**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 26 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE WAGES OF SIN - THE GIFT OF GOD by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Romans 6:23*

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER WE CONSIDERED THE TREMENDOUS declaration of Paul that where sin abounds, grace does more exceedingly abound. Continuing in this chapter, we lay emphasis upon the individual and particular responsibility of that truth and upon the responsibility which it involves. There can be no statement more clear in this regard than that of the text. In these words we have the revelation of the alternative which is offered to every soul who has heard the gospel of the grace which abounds more exceedingly than all the multiplying of sin. To many men, that alternative has never been presented. There are those who sit in darkness and under the shadow of death in lands to which the gospel has never come. They are not in view when we speak of the alternatives of this text. There are multitudes of people in London who are not in view, for we make a great mistake if we imagine that London is evangelized. There are people in the west and in the east who know nothing of the gospel. The alternative of the text is that which is offered to a soul who has heard the gospel, who knows its terms, who is familiar with its message. Such a soul will either yield to sin, serve it, and earn its wages; or it will yield to God, receive His gift, and live. No soul can escape from sin. Sin is inherited. One of the first emphases of the gospel is the emphasis it lays upon the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and where this Lordship is truly understood, it becomes the revelation of sin in the life of the soul. A man may stand, by reason of his early education and training, under Mount Sinai without trembling. No man can come consciously into the presence of Jesus Christ without finding his own guilt and his own unworthiness.

But if this soul who knows the gospel cannot escape from sin, it is equally true that it cannot escape from the gift which is placed at its disposal in the gospel. The gospel is the announcement of the fact that God has placed at the disposal of every soul the gift of eternal life. A man can ultimately escape from either sin or grace, but not from both. He can escape from sin by yielding to grace, or he can put himself outside the operation of grace by yielding to sin.

This presentation of an alternative is according to the perpetual method of God. In this text there are two statements: first, "… the wages of sin is death"; second, "… the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." If I found these two statements entirely separated in my Bible, they would both remain true; but the fact that they are together is in itself more than a suggestion of the love of God. It is in harmony with His perpetual method. In nature every poison has its antidote. When we turn from nature to the literature of revelation, the whole message is concerned with the one poison and the one antidote. It is the literature which reveals the poison; it is the literature that declares the antidote. The Bible is not a Book that gives us any light upon the universe in detail. It tells us enough to compel us forevermore to set the universe to its uttermost bound in relation with the God from Whom it proceeds. The Bible has to do with a world where sin is, and if we want to know what is the nature of the poison that blasts life, we must turn to this literature. Outside it, we shall find the fact of sin recognized and called by all kinds of high-sounding names, but here it is stripped to the nakedness of its actuality. But grace is here also; the antidote is discovered from first to last. The Divine compassion is its supreme message; the Spirit of God brooding over the chaos; the wealth of the love of the Eternal, demanding: "… Adam, ... where art thou?" "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? …" God is the God Who makes a way by which His banished ones may return; He is the God Who so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.

In our consideration of this very old and familiar text, let us first observe the contrast in the alternatives; second, ponder the two courses described; and all that, in order that as God shall help us we may in this very hour face the crisis created.

First, then, as to the contrast. The very reading of the text suggests it, and a closer consideration of it shows how perfect it is. In the first part of the text we have three terms: wages, sin, death. In the second part we have three terms: a gift, God, eternal life. They stand over against each other in each case. Wages - a gift; Sin - God; death - eternal life.

What are wages? Wages are earnings. A man has a right to wages. Wages are the equivalent of work, or at least they ought to be. When a man takes his wages by common courtesy he will say, "Thank you." He really need not do so. He has nothing to thank any one for when he gets his wages. He has earned them. They are the answer in equity and justice to what he has already given in toil and in effort. Wages lie within the realm of law, or order, of accuracy, of justice.

What is a gift? The revisers have accurately translated the one Greek word by two words, for it is a word that emphasizes the freedom of the gift. What then is a free gift? Something that cannot be earned. That which no man can claim as his right. That which cannot be bought. A free gift must be received of grace, of favor, of love. A free gift is in the realm of grace.

Let us take the next stage of contrast: sin and God. In our text the term sin is in some senses qualified by the term wages. Its appeal is made personal and direct by that word. Sin is considered here as an individual act. It is the act of a free agent. It is not merely the missing of the mark; it is wilful missing of the mark. It is not merely failure; it is the choosing of failure. If wages be the payment for work, sin is the work that earns the payment. Here sin is considered as definite volitional choosing of the wrong with all which that involves of guilt and of paralysis.

Now what term is set over against sin? The term God. That is a very arresting fact. Even in the inspired writings in which the words were chosen under the direction of the Spirit of God we always find that when they are dealing with the things of God and Christ, language breaks down. Grace is bigger than literature; grace is mightier than language! In order to make this contrast complete, the lower level of perfect rhetoric and balance and proportion must be violated. It was easy to set the free gift over against the wages, but when we come to sin, the course of action demanding wages, what can be put over against it? No course of action is equal to dealing with sin. Then God is immediately placed in contrast with sin.

Another series of contrasts could be imagined. Let us consider them. It would be possible to say, and it would be a perfectly true thing to say: the wages of sin is death, but the wages of holiness is life. That is a perfectly balanced contrast in its entirety. But therein is no reference to a gift; the first set of terms do not constitute a contrast, but a similarity. The contrast in that statement is between sin and holiness and between death and life. That, however, is not the text. If we go back to primitive man in the garden, we may say that the alternative before him may thus have been stated: the wages of sin is death, but the wages of holiness is life. That is the alternative before a sinless being. It was so in the case of God's second Man, the last Adam, Jesus. In His case the wages of sin would have been death and the wages of holiness life. The text was not written for the sinless; it was written for sinning men. In their case we can understand the declaration, "... the wages of sin is death, …" But what alternative is offered to sinning men? The answer of grace is: "… the … gift of God is eternal life. ..." God puts Himself over against sin. In a man's new endeavor He does not say: the wages of sin is death, and the outcome of reformation shall be life. He does not say: the wages of sin is death, and the outcome of religious observance shall be life. These things are of no use. The man who is in the thought of God is a man who is incapable of reformation and whose religious observances would in themselves be sinful. Therefore, God put Himself over against sin. Sin - God. We are only looking at the terms, but mark the arresting grandeur of the contrast.

So we come to the last contrast in the text: death and eternal life. What is death? It is the end of sin, the righteous end. It is that which makes sin musical. It maintains the harmony of the universe. If in the universe of God, the breaking of a law could be permitted without check or hindrance, then all music would cease, the beauty missed, and the last victory never be won! Death is the necessary end of sin, the only answer to it, the only final harvest that men can reap who sow in sin. Death is that which every man chooses in the moment when he yields himself to sin. By that yielding, he chooses death, disintegration, corruption, ruin. To break law is to create anarchy; to create anarchy is to make hell necessary.

Over against death, our text places eternal life. Death is an end; life is a beginning. But life is more than a beginning; it is the energy for the development of that which is begun; it is the potentiality for the full realization of everything which is begun. The final contrast does not refer to the end only, but to the beginning also; not to the beginning only, but also to the end; not to the beginning and the end alone, but to the whole process of development.

Let us consider the two courses of life presented by this alternative. Here we must take them in the other order. First, we must consider the second part of the text: … the free gift of God is eternal life. .. In our understanding of that, we shall find a new definition of sin which qualifies the first part of the text giving it a new meaning in view of God and His free gift. Sin, when the gospel is known no longer, consists of certain actions; it consists in the attitude of soul which results in these actions. No man who has heard this gospel will ever perish for the sins he has committed. If he perish, it will be because he has refused God's gift, the reception of which would have made him master over the sins that he has committed. Therefore, we must begin with the second part of our text.

Here, then, the first word to be considered is God. God is concerned of as One perfectly knowing the soul; as One Who is unutterably holy so that He cannot overlook sin or clear the guilty while the guilt remains; as One Who is unchangeably loving so that His love alters not when it alteration finds.

This God offers a free gift to the sinning man. That is to say, He offers a gift of His own will, a gift which is the result of His own operation, of His own passion. Moreover, He offers this gift as a free gift without any condition as to character in the person who is to receive it, without any pledge on the part of that person as to the future. God bestows His gift freely upon all such as will receive it. God does not ask that men bring a certificate of character with them. Neither does He ask us to make a pledge and a promise that we will always be good. He asks no such pledge; He asks no such promise. That is the grace of God. I speak in soberness of truth and under emotion when I say I would to God I knew just how to say "grace" as it ought to be said! Out of the very grace of His heart which in operation has involved His own unutterable pain and sorrow, God offers a free gift, and He offers it to a man without any promise whatsoever as to that man's character and without any pledge as to the future.

What, then, is this gift? It is the gift of life, age-abiding life. Our word "eternal," great and wonderful as it is, connotes in our thinking one element only, the element of quantity. The Greek word so translated has in it more than the element of quantity, though that is included; it rather suggests a quality which ensures the quantity. Literally, it is age-abiding life. Our imagination is helped by the writings of our New Testament. We may climb the heights, and watch the ages as they come and go. Glancing back over the few brief ages of the history of this world - for how few and brief they are in comparison with all the ages - we see the age of fellowship with God, the age of conscience, the age of law, and the age of grace that has lasted now for nearly 2000 years. Looking on, we see the age of the reign of Jesus with His saints for a thousand years, and the more wonderful age beyond the millennium, the age of the Kingdom of the Son and the City of God. There the Bible ends its revelation because there is not room to tell all the story. Paul climbed to a great height one day, and he tried to say something and broke down in magnificent poetry in the attempt as he wrote of "The generation of the age of the ages." In the light of that suggestion we see them coming, age after age, out of the fathomless Being of God, profound in mystery, glorious in strength, new ages of which we can but dream in the highest moments of our spiritual illumination. Age-abiding life is life that includes them all, persists through all, harmonizes with all. That is the gift which God gives a man without asking him for a certificate of character or any pledge for tomorrow.

This gift is that of life won out of death, and therefore in its reception the soul is pardoned and cleansed. It is life in union with the risen Lord and ascended Lord, and therefore it is the life of power equal to all the demands that can be made upon it in this and every succeeding age. It is life in fellowship with God; ultimately, therefore, it must prove itself to be a life of complete realization; the perfection of the individual instrument in spirit, mind and body, and the accomplishment of the purposes of God, not merely in the instrument, but through the instrument.

This, then, is one course open to every man and woman who knows the gospel. It begins with God. The soul comes to Him, yields to Him, puts itself in relationship with Him, blunderingly, tremblingly, it may be; not necessarily understanding the doctrines of faith, for no man was ever saved by understanding the doctrines of the faith; not necessarily at the moment accepting all evangelical theology, for that is too vast for immediate understanding, but by yielding to God as He has manifested Himself in Christ. There we begin. When we do so, we receive a free gift in which there are qualities of cleansing, of peace, and of pardon; and as we answer its call and its demands and its guidance through the running days and the multiplying years we are brought by it into the realization of the eternal purpose of God. That is one course open to every soul who knows the gospel.

What is the other? Here we begin at the point where the soul begins. The beginning is sin. Sin is rejection of the gift. I halt to remind you of the careful emphasis which I laid at the beginning on the fact that we are dealing only with those who know the gospel. To such, sin is rejection of God's gift. That is what our Lord meant when in His Paschal discourse He said to His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came He would convince the world of sin, of righteousness, of judgment. Concerning conviction of sin, He said: "Of sin, because they believe not on Me." For the man who has heard the gospel, that is the whole heart of sin, it is the whole reach of it. Included in it are the desires that inspire the rejection. Why do men reject the Lord Christ? Because there are certain desires clamant in their lives which they wish to satisfy and which they know they could not if they yielded to Him. The things thus done in answer to desire are done at last under compulsion. Men cannot cease if they would. All this multiplying of sin grows out of the central sin of the rejection of Christ. Let us state this from the positive side. If this gospel means anything, it means that if a man will yield to God, there is power in the gift of life which He bestows sufficient to break the power of canceled sin. Consequently, sin is the rejection of the remedy.

Where this sin is committed wages follow as the necessary results of the things we decided to do; the harvest that must come from our own sowing; that which is righteously due to us by reason of our choice; that which must come to us as the result of the false effort we are putting into life.

The wages are described by the one word, death. The only wages that sin ever pays are the wages of death. They are paid immediately and continuously. Do not confuse, I pray you, appearances with facts. Someone may say, "Sin pays more than that. Sin pays some men wonderfully!" Sin does pay some men wonderfully to all appearances, but the gains of sin are the destruction of the sinner, always, and that not ultimately merely, but immediately.

The man who imagines that riches gained in the nefarious practice, the blighting traffic by which he is damning others that he himself may get rich, constitute the wages of sin, is blind. He himself is dying and never more so than when he is counting his gains and imagining that they are the wages of sin. The wages of sin is death spiritually; this first. Eyes that cannot see God, ears that cannot hear His voice, the heart that is insensate to His nearness, the life that is untouched by the movements of His grace; this is to be dead in trespasses and sins, and this eventually will mean death, bodily and mentally as well as spiritually; and at last it will mean eternal death, age-abiding separation from God, the second death. The second death is the ending of the possibility of dying, and that is the ultimate in sin.

So we come face to face with the crisis. These two ways of life are before every one of us now. God is close at hand; nearer is He than breathing, closer than hands or feet;

Circling us with hosts of fire.

Hell is nigh, but God is nigher.

Sin is also with us, it is close to us, but God is nearer than sin. Sin is here in the sanctuary. Satan cannot be excluded from the sanctuary. He yet has access to the heavenly places. There will come the day when he shall be cast out finally, but that day is not yet. Sin is here. Sin is bargaining with souls, and souls are bargaining with sin even now, wondering whether or not they shall yield to God or sin.

These are the only alternatives open to every human being who knows the gospel. There is no middle way. Moreover, there is no hindrance either way except the hindrance created by the opposite. I can choose sin if I will. Grace will appeal to me, woo me, warn me, but it will not compel me nor can it. I can sin if I will and take the wages if I will and die if I will. Grace is here. I can yield to grace if I will. Sin will lure me and seek to blind me and traduce the God Who is near, but sin can have no power over me if I will yield to God. Sin cannot compel me. I can yield to God now and receive His gift now and begin to live now. And that, in spite of all the past. I do not want to know the past. I would not have you tell me the past. There is only One ear that ought to hear the confession of sin, and that is the ear of God. Perhaps someone is saying: "The past is indeed with me; the sin of it, the shame of it, the smirch of it, the contamination of it, the horror of it, and the paralysis of it, and my trouble is emphasized by the fact that I once yielded to Christ and walked in power, but I have turned my back upon Him." Even if that be so, God desires to blot it out like a thick cloud and banish that past. He offers His gift without any reference to the past.

But something else must be said. There is no guarantee that this offer will continue. Therefore, the question is immediate; which way of life shall we take? The debate goes on in the human soul more subtlely, more powerfully, more rapidly than any words of the preacher can describe. If this congregation could be seen from the higher heights, as the angels I think see it, what a battleground would be seen as to which way souls shall go.

The preacher's work is done, He must now stand aside, for there can be no final interference between the human soul and its own choice and its own destiny. Where God declines to interfere, who is man that he should endeavor so to do? Sometimes the preacher closes the Sunday night's service and goes away into quietness. He thinks of his congregation again; the congregation reverent, kind in their attention; then dispersing, passing along the streets in all directions, going into houses and closing doors. Such different places, so many different circumstances, such different consciousnesses, and yet, that whole congregation so scattered has been united by the service, all having taken action in the central dignity of their own humanity, all having made a choice, all having made a decision. If they are united thus, they are also divided into two companies: those who have accepted the gift and live; those who have sinned and are dying while they live. How shall we go? May God help us in the hour of our decision.