

II. Eternity in Biblical Perspective
If I Should Die Before I Wake...
“The Bible and Death...Spread to All Men”
Romans 5; I Corinthians 15
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We are dealing with death in this study. Did you notice the title of this study? Did you recite that prayer growing up? If I should die before I wake...I pray the Lord my soul to take. That like many other children's statements is fantastically insightful and theologically accurate. If we die before Jesus comes the Lord does not take our body, He takes our soul because that is what has happened in the unnatural act of death. So we are not Darwinian materialist atheistic evolutionists. We do not believe that death is a part of life. It's an enemy, an intruder of life. Death does not show up in Genesis 1 and 2. It shows up in Genesis 3 and it's the curse that comes because of sin. God says 'the day you eat of it, the day of your disobedience, you shall die.'

We found out that there are actually three deaths that come because of sin, as enemies into this world. One is eternal death. The word death in the Bible is the word *thánatos* and it means a radical separation, a separation of things that were not made to be separated. Hell is not natural. Hell is created for those who rebel against the Lord, the devil, his angels and all who would not follow Him, the Lord of glory. God made us to fellowship with Him forever. The Lord says 'Separate from Me, depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness for I never knew you.'

Secondly, we are born dead in our sins. Our sin nature separates us from God. Now that doesn't separate God from dealing with us but we are separated from an intimacy with God. We still know there is a God for you don't meet five year old atheist, they would have to work at that immediately. I love the story of Helen Keller who is from Tusculum, Alabama. She was blind, deaf and she couldn't speak but when Anne Sullivan broke through with the sign language in the palm of her hand with the first word of spelling the word 'water' they continued to go from one word to the next and then Anne got to the word 'God' and she asked Helen, 'Do you know Him?' Helen signed back into Anne's hand, 'Oh yes I just didn't have a word for Him.'

We are born in the image of God (*Imago Dei*). We know there is a God who exists and the only way that is open to deny God is professing to become wise they become fools by suppressing the knowledge of God in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). The motivation is not a lack of information, but it is moral. In unrighteousness we suppress the knowledge of who God is shouting to us from general revelation outside of us and inside of us through conscience because we are made in the image of God.

Thirdly, is the one we are focused upon now which is how we step into eternity, the other side, the door of death physically and this is the word separation; two things that were not made to be separated. When Adam was created he was the corpse from the dust for he was not living until God breathed into that body the breath of life. That soul that was breathed in is like two threads in one cloth which is the best way to look at this. Therefore the rendering of the soul from the body which is what physical death is, is in fact unnatural. This is why it appears in Genesis 3.

How do we get this definition that death is the separation of the soul from the body? Let's start by looking at James 2 which is one of many passages that gives us some insight into

it. The context of this chapter deals with saving faith that is manifested by works and it says in James 2:26, *[26] For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.* At this time I'm not going to deal with the right relationship between faith and works but I want to use the illustration James is using here where the body is dead without the spirit/soul.

You might be wondering what I'm telling you here. I am saying that we are body and soul. Some have heard that we are body, soul and spirit. I would encourage you to really think through that. I believe that Bible teaches that soul and spirit are referring to the same thing but emphasizing two different dynamics. In fact that which is made in the image of God which is that which makes you, you, is sometimes called soul and its turned relationship to God, spirit, by its enlivening presence within you that brings life. Sometimes it's called mind and sometimes it's called heart. We have multiple terms in the Bible that are used to refer to that part of you that is made in the image of God.

Your body comes in the image of your parents because God is a Spirit and has no bodily parts. Therefore when your body is not an image bearer of God, your body bears the image of your parents. Every morning I look in the mirror I end up saying 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, I am my daddy after all.' It's amazing how my body keeps going further and further in that direction. That body without that soul/spirit is a corpse.

So let's go back to creation. Adam was formed from the dust of the ground but he was a corpse until God breathed into that body the breath of life that he became a living soul. So what happens at death is the unnatural separation of that soul from the body which is why Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:28, *[28] And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* There is only One who can do that. So death is that ordained consequence of sin and that's why the prayer of the child is right – if I should die before I wake...for the assumption in that prayer is that your soul has departed. Therefore I pray that Lord You do my soul shall take, in that glorious intermediate state we'll cover in the next couple of studies. When you die your soul is absent from the body and present with the Lord – my soul He has taken to Himself.

In this study, while you are still living is the day to deal with death. We need to Biblically understand it and embrace God's solution to it. We also need to embrace the joy of the assurance of God's solution to it. Don't wait till the times of dying alone to deal with death, why? There are such things as death bed conversions for we see one on the cross but it's the only one in the Bible. The fact is you basically die the way you live. I have seen deathbed conversions that I think were real and I praise for it. I can believe in deathbed conversions because there is one in the Bible but I agree with Bishop Ryle in his commentary on that conversion – there is one deathbed conversion so we lose not hope but only one lest we be presumptuous.

The Bible is clear when by in large men and women die the way they live so don't wait till your dying to deal with the reality of death and God's solution to death. People ask me 'Pastor, aren't you up set when people come to Jesus at the last moment.' I respond 'yes it upsets me' and their response to that is usually 'I can understand why because they have all this fun and then at the last minute they convert.' However I don't get upset because of that. I get upset because I know all that they missed because they didn't get converted until the end. What they had was emptiness and vanity but I wish they had known Him in their life and not just at their death. Ecclesiastes tells us that man knows not his time but you do know there is a time and that book also says that God has put eternity in the heart of a man.

That is why eternity in Biblical perspective is so important, because every person knows it. That door whereby we step into eternity is death. On the other side of it there is no work of grace. Hebrews 9:27 says [27] *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* So today is the day of salvation from sin, death, hell and the grave, therefore today is the day that we need to understand it, not only its origin, its definition but also how to know that everybody we know will die if Jesus doesn't come back first. Because Romans 5 says that death spread to all men. Now why does it spread to all men?

Could there not be just some man who would take the Word of God, born into this world and in thought, word and deed not sin? Isn't there a possibility there could be another Adam who will do what the first Adam shall do? From the sons of Adam, the answer is 'no' but from God's gift of a second Adam the answer is 'yes.' The sons of Adam were born with a sin nature from the original sin by Adam himself. Why are they born with the original sin that Adam created? It is because they were there in Adam when he sinned.

I'd like to paraphrase from Thomas Godwin, a puritan, on this; 'From Divine decree, from Divine perspective, from the eyes of God there have only been two men that ever existed – Adam and the second Adam, Jesus. In the first Adam we were all in him, when he sinned we sinned. Therefore we, sons and daughters of Adam, are born with a sin nature and therefore we sin and we die, because we died in Adam. There is another Adam in whom are the elect of God and in this Adam who never sinned in thought, word or deed but with perfection grew in the wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man, all those in Him live.'

I have just rejected for you the doctrines of pelagianism or semi-pelagianism, where every person is born as their own Adam – no, we are born as sons and daughters of Adam and when Adam sinned we sinned. And when the curse of sin fell upon Adam, the curse of sin fell upon us so we are born with that sin nature and therefore we sin. It's not you are born as a blank tablet and then sin – no, you are born a sinner and you sin. You had already in Adam participated in Adam's sin. He is the federal head. God established a covenant with him and all of his seed and when he sinned we sinned.

Let's look at I Corinthians 15 first so that we'll go from the simple summation to the more in-depth explanation in Romans 5. I Corinthians 15 is that great exposition of the resurrection. I Corinthians 15:20-22 says [20] *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* [21] *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* [22] *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*

So in verse 20 we see the firstfruits which mean there will be more coming with Him and those coming with Him are His who will be resurrected unto eternal life. In verse 23 the man who brought death with his sin is the first Adam. The Man who with His righteousness, atoning death and resurrection has brought life is the Second Adam, Jesus. In the first Adam all die and in the Second Adam all live. What do you think people try to teach from that? They try to say that everybody is saved. Yet everybody under Adam was lost and everybody is saved under Jesus but you need to realize – two different Adams and two different 'alls.' The 'all' of Adam is humanity – spiritually dead, physically dead, facing eternal death. The 'all' of Christ is the elect of God – even though they die physically they shall live forever. When Jesus was going to the cross He says 'Father, all whom You have given Me, I lose not one, but will raise them up on the last day.' Who did the Father give Him? It was the elect. Jesus will be the firstfruits and He will raise them up on the last day. To substantiate this let's look at the next verse.

I Corinthians 15:23- says [23] *But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.* Now I want to look at Romans 8 and then Romans 5. Romans 8:28 says [28] *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* It doesn't mean all things are good but all things work together for good and why do we know this, besides the fact God has said it? Those who love God are those who are called according to His purpose. Now notice in the next verse it's not what He foreknew but it's whom He foreknew. The word 'know' means loving intimacy. Before we existed God lovingly placed His intimacy upon you.

Romans 8:29-30 says [29] *For those whom he foreknew (before they were born) he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (to be His elect), in order that he might be the firstborn (the firstfruits) among many brothers. [30] And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* Here is this unbreakable chain.

Those who love Him are those whom He first loved. He doesn't first love them when Jesus comes into the world. He first loved them before they existed, before He even sent His Son. I knew them intimately, personally, lovingly and then I decreed all of those things. Those who shared the Gospel with you was no accident for it was the Divine hand of God and the blood hound of heaven that was chasing you down. He has ordained that you would be brought to eternal life and now in time He called you, justified you and has brought you to Himself. Notice the 'those' He starts with are the 'those' He ends up with. He will lose not one.

There are five unbreakable links of sovereign grace here in our life working through human agency – changing emotions and minds for we're not robots for He is working on us. This God who determined to save us worked on us so that determined to love Him and to say 'no' to our sin by His grace. It wasn't our determination that made Him love us. It was His love that changed us to love Him and He has secured our salvation that we are justified. Let's continue.

Romans 8:31 says [31] *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Satan, those who love him, the world and the flesh will all be against you, but in comparison to the God of glory who are they? Who is Satan in comparison to the God of glory? It's not that God is God and Satan is the bad god and we're going to flip the switch. There is only one God. Satan is a pretender but he is greater than us but greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (I John 4:4). We have everything against us and he is incessant. Don't get so arrogant that you think you're smarter than Satan or that your resolve is greater – no! Your hope is in God who is greater.*

I like to use the illustration of the boy who gets bullied everyday on the way to school. He is scared to go to school until his big brother who played left tackle in football, 6ft 8 and 340 pounds. He comes down and says to his little brother, 'do you want me to walk you to school?' Do you think he will be scared that day? I'm not trying to be trivial but the bullies in comparison to Him, who are they? Our adversaries in comparison to God, who are they? One little breath shall fell him. Now I can huff and puff but I can't blow that house down, yet if God just exhales it's all over. If God be for us who can be against us? Here is how much He is for you.

Romans 8:32-37 says [32] *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is*

interceding for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

We have a Savior who has an atoning death that is exquisitely sufficient for all of humanity but is unstoppably, gloriously effective for His people and He will lose not one of them. He knew us, predestined us, called us, justified us and glorified us – the five parts of the unbreakable chain. He did all this through His Son with an atoning death for any and all but efficiently, assuredly wins and secures the salvation of all of His. None are lost, no not one. Therefore it is not that God votes for me and Satan votes against me and I declare the deciding vote. When God votes and Satan votes there is not tie and I am a victor in Christ. I live in Christ even though I was born in Adam to death for in Christ I was made alive and gloriously have the triumph over sin, death, hell and the grave. Now let's look at Romans 5.

Romans 5:12-14 says *[12] Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— [13] for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. [14] Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*

It spreads to humanity and because all sinned we sinned in him (Adam) which is original sin and now we sin like him (Adam) which is actual sin. Adam sinned under special revelation and their sins are sins against general revelation until Moses, where we get the Word of God and the law of God.

Romans 5:15-17 says *[15] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. [16] And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass (that's Adam) brought **condemnation**, but the free gift following many trespasses (Jesus redeeming us from all our sins) brought **justification**. [17] For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

The legal word for condemnation is guilty. The legal word for justification is innocent, not forgiven, but yes you are forgiven for God went beyond that. You are innocent because when Jesus went to the cross your sins were imputed to Him so you were forgiven. He paid for them. His righteousness was imputed to you so you are more than forgiven, you are accepted and justified. The verdict is innocent because of what the one Man did for you and when He did it you were in Him. Just like you were in Adam when he sinned, by God's decree you were in Christ and because you were in Christ, Christ's redeeming work removed all your sins. Death is a dictator and that's why we who are born with the sin nature move from original sin to actual sin because sin is reigning.

God's common grace keeps us from being as evil as we would be. There was a witness who lost his whole family in the holocaust and he was brought to bear witness against Adolf Eichmann, the personification of evil. When he stood and looked him in the eye, this Jewish survivor fell on his knees, began to weep and couldn't say a word. Chuck Colson records this event. They picked him up and said 'what's wrong? Don't be intimidated?' He said 'I'm not intimidated but when I looked at him I realized I'm him and the answer is the grace of God.'

God's common grace restrains us from being as evil as we would be. God's redeeming grace transforms us and saves us so that we are no longer under the reign of sin for now we are under the dominion and reign of grace.

The remaining part of Romans 5 is just a recapitulation of all that and I would encourage you to read it in your own time, but deal with this matter of death today. We have been dealing with the grief that has come from a celebrity death recently – the sudden death of Kobe Bryant and his 13 year old daughter. Praise God that there is some evidences of his fiasco in early 2000 that God did something in his life through a man who began to bring the testimony of Christianity to him and everyone says there was a marked change and I pray so. But I just couldn't help but remembering Ecclesiastes 9:12 where it says man knows not his time. How many times has Bryant made that trip in that helicopter?

I read an article about it and even commented about it on social media. A writer in the New York Times really did a very interesting coverage of this helicopter crash. There was one place you could view the wreck, the greatest and closest advantage which was at a PCA church called Church in the Canyon. The pastor is Bob Bjerkaas. They just said 'Today we're going to try and live the Gospel and hope that we'll have the opportunity to share the Gospel' because of all the people who were coming to wreck site. Then they opened up a prayer service as the pastor preached on Genesis that day for it was the Lord's Day. They opened up the church to all who were coming to see the site and gave out water.

Here are two quotes from that article. 'A house of worship, a cathedral of a sports academy, across the street the two separated by a strand of the highway, a road, and suddenly connected by the irrationality of happenstance.' No, it was the sovereign hand of God reminding us to be ready. O how I pray Bryant was ready and there was some evidence he was for which I praise God but be ready for man knows not his time.

The second quote was 'at the church people were coming, at the mamba sports academy people were leaving because there was nothing left for them to do.' Leaving the cathedral of sports, coming to the church of the Lord – we don't wait for that day for them to come. Before that day we cross the road to them. Seek and save the lost for today is the day of salvation.

What is God's solution to this death? I will tell you in the next study so let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the victory of Jesus over that and the glorious text that give us a sense of that victory that we can yet consider. Then Father I pray that You would hear our glorious praise that You give us sense in a fallen world and more than that You give salvation. God, we don't know who are Yours but we do know we spread the seed over the whole field because sometimes we think it's rocky ground but it's good ground so God You do that great work of salvation - we will plant and water so God give the increase and we'll give You the praise because in Jesus the sting of death has been removed for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.