

It has often been said that a text without a context is only a pretext. That is not always true but it is often true. The Bible is a book of continuous messages from God and naturally each part has to be interpreted in the light of the adjoining parts and of the book as a whole. Yet there are occasional verses in the Scripture which like a gem gather together the light from many different areas and sum up the teaching of many parts of the Scripture.

So this morning I would like to look with you at one of those wonderful verses, a verse which summarizes so much that is vital in the Scripture. The verse to which I call your attention is Romans 6:23. "For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord."

The first thing I'd like to look at in this verse is the fact it presents an alternative: The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. All life is made up of choices. We constantly have to choose. Shall I go this way or that way? Shall I lie in bed another hour or shall I get up and be on time for class? We always have choices all through life. But this verse shows an important fact about our choices, that our choices are not exact equivalents. You simply do not choose to lie in bed another hour or to get up. There are results that follow whichever you choose.

You may think you would like to live in a certain place. You like the climate of it, but maybe there are other things you don't like about it. You pick another place you would like to live, and there are many things there you like but you don't like the climate. You have to choose between alternatives and the alternatives are not equal.

I think that fact is brought out in this verse. You have on the one hand the wages of sin is death. On the other hand the gift of God is eternal life. You have alternatives that differ from each other. You can earn the wages and have the results. Or you can receive the gift. Every man is faced with these alternatives.

So I think the first thing that is worth noticing is this nature of alternatives, the nature of choices we have to make. When I graduated from college they had a very fine soloist sing a song. The song was "I am the master of my fate . . ." "I am the captain of my soul." Poor Henley went through a great deal of sickness and misery in his life. I think he was whistling through his teeth and trying to pretend to himself that he was the master of his fate and captain of his life. None of us are. We have to select in the various decisions that come before us, and here is the most vital decision in all life.

Now a second thing we notice about this verse is the equality of sin. I don't know if that's a very good term to express what I want to express. But you notice it doesn't say, "the wages of murder is death." Nor, "the wages of adultery is death." He says the wages of sin, not sins, not a particular sin but the wages of sin. Sin is something that God sees without a great deal of gradation. We are either sinners or he sees us through Jesus Christ as righteous. There are distinctions and we have to make distinctions in our life. But in the end it comes down to this: Will you receive the wages of sin, or can you receive the gift of God? which is eternal life. It is necessary that human courts recognize gradations, but it is impossible that they be absolutely just in it. One thing that disgusts me repeatedly, and yet there is no way around it so far as human courts is concerned, is this: A man plunges a knife into someone else. The other man is very seriously injured and they take him