

The Death that Overcomes Death

Key Verse: Galatians 2:20: *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

As we delve into the theme of the death of the Christian, it is essential to understand that this kind of death is not something we should fear; rather, it is a transformative experience that leads to life and victory through Christ. The apostle Paul's profound declaration in Galatians 2:20 encapsulates the essence of our Christian journey—the process of being crucified with Christ transforms our old selves into new creations alive in Him. Just as physical death often begins with symptoms and awareness of a deadly illness, the spiritual death of a Christian begins with the eye-opening knowledge of sin that is revealed through the preaching of the Gospel.

When someone is confronted with a life-threatening disease, the realization of their condition can induce fear, anxiety, and distress. Likewise, upon hearing the message of salvation and the ramifications of sin, the heart is stirred, and one becomes acutely aware of their spiritual sickness. The prophet Isaiah emphasizes this in Isaiah 6:5 when he declares, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Here, Isaiah acknowledges his sinfulness in the presence of a holy God—the distress of knowing one's sinful condition leads to the desire for change and healing.

In the physical realm, individuals motivated to combat a malignant disease will seek knowledge, understanding, and treatment to eradicate the illness. They develop an aversion to the affliction, which leads them into a battle for their health. In a similar vein, upon recognizing their sin, a Christian begins to take inventory of their transgressions. This acknowledgment is not merely an exercise in guilt; it is an essential step toward healing. *Each sin is metaphorically written on one's cross*—the cross that represents the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Christians are called to carry their cross daily, as instructed in Luke 9:23: "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

This conceptualization of death is unique; Christ, in His victory, provides us with the agency to proactively engage in this crucifixion. Although it is through Christ's sacrifice that our sins are forgiven, we take the initiative in embracing His death. Notably, Jesus was acutely aware of the nature and timing of His death. Throughout the Gospels, He spoke openly about it, such as in John 12:32-33: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die." Jesus taught His disciples about the necessity of His death and resurrection multiple times, emphasizing that His mission was rooted in fulfilling the will of the Father. In Matthew 16:21, we read, "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."

Just as the children of Israel were forewarned and prepared for the angel of death during the Passover, so too are Christians equipped to face the reality of death with the assurance provided by the death of Christ. Exodus 12 illustrates how the blood of the Passover lamb was applied to the doorposts, allowing the angel of death to "pass over" those homes. This event serves as a beautiful foreshadowing of Christ's redemptive work—His blood covers us, shielding us from eternal separation from God.

Now, let us explore three examples where death meets death, demonstrating how the faithful have preemptively engaged with mortality through the lens of covenant:

Circumcision: In Genesis 17, God established circumcision as a sign of His covenant with Abraham. This act involved the physical shedding of blood, symbolizing the cutting away of the flesh. Colossians 2:11-13 reveals its spiritual significance: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." Here we see that spiritual circumcision represents the death of the old sinful nature, a necessary step in the Christian journey, linking us to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ.

King Josiah's Reform: In 2 Kings 22-23, King Josiah's response to the discovery of the Book of the Law illustrates symbolic death meeting death. Upon realizing the state of the nation's spiritual decay, Josiah tore his garments (2 Kings 22:11) as an outward expression of mourning and repentance. This act of tearing his garments symbolizes the death of the old covenant and the rejection of sin; it represented a radical shift away from the Adamic nature that sought to rebel against God's commandments. By taking this bold stance, Josiah called

the people to renew their covenant with God, further demonstrating that the acknowledgment and rejection of sin must precede restoration.

Baptism in Jesus' Name: Acts 2:38 provides a powerful example of death meeting death through baptism: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Baptism symbolizes the believer's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. As Romans 6:3-4 explains, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." This act serves as both a recognition of our sinful state and a proclamation of our union with Christ in His overcoming of death.

Through these examples, we see a profound truth: that in our acknowledgment of sin and our willingness to engage in spiritual death, we are also ushered into the life-giving power of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Jesus tasted death for all of us, as Hebrews 2:9 states, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Because He triumphed over death, we are empowered to do the same. Therefore, the death that we undergo as Christians is not a finality; rather, it serves as a gateway to a deeper relationship with Christ and the assurance of eternal life.

Ultimately, the death that overcomes death is a journey of transformation that brings forth new life. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 proclaims this victorious truth: "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

In conclusion, let us embrace our own crucifixion with Christ, acknowledging that in our spiritual death, we find freedom from the bondage of sin. Just as the children of Israel were prepared to face death through the sacrifice of the lamb, we approach our own death with confidence, knowing that through Christ, we have already overcome. The death of the Christian is a transformative experience—an initiation into the fullness of life found in Jesus. As we crucify our old selves, we should rejoice in the knowledge that His resurrection means

our own rebirth, conquering the grave and welcoming us into an everlasting relationship with God. Amen.