

Five Ways Dead – But Very Much Alive!

As we move on in exploring **the experience of truth**, we encounter some truth that seems very strange and maybe we wonder whether it can be of any practical use to us in day-to-day living. We are told that *“all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”*,¹ so it seems that every item of truth is there to be experienced, one way or another . . .

One of the more bizarre statements in the New Testament is Paul’s assertion that we have been included in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is something that he says repeatedly, especially in his letters to Colossae and Rome. Peter also mentions it in **1 Peter 2:24**. We seem ready to accept that Jesus died on our behalf, paying the price for our sins and failures and reconciling us to God, but the idea that we have somehow been **included** in his death, meaning that we have in some way died already, even though we are still very much alive – ? It seems outlandish, so it is tempting to sidestep this strange idea and just concentrate on forgiveness and our ‘personal relationship with God’.

But that personal relationship is something that our Father himself has designed for us and, as we have already seen, he does **not** design for us to remain in a never-ending cycle of failure, confession and forgiveness – vital though that is – without moving forward to experience at least the beginnings of freedom from slavery to failure.² And death is his chosen instrument in that experience; not our own death but becoming sharers in the death of Jesus, and there are also other very positive results.

I am certainly not claiming any level of perfection (my wife, family and friends would soon contradict that!) but I would not want to return to the life I had before I began to see that I had been included in the death of the Lord Jesus. It has been the doorway to ongoing progress in this newness of life which we have been given.

We need to know first of all that this is not something that we can do for ourselves. It has already been accomplished for us and we can take hold of it. When we first came to faith in Jesus, we came with a sense of our own need. For many, that will have been an awareness of sin and failure and a need for forgiveness. We began to see that God had provided the remedy for our problem through the death of Jesus, taking our place and our punishment.

¹ **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

² See ‘Character Defects ?’ from <https://justonecandle.substack.com> and www.justonecandle.uk

Seeing the answer to our need, we took that step of faith and trusted in him. Experience followed.

I have called this article ‘Five Ways Dead’ because the New Testament speaks of five ways in which people can be dead while they are still alive. Let’s look at them, remembering that being dead means that we are unresponsive. Continuing unresponsiveness is a sure indicator of death.

We have already looked a little at what God means when he says that we are ‘dead to sin’ and I shall deliberately go over again some of what I wrote earlier because it is vital, and a second look may help us to see how imperative it is. But there is more, much more. Let’s start at the beginning . . .

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1) Death towards God

This is where we all started. No matter how religious we or our parents may have been, every single human being starts off by being alienated from, and unresponsive to, the one true God. ***“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus . . .”***¹ Paul very definitely includes himself as previously having been dead towards God, despite having kept the Jewish Law most scrupulously in his earlier life. He writes very clearly about this sort of death being **past** experience; we **were** dead towards God, we didn’t respond to him, he had no active role in our lives as far as we were concerned, there was no active relationship between us and him. Religion may have been there for us, just as it was for Paul, but still our relationship with God was dead and we were alienated from him. That doesn’t mean that God himself was not actively trying to ‘get through’ to us. Many of us can look back to that time in our lives, before we came to faith in Jesus, and can see that he very definitely was, as it were, knocking on our door. We just weren’t responding.

Of all the five ways of being dead (whilst still alive) this is the only one which has no positive outcome. We can very firmly and happily close the door on that time of our lives and say that it is past, never to return. We **were** dead but he has made us alive **in Christ!** ***“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).***

¹ ***Ephesians 2:1-6.*** See also ***Colossians 2:13.***

The remaining four ways of being dead whilst still alive may sound negative but are in fact extremely positive. They enable us to put the old life behind us in order to be free to live the new life that we have been given. These are not goals to strive for; they are part of our inheritance because our Father has joined us to his Son – each one of us who trusts in Jesus – so they are ours to take hold of and once more discover **the experience of truth**.

2) Death to Sin

Paradoxically, we can only begin to experience death to sin when we have moved out of being dead towards God and are beginning to experience new life in Jesus. We have looked at this in some detail already, but let's have a second look . . .

If we have now started to see that, in addition to forgiveness, we have another need – release from slavery to failure – and can see that God has made provision through including us in the death of Jesus, then we can take a very similar step of faith and step into fresh experience. As Paul writes so simply: *“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that **one died for all, therefore all died**; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”* We may often quote the last verse from this passage in **2 Corinthians 5**, but have we seen how it fits into God's plan for us to embrace the death of our old life?

Learning to take hold of death (unresponsiveness) to habitual sin and failure, taking hold of it because **it has already been accomplished** through the once-for-all death of Jesus on the cross; finding in real experience that we **can** have a measure of 'victory' in our lives; seeing our personality being gradually changed as we are learning to consign those unwelcome character defects to death and to embrace the 'resurrection' of the Holy Spirit gradually transforming us to be more like the Son of God himself . . .

No, this is not some sort of 'self-help' exercise where we try to fool ourselves into believing that our lives are being made better. It is God at work in our lives, and he needs our willing co-operation. It was Jesus who alerted his disciples to the way that it would work: *“And He was saying to them all, if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me”*.¹ He said it to them **all**, not to just a select few. If we want to follow him, the road is plain: we **must** deny ourselves and learn to die daily. No get-outs; no exceptions! But, as I said earlier, this is the doorway to life as it is designed to be. I cannot urge you strongly enough: Step through it!

¹ Luke 9:23

I would really strongly recommend reading what Paul says about this in **Romans 6** and **Colossians 2 & 3**, and also there is much help in Watchman Nee's book *The Normal Christian Life*.¹ I don't know any other book that so clearly examines the fact that our lives have been joined to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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I shall just give some 'headlines' for the remaining three types of death, and then we shall look at them in a little more detail later. Watch this space!

3) Death to Self

The Lord Jesus said *"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."*² That word 'life' is actually 'soul', which has been represented as our mind, will and emotions, all that makes us the people that we are. And the word translated 'lose' is dramatic; it means 'destroy utterly'. Utterly unresponsive to the demands of self! This verse follows directly on from **Luke 9:23**, which we looked at earlier. This sounds devastatingly destructive and potentially depressing, but it is in fact the key to 'finding ourselves' in the most fulfilling way – because our Father has placed us in his Son.

4) Death to Law

Many Christians (myself included) have spent many years struggling to try to conform to standards which they feel are imposed on them, whether from God, from other people or (most insidiously) from our own set of rules that we have set up for ourselves – and sometimes for other people as well! It's a real killer but we have been set free from all that – because we have been joined to Jesus.

5) Death to the World

We are thinking about the 'world system' here, not the physical and natural world. Jesus very clearly described Satan as 'the ruler of this world'³ and John states bluntly that the whole world lies in the evil one.⁴ What is our relationship with the world system, and how does being 'joined to the Son' make a difference to it?

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¹ Online copy available at <https://www.justonecandle.uk/page19.html>

² **Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24**

³ **John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11**

⁴ **1 John 5:19**