

HOW MANY DEATHS DID CHRIST DIE?

By
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For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Ro 6:10.

While I do not like to differ with men who are so far above me in talents and experience, yet I cannot do otherwise in this case. Some teach Christ died *spiritually* before He died *physically*.

They say Christ died *two* deaths!

This view is found in various writers. Below I append some of those who espouse this position.

John Calvin. "If Christ had died only a bodily death, it would have been ineffectual. No – it was expedient at the same time for him to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment." [Calvin. *Institutes*, Book II. Ch. 16. 10. p. 515. Westminster].

B. H. Carroll. For three hours that darkness lasted; and there was death silence. About the ninth hour, which would be three o'clock, the silence was broken, and we have the fourth voice of Jesus; 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body, and spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God. So just before that darkness passed away, closing the ninth hour, Christ died the spiritual death. [BHC. *Int. Eng. Bible*. XI, 393].

J.R. Graves: The penalty then pronounced upon Adam was **spiritual death**—the separation of man from his God. This was the penalty our Redeemer had to suffer for us, with all its inconceivable horrors, and was not his soul passing under this eclipse when he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" [Graves. *Seven Disp.* P.71]

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown: "...in his death—Hebrew, "deaths." ... The plural, "deaths," intensifies the force; as Adam by sin "dying died" (Ge 2:17, Margin); that is, incurred death, physical and spiritual. So Messiah, His substitute, endured death in both senses; spiritual, during His temporary abandonment by the Father; physical, when He gave up the ghost." [JFB. *Com.* Is 53:9].

E. W. Kenyon: Jesus died twice on the cross. I knew this for many years, but I had no scriptural evidence of it. One day I discovered Isaiah 53:9, the answer to my long search. "And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his deaths." The word "death" is plural in the Hebrew. [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=156979781038413&story_fbid=842998379103213].

Hank Hanegraaff refers to several others who hold this view:

Somewhere between the time He [Jesus] was nailed to the cross and when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane—somewhere in there—He died spiritually. Personally, I believe it was while He was in the garden. [Frederick K.C. Price, Quoted by Hanegraaff. *Christianity in Crisis*, 157].

Did Christ die spiritually? Did He die twice? We examine this subject.

NO SCRIPTURE SAYS CHRIST DIED SPIRITUALLY

The first question we ask when men tell us that Christ died *spiritually*, is, where is the Scripture which teaches this? Just saying it does not make it so. None of these men quoted give any Scripture to prove their theory. They arrive at their position by *assuming* it is a fact. But how do they know it is true? If Scripture does not reveal it, then it is just a theory and theory cannot establish doctrine. We do not believe Scripture teaches this proposition and our reasons follow.

Next, we define *spiritual* death.

SPIRITUAL DEATH DEFINED

A. H. Strong says:

In spiritual death there is, Negatively, the loss of man's moral likeness to God, or that underlying tendency of his whole nature toward God which constituted his original righteousness. b. Positively, the depraving of all those powers which, in their united actions...or, in other words, the blinding of his intellect, the corruption of his affections, and the enslavement of his will. [Strong. *SST*. 591]

Again, Strong says:

Death of the soul which consists in its separation from God... Ge 2:17; [Strong. *SST*. 660].

Spiritual death is the same as the 'second death'... [Shedd. *Doct. Endless Punishment*, p. 92].

Dabney: That which occurred on the day of Adam's transgression was not actual bodily death, but his spiritual death... [Sampson. *Com. On Heb*. Edited from MS notes of R. L. Dabney, p. 103].

Adam's immediate death in the garden was *spiritual* death. All who descend from Adam are also *spiritually* dead, Ro 5:18.

Joseph Pipa Jr. quotes the Shorter Westminster Catechism: "The terrible reality of spiritual death is summarized in the Shorter Catechism: "Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell? The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it" (Question 18). [<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/faces-of-death/>].

When men attribute spiritual death to Christ, surely they do not see the implications contained therein. Spiritual death is not only detrimental, but it is a death which cannot be reversed. That which dies spiritually is never restored. Those who are the subjects of God's grace receive the new creation, but that which died spiritually is never revived.

Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Co 5:17. Gill comments:

...those who are openly in him, or are converted persons, are actually so; they are a new "creation", as the words may be rendered... and is applied by the apostle to converted persons; and designs not an outward reformation of life and manners, but an inward principle of grace, which is a creature, a creation work, and so not man's, but God's; and in which man is purely passive, as he was in his first creation; and this is a new creature, or a new man, in opposition to, and distinction from the old man, the corruption of nature; and because it is something anew implanted in the soul, which never was there before; it is not a working upon, and an improvement of the old principles of nature, but an implantation of new principles of grace and holiness; here is a new heart, and a new spirit, and in them new light and life, new affections and desires, new delights and joys. [Gill. *Com. 2 Co 5:17*].

SCRIPTURE DEFINITION OF SPIRITUAL DEATH

Spiritual death means that the subjects of it no longer have spiritual life.

Joh 6:53-58: Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

The spiritually dead are dead in sins and trespasses:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Col 2:13;

Their understanding is darkened and they are alienated from the life of God:

Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Ep 4:18.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: Ro 5:12.

They mind the things of the flesh rather than the things of the Spirit:

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. Ro 8:5.

One who is spiritually dead is totally depraved and totally corrupt. He is in bondage to sin and corruption. He is dead in sins and trespasses. Machen puts it like this:

God said to Adam that if he disobeyed he would die. What is the meaning of that death? Well, it includes physical death; there is no question about that. But, alas, it also includes far more than physical death. It includes spiritual death; it includes the death of the soul unto things that are good; it includes the death of the soul unto God. The dreadful penalty of that sin of Adam was that Adam and his descendants became dead in trespasses and sins. As a just penalty of Adam's sin, God withdrew his favor, and the souls of all mankind became spiritually dead. The soul that is spiritually dead, the soul that is corrupt, is guilty not only because of Adam's guilt but also because of its own sin. It deserves eternal punishment. [J. Gresham Machen. <http://www.westminsterconfession.org/introduction-to-the-christian-faith/the-consequences-of-the-fall-of-man.php>]

Those who are spiritually dead need to be made alive, Ep 2:1. And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

Can these things be ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, then it is evident that He never died spiritually.

SCRIPTURE EXPRESSLY TELLS US WHEN CHRIST DIED

This is given in all four gospels as well as many other Scriptures. Da 9:26 says Messiah shall be *cut off*, that is from life and the date is given in vs 25. This *cutting off* occurred only once.

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. Mt 27:50.

And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. Mk 15:37.

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. Lu 23:46.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. Jn 19:30.

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Ph 2:8.

Scripture tells us Christ died and it tells us He died when He yielded up His spirit to His Father.

SCRIPTURE TELLS US EXPRESSLY—CHRIST DIED ONLY ONCE

No Scripture says Christ died two times. None of these writers quoted give any Scripture to support the theory of two deaths. If this was a true doctrine, it would be declared and emphasized in Scripture. But we can find no Scripture alluding to it. If the Scripture is silent on it, then we ought to be also. But there are many passages which teach Christ died only once. From many, I select a few.

Jn 12:32-33. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.

Ro 5:10. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Phi 2:8. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

He 2:9. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

He 5:7. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

1Pe 3:18. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

He 10:10. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

Ro 6:10. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

According to these Scriptures Christ died only once.

BY ONE OFFERING CHRIST PERFECTED OUR REDEMPTION

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. He 10:14. This one offering which He *perfected* is in Jn 19:30 said to be *finished* and the two terms are the same word in the Greek. This *perfection* or *finishing* was not done until Christ died because His death was essential to that offering.

When Christ died this one perfect death, our redemption was complete.

WHAT TRANSPIRED IN THE THREE HOURS OF DARKNESS

Some of those who teach Christ died twice, refer to the three hours of darkness in support of this theory.

Christ's suffering during the three hours of darkness was immense. We cannot gage nor measure what He underwent during that awful time because it is unfathomable both in manner and degree. But to insist that during these three hours of darkness Christ died *spiritually*, is unwarranted. The Scripture does not say this.

Concerning that darkness, we take off our shoes. It is the echo of the burning bush, Ex 3:2-5. Let us be careful that we do not attempt *to break through unto the Lord to gaze*, [Ex 19:21] on that which God has seen fit to cover with *His darkness*, Ex 20:21. No creature can understand what Christ suffered. The Holy Spirit conceals it. Therefore, we do not attempt to enter into those secret things, De 29:29. It would be presumptuous for any man to assert details about this period which are not revealed in Scripture. Men may give their *suggestions* as to what went on in that darkness, and when they do we remain silent. But when they claim something took place during that time which is not revealed in Scripture and contrary to what is, are we then to be silent? No, not for an hour, Ga 2:5.

We do not know what took place during the three hours of darkness, but we know He did not die then because Scripture tell us He died after the darkness was past when He committed His spirit unto His Father.

CHRIST DIED A PHYSICAL DEATH

Scripture tells us Christ died a physical death. See the gospel accounts given above.

Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. Ac 2:24.

His death was like the death of other men in this respect—it was the separation of His soul from His body. That is the Scriptural definition of what death is. He laid down his mortal life and submitted Himself to death for three days then He took back that life which He had laid down in resurrection power. Jn 10:18.

SCRIPTURE DOES NOT SPEAK OF CHRIST'S *DEATHS*

Over and over Scripture speaks of His *death* on the cross but never of His *deaths*. During the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ on the mount and they talked with Him about His *decease*—literally His *exodus* out of this world, which should be accomplished at Jerusalem, Lu 9:31, Cf. 2 Pe 1:15. Now Christ's exodus was His death and this was a singular event which consummated all His sufferings especially those on the cross.

Heb 10:5-10. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

Christ was concerned about His one death and spoke of it beforehand, Jn 12:33. This he said, signifying what death he should die.

THE PLURAL ARGUMENT

In Is 53:9 the word *death* in Hebrew is plural. Because of this, some teach that Christ had to die more than once. They argue that because the noun *death* is plural here, this means Christ died twice. Of course, if the plural means more than one here, then someone else could argue that He died seven times or eight times! Does this plural mean more than one death?

There are several words among the Jews which are singular but written as plurals. The Hebrew noun *blood* is a case in point. Cf. Ge 4:10. There are other plurals in Hebrew which are singular, such as *heaven, blood, water, face*, etc.

The word death in Isaiah 53:9 is such a word. Consequently then, it lends no support to the idea of more than one death and the context plainly denies it. In vs 8 “He was *cut off*, (singular) out of the land of the living.” Again in vs 10 we read, “When thou shalt make his soul *an offering* for sin,” and that offering was His death and it is singular. Also in verse 12, “He hath poured out his soul unto death.” Again *death* is singular. The context makes it plain that the plural for *death* in vs 9 is not *deaths*, but a singular death, of a specific kind. It intensifies the force of the word and does not mean more than one. This is illustrated by comparing Ezk 28:8 & 10, concerning the death of the prince of Tyrus. On the plural Cf. *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, where they give “in his (martyr-) death,” referring to Is 53:9. Thus the idea of the plural is not a number of deaths but rather *a violent death*, or the *intensity of the death*. That this Hebrew plural did not mean multiple deaths is indicated also by the LXX which renders *death* in Is 53:8, 9 & 12, and also Ezk 28:8 by the singular *death*. Keil & Delitzsch on Is 53:9 cite Je 16:4. “here” they say, “it is applied to a violent death, the very pain of which makes it like dying again and again”... “after He had really died a painful death.” [Keil & Delitzsch. *Com. on the OT*. Vol. 7, P. 329; Cf. Hengstenberg. *Christology*, II, 294].

THE DEATH OF CHRIST IS THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

We need to be clear on this subject because the gospel hangs on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 1 Co 15:3.

Lu 23:46. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

The heart of the gospel is Christ’s one death which occurred when He committed His spirit into His Father’s hands.

IF CHRIST DIED SPIRITUALLY BEFORE HE YIELDED UP HIS SPIRIT, THEN HIS SACRIFICE WAS NOT ACCEPTABLE

Christ could not die before His physical death occurred because He had to be obedient unto death, Ph 2:8.

Was Christ obedient all the way?

If so then He did not die before His death. He could not be obedient in a comatose state. He could not be obedient in a swoon. He could not be obedient in a stupor. For these reasons he refused to drink the stimulants offered Him, Mt 27:34, because they would lessen His senses. If He could not take those then it was impossible for Him to be obedient if He was spiritually dead! He had to be actively and spiritually obedient even in His death—and He was!

He could no more be obedient after spiritual death than Adam could be obedient after he was spiritually dead. If Christ died spiritually, then how was His offering acceptable? Can those who are spiritually dead do anything pleasing unto the Lord? Pro 21:4: ...*the plowing of the wicked is sin*; not literally, but the meaning is that everything the spiritually dead do is sinful because they are dead in sins and trespasses! Those who are spiritually dead can do nothing to please God. Who would dare to apply this to the Savior?

THE DEATH OF DEATH WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY CHRIST'S ONE DEATH ON THE CROSS

Christ abolished death by His death and resurrection. No other death was needed and no other suffered.

2 Ti 1:10. But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

CHRIST PRAYED TO BE DELIVERED FROM ONLY ONE DEATH

Spiritual death is greater and has far greater consequences than physical death. Yet Christ never prayed to be delivered from spiritual death but only to be delivered from physical death, if according to the Father's will. This was the one cup that Christ prayed about in the garden.

Mt 26:39-44. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou *wilt*. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

The book of Hebrews reminds us of the same truth.

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Hebrews 5:7.

THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE RENT ONLY ONCE AND THAT WAS WHEN CHRIST DIED

The veil was a type of His body. So long as it was intact, it indicated that the way into Heaven was not yet made manifest. When rent in two, it signified that Christ had by His death in His body provided access so that the believer could go directly to the Father through His death on the cross.

By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; He 10:20.

Mt 27:50-51. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.

This veil tore in two when Christ gave up His spirit—that is when He died—not before. This is what we celebrate in the Supper:

1 Co 11:24. And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

But this rending of the veil took place when Christ died and it took place only once.

THE SOLITARY DEATH OF CHRIST WAS THE TOPIC OF DISCUSSION ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

Moses and Elijah spoke with Christ about His decease. Lightfoot says on Lu 9:31:

[*They spake of his decease.*] ...I wish the English have not done it too narrowly... *They spake of his decease.* It were better, *They spake of his departure.* For the ascent of Christ into heaven was his *εξοδος*, as well as his death: nay, I may say more, if, at least, in the word *exodus* there be any allusion to the Israelites' going out of Egypt. For that was in victory and triumph, as also the ascent of Christ into heaven was. [Lightfoot. *Com. NT. Tal. & Heb.* Vol. 3, Lk 9:31, p. 93].

They do not speak of *deaths* but of His *decease* or His being *received up*. And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, Lu 9:51.

CHRIST WAS NEVER UTTERLY FORSAKEN BY THE FATHER

He was greatly tested in the garden and on the cross but He lived through all of it. We know this because of His words and His cry in Jn 19:30. The Lord Jesus Christ could not die until He had fulfilled what the Father gave Him to do. This had to be done through His whole life and that included every moment of His life until He died. If He failed at any point during His life time, then He failed to do His Father's will!

Impossible!

If He came short then He would be a transgressor!

Blasphemy!

Therefore, He was most diligent to accomplish this perfect obedience throughout His life, even during His suffering in the garden; also in that awful three hours of darkness, and during that great suffering on the cross.

He made the perfect sacrifice.

This means that He did not die until He had finished redemption through and through—then, and only then, would He die.

Before that He refused to die.

But when completed then he purposed to die! Then He died!

Through all of His suffering He was in the light. He was throughout that whole time fully alert to every sensation of life as well as to the imminent prospect of death! Neither the physical pain nor that greater pain of being *temporally forsaken* of the Father took from Him His spiritual alertness to finish that work assigned Him, in minute detail. And when He had perfectly accomplished full atonement, then He cried, not in defeat, but as the mighty Conqueror—“It is finished!”

Thus Christ died!

Gill’s comments on Ps 22:24 are pertinent:

... **neither hath he hid his face from him**; when men did, as ashamed of him, Isa 53:3; for though he forsook him for a while, and in a little wrath hid his face from him for a moment, that he might bear the whole curse of the law for us; yet he returned again, and did not hide his face from him for ever; **but when he cried unto him, he heard**; cried not only on account of his crucifiers, that God would forgive them; but on account of himself, that he would not be afar off from him; that he would take his spirit or soul into his hands, into which he committed it; that he would deliver him from the power of death and the grave, and loose their bands; in all which he was heard; He 5:7.

So Christ died because He purposed to die—not because He was overwhelmed! No man put Him to death! Neither the Jews nor the Romans could take away His life. He must lay down His life of His own will and He did! We have His own words in proof:

No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. Jn 10:18.

Therefore, Christ did not die spiritually on the cross nor at any other time. When Scripture refers to His death it is to His physical death. When He died on the cross He was spiritually alive! His

spiritual life could not be taken from Him! No creature could take it away and He Himself would not!

IF CHRIST DIED SPIRITUALLY THEN HE NEEDED TO BE REGENERATED

Did Christ need to be regenerated? Surely no believer will make such an assertion! See the following: Ep 2:1, 5. Col 2:13; Ep 4:18; Ps 5:9; Je 17:9; Ezk 36:26, and ask, Can these things be said of our Lord?

Those who have died spiritually must be born again. In Jn 3:5 our Lord told Nicodemus, *You must be born again* that is, Nicodemus and all those who are dead spiritually. Now this was spoken not to men as created but as fallen. Adam before the fall did not need to be born again because he was not spiritually dead. But after the fall, if he were to meet God in peace, it was necessary that he be born again. If Christ died spiritually, then the rule is as true of Him as it is of any other man! This is blasphemy!

From all I can see, the so-called faith healers such as Hagin, Price, Crouch, Meyers, Hinn et. al, who say that Christ died spiritually and then went to Hell where He was born again, are more consistent than those who tell us He died spiritually without recovery! This is strange fire!

CONCLUSION

We have looked at a theory which is stated as if it were revealed doctrine. Some say Christ died twice. They say He died *spiritually* before He died *physically*. Yet, no Scripture is given to support his idea. We are therefore compelled to reject the theory that the Lord Jesus Christ died two deaths, once spiritually and again physically. He died and Scripture tells us when He died; it tells us how He died and it tells us He died once when He died physically but it gives no evidence of a spiritual death. The consequences of this doctrine are despicable. Without Scripture we cannot receive this doctrine. We dare not go beyond what is written.