternal life - slipping in a little legalism?
 - a) To be freed by the Christ and bound to the service of God puts us on the narrow way that Jesus described - its pathway is one of imperfect but persistent holiness as we make our way into eternity - kept by God - persevere by Grace into the consummation of eternal life.
 - (1) IOW sanctification must necessarily follow liberation - or our freedom is a fraud

Bondage to sin yields no return except shame and ongoing moral deterioration, culminating in the death we deserve. Bondage to God, however, yields the precious fruit of progressive holiness, culminating in the free gift of life. (John Stott, *BST: Romans*, p. 186)

- D. Application
 - 1. Rejoice in your liberation from the penalty and power of sin - rejoice in having been set free to serve the living God - take sanctification dead-serious

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. (1 Peter 2:16)

Illustration: Slaves of God - doesn't mean an easier life - New Christian - listening to a lot of Keith Greene - mess with you - big life changes - conviction and work - what a joy to live to serve God! Sustained and strengthened by grace

- a) Not optional - treating as optional? Covering up sin? Unburden yourself before the Lord and fight against your sin
 - (1) No more "I just have a temper", or "I've earned this moment of relaxation with this porn site," or "The kids had it coming to them," or "if only they would change I wouldn't - fill in the blank"
 - (a) Slaves of God - take his will and Word with utter seriousness - not playing around
 - (2) We leave our past slavery to sin behind stepping into the freedom to pursue righteousness as we look to our blessed hope

III. Our Future

- A. v. 23 in effect sums up much of the teaching thus far in chapter
 - 1. v. 16 the one who lives in sin is a slave to sin
 - 2. v. 20 fruit of sin is death
 - a) For that sin there is a wage - a dreadful wage - death - eternal death - if you have hell in your future it is completely on you - you have earned it - apart from grace we will all receive that which we have earned

Illustration: Sin is our master - death is his allotment for our service - just as surely as you expect to be paid for what you have done at work - just so should you expect the wages of death for a life lived in sin

- B. The wages of sin is death - BUT, BUT - there is an alternative economical arrangement - not receiving what we have earned (death) but receiving THAT WHICH WE COULD NEVER EARN - ETERNAL LIFE AS A FREE GIFT
 - 1. God's grace in the gospel - in the person and cross-work of the risen Christ is not a wage earned - it is a gift received

[23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (Romans 3:23-24)

- (1) Justification - doorway into eternal life - Christ's righteousness is the key that unlocks the door
 - b) Natural course of this world - we receive what we earn
 - c) Supernatural grace of the gospel - receive what Christ has earned - life - whenever we try to earn God's favor through our acts of obedience we are reverting back to the world's economy.
- C. Oh, this free gift - COULD NOT BE MORE GENEROUS OR GREATER - Eternal life - immortality in Christ Jesus our Lord
 - 1. It is "IN HIM" we have eternal life
 - a) United with him in a resurrection like his 6:5
 - (1) Has he been raised to live forevermore? Than united with him so shall we - we live in the power of his Spirit now as we wait for the consummation in a new heavens and new earth - immortality in a world of love and light - death banished - suffering abolished
 - (2) All because we have this eternal life IN Christ Jesus our Lord
 - (a) For he is the chosen one of God to save us from our sins - Our sin-bearing substitute, the wrath-absorber, the atoning lamb, the justifier of the sinner,

the one who has crushed the head of the serpent, the the liberator of the slave, the sustainer of the weak, the shepherd of the wandering, the brother of the beggar

- (b) The one who will never leave us or forsake us, the king of righteousness, the one who died and was raised to never die again. The victorious and reigning King who is coming again - who will one day rend the heavens and reveal the justified sons and daughters of God, the recipients of his grace into a new heaven and a new earth in an ETERNITY OF JOY! ETERNAL LIFE IN HIM - IT IS SO PRECIOUS BECAUSE OF WHOM OUR LIFE NOW AND IN ETERNITY IS IN!

**The King there in His beauty,
Without a veil is seen;
It were a well spent journey,
Though sev'n deaths lay between;
The Lamb with His fair army
Doth on Mount Zion stand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land. (The Sands of Time are Sinking)**

- (c) Let familiar v. 23 wash over your soul with vivifying energy and vitality - Eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord

D. Application

1. CALL TO UNBELIEVERS

When someone says that they are rejecting Christianity because they want to be free, they are right only in the narrow sense that they're free from living in the way that will most satisfy and fulfill them; in every other way they are slaves. (Tim Keller, *Romans for You*, p. 155)

- 2. In light of the hope of the glory that is coming and we have begun to taste now - how can we continue in a lifestyle of sin?

In practice, we should constantly be reminding ourselves who we are. We need to learn to talk to ourselves, and ask ourselves questions: "Don't you know? Don't you know the meaning of your conversion and baptism? Don't you know that you have been united to Christ in his death and resurrection? Don't you know that you have been enslaved to God and have committed yourself to his obedience? Don't you know these things? Don't you know who you are?" We must go on pressing ourselves with such questions, until we reply to ourselves: 'Yes I *do* know who I am, a new person in Christ, and by the grace of God I shall live accordingly. (John Stott, *BST: Romans*, p. 186)

- a) AWAY, AWAY, KILL AND BE DONE
- b) Righteousness is not just a personal, moral structure - biblical righteousness has to do with how we serve and treat one another

Godly living is worked out primarily in the life of the Christian community. (Colin Kruse, *PCNT: Romans*, p. 285)

- c) In obedience to chapter 6 - fresh commitment to community - to CG

3. Suffering - you have eternal life - in a little while there is glory that is coming to you - the suffering you are experiencing now which God is using for your good - that suffering is nothing to be compared with the glory to be revealed in the day of Christ Jesus - ETERNAL LIFE IS YOURS
4. Live like an immortal - we are immortal until God decides we are done here - then we go on forever
 - a) Sacrifice, serve others, give, kill sin, proclaim the gospel - EVEN TO THE NATIONS IN HOSTILE NATIONS - and then enter into the rest of your master - eternal life

Close

God does not leave us in ignorance - he graciously instructs us from his Word on the nature of grace and our call to righteousness and how these things work together

How kind of God to not leave us in ignorance - let us respect him enough to live out of the realities of chapter 6

Headed to chapter 7 - don't leave chapter 6 behind - thank God we need not - gracious gift of his Word and the glorious grace of his gospel

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