

DEATH BY SIN

Have you ever personally seen anyone who died, and rose again? Christ of course did that, and the Bible talks of a number of other cases where resurrections occurred. But you don't hear much of such cases these days.

Believe it or not, you are looking at someone who died and rose again. It's something I've never talked about much—it happened overseas so I guess not much was said about it here. I haven't wanted to talk much about it in the past—it's not the sort of experience you want to talk about very readily. Even my own parents don't know much about what happened. But it's not much use my keeping it so secret, when it could be something that others could find useful and inspiring to hear about, so today I've decided to reveal it all to you.

The truth is that I died, but I'm alive to tell you about it today, thanks to God's great power! It happened a few years ago when I was in England, and the way I died was by drowning. I got out of my control in the water, and couldn't swim free. I'm not a very good swimmer. The waters swirled around me, and I was under.

But I'm here to tell the story today, and that's because fortunately there were a couple of ministers there, and they were able to haul me clear of the water. One of them looked at me and shook my hand and said "Congratulations! Welcome to the Church!"

Yes—you've got it! I'm talking about the day I was baptised. I used the terminology that I died and rose again, because that's the way the Bible describes our baptism.

Romans 6:3,4A,6-7 ³“Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? ⁴We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death.

⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.”

I don't think we generally emphasise that point enough in our daily lives that we, all of us who are baptised, have **died**. If we did understand and grasp that fact enough, wouldn't we act differently in our everyday lives? What he is saying is that dead men don't sin. We are dead, therefore we shouldn't sin.

Have you ever seen a dead man who is angry and full of hate? Ever seen a dead person jump out of a coffin full of rage at someone who has slighted him? Ever walked through a cemetery and seen corpses and cadavers rise up from various graves, grab their own tombstones and start bashing each other over the head in violent outbursts of anger?

No—of course not! That's absolutely ridiculous! Then why do we get angry and hateful? We are all dead bodies—we have all died. So why get upset at other people? Dead bodies don't worry about rivals or enemies, they don't feel hatred. It's peaceful, being dead.

Have you ever seen a dead body full of vanity? No, dead men don't get vain. They don't have to worry about vaunting themselves, impressing other people, wanting to be looked up

to and respected. Remember, we're dead. And it's a relief to be dead. We don't have to worry about impressing others with our big egos—what's the use? What's the worry? What's the big deal? We're dead, and dead people have no vanity.

Have you ever seen a dead man who's impatient? No, they don't get fretful and stewed up and rude. Because dead men have time to wait. All the time in the world.

Turn to Colossians 3:3,5 ³“**For you died**, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁵**Put to death**, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”

“For you died”! So what should you do? Verse 5—kill, put to death your sins. (TLB: “You should have as little desire for this world as a dead person does.”) When we die in baptism our sins should die with us. And if we really do look on it this way, that baptism is a **death**, then I believe this will help us in our fight against sin.

Hopefully we can stop to think about it next time we're angry or upset. “What's the big deal? I'm **dead** anyway.” Why be angry, why be cruel, why be impatient, why be vain? Because we're dead, and dead people don't have hatred and vanity and impatience.

But a good question arises here, if we take it a bit further. Have you ever heard of a dead man who was joyful? A dead man laughing, or dancing, or praising God? Have you ever heard of a dead person praying to God or studying his Bible? Have you ever heard of a dead man enjoying himself and achieving happiness and success?

The answer, of course, is no. But these are good things, so that shows there's a bit more to God's way than that. Our death in baptism, dying to our sins, is just the start.

Notice Colossians 2:12 “having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through your faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

Those of us who were buried in baptism **died**, yes that's right, and were buried under the water. But we rose again, so that (as it says in Romans) “we should walk in newness of life.”

How do we do that? Colossians 3:1-2,10 ¹“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ¹⁰and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.”

In other words, as Verse 10 says, “put on the new man” by putting on the qualities mentioned in Verses 12-25, which shows what we should be seeking to do—having died and now living again—living a totally new life.

Galatians 2:20 summarises it very well. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

“I am crucified with Christ”—we have **died**! When we were baptised we crucified our old man, with all its sins and lusts (Galatians 5:24)—we should now be **dead** to those sins. From that point of view we should think of ourselves as dead people—and dead people don't sin!

But, Paul goes on..."Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Jesus Christ lives in me."

So we have died, but Christ is now living in us—a new life of love and peace and joy and humility, and the fruits of God's Holy Spirit. That's the new life we're living.

Romans 6 has more to say about this principle. Verse 4B—we didn't read this part of the verse before. "in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Verses 6-13) So we have died, our old man has died—we killed it, and the sins of it, and now we are a new creation, living again in a new life.

Notice what Solomon says about the consequences of sin in Proverbs 2:18-19; 5:5; 6:32; 7:27; 8:36.

Over and over again, he says that adultery results in **death**.

Yet millions of people commit adultery every week, and they don't die from it. It's like God said to Adam and Eve—"In the day you eat of that tree, you shall surely die." Yet they didn't die for hundreds of years!

There's an interesting principle revealed in 1 Timothy 5:6—"But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives." "In pleasure" is better translated "in wantonness". "Dead while she yet lives": How can a person be dead and yet still alive?

Luke 9:59-60 ⁵⁹ "He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

The man's father had not yet died. It was a custom in Israel to bury the dead the same day. If his father had died the man wouldn't have been with Christ then, but would rather have been making preparations for the burial. He wanted to spend the remaining years with his father until his death. But Christ told him to leave that to the "**dead**". He referred to living human beings as dead men—spiritually speaking. They were spiritually dead.

Romans 8:6 "For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace."

Everyone who is carnally minded—who sins, who doesn't have God's Holy Spirit—is **dead**.

Ephesians 2:1,5 ¹ "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,"—⁵ "made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."

Those who sin are **dead** spiritually. But it's possible to be revived from that death!

1 John 5:12 "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." You can be alive but not have life!

1 John 3:14 "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death." We can pass from death to life.

People who are living a way of sin may be alive, but they are also **dead**. That's what God predicted when He told Adam and Eve that if they sinned (Genesis 2:17) "Dying you shall die"—from that point you will begin to die, because **death** is the automatic wages of sin.

All through the Bible we read of people who are alive and yet dead! They are existing, but God says they are not alive—in other words they are not experiencing the **quality of life** that God intended. They are on a path of life that is slowly but surely **killing them!**

Romans 1:27, RSV and NIV say “receiving the due penalty.” The Amplified Bible says “suffering in their own bodies and personalities the *inevitable consequences* of their wrong doing.” Everything God has labelled as a sin is something which will automatically hurt us if we transgress it. He created the human body and He knows what is good for it. So He told us in His Word what is good for it. He wants us not just to exist, but to enjoy *quality of life*. He wants us to live **abundantly**—not just to exist, but to begin to sample that type of thrilling life we will experience eternally in His Kingdom!

Sin of any type has a built-in, automatic penalty. It affects our mind, and it slowly but surely destroys us. It's like the famous novel “The Picture of Dorian Gray,” where everything he did wrong showed in the picture of Dorian, and it aged and got ugly. Similarly, everything we do wrong has an effect on us inside.

Sin robs us of the blessings and good things and quality of life God wants us to enjoy, and it causes us **hurt**. And it also hurts others around us, and it hurt Jesus Christ, because it caused His death. That's why God **hates** sin and that's why He wants us to put it out of our lives!

Proverbs 8:13 shows God's attitude to sin. “To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech.”

He **hates** it and He wants us to develop the “fear of the Lord”—wants us to **hate** sin too! Something that will help us develop that attitude more fully is to understand what sin does to us—**why** it is wrong—why God hates it—**how** it will hurt us.

An interesting scripture in this regard is Proverbs 11:17: “The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh.”

This verse reveals something very interesting about sin. It shows one of the main reasons **why** God hates sin, **why** we should get rid of sin. God doesn't tell us to put out our sins just to give us something to do. He wants us to destroy our sins for a very good reason—and basically that reason is that they **hurt us!**

Notice: “The merciful man does good for his own soul.” That means if you're kind, compassionate, gentle—merciful in your relationships with others, you benefit not only the others around you but **yourself** too—your “own soul.” The whole atmosphere you'll be living in will be one of good will, of peace and contentment, and that will be for your own benefit.

The rest of the verse shows the opposite effect—“he who is cruel troubles his own flesh.” Someone who is the opposite of merciful and kind – someone who is harsh, hard-hearted, severe, full of hatred or jealousy, or cruelty, or any of these negative emotions—doesn't only trouble those around him, but “**troubles his own flesh**” as well.

The truth of this statement has been proven scientifically! Scientists have examined what happens to the body when someone becomes angry, or full of hatred, or cruelty, or jealousy—because with any of these negative emotions the reactions are virtually the same. The results are amazing. They've found that as well as the obvious external changes, quite

a number of things change inside you too. For one thing, the muscles at the outlet of the stomach squeeze down so tightly that nothing can leave the stomach, and the entire digestive tract becomes so contracted that often people have severe abdominal pains.

But that's not all that happens behind the scenes when you get angry—or for that matter, when you are jealous, hateful or cruel, because most of these negative emotions produce the same reactions. The gastric juices inside the stomach change – there's a buildup of acid that helps cause ulcers. It's certainly true that “ulcers are caused not by what you eat, but by what eats you”! No wonder Solomon said “better is a scanty dinner of herbs where **love** is, than a sumptuous stalled ox and **hatred** therewith” (Proverbs 15:17).

Researchers into the reactions of the gastric juices would vouch that there's a good medical and scientific reason for that! There are other internal bodily reactions caused by anger too. Stress hormones are produced in the pituitary, adrenal, thyroid and other glands—an excess of these can cause all sorts of diseases.

On top of this, the heart rate rises greatly, blood pressure shoots up so much that a blood vessel can be burst, and the blood clots a great deal more quickly than usual—which is a good thing, because when people are angry they're more likely to be hurt in a fight. The blood vessels in the heart squeeze down and contract, and this can cause immediate death. That's why you sometimes hear about people getting really mad and riled up, and dropping dead on the spot.

Other things happen too. Proverbs 14:17(KJV) is interesting: “He that is soon angry deals foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.” The Hebrew word translated “angry” here actually means “short of nostrils”—because when someone's angry his nose contracts!

Proverbs 14:29 “He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalts folly.” —“hasty of spirit” is more strictly translated “short of spirit”—referring to the way a person gets so agitated he becomes short of breath. Notice it says to be “**slow** to wrath”—in other words anger is not always a sin. There is such a thing as righteous anger, and Jesus Himself was angry at times. But the key is to be **slow** to anger (in other words, it's a very rare thing—don't be angry easily) and when there is occasion for you to rightly be angry, then don't let the anger last long—“don't let the sun go down on your wrath.”

There are other bad effects too—anger makes someone more likely to get involved in a physical fight, more likely to injure himself, or something he picks on.

Proverbs 29:22 (KJV) “An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression.”

That's why it's a good thing blood clots quicker when someone is angry—it needs to! Anger breaks down relationships between people, ruins communication, and leads to guilt and depression. In fact, it could well be said that severe anger is a form of *insanity*. You're insane when you're not in control of your behaviour. Therefore when you're so angry you're out of control, you are temporarily insane.

Amazing, isn't it, what a fit of anger can do to you! It's easy to think—a little bit of anger won't hurt me! But think of all these kickbacks! And that's why God calls it a sin and tells us to avoid it. Because He knows it will hurt us. He created the human body, and He knows what is good for us and what isn't! Medical science has only recently discovered many of

these things, but Solomon, inspired by God, knew them many years ago. And the same can be said for any other sin we may have.

Every sin we commit automatically brings a penalty—automatically begins to destroy us. This is easily seen with regard to physical sins—you touch a hot stove, the burn mark testifies immediately to the fact that physical errors hurt you—begin to destroy your physical body. Eat the wrong type of food—result: stomach pains, or rashes, or other ill health. And so on.

With spiritual sin it's just the same, even though perhaps the effects and penalties are not usually quite so visible. A marriage problem begins to wreck the marriage. A smoking or drinking problem wrecks our health. A critical attitude wrecks our marriage and our health and our friendships. Any type of sin involves thinking a way differently from the way God has designed our minds to operate at their best, so any type of sin hurts our most precious physical possession, our mind and our character.

Knowing what our sins do to us, we ought to really hate and loathe them—and the more we do this, the closer we will be to God's attitude—because that's the way He feels about it.

And when we do have this attitude of hating our sins, what we are in actual fact doing is repenting! That's what repentance is—deep sorrow for our sins, understanding the pain they cause us and others, and also the fact that they caused Christ's death. And profound, heart-felt hatred of our sins is the first step towards overcoming them—it gives us the determination to change.

In summary, sin is a wretched thing. And God shows in His Word that people who engage in it are spiritually speaking, **dead**—they are **dead men** daily destroying their capacity for really living, as they continually break God's law and bring automatic penalties on themselves.

But we saw at the beginning of the sermon that we also are dead. How then are we different from the world around us?

Well, for one thing—we know we are dead, and they don't. They are the living dead, but they don't even know it. And for another thing—we are dead because we **killed ourselves**, so to speak, or allowed ourselves to be killed with Jesus—we mortified, or put to death our old man, our sins and transgressions. What we in effect did was to kill our sins before they killed us.

And the most important difference between us and the rest of the world is that now we are revived—we are alive again—but the rest of the world isn't. They are still dead, and they don't even know it.

So God doesn't want us to put sin out of our lives just to give us something to do, to help us learn self-control, or to give us a test to prove our loyalty to Him. He knows that the wages of sin is death! That every sin we do **hurts us** and **damages us** and slowly **kills us spiritually**.

Ezekiel 18:4 “For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die.” This is the relationship between sin and death (repeated in verse 20.)

Ezekiel 18:21-23 ²¹ “But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die. ²² None of the offences they have committed will be remembered against them. Because of the righteous things they have done, they will live. ²³ Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?”

God doesn't take pleasure in seeing people die as a result of their sins. But that's the automatic, in-built result and He can't change it without breaking His own law.

Verse 29 “Yet the Israelites say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Are my ways unjust, people of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust?”

People say that God's way isn't fair. Why is there so much suffering? Why does God hide Himself?

The answer is plain.

Verses 30-32 ³⁰ “Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offences; then sin will not be your downfall. ³¹ Rid yourselves of all the offences you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? ³² For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!”

What is the answer? To **repent!** To realise **sin is our ruin**. It is **ruining us!**

We can turn and live. We can have a new heart and a new spirit!

We can leave our sins **dead behind us** and they can be totally forgiven and forgotten.