



When a believer dies, the enemy hasn't "pulled a fast one." God is in control—He holds

The Keys to Life and Death

by Ern Baxter

These thoughts by Ern Baxter, originally shared at the memorial service for a young man in his pastorate who recently went to be with the Lord, are vital to our understanding of the lordship of Christ as exercised in life and particularly in death.

Jesus Christ is Lord of all. The foundation of our faith is that there is One who rules the universe, who is the Fountain of all life.

Life did not come together as a fortuitous concurrence of atoms. It is a product of an infinite design, and behind that infinite design is not a principle or a set of rules, but a throbbing Heart and an eternal Mind. At every turn, life links us to the Creator; He is the Lord of every area of our lives.

But His lordship goes beyond life. In this message, I want to magnify the lordship of Christ, not only in life, but also in the inevitable event of death. Death is an aspect of the purposeful exer-

Photo: H. Armstrong Roberts, Inc.

cise of Christ's lordship as He accomplishes His ongoing purposes among men.

In the Hands of the Lord

In Paul's epistle to the Romans, he defines the foundational truths of our faith. The following free translation of a passage from chapter 14 of Romans emphasizes the all-encompassing lordship of Christ:

The Truth is that we neither live nor die as self-contained units. At every turn life links us to the Lord, and when we die, we come face-to-face with Him. *In life or death, we are in the hands of the Lord.* For this was the purpose of Christ dying and coming to life, that He might be *Lord in both life and death* (Rom. 14:7-9, emphasis added).

We may be a little surprised at the apostle's words, but his meaning is clear: Jesus is not only the Lord of life; He is the Lord of death as well.

In the beautiful Twenty-Third Psalm, David speaks of God's personal involvement in the matter of death. He begins, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want"; but toward the end of the psalm, he changes from the third to the second person as he talks about the Lord in a very personal way. He says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, *Thou* art with me." That is to say, in most areas of life we have one another for support. But when we come to the matter of death, we walk in single file—we walk alone with Him. We go privately and personally with God, because He is the Lord of death.

All Things Are Yours

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "All things are yours, including life and death" (1 Cor. 3:22). My first reaction to

these words is to wonder whether I consider that a blessing or not. Why would I want to have death as mine? When we understand God's sovereignty, however, realizing that He is Lord even of death, then we know that death is as much a part of God's purpose for us as are birth, marriage, children, and all other aspects of life. Though death is an enemy to our mortality, it is God's servant in fulfilling His purposes. Death is under His lordship.

We must refuse to make room for Satan in this whole matter. We must categorically reject any suggestion that when a believer dies, the enemy has "pulled a fast one," that somehow he has sneaked in and done something without the Lord knowing about it. No—for He who sits on the throne of the universe never sleeps, and there is nothing that eludes His gaze, nothing that is done apart from His intention. He works all things after the counsel of His will.

We cannot say that someone has died by "accident"; it is rather a determination of Almighty God and part of the working out of His purposes. Though we may never understand His purposes fully, yet our faith must affirm that God gives, and it is *God* who takes away.

Death is only the porter that runs at the bidding of the sovereign Christ, and opens the door that permits us to move from one room to another. Death is at best a slave of our Master, used by Him at His determination. When someone dies our comfort comes when we submit ourselves to the absolute, sovereign right of God to do with His own what He wills.

A Mystery

Why does God choose to take someone in death? I don't fully know why. Paul said that the purpose of Christ's dying and coming to life again was that He might be Lord in both life and death. But even though I know

that is true, I don't understand how. Yet I must remember that there is so much in *every* area of life that I don't understand! In fact, as I grow older I am recapturing a beautiful sense of mystery that I had lost in the callous and callow years of my youth, when I thought I knew everything. I don't understand everything about God, but I know He is my rock.

I don't fully understand the Incarnation. I can't comprehend how the Logos laid aside the purple toga of his co-equal rulership with the Father and the Spirit and came down in the mystery of incarnation. I can't understand how He nestled in the virgin womb of a little peasant girl for nine months, was born, and snuggled close to his mother's breast as an infant. I don't have the intellectual apparatus in my fallen mind to understand how immaculate Perfection wrestled with sin and came through victorious on every occasion. Although I could try to give answers to the how and why—good answers and true answers—they would not be sufficient.

I don't understand all that was taking place when Jesus hung in agony on the cross, so mangled that He was unrecognizable. Yet I am told by revelation as the Holy Spirit draws back the curtain that at that particular historical and geographical point, an event was taking place that was cosmic in character. In those awful moments Jesus Christ was bearing the sin of the world, confronting principalities and powers and grinding under His conquering heel the skull of "His Satanic



Ern Baxter, a long-time leader in the charismatic renewal, pastored one of the largest evangelical churches in Canada for twenty years. Since that time he has traveled extensively in ministry throughout the U.S. and abroad. Ern is a member of the Integrity Communications Board of Directors and he resides in Mobile, Alabama, with his wife, Ruth.

Majesty." And when He had accomplished the work the Father

years before, probably presumed that this Soul was his to take as

Christians don't die accidentally; they die by divine design.

had sent Him to do, He cried triumphantly, "It is finished!"

On the Cross

We need to understand that Jesus' life was not taken away from Him by the enemy. He *gave* His life, yielding up His spirit. In that moment of Jesus' death, Satan, who had gathered souls at the hour of death for hundreds of

well. Possibly, he sent some of his strongest princes to gather Jesus' soul. But as the satanic powers came to bear away Jesus' soul in death, the Messiah flung them off. If those present had had spiritually perceptive eyes, they would have seen strewn around the foot of the cross the beaten forms of satanic principalities.

King Jesus never reigned so majestically as He did from His cross, where having finished His work, He triumphantly yielded up His spirit and went down into Hades to declare that the cosmic moment had arrived, that man had realized his destiny, that God's will had been done. He made His announcement and then ascended into the presence of God to sit at the right hand of the Majesty on high until His enemies will be made His footstool. That day Jesus demonstrated that He was Lord of both life and death.

No Accidents

The sovereign lordship of

When my son, Matt, is feeling guilty because of disobedience, he becomes "deaf." Although he is usually responsive to what my wife and I tell him, when he has been secretly disobedient he has difficulty listening to us, and a distance between us sets in.

One day several years ago, a situation came up in which Matt did not seem to be telling the truth. My wife was sure that he had been dishonest with her, but she was unable to prove it. Our philosophy with our children, however, has always been that whenever there is a question, love "believes all things." So I told Matt I would

choose to trust he was telling the truth and ask the Lord to show us if he was not.

The following day I took him on a fishing trip with a friend of mine and his son. I was teaching Matt how to cast from the boat, but when I stopped instructing him, he would turn the rod over and hold it a different way from what I had shown him. He was obviously not following my directions. The inevitable result was that he dropped his brand new rod and reel into eighteen feet of water.

Matt turned and looked at me with pain in his eyes and tears running down his cheeks. I said, "Son, you weren't hearing me properly. Did you lie to your mother?"

Immediately he burst into tears and answered, "Yes, Daddy, I did." Then he came over and sat in my lap. We talked and prayed

together, and I told him I wouldn't spank him because I felt the loss of his reel was sufficient punishment.

After we talked, I decided I would try to cast for his rod. The chances of hooking it were slim. The lake was man-made, with uncut trees just under the surface and logs strewn on the bottom—all just waiting to snag my hook. In addition, we had drifted some distance from where I thought he had dropped the reel. Nevertheless, I put a large lure on the end of my line to try.

The first cast caught on a tree, and as I reeled the line in, our boat was pulled in that direction. The second cast yielded nothing. On the third cast, however, I reeled up a line. We pulled the line in, and on the end of the line was my son's fishing rod.

We were all thrilled to realize that God had helped my lure find Matt's line. Matt, of course, was especially blessed. But to top it off, when he reeled his line in there was a fish on his hook—the only fish we caught all day! My friend in the boat with us joked, "Check in his mouth; you might find a coin."

That day I was more deeply aware than ever before that God was working on my son's behalf to teach him a lesson he would never forget, and to help him on the road to righteousness and maturity.

Paul Petrie is the senior pastor of Covenant Church in Lexington, Kentucky.

HOMESPUN

A Fish Story



by Paul Petrie

Christ, even in the matter of death, is clearly evident to me as I consider the tragic automobile crash in which my dear young friend was killed. One of his brothers who had been in the vehicle yet survived was understandably devastated by his brother's death. As we talked by phone in the days after the event, he said to me, "Why him? Why not me?" His words were sincere; I believe at that moment he would have gladly exchanged places with his brother.

But as he asked the question something rose up within me and I replied, "Michael, you tell me that you were only six inches from your brother at the time of the crash. He was taken and you are left. That confirms for me again that Christians don't die accidentally; they die by divine design. You must understand that God had a reason for taking your brother and leaving you. Your brother came under the lordship of Jesus Christ in the matter of death. You came under the lordship of Christ in the divine intention to keep you alive."

Why does God take someone who is young and full of promise, and leave someone like me whose life is seemingly complete? That question is not permissible to me. What *is* permissible to me is to bow to the lordship of Jesus Christ and say, "Lord of Life, you are Lord of Death as well. You have chosen to take some, and you have chosen to leave us." We know why God has taken those whom He has taken; it was a part of His purpose. But our continuing challenge is to know why He has left us.

Lord of Life and Death

We stand in the light of the Lord even as those who have gone on before us stand in the light. Paul said that to be absent from the body and present with the Lord is far better than to be present in the body and away

from the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6-8). It is far better for those who are gone and with Him, but it is difficult for us who must adjust to the absence. A veil separates us, but in spirit we are in God's presence even as they are.

Consequently we can give thanks to God for the triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ over death, over Satan's principalities and powers. In that confidence we can face death as one of the mysteries of His sovereignty, confident that Christ is Lord of both life and death.

But our ultimate confidence and triumph is perhaps best expressed by the hymn-writer who said:

It is not death to die, to leave
this earthly road
Amidst the brotherhood on
high to be at home with
God.

DID YOU KNOW?

Members of our staff gather regularly for prayer. When we come together we have on our minds not only the needs of our publications ministry, but also the needs of those who rely on New Wine for daily strength and encouragement.

In a single month, hundreds of prayer requests are sent to us asking God's intervention for healings, jobs, marriages, financial troubles, backslidden loved ones, and other concerns. We remember these requests when we pray together. We're always glad to hear again from many of these same people who write later to say how God healed a sickness, provided a job, restored a marriage, met a financial need, or led a loved one back on the right path.

We count it a privilege to pray for these needs as a staff, and we would be honored to pray for you as well. Just use the envelope provided in each issue of New Wine to tell us your prayer needs.

We thought you'd like to know...

It is not death to close the eye
oft dimmed by tears
And wake in glorious repose
to spend eternal years.

It is not death to bear the
wrench that sets us free
From earthbound life to
breathe the air of bound-
less liberty.

It is not death to fling aside
this mortal dust
And rise on strong, exulting
wing to live among the just.

Jesus, Thou Prince of life, Thy
chosen cannot die.

Like Thee, they conquer in
the strife to reign with
Thee on high.¹

Those who go on to be with
the Lord are not dead. *They are
alive!* ♥

¹Words by Dr. Caesar Malan, 1864.