



Free To Live!

Freedom through death seems an unlikely combination, but it is true for the Christian. We enter this world as slaves of the sinful nature and we cannot free ourselves from it. Furthermore, we deserve death because of our sins. Paul writes in Romans 6:23, *For the wages of sin is death*, and God warned Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:17, *but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*. They did eat, they spiritually died, and later they physically died. When we came into the world, we entered it physically dead and slaves to sin.

We yearn for freedom from the sinful nature, but there is no freedom without death. Only the death of Jesus Christ on the cross sets us free. Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary without sin and He was not deserving of death when He submitted to death on the cross as our substitute. He willingly took our sins on Himself as if He was a slave to sin, but He never sinned. Rather, out of His great love for the world, He became sin for us, received our punishment, and died. His death sets us free from sin and the sinful nature; His resurrection from the dead gives us life.

Through the waters of Baptism, we die with Christ; through His resurrection from the dead, we rise to live with and for Christ. Paul concludes for us in Romans 6:7, *For one who has died has been set free from sin*. However, although we are alive with Christ, we are not yet free from the effects of our sinful nature. That's why Paul can write in Romans 8:22-23: *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies* because we don't yet look like what Christ made us to be. While we are spiritually set free in Christ, we still carry in our weak bodies the effects of Adam and Eve's disobedience.

Only through death are we finally set free to live. That's why so many Christians in their last days are ready to leave this life and be with Jesus. They feel the weakness of the body, they've fought the good fight of faith, and they yearn for the freedom that awaits them in Christ. Suddenly, Christ's response to the repentant thief on the cross becomes very real and personal to them when they remember His words, as if He were speaking to them, *"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise"* (Luke 23:43). When we die, then we are finally set free from the sinful nature – free to live!

However, accepting the death of a loved one is not easy for those who are left behind. We see our whole life unfolding before us, and the loved one who is dying is there with us in the story we are writing in our minds. We don't know how to write the story without our loved one. However, God will help us rewrite the story. During the interim, our responsibility is to support our loved one as he or she departs from this life. Our fragile, human vessels contain the valuable spiritual treasure of God's love, hope, and freedom in Jesus Christ. We are God's messengers who prepare people for the spiritual freedom from sin that awaits them in the life to come.

It's not always easy for the Christian, but it is God's good work we do when we prepare a loved one for the freedom that awaits him or her in the life to come. Death is the gate to forgiveness and freedom. Only through death are we finally, and truly, set free to live.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, although we sin and deserve only death, You redeemed us through Your Son and opened up life for us with You in heaven. Keep us and our loved ones always in this Christian faith until You call us to the eternal life You prepared for us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Scripture references are from the ESV.

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