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DEATH AND LIFE: THE WAGE AND THE GIFT

by Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1886)

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

In the fifth chapter of this Epistle, Paul had shown at considerable length our justification from sin through the righteousness of Jesus Christ our Savior. Our apostle goes on to speak of our sanctification in Christ; that as by the righteousness of Christ we have been delivered from the guilt and penalty of sin, so by the power and life of Christ in us we are delivered from the dominion of sin, so as not to live any longer therein. His object is to show that true servants of God cannot live in sin; that by reason of our newness of life in Christ, it is not possible that we should continue to yield our members instruments unto iniquity. We have passed out of the realm of death. We have come into the domain of life, and, therefore, we must act according to that life. And that life being in its essence pure, holy and heavenly, we must proceed from righteousness unto holiness.

Whilst he is driving at this argument, our apostle incidentally lets fall the text which may be regarded as a Christian proverb, a golden sentence, a divine statement of truth worthy to be written across the sky. As Jesus said of the woman who anointed Him to His burial, “Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her” (Mat 26:13); so I may say, “Whosoever the gospel is preached, there shall this golden sentence, which the apostle has let fall, be repeated as a proof of his clearness in the faith.” Here you have both the essence of the Gospel, and a statement of that misery from which the Gospel delivers all who believe. “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

First, it will be my painful duty to dwell for a while upon *death as the wages of sin*; and then, more joyfully, we shall close our morning’s meditation by considering *eternal life as the gift of God*.

1. Death Is the Wage of Sin.

The apostle has in his mind’s eye the figure of a soldier receiving his pay. Sin, the captain, pays his hired soldiers a dreadful wage. The original word signifies “rations,” or some translate it “stipend.” It means the payment which soldiers receive, put in the plural as wages, because pay can be given in different forms. Soldiers might be paid in meat, or in meal, or in money, or in part by their clothing, or by lands promised when the time of service came to an end. Now that which sin, the grim captain, pays to those who are under him, is comprehended in this terrible term “death.” It is a word as full as it is short. A legion of terrors are found around this “king of terrors.” Death is the rations which sin pays to those who enlist beneath its banner.

Now “sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of the Law of God.” Sin is that evil power which is in the world in rebellion against the good and gracious power of righteousness which sits upon the Throne of God. This evil power of unholiness, untruth, sin, contrariety¹ to the mind of God, holds the great mass of our fellow-men beneath its sway at this hour. The rations with which it rewards the most desperate valour of its champions is death.

To set forth this terrible fact, I shall make a few observations.

a. Death is the natural result of all sin.

First, *death is the natural result of all sin*. When man acts according to God’s order he lives; but when he breaks his Maker’s Laws he wrecks himself, and does that which causes death. The Lord warned Adam thus: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). Dying does not mean ceasing to exist, for Adam did not cease to exist, nor do those who die. The term “death” conveys to me no such idea as that of ceasing to exist, or how could I understand that word in 1 John 3:14: “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death”? How could a man abide in annihilation? A grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies; but it does not cease to be; nay, rather, it bringeth forth much fruit. That Adam did die in the day when he ate of that fruit is certain, or

¹ **contrariety** – the state of being in opposition.

else the Lord spake not the truth. His nature was wrecked and ruined by separation from God, and by a fall from that condition which constitutes the true life of man. When any man commits sin, he dies to holiness and purity. No transgression is venial,² but every sin is mortal, and gendereth death.

The further a man goes in lust and iniquity, the more dead he becomes to purity and holiness. He loses the power to appreciate the beauties of virtue, or to be disgusted with the abominations of vice. Our nature at the very outset has lost that delicacy of perception which comes of healthy life; and as men proceed in unchastity, or injustice, or unbelief, or sin of any kind, they enter deeper and deeper into that awful moral death which is the sure wage of sin. You can sin yourself into an utter deadness of conscience, and that is the first wage of your service of sin!

All desire after God, and all delight in Him, die out where sin reigns. Death is the separation of the soul from God. Alas, this death hath passed upon all men. Can two walk together except they be agreed? Man may continue to believe in the existence of God, but for all practical purposes God to him is really non-existent. The fool hath said in his heart, "No God." He does not desire God; indeed, he wishes there were no God. As for seeking after God, and delighting himself in the Almighty, the sinner knows nothing thereof; his sin has killed him towards all desire for God, or love to Him, or delight in Him. He is to God dead while he liveth. "To be carnally minded is death" (Rom 8:6).

b. Death to spiritual things

As there is through sin a death to God, so is there *a death to all spiritual things*. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1Co 2:14). The man doth not perceive and discern spiritual things, for he is dead to them. Talk to him of the sorrows of the spiritual life, he has never felt them, and he despises them as mean cant.³ Speak to him of the joys of the spiritual life, and you will soon discover that you are casting your pearls before swine. He has never sought such joys, he does not believe in them, and he thinks you a fanatic for talking such nonsense. He is as dead to spiritual realities as a mole is blind to astronomy, or a stone is dead to music. To him it is as though there were neither angel, nor spirit, nor God, nor mercy-seat, nor Christ, nor holiness, nor heaven, nor hell. Giving himself up to the dominion of sin, the sinner receives more and more the result of his sin; even as the apostle says, "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (Jam 1:15). "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal 6:8).

Inasmuch as in holy and spiritual things dwells the highest happiness of our manhood, this man becomes an unhappy being; at first by deprivation of the joy which spiritual life brings with it, and afterwards by suffering the inevitable misery of spiritual death. God has justly appointed that if a man will not be conformed to God he shall not taste of happiness; and if a man will follow after that which is evil, that evil shall of necessity bring with it sorrow and unrest: Romans 2:9. Since sin as naturally brings spiritual death upon men as fire brings burning, death is spoken of as the wages of sin.

c. Sin is visible to all.

I would observe next, that *the killing power of some sins is manifest to all observers*; for it operates upon the body and the mind as well as upon the spirit. This spiritual death of which I speak may not strike some of you with fear. You may think it a small matter, though to me I do confess that hell, however painted, is never so terrible a thing as the death which fills it. Some sins are murderous to a degree which is clear to all. For instance, if a man takes to drunkenness, or if he indulges in lasciviousness,⁴ it is manifest even to the unspiritual that the wages of sin is death. See how by many diseases and deliriums the drunkard destroys himself; he has only to drink hard enough, and his grave will be digged. The horrors which attend upon the filthy lusts of the flesh I will not dare to mention; but many a body rotting above ground shall be my silent witness. All know, or ought to know, the mischief which is occasioned to men and women by the violation of that Law which commands us to be pure. I spoke the other day to an aged brother who feels the result of natural decay, but is in all other respects sound and healthy, and I congratulated him upon retaining so much vigor at such an age. "Yes," he replied, "I owe it to the grace of God that I never abused myself in my younger days, and hence I have a store of strength in my old age." How many, on the contrary, feel the sins of their youth in their bone, and in their flesh. We have all

² **venial** – not causing spiritual death.

³ **mean cant** – inferior, hypocritical talk.

⁴ **lasciviousness** – lust or lewdness.

known that sins of the flesh kill the flesh; and therefore we may infer that sins of the mind kill the mind. Death in any part of our manhood breeds death to the whole. Death drags man down from the power, beauty, and joy of life to the wretched existence, the feebleness, the abominableness of death. The man is no more a man, but the wreck of a man; and his body is not the house of his soul, but a ruin, in which his poor spirit seeks in vain for comfort. A withered heart, a blinded mind, a blasted⁵ being; such is the death which comes of sin. The wage of sin is openly death when it assumes certain forms, and it is always really so, take what form it may.

d. Death for sin is the same for everyone.

Now *this tendency is in every case the same*, “the wages of sin is death” everywhere to everyone. It is so not only where you can see it operating upon the body, but where you cannot see it. I may perhaps startle you when I say that the wages of sin is death even in the man who has eternal life. Sin has the same deadly character to one as to the other, only an antidote is found. You, my Christian brother, cannot fall into sin without its being poison to you, as well as to anybody else; in fact, to you it is more evidently poison than to those hardened to it. If you sin it destroys your joy, your power in prayer, your confidence towards God. If you have spent evenings in frivolity with worldlings, you have felt the deadening influence of their society. What about your prayers at night? You cannot draw nigh unto God. The operation of sin upon your spirit is most injurious to your communion with God. You are like a man who has taken a noxious drug, whose fumes are stupefying the brain, and sending the heart into slumber.

If you, being a child of God, fall into any of the sins which so easily beset you, I am sure you will never find that those sins quicken your grace or increase your faith; but on the contrary, they will work you evil, only evil, and that continually. Sin is deadly to any man and every man, whoever he may be. And were it not for the mighty curative operation which the indwelling Spirit of God is always carrying on upon the believer’s nature, not one of us would survive the deadly effects of even those sins of infirmity and ignorance into which we fall. I wonder not that Paul cried aloud, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24).

If a man takes poison, if it does not absolutely kill him, it injures him, and thus proves its killing tendency. In certain places the air is pestilential,⁶ and though a very healthy man may pass through them and seem none the worse, yet this does not disprove the general deadly tendency of the malarious⁷ district, nor does it even prove that the healthy person is not secretly but really injured by having been there. Evils caused by sin may be too deep to be at once visible, just as the most serious of diseases have their periods of incubation, during which the person affected has no idea of the ill which is hatching within him.

Sin is in itself an unmitigated evil, a root which beareth wormwood. *Sin is death*. Wonder not therefore that the apostle saith, “the wages of sin is death.” As the sparks fly upward, and as the rain falleth to the ground, so sin leads to death. As the river takes its leap in the thundering cataract, so must the stream of sin create the fall of death.

Moreover, when we read of anything being a wage, what does it mean? It means that it is a reward for labor. *Death is sin’s due reward, and it must be paid*. A master employs a man, and it is due to that man that he should receive his wages. If his master did not pay him his wages, it would be an act of gross injustice. Now, if sin did not bring upon man death and misery, it would be an injustice. It is necessary for the very standing of the universe that sin should be punished. It must be so. They that sow must reap. *The sin which hires you must pay you*. Wrong cannot produce right. Iniquity, transgression and sin must, in the nature of things, become darkness, sorrow, misery, death. Every transgression and disobedience must receive its just recompense of reward. There is no use in attempting to alter it so long as God and justice reign. Those who do sin’s work must receive sin’s wage, and “the wages of sin is death.”

e. This death is received now.

Now, observe, that this death, this wage of sin, is in part *received by men now as soldiers receive their rations, day by day*. It is a terrible thing that they do so receive it. The Scripture saith, “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die” (Rom 8:13); such a life is a continued dying. Again, it is written, “She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth” (1Ti 5:6). The wrath of God abideth on him that believeth not on the Son of God; it is there al-

⁵ **blasted** – blighted; withered; destroyed.

⁶ **pestilential** – tending to cause dangerous infectious diseases.

⁷ **malarious** – unwholesome or poisonous air.

ready. I would that men here who are not converted would recollect where they now are—they are “dead in trespasses and sins.” O men, you are not merely sick, but you are “dead in your sins” (Col 2:13)! You are already dead to the highest spiritual enjoyments, and can never know them except by passing from death unto life. You cannot rejoice in God, you cannot know spiritual truth. You cannot taste of spiritual bliss, for your sin deadens you to these things every day that you live in it. To all that which is worthy of a man, to all that which is the true life of manhood, you are dead through sin.

But then a Roman soldier did not enlist merely for his rations; his chief pay often lay in the share of the booty which he received at the end of the war. He expected to share in his captain’s triumph, and to be a partaker in the spoil. *Death is the ultimate wage of sin.* The death which is here intended is the eternal loss and wreckage of the soul; the destruction of all about it that is worth having; the drifting of the guilty being for ever upon the full tide of those evil tendencies which caused his sin, and were further increased by sin. When all comes to all, this is where sin will drive you. It will perpetuate itself, and so for ever kill the soul to God, and goodness, and joy and hope. You will enter upon a world in which the highest enjoyments which even God Himself can provide for men will be revealed, but they will be hidden from your eyes because you will be utterly incapable of knowing, appreciating, and enjoying them. Being under the ever-growing power of sin, it will become more and more a hopeless thing that you should escape from the death which thus settles down upon you.

All the agencies which could have recovered you from the clutch of death have failed to bless you in the life which has come to an end; and now in eternity neither the death of Christ, nor the Holy Ghost, nor the ministry of the Word, will ever again operate upon you. Till your last moments you chose sin, and through eternity you will still choose it; for this death is the reward of your sin. Our Lord Himself said, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment” (Mat 25:46). Then you shall come to know to the full what that awful word “death” really means as God intends it.

Meanwhile, if you would escape this dreadful doom, read your Bible and see how the result of sin is expounded. As our Savior taught, that future death includes within itself the fire which never shall be quenched, the worm that never dieth, the outer darkness, the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, and the departure into everlasting fire which begins with a curse from the lip of love. Alienation from God is death, and can never be otherwise. The Holy Ghost, speaking of the ungodly, saith, “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2Th 1:8-9).

This will be the ultimatum of sin. As surely as rivers run into the sea, so surely must sin run into death; there is no help for it. This hard and impenitent heart heaps up for itself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Sin inevitably pays to all who are its servants the death by which bondage to its power is sealed for ever. O my God, grant us grace to see what a wretched service this is which pays such terrible rations now, and gives such a terrible dividing of the spoil in the end.

f. The misery of sin is that it is earned.

I shall not longer dwell upon it; the subject is so distressing to me; save that I must add a few solemn words. *The misery of the misery of sin is that it is earned.* Every pang that shall fall upon the ungodly either in this life or in the life to come will have this for its sting—that it was duly earned. The sinner may well say, “I worked for this; I laid myself out to earn this I now feel the misery of what I willfully did.” Death is the result of being out of gear with God. But the sinner puts himself into that condition. If men in the world to come could say, “this misery of ours has come upon us by an arbitrary arrangement on the part of God, quite apart from its just results,” then they would derive from that fact some kind of comfort to their conscience, some easement of their biting remorse. But when they will be obliged to own that all their woe was their own choice in choosing sin, and is still their own choice in abiding in sin, this will scourge them indeed. Their sin is their hell. The worm which gnaws at the heart of the lost soul is its own willful hate of God, and love of evil.

O lover of sin, you are under the power of this death—this worse than death! You are dead to God, and dead to holiness, and dead to love, and dead to true happiness; and you have brought this death upon yourself, every part and particle of it. You have chosen that which has made you a wreck and ruin, and that in the teeth of many warnings and admonitions. It must be so, that “the wages of sin is death,” and the terror of that death is that it comes as a wage. Why will you die? Why will you earn death? Why will you choose your own delusions? Have you wickedly determined to prove what outer darkness means? Have you turned your back on God just to see how a man must fare who wars with his Maker? Have not enough dashed themselves to pieces on the rock of sin? Why

will you do the same? If you will do so, this shall be the misery of your misery: that you brought it on yourselves, and that you rejected the one remedy provided of the Lord in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ.

g. It is folly to continue in this way.

Note, next—and I speak with the truest compassion—that *it will be the folly of follies to go on working for such wage*. Hitherto they that have worked for sin have found no pro fit in it. What fruit have you had, any of you, in the things whereof you have cause to be ashamed? Has sin ever brought you any real benefit? Come, now, and let us reason together: up till now has doing wrong ever worked for your health, or your happiness? Are you the better for hate, or greed, or lust, or drink? Has sin ever developed your inner self into anything worth calling life? You know it has not. It has rather destroyed you than improved you, and you know it. Why, then, will you go further in sin? Have you not learned enough already of the deadly nature of evil? Why will you press further into this barren region, which will become more and more a howling wilderness to you as you advance into it? Why will you go where it will be more and more difficult to return? Oh, may God's infinite mercy prevent our being such madmen as to labor in the very fire to earn nothing else but death! God forbid that we should plunge from sin to sin by an inventiveness of rebellion, only to discover more and more what it is to be dead forever to God, and heaven, and hope, and everything that is to be desired.

h. Sin ought to be our great grief.

Let me add, *it ought to be the grief of griefs to each of us that we have sinned*. Oh, misery, to have wrought so long in a service which brings such terrible wages! Though I have known the Lord now these six-and-thirty years, I still regret most deeply every sin that I have ever committed against the perfect Law of the Lord. I take it that repentance is not the temporary act of a certain period of time, but it is the spirit of the whole life after conversion. When we know we are forgiven, we repent all the more that ever we loved that sin which is so abominable unto God, and so evil in every way. Evil seems most evil when we have the clearest sense of divine goodness. Its constant wage is death, and only death; and our lamentation is that we harboured this assassin, yea, even became its slave. Let us humble ourselves before God, because we have played the fool exceedingly by sinning against Him. We have wounded, injured, and destroyed ourselves, and all for nothing—our only wage being a still deeper destruction.

Oh you that have never repented, but are still abiding in this spiritual death, how I long that the voice of Jesus may echo in that sepulcher of sin in which you now lie asleep. May it arouse you, and make you dread the death that never dies! Oh that you may turn over, as it were, in your grave, and begin to moan, “O God, deliver me!” If there be such a thought as that in your soul, I shall hope that the Spirit of God has begun to bring life into your spirit. But what an awful thing it is to have spent all these days—and some of you are getting grey—in only doing that which is your undoing, in giving life to that which is your death! The sole wage that some of you have yet earned is death. Is not this a poor reward for all the risk, labor, and perseverance with which you have served sin? God help you to see your folly, and repent of it.

i. It is a miracle for any sinner to escape.

One thought more ere I leave this point, and that is, *it must certainly be a miracle of miracles if any sinner here does not remain forever beneath the power of sin*. Sin has this mischief about it, that it strikes a man with spiritual paralysis; and how can such a palsied one ward off a further blow? It makes the man dead; and to what purpose do we appeal to him that is dead? I have tried to describe what a dreadful thing it is to be dead to God, and purity, and happiness; but the dead man does not know or care for these things. Our preaching may well be called foolishness, since it is addressed to ears that cannot, or, rather, will not, hear. What a miracle of miracles it is when the divine life comes streaming down into the heart that sin has chilled into death! What a blessedness it is when God interposes and finds a way by which the wage most justly due shall not be paid! It is a necessity, that every transgression should have its recompense; but in the Person of the Lord Jesus such an expiation is made, that sin pays its wage of death to Him who did not earn it, while those who did earn it go free.

O sinner, none can save you but the God Who made you! You, as dead in sin, are in such a state that you will rot into corruption, and go on for ever rotting into a yet fouler and filthier corruption throughout the ages. And none can prevent it but Almighty God Himself. Only one power is capable of affording you the help you need; and that power worketh through the Lord Jesus, Who is at this moment mighty to save. Oh! That the miracle of miracles might be wrought upon you: for if not, there it stands, “The wages of sin is death.” Alas! I fear that sin

will pervert even the ministry of the Word, and make it a savor of death unto death. This is the first teaching of the text, and I pray the Holy Ghost to impress it on every conscience!

And now I am glad to pass into liberty and joy while I speak on the second subject.

2. Eternal Life Is the Gift of God.

Note well the change: death is a *wage*, but life is a *gift*. Sin brings its natural consequences with it; but eternal life is not the purchase of human merit, but the free gift of the love of God. The abounding goodness of the Most High alone grants life to those who are dead by sin. It is with clear intent to teach us the doctrine of the grace of God that the apostle altered the word here from wages to gift. Naturally he would have said, "The wages of sin is death, but the wages of righteousness is eternal life." But he wished to show us that life comes upon quite a different principle from that upon which death comes. In salvation all is of free gift; in damnation everything is of justice and desert. *When a man is lost, he has earned it; when a man is saved, it is given him.*

a. Life imparted by grace through faith

Let us notice, first, that *eternal life is imparted by grace through faith*. When it first enters the soul it comes as God's free gift. The dead cannot earn life; the very supposition is absurd. Eternal life enjoyed on earth comes to us as a gift. "What!" saith one, "do you mean to say that eternal life comes into the soul here?" I say yes, here, or else never. Eternal life must be our possession now; for if we die without it; it will never be our possession in the world to come, which is not the state of probation, but of fixed and settled reward. When the flame of eternal life first drops into a man's heart, it is not as the result of any good works of his which preceded it, for there were none; nor as the result of any feelings of his, for good feelings were not there till the life came. Both good works and good feelings are the fruit of the heavenly life which enters the heart, and makes us conscious of its entrance by working in us repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. "Eternal life is the gift of God in Jesus Christ." By faith we come consciously into Christ. We trust Him, we rest upon Him, we become one with Him, and thus eternal life manifests itself. Has He not said, "I give unto them eternal life" (Joh 10:28); and again, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (Joh 6:47)?

O beloved, you that have been quickened by the Spirit of God, I am sure you trace that first quickening to the grace of God. Whatever your doctrinal views may be, you are all agreed in the experimental acknowledgment that by the grace of God you are what you are. How could you, being dead, give yourself life? How could you, being the slave of sin, set yourself free? But the Lord in mercy visited you as surely as the Lord Jesus Christ visited the tomb of Lazarus. And He spoke with His almighty voice, and bade you come to life, and you arose and came to life at His bidding.

You remember well the change that came upon you. If any man here could have been literally dead, and then could have been made to live, what a wonderful experience his would have been! We should go a long way to hear the story of a man who had been dead, and then was made alive again. But I tell you, his experience, if he could tell it, would not be any more wonderful than our experience as quickened from death in sin. For we have suffered the pains that come through the entrance of life into the soul, and we know the joys which afterwards come of it. We have seen the light that life brings to the spiritual eye; we have felt the emotions that life brings to the quickened heart. We have known the joys which life, and only life, can bring to the entire man. We can tell you something about these things; but if you want to know them to the full, you must feel them for yourselves. "Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7). We bear our witness that eternal life within our spirit is not of our earning, but the gift of God.

Beloved, since we received eternal life, we have gone on to grow, and we have made great advances in the divine life; our little trembling faith has now grown to be full assurance. That zeal of ours which burned so low that we hardly dared to attempt anything for Jesus has now flamed up into full consecration, so that we live to His praise. Whence has this growth come? Is it not still a free gift? Have you received an increase of life by the Law, or has it come to you as the free gift of God? I know what you will say.

And if any of you have so grown in grace that you have become ripe Christians; if any of you have been taught of God so that you can teach others; if any of you have been led by the Holy Spirit so that your sanctification is known unto all men, and you have become saintly men and women; I am sure that your holiness and maturity are still gifts received, and not wages earned. I will put the question to you again. Did this abundant life come to

you by the works of the Law, or by grace through faith which is in Christ Jesus? Your instantaneous answer is, “It is all of grace, in the latter as well as in the earlier stages.” Yes, in every degree the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Yes; and when we get to heaven, and the eternal life shall there be developed as a bud opens into a full-blown rose; when our life shall embrace God’s life, and God’s life shall encompass ours; when we shall be abundantly alive to everything that is holy, divine, heavenly, blessed, and eternally glorious; oh, then we shall confess that our life was all of the grace of God, the free gift of God in Jesus Christ our Lord! I am sure that our heavenly education will only make us know more and more fully that while death is the well-earned wages of sin, eternal life is from beginning to end the gift of infinite grace.

b. The gift of God

Beloved, observe gratefully what a wonderful gift this is—“*the gift of God*”—the gift which Jesus bestows upon every believer. For to “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Joh 1:12-13). How express is our Lord’s statement: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (Joh 3:36)!

c. Life glorious

What a life this is! It must be of a wonderful sort, because it is called “life” *par excellence*,⁸ emphatically “life,” true life, real life, essential life. This does not mean mere existence, as some vainly talk. There never was a greater blunder than to confound life with existence, or death with non-existence; these are two totally different and distinct ideas. The life of man means the existence of man as he ought to exist—in union with God, and consequently in holiness, purity, health, and happiness. Man, as God intended him to be, is man enjoying life; man, as sin makes men, is man abiding in death. All that man can receive of joy and honor the Lord gives to man to constitute life eternal in the world to come. What a life is this! The life that is imparted to us in regeneration is God’s own life, brought into us by the living and incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever. We are akin to God by the new birth, and by loving union with His Son Jesus Christ. What must life mean in God’s sense of it?

d. Life eternal

Moreover, we have life *eternal*, too, never ending. Whatever else may end, this never can. It can neither be killed by temptation, nor destroyed by trial, nor quenched by death, nor worn out by the ages. The gift of the eternal God is eternal life. Those who talk about a man having everlasting life, and losing it, do not know the force of language. If a man has eternal life, it is eternal, and cannot therefore end or be lost. If it be everlasting, it is “everlasting”; to lose it would prove that it was not everlasting. No, if you have eternal life, you can never perish. If God has bestowed it upon you, it will not be recalled, “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom 11:29).

This eternal life is evidently a free gift; for how could any man obtain it in any other way? It is too precious to be bought, too divine to be made by man. If it had to be earned, how could you have earned it? You, I mean, who have already earned death. The wage due to you already was death, and by that wage you were effectually shut out from all possibility of ever earning life. Indeed, the earning of life seems to me to be from the beginning out of the question. It has come to us as a free gift; it could not come in any other way.

e. Life in Jesus

Furthermore, remember that it is life *in Jesus*; the “through” of our version is “in” in the original. We are in everlasting union with the blessed Person of the Son of God, and therefore we live. To be in Christ is a mystery of bliss. The apostle felt that this was an occasion for again rehearsing our blessed Master’s names and titles of honor—“in Jesus Christ our Lord.” I noted to you on a former occasion how, at certain seasons, the various honors and titles of great men are proclaimed by heralds with becoming state, and so here, to the praise of the Lord Jesus, Paul writes His full degree—“eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” He writes at large the august Name before which every knee shall bow, and he links our life therewith.

⁸ *par excellence* – being the best or truest.

Here we read the cheering and precious name of Jesus. By that name He is nearest to man. When He was born into our nature He was named Jesus, “for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21). The life which comes in connection with Him is salvation from sin. In this Savior is life. The next name is “Christ,” or anointed, by which name He is nearest to God, being sent forth and anointed of God to treat with us on God’s behalf. He is the Lord’s Christ, and our Jesus. Next He is called “Our Lord.” Herein lieth the glory of our anointed Savior; we through grace becoming servants participate in the life and glory of our Lord. He reigneth as our Lord, and by His reigning power He shows Himself to be the Lord and giver of life. “All live unto him” (Luk 20:38). Our Lord hath life in Himself, and breathes it into us. What a life this is—a life saved from sin, a life anointed of the Holy Ghost, a life in union with Him Who is Lord of all. This is the life which is peculiarly the gift of God.

3. Applications

Thus I have set forth this doctrine, and I desire to apply it by adding a little more of practical importance.

a. All come now to Christ

First, *let us come at this time, one and all, and receive this divine life as a gift in Christ Jesus*. If any of you have been working for it by going about to establish your own righteousness, I beseech you to end the foolish labor by submitting yourselves to the righteousness of God. If you have been trying to feel so much, or to pray so much, or to mourn so much, forbear from thus offering a price, and come and receive life as a free gift from your God. Pull down the idol of your pride, and humbly sue for pardoning grace on the plea of mercy. *Believe and live*. You are not called upon to earn life, but to receive it; receive it as freely as your lungs take in the air you breathe. If you are dead in sin at this moment, yet the Gospel of life has come nigh unto you. With that Gospel there comes the life-giving wind of the eternal Spirit. He can call you out of your ruin, and wreckage, and death, and make you live. This is His word, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph 5:14).

Will you have it as a gift? If there be any true life in you your answer will be quick and hearty. You will be lost if you do not receive this gift. Your earnings will be paid into your bosom, and dread will be the death which will settle down upon you. The acceptance of a free gift would not be difficult if we were not proud. Accept it—God help you to accept it at once! Even that acceptance will be God’s gift; for the will to live is life; and all true life, from beginning to end, is entirely of the Lord.

b. Abide in Christ

Beloved, have we accepted that free gift of eternal life? *Let us abide in it*. Let us never be tempted to try the law of merit; let us never attempt to live by our earnings. No doubt eternal life is a reward in one sense, but it is always a reward of grace, not a reward of debt. The Lord shall give us a crown of life at last as a reward; but even then we shall confess that He first gave us the work by which the crown was won. The Lord first gives us good works, and then rewards us for them. The labor of love is in itself a gift of love. Grace reigns all along; not only in removing sin, but in working virtue.

c. Live to Christ’s glory

Finally, are we now abiding in eternal life, trusting in the Son of God, and clinging to His skirts? Then *let us live to His glory*. Do we know that because He lives, we shall live also? If so, let us show by our gratitude how greatly we prize this gift. We dwell in a world where death is everywhere manifesting itself in various forms of corruption—therefore let us see from what the Lord has delivered us. Let no man boast in his heart that he is not subject to the vile influences which hold the world in its corruption. Let no pride because of our new life ever cross our spirit. Chase every such thought as that away with detestation. If our life be of grace, there is no room boasting, but much space for soul-humbling. When you walk the streets, and hear the groans of the dead in the form of oaths and blasphemies, thank the Lord that you have been taught a more living language. Think of drunkenness and lust as the worms that are bred of the putridity of the death which comes of sin. You are disgusted and horrified, my brethren; but these things would have been in you also but for the grace of God. We are like living men shut up in a charnel-house; wherever we turn we see the dreary works of death; but all this should make us grateful to the sacred power which has brought us out of death into spiritual life.

d. A word to those outside of Christ

As for others, let us anxiously ask the question—“Can these bones live?” (Eze 37:3). Then let us be obedient to the heavenly vision when the divine word saith to us, “Son of man, prophesy upon these bones” Eze 37:4). We must cherish the faith which will enable us to do this. Moreover, a sight of the universal death of unrenewed nature should drive us to prayer, so that we cry, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live” (Eze 37:9). This prayer being offered, we should live in hopeful expectancy that the Lord will open the graves of His people, and cause them to come forth and live by His Spirit.

Oh for grace to prophesy believingly upon these bones, and say, “O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live” (Eze 37:4-5). Beloved, we shall yet see them stand up an exceeding great army, quickened of the Lord our God. He delights to burst the bonds of death. Resurrection is one of His chief glories. He heralds resurrection work with trumpets, and angels, and a glorious high throne, because He delighteth in it. The living Jehovah rejoices to give life, and especially to give it to the dead. Corruption flies before Him, grave clothes are cut, and sepulchres are broken open.

“I am the resurrection, and the life,” saith Jesus (Joh 11:25); and so He is even at this hour. O God, save this congregation to the praise of the glory of Thy grace, wherein Thou hast made us to live, and to be accepted in Thy well-beloved Son. Amen and Amen.

