

No Furloughed Payments!

[Jeremiah 28⁵⁻⁹; Psalm 89^{1-4,15-18}] Romans 6^{12-end}; Matthew 10^{40-end}

*For the wages of sin is death,
but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 6²³]*

As of June 14, 2020, approximately 9.1 million jobs, from 1.1 million different employers were furloughed in the United Kingdom – 23% of the workforce. To employees and employers alike, where the money came from to pay ‘wages’ mattered; but these weren’t wages for a job done, this was a gift (perhaps best not to confuse the matter by exploring how we will all have to pay for the gift).

That distinction as at the heart of what Paul teaches the Roman Christians in his letter: what we earn is destruction, but God’s gift – God’s *free* gift - is life.

We need to work towards a working definition of the one word in this text that causes us difficulty, the word **sin** (*ἁμαρτία*).

- ✘ In Classical Greek the word *ἁμαρτία* meant to miss the mark, to loose, or failure to reach a goal.
- ✘ In the Hebrew Scriptures there is no single word for sin but it is a separation of an individual or a nation from God. God is the only measure of right and wrong and sin-guilt-punishment were taken together because it led to estrangement from God.

The flip side of the coin was the Covenant which was a living out of that Covenant Love (*hēsēd*) between God and his people which on the one side was obedience and the other protection. The idea that is simply a breaking of the law comes much later and doesn’t emphasise enough the aspect of relationship with God.

- ✘ Interestingly, when Jesus uses the word **sin**, it is almost always in the context of the forgiveness of sin: it is a fact, but something that has to be dealt with – opening up the need for repentance so that we can be forgiven. Rather than minimising sin (which we are keen to do) Jesus makes it more serious – he is radical in saying that the intent to sin is

as bad as the act and that to sin in one regard is to sin in every regard. So murder is the same as hatred; adultery the same as lust; indifference the same as neglect; undeclared income (whether in work or on benefits) the same as theft; etc. To attempt to grade sin is to misunderstand what it is and who we are.

- ✘ In Paul’s teaching there are two strands on his teaching on sin:

i) everyone is under the power of sin from which only Jesus can save us; and

ii) the need for Christians to turn away from sin and to live as Christians and to do so after the example of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

- ✘ Is sin just breaking the rules, especially, breaking the 10 Commandments? It can never just be the breaking of rules because sin has to do with God and offending his love, his justice, his perfection and his majesty.

How many times parents and teachers use the word ‘disappoint’ and, sparingly used and correctly applied, the phrase *I am not angry, just disappointed*, hits the mark. Sin is to disappoint God!

Am I a sinner? Certainly! Are you a sinner? Yes!

Being a sinner means that we have earned condemnation and estrangement from God.

Can we change that? No!

Are we ‘doomed’? Yes – unless we take the handout from God. Not a furloughed payment that is temporary, but the gift of eternal life in and from Jesus who dealt with sin on the cross and negated any challenge to that by rising from the dead. We were enslaved to sin – and now, through repentance and faith, we are liberated.

I am good, but not an angel. I do sin, but I am not the devil. I am just a small girl in a big world trying to find someone to love.

(Marilyn Monroe)

Sin doesn’t need to be talked around, it needs to be dealt with, which is why **while we were still sinners, Christ died for us** {Romans 5⁸}!