

## "SATAN'S WAGES OR GOD'S GIFT"

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:23.

Paul delighted in using contrasts, and there is no better way of teaching the gospel truths. The scriptures contain many striking contrasts which portray the opposite character and portion of the two great classes of people — the lost and the saved. No contrast is more forceful than that between death and life which we have in our text. This short verse goes from one vast extreme to the other, from the lowest depths of perdition to the highest heights of heaven, from the lowest gulf of the depravity of sin into the presence of the Son of God Himself. Paul has been contrasting the old life and the new; the life of sin and the life of righteousness. The one, the natural life, the uncontrolled following of impulse and desire, leading to darkness and death; the other, the spiritual life, no longer self-centered but God-centered and God-controlled, leading to light, life, liberty, and immortality.

When we note the three pairs of words which are set over against each other in this text, its meaning is all the more obvious. These six words stand out like six great columns in an old temple amid the ruins of an ancient city.

### I. A Contrast Of Masters — Satan And God.

As the Lord declared that no man can serve two masters, the question is: which of the two are we serving? The entire argument concerning the gospel and the salvation of men proceeds upon the fact that there is sin, that it is the transgression of divine law, that it came from Satan, that it has its seed in man's heart and its fruit in man's life, that a perfectly pure, holy, just, and good God hates sin and punishes the doer of it, and that man must turn from it if he is to have God's favor and blessing in this world and the next.

We know that there is sin in the world for we can see it, and we can hear it. To tell us that the world is as it was when it came from the Creator is to insult our understandings. To tell us that we are naturally disposed to what is pure and just and holy and good is to contradict the deepest feelings of our hearts. We know that it is not so and that we often have a hard battle to avoid what is wrong and do what is right.

Sin originated with Satan. It began in the human race with the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It has come around the globe, across the nations and down the centuries until the present hour and has marred the beautiful work of God. Of the multiplied billions who have inhabited the earth, only one person has escaped the taint of sin, and that was Jesus Christ. To Paul sin was the most horrible thing possible. It absorbed within itself everything that was wrong, evil, ugly, hateful to God and injurious to man. It was the fountain from which flowed all the streams of impurity, selfishness, injustice, tyranny, and the like into this wicked world. It was that which made men unlike God as revealed in Jesus, that which opposed the gospel of love and purity and goodness, that which filled the earth with crime, rapine and war and bloodshed, and gave power to the devil.

What is sin? It is a transgression of the law of God, a missing of the mark, a failure to live up to the light we have or a wrong treatment of others. It is a lack of harmony with God, whether in act or state. Sin is any violation of God's will. Sin brands the memory, burdens the conscience, fetters the will, pollutes the mind, darkens the understanding, blasts the character, breaks the heart, wrecks the home, ruins honor, blights hope, and destroys life. It is the enemy of God, the friend of hell, and the destroyer of man.

Behind all wrong-doing there is Satan, the most extensive employer of labor in the world. There is never any unemployment in his workshop. He never lacks workers and he always sees to it that his dupes receive their pay. There is a present installment, and when the sun of mortal life is set there comes the final wages of eternal despair.

Then, there is God. What a gracious master He is! What a great contrast between Satan and God. They are as different as day and night, health and sickness, heaven and hell. He is our Creator, our Lover, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the Originator of salvation, free grace and heaven. The very sound of the word, God makes us think of fatherhood, love, grace, mercy, salvation, kindness, and multiplied blessings. The very sound of the word is music in the ears of sinners, is courage to the hearts of the saved, and is comfort to the hearts of the sorrowing. It should be easy for any person to make the right choice between these two masters -- Satan and God.

## II. A Contrast Of Remuneration -- Wages And Gift.

The word which is translated "wages" is the same as is used in the scripture for a soldier's pay. It signifies the food and pay given by generals to soldiers, and the idea is that sin has its slaves and pays them, that the ruin which follows the life of sin is something which is fairly earned. How solemn is such a thought! If we commit sin we shall earn wages.

Satan pays wages to everyone who works for him. Every sin has its wage, and Satan is the pay-master. His wages are always proportionate -- the more work one does, the more pay he receives. He never gives anything for that is against his nature and disposition. Satan is stingy, covetous, and miserly, but he never gives anything. He simply demands adequate service and then pays liberal wages for it. He has deceived millions into believing that he would give them fame, fortune, health, and happiness if they would only serve him. He bargains with the sinner and promises him life, pleasure, and profit, but the wages that he pays are death, torment, and destruction. If you would care to discover the deception of Satan, just compare his promises and his payments. It would pay you to listen to the statements of men who have served Satan faithfully and who have received their pay checks. King Philip said, "I would to God I had never been born." Tom Paine exclaimed, "Oh, what shall become of my poor soul." Thus the highways of the world are lined with the wrecks of men and women who have toiled for Satan's wages,

Oh! the sin of refusing the gracious offer of salvation which God makes to you in Christ who died on the cross to save you! There is no sin so awful in its character and so terrible in its result as the sin of unbelief. That sin some of us are committing and its wages are death -- death to that peace which man can only know when he has been cleansed of all his sin by the blood of Christ; death to that hope of a happy hereafter which a firm trust in his Saviour alone can bring to him; the death which would be the more terrible because consciously deserved.

In contrast with the wages of Satan is the free gift of God. What a contrast! We work for wages, we take a gift. The first speaks of activity, the second of appropriation. God absolutely refuses to sell salvation. He will present it to a man as a gift, but He will not barter with any man for it. Life is a free gift. This is true of all life -- natural and spiritual. Man transmits life, but he does not give it. Man may destroy life, but he cannot restore it. And because life is such a sacred gift, it should be carefully maintained, profitably used, and never destroyed. As the natural life is a gift, so is the spiritual life. Many have never learned this simple truth. Man cannot create spiritual life, and yet that is what many are trying to do in their approach to God.

The word "charisma," which is translated gift in the text, suggests generosity, spontaneity, and initiative. It is the very essence of the nature of God to give. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." There is no way whereby one can earn, merit, buy, or be worthy of salvation. The only way to secure this greatest of all gifts is to accept it. Salvation is "by grace through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

### III. A Contrast Of Condition -- Death And Life.

Death is the wages of sin, something for which men work, something they earn, something they deserve. The centuries have proved the truth of Paul's contention that the consequences of sin are death. It was death when Adam and Eve were driven from Eden and the mark of mortality was placed on their foreheads. It was death when the flood waters of God's wrath deluged the earth, destroying every living, breathing thing outside of the ark. The wages of sin is death today. It is physical death, mental death, moral death, and spiritual death. It is death to character, to personality, to ambition, to reputation, to love, to influence, to life, to homes, to businesses, to schools and to churches. Legal death is the soul severed from the covenant of God; physical death is the soul severed from the body; spiritual death is the soul severed from the life of God; and eternal death is the soul severed from God forever.

Over against this column of death stands life -- eternal life. Eternal life is God's greatest gift, free on His part, unmerited on ours, bestowed entirely and exclusively "through Jesus Christ our Lord." We may as well think of buying light from the sun, or air from the atmosphere, or water from the well, or minerals from the earth, or fish from the sea, as to think of buying salvation from God at any price. The only way to get salvation is to receive it as a gift; then, enjoy and use it.

In Christ there is absolute and eternal salvation. He came to save. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." That was His mission. For that He left His home in heaven, took upon Himself the circumscribed life of a man and died on the cross. Jesus died to save. In His own precious body, on Calvary's tree, He bore the sins of every soul. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; but the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Jesus lives to save. He walks with us, talks with us, guides us, sustains us, empowers us, enlightens us, ennobles us, enables us, in brief, saves us from the drag, the drain and the drought of the slavery of this world into the joy and the fulness of fellowship with God and service for Him. When Jesus is accepted and enthroned there is always the most abundant, the most joyous, the most exuberant, the most beautiful, and the most satisfactory life.

What a grand, brave, and noble thing it is to be a Christian -- to live in this world knowing that we belong to God, that our bodies are His, our minds are His, our souls are His, and that, by His grace, we are using them to His glory!

In the light of this contrast of masters, of remuneration and of condition, I cannot understand why anybody would choose death through the wages of sin rather than life as the gift of God. Before those of you who are unsaved pass out from these six columns with God's thundering warning, "The wages of sin is death," on one side dinning in your ears and God's startling announcement, "The free gift of God is eternal life," on the other side challenging you, be wise and make the proper choice. There is no better time to make that choice than now. "Choose you this day whom you will serve." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Simply accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, and you will instantly receive real, abundant, joyous, and endless life. Such a life is offered freely to whomsoever will come and receive it.