



**W**hat have you come to believe? God reveals His glorious plan for our salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. God loves you. Jesus died for you. Life is restored for you. Come to believe in Jesus Christ.

## I'VE COME TO BELIEVE • Romans 6:15–23 • Tim McConnell • June 14, 2020

You know, I think I could stop right there. I've come to believe something is wrong. Is there anything more obvious? We are talking about sin today. How it ruptures our relationship with God, wrecks our relationships with one another and wreaks havoc on our world. Something is wrong out there and nobody has any idea how to fix it, do they? A man is killed by a police officer. We could say, let's just look at this case. It was horribly wrong. The officer has been arrested. The wheels of justice are turning. Then why are the streets filled with protestors? Well, this one incident connects to many others contributing to the feeling among a lot of people that they are not being treated equally or fairly, and it is because of the color of their skin. Fair and equitable treatment and protection under the law, that's what we promise our citizens. It's in question for many. Even here in our city.

What do you mean? Well, there are numbers. For example, the black community is 13 percent of the population but 40 percent of the prison system. Are you seriously three times more likely to commit crime when your skin is brown? Or is there bias somewhere? Identical resumes were sent to employers changing only the name. The name says Dante Williams on one and David Williams on the other. Black sounding names were 50 percent less likely to get called. Minorities are charged more for cars, get worse financing with the same credit score, are pulled over more often, shown fewer housing options, and on and on. Add to that the history. My family came over to the U.S. from Northern Ireland and bought land in Pennsylvania in 1723. They came over with money, and that money filtered down. Don't get me wrong, I work for a living! But if any of us were ever in trouble, family could help. What if your great, great grandfather arrived on a slave ship? What if your family was corralled into the bad part of town a generation or two ago, when it still was legal? It changes the whole setup for your family today, and it does run for generations. It's real. There's a problem. That's what people mean when they say "systemic injustice"—it may not be the laws on the books that are bad, but a large social system that pushes against certain groups of people. That's the pressure we see erupt every time a particular event sets it off. Bottom line: something is

wrong and it needs to be fixed.

That's what we see out there on our streets, in Acacia Park, in front of City Hall. Right here on our front porch. Last week as I was recording the message we could hear protests from inside the Sanctuary. There are some out there doing damage and inciting rage. There are some painting every uniformed officer with the same brush, as though the actions of a rotten few are the responsibility of all these selfless, brave men and women who put their lives at risk every day to keep us safe. Please pray for them. They are exhausted. Kissing their kids and walking out into 12-hour, overnight shifts. We are so grateful. Folks, what I'm saying is this—sin taints the whole doggone thing, the whole thing, until we are all so confused, so lost, so frustrated we don't know what to say or where to look. I'm so grateful for selfless servants who put on the uniform and keep us safe. I'm so grateful for a passionate people who see something wrong and long for justice! The longing for justice comes from Jesus. They long for justice because God made us to long for things to be right! It's a great longing. But here's what sin does: it perverts and twists and tangles things all up so badly, we can't find our way out, and can't find our way back together. Can you start with me right here? I've come to believe there is something wrong and it needs to be fixed. Race is just one example.

We're walking through the greatest story ever told. Your story with Jesus is your greatest story. It's the story of Jesus and how He saves your soul. It starts with what we said last week: (1) God loves you. You might not believe that, but it's true. Then today's message: (2) Your sin separates you from God. You might not like that, but I think you know it. (3) Jesus died for your sins. You might find it humbling, but you need and you have a Savior. (4) God has a plan for your life. Believing in Jesus Christ and asking for forgiveness is only the beginning of a life knowing God. The Bible calls it eternal life. Today is the sin talk. You know, when you are giving the sin talk all you have to do is pick up your newspaper. It never fails to provide evidence. Something is wrong. It needs to be fixed. I want you to take time; it might sting, but take time to write down when you knew there was something wrong—in the world, but also in you—the first time

you were aware that your sin was separating you from God and keeping you from the life you wanted. Write it in your journal. As Michael says, maybe we'll just burn that page later. But it is an important point to acknowledge in your story with Jesus.

Romans 6 talks about the problem of sin. Something is wrong. The Bible calls it sin. But if you look at this passage, it's not a list of individual mistakes and wrongdoings is it? No. It's all about the effects of sin. It's about what sin does. What happens when sin is at large. What happens in us, and what happens in the world, when sin has its way instead of the way of Christ. Paul has just explained that our sins are forgiven through Jesus, and we will talk about that next week, but the effects of sin are what we see here. The passage finishes out with a famous verse, so clear, so concise. In fact, this is the verse, Romans 6:23, that I remember giving my life to Christ over at a Young Life camp so many years ago. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Which do you want? The wages of sin or the gift of God?

"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Romans 6:15–16). Immediately we see the Bible does not talk about sin the way we talk about sin. We joke about sin. We trivialize sin. We think of it as a mistake, an ill-advised error, a dalliance, or even a sometimes-necessary way to blow off steam and have a little fun. Right? The Bible does not see sin as a goof-off, or as a list of misdeeds. It's a force to be reckoned with. It's a sickness. It's a power that, once let loose, wreaks havoc. James Choung from InterVarsity tells it this way. God made all things to bless one another, us, creation, the animal kingdom, all of it, to be in this beautiful choreography of blessing one another in harmony with God. But when we get selfish, sin enters in and breaks that harmony. It's all about me. I break the harmony. Choung says, "We wanted to be captains but we found ourselves chained to the oars, the oars of what we need to have or be. We're not captains but slaves. And we've steered ourselves away from love toward

evil." Whatever you submit to becomes your master. Submit to sin, even out of a desire to be your own captain, and you will become its slave.

Sin isn't about one misdeed here or there. It's a power. A bent. It runs through everything and taints it all. A mask can't stop it. Six feet distance won't keep it from infecting you. It's in everything and affects everything. The police are infected. The protestors are infected. The prisoners are infected. The politicians are infected. The preachers are infected. There is something wrong and it needs to be fixed, and the Bible calls it sin. Romans 3:23 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." All. The problem is sin. It separates us from God, and it isn't just out there. It is in here. Our sin separates us from a Holy God. That is the second truth of this greatest story. Holiness and sin cannot intermix. Our sin separates us from God, who, as we saw last week, loves us so very much. But we are separated. Let me read this to you from Fleming Rutledge's book *The Crucifixion*: "To be in sin, biblically speaking, means something very much more consequential than wrongdoing; it means being catastrophically separated from the eternal love of God. It means to be on the other side of an impassible barrier of exclusion from God's heavenly banquet. It means to be helplessly trapped inside one's own worst self, miserably aware of the chasm between the way we are and the way God intends us to be. It means the continuation of the reign of greed, cruelty, rapacity and violence throughout the world. In view of God's nature," she says, "it is impossible that this state of affairs would be allowed to continue forever." That, my friends, is sin. If you have a sense that there is something wrong in this world that needs fixing, you are right! You are absolutely right. And it is inside you too.

How bad is it? It's bad. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). The wages of sin. That word "wages" is usually used for pay given to soldiers. What are you fighting for? What uniform are you wearing? If you fight for the selfishness, the me-focused, the self-centered, you are fighting for sin and earning its wage. It's bad. The further you walk down that road, the harder it is to turn back, the more damage is done the more damage you will

do. "Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness," (Romans 6:19) things just go from bad to worse. It's like stepping into a stream or current, and it pulls you until you take your own step along with it. Now it's as much yours as it is something out there. That's how sin works. "What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!" (Romans 6:21). It's bad.

Sin cannot be overcome by human ability. Learning will not educate it away. Policies cannot govern it away. Protests cannot shout it away. Arrests cannot incarcerate it. It's bad. It infects us all, and we cannot escape from its grasp. But don't let me leave you without hope. There is one thing we can do. We can look for deliverance. "Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness" (Romans 6:19). You used to give in to the worse impulses and get carried away down the track of selfishness and sin, even when you were trying to do better, and it impelled you further away from love. But now, give in to the saving grace of Jesus Christ and be propelled down His way. Leave the law of sin and join in the law of Christ. What you submit to becomes your master. Bend the knee to Jesus. "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life" (Romans 6:22). Submit to Jesus. Start earning His wage instead of the wages of sin, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

We are in a mess here. The greatest leaders in our nation's history have known to lift people's heads together to a vision of a greater community, to lift eyes to the promises and vision of Jesus. Two thousand years later, and we have not yet begun to truly realize the beautiful vision of Jesus Christ. What He has for us, it's inspiring, uplifting, encouraging, uniting! It's a future and a hope, with joy! That's Jesus. There is something wrong. It needs to be fixed. I've come to believe it. We can't find our way out. But Jesus can find His way in. He is our hope.

## STUDY GUIDE

### I'VE COME TO BELIEVE • "Something Is Wrong"

Romans 6:15–23

#### **UP:** Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Slowly, we are learning how to walk in a new atmosphere. Grace is the word. Grace. John opens his gospel saying, "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." Of all the peoples of the world, the children of God must walk in the grace of God if we are to reflect this core attribute of God. This summer the word is grace. In exactly the pace at which the Lord is leading you through COVID-19, may his grace abound to you.

Now is the time to become the greatest artist you have ever been. Continue to create ways to stay relationally and spiritually tethered to your core circle. We need each other. We are gifts to one another! Together, we are the hands and feet of Christ to one another and this city!

Begin your study in prayer. Read and reflect on Romans 6:15–23.

- 1) What is a wage? What are the wages of sin? Sit in this knowledge; what emotions are stirred within you?
- 2) Paul writes, "You have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." Discuss how this theological treasure ought to instruct God's people.
- 3) At the end of verse 19, what does being a "slave to righteousness" lead to?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

4) Spend time this week reflecting and discussing biblically the current cultural conversation around race. Bring in this week's teaching on the reality of sin. As we seek to live on mission, how can we best press in to offering God's justice, mercy and reconciliation to a hurting and fragmented world? Asking the Holy Spirit to guide you, how ought you respond to living in a cultural context that is filled with division and systematic injustice? Create space this week to pray specifically for racial reconciliation and for God to move mightily in this space.

#### **IN:** Connect with Each Other

In our current series you are invited to fill out the journal mailed to you. Host a conversation on sharing your salvation stories with one another. Encourage, exhort, and speak the truth in love to one another. Connect with your core circle and pray with and for one another.