

The great mass of professing Christians will meet with bitter disappointment in the day of God. They have not upon their foreheads the seal of the living God. Lukewarm and halfhearted, they dishonor God far more than the avowed unbeliever. They grope in darkness, when they might be walking in the noonday light of the Word, under the guidance of One who never errs (Letter 121, 1903). {7BC 970.6}

Query #42 July 2018
What is death?

Query:

This is my own query.

What IS death? Not, what are its effects – but, what is it in itself and where did it come from?

I know a Christian who underwent the major operation of a quadruple bypass successfully not long ago and then was told that because there was a valve in his heart not working properly he still did not have long to live. The surgeons in his country refused to do anything about it because of the danger, but due to certain circumstances he was able to go to a neighbouring country and jump the queue and undergo the second operation. When told beforehand that the prognosis was only for a fifty percent chance of survival, without hesitation he took it and has survived!

My secondary question is: Why did he not want to die and moments later (to him) be resurrected to meet the LORD? Paul faced the same dilemma, without the urgency. He wrote:

Philippians 1:

²⁰ According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

The Message version:

[“Alive, I’m Christ’s messenger; dead, I’m his bounty [prize]. Life versus even more life! I can’t lose.]

²² But if I live in the flesh, this is [you are] the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. ²³ For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; **which is far better** [for me]:

²⁴ nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful **for you**.

²⁵ And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; ²⁶ that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

The Message version (MSG)

²²⁻²⁶ As long as I'm alive in this body, there is good work for me to do. If I had to choose right now, I hardly know which I'd choose. Hard choice! The desire to break camp here and be with Christ is powerful. Some days I can think of nothing better. But most days, because of what you are going through, I am sure that it's better for me to stick it out here. So I plan to be around awhile, companion to you as your growth and joy in this life of trusting God continues. You can start looking forward to a great reunion when I come visit you again. We'll be praising Christ, enjoying each other.

Response:

It's a long query, but it boils down to two points – what is death and why did that Christian choose life?

First, death is not a *positive* thing, but is a *negative*.

It is *the absence* of life that produces the state we call death, which is why the LORD says, "I form the light, and [thereby] create darkness: I make peace, and [thereby] create evil: I the LORD do all these things". Isaiah 45:7. I repeat, it is the absence of these positive things that produces the negative aspect and we are programmed to keep away from the negative and cling to self-preservation.

Although the Spirit often describes death as a "sleep" it is not the state of dreamless unconsciousness as we so often think of it. It is a nothingness, with only the memory of us still existing in God's mind. We have to trust that He will create us again.

So where did death come from? We have just read how God says *He created it* – by giving Life to His creatures. It (Life) continuously comes from, and belongs to Him. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being . . ." Acts 17:28. Therefore, if for any reason, that Life is rejected or lost, the person is separated from Him and then death (the absence of Life) is the natural result. "Then shall the dust [the body] return to the earth as it was: and the spirit [of Life] shall return to God who gave it". Ecclesiastes 12:7.

The devil is said to have the power of death because he can so often tempt us into a situation where we choose or are forced to depart, either a little, or a lot, from God's way. "Forasmuch then as the children [of men] are partakers of flesh and blood, He [the Son of God] also Himself likewise took part of the same [flesh and blood]; that through [His own] death He might *destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil* [that is, in the minds of His people, for He does not kill physically]; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime

subject to [the] bondage [of sin and death]”. Hebrews 2:14-15. [For we do have a fear of death, despite some teachers saying that we simply pass through a long corridor of light, and are received by a glorious being at the other end.]

But that is not the reality, for it is also written; “Wherefore when He comes [came] into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering You would not, but **a body** have You [the Spirit] prepared Me . . .’” Hebrews 10:5. And that is what happens to all humans – a body is prepared by a woman [with a man’s co-operation] from earthly materials and **then God puts the Life into it at birth.**

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust [elements] of the ground [as the mother does in her womb], and breathed into his nostrils the Breath of Life [this happens to a baby when it takes its first breath at birth]; and man **became** a living soul [by the combination of both, and for as long as they were joined.]”. Genesis 2:7. In His own case, He moved (through His own power) into the body at birth, “lock, stock and barrel” as it is said, so there was a combination of full divinity and full humanity.

It is just not true that the foetus is alive independently while in the womb! Like other organs in the body it responds to certain stimuli but it does NOT have a life of its own. In a text which is often ***misused*** for confirmation that it does, we have these words.

Luke 1:

³⁹ And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; ⁴⁰ and entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth [her cousin].

⁴¹ And it came to pass, that, ***when Elisabeth heard*** the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: ⁴² and she spoke out with a loud voice, and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And whence is this to me, that the mother of my LORD should come to me? ⁴⁴ For, lo, as soon as the voice of your salutation ***sounded in my ears***, the babe leaped in my womb for [my] joy”.

If you read the words carefully and deliberately under the Spirit’s guidance you will see that the body in the womb responded to Elisabeth’s emotion, and that she reaffirms this in her speech!

It is interesting that when it came time for the Son of man to die, it is written;

Luke 23:46

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit [My life]: and having said thus, He gave up the [Holy] Ghost.

Mark 15:37-39

And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the Ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against Him, saw that He so cried out, and gave up the Ghost, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God”.

This was what humans have always done – given up Life in one way or another. (Unless it is removed from them by force, by an outsider, or by the *result* of sin within which may have originated in an ancestor.)

Genesis 25:8,17; 35:29

Then Abraham gave up the Ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people . . . ¹⁷ and these are the years of the life of Ishmael, a hundred and thirty-seven years: and he gave up the Ghost and died; and was gathered to his people . . .

²⁹ And Isaac gave up the Ghost, and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

And yet God says:

Ezekiel 18:

³¹ Cast away from you all your transgressions [sins], whereby you have transgressed; and [allow Me to] make you a new heart and [get] a new spirit [attitude]: for *why* will you die [the first or the second death], O house of Israel? ³² For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, says the LORD GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live you [now and eternally].

We have also this story:

John 9:

¹ And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth.

² And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?”

³ Jesus answered, “Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him [which appears to be a contradiction to the truth, but He was really saying was, “That doesn’t concern you].

⁴ I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night comes, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”.

⁶ When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle [an action of working in Jewish eyes], and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam [be baptised]”, (which is by interpretation, *Sent.*) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

⁸ The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, “Is not this he that sat and begged [he looks so different]?” ⁹ Some said, “This is he”: others said, “He is like him”: but he said, “I am he”. ¹⁰ Therefore said they to him, “How were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered and said, “A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash’: and I went and washed, and I received sight”. ¹² Then said they to him, “Where is He?” He said, “I know not”.

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind [for absolution by the priests, because they believed, like the disciples, he had been punished by God for his sins]. ¹⁴ And it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed, and do see”.

¹⁶ Therefore said some of the Pharisees, “This man is not of God, because he keeps not the Sabbath day [He is a sinner Himself!]”. Others said, “How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?” And there was a division among them.

What was their problem?

{Desire of Ages 471.1 to 472.4 }

It was generally believed by the Jews that sin is punished in this life. Every affliction was regarded as *the penalty* of some wrongdoing, either of the sufferer himself or of his parents.

It is true that *all suffering* results from the transgression of God's law, but this truth had become perverted [twisted].

Satan, the author of sin and all its results, had led men to look upon disease and death *as proceeding from God, -- as punishment arbitrarily inflicted* on account of sin. Hence one upon whom some great affliction

or calamity had fallen had the additional burden of being regarded as a great sinner. {DA 471.1}

Thus the way was prepared for the Jews to reject Jesus. He who “has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” was looked upon by the Jews as “stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted;” and they hid their faces from Him. Isaiah 53:4, 3. {DA 471.2}

God had given a lesson designed to prevent this.

The history of Job [the first book recorded in the Bible] had shown that ***suffering is inflicted by Satan***, and is ***overruled by God*** for purposes of mercy [when He can]. But Israel did not understand the lesson [they rejected it]. The same error for which God had reproved the friends of Job was repeated by the Jews in their rejection of Christ. {DA 471.3}

[Consider their thoughts on this:

Job 22:

¹ Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, ² “Can a man be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself? ³ Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that you are righteous? Or is it gain to Him, that you make your ways perfect? ⁴ Will He reprove you for fear of you? [Will He hesitate because you do some good works?] Will He enter with you into judgment [discuss your case with you]? ⁵ Is not your wickedness great? and your iniquities infinite? [What follows is a list of what Eliphaz *presumes* Job has done!] . . . [Let's move on a bit.]

¹³ “And you say, ‘How does God know? Can He judge through the dark cloud? ¹⁴ Thick clouds are a covering to Him, that He sees not; and He walks in the circuit of heaven [He is too busy]’.

¹⁵ “Have you marked [understood] the old way which wicked men have trodden?

¹⁶ Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflowed with a flood [a reference to Noah’s flood, Genesis 6:5-7]: ¹⁷ which said to God, ‘Depart from us’: and what can the Almighty do for them? ¹⁸ Yet He filled their houses with good things [beforehand, like you]: but the counsel [the why and the wherefore] of the wicked is far from me” . . . [Let's move on a bit]

²¹ “Acquaint now yourself with Him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come to you. ²² Receive, I pray you, the law from His mouth, and lay up His words in your heart. ²³ If you return to the Almighty, you shall be built up, you shall put away iniquity far from your tabernacles. ²⁴ Then shall you lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks. [This is the “prosperity gospel”!]

²⁵ “Yea, the Almighty shall be your defence, and you shall have plenty of silver [you will be rewarded for your obedience]. ²⁶ For then shall you have your delight in the Almighty, and shall lift up your face to God. ²⁷ You shall make your prayer to Him, and He shall hear you, and you shall pay your vows.

²⁸ “You shall also decree a thing, and it shall be established to you: and the light shall shine upon your ways. ²⁹ When men are cast down, then you shall say, ‘ [God] There is lifting up [required here]’; and He shall save the humble person [if he is worthy, for God will listen to you!] ³⁰ He shall deliver the island of the innocent: and it is delivered by the pureness of *your* hands”.]

The belief of the Jews in regard to the relation of sin and suffering was held by Christ's disciples. While Jesus corrected their error, He did not explain the cause of the man's affliction, but told them what would be the result. Because of it the works of God would be made manifest. “As long as I am in the world,” He said, “I am the light of the world.” Then having anointed the eyes of the blind man, He sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam, and the man's sight was restored.

Thus Jesus answered the question of the disciples in a practical way, as He usually answered questions put to Him from curiosity. The disciples were not called upon to discuss the question as to who had sinned or had not sinned, but to understand the power and mercy of God in giving sight to the blind. It was evident that there was no healing virtue in the clay, or in the pool wherein the blind man was sent to wash, but that the virtue was in Christ. [Obedience to His word was evidence of a change in the blind man.] {DA 471.4}

The Pharisees could not but be astonished at the cure. Yet they were more than ever filled with hatred; for the miracle had been performed on the Sabbath day [and without their permission]. {DA 471.5} . . . [Let's move on a bit]

Again the rabbis appealed to the blind man, “What says you of Him, that He has opened your eyes? He said, He is a prophet.” The Pharisees then asserted that he had not been born blind and received his sight. They called for his parents, and asked them, saying, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind?” {DA 472.2}

There was the man himself [with his friends], declaring that he had been blind, and had had his sight restored; but the Pharisees would rather deny the evidence of their own senses than admit that they were in error. So powerful is prejudice, so distorting is Pharisaical righteousness. {DA 472.3}

The Pharisees had one hope left, and that was to intimidate the man's parents. With apparent sincerity they asked, “How then does he now see?” The parents feared to compromise themselves; for it had been declared that whoever should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ should be

“put out of the synagogue;” that is, should be excluded from the synagogue for thirty days.

During this time no child could be circumcised nor dead be lamented in the offender's home. The sentence was regarded as a great calamity; and if it failed to produce repentance, a far heavier penalty followed. The great work wrought for their son had brought conviction to the parents, yet they answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but by what means he now sees, we know not; or who has opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.” Thus they shifted all responsibility from themselves to their son; for they dared not confess Christ. {DA 472.4}

The Son of God came to change all those ideas about His Father and to give a better Life, and one way was to show that He has power in Himself to save, power to give Life. “. . . In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. “He that has the Son has life.” 1 John 5:12. The [self-existing] divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life . . .” DA 530.3.

The accepted mis-information is that He received it all from His Father, but that is another of Satan's clever twists, and so Paul, that master teacher of the gospel, opened his letter to the Christians at Rome with these words:

Romans 1:

¹ Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to [a special teacher of] the gospel of God, ² (which He had promised afore by His prophets in the holy scriptures,) ³ concerning His Son Jesus Christ our LORD, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh [had a body made for Him by a human, Hebrews 10:5]; ⁴ and [was] declared to be the Son of God ***with power***, according to the spirit of holiness, ***by the resurrection from the dead . . .***”

[If He was resurrected by the Father, as some teach,
then He would not be showing any difference
between Himself and any other Christian.]

And, it is written through another prophet:

Jeremiah 27:

¹² I [Jeremiah] spoke also to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, “Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. ¹³ ***Why*** will you die [physically], you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the LORD has spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?”

My second point is why did that Christian choose to stay alive? I am not judging his motive for he makes no secret of why. It is a choice in most cases as we have just read. Except when death comes from murder or some action of violence such as a car accident. But it is an option – something we can select! And Paul tells us that he exercised it because he wanted to help others. On the other hand, my fellow-Christian tells me that he chose the operation because *he* did not want to die.

Both choices are good and will not necessarily affect their salvation (for that comes about solely because of the possession of new birth), but unless something changes in our understanding of what God actually wants, then physical death will certainly overtake him as it already has Paul.

I know of another Christian who firmly believes that his life is solely in God's hands, and he refuses to have any recourse to human medical methods even though he is close to death. Unlike the first example, he is trying as many "natural" methods as he can, which seems to me to be the same thing in a different direction! For he is relying on the words and methods of another human whom he regards in great high regard.

The worldly saying goes, "Nothing is more certain than death and taxes!" This disregards the fact there were no taxes until Joseph imposed them on the Egyptians to enable the state to still function during the seven years of famine, and other kings and states have since followed suit. So the attitude of the worldlings and the majority of Christians is that death is inevitable, in contradiction to what God has shown in His word and with two of His creatures.

Conclusion:

Jesus said:

Matthew 5:

²⁹ And if your right eye offend [cause you to die] you, pluck it out, and cast it from you: for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell [the grave].

³⁰ And if your right hand offend you, cut it off [by a surgeon], and cast it from you: for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell [the grave].

So there is nothing wrong in either way. All we need is to do is ask the Spirit which is right for us individually. It has never been God's intention that we should die the first death and certainly not the second. But we will not receive such a gift by our good works. There is something else at play here and we do

well to search and pray that we be given the answer if we wish to be among the 144,000 who will not see death.

{Volume 7 Bible Commentary 970.8 to 10}

Those whom the Lamb shall lead by the fountains of living waters, and from whose eyes He shall wipe away all tears, will be those now receiving the knowledge and understanding revealed in the Bible, the Word of God. . . . {7BC 970.8}

We are to copy no human being. There is no human being wise enough to be our criterion. We are to look to the man Christ Jesus, who is complete in the perfection of righteousness and holiness. He is the author and finisher of our faith. He is the pattern man.

His experience is the measure of the experience that we are to gain. His *character* is our model. Let us, then, take our minds off the perplexities and the difficulties of this life, and fix them on Him, that *by beholding we may be changed into His likeness*. We may behold Christ to good purpose. We may safely look to Him; for He is all-wise. *As we look to Him and think of Him, He will be formed within, the hope of glory*. {7BC 970.9}

Let us *strive* [in this way] with all the power that God has given us to be among the hundred and forty-four thousand (RH March 9, 1905). {7BC 970.10}

Who wants to add (or subtract!) from these thoughts? I won't argue as I have stated, but I will publish your Scriptures so that we may review all the words of God on the subject. Some of the comments on this page are adapted from books in my library. No recognition is given because they are not intended as authorities, but are used because they express my understanding clearly.

Next query. To be discussed from September 1st, 2018.

Query:

Acts 16:

²⁵ And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises to God [while they were in jail]: and the prisoners heard them. ²⁶ And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. ²⁷ And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. ²⁸ But Paul

cried with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm: for we are all here” [they all chose to remain].

²⁹ Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, ³⁰ and brought them out, and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ And they said, “Believe on the LORD Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house”.

³² And they spoke to him the word of the LORD [about the Son of God], and to all that were in his house. ³³ And he [the jailer] took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. ³⁴ And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat [food] before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

Mark 16:16

“He [she] that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he [she] that believes not shall be damned”.

So the question is; should I get baptised and join the church?

For contact:

mail to: nonconformist@mail.com (Cut and paste if necessary)

To see the list of some my past queries, [click here](#).

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