

PARCHMENT

AND HE SAID UNTO ME, WRITE: FOR THESE WORDS ARE TRUE AND FAITHFUL.

REVELATION 21:5



For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:23

WHICH DEATH DID CHRIST DIE?

The Bible presents two distinct categories of death. One is a temporal sleep, while the other is a sentence of eternal extinction. Since the temporal death occurs before the eternal, we speak of these as being the first and second deaths. Please note that there are no scriptural examples of a 'third' death outside these two categories. Those who want to teach that Christ died neither the first nor second death need to produce a Bible verse to support their view. On the cross, Christ died one of these two deaths.

The question is: which death did Christ die? And how does this affect both the atonement and God's justice? In order to answer these questions, we must first understand the defining characteristics of the two deaths.

The first death is that which Jesus calls a 'sleep'. In most cases, it carries no judgment, condemnation or punishment. There is no payment for sins at this death. As we know, both the righteous and the wicked arise from this death, "some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Daniel 12:2.

By contrast, the second death involves a judgment, condemnation, and punishment. This death is eternal. Having refused Christ's gift of atonement, the lost now pay for their sins with their lives. In *The Great Controversy*, as in Scripture, Sister White clearly positions the second death after the millennium, when the wicked are destroyed according to their deeds.

"The wicked receive their recompense in the earth. Proverbs 11:31. They "shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts." Malachi 4:1. Some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days. All are punished 'according to their deeds.'" {GC 673}

Indeed, all Christians agree that Christ paid the penalty for our sins. Romans 6:23 clearly identifies what that penalty is:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."
Romans 6:23

In this verse, death is contrasted with eternal life. Therefore, the mention of death must be referring to the second (eternal) death. Further evidence is also given in the Spirit of Prophecy, where Sister White confirms this point in an undeniable and conclusive manner.

"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." [Romans 6:23.]...The death referred to in these scriptures is not that pronounced upon Adam, for all mankind suffer the penalty of his transgression. It is the "second death" that is placed in contrast with everlasting life." {GC88 544.1}

The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy clearly teach that the wages of sin is the sec-



ond death. Moreover, the Bible also declares that Christ bore our sins upon the cross.

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” 1 Peter 2:24

For Christ to “bare our sins... on the tree” that we might be “healed”, means that he bore the penalty of our sins (eternal death) so that we might be partakers of eternal life. Consider the following passage from the pen of Inspiration.

‘The penalty of the transgression of God’s law is death. Christ suffered death for man, and brought life and immortality to light by coming from the dead.’ {RH March 9, 1886}

Once again, Sister White draws from Romans 6:23 and states that the “penalty of the transgression of God’s law is death”. This is the death she is referring to when in the next sentence she states, “Christ suffered death for man”. It is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23) which, as we’ve seen, is the second death.

The statement also says: Christ “brought life and immortality to light by coming from the dead”. The objection is often made that Christ could not have died the second death because there is no coming back from that death. This is the very point! Christ conquered the grave. He conquered the second death, and in so doing, opened the way to bring “life and immortality to light”. Jesus says:

“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” Revelation 1:18.

The keys to hell and death are the keys to the grave. Without these keys, there would be no resurrection. The dead would remain lost forever. Of course, this would apply to every human being, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;” Romans 3:23. However, since Jesus conquered the second death and thus “has the keys of hell and of death”, He is able to offer us eternal life. Sister White states:

“Christ was crucified....He was lying in Joseph’s new tomb. Christ descended into the grave as our Sin-bearer, opening a grave for the sins of all

who will accept Him as their personal Saviour.” {12MR 411.1}

This statement contains a most wonderful truth. Joseph’s new tomb - Christ’s grave - became the grave for all the sins of those who will accept Him and be saved. Their sins were paid for on the cross and buried in Joseph’s tomb forever. This is what it means for the truly converted Christian to be buried with Christ in baptism. Baptism is to reflect the blessed fact that the old man was joined to Christ by faith on the cross, and that his sins were paid for and buried. God now sees him as a new creation under no condemnation.

Thus, when Inspiration says that Christ was “our Sin-bearer”, it means exactly that. He bore our sins and the wages of those sins, “the penalty of the transgression of God’s law”. {RH March 9, 1886}. With reference to Romans 6:23, we have seen that “it is the ‘second death’ that is placed in contrast with everlasting life.” {GC88 544.1}

I previously stated that in the first death, there is no condemnation or punishment. Both the righteous and the wicked die this death. There are some cases in the Bible where certain men and women (such as Ananias and Saphira) were struck down by God’s judgements. However, this judgement does not bring about their eternal condemnation. It is not until after the millennium that the wicked receive their final irrevocable condemnation and punishment. This is known as the investigative judgment and takes place after the wicked have already died:

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:” Hebrews 9:27

It’s important to consider that when a truly righteous person dies, he suffers no sense of condemnation or punishment. In fact for many, death is a deliverance. One recognises that they are freed from this life of suffering, and that in what will seem to be a moment, they will spend eternity with their Saviour in a glorified body. In many ways, this is a beautiful death. Inspiration says that “to the believer, death is but a small matter.” {DA 787}

On the other hand, when the wicked die the second death, it is full of anguish, sorrow, torment, physical pain and punishment. As we saw, some people burn for many days. Ask yourself: when Christ died, was

His death that of someone who's looking forward to eternal life? Someone who's death is but a small matter? Someone who knows that He will soon be with God in the bliss of eternity? Someone who has a beautiful peace and blessed assurance? It certainly was not.

Jesus Himself stated on the night of His arrest: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death:" Matthew 26:38. It was only at the end, after "the awful darkness, apparently forsaken of God" that "in submission He committed Himself to God" and "by faith, Christ was victor." {DA 756}

Indeed, Christ's suffering and death was full of anguish and immense physical and spiritual torment. It was a torment we will never understand. In fact, we are told that He would have died in Gethsemane if Gabriel had not been sent to strengthen Him. He was dying under the curse and condemnation of our sins and its wages. This is the second death. Notice the following statement.

"Tho innocent and undeserving of punishment, our Substitute and Surety was brought under the curse and condemnation that should have been ours." {ST Dec 8, 1898}

What is the curse and condemnation that should have been ours? Obviously, it is eternal death! Eternal separation from God. The wages of sin. On the cross, Christ could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present itself in Him coming forth a conqueror. And He felt His separation from God would be eternal. This is the very anguish and condemnation the sinner will feel at the execution of the judgement. Notice what Inspiration says about Christ's experience.

"He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race." {DA 753}

Christ feared that His separation with the Father was to be eternal. And as we saw, this is certainly not the experience of a righteous man dying the first death! Rather, the very quote says: "Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race."

When mercy no longer pleads for the guilty race, it

means that they are lost eternally. There is no coming back. Inspiration says that this is the anguish which Christ experienced on the cross. That's why He felt His separation with the Father "was to be eternal".

From these statements, it's most evident that Christ indeed died the second death. No other death carries with it this anguish, punishment and condemnation. Moreover, Christ was our "Sin-bearer". And the wages of sin is the second death. If He did not receive the wages of our sins (the second death), then they have not been paid for. You have no atonement. The very reason that all men die the first death is because Christ purchased their probation by taking their punishment upon Himself, giving man another chance.

The moment Adam sinned, Christ pronounced the everlasting covenant, that He would take man's punishment. Hence, man would be given a second probation. That's why every human being aside from the 144,000 dies a first death.

"The instant man accepted the temptations of Satan, and did the very things God had said he should not do, Christ, the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, "Let the punishment fall on Me. I will stand in man's place. He shall have another chance"" (Letter 22, Feb. 13, 1900). {1BC 1085.2}

Had Christ not intervened, the death that was to fall upon man would have been eternal death. It would not have been a second death numerically, but man would have ceased to live forever. His death would have been eternal. Christ took that punishment in order that man could receive probation. Hence, the first death is only a sleep from which every human being, wicked or righteous, will be resurrected. Accordingly, the punishment that Christ received was clearly the second/eternal death. It is the punishment that should have been man's for transgressing God's law. As we saw, the wages of sin is the second death.

In fact, the Bible says:

"...the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:6

"For he hath made him [to be] sin for us..."

2 Corinthians 5:21

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us...” Galatians 3:13

“...that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” Hebrews 2:9

One objection to this truth states that Christ could not have died the second death because the second death is solely “the lake of fire”.

“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” Revelation 20:14

This interpretation of Revelation 20:14 is incorrect. The second death is not the lake of fire. The second death is eternal death, from which there is no coming back. The lake of fire is simply the means by which God executes the second death after the millennium. Consider the context of this passage.

“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. **This is the second death.**

And **whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”**
Revelation 20:12-15

Clearly, the lake of fire isn't, in and of itself, the second death. It is simply the means God uses to destroy the wicked after they've been judged. For example, consider a house fire. With no one inside the house, there is no death. But suppose a family perished inside that house fire. Now there is death. The house fire was the cause, or the means, of the family's death.

When the Bible states of the lake of fire, “this is the second death”, the context clearly reveals it is the wicked perishing in the lake of fire that is the second death.

Although Christ died this death for the lost as well as the righteous, the impenitent, by their lives, rejected His sacrifice on their behalf.

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” 1 John 2:2.

Yet having refused Christ's gift of atonement, the lost now pay for their sins with their lives. Whereas the righteous, as we will see, are judged to have already endured by faith, the penalty with Christ on the cross, and therefore receive forgiveness, atonement and the gift of eternal life.

Others argue that ‘death is death’. They refuse to answer which death Christ died, claiming instead that He simply died. It is important to note that while the nature of death is the same in both the first and the second death - in that one cannot think, feel, or have emotion etc - the case of it being a temporal sleep or an eternal extinction makes them positively different. One might rightly say: ‘I am not concerned for dying the temporal death before me, but I am terribly concerned for dying the eternal death.’

This fact that the two deaths bring about vastly different conclusions is undeniable. The point of this study is: which conclusion was Christ facing? Christ was facing the punishment of a sinner dying under the wages of sin - the second death! On the cross, Jesus was judged. He was condemned; cut off from the light of His Father's presence and from all heaven. Inspiration declares:

“He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race.” {DA 753}

Leaving all numerals aside, Christ was facing the conclusion of eternal separation from His Father; eternal death. This is the same conclusion which Adam was facing had he not been given a second chance. Although Adam would only have died once, his death would have been in the category of what we now call the ‘second’ death. For the second death is the wages of sin.

Ultimately, the teaching that Christ did not die the second (eternal) death destroys the atonement and casts questions upon God's justice. For if Christ

only died the first death (which bears no penalty for the transgression of the law) then God forgives you without payment for the penalty which the law demands. Conversely, if Christ did pay for our sins, how can one claim that He did not die the second death?

Notice the following statement which shows how the penalty for our sins was paid for that we might be justified.

“Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed.’” {DA 25}

God cannot punish the innocent for the guilty. This would be unjust as Ezekiel 18:20 explains. Christ’s death was not only substitutional, it was vicarious. This point cannot be over emphasised. We rightly criticise other faiths because they do not have a Saviour, and because their god is unjust, yet this false doctrine similarly teaches salvation without one’s sins being paid for.

If Christ died any other death than the second death - which is the death the law demands for its transgression - then our sins have not been paid for.

Christ’s entire life was lived out vicariously as a part of all humanity, not only his death. The earlier verses continually emphasise the word “us”. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states: “...he hath made him [to be] sin for us”. This refers to the entire human race; the iniquity of us all. And it wasn’t only at the cross. Notice the following dictionary definition and the successive statements by Sister White.

vicarious
(Merriam Webster Dictionary)
2: performed or suffered by one person as a substitute for another or to the benefit or advantage of another : substitutionary <a vicarious sacrifice>

“Sickness of Others Carried Vicariously
Christ alone was able to bear the afflictions of all the human family. “In all their afflictions he was afflicted.” He never bore disease in His own flesh, but He carried the sickness of others. When suf-

fering humanity pressed about Him, He who was in the health of perfect manhood was as one afflicted with them. . . .” {3SM 133.2}

“He has borne every test imposed upon him. He failed not in the wilderness of temptation when he endured the pressure of Adam’s guilt and that of his posterity.” {3SP p38}

“Look upon our precious Saviour suffering in the wilderness, bowing under the load of man’s guilt, and enduring the keenest pangs of hunger...he was the Prince of heaven; but in man’s behalf he became sin for the race.” {RH, September 23, 1890 par. 3}

“In man’s behalf, Christ conquered by enduring the severest test. For our sake He exercised a self-control stronger than hunger or death. And in this first victory were involved other issues that enter into all our conflicts with the powers of darkness.” {DA 117.4}

Finally, please consider this wonderful statement from E.J Waggoner. This statement is so meaningful that one may need to read it several times to fully grasp its depth. It contains our forgiveness, our salvation, the payment for our sins, the entire gospel and ultimately, the evidence of heavenly justice.

“As many of you as have been baptized into Christ hath put on Christ.” Gal. 3:27. But we are baptized into Christ, by being “baptized into his death.” “We are buried with him by baptism into death.” And thus it is that we receive the penalty of the law; not in person, but in figure. Christ has suffered for sin; and if we are “in him,” we also are accounted as having received the penalty. And since it is by baptism that we become united to him, we become dead to the law and united to Christ at the same time.” {June 17, 1886 E JW, SITI 360.2}

Notice how the Spirit of Prophecy supports Elder Waggoner.

“All who, before the universe of heaven, are adjudged to have, in Christ, endured the penalty of the law, and in him fulfilled its righteousness, will have eternal life.”

Today, some believers are teaching that Christ did not die the second death. In light of the previous

two statements we've just read, notice how their teaching contradicts and destroys their atonement.

Both these statements plainly teach that the forgiven sinner is judged to have endured "the penalty of the law". As Sister White affirms, they "are adjudged to have, in Christ, endured the penalty". And as Elder Waggoner brings out, "We are buried with him by baptism into death.' And thus it is that we receive the penalty of the law; not in person, but in figure."

Therefore, how can one by faith in Christ endure the penalty of the law (the wages of sin which is the second death) when they don't believe that Christ endured the second death? Their sins remain unpaid for.

Friends, this issue is not just about 'which death', but how our sins can be atoned for. Remember, God must be both "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Romans 3:26. God cannot justify us without upholding the justice that His law demands. Someone has to pay for the transgression of God's law. And we know that "the penalty of the transgression of God's law is death." {RH March 9, 1886}

Indeed, Christ took our penalty for transgressing God's law. And we saw that when referring to the wages of sin, which is another way of describing the penalty of transgression, Sister White declares:

"It is the "second death" that is placed in contrast with everlasting life." {GC88 544.1}

At the fall, man was facing eternal death. If Christ did not take that penalty, then we wouldn't have received a probation. Accordingly, we wouldn't die a first, temporal sleep. The very fact that all men arise from the first death is a testament to the fact that Christ died the second death, because if Christ did not take that penalty (the wages of sin) for us, then we would have been eternally lost.

This is why the Bible states that God is both "just, and the justifier". The penalty for our sins was truly paid for. This is the very heart of the gospel. As Jesus triumphantly declares:

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Revelation 1:18