

Bible Study: Is Death to Self a Daily Experience?

Objective: To provide a comprehensive, Scripture-grounded, Spirit of Prophecy-aware response to the commonly held Adventist belief that death to self is a daily process. This study examines both biblical texts and Ellen White's writings to demonstrate the true nature of "death to self" as a once-for-all experience lived out continually, not repeated daily.

Part 1: Scriptural Foundation — What Does the Bible Say?

A. The Language of Spiritual Death in the New Testament

After a full analysis of every New Testament verse using words like "died," "die," "death," "crucified," and so on, we discover:

- **Spiritual death is always described in past-tense or completed terms** for the believer:
 - Romans 6:2¹ – "How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"
 - Romans 6:6 – "Our old man was crucified with Him."
 - Galatians 2:20 – "I have been crucified with Christ."
 - Colossians 3:3 – "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ."
- **Death to sin/self is spoken of as an identity change, not an ongoing action.** It is something that happened when we were united with Christ at conversion.
- **There is no verse that says we must die spiritually every day.** The only phrase used is "once for all" (Romans 6:10).

B. Commonly Misused Verse: 1 Corinthians 15:31

- "I die daily" is contextually about physical danger and Paul's constant exposure to death due to preaching the resurrection (v.30–32).
- Paul is not talking about a daily spiritual death, but physical peril for the gospel.

C. True Ongoing Experience: Living by Faith, Not Dying Daily

- Romans 6:11 – "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God."
- Galatians 5:25 – "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."
- Ongoing **life** is emphasized—not ongoing death.

D. Exceptions?

- Romans 8:13 and Colossians 3:5 use the present tense about putting to death the deeds of the body, but these refer to actions (sins), not identity.
 - These verses show **ongoing mortification of sin**, not repeated death of self.
-

Part 2: What About Ellen White?

"The Spirit was not given--nor can it ever be bestowed--to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."

— *The Great Controversy*, p. 9

This foundational statement from Ellen White herself makes it clear: **the Bible remains the final authority**. Her writings are not to override Scripture but to uplift and clarify biblical truths.

A. What She Says

- Ellen White repeatedly quotes 1 Corinthians 15:31 to support daily dying to self (e.g. LS 237.1², 8T 313.3³, UL Aug. 5, etc.).
- She uses the phrase "I die daily" to refer to internal battles, self-denial, and victory over temptation.

B. The Problem

- Her application of 1 Corinthians 15:31 is **not the original context** of Paul's statement.
- There is no other verse she appeals to for daily death. The foundation is a misapplied text.

C. Possible Explanations

1. **Sensus Plenior (Fuller Meaning)**: Like NT writers applying OT texts in ways beyond original context, Ellen White may be drawing out a broader spiritual principle.
 - But we must **not confuse application with interpretation**.
 - The *application* must not contradict *theology clearly taught* elsewhere.

2. **Prophetic Limitations:** Being inspired does not mean infallibility in usage of verses. She herself wrote:

"The testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed."⁴

3. **True Principle, Misapplied Text:**

- Her emphasis on **ongoing self-denial and victory over temptation** is valid.
- But this principle should be rooted in the **Bible's actual teaching about living the crucified life**, not a flawed interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:31.

Part 3: Answering Common Adventist Objections

Objection 1: "So you're saying Ellen White is wrong?"

- No, we're saying **she made a mistake in application**, not that she is uninspired.
- Inspiration allows for humanity (see 1 Corinthians 7:12 vs. 7:40 – Paul himself distinguishes between inspiration and opinion).
- Even Ellen White acknowledged the Bible as supreme:
 - "The Bible is the only rule of faith and doctrine."
— *Letter 105, 1903*

Objection 2: "But she's inspired like the Bible writers!"

- She herself said: "I am not a prophet... I am the Lord's messenger."⁵
- Her role was to **guide to the Bible**, not supersede it.

Objection 3: "Then what does it mean to crucify self daily?"

- It means to **live each day according to a death that has already occurred**.
- We don't **die again** but **walk in the Spirit** (Gal. 5:24–25).

Objection 4: "But shouldn't we strive daily to follow God?"

- Absolutely. We strive daily to live out our **once-for-all death** to self. This is the biblical model of sanctification.

Objection 5: "Won't this cause disunity or doubt in Ellen White's inspiration?"

- Not if we understand her writings correctly. She herself said, “The Bible is the only rule of faith and doctrine.”
 - Unity in error is not unity at all. True unity comes from submitting to Scripture.
 - Differentiating **interpretation** from **application** honors both the prophetic gift and the supremacy of the Bible.
 - As Ellen White wrote: "The testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed." (5T 665)
-

Part 4: What the Bible Says Happens Daily

While the Bible never commands believers to “die daily” in a spiritual sense, it does emphasize **daily living** and practices. Here are clear biblical instructions or descriptions of daily spiritual life:

1. **Luke 9:23** – “Take up your cross daily and follow Me.”
 - Cross-bearing is not self-death but surrender and willingness to endure for Christ.
2. **Acts 2:46** – “Continuing daily with one accord in the temple...”
 - Daily worship, unity, and fellowship.
3. **Acts 17:11** – “...they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily...”
 - Daily Bible study.
4. **2 Corinthians 4:16** – “...our inward man is being renewed day by day.”
 - Daily spiritual renewal.
5. **Hebrews 3:13** – “Exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today’...”
 - Daily encouragement.

The biblical emphasis is on **daily life, renewal, devotion, and fellowship**—not daily death. This gives a fuller, richer, more hopeful view of sanctification.

Part 5: Conclusion — A Liberating Gospel

- You are not called to kill yourself spiritually every day.
- You have **died once with Christ**, and now you live a new life.
- True victory is not in repeated death, but in walking in **resurrection power**.

Memory Verses

- Romans 6:11 – “Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
 - Galatians 2:20 – “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live...”
-

Final Appeal:

Stop trying to die again. Start living from the death that already happened.
Live in the Spirit. Walk in newness of life.

This is the biblical gospel of victorious living.

Appendix A: Categorized Verses on Spiritual Death

| Verse | Category | Death Type |
|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|
| Romans 6:2 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| Romans 6:6 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| Romans 6:10 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| Romans 6:11 | Spiritual | Identity reckoning |
| Romans 8:13 | Spiritual | Ongoing action |
| Romans 7:6 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| Galatians 2:19 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| Galatians 2:20 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| Galatians 5:24 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| Galatians 6:14 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| Colossians 2:20 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| Colossians 3:3 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| Colossians 3:5 | Spiritual | Ongoing action |
| 2 Timothy 2:11 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |

| Verse | Category | Death Type |
|---------------------|-----------|------------------|
| 1 Peter 2:24 | Spiritual | Once-for-all |
| 2 Corinthians 4:10 | Physical | Ongoing exposure |
| 2 Corinthians 4:11 | Physical | Ongoing exposure |
| 2 Corinthians 4:12 | Physical | Ongoing exposure |
| 1 Corinthians 15:31 | Physical | Daily danger |

Footnotes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are from the NKJV.
2. Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (LS), p. 237.
3. *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8, p. 313.
4. *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 665.
5. *Review and Herald*, July 26, 1906.