

# The Brown Street Beacon

*"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,*

*holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)*



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## Is Death the Penalty for Living?

I recently heard a man say, "Death is the penalty for living." Is death the penalty for living? Many would say yes. Death is a penalty, but it is not the penalty for living, it is the penalty for sin. Paul said, *"For the wages of sin is death...."* (Romans 6:23). Also we read in the book of James, *"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death"* (James 1:14, 15). I recognize that the death of these passages are dealing with spiritual death, i.e. separation from God (Isaiah 59:1, 2), but physical death came as a result of sin too. Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden of Eden because they ate of the fruit of the tree that was in the middle of the garden. God forewarned Adam and Eve that the penalty of such action would be death. *"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.'"* (Genesis 3:16, 17). Yes, they died spiritually because of their transgression; but physical death became a reality as well. Being expelled from the garden, Adam and Eve lost access to the tree of life and therefore death was inevitable. Their bodies would run down and they would die. They in fact were in the process of dying the moment they sinned.

Today physical death is still a reality because of sin. It is not the penalty for living; it is the penalty for sin. We die spiritually because of our own sins (Romans 5:12), and we die physically because of the sin of our first parents Adam and Eve. We do not inherit sin as many religious people teach, but we still suffer the consequences of the first sin that was committed.

While death is the penalty for sin, it does not have to be viewed as bad in every sense. In fact, in some ways death is a blessing. For some death is a gateway to a better existence. Paul said, *"For me to live is Christ and TO DIE IS GAIN"* (Philippians. 1:21). How can Paul say that death is gain? That does not sound like the words of a rational man, does it? It sounds like one who has become depressed and suicidal, right? Wrong! They are the words of a man who has the hope of heaven on his mind. Paul knew that death was not the end of all existence. Death was a time when he would escape the trials and tribulations of this earthly life, and be at rest from the assaults of the devil. It would indeed be gain.

Death, however, is only gain for some. John said, *"And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'"* (Revelation 14:13). For death to be gain, one must obey the gospel and die in the Lord, that is, in good standing with God. Those who are faithful until death die in the Lord and shall receive a crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Those who die without obeying the gospel will find themselves in a far worse condition than they ever experienced

here on earth. They shall be punished with an everlasting punishment (2 Thess. 1:9).

Death is not the penalty for living, it is the penalty for sin. And, in fact, because sin has corrupted this world and makes it a more unpleasant place to live, death isn't the worse thing that can happen to a Christian.

*Don*

## Opinions in Bible Class

Rick Liggin

**A**re our Bible classes supposed to be times for open discussion where anyone and everyone may state his own "*opinion*" on what some Bible text or verse of Scripture means? Asked a little differently: are Bible class teachers simply discussion facilitators or are they supposed to actually teach the class something?

Obviously, teachers are supposed to teach! They are "**to give instruction**"—since that is what a "*teacher*" does. And though that may involve engaging his students in some kind of discussion, in the end the teacher is supposed to be leading his class in a definite direction so that real learning takes place. Anyone can stand at the head of a classroom and ask his students for comments—but a teacher must do more than that. He must teach! He must instruct! He must make sure that real learning—learning that is true to the Word—takes place in the minds and hearts of his students.

But not only must he teach; he must do so with authority. Paul told Timothy: "**These things command and teach**" (1 Tim. 4:11). He told Titus: "**These things speak exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you**" (Tit. 2:15). A faithful Bible teacher does not hand down his own "*opinion*" of what the Bible says—an "*opinion*" that others may take or leave, accept or reject. He teaches the **Word of God**—an authoritative message that must be accepted and obeyed.

Now, I say these things because I fear that some of us have gotten the wrong idea about our Bible class periods. Some of us seem to think that Bible class is a time for us to all get together and share our "*opinions*" with one another about some Bible topic or Bible text. But folks, that's not Bible study! It might be one thing if we were sharing with one another the fruit of our own diligent, honest and careful private Bible study. In fact, if that were the case, I'm sure that some real and significant Bible learning would take place in such a class period. But that most often is not the case!

More often than not, these "*opinions*" we express are not based on any real, personal Bible study; in fact, they're often not even based on having previously read the text before coming to class. More often than not, they are the result of whatever might pop into our heads as we read the text for the first time while already in class. I'll be honest and tell you that, as a Bible class teacher who works hard at preparing to teach Bible classes, I find that insulting. How dare you come to class and challenge a teacher's conclusions by expressing your "*opinion*" when you haven't even taken the time to read the text before coming to class! We're not saying that error should not be corrected. If a Bible class teacher teaches something wrong, he should be challenged and corrected-kindly. But how can we do that if we have not studied the text before coming to class?

Bible class is not about sharing "*opinions*" (especially unstudied opinions) with one another. It's about helping one another learn correctly what God's Word says, so that we can use it to change our lives. And it is the teacher's place to do that—and to do it with authority, so that all feel the need to do what God says. Vision for the future demands that we make our Bible classes periods of real learning—and that requires teachers who are prepared to teach and students who come to class prepared to learn.