

# CHRIST AND DEATH

By

Curtis Dickinson

The gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ focuses on the issues which lie at the root of all man's problems and reveals the connection between sin, judgment and death. We must see this connection or we have no Gospel.

The Bible pictures death as the enemy of man. It entered the world as a curse for man's sin and stands always as the product of man's estrangement from God. God takes no pleasure in death. It is equated with enmity against God: "All they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36).

When Jesus spoke of dying, the disciples were distressed. It was something that should happen to the wicked — David even prayed that God would take the lives of the wicked — but not something that should happen to the pure and holy teacher who exemplified righteousness and lived without sin.

To the Jews the preaching of the cross was a stumbling block. They were not prepared to accept a Messiah who must submit to a shameful death. Their Messiah was to be a superman, smashing their enemies and leading them to a glorious golden day when they would live in luxury and power. This concept still holds sway in Zionism and millennialism.

Then, even today, the basic issue of sin, judgment and death was overshadowed by the love of the world and by political and material goals.

The preaching of this generation has focused on self-esteem and love. Somehow we have embraced the idea that it denies love to talk about our guilt before God and the inevitable consequences of sinning against Him.

When the relationship between sin and death is denied, then Christ's death becomes only a sentimental story, a picture of man's inhumanity to man, but with no direct effect on man's ultimate destiny.

In fact, great effort is made to deny the connection of death with sin and judgment. Death itself is ultimately denied. It is only a transition to another form or state; the "real you" doesn't die. Hence the popularity of the reincarnation concept and the doctrine of universalism, that all will somehow eventually be saved to eternal life.

In the face of such common philosophies, the death and resurrection of Christ loses Biblical relevance. Men continue to mouth the words in order to sound orthodox, but the significance is missing.

Christ viewed death as a fearful reality. As He knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before His death, "distress and anguish came over him." He saw death as an enemy (as Paul, who called it the "last enemy" in I Corinthians 15:26). He prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me."

Contrast Christ's attitude toward death to that of Socrates, who saw death as his liberator, which loosed his soul from its prison in the body. Socrates, in his ignorance, saw death as a friend. It had no connection to sin and judgment and held no terror for him because it had no reality.

Christ's death was voluntary. Given His unique and super-natural power, demonstrated in many miracles including the times He walked away from the Jews who continually sought to murder Him, Jesus could have avoided the cross. He explained, "I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down of myself" (John 10:17–18). He clearly stated that the purpose of His coming into the world was to "give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). He was not put to death for His ideals, nor because He was in conflict with the guardians of religious law or a threat to Roman authority, but because He was the "lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

It is significant that the Gospel narrators make no attempt to impress upon us the grotesque horror of a Roman crucifixion, as so many of us are tempted to do. Nor do the apostles dwell upon this, but simply refer to the **cross** or to **blood** or to His **death**. The force of the event was in the fact that a sinless man died to meet the penalty of sin upon the sinful. God provided a "dier" with no guilt of His own to die for the guilty! Call it atonement. Call it propitiation. Call it redemption. It all amounts to the same thing, that the stroke of death due to all of us fell upon Jesus in order that we might receive life instead of death. "...now at the end of the ages has He been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this comes judgment; so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for Him., unto salvation" (Heb. 9:26–28).

On the third day after death Jesus arose bodily from the dead. Having no sin of His own, He could not be held by death (Acts 2:24). His resurrection is a demonstration of a supreme miracle of God, to restore life to the dead. It says nothing of a transcendent power of the soul, but the opposite, that the solution to death is resurrection, a restoration of life to the whole man. Jesus said to John, "I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore" (Rev. 1:18).

The hope Christ offers is grounded in these historic facts: that He died to meet the just penalty for sin and that He arose from death. All whose sins are imputed to Christ are sinless so far as judgment is concerned; therefore, death cannot hold them and they too shall rise to live even as He does. Sin is the root of all man's ills, including death, and the remedy is found in only one thing, the death of Jesus.

For humanity God sets for the only one destiny, not a variety of options. We will have life in His image and in fellowship with Him, or we will not have life at all. Paul writes that "you were called in one hope" (Eph. 4:4). The alternative is death. Only in this context is the cross of Christ understandable.

On this basis the apostles called men to repentance and faith in Christ as Lord. To the Greeks Paul cried, "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man who He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31).

To escape the prospect of that judgment men have invented a systematic theology which denies death. But the proof is in the historic fact that Jesus who stood as a man in that judgment suffered death and was restored to life by resurrection.

Jesus promised, "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32). On that great and final

day, when we stand before God, when all must give account for the sin and evil of this life, it is as if Jesus should stand before the Father and say, "I confess that I took the guilt for all this one's wickedness and bore his sin in my own body on the tree. The wages of his sin is paid, therefore, he is acquitted and is free to enter into eternal life."

Death is everywhere. The second and final death awaits each sinner. But the solution has been provided in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Only by identifying with Him can the sting of death be removed.

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