

Romans: The Wages of Sin and the Consequences of Sin
4-16-17 PM

As we have been studying through the book of Romans, one of the difficult points that we have seen relates to the nature of sin. We have already discussed issues such as original sin, total depravity and sinful nature. We have seen that these are not biblical doctrines, but doctrines created by men illegitimately. But there are still questions that are not easily answer. Is sin a natural part to man, or is it external? Does man have a sinful nature, and if not, why do all men sin? More specifically, why does Paul say that all men sin (Romans 3:23) and therefore each man will receive the penalty of his own sin (Romans 6:23), but then again in Romans 5:18-19 speak about the universal impact of Adam's sin?

This seeming contradiction is one seen in other places. Ezekiel 18 spends the entire chapter speaking to the nature of men and sin. God makes it clear that NO ONE is punished (by death, Rom. 6:23) for another person's sins. But in Exodus 20:5 God says that He will visit iniquity on the third and fourth generation of a sinner. Is this a contradiction? God saying that He does NOT punish children for their parent's sins, and yet seemingly saying just that elsewhere? These passages speak to distinction between the wages of sin and the consequences of sin.

Using these terms (wages and consequences) is a bit of an artificial construction, as these terms are not always used consistently of these ideas. But that there is a distinction in the way sin affects us is an important and clear idea. First, let us break out the idea of the difference between wages and consequences:

A WAGE (Matthew 20:1-15)	A CONSEQUENCE (Jeremiah 15:4)
Something deserved or earned	Sometimes it is earned and equal to the action
Something received at a conclusion	May be received at any time
Something one person receives	May not be received at all
Something absolute or pre-determined	May be received by others/many

When a person works at a job, they do so for a wage. Only the worker receives the wage; they receive it at the end of the work cycle. It is not random (i.e. like a game of chance), but pre-determined, perhaps agreed upon. At the same time, there may be consequences to the job. Maybe good, such as benefits or perks. Or perhaps they are bad, such as side effects from exposure to work hazards, or other issues. All employees receive a wage, but the side effects are not equal.

So it is with sin. Let us consider that in Scripture there are two types of impact that are created by sin.

THE WAGE OF SIN (ONE) (Colossians 3:25)	THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN (MULTIPLE) (Jeremiah 15:4)
Deserved – Luke 16:25	May not be deserved – 2 Samuel 12:14
Given at the end judgment – Romans 2:5	Could happen anytime in life – 2 Samuel 12:11
Only one person receives – Romans 1:27	Possibly affects many – Numbers 16:32
Guaranteed – Hebrews 12:25	It may not happen – Jonah 3:10
Understood to be eternal death – Revelation 21:8	Cannot be certain what it will be – Acts 5:1-5

Now that we see that there are two ways sin impacts us. One way is the eternal way, which is not during this life; the other is the way sin impacts us in this life. They are not the same; just because Korah was swallowed up by the earth or the men of Jericho died in destruction does not mean they will not be held accountable eternally for the wages of sin. At the same time, someone may suffer the consequences of sin, but if it is not their sin (consider the household of Korah or the children of Jericho), they may not suffer the wages of sin.

There are several examples in Scripture where the two distinct natures of sin are seen with one sin. First, consider Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3. There they are told in 2:17 that the day they ate of the tree of knowledge they would die. This is understood to mean the wages of sin, since they did not physically die that day. Once they had sinned, God then says "*Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever*" therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken (Genesis 3:22-23). This is the consequence of their sin. All of their descendants received this consequence, and it is this consequence referred to in Romans 5:18-19. We do not receive the wages of Adam's sin (which is the doctrine of Original Sin), but we do receive the consequences.

Another example (already mentioned briefly) is that of David's sin with Bathsheba. When confronted by Nathan the prophet, David repented of his sin. Nathan then tells him "*Jehovah has put away your sin; you shall not die*" (2 Samuel 12:13). However, there were still consequences to sin, and one of them was that his child would die. "*However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die*" (2 Samuel 12:14). His child was not receiving the wages of sin (which were removed by repentance), but the consequences.

Why are there wages of sin? God cannot be just unless He brings a penalty for sin. He also cannot bring a reward for righteousness. This is explained in Romans 2:6-8. God's desire is that men should be saved and join Him; therefore there must be a wage for sin and a wage for righteousness. The wages of sin are present because of the Just nature of God.

The consequences of sin are present because of the mercy and benevolence of God. While that is not apparent at first, consider that the whole purpose of consequences is to demonstrate to men the character of sin. Paul points out in Romans 2:14-15 that men can naturally know the law; this is only true because of the consequences of sin. God created and permits (and even causes) consequences of sin to keep men from sinning and receiving the wages of sin. God desires that men should fear those wages and seek him. The consequences of sin are present to save us, like a child being disciplined for walking onto a street. They are present because of the Mercy of God.

Understanding this distinction in the way sin impacts our lives leads us to some important conclusions.

CONCLUSION 1: Consequences may be permanent; there may be nothing we can do to remove them. Even repenting of our sins may not end them, although sometimes it can. It is important to understand that when we suffer from the consequences of sin we do not believe that this is God punishing us.

CONCLUSION 2: The wages of sin once received are inescapable, but in this life it is possible that we can (by obedience to the Gospel) avoid them. For the believer, it is repentance that avoids the wages of sin, and for the non-Christian it is the obedience to the Gospel that saves them from the wages of sin. This gives us the wages of righteousness; not our righteousness, but Christ's.

CONCLUSION 3: There are also wages and consequences to righteousness. Obedience to the covenant of Christ imputes His righteous wage on us (Romans 6:23). At the same time, while living in Christ we receive the consequences of righteousness, perhaps summarized as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5).