

HEBREWS 9:27, 28 WON'T WE GET A SECOND CHANCE?

“Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”¹

God is God of the second chance, the third chance, the fourth chance, ad infinitum until... There is no question but that God forgives sinners, receiving them as His own dear children when they receive the sacrifice for sin that He has provided through His Son. However, no mortal dare presume against God. There is a day known only to the Living God when man must die; and after death there is no opportunity to receive the grace of God.

I recall a saying from the early days of my walk with the Master. That saying asked, “Poor soul, what will you do, if you begin to die naturally, before you begin to live spiritually! How will you look, if the tabernacle of nature be taken down, before the temple of grace be raised up! What must you feel, if your paradise be laid waste, before the tree of life be set in it! How can you bear to give up the ghost, before you have received the Holy Ghost! Eternal will be your darkness, if the sun of your life set within you before the Sun of righteousness shine upon you. Woe be to you, if your body be turned into the earth, before your soul be fit to be taken into heaven. If *the second birth* have no place in you, *the second death* will assuredly have power over you.” The saying referred to the gracious warning issued to those who dared presume against God’s grace, rejecting the life offered in Christ His Son. John wrote, “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years” [REVELATION 20:6]. Again, with compassion, the Revelator wrote, “Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire” [REVELATION 20:14].

Many people are banking on a false premise that because God is gracious, He won’t hold them accountable for their sin. Popular culture presents a caricature of the True and Living God. Few individuals put the strange concept into precise words, but glimmers of the distortion shine through in unguarded moments. What is tragic about this condition is that it has become common among the professed people of God. I daresay that a majority of people occupying evangelical pews hold—implicitly, if not explicitly—to the idea of universalism. One popular preacher put into words the concept that God’s love wins over mankind in the end.²

In this theology, every sinner will turn to God and realise he has already been reconciled to God, in this life or in the next. There will be no eternal conscious torment. God says no to injustice in the age to come, but He does not pour out wrath (we bring the temporary suffering upon ourselves), and He certainly does not punish for eternity. In the end, love wins.

The message is certainly appealing to many professed Christians. Moreover, it seems to have been popularised by the movement that has become known as the Emerging Church. The message declares that we can live as we wish, avoid accepting responsibility to warn sinners or to declare the message of life, and yet see our loved ones and friends receive the life Christ promises. It is undoubtedly appealing, and even has the appearance of being a loving message.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Rob Bell, **Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived** (HarperCollins and HarperOne, New York 2011)

However, our doctrine must not arise from eisegesis, but rather from exegesis. *Eisegesis* means that we read into Scripture what we want it to say; whereas *exegesis* means that we permit Scripture to inform us. In other words, we are to permit the Word to judge our hearts rather than judging the Word on the basis of what we feel. When we turn to Scripture, what do we find? The text chosen for study in this time is a statement that appears in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. The author, discussing the redemption offered through the sacrifice of God's own Son, takes special note of how that sacrifice was presaged in the ceremonies of the Law. He then makes this pointed statement. "Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." The author presents three significant certainties; and these certainties answer the question of whether we will receive a second chance.

DEATH IS CERTAIN — The first certainty is death. Death is a reality. Man may deny this reality, as does John Luckey McCreery in his poem.³ Nevertheless, people die! The text states bluntly, "It is appointed for man to die once." The Apostle has noted in another place, "In Adam all die" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:22]. His point is that all mankind is under sentence of death. From the tiniest infant to the most aged individual, all mankind is subject to death. Every preacher who has served even a minimum of days among the people of God will have conducted far more funerals than he cares to remember. Moreover, he will have officiated at the funerals of newborn infants as well as presiding at the funerals of aged individuals whose lives spanned decades.

God's Word is quite specific in stating that "The wages of sin is death" [ROMANS 6:23]. Whilst we of mature age would be compelled to acknowledge that we have sinned and thus confirm the sentence that constantly hangs over us, we wonder why the innocent child is subject to death. Of course, the answer is that our makeup is fatally flawed. Moreover, the flaw that mars our lives is integral to our being as mortals. The Bible points to the origin of this deadly condition when it says, "Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come" [ROMANS 5:12-14]. Though sin ultimately leads to death, even should we live a life unmarked by sin, we would nevertheless die because of the transgression of our first father. Thus, we discover that mankind is contaminated with what the theologian speaks of as Original Sin or Adamic Sin. Death has contaminated our DNA.

Some time back I preached a sermon entitled, "When Death Has Taken My Loved One."⁴ Unbeknownst to me, there was present in the congregation that morning was a man whom I had never met. After the service, I was informed that he was still grieving the tragic and sudden death of his wife who was killed in an auto crash. Some individuals questioned whether I should have spoken of death in light of his presence. My response was that I did not know he would be present. I continued my response to interlocutors by noting that a major aspect of my pastoral responsibility is preparing people to die. Death is certain. Because that is true, I endeavour to equip those who share these services to live in such a way that they need not fear death.

³ John Luckey McCreery, "There Is No Death"

⁴ Michael Stark, "When Death Has Taken My Loved One," July 11, 2010, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchie/ezekiel%2024.15-18%20when%20death%20has%20taken%20my%20loved%20one.pdf>

When that particular message aired on television, I received an Email from a woman who was apparently offended by the subject matter. “Are you crazy?” her Email began. Gathering steam, she continued by questioning the propriety of speaking of death in a church service.

Such responses betray a view throughout society that attempts to deal with death through denial. However, as I often observe, the statistics on death are startling—one out of one dies.

JUDGEMENT IS CERTAIN — Just as death is certain, so the requirement that we must give an accounting to Him who gave us our being is also a certainty. The text states, “It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.” The text points to a dark certainty. What is seldom appreciated by the lost is that they are now under sentence of death. The unsaved are outside the precincts of grace, estranged from God and thus without hope in the world.

I have often cautioned people of the present condition of those who are lost. God warns, “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” [JOHN 3:18]. Soon after penning these dark words, John wrote, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” [JOHN 3:36]. Make no mistake, the judgement that outsiders must face is a formality to pronounce eternal sentence.

Paul cautions those who imagine that they can avoid Divine judgement when he writes, “Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.

“He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil [ROMANS 2:4-9a].

Let me say that there is also a judgement for the redeemed; but the judgement of the saved is not a judgement to determine sentence, it is rather a judgement to determine rewards. The contrast in these judgements is witnessed as Daniel draws his prophecy to a conclusion. Writing of the accountability demanded of all mankind, Daniel wrote, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” [DANIEL 12:2, 3].

SALVATION IS CERTAIN — The text warns that death is certain. In the same way, the author has warned that judgement is certain. However, it is the twenty-eighth verse that encourages and comforts the child of God. That same verse holds out a promise to each outsider who will receive the message presented. The text promises, “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” [HEBREWS 9:28].

The promise looks back to the sacrifice of the Master, reminding all who will receive it that Christ the Lord was offered as a sacrifice to bear sin. The Infinite God presented His own life in the place of sinful people, taking upon Himself the judgement that we so richly deserve. Isaiah’s prophecy reads as though it was a mystery, save for the account provided by the Evangelists. God’s prophet has written:

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

[ISAIAH 53:4-6]

Undoubtedly, this passage was in mind when the Apostle wrote the Corinthian Christians, “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:21]. Thus, the Word of God promises each individual, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” [ROMANS 8:1]. For each one hearing this message, on the authority of God’s Word, we can announce that Christ Jesus presents Himself as the Saviour of all people, but His offer becomes effective only when we believe. And that is the message we encourage each one to receive as they come in faith to the Master, Jesus, receiving Him as Ruler over life. Amen.