

Introduction

Life's cycle makes it clear that death is a natural event that man (through his own devices) cannot escape. God's word makes it clear that death happens to all people; it also explains the reason for the existence of death, stating that it is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). The human race would have been locked into this path of death if it had not been for the sin-covering death of Jesus which declares God's righteousness. An objective of this article is to explain the manner in which Jesus' death declares God's righteousness.

Jesus -- The strong man who defeated the devil.

As a mortal being, Jesus was a special person. The Bible states that he perfectly imitated God. Jesus in response to Philip's request to see the Father says "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*". (John 14:9) and in a speech to the Jews that "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10:30). Note that this oneness refers to a oneness of mind, which is made clear by Jesus' desire for this oneness to exist in all believers (John 17:21-22).

As the son of God, Jesus was unique. Paul said of Jesus "*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form*" (Colossians 2:9). He also says that Jesus is "*...the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.*" (Hebrews 1:3). These things can be said of no other person. Jesus inherited God's nature because he is the son of God, making him a very special person.

Whatever efforts we make, it is obvious that our salvation is achieved, not through our own efforts, but as a result of the salvation achieved for us through Jesus Christ. In fact, God had to send Christ to achieve what man could not do as a result of human weakness:

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,
Romans 8:3, NIV

These words from Paul to the Romans teach us that Jesus' mission involved the condemnation of sin in sinful man. We are also told that his most important mission was to destroy the devil:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death -- that is, **the devil**.
Hebrews 2:14, NIV

The death of Jesus on the cross enabled mankind to move closer to God. Paul describes Jesus as *our peace*. Once again, it is plain that the peace won for us was won as a result of the death of Jesus:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

Ephesians 2:14, NIV

This reference to Jesus' destruction of the middle wall of partition (to bring man nearer to God) is quite interesting. It is a reference to the curtain that separated humanity from the most holy place within the tabernacle under the law of Moses. The most holy place was special to the extent that the most holy man in Israel (God's high priest) could not enter unless invited. The penalty was death for contravening God's rule on this issue.

The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, **or else he will die...**

Leviticus 16:2, NIV

The curtain was an essential feature of the tabernacle. As a barrier between God and man, it impressed upon humanity that all were sinful and that sin separated man from God. Matthew describes the death of Jesus and the simultaneous destruction of the curtain within the tabernacle:

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.

Matthew 27:50-51, NIV

Jesus prayed to God, asking to be released from the impending death on the cross (Matthew 26:39-42). In destroying his desire to continue his life, allowing himself to suffer a painful death, he conquered the desire of natural man and was obedient to God, making it possible for man's eventual salvation. Jesus did more than draw nearer to God as a result of his crucifixion of the natural human desires that separate God from man, he totally destroyed the barrier, making a path for those who choose to follow in his foot-steps:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us **through the curtain**, that is, **his body...**

Hebrews 10:19-20, NIV

It is believed that the following four statements reflect the Scriptures quoted to this point:

- Jesus came to destroy the devil.
- Jesus came to destroy the barrier between God and man, enabling man to draw near to God.
- The curtain within the temple that was destroyed upon the death of Jesus represented the destruction of this barrier; it also represented all human flesh, including Jesus' flesh.
- Jesus came to destroy "*sin in sinful man*" (Romans 8:3).

Based on these four points, it can be seen that the barrier between God and man that was destroyed by Jesus is the devil mentioned in Hebrews 2:14. It is also evident that the curtain represented the flesh possessed by natural man (Hebrews 10:19-20). The conclusion is that human nature is the devil that separates God from man.

The term "devil" is used to describe the human nature and its adversarial attitude towards God. It is this adversarial attitude that establishes a barrier between God and man. Jesus destroyed the barrier in his life and death. He always did that which was pleasing to God, being totally free from sin or transgression, yet at the same time, he possessed the nature that made him susceptible to transgression -- he possessed our nature.

Since the children have flesh and blood, **he too shared in their humanity** so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death -- that is, the devil.

Hebrews 2:14, NIV

Believing that the "devil" is an inherent aspect of human nature explains why Jesus was sent with our nature in his mission to destroy the devil. For those who believe that the devil is a super-natural god of evil, why was it necessary for Jesus to share our nature in order to be able to destroy the devil?

The belief that Jesus was sent with the nature to conquer human nature does not detract from the fact that (as a mortal man) he was totally obedient to God and totally free of transgression. His appearance as a mortal man made his mission more difficult and his achievements more spectacular:

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,

Romans 8:3, NIV

What does the term "Satan" mean?

The understanding explained above is supported by events recorded in the Bible. Paul's dealings with Ananias and Sapphira is an example:

"Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit... What made you think of doing such a thing?"

Acts 5:3-4, NIV

Paul's words show that the heart of Ananias was filled by Satan. They also show that the evil thought was conceived within the heart of Ananias. As the evil thought was conceived within Ananias' heart, it is evident that the source of the sin came from within the man, not from an outside source such as a supernatural god of evil. The fact that the heart is identified as the devil and the source of sin shows that it is man's nature that is the power of sin that is opposed to God.

When Peter attempts to divert Jesus from the course that he knows that he must take, Jesus rebukes Peter. Jesus refers to Peter as "Satan." A consideration of this comment sheds light on the meaning of the term Satan:

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Mark 8:33, NIV

Accepting that those who view Satan as a powerful source of evil able to draw man away from God shows that those who hold this view understand man is torn between serving God and Satan. Jesus words to Peter indicate that Satan is drawn away by man. This shows that the popular understanding is faulty.

Why did Jesus refer to Peter as Satan? The word "Satan" means "adversary." Peter was opposing Jesus in his efforts to serve God. The word Satan is used in both the Old and New Testaments. The same word is used in the Old Testament to describe the devil (1 Chronicles 21:1 & Job 1:6), the angel of the Lord in his role as an adversary (Numbers 22:22), and also to describe king David as a possible adversary to the Philistines (1 Samuel 29:4)

Difficulties created as a result of believing in a super-natural devil.

Belief that the devil is a supernatural being whose objective is to entice people to sin is not compatible with Bible teaching. Some of the difficulties are listed below.

- It alters our concept of salvation.
- If the devil is a fallen angel, God's gift of eternal life is devalued because this belief means that being immortal is no guarantee of immunity to sin, which God has guaranteed us. Luke 20:35-36 states that those who are accounted worthy of eternal life will be immune from death. This is only possible if people are also immune from sin -- "*The wages of sin are death*", Romans 6:23. Portraying the devil as a fallen angel also contradicts the Scripture and makes Scripture contradict itself. It says that angels are immortal and that the devil will be destroyed.
- Belief in a supernatural devil contradicts very plain Scripture teaching on the origins of sin. Romans 4-7, compare Acts 5:4 with James 1:13-15, "*Sin entered the world through one man*" (Romans 5:12. No mention of any devil).