

To Be or Not to Be

Colossians 2:13-23

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Most of us are familiar with *Romeo and Juliet*, if not the original play then one of the movies the play has inspired, or perhaps the soundtrack from the 1968 movie.

The title song was called “*A Time for Us*” which has been the prelude music for many weddings, and perhaps you’re familiar with Romeo’s words outside Juliet’s balcony.

*But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:*

If you haven’t studied the play, then you probably think it’s just a love story. Seriously, it’s about a 3-day relationship between a 17-year-old boy and a 13-year-old girl that ends with six tragic deaths, including their own.

Another of Shakespeare’s play was “*The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.” You probably know it simply as *Hamlet*. Most everyone knows one line from that play, usually it’s, “*To be or not to be, that is the question.*”

That’s part of a much longer monologue given by the prince, but what Hamlet was actually saying was, “*To be alive, or not to be alive, that’s the question.*”

He was talking about life and death. I didn’t know that at first because I hadn’t actually studied the play, I just knew the quotes. Sometimes we’re like that with the Bible, we can quote it without knowing it.

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This is week, I want to focus today on Colossians 2:13a, *“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh...”*

Dead is a word that we don't often use in today's society. Today, when someone dies, “they expired.”

Parking meters expire. Warranties expire. People die. With one exception, I will probably expire but only because I forgot to mail in my renewal.

People die. But what is death? What is dead? Well, I'm glad you asked. The dictionary defines death as *“The permanent end of the life of a person or animal,”* but there must be more to it than that.

Alice Thomas Ellis wrote, *“Death is the last enemy: once we've gotten past that I think everything will be alright.”* Robin Williams said, *“Death is nature's way of saying, 'Your table is ready.'”*

While we all know we're going to die, I think we all share the sentiments of the tombstone that said, *“I expected this but not yet.”*

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, the psychiatrist who's known for her five stages of grief, wrote *“How you die is the most important thing you ever do. It's the exit, the final scene of the glorious epic of your life. It's the third act and, you know, everything builds up to the third act.”*

Finally, psychologist, Timothy Leary said, *“Dying is something we human beings do continuously, not just at the end of our physical lives on this earth.”*

The words, “death, dead and dying” are mentioned 1683 times in the Bible. I know because I counted them. Actually, I asked Logos, a Bible program to count them. I tried AI, but that didn't work.

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In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he isn't talking about being dead physically; he's using death as a metaphor for our spiritual condition.

Before we're "born again" into a relationship with Jesus, we were dead spiritually.

So, the question I need to ask today is, "*Are you dead?*" You may say, "*I'm sure I'm not.*" For the most part we understand that. We know that we're not physically dead.

I'm not asking if you're physically dead. I'm asking if you're spiritually dead.

Are you walking this earth alive in the body but dead in the spirit? The only way you can know for sure that you're not dead is to know that you're alive.

If you're dead, you have no appetite. When a person is dead, food no longer holds any interest for them.

They could be served a filet wrapped in bacon, stuffed mushroom caps, baked potato with sour cream and chives, a desert of fresh strawberries and cream and that person won't care.

Dead people don't have Big Mac attacks. They don't crave food. Pizza, ice cream, burgers, fries, not even Chinese food interests them.

On the other side of the coin, someone who's alive gets hungry on a regular basis, some of us more than others. Someone who's dead is unmoved by food.

One of the symptoms of the spiritually dead is a lack of appetite for God. Now a lack of appetite for God doesn't necessarily mean a lack of appetite for church.

The problem here is that many people get God and church confused. You can have an appetite for church without having an appetite for God.

Your church appetite might be because you like the music, or perhaps the preaching, or because it's a social occasion.

There can be many reasons why you like church and God not be in the picture at all.

No hunger for God indicates a lack of spiritual appetite, which is usually indicative of spiritual deadness.

One of the easiest ways to diagnose your appetite is by watching what you eat. Do you eat healthily because you want to, or do you pig out on anything you want.

It's the same in the intellectual and spiritual level as well, what are you eating. Do you have a desire to feed on the things of God?

Where do you feed your soul? In front of the computer, on your phone or tablet or reading God's word?

Now I'm not advocating getting rid of your computers or phones, but it shouldn't supersede the time you spend with God.

When you're reading the Bible, you're feeding on the things of God, after all He did call it "the bread of life."

This is why some people can't figure out why they aren't growing spiritually; they're not feeding on the Word of God.

When computers were still in their infancy, the term "Garbage in, Garbage out" was popular. That term also applies to our spiritual lives.

If you're only being fed from YouTube, Tic Tok, Facebook, X or Netflix, you probably aren't getting the spiritual nutrition you need.

If your view of the world is shaped entirely by Fox News or CNN, you probably aren't seeing the world with God's eyes.

There are opportunities here at Grace Fellowship to feed on the things of God. But just as other people can't physically eat for you, they can't spiritually eat for you either.

Do you have an appetite for the word of God? Do you seek it out or do you find it boring?

Do you feed on what God says or do you have no appetite for the things of God? No appetite means no life and that means that you're dead.

Even though you might fake your appetite, God knows what it really is. Sometimes we can give the impression that we have an appetite for the things of God but it's just an illusion.

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Another attribute of being dead is that you have no activity. A strange thing about dead people is that they're very still.

No matter if they had been active previously, when they died, they stopped. They had no choice.

That's going to be the hardest thing for me when I die. It'll take me a month to finish the projects I've started and complete the ones I want to do.

People who die are motionless; they're no longer active. A spiritually dead person reflects this same attribute.

Even though they find time for other activities, duties or functions, they never have time to work in the church. That's strange.

Now, it's not that they're totally inactive, it's just that they're without kingdom activity.

In other words, someone else can lead a small group, help with the children's ministry, work in VBS, or serve on the Church Council. They feel no need to participate.

There's room in their lives for school activities and community service, but if you ask them to commit time to ministry, they say, "*Well Pastor, family comes first.*"

Actually, if the truth was known, family probably comes last after work, play, hobbies, school, sports, television, friends, yard work, fishing, crafts and defleaing the dog.

But God's work definitely comes after family, regardless of what rank family is.

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Then, if you're dead, you have no direction. Now, that may sound redundant, but lack of motion often translates into lack of direction.

A person who is physically dead doesn't have to know what direction to go because they aren't moving. They're quite content to head in whatever direction in which they've been laid.

It's like being a Christian zombie, even though we're moving, we're not sure what direction we're supposed to be going.

Usually, men don't want to admit they're lost and certainly aren't going to ask for directions. But guess what? We must. If we're seeking to follow God, we need to know where to go.

Many people sense a lack of spiritual direction in their life, but it's because they haven't asked the way. If you want to know where God wants you to go, you must ask, that's called prayer.

Signs of spiritual deadness are a lack of spiritual growth and spiritual direction. God doesn't direct the dead. He doesn't have to because they're not going anywhere.

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Also, if you're dead, you have no love. When a person's alive, they usually love all kinds of people, even Hitler loved his mother.

When people die their love dies with them. Dead people can't express their love and neither do dead churches.

Spiritual appetite, spiritual activity and spiritual direction are indicative of life, which ultimately produces love. A love that touches people and communities for Jesus.

So, not only must we love people, but we need to tell people that we love them. We need to express our love now because there will come a time that we're unable to express it.

In the Book of the Revelation, Jesus spoke to the church in Ephesus. He commended them for all they did and then he said this,

Revelation 2:4, "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first."

That's not something I want said about me or about our church. I truly believe that if we were to try and find a secret weapon for reaching the lost, it would be love.

Bill Hybels, made this statement about creating a loving church, *“If you create a loving community, first time seekers will say “I want in.” Crusty old veteran believers whose hearts have shut down will warm up again. Arrogant people will have their pride melted.”*

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Conclusion

How do you measure up? Are you dead or alive? If there's no appetite, activity, direction, or love then it's probably time to take a spiritual pulse, and I'd bet you won't find a pulse at all.

You've expired, passed away, you're no longer with us, you've kicked the bucket, you're dead.

You may not think so, but like Christ said in Revelation 3:1b, *“...I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”*

So, if you're dead, what do you need? There are some who say, *“All people need is a Good Example,”* and there are those who do their very best to provide that good example for society.

But let's face it, have you ever tried to be a good example to a dead person. It's hopeless.

Someone else may say, *“What he really needs is encouragement.”* Now I think encouragement is wonderful. Enthusiasm is contagious, but you can never encourage a dead man to be anymore than dead.

Maybe it's their environment but face it, even if a dead man's not in the funeral parlor he's still just as dead.

Education isn't the answer either. You can't educate the dead but face it, if a person is dead then their most pressing need is life.

It's so simple, when you're dead what you need more than anything is to be alive. The word "life or live" is mentioned 1778 times in the bible, that's a hundred more incidences than "death, dead and dying."

You say fair enough. I need life where do I get it. At different points in the Gospel story, we hear people asking Jesus the same question, *"How do I get life?"* These are some of His responses:

John 11:25–26, *"Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

John 14:6, *"Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

John 6:47, *"Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life."*

John 10:10, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*

Life can only be given by the Life Giver and that's Christ. He gives life, not in teaspoons but in buckets and 100-gallon drums.

The question isn't, *"Are we dead?"* We're all dead. So, let's go back to where we started, Colossians 2:13, *"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh..."*

But Paul doesn't end there, he continues and says, *"God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins."*

Sin is death, God is life; the choice is yours. *To be or not to be*, that is the question.