

The Bible and the Everyday Life: Biblical Approach to the Phenomenon of Human Death

Lana Klokočki

lpomorav@gmail.com

UDK: 27-23:2-186
Essay

Abstract

The paper considers the biblical teaching on the phenomenon of human death, starting from the account in Genesis 2:15-17 and connecting it to other Scriptural texts. The first part considers the biblical-theological meaning of death and the Christological-soteriological answer to the problem of death. The second part of the paper presents the practical significance of the correct biblical understanding of the phenomenon of dying both for believers and unbelievers. The conclusion is that the Bible often talks about death and does not run from it but rather exposes and explains it. According to the Bible, death is God's punishment for sin: spiritual, physical, and eternal death. It is the enemy that repeatedly wields victory over humankind, however, God, in his grace, has provided the victor over death – Jesus Christ, true man, and true God.

Keywords: *death, law, covenant, resurrection, wisdom, gospel*

Introduction

The phenomenon of human death can be viewed from various perspectives: medicinal, biological, philosophical, psychological, sociological, religious, ethical, artistic, etc. This paper approaches the phenomenon of death from the biblical perspective. We shall consider the occurrence and the meaning of the notion of death in the Bible, with an emphasis on the account found in Genesis 2:15-17. The paper will attempt to connect the theological features of said text with other Scriptural texts and work out possibilities of practical application. Theological and

practical characteristics of biblical texts will be elaborated on in two directions: concerning the person who believes the gospel (hereafter referred to as *believer*) and regarding the person who does not believe the gospel (hereafter referred to as *unbeliever*). The paper will not encompass the phenomenon of dying in relation to all living creatures on earth, but exclusively concerning man.

The topic is current because when considering everyday life, the phenomenon of death imposes itself as omnipresent and unavoidable. Death happens to every living being, and so also to man – it is a “universal and undeniable occurrence” (Thomas 1975, 23). Death is a “democracy we all participate in and hence represents a unique and universal human bond” (Brstilo and Mravunac 2017, 310). Every day people are witnesses to their own and other people’s transience. Nevertheless, death is still considered taboo and most people are reluctant to talk about it. In general, a man leaves thoughts about death to philosophers and theologians and is prone to suppress and deny its serious consideration, which is a type of psychological defense mechanism. It is worth mentioning research conducted by Štambuk on a sample of 488 examinees within the city of Zagreb (November 2002 – March 2003) which showed that most people do not think about their death or think about it very rarely or occasionally, with the remark that older people think about death more often than young people (Štambuk 2007).

An interesting aspect of the research is the fact that most examinees were inclined to believe in some form of life after death, and most examinees expressed hope in some form of immortality. Also, more than half of the examinees feared life after death. When asked how they felt when thinking about their death, more than half of the examinees pointed out that they were satisfied to be alive (regardless of whether they stated they believe in the afterlife or not).

It is also important to point out the fact that death is not a simple physical event, but a phenomenon formed by social factors. In traditional societies, death was “less hidden and more pervasive and familiar, although not more peaceful” (Brstilo and Mravunac 2017, 312). Modern and postmodern societies are marked by a lowered death rate due to better quality of life, especially hygienic practices, and health care. In that vein, Bošnjak (2017, 7) emphasizes the following:

Mere hundred years ago death was talked about as a normal part of human existence, children were taken to see the deceased, whole communities gathered at funerals, and death was not a hidden secret, but present in the community. The modern man most often does not have the opportunity to see a dying or deceased man, because nowadays people die in hospitals. If someone happens to die at home, he or she is rushed forward to some institution because staying in the same space as the deceased causes severe trauma for the contemporary man.

Moreover, modern man does not know what to say to the dying person, and, due to prolonged longevity, unconsciously considers death a “pathological part of life

that could have been avoided were it not for the heart attack, cancer or car accident” (Bošnjak 2017, 7).

However, since we are talking about an omnipresent phenomenon, people are not able to completely ignore the reality of death. Especially in uncertain times, death seems like a “more relevant topic” (Brstilo and Mravunac 2017, 310). When death happens to someone in our family or circle of friends, when the world is swept in a deadly pandemic or threat of war, we are forced to face what we fear and what we wish to avoid. In those moments, a person often becomes aware of his/her fleetingness and the destructive force of death – biological, social, or psychological. He or she is more inclined to think about life, death, and the meaning of existence because it is “easier to experience pain that has a meaning” (Bošnjak 2017, 5). The fact that we die confronts us with the meaning and nature of existence and forces us to ask such questions as “Who am I? Why was I born and why do I have to die? Did I exist before I was born and will I exist after I die?” Having said that, the goal of this paper is to offer biblical answers to questions: “What is death?”, “Why do we die?”, and “How should we prepare for death?”, as well as show the comprehensiveness, consistency, and meaningfulness of the biblical explanation of death. This is a way to actualize this socially neglected theme and show its theological, but also practical significance.

1. Biblical-Theological Meaning of Death and Christological-Soteriological Answer to the Problem of Death

1.1. The First Biblical Account of Death

The biblical text that will serve as the basis for our study will be the text from Genesis 2:15-17: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

This is the first biblical account of death. It is preceded by the Creation account. Genesis 1-11 tells the story of “the beginning of mankind” (Hamilton 2010, 2). Death is mentioned in the context of God’s important warning to first humans and is related to the first commandment God utters: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” God sets the condition: if a man eats the fruit of the forbidden tree, he will die. Death will take place as the consequence of disobedience to the commandment. Later on in the Genesis account, we see that the first humans failed to keep God’s commandments. Their disobedience resulted not only in their death, but in the death of all humankind,

as it is written in the Epistle to the Romans: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom 5:12).

1.2. The Triple Meaning of Death in the Bible

Regarding the meaning of death, Stanko Jambrek (2005, 137) observes the following:

The Bible talks about death in three ways: physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death. It is the consequence of sin and all are subject to it. Spiritual death denotes separation from God. The Lord Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul clearly taught that the unconverted (unregenerate) people were in the state of spiritual death, i.e. alienated and separated from God. This state refers to earthly life and does not imply the destruction of physical life. The term eternal death denotes the eternal separation from God, a state in which spiritual death can no longer be overcome.

It is interesting to notice that the first people did not die physically after they tasted the fruit from the forbidden tree. Nevertheless, the Bible clearly emphasizes that their death took place at the very moment of their transgression. It is undeniable, therefore, that death as the divine punishment mentioned in Genesis refers to spiritual death. Besides the Genesis account, many other biblical texts state the same. The Bible repeats that people are born spiritually dead although physically alive (Eph 2:1) and it describes this state of spiritual death as living in desires of the flesh and carrying out those desires. The main characteristic of a spiritually dead person could be described as an inability to receive things that come from the Spirit of God, “for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them” (1 Cor 2:14). Jesus says that physical (spiritually dead) persons cannot see “the kingdom of God” nor “enter” it (John 3:3-5). Since all people in the world share the same nature, they also share sinfulness and mortality; no person is not subject to sin and death. Therefore, everyone is born spiritually dead – incapable of living in a way that would please God by keeping his commandments. Moreover, they are born as enemies of God and adversaries of God’s law. This innate corruption is called sin; because of sin, man is “full of all wickedness, distrust, contempt, and hatred of God” (The Second Helvetic Confession 2000, 101).

Besides being spiritually dead, people also die physically. Death is a “process whose precise moment is hard to pin down” (Bošnjak 2017, 6), but it is clear that physical dying begins at birth, while the aging of the organism is an unstoppable process that will inevitably end with death. Although the first people did not die physically after they transgressed, the Bible reveals that physical death is also a consequence of divine punishment. Immediately after man’s fall into sin, God announced that man will return to the ground he was taken out of (Gen

3:19). Furthermore, the Bible regularly describes death as evil and misfortune: it reports death as the “greatest calamity, most extreme and worst of all natural evils in the world” (Edwards 1998, 173), and the destruction of cities, countries and multitudes of people denotes as “testimony of God’s wrath” (Edwards 1998, 174). Numerous Old Testament examples include the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra, Onan, the Pharaoh, Egyptians, Nadab and Abihu, Korah and his company, perverted inhabitants of Canaan, Hophni, and Phinehas, and in the New Testament, the death of Ananiah and Saphira, as well as the destruction of Jerusalem announced by Jesus. Christ’s words to the people at Siloam who were upset about the death of Galileans are also significant: “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1-9). Probably the best proof that physical death is a punishment for sin is the necessity of the physical death of Jesus Christ. He was punished instead of people (he died physically); there was no other way for sins to be forgiven “for the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23) and “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb 9:22).

The third dimension of mortality the Scriptures mention is eternal death. Earthly, physical death does not mean the final cessation of man’s existence, which is why it is sometimes called “first death.” It is the death of the body, but the soul/spirit does not die but is subject to God’s judgment after the body is dead. God warns that every man is already condemned before God, ever since the Garden of Eden. On the last day (a term that signifies the end of time and the moment of God’s final judgment) people will be bodily resurrected (in new, changed bodies) and appear at the last judgment, and if someone’s “name was not found written in the book of life,” he will be thrown into the lake of fire, described as “the second death” (Rev 20:15; 21:8). This death is also called eternal death because it denotes the eternal state of separation from God. It does not denote the final cessation of existence, but an eternal existence of a conscious, resurrected man who will be forever separated from God, in a state of hellish torment (Rev 20:10).

Therefore, the Bible considers death to be a disaster in every possible meaning. Edwards (1998, 173) says that the word “death” implies “complete, significant, and hopeless destruction and misery.” It is a chief human enemy and is impossible to escape. Death separates people from God, but also one another. Calvin (2008, 152) concludes that “the original sin is a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature that reaches all parts of our souls, which first makes us repugnant before God’s wrath, and then produces in us works which the Scriptures call the deeds of the flesh.” The same author cites that after man’s fall into sin, “the ornaments he received from God – wisdom, virtue, righteousness, truth, and holiness – were replaced by terrible misery, blindness, weakness, arrogance, impurity, and unrighteousness” (Calvin 2008, 150). These characteristics, in greater or smaller measure, describe every man. Human sinfulness is a dominant characteristic that shapes the world and society. Its consequence is the inability to overcome the

works of the flesh, namely “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness” (Gal 5:19-21).

So, death as a phenomenon appears through the first man’s separation from God due to disobedience, and its dimension encompasses both spiritual and physical death. Every consequent man was born under the same curse: spiritually dead (separated from God), in the process of physically dying from the day he was born. Eternal death is the third dimension of death that represents something of its metaphysical culmination. We can conclude that death, in all three meanings, is the adversary man cannot defeat. He cannot come up with a medicinal solution to fight off the physical death and he cannot remove his inclination for sin to overcome the spiritual, and finally, eternal death.

1.3. God’s Plan of Salvation from Death as Part of the Gospel

Since dying is a punishment for sin, to escape this punishment, a person would have to be sinless. However, there is no such person, because all people are descendants of the same great-parents through which sin entered the world. Not all people sin in the same measure, but God demands complete, perfect sinlessness and considers the transgressor of one commandment to be responsible for all the others as well (Jas 2:10-11). So, the Bible emphasizes that there is not one good man among people who could measure up to God’s standard of goodness. God’s law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, is the standard of God’s holiness, but by keeping the law no human will be justified before God, the purpose of the law is “knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20) – law condemns, and does not save.

The Law “made nothing perfect; but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced through which we draw near to God” (Heb 7:19). The Heidelberg Catechism summarizes this truth, concluding that God’s will is to “have his justice satisfied through a Mediator and Savior; one who is a true and righteous human, yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is also true God” (Heidelberški katekizam 2000, 32). That is why God’s Son, Jesus, emptied himself of his equality with God and was born in a body – born of a woman, conceived by the Holy Spirit. In that way, “being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8). He “also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (1 Pet 3:18).

The gospel was completely revealed in the New Testament, however, all of the Old Testament (Law and the Prophets) testifies about Christ (God’s righteousness). Right after man’s fall into sin, God declared that one shall come from the woman’s offspring who will “bruise” the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15). Very early in Israel’s history, an event called Passover occurs. Passover marks the exodus from

Egypt when the Passover lamb was a type of future sacrificial lamb that would be offered for the redemption of sins. Furthermore, when Moses brought God's commandments to the Israelites, he took some animal blood and sprinkled the book, the people, the Tabernacle, and all the objects selected for God's service. This shows that "not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood" (Heb 9:18-21). All of Israel's complex sacrificial system for the sins of the people was God's way of showing that "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22). However, these sacrifices could not truly purify the sins of those who offered them to God. They had to be offered repeatedly, and could never truly take away sins – moreover, they were only a "reminder of sins" (Heb 10:3). This is because the Law had only "but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities" (Heb 10:1); it was a copy of the heavenly things, but not the heavenly things themselves (Heb 9:23). The New Testament reveals that there is only one purpose of the Law, and that is Christ – "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4).

1.4. Christ's Mediatorial Death and Resurrection

It was God's will to prepare a body for Christ so that it would be offered once and for all – by that offering "he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Heb 10:14). In this way, Christ abolished the previous sacrificial system (Heb 10:8-9). He thus became the mediator of a new covenant. Unlike the Old Testament High Priest, who used to enter into the man-made Holy of Holies as an imperfect mediator, Jesus, the perfect mediator, entered the real Holy of Holies – Heaven, before the very face of God.

Christ's resurrection is proof of his victory over death and sin; He "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1:10) and he is described as the one who has "the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev 1:18). In First Corinthians, apostle Paul points out that Christ's resurrection is a fact confirmed by many witnesses:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (1 Cor 15:3-8).

It is important to say that Jesus did not rise from the dead in some other body, but in the body that was buried, which he proved to the disciples by showing them his hands and feet that still held the scars from nails and wounds (Luke 24:39). At the same time, this body was also "changed" (1 Cor 15:51). According to Paul, the resurrection is the basis for preaching and faith (1 Cor 15:14). Paul argues

that faith has no value without Christ's resurrection, because, if there were no resurrection, the believers would still be in their sins (1 Cor 15:17). But, through Christ's resurrection, they were made participants of righteousness – they rose to a new life and inherited “an assurance of their bodily resurrection” (Heidelberški katekizam 2000, 39).

Christ, therefore, partook of flesh and blood “that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb 2:14-15). As all men were condemned through the transgression of one man (Adam), so the justification for all comes through the fulfillment of the commandment by one man (Jesus); as all became sinners through disobedience of one, so through the obedience of one, all will become righteous (Rom 5:18-19). We find similar thoughts in Romans 3:21-24: “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”¹ So, one must have faith to be justified before God. It is important to emphasize that salvation is a gift, and not something earned, because even those who are now saved used to be “by nature children of wrath,” just like everybody else (Eph 2:3):

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph 2,4-9).

Believers have been spiritually revived. Those who were “alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by [Christ's] death” (Col 1:21-22); “he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col 1:13). Moreover, the Bible points out that they “died to sin” (Rom 6:2), which is portrayed in the baptism – in baptism, figuratively speaking, they were buried into death, thus identifying with Christ (Rom 6:5) and could consider their old selves dead (Rom 6:8). The term “old man” implies man's fleshly nature prone to sin. “New man” is “born again.” In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus explains that unless one is born again, “he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3) and says that he is talking

1 The aforementioned verses point out that righteousness through faith in Christ is received by “all who believe” and not “all” people who exist and can be used as proof against the idea of universal redemption (Christian universalism).

about a spiritual birth that is realized through faith in the Son of God (John 3:1-16). A spiritually regenerated man can understand the gospel – he understands the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, perceives the Kingdom of God, repents for his sins, and devotes himself to it. To describe this born-again life, Edwards (1998, 214) uses the expression “spiritual resurrection.”

Besides being spiritually regenerated, believers await the resurrection of bodies. Although they must physically die because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, they will rise again in new, glorified bodies, similar to Christ’s body, and this will take place on “the last day” (1 Cor 15:51-53). Apostle Paul confirms this by repeating the words found in prophet Hoshea: “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:54-57).

Therefore, Jesus’ victory over death also means assurance for the believer regarding the final judgment that will happen at the end of this age. At this judgment, anyone whose name is not found written in the “book of life” will be punished with eternal death in the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). However, the second, eternal death, has no authority over believers – they are saved from God’s wrath and punishment. His promise to believers is: “Whoever believes in [Son of God] is not condemned” (John 3:18). Both believers and unbelievers will be resurrected, but not for the same purpose: believers will come out of the graves to the resurrection of life, and unbelievers to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:29).

2. Practical Significance of Correct Understanding of Biblical Understanding of the Phenomenon of Death

2.1. Wise Man Ponders Death

The Bible says that the wise man thinks about his death and the death of other people, and prepares for it. Psalm 90 asks God to “teach us to number our days so that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Ps 90:12). In Ecclesiastes, we come across a seemingly strange claim that it was “better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting” and that the former was the place of the wise, and the latter was the place of fools (Eccl 7:2-4). In paraphrase, it is better to go to a funeral than to a party. At a funeral, the people are confronted with the thought of mortality and transience, which makes them consider serious matters such as, “What is the purpose of my life?” These considerations, albeit unpleasant, have their purpose, which is to direct us to that which is truly important and help us

to grow in wisdom. This is why the Bible suggests that grief is not an exclusively negative emotion that should be avoided at all costs – on the contrary, “by sadness of face the heart is made glad” (Eccl 7:3) because “godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret” (2 Cor 7:10).

It should be said that to have a correct understanding and consideration of death, it is important to have a correct biblical understanding. Here the problem lies in the aforementioned fact that all men were born spiritually dead and incapable of perceiving spiritual realities regarding God, God’s Word, sin, righteousness, judgment, or death. On the contrary, they are mistaken in all those matters, because the physical man is a slave to a fleshly way of thinking which does not allow him to truly know God. Moreover, “people are trying to create God in their own image” (Budiselić 2018, 17). Reflecting on death can be useful for understanding the value of human life and man’s personal growth, but that is not enough. Biblically, the most important thing for an unbeliever is not to live a good life and peacefully prepare for death. He/she is spiritually dead and is headed for physical (first) and eternal (second) death and needs to be saved.

On the other hand, a believer is saved, justified from sin, and reconciled with God. He/she does not negate his/her sinfulness (1 John 1:18), but confesses it (repents) and receives forgiveness through Christ’s blood. He/she is “spiritually regenerated” and awaits bodily resurrection after physical death. For a Christian, physical death signifies the end of earthly life, which implies the end of work for God’s kingdom and the end of possibilities for personal sanctification. Therefore, although a Christian is safe concerning eternal death, he/she must still think about the end of his/her earthly life because he/she will have to appear “before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body” (2 Cor 5:10). Cultural and personal views on death are closely related and, in this sense, there is sadly a danger that the *Zeitgeist* will affect the Church, prompting it to become excessively focused on the life on this earth, which can be seen in matters believers often talk about, books they most often read; in sermons and teaching, etc. In what follows, I will attempt to show in more detail the practical importance of thinking about death concerning believers and unbelievers.

2.2. Application in Relation to Believers

2.2.1. Thinking about salvation from death motivates believers to worship God

Man’s mortality is proof of his falling away from God and the appropriate punishment. However, at the same time, God’s saving grace as an answer to the punishment is a reason for worship. It is impossible to understand the sacrifice Jesus offered unless there is an awareness of the total depravity, and death as a deserved punishment. Only after we understand how repulsive and unacceptable human

sin and rebellion against God are in God's sight, we can begin to understand the greatness of grace and love he showed us in Christ. Christ was born, buried, and risen for God's glory and man's salvation. Doing so, he "reconciled the faithful with the Father, made satisfaction for sin, disarmed death, overcame judgment and Hell and renewed life and immortality" (Heidelberški katekizam 2000, 115). This knowledge sustains in our consciousness of God's glory, holiness, righteousness, goodness, majesty, and omnipotence; it motivates us to admire him, thank him and glorify him; it makes us more eager and committed to Christ's disciples and witnesses. In short: mortality reminds us of our guilt; our guilt motivates us to seek God; and in Christ, we find peace and forgiveness, which leads us to worship in awe and reverence.

2.2.2. Thinking about the transience of the earthly life motivates believers to be awake and sober

The Holy Scriptures warn that man's life on earth is very short. It reminds us that we do not have much time before we die. It compares a man's life with "a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (Jas 4:14); with "a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone" (Ps 103:15-16) as well as with "breath" and "shadow" (Ps 39:5-6). God has given every person a specific number of days, according to his sovereign will, and nobody knows the moment he/she will be called from this world. When man would know how much time he has left, he would make sure to spend his time, money, and energy in the best way possible. It would be faster and easier for him to discern what is important and what is not. He would probably try to show love to his loved ones or to reconcile with someone. He would reexamine the way he lives and repent for sins more easily. John Flavel (2019, 7), in his book dedicated to grieving friends who lost their child points out that the death of a loved one is a "reminder that we ourselves must soon prepare to follow them, which is why our death should be simpler, closer and more familiar."

However, a Christian is called to live in a constant state of sobriety and vigilance. A person who is awake is aware of his/her surroundings and reacts to them, a sober person is calm and behaves reasonably. For the believer, this means to actively think about reality in light of the Holy Scriptures and confirm his/her wishes, needs, interests, and plans to God. Specifically speaking, a believer's task is to practice works of love, serving his/her neighbors in different ways: to pray, to train in godliness, to become acquainted with the sound doctrines of the Scriptures, and persevere in him as Christ's disciple, and to be the witness for the gospel in the world. Of course, these are not works through which we are saved, but works which prove that we are saved because faith is proved by works (Jas 2:17-18). The Scriptures talk about life in the body as a chance to work for God's kingdom and an opportunity for sanctification, and not for exercising sinful desires and pleasures of the flesh. Although fear of punishment should not be the only

motivation to do good, the fear of God is a positive kind of fear that makes us wise (Ps 111:10). Consciousness of our death, transience, and limitations remind us that we will have to appear before the face of God and receive “what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor 5:10).

2.2.3. Correct understanding of death liberates believers from fear of death and sorrowful despair

A believer can have complete assurance about Judgment Day. He knows that he had already passed from death to life and that it no longer has any authority over him. He will physically die, but that will not be the end of his existence; at that moment, his soul will be raised to Christ, and his body will await the resurrection of the dead. After the resurrection, it will, albeit changed just like Jesus' glorious body was changed, “reunite with the soul” (Heidelberški katekizam 2000, 48). Psalm 23 expresses dying in faith and trust: “I am not afraid, for you are with me” (Berković 2017, 204). Of course, that does not mean a complete absence of negative emotions; it is possible for a believer to feel fear, worry or uncertainty regarding his death. But “the art of dying” as a preparation of a believer for death, “points him toward an eternal hope and awareness of how fleeting life really is,” and “encourages to something of a catharsis with regards to his personal conscience in repentance” (Berković 2017, 191).

When a believing loved one dies, the believer finds comfort in the fact that they will meet again in heaven, or the new earth at the resurrection of the dead. The Scriptures, therefore, indicate that believers should not be sad about the dead like others who have no hope. On the contrary, we can rejoice because we will meet again, and also have peace in the fact that the dead believers now feel much better than us. After all, they are with Christ (Phil 1:23). Again, this does not imply heartless insensitivity, but surrender of our pain to God and “avoidance of excessive sorrow” that expresses itself as a sinful mode of behavior (Flavel 2019, 15).

Unfortunately, the death of a loved one whom we do not think was a believer can cause great anguish and pain. However, even then we can trust in God's perfect righteousness and comfort. In some cases, there remains a hope that our loved one did turn to God at the moment of his death, like the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). The final comfort for believers lies in the knowledge that they possess a better hope and life eternal, which supersedes any good they might have had on earth. God promises a new heaven and new earth and a new city prepared for the faithful. This new world will be completely different from today's world. God will “dwell with them” and “wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore” (Rev 21:1-4) because the devil, death and the underworld will be forever cast in the lake of fire (Rev 20:10-14).

2.3. *Application in relation to unbelievers*

According to the Scriptures, an unbeliever is a person who does not believe in the only begotten God's Son, Jesus. His unbelief prevents him from receiving salvation from God's wrath and death; faith is, in fact, the means of our salvation. This state of unbelief is man's natural state; it is a characteristic of the fleshly nature that resists God and rejects him. The Scriptures testify that no man is the child of God through his natural birth, but on the contrary, they are by nature "children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). For a person who is not reconciled with God, good works have no value as means of justification; God does not accept them. People around us benefit from our good works, and we sometimes use them to ease our conscience, as well. However, "fixing" our fleeting and brief earthly life for personal growth or humanism without doing the works God wants is folly and vanity.

When the Jews asked Jesus what they should do to be doing the works of God, he told them that God requires one work – "that you believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6:28). This means God appointed for people to be saved by his "the folly of what we preach" (1 Cor 1:21), and that is the believer's task. Preaching implies the proclamation of the gospel or the kingdom of God. Through listening to God's Word, by God's will and grace, a supernatural change occurs in a man: he begins to have faith. By faith, man becomes aware of God's existence, his nature, and character, the reason for his existence, as well as his sinfulness and need to be justified before God. Regarding the part of the gospel that pertains to the plan of salvation, when we witness, we should explain "in what way the death of Jesus affects our sinful state" (Budiselić 2013, 23). However, "in today's culture, it is harder and harder to call sin its proper name and call a sinful person a sinner" (Budiselić 2018, 15). Good examples of repentance can be found among the apostles, who, among other things, "bore witness and continued to exhort [people], saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation'" (Acts 2:40) and warned them to "repent, therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). Jesus himself was harsh and even "insulting" in his teachings (Budiselić 2018, 17), and "he often spoke about Hell" (Budiselić 2018, 11).

It is important to mention that man's salvation is exclusively God's work and dependent on his grace. He is the one who opens people's hearts so they would pay attention to God's Word (Acts 16:14); this does not happen because of human wishes, labor, or efforts. Nevertheless, it is up to us to plant and water the seed of the gospel, while growth should be left to God (1 Cor 3:6). According to Jesus, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Luke 10:2). We are called to proclaim the gospel to all people and make them Christ's disciples, and this earthly life is our only chance to do so. After physical death, man can no longer be saved. This knowledge should deeply move us to prayer, service, and sharing of the gospel.

Conclusion

The Christian worldview and relationship with death differ starkly from the world. The Bible often speaks about death; it does not run from it, but exposes it and explains it. Studying the Scriptures, we find that death is God's punishment for sin and is manifested in three dimensions: spiritual, physical, and eternal death. It is the enemy that repeatedly wields victory over humankind. However, God, in his grace, has provided the victor over death – Jesus Christ, true man and true God, who humbled himself “by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8), and “suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (1 Pet 3:18), and “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:10). Because of what Christ has done, believers are already participants of eternal life and have assurance and comfort regarding death. They are called to set their minds “on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:2-3). Reflecting on death will make them wise in living and eager in serving.

Also, they have to be ready to share with others the reason for their hope (1 Pet 3:15). Because people are more prone to pose existential questions and think about death at an older age (Štambuk 2007), as well as in situations when their lives or lives of their loved ones are under immediate threat; places such as homes for the elderly, hospitals, hospices and the like, offer a specific possibility for Christian ministry and evangelization. Impending death is characterized by anguish, pain, fears, longings, and questions. In this context, it would be worth thinking not only about a form of service but about additional equipping of servants for specific spiritual care needed by the dying in the last days of their lives.

Christian preaching, teaching, and witnessing should contain the message about the fact of the resurrection and eternal life that pertains to all people, “for as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:21-22). However, for believers, this will be a resurrection of life, but for unbelievers, it will be a resurrection of judgment (John 5:29). The core of believers' message for unbelievers regarding death is: “Death is not the end and is not a natural part of life. It is a testimony to human sinfulness and God's righteousness. After death, you will find yourself before God and you will have to account for what you have done. Together with the apostles, we beseech you: reconcile with God” (2 Cor 5:20).

References

- Berković, Danijel. 2017. Biblijski psaltir kao *ars moriendi*. In: Ivan Markešić, ed. *Čovjek i smrt. Teološki, filozofski, bioetički i društveni pristup*, 189–205. Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, Hrvatsko katoličko sveučilište Zagreb i Posmrtna pripomoć Zagreb.
- Bošnjak, Alisa. 2017. Mišljenje o djelovanju smrti i umiranja bolesnika na medicinske sestre u KBC Osijek. Diplomski rad. Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Medicinski fakultet.
- Brstilo, Ivana and Damir Mravunac. 2017. Kroz tajno ogledalo ili o smrti u tradicionalnome, modernom i postmodernom društvu. In: Ivan Markešić, ed. *Čovjek i smrt. Teološki, filozofski, bioetički i društveni pristup*, 309–328. Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, Hrvatsko katoličko sveučilište Zagreb i Posmrtna pripomoć Zagreb.
- Budiselić, Ervin. 2013. Pravilno razumijevanje evanđelja kao ključ za zdravu evangelizaciju, život i službu Crkve. *Kairos: Evanđeoski teološki časopis* 7 (1): 9–32.
- Budiselić, Ervin. 2018. Isus iz Evanđelja i Isus danas. *Kairos: Evanđeoski teološki časopis* 12 (1): 7–21.
- Calvin, John. 2008. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. USA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing.
- Drugo helvetsko vjeroispovijedanje*. 2000. Translated by Žigmund Keck. Osijek: Reformirana kršćanska Crkva u Republici Hrvatskoj, Reformirani teološki institut.
- Edwards, Jonathan. 1998. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Volume 1. USA: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Flavel, John. 2019. *A Token for Mourners*. USA: Monergism Books.
- Hamilton, Mark W., ed. 2010. *Riječ koja preobražava*. Volume 1. Zagreb: Biblijski institut.
- Heidelberški katekizam*. 2000. Translated by Žigmund Keck. Osijek: Reformirana kršćanska Crkva u Republici Hrvatskoj, Reformirani teološki institut.
- Jambrek, Stanko. 2005. *Kršćanstvo i new age duhovnosti: Sličnosti i suprotnosti*. Zagreb: Bogoslovni institut.
- Štambuk, Ana. 2007. Razmišljanje o smrti – dobne i spolne razlike. *Ljetopis socijalnog rada* 14 (1): 155–177.
- Thomas, Louis-Vincent. 1980. *Antropologija smrti*. Beograd: Prosveta.

Lana Klokočki

Biblija i svakidašnjica: biblijski pristup fenomenu ljudske smrti

Sažetak

Rad razmatra biblijsko naučavanje o fenomenu ljudske smrti, polazeći od izvještaja iz Knjige Postanka 2,15-17 i povezujući ga s drugim tekstovima Svetog pisma. Prvi dio rada sagledava biblijsko-teološko značenje smrti te kristološko-soteriološki odgovor na problem smrti. U drugom dijelu rada predstavljen je praktični značaj ispravnoga biblijskog razumijevanja fenomena umiranja kako za vjernike tako i za nevjernike. Zaključuje se kako Biblija često govori o smrti te ona od nje ne bježi, već ju razotkriva i pojašnjava. Prema Bibliji, smrt jest Božja kazna za grijeh koja je kao duhovna, tjelesna i vječna smrt. Ona je neprijatelj koji uvijek iznova pobjeđuje ljudski rod, no Bog je svojom milošću predvidio pobjednika nad smrću – Isusa Krista, pravog čovjeka i pravog Boga.