

# *The Sting of Death Is Sin:*

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An old non-biblical parable illustrates the issue very well. A frog and a scorpion arrived at the shore of a swollen stream at the same time and were pondering how to get across. The scorpion pleaded with the frog to let him ride across on the frog's back. The frog replied, "That won't work. Halfway across you will sting me and we both will drown!"

The scorpion argued back, "Oh no, I won't do that; I promise." After much debating, the frog finally relented, and they launched into the stream, the scorpion riding on the frog's back. And, of course, about halfway across, the scorpion stung the frog. The frog cried out, "Now, see what you have done! Now we'll both die! Why did you do that?" The scorpion replied with resignation, "I am a scorpion. We sting things. That's what we do!"

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:55-56, "O Death, where *is* your sting? O Hades, where *is* your victory?" The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law."

Mankind has been trying to get the Adam-ridden flesh and blood to perform righteously and to no avail. It is impossible! That old scorpion that Paul called "this body of death" cannot change its spots, just as the leopard cannot either (Romans 7:24 and Jeremiah 13:23).

In that context with Romans 7:24 is verse 25, which says, in Paul's conclusion, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ our Lord, so with my mind I will serve the law of God and with my flesh, the law of sin."

## **What is that "law of sin?"**

The ruling principle of sin is that sin always craves for more...more...more! I knew a man once who had a weakness for alcohol and that cry of his flesh would not go away. (He finally took a fifth of whiskey to bed with him with the intent of not waking up, and he did not wake up!)

## **The sting of death is sin!**

One summer during my college years I worked for my brother in his fledgling bookkeeping service. He had acquired a small business client, an older couple who ran the business together...rather, she did it. The husband stayed drunk continually. He told my brother that he loved whiskey and would drink it until he died. It was a pitiful thing, especially the dutiful wife, who carried the appearance of a total resignation to hopelessness in her body language.

For the believer, Romans 6:14 says, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law but under grace." The ongoing challenge is to claim that and hang onto it with all possible desperation.

Death for a believer, the physical death of this life, is like closing your eyes, then opening them and finding you are in the presence of the Lord. I have no personal knowledge of it being that way, but I saw my wife come to that place and cry out, "Help me, Jesus," and immediately her body responded voluntarily with great gasps for breath that repeated two or three times, then all was quiet.

She had made the transfer from physical being to totally spirit being. As Paul wrote, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). (Please forgive me for the graphic account of this experience displayed here. I am hopeful that its reality may grip the reader with renewed confidence that heaven really is beyond that last breath we take, and Jesus is waiting with open arms!)

As the one who remained behind, I must tell you that it is a wonderful memory of her transition to the arms of the Lord Jesus. Just knowing what she saw and reported in that last statement means much for a sense of peace and glad expectation for that day when my time comes—even if it may be when that "last trump" is sounded.

But for the unsaved there is a sting in death, the sting of sin that comes rushing into the conscience, for Hebrews 9:27 says this:

“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

The sudden realization of a lost opportunity brings forth a cry for mercy because of good works that were done, but it is muffled under an austere voice saying, “Depart from Me, for I never knew you!”

No doubt is it that the greatest sting of sin at death is when one who has denied the Lord intensely during his life. Suddenly face to face with that One who gave His own mortal life on a cruel cross so that the one now facing Him could live forever rather than die forever, as the situation really becomes.

Many years ago we had neighbors who were common folk like us, and our two wives became close friends in fellowship together with the Lord. The husband, however, would become almost out of control, emotionally, when any conversation turned to a matter of faith in God and a relationship with Him. I never was able to learn the root of his problem, what might have occurred in his background to cause such a rejection, adamantly, of the Lord. He claimed that his wife had enough religion for both of them—an obvious empty excuse for the rejection.

They moved away, but our wives stayed in touch. Some forty plus years later, after several other moves and his retirement, we had a call from their son, telling us that his dad had passed away. Our further inquiry brought out the awful truth that he had taken his own life. Apparently, as I surmised it, as old age began to creep upon him, the hopelessness of his existence became too much for him to overcome. The reality of that sting of death surely came with a tremendous shock.

Again, forgive me for such graphic displays of mortal realities, but the fact that they bear directly upon immortal realities must grasp our own hearts, as believers, that “today is the day of salvation,” for tomorrow may never come. For that reason, I hope these are not dismissed as the rambling memories of an old man in his eighth decade of mortal existence and his sixth decade of spiritual enlightenment in the knowledge of the Lord’s mercy and grace. It may well be that the One who is coming as a thief in the night may already be at the door, looking down upon a world that has largely dismissed Him as a non-entity and unworthy of man’s consideration.

A couple of times as a youngster on the farm, I suffered the sting of a scorpion. Picking up a rock or a dead stick brought that result as the scorpion resented its disturbance underneath. It seemed that the pain was about double that of a wasp or a bee. It brought tears, for sure!

Those stings, however, would never have been as deep and long-lasting as that which would have been forthcoming had I not have given my heart and soul to Jesus some years later. It works this way: If the sting of death is sin, but all of my sins have been forgiven and removed from me, “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12), then there is no sting in that moment when I will cross over Jordan, so to speak, and see my Savior, face to face.

The pivotal issue is centered on what Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by Me,” and underscored by John 3:18, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

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