

# The Vaccine That Leads to Life Eternal

Since the coronavirus pandemic hit our state, nation, and world months ago, I have been burdened by a conviction that has both plagued and inspired me. As governmental stay-at-home orders were implemented, hand sanitizer became the hottest commodity on the market, and ordinary people began appearing in public wearing latex gloves and surgical masks to protect themselves and others from transmission of COVID-19, a profound question dawned on me that I just haven't been able to shake: "What if I—what if we—took sin as seriously as we are taking this potentially deadly virus? And if we did, how would our lives and our world be different?"

The Apostle Paul in the first part of Romans 6:23 declares, "For the wages of sin is death ..." So why is it that we treat COVID-19 with such regard and extraordinary measures but are so often ambivalent when it comes to the effect of sin in our lives? (Believe me, I am speaking as much to myself as anyone.)

The Reverend Billy Graham expressed it this way in his column Answers:

"What is it about sin that you don't understand? Let me suggest two things. First, you don't understand sin's depth. Sin is like a deadly disease that touches everything we do and everything we are. [Sound familiar?] Yes, you may be a good and moral person whose life isn't marred by obvious sins. But what about your inner thoughts and motives? What about your pride? What about the things you should be doing but fail to do—the people you ought to help, the person who needs a kind word, the person you ought to be praying for but don't?"

Ouch—now that hits close to home! Do we really consider sin this deeply? Each day, do we wake up and don our "gloves" and "masks" in an effort to shield ourselves from this "deadly disease" that is so prevalent in our lives? Do we carry a bottle of "spiritual sanitizer" for those times when we get too close or make contact with it? Do we honestly live into the reality that just as COVID-19 can result in physical death, unrepentant sin can result in spiritual death and, ultimately, eternal separation from God? I humbly admit that far too often, I do not.

Rev. Graham continues,

"But second, you don't understand sin's cost. Sin is so serious that it cost God's own Son, Jesus Christ, His very life. If God takes sin that seriously, shouldn't we as well?"

It is likely that this grasp of the depth and cost of sin led Rev. Graham to famously avoid even being alone on an elevator with a woman other than his wife in order to escape the mere appearance of impropriety.

But we know that neither gloves nor masks nor sanitizers nor methods of avoidance can inoculate us from sin and its mortal penalty. It is only the gracious and atoning sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the cross that can.

Rev. Graham notes, "The Bible says, 'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us' (1 John 3:16)."

The second part of Romans 6:23 tells us "... but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rev. Graham goes on to point out how we can receive the gift of eternal life: "Have you ever invited Jesus Christ to come into your life, to forgive you and cleanse you and change you from within?"

While talking about the gift of eternal life in Romans 6, Paul also admonishes that God's grace and Jesus' atoning sacrifice do not give us license to go on sinning. "By no means!" Paul exclaims. Instead, he says, "Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness."

Now that is a weighty command, but one that is attainable if we surrender ourselves to the will and power of God in our lives. Consider the impact on our present culture if instruments of wickedness were turned into instruments of righteousness. Racism and hatred would be eliminated, economic distress would be curtailed, political divisions would be healed, and, yes, sickness would diminish. Praise be to God that Jesus Christ offers the cure—the only cure—for the wages of sin, even as scientists, biologists, and chemists aggressively pursue a vaccine for COVID-19.

So, as we venture out into this "new normal" of a world enmeshed in a global pandemic with gloves, masks, and bottles of sanitizer, let us (myself included) consider the depth and cost of sin in God's economy. May we take sin seriously, seek to be instruments of righteousness and grace in our communities, and love our neighbors as Jesus Christ first loved us. 🙏



John L. Rustin is President of the North Carolina Family Policy Council