

Romans 6:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

For the wages of sin is death—ta gar opsōnia tēs hamartias thanatos (τὰ γὰρ ὀψώνια τῆς ἁμαρτίας θάνατος). Opsōnia (ὀψώνια, wages) was military pay, earned compensation. Sin pays its 'employees' exactly what they deserve: death. The genitive tēs hamartias (of sin) indicates sin as employer; death is the earned wage. This is justice: sin merits death. Thanatos (θάνατος, death) encompasses spiritual death (separation from God now), physical death (mortality), and eternal death (hell, second death). The wage is earned, deserved, and paid in full.

But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord—to de charisma tou theou zōē aiōnios en Christō Iēsou tō kyriō hēmōn (τὸ δὲ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ ζωῇ αἰώνιος ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν). Sharp contrast: opsōnia (wages, earned) vs. charisma (χάρισμα, gift, unearned). Eternal life isn't earned but graciously given. En Christō Iēsou (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, in Christ Jesus)—union with Christ is the sphere where this gift exists; apart from Christ, no eternal life. The full title emphasizes His mediatorial role: **Jesus** (Savior), **Christ** (Messiah), **our Lord** (sovereign Master). This verse summarizes Romans 6 and the gospel: sin earns death; grace gives life through Christ. The two slaveries have opposite compensations: wages (death) vs. gift (life).

Historical Context

Roman soldiers understood wages—regular pay (stipendium) and bonuses (donativum). Paul uses opsōnia (wages) to emphasize sin's 'earned' consequence.

Gift-giving in Roman culture involved patronage (benefaction expecting loyalty/gratitude), but Paul's charisma (gift of grace) is freely given without strings. Jewish theology taught that sin brings death (Genesis 2:17, Ezekiel 18:20); Paul affirms this but contrasts it with God's gift of life in Christ. The phrase 'in Christ Jesus' became central to Pauline theology—all salvation blessings exist in union with Christ, not as independent transactions.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding eternal life as 'gift' rather than 'wages' transform your approach to obedience and assurance?
2. What 'wages' of sin have you experienced that confirm sin's deadly payment system?
3. How does the full title 'Jesus Christ our Lord' shape your understanding of how eternal life is given?

Interlinear Text

τὰ	γὰρ	ὁψώνια	τῆς	ἀμαρτίας	θάνατος	τὸ	δὲ	χάρισμα
G3588	For	the wages	G3588	of sin	is death	G3588	but	the gift
	G1063	G3800		G266	G2288		G1161	G5486

τοῦ	θεοῦ	ζωῇ	αἰώνιος	ἐν	Χριστῷ	Ἰησοῦ	τῷ	κυρίῳ
G3588	of God	life	is eternal	through	Christ	Jesus	G3588	Lord
	G2316	G2222	G166	G1722	G5547	G2424		G2962

ἡμῶν
our
G2257

Additional Cross-References

John 3:36 (Eternal Life): 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.

Romans 5:12 (Sin): Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

James 1:15 (Sin): Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

John 6:40 (Eternal Life): And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Matthew 25:46 (Eternal Life): And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Ezekiel 18:20 (Sin): The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

Ezekiel 18:4 (Sin): Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

John 5:24 (Eternal Life): Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Romans 5:21 (Sin): That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 2:7 (Eternal Life): To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: