

# Only the Bad Die Twice

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23

## What is Death?

If we are to understand the penalty for sin, then it is necessary for us to understand what death is. Many have the opinion that death is the cessation of existence or activity. They believe that when someone or something is dead it is no longer functioning, or perhaps has even ceased to exist. The Scriptures do not support this definition of death. In fact, the Scriptural use of the term would seem to argue against this understanding. A few examples from Scripture will help us understand the true meaning of death.

And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. Luke 9:59,60

Clearly, Jesus Christ cannot be saying that someone who no longer exists, or can no longer function, should bury someone who no longer exists. We shall see that in this passage Christ is speaking of someone who is spiritually dead burying those that are physically dead.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. Ephesians 2:1-3

In this passage, Paul is not saying that we did not exist or function before our salvation. This is obviously not the case. He is simply saying that we were spiritually dead before our salvation. In a moment, we will learn how this spiritual death came to be. It is important to note here that this state of spiritual deadness does not mean that our spirit was not functioning. Our spirit was functioning. It was following the course of this world and leading us to fulfill the lusts of this world.

Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth. I Timothy 5:5,6

The passage above is most interesting and useful in helping us to understand the meaning of death. The widow spoken of by Paul is both physically and spiritually alive. She is a part

of the local assembly and a fellow believer, yet her actions can cause her to be, "dead while she liveth". How can this be? We can understand Paul's use of the term, "dead", here when we understand the purpose for which God saves us.

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

Believers are made new creatures in Christ that they might walk in good works. The widow in the above passage that is living in pleasure is not functioning for the purpose for which she was created in Christ. This then, is the Scriptural meaning of death. A person or thing is said to be dead when it has ceased to function for the purpose for which it was created. This is why Paul refers to the pleasure-seeking widow as being dead although she has both physical and spiritual life.

As we continue, we shall see that sin has caused every part of man to die, to cease to function for the purpose for which it was created.

## In Adam All Die

To understand how death became a part of man's existence we must go back to the Garden of Eden. In the garden, God warned Adam of the one thing he could do that would cause him to die.

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Genesis 2:16,17

Unfortunately, Adam did that one thing that God had warned would bring death.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. Genesis 3:6

When we think of the death that Adam's sin brought, we most often think of the physical element of that death. However, since Adam was a triune being, made up of spirit, soul, and body, we must realize that his death affected every part of his existence. As we apply our definition of death to the various parts of Adam, we see just how extensive the penalty for sin really was. Remember our definition for death. Death is when someone or something ceases to

function for the purpose for which it was created.

Adam's spirit was created to allow him to know God, to have an intelligent understanding of God. After the fall, Adam's spirit knew not just God, but it came to know good *and* evil. So we see that Adam's spirit, which was created to know God, came to know good and evil. It was no longer functioning for the purpose for which it was created.

Adam's soul was the center of his will and emotion and was created to allow him to be a friend of God. Adam's soul allowed him to have affection toward God. After the fall, Adam was no longer a friend of God, far from it. In fact, when God went looking for his friend, Adam, his friend fled and hid from God's presence. Hardly the action of a close friend! Man's soul, that had been created to be God's friend, had become God's enemy. It was no longer functioning for the purpose for which it was created.

Adam's body was created to be a permanent earthly dwelling place for the soul and spirit. After the fall, Adam's body began to decline and finally to die. Adam's body that was meant to permanently house his soul and spirit on the earth became destined to return to the dust from which it was taken. It was no longer functioning for the purpose for which it was created.

At this point, some may be wondering what all this has to do with us. What does Adam's sin and resulting death mean to us today? In Paul's epistle to the Romans, he answers that very question.

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: Romans 5:12

The sin and death that Adam experienced has been passed on to all his descendents, to all men. All human beings are born with a spirit that does not know God, a soul that is an enemy of God, and a body that begins to die the moment it is born. Adam's sin and death are important to us because, as his descendents, his sin is our sin and his death is our death. This sin and death makes our existence an existence of absolute vanity.

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. Ecclesiastes 1:1,2

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Romans 8:20

This vanity is a direct result of the death that sin brings, and matches exactly our definition of death. Man was created to bring honor and glory to God; his death and separation from God cause that purpose to be unfulfilled. If man is not functioning for the purpose for which he was created (i.e. he is dead) his existence is completely without meaning, it is vain. Sin brings death and death brings vanity to man's existence.

### **The Terror of the Second Death**

The effects of death go far beyond those that are evident in our present existence. The sting of death reaches into eternity. In the book of Revelation, John speaks of an aspect of death that he refers to as the "*second death*".

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. Revelation 20:12-14

In the second death, the unsaved will experience in their souls and spirits what they experienced in their bodies when they departed this earth. Although all men are born with souls and spirits that are dead, the second death causes them to *experience* that death. It also seals that dead condition for all eternity. Never again will the sufferers of the second death have an opportunity to receive spiritual life and have a relationship with their Creator. Scripture further indicates that their bodily existence will be reduced to the most basic of forms, a worm. It is interesting to note that when Scripture uses the word "worm" it often refers to a specific kind of worm, a maggot.

And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Job 19:26

The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him; he shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree. Job 24:20

And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. Acts 12:23

This same term is used to describe the condition of Lucifer as he descends into the pit of hell.

Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! Isaiah 14:9-12

The worms that greet Lucifer in his decent into the pit are the forms of lost men suffering the second death. This fate becomes even more horrific when we realize that not only are these lost men spending eternity as maggots, separated from God, they are also suffering the torment of flames.

And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh. Isaiah 66:24

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not

quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Mark 9:43-48

It is hard to imagine a more disgusting sight than a partially rotted animal carcass teeming with maggots. Magnify that by pouring gasoline on the whole decaying mess and igniting it. The maggots then become a boiling mass of loathsome, suffering creatures. That picture is truly an "*abhorring unto all flesh*". Now that you have this picture in your mind, remember that the second death is even worse because the Lake of Fire will never go out as the gasoline fire eventually would. And the souls of the lost will never be consumed, as the maggots would be. "*Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*". The lost will remain in the condition described above for all eternity.

It is hard to overstate the terror and horror of the second death. Fortunately, God has provided a way for all men to escape that fate.

### **New Life in Christ**

There is one being who suffered the pain and torment of the second death and was victorious over it. That being was the perfect Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The twenty-second Psalm gives us a prophetic view of this death.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. Psalms 22:1-6

The reason that God forsook His Son on the cross is that He had become that abhorrent creature that the second death produces. On the cross, Jesus Christ died not only a physical death, but He also died the second death.

The glorious truth of Christ's second death is that it was not His own. That is, it was not His own sin that caused Him to die. Rather, it was our sin being placed on Him, being credited to His account, which brought the sting of death to His perfect existence. Because the death He died was not for His own sin, He was raised from the dead and can now offer that resurrection life as a gift to all that come to Him by faith. This is the truth revealed by Paul to the Corinthians.

For he [God the Father] hath made him [Jesus Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. II Corinthians 5:21

Notice that not only was Jesus Christ made "*to be sin for us*", but we are now given the opportunity to "*be made the righteousness of God in him*". He died the death that was ours and He offers us the righteousness that is His.

When we trust in the work of Jesus Christ, we are placed into Christ and are made partakers of His sacrificial death and His eternal life.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried

with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Romans 6:3-5

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

Being placed into Christ gives us His life. As possessors of the life of Christ, we are delivered from ever having to endure the torment of the second death.

Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. Romans 6:9

Because Christ has endured the second death and triumphed over it, He can never again be brought into subjection to it. Death has no more dominion over Him and when we are, "*in Him*", it has no more dominion over us.

### **Escaping the Second Death**

The second death is the ultimate fate of all the unrighteous. Those that die in their unrighteous, unbelieving state will experience the second death.

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. Revelation 21:8

Those that have received the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ will never have to suffer the pain of the second death. You can receive God's righteousness right now simply by believing that Christ's death paid completely for your sin and that His resurrection allows Him to offer you the gift of eternal life. It is this faith ALONE that delivers you from the second death.

Once you have escaped the second death and received the life of Christ, you can function for all eternity for the purpose for which you were created, to honor and glorify God.

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*“...to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery...”*

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