



ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 7, Issue 31

The truth about the second death.

THE FOLLOWING IS EXCERPTED FROM A LETTER I RECEIVED ELEVEN YEARS AGO ABOUT THE SECOND DEATH:



The 2007 Willard Bible Conference was a very inspiring event for me. I thought that all of the speakers' presentations were excellent and I came away feeling God's Spirit was very active. I was particularly looking forward to this event because I knew beforehand that two speakers were going to talk on a subject that has had me in a state of mixed emotions for several years: the second death. The interpretation of the second death by A.E. Knoch is that the lake of fire is literal and the second death is literal and it follows the Great White Throne judgment. You, Martin Zender, presented the A.E. Knoch version.

Martin, you are a very hard working man of God. I truly believe God is going to use you in a very significant manner sometime in the future. You spoke on the second death, and when you were finished, I didn't think that Phil

Scranton, the author of a book on the second death in which he claims the second death to be figurative, could present anything contrary with conviction. But when Phil finished presenting his view, I was convinced that a fresh look at the second death was needed.

I picked up a copy of Phil's report "A Fresh Look at the Second Death." I've read the report several times and each time I read it exciting thoughts came into my mind. Someone was kind enough to send me a CD on which Phil speaks for 79 minutes on the second death. It also is very enlightening.

My experience in learning God's truths over the past several years is that each time I learn a new truth it excites and amazes me. My wife and I were in the Worldwide Church of God from 1966 to 1978. After leaving that Church, we were without spiritual guidance for 20-plus years. Early on in that period I reasoned that "salvation for all" made sense to me, even though I was never taught it. Then in 2003 a friend gave me literature and cassette tapes by a guy named Martin Zender. That was the beginning of a lot of new truths revealed to me, including salvation for all. Every new truth excited and amazed me! Each one made me feel happy! Each one made me praise God! Each one amazed me how the world's churches were so deceived!

When I first heard of the second death explanation according to A.E. Knoch, it did not excite me. It actually made me sad. It just did not make any sense. I thought, *Why would God resurrect people at the Great White Throne Judgement and immediately throw them into a literal lake of fire? What purpose would that serve?*

I thought of my parents, who never hurt anyone, friends who are deceased but, when they were alive, were nice people. I could think of many people that I honestly thought were better than I. But I was told that these people were unbelievers and therefore were to be cast into the lake of fire. *But didn't God make them unbelievers?* It was very confusing to me. I surmised that someday God would help me to understand this

issue and, like other issues, bring excitement rather than sadness. That “someday” arrived this past June, 2007 in Willard, Ohio, thanks to Phil Scranton.

“IT DOESN’T MAKE SENSE”

John (not his real name), you are setting the tenor of your letter, and it is this—unless something a) makes sense to you, b) excites you, c) amazes you, and d) doesn’t make you sad, then you would have a hard time believing that it is true. I’m not denying the validity of your feelings, I’m just saying that your personal feelings about things and whether things amaze you or not, has nothing to do with truth. You’re sounding an awful lot like the protestor of Romans chapter nine who, when God says, “Consequently, then, to whom He will, He is merciful, yet whom He will, He is hardening” (Romans 9:18), answers, “Why, then, is He still blaming? For who has withstood His intention?” (Romans 9:19).

You protest: “Why is God resurrecting people and then casting them into death when He Himself made them unbelievers? It doesn’t make sense. It makes me sad. It doesn’t amaze me.” Paul’s answer to the protestor would also be his answer to you: “Oh, man! Who are you, to be sure, who are answering again to God?” (Romans 9:20).

Besides, no one has a “version” of the truth. It’s either truth or it isn’t. No one cares about “Martin Zender’s version” or “A.E. Knoch’s version.” What anyone should care about is, *What does God say on the topic?* I don’t have a version of the truth, and I will not allow anyone to saddle me with that.

YOU MISSED THE MAIN THING

John, you’ve missed the most critical event at the great white throne: *judgment*. God does not “immediately” cast people into the lake of fire upon resurrecting them, as you suggest that He does. God raises these people, judges them, and then those whose names are not written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. That’s simply what the text says, and it does so in plain words. Revelation 20:11-15—

And I perceived a great white throne, and Him Who is sitting upon it, from Whose face earth and heaven fled, and no place was found for them.

12 And I perceived the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne. And scrolls were opened. And another scroll was opened which is the scroll of life. And

the dead were judged by that which is written in the scrolls in accord with their acts.

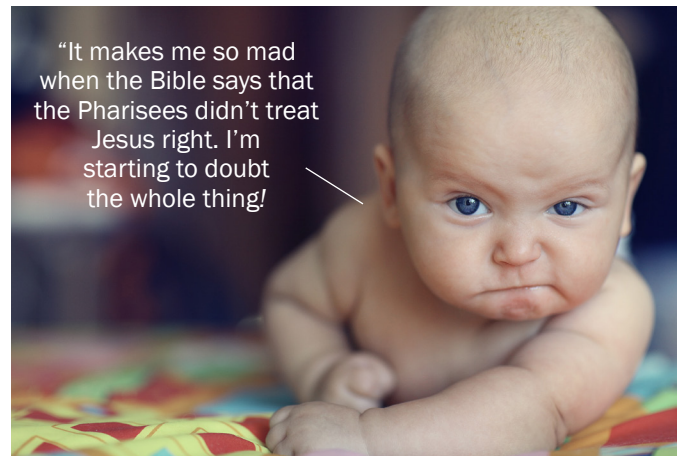
13 And the sea gives up the dead in it, and death and the unseen give up the dead in them. And they were judged, each in accord with their acts.

14 And death and the unseen were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire.

15 And if anyone was not found written in the scroll of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

That’s pretty straightforward. As for me, I refuse to run this text—or any text—past personal, razzle-dazzle filters that ask, “Does it excite me? Amaze me? Does it make sense to me? Am I happy with it?” I just read it and say, “Oh. Okay.” I recommend the same to you.

Your emotions are compromising your ability to read and believe Scripture. Are you happy when you read in Revelation, chapter nine, that one-third of humanity will be killed? Are you happy (or excited) when you read in 2 Thessalonians, chapter two, that God will be sending humanity an operation of deception? None of these things



make me happy *or* excited, but they’re true nonetheless. These truths really don’t care how we feel about them.

You write: “I could think of many people that I honestly thought were better than I. But I was told these people were unbelievers and therefore are to be cast into the lake of fire. But didn’t God make them unbelievers? It was very confusing to me.”

NAUGHTY OR NICE

What does certain people being better than you have to do with God’s choices for eonian life? I thought that you were founded on the fact that those chosen for eonian

life are chosen “not in accord with acts” (2 Timothy 1:9). But perhaps you don’t yet realize this, because now you’re confusing *me*: Are your parents and the “nice people” of this context believers or unbelievers? If they are believers, then they have no business here at the great white throne. If they are unbelievers, no amount of niceness added to their unbelief will turn them into believers.

Your main difficulty with the great white throne judgment seems to be that nice people who are unbelievers are returned to death right along with mean people who are unbelievers. But I must ask you this: Why don’t you have the same difficulty with nice people and mean people suffering this common fate *now*? I’m speaking of death—the first death. Don’t nice people as well as mean people die?

“Death is not a punishment for what we do, but rather the result of what we are.”

The first death seems to be an equal-opportunity destroyer. I’m not sure why it’s acceptable to you now and would not be then, except perhaps that God’s hand is not as plain in death now as it will be then. I must also add here that you missed the main point of my Willard address, namely, that death is not a punishment for what we do, but rather the result of what we are. Otherwise, you would not consider the second death—or any death—unfair to people of varying degrees of affability.

Back to your heart’s desire. Since you want these nice folks at the great white throne to survive their judgment and continue living into Eon 5, you—along with Phil Scranton—are forcing the second death to be something

other than what it is, which is death. Phil actually thinks that the second death is a second mortality. He thinks that the lake of fire is a place where both pleasant and repulsive unbelievers get a second chance to learn about Jesus. It’s not really the second death to Phil, but rather the second reform school. It’s a sort of rehabilitation program for the wanna-be dead—or something like that. Both you and Phil are looking for something in the environs of the great white throne judgment to squeeze life from, but unfortunately you’ve chosen the wrong element, namely, the lake of fire, which is the second death. You’d have better luck squeezing pineapple juice from an apricot.

THE ABOLITION OF DEATH, NOT LIFE

Any teaching that would turn a thing called “the second death” and “the lake of fire” into a wonderful ministry of spiritual illumination has the stain of desperation smeared all over it. Literal death is the absence of life; figurative death is senselessness. What is there besides the literal and the figurative? In Scripture, death is called an enemy; it is never—either in a literal sense or a figurative one—used to describe a period of either divine illumination or second-chance reform—or *anything* positive, for that matter.

What is worse, you and Phil are denying the abolition of death itself at the Consummation. How can literal death be abolished if the dead aren’t really dead? According to Phil and now you, not one being in the universe, following the great white throne judgment, will be dead; everyone will be alive, either on the new earth or in that lovely little reform school called the lake of fire.

Here’s Phil’s teaching, stood next to God’s:

PHIL: Following the great white throne judgment, not one being in the universe will actually be dead; everyone will be alive somewhere—*everyone*.

GOD: At the consummation, the last enemy is being abolished: death (1 Corinthians 15:26).

COMMENT TO GOD FROM THE GALLERY: *What* enemy, God? *What* death? You’re behind the times, God. Phil Scranton already abolished death way back at the great white throne. According to Phil Scranton, death isn’t an enemy at all, but—in the case of the second death—it’s a friend that ushers “the dead” into a life of beneficial—albeit painful—tutelage. That’s right, Phil



Hard to believe this happened to the Willises.
The whole family was so nice.

insists that the second death is figurative. (Not even figurative death enlightens anyone—but of course you know that already, God, so let’s stick with the Scranton version here.) If the second death is figurative, then the abolition of death is also figurative; but one can no more *literally* abolish a figure of speech than capture a shadow in a jar.

You can’t have it both ways, John. Either the second death is literal, or the great event of 1 Corinthians 15:26—the abolition of death—is the abolition of a figure of speech.

NEWS FLASH: *Death* is to be abolished, not life. Maybe Paul meant to say, in 1 Corinthians 15:26—

“And the last enemy is being abolished: the figurative usage of death.”

I think not.

LIFE AT THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

So now I’m going to take your side. I am. But I first wanted you to see the emotional basis of your argument, your questioning of God’s justice, your mistaking of death for punishment, and your unconscious glorification of death.

I think you will like this, John: the nice unbelievers at the great white throne—the Mother Teresas and the mahatmas—*will* be granted life there, albeit mortal life, while the unbelievers of more questionable character (i.e. “jerks”) will revisit death in the lake of fire.

At God’s throne, the great and the small are judged “each in accord with their acts.” Some acts will be good, some evil. There is a scroll of life. *A scroll of life*. “And if anyone was not found written in the scroll of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.” It is reasonable to believe that, because the scroll is consulted, there *are* names written here. Those whose names are recorded, then, are spared the second death and thus they advance—albeit as mortals—to the new earth. The others? Returned to the grave until the Consummation.

When we appear at the dais of Christ, we will all receive applause (1 Corinthians 4:5); some will receive a wreath of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8), and some will see their evil works torched (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Or maybe each of us will receive a little bit of everything. We know that the resurrection of life holds varying degrees of glory, just as there are various glories among the stars (1 Corinthians 15:40-41). As distinctions are recognized for believers at the dais of Christ, there are

also distinctions recognized at the great white throne for unbelievers.

JUDGED, NOT CONDEMNED

The argument may be forwarded that the distinctions *are* recognized, but the judgments are applied while the recently-dead are alive, to be followed by the re-death of these folks by virtue, not of their sins, but of their kinship to Adam—just as happens with believers and the first death. I am willing to believe this; I have believed it for years; it would be right of God; just. But that darn scroll of life is now looming large to me.

I believe that there are only three vivifications, corresponding with three *periods* of vivification, as noted in 1 Corinthians 15:23-24:1)—the Firstfruit, Christ, 2) thereupon those who are Christ’s at His presence, and 3) the consummation, when death is abolished. So I am not suggesting that those whose names are recorded in the scroll of life—if, indeed, there are any—are made immortal. I’m suggesting that, since only those whose names are *not* written in the scroll of life are cast into the lake of fire—which is the second death—the only alternative available for those whose names are recorded is transference



to the new earth, where they will sustain their lives—as mortals—with leaves from the log of life, in the city of God (Revelation 22:2).

I realize that the word “condemned” in the CLNT version of Revelation 20:13 makes this scenario impossible, but even A.E.K. acknowledges that only one of the three oldest manuscripts has “condemned” here. The others make this, “judged.” I believe that “judged” is the correct

reading. (I put it into the text on page 2.) Were I seeking life for the nice at the great white throne, I'd be seeking it from the scroll of life, not from the lake of fire, which is the second death. You and Phil Scranton—and now Ted McDivitt and Rick Farwell—are barking up the wrong tree. Aren't the living more apt to be found in a book called "life," rather than in a phrase containing the word "death?"

TIME AND THE MIND OF CHRIST

You assume (in another part of your letter) that being cast into a lake of fire will hurt. It would if man did it, but God is more merciful than man. My mother died on April 8 of this year; I loved her. But as far as I know, she died an unbeliever. Does this sadden me? Yes. I will be made immortal at the snatching away, before the thousand year kingdom, while my mother will remain in the grave. In other words, I will be alive for a thousand years without my mother. But I'm alive without her now. Does all this sadden me? Yes. Will it sadden me when I am alive for the thousand years? Not as it does now. Perhaps not at all.

My life now and my life during the thousand years will have one thing in common: I will be alive without my mother. But there will be a critical difference between

my life and feelings now and my life and feelings then: I will have the full mind of Christ then. My spirit will fully control my emotions, keeping them from fighting God's operation.

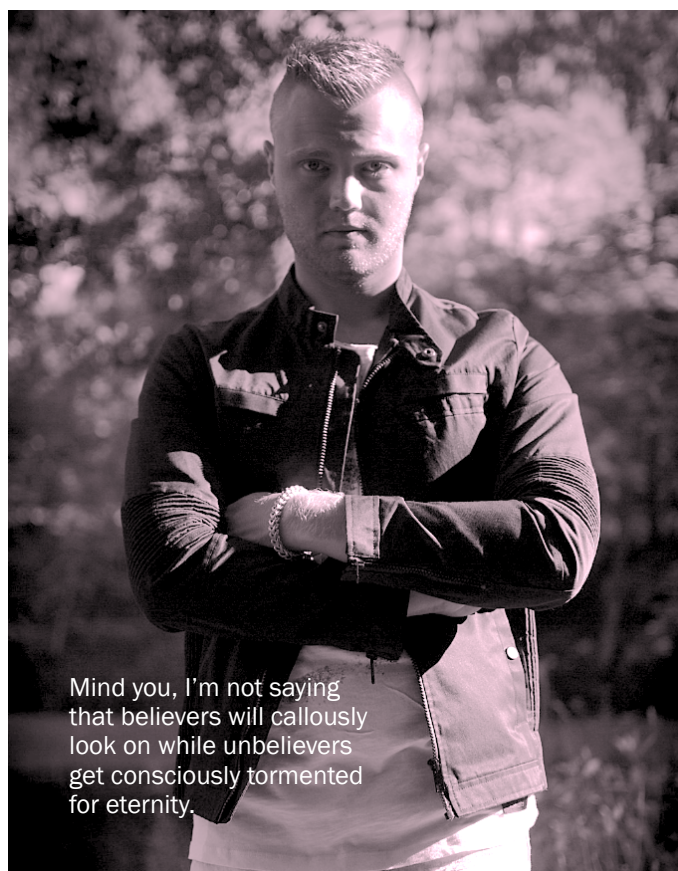
Mind you, I am not putting forth here the Christian teaching that believers will callously look on while unbelievers get consciously tormented for eternity. For one thing, I am not talking about conscious torment, but death. For another thing, I am not talking about callously looking on, but possessing spiritual understanding. God will do the right thing by my mother at the great white throne. And if she does not live during the fifth eon? It will be no different than her not living for the thousand years, except then, I believe, she will be asleep in Christ, having received Him at the great white throne.

Isn't the apostle Paul now asleep in Christ? Peter? John? Do you have a problem with that? Do you have a problem with believers *now* being asleep in Christ? No? Then why would you have a problem with it then? It's because of your tender emotions, and because God's hand is not as evident in death now as it will be at the great white throne.

Jesus Christ has been living in heaven for 2,000 years without His beloved Peter, without His beloved John, and without His beloved Paul. Has He been depressed all this time? I doubt it. He has spiritual understanding concerning the dead, and I'm sure He already sees them in His mind's eye as if alive. If He tells us now (as mortals) to walk as if alive from among the dead, don't you think that He follows His own advice concerning the presently dead—especially as He is in His glory at the right hand of God? Did He not say on earth, concerning Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—who were dead at the time He spoke—that God was the God of the living, not the dead? And was this not while He was in His flesh? Now that He is at the right hand of God, would you imagine that time afflicts Him in a worse way than it did then? Or would it rather be that He is now the master of emotional time management?

Time will not affect us after we are snatched away and made immortal with Christ in the same way that it affects us now.

Stop trusting your emotions, John, and believe what God has to say about the second death. —MZ



Mind you, I'm not saying that believers will callously look on while unbelievers get consciously tormented for eternity.

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