

Free Gift Romans 6:19-23

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

How hard is it for you to receive a gift? Ever been invited to a birthday party or an anniversary celebration and there is an addendum “no gifts, please!” Why? It is hard to receive gifts! We want to reciprocate, do something in return. We may even feel an obligation to do something in return.

Have you ever bought birthday gifts for someone and thought about how much you were going to spend, based upon what you thought was the amount they spent on their gift to you? This may have been more of a thing as you sent your young children to the birthday parties of other children?

Invited by a friend for dinner – whether at their home or out – while you are there, you are already planning when you can “return the favor.”

Why is this? Why is it so hard to accept a gift given to us by someone? Dare I say it, it is because we are caught up in self. To accept a gift is to place ourselves in subordination to another. To receive a gift, we need to consider ourselves as the ones who receive, and we are conditioned to think of that as a movement from the greater to the lesser.

Or at the very least, if we accept the gift, we think that we are now beholden to the giver of the gift.

Now comes this text where it speaks about God’s free gift. Guess what, from the beginning of this sermon we have established that we have a problem with the concept of receiving a free gift. We have a hard time wrapping our minds around that. Why? Because we are self-absorbed! We want it about us, but not as the receiver of gifts, but as the doer of things. We want to be the center of attention, “Look what I have accomplished! Look what I have earned by the sweat of my brow! Look at what I have done!”

It is our human nature to be self-sufficient, the one to shape our own world, the masters of our own destiny.

We not only think that way in regard to our life in the world and our relationships with others, but we like to think that way even in regard to our relationship with God. Unfortunately, when we do that, it becomes a sin problem.

Our sinful human nature wants to take credit for things, and the world has taught us that things are not free, that we need to do our part. So, it makes sense to say, I have chosen God! I have decided to follow God! My faith is my work, God does His part, but I **HAVE TO DO MY PART.** It does not make sense that it is all a free gift.

There are some who are tempted to believe, “I stand before God as righteous, because I am good enough – at least better than so many others – especially those who are not even believers in Christ.” We want to believe that has to count for something.

Most importantly, our sinful human pride wants to say that the difference between unbelievers and believers is because of something ‘I’ did.

Even those who are not sure of their salvation are very self-absorbed, they are also trusting in themselves – or actually, they are *unsure* because they are trusting themselves, “I am not sure if I going to heaven. I know I have not been perfect, and I am not sure I have even been good enough to earn it.

Is that true? Where do you stand before God? What is your role to play? All I have to say to you is five simple words, “Jesus Christ and Him crucified!” On the cross He proclaimed, it is finished. It is all a free gift! Nothing

left for you to do!

Paul addresses us in our self-reflection.

I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We were, and according to our human nature, too often still are, slaves to impurity and lawlessness. It is why we publicly confess that we are poor, miserable sinners, it is why we beg God's mercy upon us poor, sinful beings.

You are forgiven! It is free gift, given to you. It was purchased for you by Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It is a gift given to you hidden in the cloak of water, it is wrapped up for you in the Word of absolution spoken in your ears, it is concealed in, with, and under the trappings of the bread and wine you eat and drink.

These are the means of grace. They are the earthly wrapping by which God gives you the free gift, the forgiveness of sin. That forgiveness of sins, by which Christ redeemed you and me, lost and condemned people, is how He purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. Dear friends, He paid for this incredible gift for you; not with gold, or silver, or with a Cabela's Club Visa Black card, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.

This free gift of God works in you to love your neighbor. Freed from sin, you are slaves of righteousness – Christ's righteousness that lives within you.

The free gift you have been given is the free gift you give. The love of Christ in you, constrains you to love others, even as God loves you in Christ.

You are freed to love your neighbor. You are God's free gift to your family – to care for them. You are God's free gift to your neighbor – to speak well of them, and defend them when others trash their name and reputation. You are God's free gift to protect your neighbor's property and possessions. You are God's free gift to preserve the chastity of your spouse, or boyfriend, or girlfriend.

You are God's free gift to all those around, to be God's blessings to them, the love of Christ flowing from you to all those around you.

It is a free gift of forgiveness which releases you from your sinful desires to trust yourself above even God.

Your Savior-God invites you to receive the free gift He offers you.

Unwrap the gift with your ears, hear the Word of forgiveness and be filled with peace that passes all understanding.

Find that gift cloaked in the forms of bread and wine. Eat the very flesh of your Savior, drink of His precious blood. Be filled with Him who comes to you to forgive and bless you, that you may be His gift to forgive and bless your neighbor.

God's gift to you today is forgiveness, full and free, purchased by Christ and delivered by His command. Receive it with joy unto life everlasting. Amen.