

Did Christ die the “Second Death”?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | August 8, 2008



Recently I read in a Christian magazine the stated belief that Christ died the second death. Have you ever heard this theory before? Have you even heard of the second death? Can you articulate what the second death actually is?

How is the second death different from the first death? What Biblical evidence do we have to define the second death? And is there any Biblical evidence that Christ died the “second death”?

The Bible uses the actual term “second death” only in the book of Revelation in 2:11, 20:6, 20:14 and 21:8. The first two times the term is used the Bible tells us that the second death has no power over the righteous, the victorious in Christ, those who arise in the first resurrection. It is in the last two uses that the Bible gives us some definition of what the second death actually is:

Rev 20:14 “The lake of fire is the second death”

Rev 21:8 “their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

According to Revelation the second death occurs in the lake of fire or that dying in the lake of fire is the second death. Did Christ die in the lake of fire? When Jesus died do we have any inspired evidence that Jesus died with fire reigning down upon Him? Or does the inspired record reveal just the opposite that

darkness covered Him and He pled, “my God, my God why have you forsaken me” (Matt 27:45, 46)?

Some Bible commentators add further clarification between the first and second death noting that the first death is the death from which a resurrection occurs but the second death is the death from which there is no resurrection. There is sound Biblical evidence for this conclusion (1Cor 15:12-21, 42-49, 1Thes 4:16, Rev 2:11, 20:5,6,14, 21:8). If we accept this additional demarcation then we must ask, Did Christ die a death from which there was no resurrection or did Christ rise again? “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1Cor 15:13). On two counts the Biblical evidence suggests Christ did not die the second death. Is there more evidence?

While the Bible doesn’t use “second death” language in any other place, Jesus actually described the two deaths (first and second) in Matthew 10:28 when He said:

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Christ makes a distinction between two types of death. The first in which only the body is destroyed and the second in which the body and soul is destroyed. Amazingly, the word translated “soul” is the Greek word “psyche” which means “mind, identity, individuality.” So, when Jesus died on the cross, did He have His mind, identity, individuality destroyed or did He rise again as the “same Jesus” (Acts 1:11) who died?

If we use the Bible as our guide we have three demarcating features of the second death:

- lake of fire
- death without resurrection
- death which destroys both body and soul (psyche, individuality, mind)

When Jesus died were any of these identifiers met? No! The Bible seems to be making a strong case that Jesus did not “die” the second death. If He didn’t die the second death then what was the significance of His death?

Jesus death was the means of actually destroying death!

Christ confronted the second death and conquered it, not “paid” it.

2 Timothy 1:9,10 states, Christ “destroyed death and brought life and immortality to life.” Christ destroyed the elements of Satan’s government that bring death “by his death he destroyed him who holds the power of death that is the devil” Hebrews 2:14. The law of God is the law of love (Deuteronomy 6:5, Psalms 19:7, Matthew 22:37, Romans 13:10, 1 Cor 13, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8), which is the law that all life is created to operate upon. Sin is lawlessness (1John 3:4), which is trying to live outside the law of love. In other words, sin is violating the very principle that life is created to operate upon. Death results where selfishness rules and death is destroyed where love reigns supreme!

Christ died when love overcame selfishness, when He gave His life freely, when He chose to lay down His life voluntarily. In Christ the law of love, the law of life, was fully lived out when Christ refused to use His power to save self, but rather gave His life freely in love. In Christ, giving destroyed taking, love destroyed selfishness, life destroyed death! Thus Christ’s death destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light! Christ’s experience on the cross stands in sharp contrast to that of those who die in

the lake of fire where they are overcome by selfishness. The differences between Christ's death and that of those who die the second death are stark:

Christ died trusting the Father - Luke 23:46

The wicked die distrusting the Father - Revelation 6:16

Christ died longing to see the Father - Mark 15:34

The wicked die hiding from the Father - Revelation 6:16

Christ died when the Father's presence was hidden - Mark 15:34

The wicked die when the Father is fully revealed - 2 Thes 2:8

Christ died less than 72 hours - Luke 24:1-8

The wicked die eternally - Malachi 4:1-3, Romans 6:23, James 1:15, 2Pet 3:10-12

Christ died when love overcame selfishness - John 3:16, 10:17,18, 1John 3:16

The wicked die overcome by selfishness - Revelation 21:8

If the Scriptures so plainly teaches that Christ did not die the second death, then why do so many insist that He did? Because many have misdiagnosed the problem of sin. Rather than realizing sin destroys the sinner, that we are in a terminal state of sinfulness, that without Christ's victory we would die, many have innocently, but wrongly, concluded that our problem is actually God Himself. Many believe God must kill, that God is the source of death. They believe that God punishes sin and sinners by inflicting eternal death (the second death) on the wicked when He throws them in the lake of fire. Therefore it is believed that in order to avoid God killing us that God needs to be appeased or our penalty of sin needs to be paid. The natural conclusion of this misdiagnosis is to believe that Christ must have died the second death lest our penalty remain unpaid. But the Bible teaches that sin brings forth death (Romans 6:23, James 1:15), not God. The Bible is plain: God is the source of life (Genesis 1, Psalms 19:7, John 3:16, Romans 6:23, Romans 8:31-34).

The desire to believe the idea that Jesus died the second death is so strong with some that not only is all the above evidence ignored, but fancy twists of logic are often employed to "justify" this idea. The argument is put forth that because Christ could not see through the tomb and because He emotionally and psychologically thought He was going to eternally die, then such mental anguish is the same as actually dying the second death. Just take a moment and think that through.

Suppose a death row inmate goes into the death chamber and is given a lethal injection. He feels the poison enter his veins and then loses consciousness, but in actuality an anesthesiologist put him to sleep. Three days later he wakes him up. Now, would we really say, "Well, he really died because he thought he was going to die and had no hope he would live again in three days?"

Such an argument has God playing "tricks" and "deceiving" His intelligent creatures into the idea that Christ somehow "died" eternally the "second death" because "He thought" He would never rise again. I challenge you to exam the evidence for yourself, weigh the issues, come to your own conclusion!

Christ didn't need to die the second death in order to pay His Father the proper penalty because this was never the problem that needed fixing. Christ died as the way and means of destroying death by overcoming the infection of sin/selfishness with perfect self-sacrificing love!

Jesus Christ “destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light” 2 Timothy 1:9,10.