

HOW COULD JESUS DIE THE SECOND DEATH AND BE RESURRECTED

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(a) Please comment on what happened when Jesus died on the cross. Did He die the second death? (b) If so, how could He be resurrected? (c) What does Paul mean in Romans 3:25, 26 about Christ being “set forth . . . to demonstrate His righteousness”? (d) Did He die as our legal substitute? If so, wouldn't He have to stay dead forever? (e) Is the second death an imposed penalty or is it a natural consequence of sin? (f) How do you explain the “fierce-temptations which wrung the heart of Jesus on the cross” (DA 753)?

This brings us to the white-hot crisis of the plan of salvation. God invites us to identify in the agony and the joy of His Son in that awful hour when He saved us.

(a) On the cross He felt the horror of eternal darkness. The divine One was “made to be sin for us who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). The “us” is the entire human race. He felt the crushing load of enormous guilt not His own. Combine the sin of the world: that is what He bore “in His own body,” in His nervous system, in His deepest soul, feeling as if the guilt were His own. “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). He died for the human race and He died as the human

race, our second Adam. In dying the equivalent of our second death, He delivered the human race from that death (John 3:16):

“The guilt of a world lying in wickedness, . . . the sense of God's wrath against sin [He felt it against Himself personally!] was crushing out His life” (DA 687). “So great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father's love” (685). “As man, He must suffer the consequences of man's sin” (686; and the “consequences” are eternal death). “He will save man at any cost to Himself” (693). “He had borne that which no human being could ever bear; for He had tasted the sufferings of death for every man” (694, a quotation from Hebrews 2:9). “The guilt of every descendant of Adam of every age was pressing upon His heart. . . . The Son of God, . . . the sin-bearer, endures judicial punishment for iniquity and becomes sin itself for man” (SR 225); “guiltless, He bore the punishment of the guilty” (1SM 322).

One need only ask two questions: (1) What is that “punishment of the guilty”? The answer has to be, “death.” “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17); “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23); “the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze. 18:4); “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Rev. 2:11); “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rev. 20:14). But the first death which the Bible calls “sleep” can never suffice. The Bible does not say

that “Christ went to sleep for our sins,” but “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3).

(2) “Did He suffer the true punishment for our sin?” The answer had better be “yes,” or we are lost for eternity! Thus Christ died the equivalent of every man’s second death. He bore “the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6); and tasted our death, “that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). When you realize what this means, you will want to dance with joy for ever!

(b) But how then could He be resurrected? To misread Revelation 20:14 out of its context creates confusion. The “second death” is not the mere Fahrenheit-physical pain of a lake of fire. On the cross, Jesus hardly felt the physical pain, so terrible was His spiritual anguish, being “made . . . sin for us” (DA 753). So the lost will hardly feel physical pain, so great will be their spiritual anguish because of finally realizing their true guilt. The despair which Jesus endured was what the lost will feel—the pain of the second death (“he shall not be hurt of the second death,” Rev. 2:11).¹ “He poured out His soul

¹ “Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race” (DA 753). The phrase “This is the second death” does not limit the “torment” (vs. 10) to physical pain, even though as children we could imagine nothing greater. Verses 12, 13 make clear that the real pain will be the self-condemnation aroused by a full realization of guilt for “those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” There is no agony greater than seeing that record in all its horrible exactness—when there is no Saviour to deliver from it. “In the day of final judgment, every lost soul will understand the nature of his own rejection of truth. . . . Before the vision of Calvary

unto death.” “Therefore” the Father honors Him supremely, to “divide Him a portion with the great.” “He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11, 12).

It *had* to be that “God raised [Him] up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:24). Those “pains” were not mere sleep. Not only did He make the total commitment of His “soul” unto eternal death, not seeing “through the portals of the tomb” (DA 753), He actually experienced the agony of the real second death. But His *agape* made it “not possible” that He should be “held” by it. Thus His resurrection becomes an eternal principle: those who choose to be “crucified with Him,” says Paul, also cannot “possibly” be “held” in the grasp of the second death, for “if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom. 6:5).²

Your burden is lifted. Time to sing Hallelujah.

(c) Although Christ was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8), He was not “set forth” or “*manifested*” until Calvary. There He displays, “demonstrates,” His “righteousness,” that “whoever believes in Him should not perish” (Rom. 3:25; John 3:16). A purely legal, fear-induced “salvation” is not the real thing; *the heart must be won*—that’s what it means to “believe” in response

with its mysterious Victim, sinners will stand condemned” (DA 58). (The gift of self-humbling repentance *now* is an infinite blessing, whether for individuals or for a church.)

² Moses had that experience—compare Ex. 32:31, 32.

to Christ's "drawing." It's His being "lifted up" that will "draw all unto [Himself]" (John 12:32). No way can a sinful heart be won except by the revelation of *agape*. (When people who ought to "grow up" still have devotion based on childish, selfish concern, Jesus says it makes Him feel like throwing up; see Rev. 3:16).

(d) Is there a legal, judicial foundation for the atonement?

"The judicial action, following upon the one offence [of Adam] resulted in a verdict of condemnation, but the act of grace [of Christ], following on so many misdeeds, resulted in a verdict of acquittal" (Rom. 5:16, NEB). "The law brings about wrath: for where there is no law, there is no transgression" (4:15). "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law" (DA 753). "God did not change His law, but He sacrificed Himself, in Christ, for man's redemption" (DA 762). "Satan declared that mercy destroyed justice, that the death of Christ abrogated the Father's law. Had it been possible for the law to be changed or abrogated, then Christ need not have died. But to abrogate the law would be to immortalize transgression, and place the world under Satan's control. It was because the law was changeless, because man could be saved only through obedience to its precepts, that Jesus was lifted up on the cross" (DA 763).

To say merely that Christ's sacrifice satisfies the broken law without seeing a love that reconciles the alienated human heart, is legalism, like using an x-ray of one's skeleton to win a loved one instead of your portrait. The x-ray doesn't "draw" anyone to admire you. Ellen White said that "we" had been preaching "the law, the law, until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa." Without a bony skeleton, one's "portrait" would be of a jellyfish; it's necessary. And only the death of a *divine* Being can equal the holy law.

So the atonement (or reconciliation) is more than merely paying for the broken law. It's a demonstration of God's righteousness which "will draw all" who do not resist. The legal basis is not because "we need it," and not because God seeks a vengeful "pound of flesh," but because a sense of justice *in the universe* demands it.

The law is "written" already in every human heart (Rom. 2:14, 15; John 1:9). It's an inner sense of justice that will be fully developed either in the final repentance or (too late) in that final judgment day. The lost will welcome their own second death. "All they that hate Me love death" (Prov. 8:36). "In the day of final judgment, every lost soul will understand the nature of his own rejection of truth. The cross will be presented, and its real bearing will be seen by every mind that has been blinded by transgression. Before the vision of Calvary with its mysterious Victim, sinners will stand condemned. Every lying excuse will be swept away. Human apostasy will appear in its heinous character" (DA 58). (GC 666-668). "Have I any pleasure at all that

the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" (Eze. 18:23). God "has no pleasure" in their end, but *they* want it (Eze. 18:23, 31, 32).

Christ's "tasting" the second death is taught in the sanctuary services. No lamb or bullock offered was ever resurrected; all perished in what was to them the equivalent of a "second death." This foreshadowed in type the sacrifice of "the Lamb of God." The human race in the Garden of Eden would have suffered an "instant death" the same as the second death had He not been "slain from the foundation of the world" (PP 74). *Our* death is what He died. This *agape* is a love that dares to relinquish its eternal reward—as Moses did in Exodus 32:32. If Moses could experience such *agape*, why couldn't Jesus? When He "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" He resigned His resurrection and eternal life (Phil. 2:5-8). He couldn't step down any lower, *for that was hell*. Peter says that's where He went in order to find us (Acts 2:31). Yes, that's where *you* were, where you would be today, if *He* had not found you there. Again, time to dance forever for joy!

(e) Does the sinner bring the second death upon himself?

"We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself" (1SM 235). "Every man who is destroyed will destroy himself" (OHC 26). "God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to

reap that which they have sown" (GC 36). "By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them" (DA 764).

That last sentence was Ellen White's post-1888 understanding of this "strange" act of God. It illuminates other statements in both Scripture and her writings that speak of God "destroying" the lost. Although it may appear in the Bible that *in past ages* He treated His people that way, in these last days He cannot force obedience by threatening to kill us. The reason? The plan of salvation has been unfolding and must come into sharper focus at the end of time. His people must "grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ, . . . the whole body . . . building itself up in *agape*" "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:15, 13). Fear will cease to be their motivation although it has been so previously, for *agape* will replace it. The Bride must "make herself ready" for the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:6, 7). That is what requires "growing up"!

What bridegroom can force his bride? "The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love" (COL 415). Let no one complain that a motivation of *agape* lessens obedience to the law; only *agape* can constrain to true heart-obedience. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they

which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15); “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10).

(f) What “fierce temptation” “wrung” Christ’s heart on His cross? *To leave us to perish*. He faced a “horror of great darkness,” for never had anyone died the kind of death He knew He had to die.³ He had the added capacity for suffering that divinity combined with humanity made possible, the distilled horror of all earth’s billions who die their own second death, all compressed into an exquisite agony felt by one divine-human soul. His sacrifice would be meaningless and helpless were He not divine. “Now the tempter had come for the last fearful struggle. . . . Terrible was the temptation to let the human race bear the consequences of its own guilt” (DA 687, 688).

Because Christ “became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross,” “therefore God also has highly exalted Him” (Phil. 2:8, 9; Isa. 53:11, 12). Since no one else has ever been so highly “exalted,” it’s obvious that no one else has ever died the death He died. The highest honor given Him presupposes the lowest death—for

³ No human being has ever died bearing the combined guilt of the world, even the poor wretches who were crucified in the ancient Roman Empire. Even the unrepentant thief who died on his cross with Jesus did not feel the full wrath of God against sin. Doubtless he took the pain-killing drug that Christ refused.

“every man.”⁴ “Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror” (DA 753). His subsequent resurrection could not invalidate the extent of that self-emptying sacrifice. Thus His *agape* demanded His resurrection.

How can one not rejoice forever?

His greatest temptation was the fear that He had not been successful in His sacrifice by which we might have eternal life. Psalm 22 discloses Christ’s second death experience on the cross and His final victory just before He took His last breath: He rejoiced that we would live forever, not that *He* would (see vss. 22-31). Wonder, O heavens!

Did Ellen White teach the “moral influence of the atonement doctrine”? No, but it appears on the surface according to her inspired words that she came close:

“A true sense of the sacrifice and intercession of the dear Saviour will break the heart that has become hardened in sin; and love, thankfulness, and humility will come into the soul. . . . This is the true religion of the Bible; everything short of this is a deception” (4T 625). “The atonement . . . was made as a manifestation of the love that was ready in God’s heart. . . . *The death of Christ was expedient in order that mercy might reach us with its full pardoning power*, and at the same time that justice might be satisfied in the righteous substitute” (ST May 30, 1895, emphasis added; obviously written

⁴ If Jesus in His incarnation had not taken man’s fallen, sinful nature, He could not have died for us. His death was a total “condemnation of sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). He could not have “condemned sin” in a sinless nature.

under the influence of the “most precious message” of the 1888 era).

The “moral influence” doctrine is right in what it says; it’s wrong in what it doesn’t say. A sense of justice must permeate the universe of God, not vindictively demanding the death of the transgressor as revenge, but demanding that sin be eradicated. The lost will perish only because they cling to sin. Love cannot perpetuate their existence when it would only heap up more misery for themselves and for everybody else.⁵

So let’s present the atonement as not only a great legal accomplishment, but a heart-winning love that delivers us from the selfishness of our sin.

The word “accuser of the brethren” in Rev. 12, means in the Greek, a prosecuting attorney. The Greek for “propitiation” implies placation. In *Great Controversy*, the chapter on the Investigative Judgment shows clearly that in the Investigative Judgment, Satan is on hand to “accuse” the saints whom Christ claims, and that because of his accusations, Christ pleads *before* the Father and the angels. John and Paul make it plain that the “propitiation” was set forth *by* the Father. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:24). If set forth *by* Him, how can it possibly be set forth *to* Him? Any such “propitiation” must be set forth *by* someone, *for* some reason, *to* another. The Father is the Judge, who loves the sinner as much as the Son loves him, and wants to see him cleared. The criminal is the

⁵ See A. T. Jones, *The Consecrated Way*, pp. 83, 84 (original printing, p. 117).

sinner. The jury are the angels and the intelligences of the universe, before whom, in principle, the whole Judgment takes place. The prosecuting attorney is NOT the Father, but *Satan*, and the defending attorney, the “advocate”, is Jesus. Thus, the Father set forth the “propitiation”, His Son, *for* our sins, as evidence to the prosecuting attorney, that we ought to be delivered from his grasp, and saved. Satan while the very soul of evil, is not insane. He is forced to admit the justice of it, when the case is pled by the merits of Christ’s crucifixion, which has had the effect, *in fact*, of delivering the believing sinners entirely from any love for sin or selfishness, for they have, indeed, been crucified with Him if they *believe*. Their hearts are broken by a sense of the sacrifice of Jesus for them, the redemptive price paid, not to a vengeful Father, but to a vengeful devil, whose they were *by rights*, legally, since they had obeyed him; and are now delivered from the power of sin. Thus Satan is forced to admit his utter defeat, and he will do so, when every knee bows before Jesus.

All of this is practically meaningless if it is confined to a book transaction some thousands of light-years away, beyond Orion. This little earth is the battlefield, and more, particularly, our own hearts. It is *there* that the battle must be fought, and the Advocate made His pleas, and the prosecuting attorney be cast down, and the Father declared just, as He did Abraham, to be righteous. If the transaction takes place in the heart of Israel, there need be no doubt that the books of heaven, on which the charges against us are still recorded, will

be cleansed, and the whole sad affair of sin be wiped off the books at last, and God, Christ, and the redeemed be “cleared” or *cleansed* before the entire *unfallen* universe. And Mary Magdalene will help, until the end, “wheresoever” this is preached.

The false Christ is a Lawyer; the true One is a Lover. The false one “justifies” by belief in a legalistic, vicarious, substitutionary propitiation, whereby another pays our debt, and we need only avail ourselves of the provision through making the necessary legal arrangements of having the papers made out in our name, etc. This “salvation” offered by him is “free”. It saves drunkards from their drink, sometimes; prostitutes from “sin”, murderers from pulling the trigger, bank robbers from holdups, makes “worldlings” into church members; but it doesn’t save from the *tyranny of self*, or from that covetousness which is idolatry, except through sublimation of the covetousness into a covetousness for a reputation for preeminence in piety and the like within the “church”. On the other hand, the true Christ, through His wondrous Cross, breaks the heart, and leads the sinner to the place which Mary occupied when she washed His feet with her tears, heart, her tearful repentance, her mysterious, humbling love.

When we turn our eyes upon the false Christ, “Turn your eyes upon Baal, Look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his wonderful face,” etc., “radiance”, “relaxation”, “peace”, “contentment”, “joy” fills the heart. When we turn our eyes upon the true Christ, we can look but

momentarily, for tears soon fill our sight, and we go out to Gethsemane, to weep bitterly (see Luke 22:61, 62, and “At that moment Christ looked at Peter, and beneath that grieved look, in which compassion and love for him were blended, Peter understood himself. He went out and wept bitterly. That look of Christ’s broke his heart. Peter had come to the turning point, and bitterly did he repent his sin. . . . The look of Christ assured him of pardon” COL 152, 154.) See the difference?