

Death of Death

William Shakespeare, the great English playwright, once said, “By medicine life may be prolonged; yet death will seize the doctor, too.” What he was saying is that no one is exempt. Even those who deal in matters of life and death must die some day.

Dr. Alexander Bogomolets was a Russian scientist who claimed that he had developed a youth serum that would lengthen life by at least 150 years. But Dr. Bogomolets died at age 64.

There have been millions of men and women like Ponce de Leon who have sought for the mythical Fountain of Youth. All that they have ever found is age and death! Imagine the fame and fortune that would come to a physician or scientist who could find a cure for death!

The Bible says in I Corinthians 15:26, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” What a terrible enemy to battle. How very powerful this enemy is! But the Bible also says that a Champion has already fought this battle for us. Jesus Christ has conquered death. Let’s look at three ways in which Jesus Christ conquered death for us.

Jesus Christ has conquered death for us by fulfilling the law. The Bible says a great deal about the Old Testament concept of law and the New Testament relationship to it. However, even as Christians we may have at best an inadequate understanding of what the Bible means when it talks about law.

Actually, within the Bible there are two functions of the law.

One is a negative function, and it has to do with guilt for sin. Romans 7:7 teaches us about this. Sin is transgression of God’s law. Without laws we feel no guilt even though we are naturally guilty. When there are no speed limit signs in a residential area we may rationalize driving faster than we should. We don’t feel guilty because there are no signs telling us we are wrong.

So it is with the law of God. It’s not that we aren’t sinners without the law; we are. But one of the functions of the perfect law of God is to show

us how sinful we really are! We are all lawbreakers. We are all guilty. You cannot really tell if a board is crooked until you check it with a level. God’s law is the level that shows us how crooked we really are. The law of God is our standard.

I Timothy 1:9 says that “the law is not made for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious” The law shows us for certain that we are sinners.

Not only that, but with the law comes a curse on sinners because it proves our guilt. Galatians 3:13 says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”

Many times we’re aware of the negative function of the law, but too often we’re not aware of the positive function of the law. The positive function of the law is the glorification of God. To glorify God means to enhance his reputation.

I Timothy 1:8 says, “We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.” When we see the positive function of the law, we see that the law is good. Romans 7:12 says that “the law is holy and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.” The positive function of the law is to glorify and honor God through obedience.

Let’s go back to the concept of the speed limit law. It has a negative function. The negative function

is to catch bad drivers and to prove their guilt. But at the same time, it has a positive function. The positive function is to maintain

safety and order for the community and to demonstrate to ourselves and to others that we are committed to the community and to the rules of the community. We participate in that by supporting the laws of the community.

Let’s use the Ten Commandments as an example. The Ten Commandments can have either a negative function or a positive function. With the negative function, the Ten Commandments remind every single one of us that we are sinners that have fallen short of the standard of God and

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that we are guilty. But the Ten Commandments also have a positive function. Once we have received salvation through Jesus Christ and are part of God's family, these same laws can be used to thank God and to glorify and please God.

Jesus Christ has conquered death through the fulfilling of the law. This fulfillment of the law is stated by Jesus in Matthew 5:17 when he said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Jesus' fulfillment of the law tied into both the negative and the positive functions. You see, Jesus was completely sinless according to I Peter 2:22. According to Hebrews 4:15 he was tested "in every way, just as we are—yet without sin."

So what does that mean to us? Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law." And Romans 8:2 tells us that "the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." All of that means that because of what Jesus Christ has done, we are no longer under the negative function of the law.

Here in the United States we have an interesting legal concept called the Law of Double Jeopardy. It says that you cannot be accused and tried for the same crime twice. Try to imagine transferring that concept to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ lived his life on earth under God's law, and so his life was on trial. For thirty-three years it was scrutinized in every detail, not only on this earth but also from the perspective of heaven. The verdict at the end of those thirty-three years was "innocent" . . . completely innocent; perfect; righteous. That means that he cannot be tried again. The verdict is in. It's once and for all.

But then there's us, and we have a record. There's my record. Except Romans 4 says that as far as God is concerned, when he looks at the record that says 'Leith Anderson' on it, instead of seeing my life, God looks and sees the life of Jesus Christ. Or, as the theologians say, based upon Romans 4, "The righteousness of Jesus Christ has been imputed to us, has been put upon our record."

But the law of double jeopardy still applies. We cannot be tried again. Once we have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, his record has been ap-

plied to our form and there can be no more trials. The verdict is in and the verdict is permanent. Innocent! Righteous! Not because of what we have done, but because the righteousness of Jesus Christ has been imputed to us. Therefore, we are never again subject to that negative guilt function of the law. Instead, we have only that positive function that the law of God becomes an opportunity for us, through Jesus Christ, to please and to glorify God.

Jesus Christ fulfilled the law. That means that when the issues of this life come, particularly as far as death is concerned, that Jesus Christ has already gone through the trial and has already received the verdict on our behalf.

A second way in which Jesus Christ has conquered death is by paying sin's penalty. The penalty of sin is death, according to Romans 6:23. That applies both to physical death, that is the separation of the body and the spirit, and spiritual death, which is the separation of man and God.

Romans 5:12 says that there is a universality of sin that brings a universal death. The inevitable penalty for sin is death. We all will die. But Jesus Christ paid the penalty for us when he died on the cross. I Peter 2:24 tells us that Jesus Christ "bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness." Or I Peter 3:18, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." And in II Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Jesus Christ paid our debt and our penalty for sin. That's at the very core and essence of the gospel. That means that those of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior no longer are subject to pay the penalty for our iniquities. That ties in with what the Apostle Paul wrote in the final paragraph of I Corinthians 15: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" And then Paul says, "The sting of death is sin."

Why do people without Jesus Christ fear death so much? It's because of the sting of sin. The penalty of death is still upon them. Death is

to be feared because of the consequences that are inevitably tied to living lives as sinners and not experiencing God's redemption. But Jesus Christ has taken the sting out of death.

When I think of sting, I think of one thing: bees. I don't know what your experience has been, but I remember that as a lad one of my favorite pastimes in the summer was to get a jar and poke holes in the lid and go out and catch bees. It seemed like great fun. In fact, most of my experiences with bees were very positive.

One day—I remember it so well—I was very proud of my collection of bees and I decided to sit down on the lawn and admire them. Unbeknownst to me, one of the bees I had not captured was sitting on one of the four leaf clovers beneath where I sat. I had never until that day ever been stung by a bee. And he stung me—you're right, that's where it was. Being modest, I didn't want to get anyone else's help but I was also unable to medically help myself. So I just suffered the sting of the bee.

I learned as I grew up that that bee apparently gave his life to give me that misery because he sacrificed his stinger and without his stinger he could not go on living. But one thing that did happen was that he was no longer a threat to the rest of the neighborhood children because the stinger was in me. I had taken it, and therefore that bee couldn't sting anyone else.

That's what Jesus Christ did. He took the sting of death. When he died on the cross, he took the penalty for our sin. He took our sting. That bee continued to live and be a reality but that bee's threat was no longer there. It's the same for those of us who have accepted Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross. Death may continue to live and be a reality but it no longer has a threat. It no longer has a sting.

The third way in which Jesus Christ has conquered death is by rising from the grave. He made a promise. Jesus promised immortality, that those who follow him will live forever. He promised resurrection. Resurrection means that the body

will be reunited with the soul for an eternity of living. In John 11:25 Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." He promised!

Jesus promised this complete reversal of all of sin's influence and effect of life. Romans 6:5 says that "we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." Jesus in his resurrection body was able to do things that he did not previously do, and so shall we.

II Corinthians 4:14 promises that "the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us." And Romans 8:11 says, ". . . he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies . . ." Immortality!

But there was proof to that promise. It wasn't just words. Jesus Christ proved that his promise really could be kept, and it was done through his own resurrection. When Jesus Christ was raised from the dead he became like the earnest money of that which would happen as far as we were concerned. He became the promise of that which was to come. He proved it could be done, and that his promise would be kept.

Jesus Christ's resurrection is as well attested to as any fact of ancient history. There were numerous written accounts as well as many eyewitnesses. According to I Corinthians 15 there were as many as 500 people at one time that saw Jesus alive after he had died.

Jesus' resurrection proved God's power. It proved Jesus' deity. As far as we're concerned, it guaranteed our eternity because it proved that the promise would be kept. All of Christianity stands or falls with the proof for that promise.

When I was a little boy, another friend and I found a large storm drain that went under a local street. My friend suggested that we walk through it to the other side. I was frightened. It was dark and damp and I thought it was dangerous. But my friend said, "No problem," and he proceeded to go on through while I waited behind. I figured somebody had to inform his parents what hap-

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pened and call the police and take care of the details. I genuinely thought at the time that that was the last time I would ever see him. I knew horrible things would happen. You couldn't see all the way through to the other side. He left and I expected the worst.

It wasn't too many minutes later until he had gone all the way through the storm drain that went under the highway and came up the other side. He walked across the road and stood up above and called down to me and said, "Leith, don't worry about it. Go ahead. You can make it through. It's not as scary as it looks." And so I did. I still had some apprehension, but he had gone before me. He had proved that it could be done. I trusted him.

That's what Jesus Christ has done. We look at death, and it's like a long, frightening tunnel that doesn't seem to have a light at the other end and carries with it a multitude of fears. But Jesus Christ has said, "You stay here. I'll go on through ahead of you." And he did. He was raised from the grave. And now he stands above us and as we look down the tunnel of death he says, "Go ahead. It's not as scary as you thought. It's okay. There's no problem. You can do it."

Yes, the Bible says that death is our last enemy. Some people spend all of life worrying about death. Some people spend all of life with an ago-

nizing fear of that final great battle. But if you're a Christian you will find that another Warrior has gone ahead of you and he has defeated that awesome enemy called death. He is Jesus Christ.

On Calvary's cross death died so that we could have life!

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