

The Nature and Universality of Spiritual Death

by Samuel Davies

The sermon emphasizes the universal nature of spiritual death, caused by transgressions and sins, and offers hope for regeneration and spiritual life through God's great love and mercy.

Scripture: Numbers 16:22, Psalm 139:23, Isaiah 59:2, John 5:24, Romans 6:23, 1 Corinthians 15:10, 2 Corinthians 2:16, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:1, Hebrews 12:9

Topics: "Spiritual Death", "Salvation By Grace"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the nature and universality of spiritual death, emphasizing the dreadful state of the soul separated from God, dead in transgressions and sins. He vividly describes the ghastly countenance, convulsive agonies, and insensibility of physical death, paralleling it with the spiritual death that separates the soul from God's presence and leads to everlasting misery. Davies highlights the need for God's mercy and grace to make sinners alive with Christ, underscoring the inability of individuals to quicken themselves due to their deadness in sin. He urges both the spiritually alive and dead to reflect on their condition, calling for repentance, gratitude, and a recognition of salvation by grace alone.

Transcript

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"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved!" Ephesians 2:1-5

There is a kind of death which we all expect to feel, which carries terror in the very sound, and all its circumstances are shocking to nature:

The ghastly countenance,

the convulsive agonies,

the stupor,
the insensibility,
the universal inactivity,
the expiring groan,
the coffin,
the grave,
the devouring worm--

these strike a damp to the spirit, and we turn pale at the thought!

With such objects as these in view--courage fails, levity looks serious, presumption is dashed, the cheerful emotions sink--and all is solemn, all is melancholy. The most stupid and hardy sinner cannot but be moved to see these things exemplified in others; and when he cannot avoid the prospect, he is shocked to think that he himself must shortly feel them!

But there is another kind of death, which indeed is little regarded, little feared, little lamented--yet which is infinitely more dreadful--the death, not of the body--but of the soul! This is a death which does not stupefy the limbs--but the faculties of the mind! This is a death which does not separate the soul and body, and consign the latter to the grave--but that separates the soul from God, excludes it from all the joys of his presence, and delivers it over to everlasting misery! This is a tremendous death indeed!

"A death unto death." 2 Corinthians 2:16. The expression of Paul is prodigiously strong and striking: Death unto death, death after death, in all dreadful succession, and the last more terrible than the first! And this is the death meant in my text--dead in transgressions and sins.

To explain the context, and show you the connection--I shall make two short remarks. The one is, That the apostle had observed in the nineteenth and twentieth verses of the foregoing chapter that the same almighty power of God, which raised Christ from the dead--is exerted to enable a sinner to believe. "We believe according to the working (or energy) of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." The one, as well as the other, is an exploit of omnipotence. The exceeding greatness of his mighty power is exerted towards us who believe, as well as it was upon the dead body of Christ to restore it to life, after it had been torn and mangled upon the cross, and lain three days and three nights in the grave. What strong language is this! what a forcible illustration!

Methinks this passage alone is sufficient to confound all the vanity and self-sufficiency of mortals, and entirely destroy the proud fiction of a self-sprung faith produced by the efforts of degenerate human nature. In my text the apostle assigns the reason of this. The same exertion of the same power is necessary in the one case--and the other. Because, as the body of Christ was dead, and had no principle of life in it, so says he, you were dead in transgressions and sins; and therefore could no more quicken yourselves than a dead body can restore itself to life! "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us;" that God, who raised the entombed Redeemer to life again, that same almighty God, by a like exertion of the same power, "has quickened us, even when we were dead in sins;" dead, senseless, inactive, and incapable of animating ourselves.

Let any man carefully read these verses, and consider their most natural meaning, and I cannot but think common sense will direct him thus to understand them. The Scriptures were written with a design to be understood; and therefore that sense which is most natural to a plain unprejudiced understanding, is most likely to be true.

The other remark is, That the apostle having pronounced the Ephesians dead in sin, while unconverted, in the first verse, passes the same sentence upon himself and the whole body of the Jews, notwithstanding their high privileges, in the fifth verse. The sense and connection may be discovered in the following paraphrase: "You Ephesians were very lately heathens, and, while you were in that state--you were spiritually dead, and all your actions were only dead works. In time past you walked in transgressions and sins, nor were you singular in your course; though it be infinitely pernicious--yet it is the common course of this world, and it is also agreeable to the temper and instigation of that evil prince--that malignant spirit who works with dreadful efficacy in the numerous children of disobedience. But this was not the case of you heathen alone: we also who are Jews, notwithstanding our many religious advantages, and even I myself, notwithstanding my high privileges and unblemishable life as a Pharisee--we also, I say, "lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature". We all, as well as they, walked in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires and inclinations of our sensual flesh, and of our depraved minds; for these were tainted with spiritual wickedness, independent upon our physical passions and appetites!

And we are all, even by nature, are children of wrath even as others; in this respect, we Jews were just like the rest of mankind, corrupt from our very birth, transgressors from the womb, and liable to the wrath of God! Our external relation and privileges as the peculiar people of God, distinguished with a religion from heaven, make no distinction between us and others in this matter. As we are all children of disobedience by our lives--so we are all, without exception, children of wrath by nature!

But when we were all dead in sins, when Jews and Gentiles were equally dead to God, then, even then, God who is rich in mercy, had pity upon us; he quickened us; "he inspired us with a new and spiritual life by his own almighty power, which raised the dead body of Christ from the grave." He quickened us together with Christ: "We received our life by virtue of our union with him as our vital head, who was raised to an immortal life, that he might quicken dead souls by those influences of his spirit which he purchased by his death; and therefore by grace are you saved." It is the purest, richest, freest grace--that such dead souls as we were made alive to God, and not allowed to remain dead forever.

This is the obvious meaning and connection of these verses; and we now proceed to consider the text, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins!"

You are dead; we are dead; Jews and Gentiles are all dead together in transgressions and sins! A dismal, mortifying character! "This one verse," says Beza, "like a thunder-bolt, dashes all mankind down to the dust, great and proud as they are; for it pronounces their nature not only hurt--but dead by sin, and therefore liable to wrath!"

Death is a state of insensibility and inactivity--and a dead man is incapable of restoring himself to life; therefore the condition of an unconverted sinner must have some resemblance to such a state, in order to support the bold metaphor here used by the apostle. To understand it aright, we must take care, on the one hand, that we do not explain it away in flattery to ourselves, or in compliment to the pride of human nature; and, on the other hand, that we do not carry the similitude too far, so as to lead into absurdities, and contradict matter of fact.

The metaphor must be understood with several limitations or exceptions; for it is certain that there is a wide difference between the spiritual death of the soul--and the natural death of the body, particularly in this respect:

BODILY death puts an entire end to all the powers, actions, and sensations of our physical nature universally, with regard to all objects of every kind.

But a SOUL dead in sin, is only partially dead; that is, it is dead only with regard to a certain kind of sensations and exercises--but in the meantime it may be all life and activity about other things. It is alive, sensible, and vigorous about earthly objects and pursuits; these raise its passions and engage its thoughts. It has also a dreadful power and faculty of sinning, this is not its life--but its infirmity, its death, like the tendency of a dead body to corruption. It can likewise exercise its intellectual powers, and make considerable improvements in intellect. A sinner dead in transgressions and sins may be a living treasury of knowledge, a universal scholar, a profound philosopher, and even a great theologian, as far as mere speculative knowledge can render him such; nay, he is capable of many sensations and impressions from religious objects, and of performing all the external duties of religion. He is able to read, to hear, to pray, to meditate upon divine things! Nay, he may be an instructor of others, and preach perhaps with extensive popularity; he may have a form of godliness, and obtain a name to live among men! He is in some measure able, and it is his duty to attend upon the means which God has instituted for quickening him with spiritual life; and God deals with him as with a rational creature--by laws, sanctions, promises, exhortations, and invitations.

These concessions I make, not only to give you the sense of the text--but also to prevent the abuse of the doctrine, and anticipate some objections against it, as though it were an encouragement to continue idle, and use no means to obtain spiritual life: or as though it rendered all the means of grace needless and absurd, like arguments to the dead, to restore themselves to life!

But, notwithstanding all these concessions, it is a melancholy truth that an unregenerate sinner is dead! Though he can commit sin with greediness, though he is capable of physical actions and secular pursuits; nay, though he can employ his mind even about intellectual and spiritual things, and is capable of performing the external duties of religion--yet there is something in religion with regard to which he is entirely dead! There is a kind of spiritual life of which he is entirely destitute. He is habitually insensible with regard to divine and eternal things! He has no activity, no vigor in the pure, spiritual and vital exercises of religion! He has no prevailing bent of mind towards them! He has not those views and apprehensions of things which a soul spiritually alive would necessarily receive and entertain! He is destitute of those sacred affections--that joy, that love, that desire, that hope, that fear, that sorrow--which are, as it were, the innate passions of the new man. In short, he is so inactive, so listless, so insensible in these respects--that death, which puts an end to all action and sensation, is a proper emblem of his state; and this is the meaning of the apostle in my text.

He is also utterly unable to quicken himself. He may indeed use means in some way; but to implant a vital principle in his soul, to give himself vivid sensations of divine things, and make himself alive towards God--this is entirely beyond his utmost ability! This is as peculiarly the work of almighty power--as the resurrection of a dead body from the grave!

As to this spiritual death--it is brought upon him by, and consists in, transgressions and sins. The innate depravity and corruption of the heart, and the habits of sin contracted and confirmed by repeated

indulgences of inbred corruption--these are the poisonous, deadly things that have slain the soul! These have entirely indisposed and disabled it for living religion. Transgressions and sins are the grave, the malignant diseases, the rottenness of a dead soul! It lies dead, senseless, inactive--buried in transgressions and sins. Transgressions and sins render it ghastly, odious, abominable, a repulsive putrefaction before a holy God--like a rotten carcass, or a mere mass of corruption! The vilest lusts, like worms, riot upon and devour it--but it feels them not, nor can it lift a hand to drive the venom off!

Such mortifying ideas as these, may be contained in the striking metaphor, dead in transgressions and sins; and I hope you now understand its general meaning. If you would know what has turned my thoughts to this subject, I will candidly tell you, though with a sorrowful heart.

I am sure, if any objects within the compass of human knowledge have a tendency to make the deepest impressions upon our minds, they are those things which Christianity teaches us concerning God, concerning ourselves, and a future state. And if there are any exercises which should call forth all the life and powers of our souls into action--they are those of a religious nature: but alas! I often find a strange, astonishing stupor and listlessness about these things. In this I am not singular; the best among us complain of the same thing; the most lively Christians feel this unaccountable languor and insensibility; and the generality are evidently destitute of all habitual concern about them! They are all alive in the pursuit of pleasure, riches, or honors; their thoughts are easily engaged, and their affections raised by such trifling things as these. But the concerns of religion, which above all other things are adapted to make impressions upon them, and stir up all the life within them, seem to have little or no effect!

When I have made this observation with respect to others, and felt the melancholy confirmation of it in my own heart, I have really been struck with amazement, and ready to cry out, "Lord, what is this that has befallen me, and the rest of my fellow-mortals? What can be the cause of such conduct in a rational being--to be active and eager about trifles, and stupid and careless about matters of infinite importance! Oh, whence is this strange infatuation!"

Thus I have been shocked at this astonishing fact, and I could account for it in no other way--but by reflecting that we all have been dead in transgressions and sins. In such a solemn hour the apostle's expression does not seem at all too strong. I have no scruple at all to pronounce, not only from the authority of an apostle--but from the evidence of universal experience, that I, and all around me, yes, and all the sons of men, have been dead; in the spiritual sense, utterly dead!

Multitudes among us, yes, the generality are dead still; hence the indifference about true religion among us; hence the stupor, the carelessness about eternal things, the thoughtless neglect of God, the insensibility under his providential dispensations, the impenitence, the presumption that so much prevail.

God has indeed, out of the great love with which he loved us, quickened some of us, even when we were dead in sins; and we have a little life, some vital sensations and impressions at times--but oh! how little, how superficial, how much of a deadly stupor yet remains! How little life in prayer, in hearing the preached Word, or in the nearest approach to the living God! The reflection is shocking--but alas! it is too true! Consult your own hearts--and you will find it even so.

Physical life seems to be a gradual thing; it gradually grows in an infant, it is perfect in mature age, and in old age it gradually decays until all is gone; but how small is the degree of life--when the fetus is just animated, or the infant born into the world! It is but little superior to that of a plant or an oyster. What faint sensations, what obscure and languid perceptions, what feeble motions! Such are the children of grace in

the present state.

Spiritual life is gradual; it is infused in regeneration; but oh! how far from perfection while on this side heaven! Alas! the best of us are like the poor traveler that fell among thieves, and was left half dead! However, it is an unspeakable mercy to have the least principle of spiritual life; and we should prize it more than crowns and empires!

If you would know my design in choosing this subject, it is partly for the conviction of lost sinners, that they may be alarmed with their deplorable condition, which is the first step towards their being quickened. And it is partly to rouse the children of grace to seek more life from their vital head. And it is partly to display the rich grace of God in quickening such dead sinners, and bestowing upon them a spiritual and immortal life! Surely nothing can inflame our gratitude and raise our astonishment, more than the consideration that we were dead in transgressions and sins!

If I may but answer these ends, it will be an unspeakable blessing to us all. And oh, that divine grace may honor this humble attempt of a poor creature, at best but half alive, with success! I hope, my brethren, you will hear seriously--for it is really a most serious subject!

You have seen that the metaphoric expression of DEATH in my text, is intended to represent the stupidity, inactivity, and impotence of unregenerate sinners about divine things. This truth I might confirm by rational argument, and Scripture authority; but I think it may be a better method for popular conviction, to prove and illustrate it from plain instances of the temper and conduct of sinners about the concerns of religion, as this may force the conviction upon them from undoubted matters of fact, and their own experience. This, therefore, is the method I intend to pursue; and my time will allow me to particularize only the following instances:

I. Consider the excellency of God--who is the sum total, the great original of all perfections. How infinitely worthy is he of the adoration of all his creatures! How deserving of their most intense thoughts and most ardent affections!

If majesty and glory can strike us with awe and veneration--does not Jehovah demand them, who is clothed with majesty and glory as with a garment, and before whom all the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers, as nothing, as less than nothing, and vanity!

If wisdom excites our pleasing wonder--here is an unfathomable depth! "Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

If goodness, grace, and mercy attract our love and gratitude--here these amiable perfections shine in their most alluring glories!

If justice strikes horror to the guilty--here is justice in all its tremendous majesty!

If any, or all of the moral virtues engage our esteem--here they all center in their highest perfection!

If the presence of a king strikes a reverence; if the eye of his judge awes the criminal, and restrains him from offending; then certainly we should fear before the Lord at all times, for we are surrounded with his omnipresence, and he is the inspector and judge of all our thoughts and actions!

If riches excite desire--here are unsearchable riches!

If happiness has charms which draw all the world after it--here is an unbounded ocean of happiness! Here is the only complete portion for an immortal mind!

Men are affected with these things in one another, though found in a very imperfect degree:

human power awes and commands;

human virtue and goodness please;

human beauty charms;

human justice strikes with solemnity and terror;

human genius is admired;

human benevolence and mercy are loved.

Thus men are affected with created excellences. Why is it, then, they are so stupidly unaffected with the supreme excellences of the infinite Jehovah?

Here, my brethren, turn your eyes inward upon yourselves, and inquire: are not several of you conscious that, though you have passions for such objects as these, and you are easily moved by them--yet, with regard to the perfections of God, the supreme and best of beings, your hearts are habitually senseless and unaffected? It is not an easy thing to make impressions upon you by them! And what increases the astonishment, and aggravates your guilt, is, that you are thus senseless and unaffected, when you believe and profess that these perfections are really in God, and that in the highest degree possible! In other cases--you can love what appears amiable, you revere what is great and majestic, you eagerly desire and pursue what is valuable and tends to your happiness; and all this you do freely, spontaneously, vigorously, by the innate inclination and tendency of your nature, without reluctance, without compulsion, nay, without persuasion! But as to God and all his perfections, you are strangely insensible, backward, and averse! Where is there one being that has any confessed excellency in the compass of human knowledge, who does not engage more of the thoughts and affections of mankind--than the glorious and ever blessed God!

The sun, moon, and stars have had more worshipers--than the uncreated fountain of light from which they derive their luster. Kings and princes have more homage paid to them--than the King of kings and Lord of lords! Trivial worldly enjoyments are more eagerly pursued, than God--the supreme good! Search all the world over, and you will find but very little motions of heart towards God; little love, little desire, little searching after him. You will often, indeed, see him honored with the compliment of a bended knee, and a few heartless words, under the name of a prayer--but where is the heart, or where are the thoughts, where the affections? These run wild through the world, and are scattered among a thousand other objects. The heart has no prevailing tendency toward God, the thoughts are shy of him, the affections have no innate propensity to him.

In short, in this respect, the whole man is out of order: here he does not at all act like himself; here are no affectionate thoughts, no delightful meditations, no ardent desires, no eager pursuits and vigorous endeavors; but all is listless, stupid, indisposed, inactive, and averse! And what is the cause of this astonishing stupidity? "Lord! what is this that has seized the souls of your own offspring--that they are thus utterly disordered towards you?"

The reason is, that they are dead--dead in transgressions and sins. It is impossible a living soul should be so stupid and unaffected with such an object; it must be a dead soul, which has no feeling. Yes, sinners, this is the melancholy reason why you are so thoughtless, so unconcerned, so senseless about the God who made you: you are dead!

And what is the reason that you, who have been begotten again to a spiritual life, and who are united to Christ as your vital head; what is the reason that you so often feel such languishments; that the pulse of spiritual life beats so faint and irregular, and that its motions are so feeble and slow? All this you feel and lament--but how does this come to pass? What can be the cause that you, who have indeed tasted that the Lord is gracious, and are sensible that he is all-glorious and lovely, and your only happiness; Oh! what can be the cause, that you, of all men in the world, should have so little delight and love to him? Alas! the cause is, you have been dead, and the deadly stupor has not yet left you! You have (blessed be the quickening Spirit of Christ!) you have received a little life--but, alas! it is a feeble spark! It finds the principles of death still strong in your constitution; these it must struggle with, and by them it is often borne down, suppressed, and just expiring.

Walk humbly, then, and remember your shame, that you were once dead, and children of wrath, even as others. The carelessness and indisposition of the soul towards the supreme excellence will appear yet more evident and astonishing, if we consider,

II. The magnificent and endearing relations which the great and blessed God sustains to us; and the many ways he has taken to make dutiful and grateful impressions upon our hearts.

What tender endearments are there contained in the relation of a FATHER! This he bears to us--he made us, and not we ourselves. Our bodies, indeed, are produced in a succession from Adam by natural generation--but who was it that began the series? It was the Almighty God, who formed the first man from the dust: it was he who first put the succession of causes in motion; and, therefore, he is the grand original cause, and the whole chain depends upon him! Who was it that first established the laws of generation, and still continues them in force? It is the all-creating parent of nature: and without him men would have been no more able to produce one another--than stones or clods of earth!

As to our souls, the principal part of our being--God is their immediate author, without the least concurrence of secondary causes. Hence he is called the Father of your spirits in a peculiar sense, Hebrews 12:9; and he assumes the endearing name of "the God of the spirits of all flesh." Numb. 16:22.

Now the name of a father is accustomed to carry some endearment and authority. Children, especially in their young and helpless years, are fond of their father; their little hearts beat with a thousand grateful passions towards him; they love to be dandled on his knees, and fondled in his arms; and they fly to him upon every appearance of danger. But if God is our father--where is his honor? Here, alas! the filial passions are senseless and immovable. It is but a little while ago, since we came from his creating hand--and yet we have forgotten him! It seems unnatural for his own offspring to inquire, "Where is God, my Maker?" They show no fondness for him, no affectionate veneration, and no humble confidence; their hearts are dead towards him, as though there were no such being, or no such near relation subsisting between them!

In childhood--a rattle or a straw, or any trifle, is more thought of, than their heavenly Father! In riper years--their vain pleasures and secular pursuits command more of their affections, than their divine original and only happiness. Compare your natural temper towards your heavenly Father, and towards

your earthly parents--and how wide is the difference! Nature works strong in your hearts towards them--but towards God all the filial passions are dull and dead! And why? alas! the reason is, because you are dead in transgressions and sins.

But this relation of a Father is not the only relation our God sustains to you--he is your SUPREME KING, to whom you owe allegiance! He is your LAWGIVER, whose will is the rule of your conduct! And he is your JUDGE, who will call you to an account, and reward or punish you according to your works!

But how unnatural is it to men--to revere the most high God under these solemn characters! Where is there a king upon earth, however weak or tyrannical--but is more regarded by his subjects--than the King of heaven by the generality of men! Were ever such excellent LAWS despised and violated! Did ever criminals treat their judge with so much neglect and contempt! And are these souls alive to God--who thus treat him? No! Alas! "they are dead in transgressions and sins;" however lively they are towards other things--yet in this respect they are seized with a deadly stupor!

God is also our GUARDIAN and DELIVERER; and from how many dangers has he preserved us! From how many calamities has he delivered us! Dangers, distresses and deaths crowd upon us, and surround us in every age and every place! The air, the earth, the sea, and every element, are pregnant with numberless inlets of pain and death ready to seize and destroy us! Sickness and death swarm around us! Nay, they lie in ambush in our own constitution, and are perpetually undermining our lives--and yet our divine Guardian preserves us for months and years unhurt, untouched. Or if he allows the calamity to fall, or death to threaten--he flies to our deliverance; and how many salvations of this kind has he wrought for us! Salvations from accidents, from sicknesses, from pain, from sorrows, from death! Salvations from dangers seen and unseen! Salvations in infancy, in youth, and in maturer years! These things we cannot deny, without the most stupid ignorance, and an atheistic disbelief of divine Providence.

Now, such repeated, such long-continued, such unmerited favors as these--would not pass for nothing between man and man. We have hearts to feel such obligations; nay, the ten thousandth, the millionth part of such gracious care and goodness from men, would be gratefully received, and thankfully acknowledged. Indeed it is impossible we should receive even this small, this very small proportion of favors from men, in comparison of what we receive from God; and even when they are the instruments of our deliverance, God is the original Author.

But after all, is there a natural aptitude in the hearts of men to think of their gracious Guardian and Savior? Does the principle of gratitude naturally lead them to love him, and to make thankful acknowledgments to him? Alas! no! They may indeed feel some transient, superficial workings of gratitude when under the fresh sense of some remarkable deliverance; but these impressions soon wear off--and they become as thoughtless and stupid as ever!

But let a mere man, like yourselves, save you from some great distress, you will always gratefully remember him, think of him often with pleasure, and take all opportunities of returning his kindness, especially if your deliverer was much your superior; and if you had forfeited his favor, provoked him, and incurred his displeasure: great favors from such an one would make impressions upon the most obdurate heart.

But though God is infinitely superior to us, and it is nothing to him what becomes of us, though we have rebelled against him, and deserve his vengeance--yet ten thousand deliverances from his hands have little or no effect upon the hearts of men! All these cannot bring them to think of him, or love him as much as

they do a mere friend, or a common benefactor of their own species; and does such stupid ingratitude discover any spiritual life in them? No! They are dead in this respect, though they are all alive to those passions that terminate upon mere created objects.

Further, God is the Benefactor of mankind, not only in delivering them from dangers and calamities--but in bestowing unnumbered positive blessings upon them. Here I cannot pretend to be particular, for the list of blessings is endless; and it will be the happy employment of an eternity to recollect and enumerate them!

What an extensive and well-furnished WORLD has our God formed for our accommodation! For us he has enriched the sun with light and heat, and the earth with fruitfulness. The numerous species of every element--the plants, minerals, and beasts of the earth, the fish of the sea, the birds of the air--are all rendering their service to man! Some afford him food, and others work for him: the wind and seas, fire and water, stones and trees--all act together to be useful to him.

Our divine Benefactor crowns us with the blessings of liberty, of society, of friendship, and the most endearing relations. He preserves our health, gives us "rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, and fills our hearts with food and gladness." In short, he gives us life, and breath, and all things richly to enjoy! Every day, every hour, every moment--has arrived to us richly freighted with blessings! Blessings have resided with us at home, and attended us abroad! Blessings presented themselves ready for our enjoyment as soon as we entered into the world: then God provided hands to receive us, knees to support us, breasts to suckle us, and parents to guard and nourish us! Blessings have grown up with us, and given such constant attendance, that they are become familiar to us, and are the inseparable companions of our lives. It is no new or novel thing to us--to see an illustrious sun rising to give us the day, to enjoy repose in the night, to rise refreshed and vigorous in the morning, to see our tables spread with plenty, the trees covered with fruit, the fields with grain and various forms of animals growing up for our support or service. These are such familiar blessings to us, that they too often seem things of course, or necessary appendages of our being.

What a crowd of blessings have crowned this present morning! You and yours are alive and well, you have not come hither ghastly and pining with hunger, or agonizing with pain. How many refreshing breaths of air have you drawn this morning! how many sprightly and regular pulses have beat through your frame! how many easy motions have you performed with hands, feet, eyes, tongues, and other members of your body! And are not all these favors from God? Yes, undoubtedly!

And thus has he gone on blessing you all your days, without any interruption at all in many of these particulars of kindness, and with but very little in the rest. As sinful and miserable as this world is--it is a treasury rich in blessings, a storehouse full of divine provisions, a dwelling well furnished for the accommodation of mortals--and all by the care, and at the expense of that gracious God who first made, and still preserves it what it is.

"Lord, why is it then that the inhabitants forget and neglect you, as though they were not at all obliged to you? Oh! why is it that they love your gifts--and yet disregard the Giver? Oh! why is it that they think less of you--than an earthly father or friend, or a human benefactor! Oh! why is it that there should be so little gratitude towards you, that of all benefactors, you should be the least acknowledged! Why is it that the benefactors of nations, and even of private people, in instances unworthy to be mentioned with those of your goodness, should be celebrated, and even adored--while you are neglected, your agency overlooked, and your goodness forgotten!

Oh! whence is this strange phenomenon, this unaccountable, unprecedented stupidity and ingratitude in reasonable creatures? Surely, if they had any life, any sensation in this respect, they would not be capable of such a conduct; but they are dead, dead to all the generous sensations of gratitude to God!

As a dead corpse feels no gratitude to those who perform the last friendly office and cover it with earth--so a dead soul stands unmoved under all the profusion of blessings which heaven pours upon it!

The blessings I have mentioned, which are confined to the present state, are great, and deserve our wonder and thanksgiving. Especially, considering that they are bestowed upon a race of rebellious, ungrateful creatures, who deserve the severest vengeance!

But there is a set of blessings yet unmentioned, of infinitely greater importance, in which all others are swallowed up, by the glory of which they are obscured; like the stars of night--by the rising sun. To some of our race--God has given crowns and kingdoms. For Israel Jehovah wrought the most astonishing miracles; seas and rivers opened to make way for them; rocks burst into springs of water to quench their thirst; the clouds poured down manna, and fed them with bread from heaven; their God delivered Daniel from the jaws of hungry lions, and his three companions from the burning fiery furnace. He has restored health to the sick, sight to the blind, and life to the dead. These blessings and deliverances have something majestic and striking in them; and had we been the subjects of them, we could not but have regarded them as great and singular.

But these are but trifles--in comparison of God's gift of his Son, and the blessings he has purchased! His Son, who is of greater value, and dearer to him than ten thousand worlds; his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased--him God has he given for us, given up to three-and-thirty years of the most mortifying abasement, and an incessant conflict with the severest trials; given up to death, and all the ignominy and agonies of crucifixion! Thus has God loved our world! And never was there such a display of love in heaven or on earth! You can no more find love equal to this among creatures, than you can find among them the infinite power that formed the universe out of nothing!

This will stand upon record to all eternity, as the unprecedented, unparalleled, inimitable love of God. And it appears the more illustrious, when we consider that this unspeakable gift was given to sinners, to rebels, to enemies, who were so far from deserving it, that, on the other hand, it is a miracle of mercy that they are not all groaning forever under the tremendous weight of his justice! Oh! that I could say something befitting this love; something that might do honor to it! But, alas! the language of mortals was formed for lower subjects. This divine love passes all description and all knowledge.

Consider also what rich blessings Christ has purchased for His people; purchased not with such corruptible things such as silver and gold--but with His own precious blood! The price recommends and endears the blessings, though they are so great in themselves, as to need no such recommendation! What can be greater or more suitable blessings to people in our circumstances, than pardon for the guilty, redemption for slaves, righteousness and justification for the condemned, sanctification for the unholy, rest for the weary, comfort for mourners, the favor of God for rebels and exiles, strength for the impotent, protection for the helpless, and everlasting happiness for the heirs of hell! And, to sum up all, grace and glory, and every good thing, and all the unsearchable riches of Christ--for the wretched and miserable, the poor, the blind, and naked! These are blessings indeed, and, in comparison of them, all the riches of the world are impoverished, and vanish to nothing!

And all these blessings are published, offered freely, indiscriminately offered to you, to me, to the greatest sinner on earth, in the gospel! And we are allowed; 'allowed', did I say? we are invited with the utmost importunity, entreated with the most compassionate tenderness and condescension, and commanded by the highest authority, upon pain of eternal damnation, to accept the blessings presented to us!

And what reception does all this divine love meet with in our world? I tremble to think of it! It is plain that these things are proposed to a world dead in sin; for they are all still, all unmoved, all senseless under such a revelation of infinite grace! Mankind do not know what it is to be moved, melted, and transported with the love of a crucified Savior--until divine grace visits their hearts, and forms them into new creatures. They feel no solicitude, nay, not so much as willingness to receive these blessings--until they become willing by almighty power. And you judge, my friends, whether they are not dead souls--who are armored even against the love of God in Christ, that are not moved and melted by the agonies of his cross, who are careless about such inestimable blessings as these?

Has that soul any spiritual life in it, that can sit senseless under the cross of Jesus? that can forget him, neglect him, dishonor him, after all his love and all his sufferings? that feels a prevailing indifference and languor towards him? that loves him less than an earthly friend, and seeks him with less eagerness than gold and silver? Is not every generous passion, every principle of gratitude quite extinct in such a soul? It may be alive to other objects--but towards Christ--it is dead! Alas! is not this the common case? Oh look around the world, and what do you see--but a general neglect of the blessed Jesus, and all the blessings of his gospel! How cold, how vexing, how reluctant, how averse--are the hearts of men towards him! How hard to persuade them to think of him and love him! Try to persuade men to give over their sins which grieve him, dishonor him, and were the cause of his agonizing death; try to engage them to devote themselves entirely to him, and live to his glory--and alas! you try in vain! Their hearts still continue as cold and as hard as a stone! Try to persuade them to murder or robbery, and you are more likely to prevail!

Suffer me, in my astonishment, to repeat this most melancholy truth again; the generality of mankind are habitually careless about the blessed Jesus; they will not seek him, nor give their hearts and affections to him--though they must perish forever by their neglect of him! Astonishing, and most lamentable, that ever such perverseness and stupidity should seize the soul of man!

Methinks I could here take up a lamentation over human nature, and fall on my knees with this prayer for my fellow men, "Almighty Father and Lord of life--quicken, oh quicken these dead souls!" Oh, Sirs, while we see death all around us, and feel it benumbing our own souls--who can help the most bitter wailing and lamentation? Who can restrain himself from crying to the great Author of life, for a powerful work of grace? While the valley of dry bones lies before me, while the carnage, the charnel-house of immortal souls strikes my sight all-around me far and wide--how can I forbear crying, Come from the four winds, oh breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live!

But to turn from this digression, into which I was unavoidably hurried by the horror of the subject, I would observe farther, that kind usage and pleasing treatment may not always be best for such creatures as we are. Fatherly severities and chastisements, though not agreeable to us--yet may be necessary and conducive to our greatest good. Accordingly, God has tried the force of chastisements to make impressions on our hearts. These indeed have been but few--in comparison of his more agreeable dispensations; yet recollect whether you have not frequently felt his rod. Have you not languished under sickness and pain, and been brought within a near view of the king of terrors? Have you not suffered the bereavement of friends and relations, and met with losses, adversity, and disappointments?

Others have felt still greater calamities in a closer succession, and with fewer mercies intermixed. These things, one would think, would immediately bring men to regard the hand that smites them, and make them sensible of their undutiful conduct, which has procured the correction! These afflictions are like the application of fire to one in a lethargy, to awaken him to life. But alas! under all these afflictions the stupor and insensibility still remain! Sinners groan by reason of their afflictions--but it is not natural for them to inquire, "Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?" It is not natural for them to repent of their undutiful conduct and amend; or if they are awakened to some little sense, while the painful rod of the Almighty is yet upon them, as soon as it is removed--they become as hardened and senseless as ever!

And is not a state of death a very proper representation of such sullen, incorrigible stupidity? Living souls have very tender sensations; one touch of their heavenly Father's hand makes deep impressions upon them; they tremble at his frown, they fall and weep at his feet, they confess their offences, and mourn over them! They fly to the arms of mercy to escape the impending blow! And thus would all do--were they not quite destitute of spiritual life.

I have materials sufficient for a discourse of some hours; but at present I must abruptly drop the subject: however, I cannot dismiss you without making a few PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS:

1. What a strange, affecting view does our subject give us of this assembly! I doubt not but I may accommodate the text to some of you with this agreeable addition, "You has he quickened, though you once were dead in transgressions and sins." Though the vital pulse beats faint and irregular, and your spiritual life is but very low--yet, blessed be God, you are not entirely dead! You have some living sensations, some lively and vigorous exercises in religion.

On the other hand, I doubt not but some of you not only were--but still are--dead in transgressions and sins. It is not to be expected in our present world--that we shall see such a large company together, and all are living souls. Here then is the difference between you; some of you are spiritually alive--and some of you are spiritually dead! Here the living and the dead are blended together in the same assembly, on the same seat, and united in the nearest relations! Here sits one dead soul, there another, and there another--and a few living souls scattered here and there among them! Here is a dead parent--and a living child! Or, a dead child--and a living parent. Here life and death (oh, shocking!) are united in the bonds of marital love, and dwell under the same roof! Here is a dead servant--and a living master! And there a dead master (oh, terrible!) commands a living servant.

Should I trace the distinction beyond this assembly--and into the world, we shall find a family here and there that have a little life; perhaps one, perhaps two, reveal some vital evidences of spiritual life. But oh, what crowds of dead families! all dead together, and no endeavors used to bring one another to life! A death-like silence about eternal things; a deadly stupor and insensibility reign among them; they breathe out no desires and prayers after God, nor does the vital pulse of love beat in their hearts towards him! But, on the contrary, their souls are putrefying in sin, which is very emphatically called corruption by the sacred writers; they are overrun and devoured by their lusts, and worms devour and destroy the dead body.

Call to them--and they will not awake!

Thunder the terrors of the Lord in their ears--and they will not hear!

Offer them all the blessings of the gospel--and they will not stretch out the hand of faith to receive them!

Lay the Word of God, the bread of life, before them--and they have no appetite for it!

In short, the plain symptoms of death are upon them: the physical is alive--but alas! the spirit is dead towards God.

And what an affecting, melancholy view does this give of this assembly, and of the world in general! Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears--that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Weep not for the afflicted, weep not over ghastly corpses dissolving into their original dust--but oh! weep for dead souls! Should God now strike all those people physically dead in this assembly, whose souls are dead in transgressions and sins; should he lay them all as pale corpses before us, like Ananias and Sapphira at the apostles' feet--what numbers of you would never return from this house again--and what lamentations would there be among the surviving few!

One would lose a husband or a wife, another a son or a daughter, another a father or a mother! Alas! would not some whole families be swept off together, all blended in one dead heap! Such a sight as this would strike terror into the stoutest heart among you. But what is this, compared to a company of rational beings slain and dead in transgressions and sins! How deplorable and inexpressibly melancholy a sight this! Therefore,

2. Awake you who sleep, and arise from the dead--and Christ shall give you light! This call is directed to you, dead sinners; which is a sufficient warrant for me to exhort and persuade you. The principle of reason is still alive in you; you are also sensible of your own interest, and feel the workings of self-love. It is God alone who can quicken you--but he effects this by a power that does not exclude--but attends rational instructions and persuasions to your understanding. Therefore, though I am sure you will continue dead still, if left to yourselves--yet with some trembling hopes that God's divine power may accompany my feeble words, and impregnate them with life!

I call upon, I entreat, I charge you sinners to rouse yourselves out of your dead sleep, and seek to obtain spiritual life! Now, while my voice sounds in your ears; now, this moment, waft up this prayer, "Lord, pity a dead soul, a soul that has been dead for ten, twenty, thirty, forty years or more, and lain corrupting in sin--and say unto me, LIVE! From this moment, let me live unto you."

Let this prayer be still upon your hearts; keep your souls always in a supplicating posture, and who knows but that he who raised Lazarus from the grave--may give you a spiritual resurrection to a more important life!

But if you willfully continue your carnal security--then expect in a little time to suffer the second death--which will be incurable! And then, though you will be still dead to God--yet you will be tremblingly alive all over to the sensation of pain and torture! Oh that I could gain but this one request of you, which your own interest so strongly enforces! But alas! it has been so often refused, that to expect to prevail is to hope against hope!

3. Let the children of God be sensible of their great happiness in being made spiritually alive. Life is a principle, a capacity necessary for enjoyments of any kind. Without physical life--you would be as incapable of physical pleasures as a stone or a clod! And without spiritual life--you can no more enjoy the happiness of heaven than a beast or a devil! This therefore is a preparative, a previous qualification, and a sure pledge of everlasting life. How highly then are you distinguished, and what cause have you for gratitude and praise!

4. Let us all be sensible of this important truth: that it is entirely by grace that we are saved. This is the inference the apostle expressly makes from this doctrine: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved!" And as soon as he has room, he resumes it again, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast!"

This, you see, is an inference that seemed of great importance to the apostle; and what can more naturally follow from the premises? If we were once dead in sin, certainly it is owing to the freest grace that we have been quickened! Therefore, when we survey the wondrous change, let us cry, "By the grace of God I am what I am!" 1 Corinthians 15:10.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/samuel-davies/the-nature-and-universality-of-spiritual-death/>

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