

Death – An Enemy Vanquished

From one viewpoint death is the most natural of things.

Hebrews 9:27 [NIV] *“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,”*

We are all destined to die **once**.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 [NIV] *“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and **a time to die**, a time to plant and a time to uproot,”*

Part of human life.

From another viewpoint it is the most unnatural of things.

Romans 6:23 [NIV] *“For the **wages of sin is death**, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

The penalty for sin, and as such is to be feared.

1 Corinthians 15:26 [NIV] *“The last **enemy to be destroyed is death**.”*

Looked on as an enemy of humans.

Both of these views are expressed in God’s Christian Bible, and **neither should be overlooked**.

Physical Death

Death seems to be necessary for physical bodies constituted as ours are, that gradually decays.

Yet the Bible speaks of death as the result of sin.

Genesis 2:17 [NIV] *“but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”*

God warned Adam that he would die if he ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Yet when we look more closely at the matter, Adam did **not** die physically on the day he disobeyed God’s command.

Romans 5:12 [NIV] *“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way **death came to all men, because all sinned**”*

Death entered the world of humans through the sin of Adam.

In Romans chapters five and six Paul is contrasting the death that came about through Adam’s sin with the life that Christ brings to all humanity.

The possession of eternal life through Christ does **not** cancel out physical death.

Eternal life is a spiritual state, **not** a physical event.

The inference we can draw from all of this is that **death which is the result of sin is more than physical body death**.

The mortality that was the result of Adam's sin, has a penalty that includes both physical and spiritual aspects.

Death is something that involves the whole person, the body, mind and spirit.

Humans can die totally as a physical and spiritual being, and the Bible does not put a sharp line of demarcation between the two aspects.

Physical death then is a fit symbol of, and expression of the deeper death that sin inevitably brings.

Spiritual Death

Death is a divine penalty, as we have read in **Romans 6:23** it is the reward due for sin.

Romans 1:32 [NIV] *“Although they know God’s righteous decree that **those who do such things deserve death**, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practise them.”*

Paul is saying that certain sinners who know the judgement of God and continue in these sins “*deserve death*”.

1 John 5:16 [NIV] *“If anyone sees his brother commit **a sin that does not lead to death**, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. **There is a sin that leads to death**. I am not saying that he should pray about that.”*

This same thought underlies John's reference to “*sin that leads to death*”.

This is a very important truth, that enables us to see the full horror of death.

Yet paradoxically at the same time gives us hope.

Humanity is **not** caught up in a web of blind fate, so that once we have sinned there is nothing that can ever be done about this “*state of death*”.

God is in control of the whole situation, He has decreed that death is the penalty of sin, for very good reasons, but He is also determined to give life eternal to all sinful humans who allow Him to do so.

Jude 12 [NIV] *“These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm, shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted, **twice dead**.”*

“*twice dead*”.

Revelation 2:11 [NIV] *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the **second death**.”*

Sometimes the New Testament emphasises the serious consequences of sin by referring to a second death. This is a rabbinic expression which signifies eternal death.

It is to be understood along with passages where Christ spoke of “*everlasting fire*”.

Matthew 25:41 [NIV] *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the **eternal fire** prepared for the devil and his angels.’”*

Eternal death.

Matthew 25:46 [NIV] *“Then they will go away to **eternal punishment**, but the righteous to eternal life.”*

Directly contrasted to eternal life.

This describes the final state of unrepentant human beings.

Sometimes the objection is made that all this is inconsistent with the view of God as a loving God.

Such an objection overlooks the fact that **death is a state of mind as well as a physical event.**

Romans 8:6-8 [NIV] *“**The mind of sinful man is death**, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”*

Why should a sovereign all-loving God allow those who are hostile to His way of love live in His presence for eternity?

Such a decision shows great mercy on God’s part that such people do not live in a state of hatred for eternity, bringing only pain to other people as well as themselves.

1 John 3:14 [NIV] *“We know that we **have passed from death to life**, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love **remains in death.**”*

Such people are **already in a state of death**, and as such when linked with an unrepentant mind it is impossible for them to be saved.

John 5:24 [NIV] *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me **has eternal life** and will not be condemned; **he has crossed over from death to life.**”*

To receive salvation a human being has to pass from the state of death into the state of eternal life.

John 3:1-8 [NIV] *“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” In reply Jesus declared, “**I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**” “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, **no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.** Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*

To pass from the natural state of death in which every human being finds themselves we have to be “born again” into a new life.

Romans 3:23 [NIV] *“for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God,”*

All of humanity have sinned and are far short of the eternal life that God has to give.

Romans 6:1-4 [NIV] *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! **We died to sin**; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were **baptised into his death**? We were therefore **buried with him** through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was **raised from the dead** through the glory of the Father, **we too may live a new life.**”*

This is how we are “born again”.

Romans 6:5-10 [NIV] *“If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be **united with him in his resurrection**. For we know that **our old self was crucified with him** so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but **the life he lives, he lives to God.**”*

This new life is one that is lived as Christ in service to God and His created family.

Romans 6:11-14 [NIV] *“In the same way, **count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus**. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been **brought from death to life**; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because **you are not under law, but under grace.**”*

Moved from death to life.

Victory over Death

An interesting feature of New Testament teaching on death is that the emphasis is on life.

Scriptures face death as it faces all reality, but the interest is in life.

Death is treated more or less incidentally, as a state from which humans are saved.

Hebrews 2:14-15 [NIV] *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and **free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.**”*

The devil’s power is always regarded as subject to God’s overruling.

Job 2:6 [NIV] *“The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.”*

Limited what Satan could do to Job.

Luke 12:4-5 [NIV] *“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: **Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell.** Yes, I tell you, fear him.”*

Satan may be given power over a human being but **cannot** inflict the second death on a human being.

Satan is **no** absolute disposer of death, nevertheless death, and the negation of human life, is his sphere of operation.

Christ came to put an end to this power that Satan has over human beings, by putting to an end to death, first and second.

Christ did this by putting away the penalty of our sin, by taking it all on Himself and dying a physical death as a result.

He then by the power of the Holy Spirit was resurrected back to eternal life.

Romans 6:10 [NIV] *“The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.”*

Christ as Creator of all things is worth far more than all humans who will ever live, so His death can be a substitute for our deserved death.

Apart from Christ death is the supreme enemy of all humanity.

Death is the symbol of our alienation from God, the ultimate horror.

But Christ used death to deliver humanity from death, Jesus bore the full horror of death.

What can this do for any human being?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 [NIV] *“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”*

Death is transformed into a sleep for those who believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

We all know on a daily basis that we can go to sleep at night with the assurance that we will awake again in the light of morning.

Romans 6:9 [NIV] *“For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.”*

Because of Christ’s victory over death by a resurrection we too can be resurrected from death.

Romans 14:9 [NIV] *“For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.”*

By a resurrection Christ is Lord of the dead as well as the living.

1 Corinthians 15:11-23 [NIV] *“Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed. But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.”*

Christ’s victory over death is complete, and is made available to all who have faith in Him and His promises.

Revelation 20:6 [NIV] *“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”*

Believers are protected from the second death to become living examples to all who never had the opportunity to know what Jesus Christ had done for them, before they died the first physical death.

Not only does Christ's death and resurrection give us a glorious future but a glorious present life.

John 5:24 [NIV] *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has **crossed over from death to life.**"*

Already crossed over from death to life.

Romans 8:37-39 [NIV] *"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For **I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"*

Physical death does **not** separate believers from God.

John 8:51 [NIV] *"I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, **he will never see death.**"*

Obedience to Christ's words will never experience the second death.

Such words do **not** deny the reality of biological death.

Rather they point us to the truth that the death of Jesus Christ means that a believer has passed altogether out of the state of death into a new state that is aptly characterised by life, a new "*born again*" life.

The believer in Christ will in due course pass through the gateway we call death, but the sting of death has been drawn.

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 [NIV] *"I declare to you, brothers, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.** Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: **"Death has been swallowed up in victory."** "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, **O death, is your sting?**" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.**"*

To show how grateful we are to our Creator and Saviour that He has saved us from eternal death we all should "*give ourselves fully to the work of God*".

Romans 12:1-2 [NIV] *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, **in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.** Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

Offer our total lives back to God as a living sacrifice to fulfil our commission to bring others to that "*state of life*" not death by being reconciled to their Creator.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 [NIV] *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And **he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.** We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

This is but a small sacrifice on our part compared with the sacrifice that God made for us through Jesus Christ His Son that we may face our physical death with confidence knowing that the second death now has **no** power over us.