

## How Could Jesus Die the Second Death If He Rose Again in Three Days?

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His *agape* made it “not possible”  
that the second death should “hold” Him in its grasp

(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)?—A reader from California.

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 (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” and “tasted [our] death” (Isa. 53:6; 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?**

“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” 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 (Rev. 2:11).<sup>1</sup> “He poured out His soul unto

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<sup>1</sup> “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

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).<sup>2</sup>

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

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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.)

<sup>2</sup> Moses had that experience—compare Ex. 32:31, 32, “And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.”

“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 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; “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (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).

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 “as a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain” (RH, March 11, 1890). 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 (“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves. Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and [their] thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;”) Rom. 2:14, 15; “That] was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (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. Men will see what their choice has been. Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy will then have been made plain.” (DA 58). GC 666-

668). 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).

“We cannot know how much we owe to Christ for the peace and protection which we enjoy. It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan. The disobedient and unthankful have great reason for gratitude for God’s mercy and long-suffering in holding in check the cruel, malignant power of the evil one. But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed. 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. Every ray of light rejected, every warning despised or unheeded, every passion indulged, every transgression of the law of God, is a seed sown, which yields its unfailing harvest. The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and then there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan. The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace, and resisting the pleadings of divine mercy. Never was there given a more decisive testimony to God’s hatred of sin, and to the certain punishment that will fall upon the guilty.” *The Great Controversy*, pp. 35, 36.

When man destroys, he moves toward the victim with deliberate intention to kill.

When God destroys, He moves away from the subject with no intention of killing.

When man destroys, he carries the weapons of death in his hands.

When God destroys, He carries no weapons but lays down control of the destructive powers.

When man destroys, he guides the sword on to its target.

When God destroys, there is no personal administration of punishment. Whatever comes upon the sinner is the outworking of the forces of death which he himself has set in motion.

Two questions are apt to arise. The first is: After all, what is the essential difference between the direct act of destroying, or that of departing to leave the person to die? In both cases it is God's action which brings about the destruction and therefore, in each case, He is a destroyer.

This would be true if God's withdrawal was His own act, but it is not. The fact is that He is driven away. Think of the way in which Christ went to Calvary. He was taken there forcibly. This shows in its clearest terms man's reaction toward the loving appeals of God. Man drives God away, depriving Him of any possibility of remaining unless He forces His presence, which the Lord will never do.

Let us suppose that there is an atomic power plant located in the midst of a small township of two thousand people. The nature of this power plant is such that an operator must continually be in the control room to monitor the controls. Should this post be left unattended for several hours or more, the nuclear fission will run out of control and blossom into a holocaust of destruction.

The situation arises where every technician but one is taken away and the full responsibility rests upon this man. No one else in the whole area has

the training, knowledge, or skill, to operate this volatile equipment.

This creates no special problem, for the man is healthy, very conscientious, and does his work with great faithfulness day and night. He is able to take sufficient rest between check times to enable him to carry on indefinitely.

But, there enters the area an arch-enemy of the technician who determines to run him out of town. To accomplish this, he circulates lying reports until a hate complex is generated among the villagers. They begin to persecute the technician in every imaginable way with increasing intensity. For a very long time he patiently endures the attacks in the hope that they will subside and with the realization that if he does forsake his post it will be disastrous for the village.

Finally his patience runs out. "I have had enough of this," he cries. "I have gone the second and the third mile. These people have shown that they do not deserve to live. I am leaving."

Whereupon he walks out of the control room and drives far away. Several hours elapse and he is safe beyond the reach of the explosion when it occurs. The village and all in it are utterly destroyed.

While it is true that in a certain sense the villagers destroyed themselves, it is equally true that this technician destroyed them for he left them knowing that his departure would bring those sure and certain results. This is the picture which many have of God.

The situation faced by this man is the same as that faced by God. He is the great “Technician” who is in charge of the power house of nature. When He lets go of those powers, there is no one else who can control them and keep them from exploding in a horror of destruction. An enemy has come in and a hate complex has been generated against God.

“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 worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

also has highly exalted Him” (Phil. 2:8, 9); “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (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 “every man.”<sup>4</sup> “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 (“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. . . . (vs. 30) A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.” 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 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.<sup>5</sup>

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

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.