

This Is My Story... I was jolted into the world of grief

By

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At seventeen years of age, I had never faced the death of a loved one. Of course, I'd known a few people who'd died; but, I myself had lost no close relatives, no family members and no friends. Then, suddenly, I was jolted into the world of grieving. As I went to see the body of my boyfriend, just flown home from Viet Nam, and as I attended his funeral, I knew that life would never be the same again for I had met an enemy—death.

In the months after Harvey's death, our Sunday School decided it would be nice to buy a memorial plaque for him. I found comfort in working to raise the money for this purchase and in going with my Sunday School teacher to present the plaque to his parents. Its inscription read: "In Memory of Harvey C. Harris... 'O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?'" (The quotation is from 1 Cor. 15:56).

"What do those words mean?" I pondered as I read the plaque. "O death, here is your sting?" (Death is like the sting of a scorpion.) "O grave, where is your victory?" (The sting of death is gone.) "The sting of death must be gone," I decided, "because Harvey is in heaven.

Years later, when my father died unexpectedly, I viewed Death in the same way. I remember consoling myself with fantasies of my musically gifted father—who had led the church choir—now directing an angelic choir. I thought of him as living a very active life in heaven. Death hardly seemed an enemy at all. I almost felt guilty—if not schizophrenic—for even grieving.

Since those days I have come to understand the biblical teaching of Conditional Immortality. And this has led me to see Death in three new ways.

DEATH IS OUR ENEMY

First of all, Death IS our enemy. "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26 NKJV). Of what value would Christ's victory over death be if death were a blessed event?

Our Christian loved ones who die do not graduate into a more wonderful life without a physical body. They were created, not for life as spirit beings, but to be alive as whole persons. The Bible introduces us to Death as a thief, not as a gift-giver. Death *takes away* life, it *doesn't give* a fuller and more meaningful life.

Death is doomed to destruction

Secondly, I see that not only is Death our enemy, but it is to be destroyed by Christ at the Resurrection. As I read in the Bible the verse that was on Harvey's plaque, my attention is riveted to the verse preceding it: "So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and

this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Cor. 15:54 NKJV).

Now that I recognize the Bible’s teaching that Christians receive immortality at the resurrection—and not before, I can more fully appreciate the victory that we have over Death. It is more than just going to heaven! The sting of death is removed because Death itself will be completely abolished!

Now I can both grieve and rejoice

Third, as I understand death more realistically and put my hope in the Resurrection rather than a fantasized afterlife, I am both allowed to grieve and to rejoice. I can grieve over the death of a loved one because that person is not alive. My sadness is not only that I miss them, but also that I know that life has temporarily ended for them.

But I can also rejoice because I know that when Christ arose from the grave, he dealt a death-blow to our great enemy, Death. So, as believers, though we eventually die, we will not die forever. We will rise again! And we will see the destruction of our enemy, Death. Then our perishable body will become imperishable, our mortality will be replaced with immortality, and we will truly shout victoriously:

**“O Death, where is your sting?
O Grave, where is your victory?”**

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