

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Last Enemy—Death

Many ask the question: Why do bad things happen and it seems as if God does not intervene? Of course, it doesn't appear this way all the time, since there are many anecdotal stories of miraculous deliverances. It is not unusual to hear people praise God when seemingly horrible events either turn out for good for them or, at a minimum, they are saved from it. Obviously, however, things do happen to people that seem unexplainable or inexcusable for a loving God to allow. Some people are able to praise God in spite of the event, while others become embittered toward God or turn from Him entirely. As noted elsewhere, a man wrote an article, based on these very questions, in which he concluded that Christianity is superstitious and repugnant.

To put it openly and honestly, it does seem that God often goes out of His way to contradict Himself and leave us wondering what is going on. Where is He? What is He up to? Why is He doing it this way? Why do my cries for help seem to go unanswered? Have I done something wrong to offend Him?

I won't pretend that I have all the answers to these questions, but I do know that He knows what He is doing and He does know best, whether we fully understand it or not. This may not be good enough for some, perhaps many, but at the end of the day, we have to concede we are not God and we did not create the universe or the laws that hold it all together or govern it. Theologians and preachers may try to explain it, often trying to exempt God or letting Him off the hook, so to speak. But it seems right that, unless He gives us revelation on the matter, we accept, even embrace, the fact that He, not us, is responsible for His creation and He has it right in the palm of His mighty hand of love. On our part, we hold to this by faith, the faith of the Son of God that was given to us when Jesus broke into our lives and revealed Himself to us and it pleased the Father to reveal His Son in us. In this issue, I want to offer one explanation for the bad we see in the world from the perspective of something we all see all around us and is unavoidable, and that is death, which Paul calls *the last enemy*.

Let us start with a verse as translated by the editors of the *Concordant Version*. I have chosen this particular translation because it more closely captures the meaning of death entering into the world.

Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death [death through sin], and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned – (Romans 5:12 CLV [NASB])

The NASB implies that death spread to men because of sin. It is true that death came through sin, the one sin of Adam. However, the CLV makes it clear that after Adam, it is death that passed through into all mankind and man sins because death entered into mankind. In other words, for us today, the reason for sin, and all the evil or bad things that seem to abound, is death, not the other way around, as implied by so many other translations.

It is quite common to hear preachers declare that we inherited sin from Adam. Technically, this is not correct. Mankind inherited death from Adam, and because we have mortal bodies, we sin. The warning to Adam was that *in the day that you eat from it (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) you will surely die* (Genesis 2:17). When Adam partook of the tree, his body began a very slow but nevertheless very deliberate process of decay. His body, along with Eve and all their children, became mortal, and they faced a complete death of their bodies and souls. For Adam, the process was a lengthy one that lasted for probably around 897 of the 930 years of his lifespan. Following the pattern of Jesus dying when He was around 33 ½ years of age, we could assume that Adam first sinned at the same age. At any rate, with 930 years under his belt, so to speak, Adam finally died.

As an aside, many teach that Adam's death, thus all of mankind's death, was and is a spiritual death. This is not being challenged or dealt with here; however, it makes more sense from Romans 5:12 that Paul refers to physical death and not spiritual death. This is born out on closer examination of what Paul taught.

First, Paul states that through one man, sin entered into the world, and through sin death. This was on Adam's side, not on the side of all that followed Adam. Adam had to break God's one command in order for sin to enter into his world. Then, once sin entered into his world, death followed for Adam and his race. Paul later wrote that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). God was true to His word, and Adam and his race paid the wages.

Second, Paul states that death passed through into all mankind. Notice that he did not state that sin passed through into all mankind. If he had, it would have meant that we inherited sin and not death.

Third, Paul states *on which all sinned*. This could be rephrased *on account of death passing into all mankind, all mankind sinned*. In other words, after Adam, it is death that leads to sin. But let us not get too technical on the point, for the two are inseparable. Sin led to death and death is the breeding ground for sin. This order answers the question of why a baby straight out of the womb can die within seconds even though the infant had no opportunity to sin. If sin were the reason for death, then a baby could not die until it committed its first act of rebellion.

Stated another way: We are born to die, or we are born with mortal bodies. This is what we inherited from the first Adam, and this is only reversed in the last Adam at the resurrection, for Christ is the resurrection and the life. Until the resurrection and transfiguration, death is the lot of all mankind, without exception. Even Jesus, the Son of God, died that all mankind might live one day in immortal bodies; not all at the same time, but all eventually.

Fourth, the reason we sin is because sin reigns in death or, we could say, sin makes its home in death. As long as we have a mortal, corruptible body, sin has a place in which to reign or rule. Paul wrote: *So that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal [eonian] life through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 5:21 NASB [CLV]). For believers, sin is not to reign over us any longer, but this does not negate the fact that sin is ever present and stands ready to take the reign of our body. Paul warns us: *Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts....* (Romans 6:12)

Sin leads people to lust in their mortal bodies. It is a corruption of life that leads to death. But thank God, believers have been given the grace of God that His grace would reign through righteousness to eonian life through the life of our Lord Jesus. Therefore, *even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus* (Romans 6:11). It took the last Adam to come to this earth, die on a cross, and be raised up from among the dead to reverse this death sentence upon mankind. The last Adam became *a life-giving spirit* (1 Corinthians 15:45). Our hope is to inherit the coming kingdom of Christ, and this comes through resurrection and transfiguration into the image of King Jesus.

Death, not sin, is the real enemy of mankind. Another way to look at death is that it is a corruption. Everything that it touches is corrupted. Since death is still with mankind, events, situations, etc. can be corrupted with disastrous results for the recipients. This is proven throughout the world every day and is the most logical answer to the why.

The good news is that God has set in motion an eonian plan, a plan of the ages, to bring about the death of death. He could have abolished death at Calvary, but He didn't. God's Son defeated death on the cross and now holds the keys of death and Hades, but He has not abolished death, *for He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death* (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). This is the hope of all mankind, for without it, sin will continue and mankind will not come into the all in all new of God, which is truly the love of God, for *God is love*. Until then, death will continue to plague mankind as a curse and bad things will happen. But be of good cheer; the death of death is God's plan, and the victory over death is in His Son who will lead all mankind out of death into immortality, not all at once but each in their own order. Remove death, and sin has no place in which to reign; it will die or cease to exist as a force over man's life. Immortality does this. This day is coming!