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THE STING OF DEATH

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"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law," I Corinthians 15:56, 57.

The Bible is a solemn book. It deals with serious matters. It faces the sternest facts. It gives information upon eternal issues. It tells the truth about God and man. It describes God as Creator, Ruler, Preserver, and Saviour. It presents God as holy and almighty. It sets him forth as the supreme and solitary Sovereign of this vast universe. It describes man as a sinner and rebel before God and in terrible danger of eternal punishment.

The Bible is also a happy book. It tells of glorious things. It contains the grandest news ever to fall on human ears. It tells of salvation from all the dangerous effects of sin. It tells of One who is mighty to save. It traces the believer from nature to grace and from the grave to glory.

My text has several words of solemn importance: law, sin and death; and yet it concludes with a note of victory. Law, sin, and death seem to spell defeat and doom, and they would were it not for a certain person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our text ends with a paean of victory. It is a shout of triumph as Paul with the eye of faith sees redeemed sinners rising from their graves in bodies fashioned like unto the glorious body of Christ. And in holy ecstasy he exclaims: *"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"* He then faces the facts of sin and death and gives thanks to God for victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Consider:

1. **The sting of death.** Death is spoken of as venomous creatures inflicting fatal wounds. Now what is the sting of death? What makes death so terrible to some people?

(a) The sting of death is not physical suffering. If physical pain were the sting of death, the nurse or physician would be able to pull it with a hypodermic needle. Medical science has done wonders in alleviating bodily pain. But medical men can't pull the sting of death. Beasts die physically, but there is no sting of death to them. They have no moral responsibility before God.

(b) Nor is the sting of death mental agony. Some of the most wicked men have died in peace of mind. Sir William Osler, a great physician, studied five hundred deaths. Only eleven showed any mental apprehension, and only two any signs of terror. Dr. Alfred Worcester of Harvard says that "Death is almost always preceded by a perfect willingness to die. I have never seen it otherwise. It is always easy at the last; however great the previous pain."

(c) The sting of death is sin--unforgiven sin that has to be accounted for after death. *"The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law,"* I Corinthians 15:57. The sinner is not through with his sins when he dies. *"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,"* Hebrews 9:27. Irvin Cobb used to plead with the public to let a man's sins die with him. Well, we may, but God will not. When a lost man dies, the voice of justice cries, *"Seal up the fountain of blood, stop the stream of forgiveness; let him that is unrighteous be unrighteous still and let him that is filthy be filthy still,"* Revelation 22:11. The sinner

who dies without a Saviour--without Christ--is sure to experience the words of Dante, "All hope abandon, ye who enter here." Next consider:

2. **The strength of sin.** What is it that makes sin such a dangerous thing? What is it that gives sin its damning power? Our text gives answer: *"The strength of sin is the law."* God is a Lawgiver and sin is violation of His holy law. The violation of God's law is the only real source of danger for any person. Human laws can only inflict temporary punishment of the lawbreaker. But God's law inflicts eternal punishment on the sinner. The law gives sin its damning power because nobody has kept the law of God. *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,"* Romans 3:23.

(a) The spirituality of the law makes one hopeless under the law. The law of God not only forbids outward acts, it also forbids sinful thoughts, imaginations and desires. The law of God forbids hatred in the heart as well as murder by the hand. It considers a lustful look as adultery. It forbids covetousness as well as theft.

(b) The inflexibility of the law makes the sinner hopeless. The law of God can't be bent or lowered to meet human imperfection. The law will not abate one tittle of its stern demands. There is no provision for pardon in the Ten Commandments. He who hopes to live before God under the law must live as good as

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"BUT GOD" or THE CHRISTIAN GOD'S HANDIWORK

BY: C. D. COLE

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them," Ephesians 2:10.

A criminal, while in jail in Miami some years ago, read of a brain operation designed to destroy criminal tendencies. He finally persuaded the Criminal Court Judge to let him undergo such an operation. He said he hoped he would live through the dangerous surgery, become a new man and that a sympathetic society would give him another chance.

So, at Coral Gables, Florida, surgeons bored two holes through his skull and cut the pre-frontal lobe from the rest of his brain, hoping to sever the motivation for his criminal propensities. Psychiatrists and attorneys planned to get permission from the court to place him with a good family, get him a good job, and give the psychologists six months to continue his moral training. In this way, they hoped to make a saint out of a criminal. But the criminal walked out of the hospital and escaped and left a trail of cold checks from Kansas City to Massachusetts.

Foolish men to think that any physical operation could cure a sinful soul! Sin cannot be eradicated by cutting on the human body for the simple reason that sin does not belong to the body but to the soul. *"Every sin that a man commits is without the body,"* I Corinthians 6:18.

Man is a moral being--he is a soul dwelling in the body--and the soul is the source of sin. As a moral being, he has a heart and mind altogether distinct from the physical organs of heart and brain. That which causes man to sin is something that the surgeons cannot cut out. The body is used as an instrument of sin and it is also the victim of certain sins, but sin does not originate with any physical organ. Surgeons cannot save a soul.

My text is a phrase of two words: "But God." And this phrase stands between the description of what men are by nature and what they become by grace. It explains our salvation. Salvation is not of ourselves; it did not come out of us; it came from God. It is the result of the mercy of God and this mercy was because of His great love. And this love as a gracious love became a power--an operating principle--in us. Paul said, *"I persecuted the church of God, But by the grace of God I am what I am."*

"But God." This is the hope of every sinner--no sinner can make of himself a saint. This is the hope of every preacher. We may preach and pray but God must work. The saved person is God's handiwork. Instead of being saved by our own works, we are ourselves God's work. *"We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works."*

We have in the scripture before us:

1. **Man without God** - Man in his natural and unregenerate state.

(a) He is dead. This is not physical death; it is moral death. He is dead to God and holiness because he is separated from God, the source of all that is good and holy.

(b) He is controlled by Satan. The lost man is under the dominion of Satan, who is called the god of this world. The lost man has the same boss that the demons have. The prince of the power of the air--the leader of the fallen angels who have their dwelling in the air above us--is the same spirit that works in the sons of disobedience.

(c) In his conduct he fulfills the desires of the flesh and of the carnal mind and is by nature a child of wrath. This means he is exposed to the wrath of God. The sinner is in a hopeless and desperate condition unless God works graciously and mightily.

2. **Man as a saved person.**

(a) He is said to be alive. He lives unto God. He is brought to God who is the source of life.

(b) In his standing he is raised and seated with Christ in the heavens.

3. **The saved man is God's handiwork.** "But God" spells the difference between man as saved and as lost. Man is a guilty sinner but God, for Christ's sake, forgives him. Man is a filthy sinner but God, for Christ's sake, begins a good work in him. Man, as a sinner, is fitted to destruction but God, for Christ's sake, fits him for heaven. Man in his natural state is blind to the gospel but God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness shines in his heart to give him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

(a) The source of salvation is grace. *"By grace are ye saved."* Salvation is not something earned by the sinner; it is something given by God without money and without price.

(b) The process of salvation is faith. *"By grace are ye saved through faith."* Salvation is not by our own works; it is through trust in the works of another--Jesus Christ.

(c) The result of salvation is good works. We are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Don't claim to be saved if you have no interest in good works.

The surgeons operated on that criminal without any good results, but when God operates on the moral heart of the sinner, there will be good results.

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Jesus Christ. Law represents justice. The law says *"obey and live; sin and die."* The law says, *"The wages of sin is death."* The law links sin and punishment; not sin and mercy. Law exacts punishment for every sin. It never remits a farthing of the sin debt. First, the sinner comes to the house of God's justice to be weighed. Justice holds a pair of scales and puts a certain sin into the balances. The sinner cries, "Can't you forget that sin?" "No," thunders justice, "I must enforce the law." Justice puts another sin into the balances, and the sinner cries again, "Can't you overlook that?" "No," replies justice, "my business is to see that the law is enforced." Then the sinner pleads that there are many sins he has never committed. Justice says, "I will be fair with you, I will not punish you for what you haven't done. I punish only for the sins you have committed." Justice puts another sin in the balances and the sinner cries out for mercy. But justice replies: "I must enforce the law; you are at the wrong place if you wish mercy. Mercy has her own place; mercy is at the house of Jesus Christ. Go to Christ if you expect mercy." Justice goes on to say that he must exact penalty for sin, and that if the sinner can find a substitute to take his place under the law, he will exact the penalty from that substitute. *"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them,"* Galatians 3:10. Under the law every sinner is hopeless because he has not and cannot keep the holy law of God. The only hope for any sinner is in a Surety and Substitute, and Jesus Christ is both of these. *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree,"* Galatians 3:13. *"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,"* II Corinthians 5:21.

If any man thinks he can keep the law of God and stand in his own record in the day of judgment--if he thinks he

can be saved by his own character and conduct, then let him build his pyramid of air, let him build his house of bubbles, and he will find himself in Hell in spite of all his efforts.

3. **Victory through Christ.** The more we talk about law and sin, the more hopeless our situation becomes. But thanks be to God who giveth us victory through Jesus Christ. If I want victory over law and sin and death, I must look to Jesus Christ. If I want peace with God, I must look to Jesus Christ who made peace by the blood of His cross. If I want forgiveness, I must look to Jesus Christ *"in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace."* The sting of death is unforgiven sin, but sin can be forgiven on the ground of the redemptive death of Christ.

Now if the sinner is in danger from violated law--the law all have violated; then salvation is through satisfied law. The law of God cannot be pushed aside and ignored. The law has to be reckoned with in salvation. Divine justice will see to it that the law of God is enforced and the penalty of sin paid. Now the question is: "How can the law be satisfied? And who is able to satisfy the law and live?" There are two ways and two places the law is satisfied: One is at Calvary, the other is in Hell.

The sinner can satisfy the law by suffering eternal punishment in Hell. This will be the second death in the lake of fire. And this will be defeat and not victory.

The other way to satisfy the law is for the sinner's Surety and Saviour to satisfy it. This is what Christ has done for His people. Christ satisfied the law by His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. In Hebrews 7:22, Jesus is called the Surety of the better covenant. Everybody knows that a surety pays the debts of another person--pays the debts the surety did not incur. Jesus incurred no debt to the law of God, for He kept it perfectly. He could pay our sin debt because He had no sin of His own. And on the cross, He was bearing our sin debt in His own body. *"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"* Romans

8:32. Christ died as our Substitute--he suffered what we would suffer eternally in Hell. He saved us by satisfying the law, and He satisfied the law by keeping it for himself and by suffering its penalty for us. Christ obeyed the law for our salvation; we obey the gospel to be saved. The gospel is about what Christ has done and we obey it when we trust what He did at Calvary.

4. **Conclusion.** The lost man's sinful condition is greatly aggravated by his refusal to trust Jesus Christ and Him alone for salvation. *"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,"* John 3:36.

WHAT IS FAITH?

*Faith is not trying,
it is trusting.
Faith is not struggling,
it is clinging.
Faith is not fighting,
it is the victory.
Faith is not an attainment,
it is something we obtain.
Faith is not self-sufficiency,
it is dependency upon
another, even Christ.
Faith is not pride,
it is humility.
Faith is not fear,
it is love.
Faith is not anchored
in self, it is anchored in Christ.
Faith is not self-produced,
it is born of God,
For whatsoever is born of
God overcometh the world,
and this is the victory
that overcometh the world,
even our faith.*