

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

PART III



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Question #16 - *“Does the spirit leave the body at the time of death? Then Jesus comes at the end of time and takes the soul home to heaven.”*

In our last segment, we began the discussion about how we were specifically created, and how that directly relates to the fact death is a problem for us. We are made in the image of God, Who is Triune, which is something Jesus helped us understand better by using family relationship illustrations we should all understand. These illustrations not only show how God functions, but also how we should function because we are made in the image of God, and thus also consist of three parts. Our mind is reflective of God The Father and our body is the reflection of The Son. This means our body should be subject to our mind. Discussing the function of our spirit is where we begin this segment of “A Matter Of Life And Death.”

Our spirit is much the same in relationship to the mind. It too is intended to be under the command of the mind, and it too has instincts and capabilities. The fact we are not as clear on these instincts and capabilities as we are the fleshly side of us is, again, a big part of why Jesus prayed The Father send us The Holy Ghost after He exited this physical world. In spite of this, people still believe very wrong things

about our spirit. The biggest false teaching, which can and does cause significant trouble in our understanding of a question such as we have here, is some people will tell you our spirit is dead until the time we accept salvation. People get away with teaching this, mostly without question, because the spirit, unlike the flesh, is not made from temporal pieces. This means it will not die just because it does not get what it instinctively asks for, and this means people get away with ignoring the spirit entirely. As long as they have what they want in the flesh, people usually do not see the harm in allowing the spirit to languish, but we need to understand - it is never dead!

We may not be entirely able to define the spirit, its desires, capabilities, and instincts; but just as with the flesh, there would be more than simple impairment to our lives if our spirit was truly dead! So, where do we come up with the thought the spirit is dead? Well, in Genesis 2:17 God told Adam the consequences of eating of the tree He told them not to, and many people believe those consequences were: if they ate they would die immediately! Because it's easy to see Adam and Eve did not physically die upon taking the fruit, many people expand upon this wrong thought by attempting to determine what must have happened. What they come up with is the idea Adam's and Eve's spirits are what died. They then expand this bad thought into saying we are all born in spiritual death, and that is why we need salvation. All this is a far bigger misunderstanding and mistranslation of what God said, than we see in Eve telling the serpent God said they could not even “touch” the tree, or they would die! (Gen. 3:3)

We need to look at what God actually said. God tells them of all the trees they may freely eat, “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.” Genesis 2:17 God said, “in the day” they would “surely die.” This is not the hard, “You will die!” statement we are often taught is there. So, what does God mean? Well, the tree in question is a tree that gives the knowledge of what is good, and what is evil. This is something man was not created with. God did not want us to have it for the exact reasons we see after Adam and Eve took of it. We are told, immediately they had understanding they did not have before. Because of this, they realized they had responsibilities which they did not have before. The first thing they realized was they needed

an ability to cover their physical nakedness. This, because they had a responsibility to others not to be a stumbling block, and they understood physical temptation in a way people today try to ignore for the most part.

The story shows us Adam and Eve failed to do this one simple task even to their own satisfaction, and when God came to them they hid for that specific reason. (Gen. 3:6-11) God did not want us to bear the burden of being responsible for the whole knowledge of good and evil, for this very reason. He wanted to bring us up in the ways we should go, much like a parent should train a child. (Prov. 22:6) What made it wrong to take of the tree was, first and most simplistically, God had told us not to; but even in telling us not to, He explained it was because there were consequences we could not bear. Those consequences were not that we would die; and if it did not strike you just then, let me point out: one should stop to consider that the statement I just made sounds a lot like what Satan said to Eve. The truth is, the devil did not really lie to Eve; he simply played on her ego, by leading her down a thought pattern of mistrust toward God. The devil told Eve, God did not want man to take of the tree because man's eyes would be opened and they would know things like God knows things. (Gen. 3:4-5) This is nothing but the flat-out truth! God did not want us to know what He knows, but it was not because He was trying to hold us back, nor was it because having the knowledge would kill us like a poison. It was because the consequences of knowing and being responsible for such knowledge would be that we surely would not even make it through one day - much less eternity - without doing something worthy of the judgment of death. As we look at the story, we see that is precisely what happened!

With this understanding, one should see clearly, by reading through the story, it was not our spirit that died, it was still the flesh that would pay the price. No, it did not die right then and there, but it was for this reason God had to - yes had to - separate man from the other tree, which also gave something we were not created with. That something is a fact we have been talking about since the beginning of this writing. Physical things die, and even man was not immortal on a physical level. Because our bodies are made from dust, they are temporal in the same way

plant and animal bodies are temporal. What gave man the chance to be different was the Tree of Life!

Now, keep in mind, man obviously did not have to eat from the Tree of Life once a day, or even every year, in order to survive. Today, we live for several decades without the Tree of Life, and before the flood of Noah's day, where it was God's determination our years would need to be capped at 120, people lived hundreds of years without the Tree of Life! The Garden of Eden, where the Tree of Life existed, was made not just for Adam and Eve to live in forever, but for a place where man could come and directly commune with God. No matter where or how far he roamed, man would always have returned to the garden, if for no other reason, to eat from the Tree of Life. When they did, God would be there, just as He was even after Adam and Eve disobeyed.

The fact this was the point in creating a specific garden, and the fact God put the Tree of Life there, is mirrored in the stories we find throughout the Bible. God created a nation of people where He would place His name, and it would be through those people and to that specific place where He set His name that The Messiah would come. There Jesus would sacrifice His life, which would provide the opportunity of eternal life for us, once again. Why? Because God wants us to commune with Him. He does not force Himself upon us, but He does make Himself available to us. He also makes it clear that only in communing with Him is there life everlasting, because only in serving the purpose we were created to serve is there a reason to exist at all! (Rom. 6:8-23)

This truth is why, even after taking of the tree God told them not to, Adam and Eve heard the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool of the evening. God did not want to separate us from Him, but because God is Holy, sin brings separation; and what really caused us to be driven from the garden was the fact the Tree of Life was there. (Gen. 3:22-24) God specifically says man would reach out with his physical hand and take of the fruit. Because of the Tree of Life, man had a physical way to choose for himself to live indefinitely, whether he cared to know God or not. Because this world is temporal, God did not have to strike us down immediately; but God could not allow the destruction our sin would bring to go on for eternity, especially in a place where God

had also given us the ability to make the choice of how many other humans there would be in this universe. We would sin and be affected by the sins of others. All this is why God did not wish for man to have the knowledge of good and evil in the first place.

Sin is just downright destructive all the way around. Not only is it a difficult responsibility to know what is good and do it with the perfection necessary not to be guilty of the punishment of death, the knowledge brings a propensity for self-reliance, which is counter productive to learning how to handle the responsibility the knowledge brings. This is why Adam and Eve hid from God instead of running to Him. They were naked, and they wanted to do something about that before they came to God. While this may make sense to many of us, we need to stop and realize that's only because we are affected by the same problem! This is why God points out that Adam's excuse for hiding was not a real excuse. Adam and Eve had been in the presence of God day after day from the day they were created, and it had never been a problem before. It was only a problem now because their mindset had been changed. (Gen. 3:11)

In this new state of having the knowledge of good and evil, it would truly be up to each man, woman, and child to make their own choice: do you want to learn what righteousness truly demands and how to perform those demands, or do you want to simply live life as you see fit? On top of this is the truth that it's not a onetime decision, it is one that needs to be made every day, in every situation. Now, it would be great if everyone would go wholly unto God for the answers; but even then, without the innocence necessary for God to constantly constrain us, we would still cause much destruction and sorrow as the learning process went forward. We see this simple truth by looking at what happens even among a group of believers today. No matter how hard any of us are trying, we all make mistakes that cause harm. Couple that with the fact there are people in this world who use their free will to reject God's guidance altogether, and you can see the overall problem!

Everyone's lives are intertwined with everyone else, and desiring God's direction in your personal life does not exclude you from this truth. Those who desire God's ways will consist of an entire spectrum of people at different points in the learning process.

Those who do not want God's guidance will range from fairly good people who, at the very least, are trying to do what they think is right, all the way to those who could not care less. In looking at this point, we should be able to see there are limiting factors to what God can even do for and with those who do want a world the way God would have it. God gave man a free will; if He simply took that away from us, it would destroy the reason He created us. Thus, the plan from the very beginning was that even if sin entered the picture, man would be allowed his free will. The difference would be that man's time would be limited. These are the reasons why God had to bring the judgment of death upon sin, which is why He had to separate man from the Tree of Life the very day they took of the tree He told them not to take of. Even in sin, the tree could still cause man to live forever. In a sin-filled world, that is not a good thing for anyone!

Now, before we walk on from this fact, I feel, even after all we have discussed, there is a need to look specifically at the argument some would make that man's physical form did not need this tree, before man's fall into sin, in order to live forever. For this, I will pose some fairly simple questions. If it were true, we could have lived forever without the Tree of Life before our fall into sin, the question becomes, why did God put it in the garden at all? If God had to separate us from it the minute we did the one thing we were told would bring the judgment of death, it was certainly more than an object lesson, and it certainly was not put there for us to overcome death after losing immortality by sinning. If we had immortality to begin with, how else would we have lost that immortality and then needed the Tree of Life to sustain us?

Now, some might argue, according to what John saw in Revelation, the Tree of Life is seen in heaven, which would pose the same question. However, it does not, because of the very things we have been discussing. God created us to live a certain way. We know these facts by studying our Bible. We will have eternal bodies in heaven, which do not need the Tree of Life to sustain; but just as calling God, The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, even heaven is designed to be a place we will understand in much the same way we understand what is here! God will use images that comfort us, and this is due to the fact our mind and

spirit will be the same mind and spirit we have here, in spite of the fact we will have new bodies. Just as God repeated the pattern He created us with by creating a place to put His name on this earth and send His Son to, there will be, in heaven, a repeat of all the things we as humans, even from different time periods, were familiar with as it relates to the true things of God. (Rev. 21:1-5)

Getting back to the discussion of the fact it was not our spirit that died when Adam and Eve took of the fruit, and a point that takes us more directly to answering our question, we will turn now and look at the story which gave us the very popular Christian term, "born again." When people hear this term they often think about it in the context of the idea we are spiritually dead. Then they believe when we accept Jesus into our hearts, we are spiritually "born again." They extrapolate this concept from a conversation Jesus had with a leader of the Jewish nation, named Nicodemus, and many believe Nicodemus was confused by what Jesus said. It's true, today, we do have the same problem Nicodemus had, which is the simple fact Nicodemus was flabbergasted by the information. However, the real problem is that we don't simply marvel as Nicodemus did, and which Jesus told him not to. Because we are the ones who get confused, we try to explain away the information by talking about spiritual death again!

In John chapter 3, Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and admitted the Jewish leadership clearly knew Jesus was, at the very least, a teacher from God. Nicodemus came to Jesus because he wanted information from Jesus. Jesus knew what was burning in Nicodemus' mind, and He went right to it. Jesus tells Nicodemus the only way for a man to see the Kingdom of God is to be "born again." Now, many people think Nicodemus was confused about what Jesus was saying, and that is why he asked how a person can go back into his mother's womb and be born a second time? The truth is, Nicodemus was not confused. Jesus was answering the question Nicodemus wanted to know the answer to, and Nicodemus was right there in step with what Jesus was talking about. Because people believe in spiritual death, they believe Nicodemus was confused, and they often believe Jesus' answer confirms it. In doing this, we get all turned around and become the ones confused much the same way we believe Nicodemus was.

People believe Nicodemus was confused in that he was thinking physical when Jesus was talking spiritual, but this is untrue! Once again, what we are up against in many ways is the weakness of language. Jesus was talking about the physical, just as Nicodemus was talking about the physical. Nicodemus knew people died, even people who were believers in God. He did not understand how anyone could be saved from the judgment of death that sin brings if God allowed all people, whether they served God or not, to simply die! In truth, what Nicodemus wanted to know was not to dissimilar to the very question we are dealing with here; but we should consider Nicodemus did not have the facts as yet, which we now have by seeing the work Jesus was to do.

Many people believe Jesus' answer to Nicodemus' question confirms Nicodemus was just not thinking spiritually as he should, because Jesus says, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John 3:5 People interpret this as meaning we have to be born physically and then our spirit must be born as well. This is wrong! I often say we cannot understand the latter parts of the Bible if we do not study the first parts. In I Corinthians 15:23 Paul explains, Jesus is the Firstfruits. We understand all this better if we know the Jewish law and the feasts it contains, but even if we don't, it should still be fairly simple to grasp the basic point. Jesus is not the only fruit His work will accomplish, but He is, by necessity, the One Who had to accomplish the sequence; and thus, the first to be what He was talking about when He said you must be "born again." This is the base dynamic of salvation which Jesus came to demonstrate to us and accomplish for us. It is the core of what being a Christian is all about!

Jesus would be killed, and His dead body laid in a tomb. If that was where the story ended, there would be no point in talking about it or Him anymore, but it does not end there! After the Sabbath had passed, women came to the tomb where Jesus' body was laid; and as they came, they wondered how they were going to get the stone rolled away so they could access the body of Jesus. What happens is a great example of God providing our needs, but not interfering in the unfolding of our lives by stepping in at every moment and correcting our path. It was a truth the stone was heavy. It was a truth the women, with-

out help, would not likely get it moved, nor were the guards placed by the governing authority likely to let them in. However, it was also a truth they, as well as others, needed to see inside that tomb!

Thus, God sends an angel down, whose appearance scares the soldiers so badly they become as dead men. This angel proceeds to roll the stone out from in front of the opening of the tomb, and then he sets upon it! (Matt. 28:1-4) When the women get to the tomb, they see it is open; and according to Luke, the angels who greet them inside the tomb have a simple question for them: "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Luke 24:5 You see, the angel did not roll the stone away for Jesus to get out. He was already gone! The angel rolled away the stone for the women to see that fact, and for others to see it as well. Thus, the women are instructed to go spread the news! (Matt. 28:5-7)

Now, only a handful actually see Jesus before the sun sets on that third day of the process, but Jesus had proven what He told Nicodemus was necessary in order to see the Kingdom of God was, in fact, possible! Jesus had went through the process Himself. He had died a physical death, if not by the same means, still in the same manner we all die; and His body had been put in the grave, just as all dead bodies must be disposed of in some manner. However, Jesus did not stay in the grave. He got up and walked away from that grave! He did not do this because of the will of man. Remember, man's will is why Jesus had been put to death in the first place, which is the ultimate example of the destruction sin brings. No, Jesus walked away from the grave because of the will of God! (Acts 10:37-42) This is why Jesus told Nicodemus not to marvel at the fact God can do such a thing. The fact overcoming physical death is no complication for God, and God proved this through the work of The Messiah, is the Gospel in a nutshell! If you don't believe it's possible, then why would you claim to be a follower of Jesus?

Again, we return to the simple fact, it's our flesh that dies, and so it's our flesh that needs to be born a second time. That is what Jesus was talking about! Jesus was saying, the first time you were born it was because of the will of man. God made one and only one human. His name was Adam. Eve was not created as Adam was created, she was made by taking a

piece of Adam and forming a bone of Adam's bone, and flesh of Adam's flesh, human. Adam was a man, and because Eve was physically his counterpart, Adam called her a woman. (Gen. 2:23) The fact God created both male and female is how new individuals have come into existence ever since. An already existing pair of humans gave a piece of themselves to form your physical life. However, this world is filled with sin and did not remain, from creation forward, what God wanted it to be. What you need in order to see that place where God's will is being accomplished, or what is simply called the Kingdom of God in John chapter 3, is for this flesh, which is part of you and which being made of the dust of this planet is part of what God created in Genesis 1:1, to die. Then, as an individual, you can be born again by the will of God, in a new body that is not part of this sin-filled, temporal universe!

In our next segment, we will talk more about what true salvation is, and the ways we should understand and use terminology such as "salvation" and "born again" more properly than we do. We will also begin the discussion of what truly happens to us after the death of our physical forms, by looking at the fact so many things people throughout time have believed do not line up with what the Bible teaches us. Thus, we cannot hold onto the theories of men if we want to understand the truth. Until then, I pray you will grow in His assurance and comfort, as you prepare your life to meet The Lord at His return!

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