

WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT DEATH

Romans 8:36-39

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The gospel of Jesus Christ is total Good News. It is good news about life, but it is also good news about death. It is not surprising, therefore, that before Paul closed the great eighth chapter of Romans he gave us some good news about death. Beginning with Romans 8:36 he says, "As it is written for thy sake we are killed all the day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that not even death can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is tremendously significant for Paul to say that death cannot separate the child of God from Jesus Christ because the primary biblical meaning of the word "death" is separation. The word "death" comes from the Greek word thanatos whose basic meaning is "separation." When a person dies in any form, he has experienced a form of separation in his experience. Death, according to the Bible, never represents the end of anybody. It only represents a special kind of separation whereby that individual has changed his form or his place of existence. Paul comes along in our text and says that death cannot ultimately separate a child of God from Jesus Christ.

According to the Bible there are three great separations that are caused by death.

I. There is the separation of a man's spirit from God. This is what the Bible describes as spiritual death. Do you realize that it is possible for a man to be alive in the body and dead in the eyes of God? You are either spiritually alive or spiritually dead today. This separation from God is caused by sin. Paul says in Ephesians 2:1, "You were dead in trespasses and sin." In Romans 6:23 he says, "The wages of sin is death." He is speaking primarily of spiritual death in this text, for he is using the present tense. He says, "The wages of sin is death." Man tries to kid himself by saying sin is not really too bad, that we can get by with it. But the horror of sin is seen in the fact that it separates man from God. It means that a man is spiritually dead. How many people there are today who are spiritually dead because

they are in their sins; they do not have fellowship with God; they do not know God. A movie star recently said, "I have fame and fortune, but I am dead on the inside." Are you spiritually dead today? Alienated from God and Christ? This is the first great separation - spiritual separation - from the eternal God.

II. There is the separation of man's soul and spirit from his body. This is what the Bible describes as physical death. This experience will come to all men because of sin. It is the fruit of original sin. Death is in the blood stream of every mortal man; everyone is destined to die. Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed unto man once to die." Even the Christian will die unless Christ comes again. He must undergo physical death -- the separation of the body from the spirit and the soul.

III. There is the eternal separation of the total man from God. This is death in hell. The Bible speaks of hell as death. This does not mean that there will be an end to hell, but that the hell state is so terrible that it is described as a continuing, never-ending state of death. Revelation 20:14 describes hell as the "second death." It is eternal death because when one dies without Christ, when one goes into hell without Christ, he is forever separated from God. There is no second chance. All men who die unrepentant go into a state of eternal death or eternal separation from God. Yet Paul comes along in our text and says that death cannot separate the child of God from Jesus Christ. We know that the state of spiritual death does not even apply to a Christian at all. If you are a Christian you are spiritually alive; you have been born again; you have received the new life in Christ. Your spirit is not dead but your spirit is alive unto God through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:11). Once you were spiritually dead, but you are spiritually alive today if you are a Christian. To be a Christian means that we have passed out of spiritual death into spiritual life. (John 5:24).

Christians in Korea are called "resurrected persons." That is indeed a great biblical description. The Bible says that the Christian has been resurrected out of

spiritual death into spiritual life. In Ephesians 2:4-5 Paul says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)." Jesus himself says in John 5:24, "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." To be a Christian is to pass out of a state of death into a state of life. This state of being spiritually dead, therefore, does not refer to a believer at all. We are not separated from Christ even in this world. We are in fellowship with Christ through the person of the Holy Spirit.

Not only is this true, but physical death itself does not separate a Christian from Jesus Christ. Paul says in our text, "accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Paul did not say that a Christian would not die. Paul knew that a Christian might die in a lot of ways. A Christian might die from natural causes, in an automobile accident, in a plane crash. A Christian might die in war, from murder or abuse at the hands of a wicked man. The Bible does not promise a Christian will not die. Paul speaks of the most terrible kind of death in our text. Yet, he says that we are more than conquerors even though we <sup>die</sup> ~~are~~ dead. How could this be possible in the case of physical death? It is simply because of this: At the point of death a Christian realizes that Christ is with him - the great conqueror of death. ~~###~~ He also has the full assurance that when he leaves his body that he will ~~begin to~~ live with Jesus Christ forever, without any interruptions. This has been the experience of the saints through the ages.

I read of the death of D. L. Moody. He came to the end and asked the question, "Is this death? It is a glorious day! Earth is receding, heaven is coming down, this is my coronation day." So it is for any Christian. It is our coronation day. It does not represent separation from Christ at all, but union with Christ forever.

*Savonarola*  
I read of the death of ~~Savonarola~~. He was one of the greatest preachers who ever lived. He was burned at the stake in 1498 for preaching repentance. As this

man was sizzling in the fire he said, "They can kill my body if they please, but they can never tear the living Christ from my heart." This has been the victory and the testimony of the saints through all the ages. Physical death could not separate them from Christ.

We wonder how the early Christians could die so bravely. It was because they believed what I am saying. We wonder why Paul could die so bravely and give such a testimony. *(2 Tim. 4:6-8)* It is because he believed the Gospel - that death, not even physical death - could separate a child of God from Jesus Christ.

Then there is eternal death. Does eternal death separate a believer from Jesus Christ? Impossible. You could no more go to hell than Jesus Christ could go to hell, according to Scripture. You just cannot go there if you are a Christian. If you are a Christian, Jesus Christ has taken your hell and ~~we~~ *you* do not have to bear it again.

Before Christ was resurrected from the dead, the righteous dead went to Hades, a forbidding realm even for them. But between the time Christ died and was resurrected from the dead, He descended into Hades and wrenched from the devil the keys of Hades and of death, according to the Bible. On the day of His resurrection He took Paradise, the place of the departed righteous dead, into heaven or into His presence where it has been ever since. So after the resurrection of Christ you ~~have~~ never hear of a believer going to Hades. Death is never a fear after the resurrection, ~~according to the New Testament~~. Always in the New Testament we read that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. That is what Paul says in II Corinthians 5:8. You think of the words of Jesus to the dying thief. Jesus did not say to him, "Today shalt thou be with me in Hades." He said, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." We know from the text that Paradise is where Jesus Christ is. If you want to take one verse of Scripture that illuminates the after life or the place of the departed dead, take the words of Jesus to the dying thief. He said, "Today thou shalt be with me." Not in some distant future, but today. Not in some future general resurrection, but today. Not ~~when~~ *when* some Gabriel blows his horn, but today. Jesus said, "Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise." He did not

say, "Today thou shalt be with me in Purgatory." There is no basis in Scripture for the doctrine of Purgatory. He did not say, "Today you shall go into soul sleep and unconsciousness." But He said, "Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise." If you want to know what happens to the righteous dead, scripture tells us. It says they go immediately into the eternal blessedness of God and into the presence of Jesus Christ. No wonder Paul said, "No matter how we die and no matter how tough it may be, death cannot separate a child of God from Jesus Christ."

When you come right down to the real problem in life it is not really death at all. If you are afraid to die today the problem is not death. The problem is sin, because sin brings death and fear of death. When you get rid of sin, when you know you are forgiven and when you know you have a Savior, then you know death has been dealt with in His death, burial, and resurrection. Think of John on the isle of Patmos. John was afraid. Afraid of what? Afraid of death. He had been banished there by the enemy, and Jesus, the resurrected Lord, appeared to him saying, "John, fear not, for I am he that liveth and was dead and I hold the keys of Hades and of death. (Revelation 1:17-18). When we know Jesus Christ, we have in our own experience the conqueror of death and the emptier of Hades. This is the teaching of God's Word.

The question we need to ask is, "What is our relationship to the Savior who has conquered death?" What is our relationship to sin? Are we forgiven, have we been cleansed? Have we settled the sin question in our lives, or is it unsettled? If so, you are not prepared to live and you are not prepared to die. I think of the words of Teddy Roosevelt when Quentin Roosevelt died. He said, "If a man is not prepared to live, he is not prepared to die. But if he is prepared to live, he is prepared to die." That is what the scriptures teach. A man is prepared only by receiving Christ who is eternal life. Borgia made this statement as he came to the end of his life: "I have made provision for everything in life except death. Alas, I have come down to the place to die and I am entirely unprepared." Think how foolish he was and how foolish you are today if you have prepared for everything except this great summons

which is sure to come - the summons of death. Death is coming. The Bible teaches it and does not camouflage it. We have people today who are even unwilling to mention the word death. We live in a society that does not want to hear anything about death. I can understand why - because <sup>so many</sup> ~~they~~ are not prepared to meet God.

Are you prepared for death? You are totally prepared if you have repented and believed the Gospel. If you have received Jesus Christ, who is eternal life, you need not worry about it. It will come in God's own time and God will give you grace to die. Beyond death you will be ushered into the presence of Jesus Christ. This is the teaching of Scripture. If you die unprepared, you are going to die forever; you are going into eternal death. You are facing eternal hell and separation from Christ.

Thank God, it does not have to be that way. Christ calls you to come to Him. He says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." <sup>John 11:25-26</sup> Christ says the dead shall live and those who believe in Him shall never die. Christ looks on life as continuing with him until the believer need not think of death at all because his death will merely be the continuation of life with Him. Are you prepared to die? If you are not, it is time to prepare. Come to the Savior and prepare to meet thy God.