

The Death That Leads To Life

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Years ago some archaeologists were exploring the inner chambers of an Egyptian pyramid. Among the artifacts that had lain in undisturbed seclusion for thousands of years were some grains of wheat.

Someone calculated that if those grains of wheat had been planted, and if the successive crops had been replanted, that handful of wheat could feed the present population of the world for several days.

But it fed no one. Why? Because it remained alone. It did not die; therefore, it did not live.

While those grains of wheat lay in fruitless isolation in Egypt, some distance away in Jerusalem the Lord Jesus Christ spoke these significant words: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24).

We hear much about the victorious life of faith that is the heritage of every true believer in Jesus Christ. We are told of our authority in Christ. We are exhorted to rise above discouragement and defeat, confess the Word of God, and live as overcomers.

Good! So it is, and so we should. At the same time we must also remember this essential truth: although in the natural death follows life, in the spiritual *life follows death*. Victorious resurrection life in Christ is ours only if we first come to the Cross and there die to sin and self-will. This Cross is not some modern replica; it is *the* Cross of history where Jesus once-for-all bore our sins. There Jesus died *for* sin; there we die *to* sin. His death for sin becomes our death to sin.

Many desire to go directly to the empty tomb and enter into the victory of Christ's resurrection. But the road to the resurrection goes across a hill called Calvary. It is the stop at the Cross to die that they struggle to avoid.

They want eternal life and all the blessings of God, but *on their own terms*. They desire to have all the benefits of the gospel and still remain committed to their self-will and self-indulgences.

Impossible! One cannot choose life and death, freedom and bondage, at the same time. The attempt to do so only produces the wretched man of Romans chapter seven.

But doesn't the Bible say that eternal life is the gift of God? Yes, in Romans 6:23. But it is not the kind of gift that the emcee of a game show gives to a lucky contestant. Rather, it is the gift that the offended Sovereign graciously bestows upon a rebellious subject who has returned to obedience to his Lord and now bows contritely before Him.

John 10:10 records these beautiful words of our Savior: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

This life is a personal relationship with the Father and the Son. Jesus said so in John 17:3. "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Notice, eternal life is not just the *result* of this relationship with the Father and the Son. The *relationship itself* is eternal life.

Now what disrupts and destroys this relationship? The answer is *sin*. How can two have a relationship when one is alienated from the other? They cannot. Man is alienated from God because of disobedience. To have a relationship with God—that is, to have eternal life—we must be reconciled to God. That requires the forsaking of sin because sin is the cause of alienation and the obstacle to reconciliation.

The Cross is where sin is dealt with and removed. So then, to be reconciled to God, we must meet Him in Christ at the Cross. And remember, the Cross means death to our self-will and selfishness. The Cross is the end of disobedience and the beginning of new life, eternal life, life in personal fellowship with the Father and the Son.

Jesus said: "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34, 35). Try to salvage your self-ruled life, and you will lose real life. Like the grain in the pyramid, you will be *alone*.

The sixth chapter of Romans states that every true believer in Jesus Christ *died to sin* (Romans 6:2). Paul testified to this for himself in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Paul affirmed the same to be true of all who belong to Christ. "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24).

He reminded the Colossian Christians: "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

If you are Christ's, you are dead to sin. Your flesh and its lusts no longer rule you; they are nailed to His cross.

Now, even though we are dead indeed to sin, we must daily "reckon" (count, consider, settle) that fact to be so and that we are "alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11). When temptations assail us, desires clamor for control, and weaknesses appear, we do not

respond by trying to "crucify the flesh" (works), but by reckoning that we are already dead to sin and alive to God (faith).

With that fact firmly settled, we refuse to allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies (Romans 6:12). We point back to our baptism in water as the funeral where we buried the old person who was a slave to sin; and we say: "The old me who did those things is dead and buried, and there is no room for them in the new me because Christ lives there." In effect, we say to temptation and sin, "What part of *NO* don't you understand?"

This is the death that leads to life, and it is the only way to live. 2 Timothy 2:11 declares, "For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him." Also, 1 Peter 2:24 emphasizes "that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness."

So then, the real theme is life. "He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

This is exactly what Paul meant when he declared: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Eager for eternal life, a rich young ruler came to Jesus. The Master told him to take up the cross and follow Him. The young man refused. He wanted eternal life, but not if it meant death to self and selfishness. So he went away sorrowful (Mark 10:17 - 22). If only he had surrendered, he would have gone away happy—forever.

Perhaps you are struggling to "live like a Christian." You have heard sermons and perhaps have read books on faith, spiritual power and victorious living. But still, you remain under bondage, defeated and discouraged. The problem is that you are trying to live in the power of Christ's resurrection without being made conformable to His death (Philippians 3:10).

Yes, we are saved by faith alone, and the first exercise of saving faith is to come to the Cross and there let go of self and embrace the Savior.

There's room at the Cross for you. Come, die—and live!