

What is Death?



WHAT IS DEATH?

AMAZING AS IT MAY SEEM to some, death is a *return*. Man is soil and *returns* to the soil (Gen. 3:19). The spirit *returns* to God who gave it (Ecc. 12:7). The soul *returns* to the unseen whence it came (Psa 9:17 and Acts 2:27,31). In fact Job speaks of death itself as a return when he says:

For I know that Thou wilt return me to death.
(Job 30:23 A.V.).

Neither man as a whole, nor any part of him enters a new, unknown condition at death, but all returns to the state from which it emerged when life was imparted. Even as the body was created of existing entities, so with the spirit which was given by God; and at death these return to the same condition in which they were before.

This truth has been obscured by inconsistency in rendering the Hebrew word שׁוּב *shub*. This word is represented in the English Authorized version by one hundred and forty-two variations in rendering. On the other hand, five Hebrew words are translated "return." Our only recourse is a fresh, concordant study of the term. The main question to be decided is whether this Hebrew word simply means to *turn*, or if it includes the thought of a previous condition, hence a return. The following passages from the Authorized Version are in point.

Gen. 3:19 till *thou return* unto the ground;
 Gen. 3:19 unto dust *shalt thou return*.
 Psa. 104:29 they die, and *return* to their dust.
 Psa. 146:4 *he returneth* to his earth
 Job 10:9 *wilt thou bring me* into dust *again*?
 Ecc. 12:7 *Then shall* the dust *return* to the earth as it was:
 and the spirit *shall return* unto God Who gave it.
 Psa. 9:17 The wicked *shall be turned* into hell,
 Judg. 15:19 *and when . . . his spirit came again*
 1 Ki. 17:21 *let this child's soul come* into him *again*.
 Gen. 42:28 My money *is restored*;
 Lev. 6:4 (5:23) *that he shall restore* that which he

These are but a few of many passages which clearly prove that this Hebrew word means not only *turn* but *return*. Many instances are quite misleading if we should translate *turn*, but all are clear when we prefix *re-*.

With this key in our hands we are able to unlock the secret of death. And if we apply it first of all to the material part of mankind, the body, we not only have unquestionable proof of its truth, but are supplied with a parable of the spirit and a clue as to the soul.

THE BODY IS SOIL

Consider, then, the facts as to the body. It is soil. At death it returns to the soil whence it came. While it was a part of the body this soil was stamped with our personality. We speak of it as *our* body, though the elements which compose it are constantly changing and are entirely decomposed in death. As a matter of fact, each seven years or so the body has undergone an entire change, so far as its material components are concerned, yet it is the same body as far as we are aware. Perhaps it would not be too much to say that our bodies die every seven years and are renewed as often. This, of course, is a gradual process, nevertheless a real one. It should help us to realize what the death of a body involves. Could we compress this process of dying into a brief

period and check the repair processes, then we have death itself. This daily dying is a continual reminder and a constant intimation of mortality. Death is written large in our daily experience for it is perpetually operating in our bodies to return them to the soil from whence they came. And it is to this that Scripture points us if we would realize what death means. It should teach us that the body is not identified with any arbitrary unchangeable portion of the soil, but remains the identical body when the material elements which compose it have been replaced by entirely different substance. The elements which return to the soil have no more consciousness or identity than they had before we partook of them in the form of food.

DEATH FOR LIFE

Another law, akin to this, is that the higher organization must live by the death of the lower. Plants can draw their sustenance directly from the soil, but animals, living souls that move, cannot extract their food from the earth directly. They must live by the death of the herb and the grain and the fruit.

Thus we are constantly being reminded of the great lesson that God can not only bring life from death, but that our death is but a stepping stone to the high honor given to us through His Beloved, Christ Jesus.

No fact in all the universe is so amply and constantly evidenced as the truth that death is the only means of life. The death of Christ, as the harbinger of life to a dying race, is the most illustrious example, but it is far from being a solitary one. It is but the apex of a pyramid of facts which have been piled up by the ages, which are still recurring and which may be felt by everyone and everywhere. The food we eat is eloquent on

this point. Not merely flesh food—though this is its highest expression—but vegetables and grains as well. To begin with, it is only by dying that the grain can grow. It is only through death that the seed we sow can sprout. And this imparted life is lost again when the grain is used as food, either of animal or mankind. Death, death, death, nothing lives but by death. This is the universal law of life from which nothing can escape.

DEATH IS NOT LIFE

Men have been betrayed into the most absurd inconsistencies in their efforts to accept the dictum of the serpent "Ye shall not surely die." They frantically flee from death, they add precaution to precaution to avoid it, they brand a man a murderer who kills another, and call him a suicide if he kills himself, yet they persist in painting death in most pleasing colors. If it is such a blessed state why not embrace it?

But the word of God clears away such mists by associating life with good and death with evil (Deut. 30:15,19). God has no pleasure in the death of those who die (Ezek. 18:32), nor has anyone else. Death, in God's Word, is compassed with sorrows (Psa. 18:4; 116:3) and terrors (Psa. 55:4).

DEATH IS ESSENTIAL TO RESURRECTION

The greatest havoc wrought by a false view of death is the virtual denial of the resurrection. In my early endeavors to grasp the mind of God as to the true Gospel which He would have preached, the most striking and notable departure from the preaching of the Apostles I found to be in their constant stress on the resurrection of Christ, while present day evangelical preachers hardly ever deem it worth mentioning in a Gospel address.

I sought the cause of this discrepancy and found it in the false view of death which has become orthodox and "sound." For if death for the believers is but the entrance into a fuller, freer *life*, then what need of a resurrection? Why drag down the spirit from its ecstatic session in the divine Presence into a burdensome body again?

In line with this I found that the theological phrase "the resurrection of the *body*" (which virtually denies resurrection in that it excludes the soul and spirit) has wrought great mischief. This unscriptural, misleading phrase has found its way into the creeds and seeks to hide its falsity by its challenge to "faith." It wears a mask of truth to conceal its real intent, which is hardly less than the error of which the apostle Paul warns us (2 Tim. 2:18) for it infers that the resurrection is past already so far as the soul and spirit is concerned.

Until we acknowledge death to be *death* we cannot understand resurrection aright, for it is resurrection from the *dead*, not from another form of life!

Another remarkable phenomena is worth noting in this connection. It is the tendency for those who deal much with the original Greek to become "heretics" on this question. The church has corrupted the truth so that a vital contact with the early manuscripts is sure to lead to "heresy." In truth, such a study of the original has become almost necessary in order to recover this truth. Thus it was with Martin Luther, soon after his escape from the thralldom of Rome. In his "Defense" he says: "I permit the Pope to make articles of faith for himself and his faithful: such as that the soul is the substantial form of the human body, that the soul is *immortal*, with all those monstrous opinions to be found in the Roman dunghill of decretals."

But even before that day our martyr, William Tyndale, whose life and death were devoted to the truth, writes to Sir Thomas Moore: “In putting departed souls in heaven, hell and purgatory, you destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection. What God doth with them, that shall we know when we come to them. The true faith putteth the resurrection, which we be warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that souls did ever live. And the Pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ, and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together—things so contrary that they cannot agree. And because the fleshly-minded Pope consenteth unto heathen doctrine, therefore he corrupteth the Scriptures to establish it. *If the souls be in heaven*, tell me why they be not in good case as the angels be and *then what cause of the resurrection?*”

And not only the faithful Tyndale but others since his day who have dealt directly with the text of the early Greek and Hebrew have become convinced of this “heresy.” As a young inquirer I was warned against Wilson’s *Emphatic Diaglott* on this ground. Rotherham, whose quaint version has been the delight and help of many, has been impeached of this “error.” Dr. Bullinger, whose *Critical Lexicon* evinces a close study of the original, suffered much for maintaining this truth. So that we must warn all who wish to remain orthodox not to brush aside the veil of the Authorized Version or look upon the face of the ancient text or you will surely be tainted with the heresy of God’s truth!

IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL NOT SCRIPTURAL

The most unblushing denial of God’s Word is found in the orthodox doctrine of inherent immortality. It finds

no source or prop or excuse in the Scriptures of truth. It is but the wild guess of a pagan philosopher foisted upon us by a degenerate theology. When its supporters are driven to admit that it has no place in God's Word they try to tell us that it is everywhere inferred. If they should say that it is everywhere inferred that God will bring all back to life it would fully satisfy each intimation and would have solid support and definite declarations. But nowhere is there the least intimation of immortality being a present possession anywhere in the sacred scrolls. Death is insisted on everywhere as being the lot, not only of humanity, but of other creatures as well.

At the very forefront of revelation man is denied immortality. The serpent had indeed said, "Ye shall not surely die." (Gen. 3:4). But Ieue Alueim takes all the necessary precautions, so that His Word does not fail. Not only does the sentence go forth, "soil are you, and to soil are you returning" (Gen. 3:19, C.V.), but they are driven from Eden for the express purpose of keeping them from the tree of life. Had they tasted of this tree then they would indeed have been immortal—at least for the eon—and their life would have been prolonged in the midst of all the infirmities and distresses of advancing age. They would be tortured by pain and racked by disease without the possibility of escape through death or restoration by resurrection. They would be in the modern "hell."

But Ieue Alueim allows no such inconceivable calamity to overtake them. He placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way of the tree of the living. In other words, He took care that no one could possibly become immortal until the way should once more be opened by means of Christ and the resurrection. How

anyone, in the face of the narrative, coupled with the distinct assertion that Christ alone has immortality—how anyone can still believe Satan's lie, seems almost incredible. Yet we know that those in high places not only hold and herald it forth as truth, but seek to find "evidence" for it in the Scriptures! Some, however, allow that it is not taught there, but that it is taken for granted!

IMMORTALITY AND INCORRUPTION

Christ alone has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16). We shall put it on when we are vivified (1 Cor. 15:53, 54). These two passages are the only references to immortality, or deathlessness, in the Greek Scriptures. Romans 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:10 refer to *incorruption*, not immortality. This is clear from 1 Corinthians 15:42, 50, 53, 54, Ephesians 6:24 and Titus 2:7, which comprise all the occurrences of the word for incorruption. Immortality is not "brought to light" or *illuminated* through the Gospel, but through the resurrection (2 Tim. 1:10).

PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY vs. GOD'S TRUTH

In spite of the plain, unequivocal declaration of Holy Writ, it is commonly believed that the theory of Plato, that man is inherently immortal, is found in the Bible. Let any one who believes this take up his Bible and concordance and search and see if he can find a single passage to support the assertion. Usually this is acknowledged, though some passages, such as Mark 12:27, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living," are cited which clearly refer to resurrection, or the fact that the dead are roused, not to deathlessness. The very weakness of Plato's position, when referred to the Word of God, ought to be the most powerful argument for believing God's express declaration that Christ *alone* is now possessor of immortality (1 Tim. 6:16).

Nevertheless many of the arguments of Plato and his followers appeal to our reason with great force. The longing for deathlessness which God has implanted in the human breast is eloquent in its favor. Will He deny the craving which He has Himself created? Shall death defeat the designs which have cost Him infinite pains and unlimited labor?

It was but human for Plato to reason from all this that death was not the end of God's dealing with mankind. And thus far he and those who follow him are right. But his error lay in his ignorance of God's power to rouse the dead. All Plato could do was to deny the reality of death itself. He would limit it to the body. He would make the soul or the spirit immortal and thus provide for the continuance of man's existence that the purpose of creation might thus find a possibility of fulfillment.

The grand truth that, in Christ, all shall be made alive, or vivified, at once denies the doctrine of inherent immortality and supplies the true and satisfactory solution to Plato's problem. Man, truly, was not created to float as a vapor across the sky and dissolve into nothingness. His present life is no more than this. But this fails to fulfill his destiny and falls short of the purpose God has in view in His creation. But the object is not obtained by a fancied immortality. It is attained only through death. It is reached only by resurrection. It is found alone in vivification. Men shall not be *kept* alive; they shall all be *made* alive. It will not do to deny death, for death is one of the means for manifesting God's might and mercy.

Every argument in favor of immortality receives a complete and comprehensive answer when once we see that all shall be made alive. Not only will they be raised

to receive the deserts of their deeds, but, when this has been attended to and the second death has run its course, then they will be made alive in Christ in order that God may enjoy the fruit of His endeavors on their behalf and that they may enjoy the love which will not leave them even in the dust of death.

It has been truly said: "Even in pagan religions there is found an element of distorted truth. In fact, many a deep truth, which narrow-minded Christian theology has never grasped, can be discovered, in caricature, in heathen religions. They all date back to the sons of Noah, all of whom had the oracles of truth, as far as they were known in their day. It is around fragments of these oracles as a basis that heathen philosophy has spun. It is from them, as a source, that all pagan cults have sprung, even though they are, in the form they have taken, 'doctrines of demons.' Distorted, malignant caricatures of truth are they, just the same. . . . And so, in the heathen belief of the soul's immortality there is a grain of truth also."

The element of truth in the doctrine of the inherent immortality of man will be evident after the consummation when all men will indeed be possessed of this priceless gift. But the great error lies in the denial of God's power and that of His Christ. Life is not inherent in man in any sense. Not even in God's Son. The Father has life in Himself—inherent life—and He makes this a gift to His Son (John 5:26). Apart from Christ, the Son of the living God, there is no life. The continuity of life after death in some modified, fragmentary way, is entirely unknown to Scripture. The spirit does not continue to live. The soul does not continue to live. The *man* is dead. The denial of this is only a subterfuge of philosophy which knows nothing of resurrection. At

all hazards they must keep God from touching His own creatures!

GOD GIVES

But God will not have it thus. The cold comfort which "inherent immortality" affords is replaced by the grand consolation that death, like all else, is *for* God; a means for the discovery of His heart. So that when all men indeed possess immortality it will be a *gift*—a gift from God Himself, and the realization of their utter unworthiness for this priceless boon as well as their absolute helplessness to gain it—these are the offices and function of sin and death and judgment. God will *sell* nothing to any man, but nothing will be able to keep Him from *giving* with a lavish hand what each may most esteem and least deserve.

Inherent immortality is a doctrine of the demons, the substructure of spiritism, a destructive delusion. It is the offspring of the ignorance which prevails as to God's ultimate vivification of all. Christ alone has immortality now. In order to die, when on the cross, it was necessary for our Lord to give up His spirit, for His Father had given Him to have life in Himself (John 5:26). This power God gave back to Him in resurrection. Thus it is that through Him, the Firstborn from among the dead, and His death, God is able to promise to all the gift which they vainly seek to arrogate to themselves, apart from God's grace.

TWO FALSE VIEWS OF DEATH

Resurrection is denied by both of the extreme views of the death state. One theory is that the dead are conscious though disembodied—that they are really *alive*: the opposite view holds that they are annihilated. From both of these standpoints resurrection is impossible.

“THE DEAD ARE ALIVE!”

If the dead are consciously alive then they are not dead at all and both the need and possibility of resurrection is unthinkable.

Being an unscriptural doctrine, the advocates of a conscious intermediate state have nothing definite to offer as to the conditions of such an existence. It would be far from accurate to guess that it would correspond to the state of so-called “angels”; or to liken it to the imagined conditions of “disembodied spirits.”

Once a leading magazine published a series on “Are the Dead Alive?” Few seemed to notice the incongruity of the question. For if it should be established that the dead are alive this would also prove that they are not dead. This leads to the bold denial of death:

“There is no death
What seems so is transition.”

And this reminds us of Eden’s garden where the “mother of all the living” is told, “Ye shall not surely die.” Orthodoxy is nothing less than the propagation of the Adversary’s lie. In seeking to deny death, however, it also denies the possibility of resurrection. To make alive that which already has life should not call forth much effort. Yet resurrection is set forth as the mightiest exhibition of God’s great power. And everywhere it is insisted that it is the resurrection *from the dead*.

Likewise, if the dead are as though they had not been they are beyond the reach of resurrection. Let us allow all that God says as to the reality of the death state. Let us never think of it as life in any sense. Let every element return whence it came. Yet it is no more possible to annihilate the history of a man’s life than to annihilate his individuality, or that which is spoken of

in Scripture by means of the pronoun. Our Lord said that all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall come forth. If they had been annihilated what "they" would there be to hear His voice? We are persuaded and fully grant that they can hear no *other* voice; in fact they are no more able to hear than if they really had been annihilated. And, indeed, unless *He* should speak to them we are certain that they never would hear nor live again—they would be the same as annihilated for all practical purposes.

But while we allow death its full force, we must always stop short of annihilation and acknowledge that something still exists (not *lives*) which responds to the voice of the Son in resurrection.

Perhaps one of the most convincing passages in favor of annihilation is found in Obadiah 16 where we read: "They shall be as though they had not been." This, however, is but a loose paraphrase of the Hebrew text, for the verbs "shall be" and "had been" are exactly the same in the original. If we render the verb the same in both instances it relieves the sentence of the very element which it needs to predicate annihilation. If for instance, we should translate "they are as if they are not" their existence is affirmed rather than denied. Besides, this passage deals with *nations*, not individuals, and we are quite free to admit that nations are to vanish as such, but not the persons who compose them.

The most striking case of the fire of Divine judgment is found in the overthrow of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Indeed, they are expressly said to be set forth as an example "experiencing the justice of fire eonian" (Jude 7, C.V.). But even this extreme case carried no thought of final annihilation to the mind of our Lord or to the prophets. Ezekiel assures us that

Sodom shall return to her former estate (Ezek. 16:55). Our Lord warns those cities which were refusing His message that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judging than for them (Matt. 10:15, 11:24; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12).

THE SECOND DEATH

While many will acknowledge that death is not annihilation, they insist that this is not true of the second death, the lake of fire. We are told that death without resurrection is virtual annihilation, and such it is. But let us not be too positive that there is no Scripture which teaches that there is a resurrection from the second death. That many have never discovered such a passage is quite true. But it is not what we have *not* seen which should form our doctrine, but what we *have* seen. There is such a passage, as we shall show, in due time. The main confusion on the subject of the second death has been brought about by the refusal to believe that it is a death at all. It is put in an entirely distinct category simply because it is called the *second* death. But we must remember that this phrase "the second death" is not to be explained—it is itself the divine explanation of what is to be understood by the lake of fire. Let us never seek to explain God's explanations.

We read of many things which are said to be *second*. Was not the healing of the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54) a *sign* just as much as when the water blushed at Christ's presence in Cana of Galilee (John 2:11)? Was the second "ward" or jail not a ward because it was second (Acts 12:10)? And the second Man, is He not a Man just as certainly as the first man, Adam (1 Cor. 15:47)? And is not the second covenant (Heb. 8:7) a covenant at all? And the second "veil" or curtain (Heb. 9:3), was it not a veil? Peter's second epistle

(2 Pet. 3:1), the second animal (Rev. 4:7), the second seal (Rev. 11:14), the second foundation (Rev. 21:19)—all of these are precisely what they are said to be in spite of the fact that they are not the first of their kind. Why, then, should the second death (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) be anything other than death?

This is the divine definition of the lake of fire. The fearful travesty which makes the dead alive, tortured before they are even brought before God's bar of justice, and raised from the dead merely to be hurled back into a fiercer torment—with such travesty the Scriptures have nothing to do. Nor do we appreciate the mighty effort God puts forth to wrest them from the sleep of death, if it is only to consign them once again to oblivion by the awful horror of the lake of fire.

To those who know the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the judgment of the great white throne will always present an insuperable difficulty apart from the grand truth of universal reconciliation. Why disturb the slumber of the wicked if no one is to be benefited thereby? Why wake them to life again if it only brands His name as Vengeance and wreaks unspeakable pain on them? Or if (as some may insist) they are consciously suffering even before their trial, why should He put forth infinite power only to damn them with double damnation? This is not His God nor ours.

ADAM, DYING TO DIE

A notable passage—which, indeed, contains the very first mention of death in the Word of God—is the penalty imposed on Adam in case of his disobedience.

"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."
(Gen. 2:17, A.V.).

How are we to understand this statement? That Adam

lived on for nine hundred years is beyond dispute (Gen. 5:5).

The most plausible explanation—spiritual death—becomes more impossible the closer it is considered “Spiritual” death is figurative. It depends on a knowledge of literal death for its understanding. Now it is an unbreakable law of figures such as this that the literal must come first, then the figurative. But death was unknown to Adam before this. Literal death would be difficult for him to apprehend, much less “spiritual.” Another consideration confirms this conclusion. In all the references to death in the Hebrew Scriptures not once is spiritual death referred to. It is a thought beyond the range of those who received that installment of God’s revelation.

Besides, death was not confined to Adam’s spirit. The pronoun “you” cannot be so interpreted, for we are never told that Adam was spirit, but often that he was soil. If we confine it to any part of him it will be necessary to refer it to his body, for he was not only formed from the soil but it is distinctly stated “soil *you* are, and to soil are *you* returning.” (Gen. 3:19, C.V.).

The key to the solution of our difficulty lies in the notable expression which our translators have rendered “*surely* die.” In the Hebrew it is unlike anything which we have in English. It reads literally, if we accept current standards of translation, “to die shall you be dying.” That is, the verb “die” is repeated in two different forms. First it is in the so-called “construct infinitive.” Our infinitive is “to die.” Being in the “construct state” shows that it is limited or restricted in its meaning by the following word. In the phrase “the word of the Lord,” for instance, the word “word” is in the construct state because not every one’s

word is intended, but only the Lord's. So here, the thought of dying is restricted by the following verb "you shall be dying." From this we gather that it is only in a restricted sense that Adam would die that day. "To die shall you be dying" brings before us a *process* of death, culminating, indeed, in actual death, but of indefinite duration in its operation.

The same phrase is used in a similar sense in Genesis 29:7; 1 Samuel 14:44; 22:16; 1 Kings 2:37, 42; 2 Kings 1:4, 16; Jeremiah 26:8; Ezekiel 3:18; 33:8, 14.

A PARALLEL CASE

The most interesting of these occurrences is 1 Kings 2:37, where we have the identical statement made to Shimei by Solomon in case he should dare to leave the confines of Jerusalem. "In the day...to die shall you be dying" gives us a perfect parallel case. And, like Adam, Shimei transgressed. And like him *he did not die* on the day he crossed the brook Kidron, but went to Gath after his servants and returned. This would not be so notable if Solomon had offered some excuse for not keeping his word and sending after him to fulfill his threat. Indeed, Solomon reiterates his previous words, not omitting the phrase "in the day" and proposes to carry it into execution several days afterward! It is evident that his understanding of this phrase was quite different from the impression conveyed by our usual English translation.

Such evidence as this is valuable—far more valuable than the labored efforts of Hebrew scholarship. Learning is ever lame, but here is evidence of Solomon's interpretation of this phrase—and how many would dispute his knowledge of Hebrew?

But we have still stronger evidence from Him Who is greater than Solomon.

IEUE'S UNDERSTANDING

What is Ieue's commentary on this phrase? For the time came when He must remind Adam of it and pronounce a sentence in harmony with it. As a matter of fact the verdict of Ieue is but an expansion of this phrase. And, as we have been led to expect, it is mostly occupied with the process of death.

"And to the human He says, 'As you hearken to the voice of your wife, and are eating from the tree of which I instruct you, saying not eat shall you from it, cursed shall be the ground when you serve it, for your sakes. In grief shall you eat of it all the days of your lives. And thorns and weeds shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the herbage of the field. In the sweat of your face shall you eat your bread, till your return to the ground, for from it are you taken, for soil you are, and to soil are you returning.' "

(Gen. 3:17-19, C.V.).

Instead of instant death, he is to eat of the ground in sorrow "all the days of your lives." Here we have an intimation of death, yet only as the result of grief long drawn out. The same story is repeated when he is assured that he shall eat bread "till you(r) return to the ground, for from it are you taken, for soil you are, and to soil are you returning."

"THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT"

The silly story of the "apple" need not concern us. But, whatever the fruit may have been, it seems certain that it was "poisonous," as we would say—a slow poison, eventually causing death. Its effects were felt the very day on which it was tasted.

Let us not suppose that this is the introduction of evil into the universe. It was merely the channel *through* which it came into the world system (Gk. *cosmos*, Rom. 5:12). The Adversary had spoken of evil as something well known to the "gods" (Heb. *alueim*) and Ieue Alueim Himself says:

"Behold! The human becomes as one of us, knowing good and evil. And now, lest he stretch forth his hand, moreover, and take of the tree of the living, and eat and live for the eon—!"
(Gen. 3:22, C.V.)

Therefore Ieue Alueim sent Adam forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he had been taken. So He drove out the man; and He stationed at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubim, and a flaming sword turning itself, to keep the way of the tree of the living.

Grace glows in every word of this judgment scene. We have become so used to man's judgment that we can think of it in no other way than a vindictive condemnation. Not so in the Scriptures, "Judge the widow and fatherless" does not mean to condemn them: it rather refers to their receiving their full rights in spite of their weakness and lack of influence. So here, in this, the earliest trial of mankind, we have the principles which govern all subsequent sessions of the court of God. It consists essentially of such a readjustment of affairs as will eventually produce, not only restoration, but reconciliation. The cursing of the ground was not in revenge; it was "for your sake." And toil and sweat, as we all know, carries with it a blessing, in fact it is one of the means of warding off the death which so surely impends.

DEATH WILL GLORIFY GOD

Another merciful provision was the guarding of the way leading to the tree of the living. Life, such as we now know it, is tolerable for a brief period, but when the functions fail and the senses cease, living becomes an unbearable burden. So that death itself is a mercy, under the circumstances, and provides the Creator with another opportunity to magnify His name by means of resurrection. He is not the God of the dead but of the living!

A.E.K.

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