

Static Versus Dynamic Life

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What does this warning of death in Rom 8:13 mean for the Christian: “If you live according to the flesh, you must/will die”? Various alternatives have been suggested.

1. Die prematurely (Kendall, *OSAS*, 189; Constable)
2. Die temporally (Dillow, *Reign*, 365-368; Kendall, *OSAS*, 189; Constable; BKC; NIBC,).
3. Die misthologically (Sweigart, *Pothole*, 3.)¹
4. Die hypothetically (Calvinists)
5. Die spiritually (Arminians)

According to the Arminian, if a believer does not persevere, he will die spiritually. That is, he will lose eternal life and go to hell. To be sure, this verse describes the potential death of born-again *believers*, referred to as *brethren* in v. 12. Calvinists will frequently admit that the verse is dealing with genuine believers. Then they will argue that it is only portraying the hypothetical possibility of such death. But this first class conditional sentence is firmly rooted in reality. It cannot be shuffled to the outer stratosphere of mere potentiality belonging to classes further removed from reality.

After all, if this death were not a real possibility, the warning would be nonsensical. Those believers who walk according to the flesh will die. Those believers who walk according to the Spirit will live. The possibility of death is no more hypothetical than the possibility of life. The other Calvinistic counter sometimes offered is that these *brethren* are merely professing believers. But the context shows otherwise. Moreover, one must have spiritual life in order to be in danger of spiritual death. You cannot threaten a spiritually dead person with spiritual death. Such a person is already dead. Therefore, it must be concluded that these are regenerate *brethren* who are being warned of dying.

Does this mean that retention of regeneration is at stake? According to both Arminians and Calvinists, the answer is, “Yes.” Perseverance is necessary to reach heaven in both of these soteriological systems. If a believer were not to persevere, then the believer would lose the eternal life imparted at regeneration. Eternal life is a dynamic life-giving stream flowing from one’s union with Christ. If one is severed from Christ (Gal 5:4), one will wither and die and lose eternal life. For both the Calvinist and Arminian, soteriological security is at stake.

Since the Calvinistic interpretation merges into the Arminian outcome, our specific interest in this survey is this Arminian explanation. The first three interpretations, in contrast, are non-soteriological and preferred by FG interpreters. From the FG perspective, since life and death are dependent upon the way we live in Rom 8:13, life and death do not refer to soteriological truths. FG does not understand Paul as teaching soteriological security based on works. Our soteriological possession of life is not conditioned on the way we live. It is static in that there is no fluctuation in our possession of eternal life at the soteric level. However, our experience of life and death is so conditioned on the way we live and is therefore open to dynamic variation. This distinction between possession and experience, therefore, leads us to conclude that eternal life has both static and dynamic dimensions. The result of sin is death, even for the believer. But by definition of what is meant by static possession, the FG interpretation will limit this death to the dynamic experience of such life.

Paul has set the stage for this conclusion earlier in the context where he notes that the believer may *walk in newness of life* (Rom 6:4). But he also warns of the possibility of a death dependent upon moral obedience (Rom 6:16). The *outcome (telos)* of unrighteousness in contrast is death (6:21). But in the same verse he presents the positive parallel: obedience *results in (eis)* righteousness (6:16). With this potential positive outcome in mind, Paul urges believers to “present your members as slaves to righteousness, *resulting in (eis)* sanctification” (6:19). The causal connection is clear. Moral obedience *results in* righteousness, and righteousness in turn *results in* sanctification. And the *outcome (telos)* of this practical sanctification is eternal life (6:22).

Telolic Links:

obedience → experiential righteousness → practical sanctification → eternal life
disobedience → experiential unrighteousness → death

For further explanation, see my upcoming book *The Outer Darkness*.

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Misthologist@misthology.org

The misthological nature of this telolic spectrum of eternal life is thus very apparent. Eternal life is the reward for practical sanctification. Alternatively, telolic death is the outcome for unrighteous behavior. The parallelism between telolic life and telolic death as dual possible outcomes for the believer strongly suggests a misthological view of this telolic death. Telolic death is the absence of telolic life. Therefore, we do not fault Arminians and Calvinists for finding an eschatological dimension to this death. The broad context suggests this is indeed the case. But must this misthological death necessarily entail soteriological loss? Our readers are certainly asking this question, and Paul apparently felt that his readers would also. So he responds to this anticipated question in the very next verse with a contrast not only between life and death, but also between soteriological and misthological bestowments. With life and death for the believer hanging in the contextual balance, Paul reassures his Christian readers, “The **wages** of sin is death, but the **free gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23).

Death, whether soteriological or misthological, is a wage. Eternal life, in contrast, is first and foremost a free gift. Since it is eternal, once it is received it cannot be lost. The dynamic qualitative force of this life must not be stressed to the detriment of its static quantitative stability. The durative nature of this life must be maintained at the static level. Otherwise, it would not be eternal life.

However, Paul’s emphasis in Romans is not on the fundamental nature of this life at the static level. The other three times Paul uses the full expression *eternal life* in Romans, he uses it misthologically to describe the telolic nature of this life. ① “He will reward eternal life to those who seek for glory and honor and immortality by persevering in good work (Rom 2:7; TM). Eternal life is a reward for good work. ② “Grace might reign through righteousness *resulting in (eis)* eternal life (Rom 5:21; TM). This verse, which is the last verse of ch. 5, introduces the same causal link we see in ch. 6. Experiential righteousness results in eternal life (6:16-20). ③ And as we noted in 6:22, eternal life is the *outcome* or *end result (telos)* of practical sanctification. In these three verses, eternal life is an object that is bestowed as a reward.

But in Rom 6:23, Paul is no longer presenting eternal life as a misthological object. Rather, in clear contrast with the concept of reward, he uses an adversative conjunction *but (de)* to affirm that eternal life is a free gift. Before eternal life can be pursued as a reward, it must first be received as a free gift. From Pauline theology in general, and the book of Romans in particular, we may clearly assert that a gift is not a reward since the latter is based on works and the former is not. (See [What is Work.](#)) So how is it that eternal life is both a gift and a reward when a gift is not a reward?

The answer is simple. There are dual dimensions to eternal life. The various dynamic experiences of this life is conditioned on works. But the basic static possession of eternal life is not conditioned on works. Therefore, it clearly follows from the definition of *gift* that the possession of eternal life cannot be conditioned on how we live. Consequently, when Paul warns that those believers who live according to the flesh will die, he cannot be talking about losing possession of eternal life. The imputation of righteousness as a free gift (5:17) results in *justification of life* (5:18), which is the impartation of the eternal life as a free gift.

Soteric Link:

imputational righteousness → justification → eternal life

Imputational justification thus makes the impartational regeneration possible. (See *ordo salutis* in *The Outer Darkness.*) Since soteriological justification is by faith apart from works, the soteriological possession of eternal life must likewise be by faith apart from works. The two go hand in hand. Likewise, the possibility that a believer may be righteous positionally but not experientially corresponds to our conclusion that a believer may have eternal life statically but fail to experience it dynamically. As Paul said elsewhere, believers who live according to the flesh are dead even while they live (1Tim 5:6). They are the living dead. Although they have both physical and spiritual life, their experience is one of death. Eternal life for them is a static possession rather than dynamic experience. They are dead in terms of their spiritual experience and in terms of their fellowship with God. Death is separation from God who is life. But God gives life at various levels. Such believers are separated from God’s fellowship and empowerment. They are not experiencing a life of fellowship with God or the dynamic power of God.

Tragically, such believers will also experience misthological death. Death is the absence of life. Misthological death would therefore be the absence of misthological life. Just as life can be experienced at multiple levels, so can death. Those believers who have eternal life at the soteriological level may fail to

experience eternal life temporally at the filial level and eternally at the misthological level. They will not reign in life (Rom 5:17). They will not share this reign in life. Rather, their temporal and misthological experience will be one of death. They will be separated from this victorious experience with God as a result of their sin. They will have an impoverished experience both now and in the future.²

The wages of sin is death—both temporal and misthological in the case of the believer. In contrast to the wages of sin, the gift and reward of God is eternal life. At the static level, eternal life is a gift. At the dynamic level, it is a reward (Rom 6:22-23). Our daily experience of salvation from the power of sin can fluctuate. Relationship is permanent; fellowship is not. Present dynamic salvation should be a growing experience (1Pet 2:2). But it may wither instead. But even if it withers to the point of experiential death, the static possession of the imputation of justification and the impartation of regeneration is retained. Judicial victory over the penalty of sin has been permanently granted apart from works. The fact that Peter describes being born again as being accomplished with indestructible seed in 1Pet 1:23 would suggest that the life imparted is indestructible.³

The NT talks about the possibility of believers losing their life, reward, and crown in the future. These ennoblements are *forfeitable* and thus may be *lost* in terms of the believer failing to achieve the intended consummation. Eternal life may indeed be lost—in terms of dynamic experience and potential. For example, believers may lose the crown of life and lose access to the tree of life in the future, and they may fail to experience eternal life in the form of abundant life in the present. This fullness of the dynamic potential of eternal life is indeed forfeitable.

Salvation		
past	present	future
judicial penalty of sin	power of sin	misthological penalty of sin
static permanent relational	dynamic fluctuating filial	conditional

We may lose eternal life as a reward, but we cannot forfeit the gift of eternal life. This would seem to be a rather straightforward deduction from the nature of the terms involved. Soteriological security is not at risk. Nevertheless, the question one still hears posed is, “Where is the proof from the context that this death is not spiritual death?” We offer this brief interaction with the context to provide that proof.

☺	☹	Quotation	Summation
✓		You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. (8:9a)	You are not in the flesh since you have the Spirit.
✓		But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (8:9b)	You belong to Christ since you have the Spirit.
✓		And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. (8:10)	Your spirit is alive since you have the Spirit. Note, Paul was trapped in a body of death in 7:24. Yet, here he affirms that his spirit was still alive nonetheless.
	✓	But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you. (8:11)	Note the change from present to future tense. This life is to be given in the future to your bodies. Why? Because it is a logical future. It is logically dependent upon your cooperation in meeting your obligation. But it may be eschatologically future as well since these sons are waiting for the glorified redemption of their bodies.
	✓	So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. (8:12)	Statement of moral obligation.
	✓	For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die. (8:13a)	Future death because logically dependent upon your cooperation.
	✓	But if by the Spirit you are putting to	This future life matches the future life of 8:11 and is

		death the deeds of the body , you will live. (8:13b)	dependent upon our meeting our moral obligation. It is to have life in your body now and live as a son of God in the future.
✓		For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (8:14)	You are a son of God if you are being led by the Spirit. Thus, your being a son of God is conditioned on your following the Spirit's leadership in meeting your moral obligation. Only those who meet their obligation will live as sons of God.
?		For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (8:15)	Adopted sons cry, "Father." But sons have just been defined as those who meet their moral obligation to their Father. They may not be the only ones who can cry, "Father." The children of God may also.
✓		The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (8:16)	Children of God as opposed to sons of God.
✓		If children, heirs also, heirs of God. (8:17a)	Children then unconditionally heirs.
✓		If indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. (8:17b)	Conditional co-glorification. Only those who meet their moral obligation will live as co-heirs.
		For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (8:19)	Sons of God are co-glorified in the revelation (8:17b-18)
		The creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (8:21)	Children of God are glorified.
		And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body . (8:23)	Adopted sons await their redeemed glorified bodies.

☺ = Unconditional for the believer

☹ = conditional for the believer

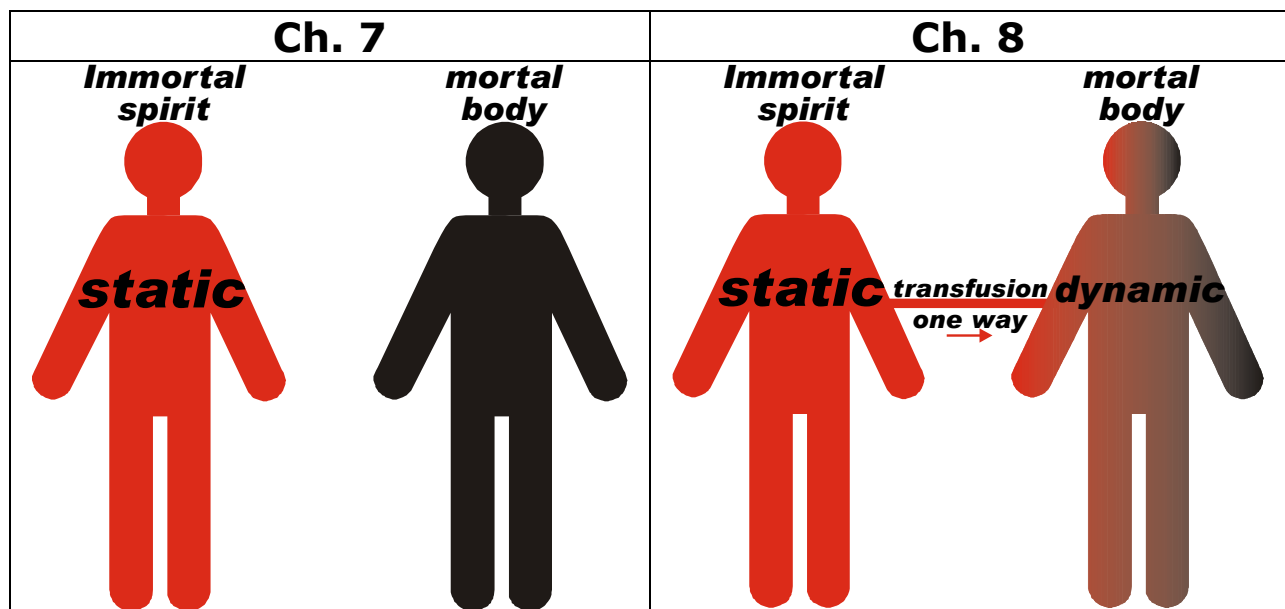
From the chart we see that meeting our moral obligation by putting to death the deeds of our body results in life for our body so that we may live as a son of God in the present and be co-glorified as sons of God in the future. In the broader context, the death of ch. 8 is illustrated in ch 7. Sin killed Paul (Rom 7:11). How? Did it send him to hell? No. Paul describes this death as failing to experience the life-giving power of the Spirit in his body. Therefore, death is dynamic rather than static. Even in this state of death, his *inner man* is nevertheless pictured as alive (7:22). He has static life even during his dynamic experience of death. Having life in the inner man corresponds to having life given to his spirit (8:10). This static impartation of life to his spirit had failed to result in a dynamic transformation in his experience in ch. 7. He explicitly identified his death as occurring in his body (7:24). His inner man was alive within his body of death. The implication of ch. 7 is that his spirit was alive despite his failure to meet his moral obligation to put to death the deeds of his body.

Paul makes this explicit in ch. 8 when he affirms that the spirit is alive even though the body is dead (8:10). Let us not gloss over the affirmation that Paul is making in this verse: "If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness." For the body to be dead means that it is not experiencing the life-giving power of the Spirit. Paul has just been describing what it means for the body to be dead in ch. 7. Paul is claiming that even if you as a believer are having a ch. 7 experience, your spirit is nevertheless alive because of righteousness. Experiential righteousness? Not hardly. His experience as

a believer in ch. 7 was one of death. Yet Paul affirms that the believer's spirit is alive. Why? Because of righteousness. This must be imputational righteousness. It is not the telolic causal link of righteousness resulting in eternal life eschatologically. Rather, it must be the soteric causal connection between justification and life that he alluded to as *justification of life* in 5:18. The impartation of the eternal life is a free gift. This imputational righteousness makes impartational regeneration possible. More than that, imputation makes regeneration retainable.

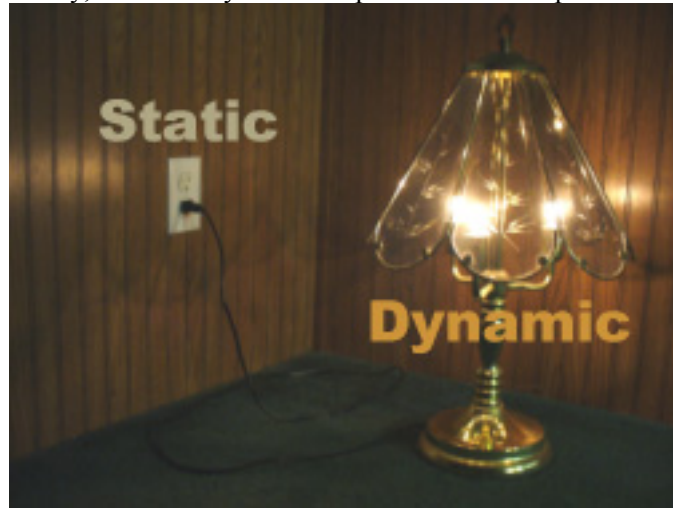
Paul is assuring us that even if our *body is dead because of sin* (i.e., even if we are dynamically dead and immoral in our practice as described in ch. 7) nevertheless our *spirit is alive because of righteousness*. This is the static possession of life due to the imputation of righteousness to us as a gift. Romans 8:10 is 7:7-21 in a nutshell. Even though your body is experientially dead because of sin, your *spirit* (i.e., your *inner man* is soteriologically alive). As Lopez notes, the *if* of verse 10 is best translated as *since* (Romans, 166). After all, there is no question as to whether or not Christ is in someone who is spiritually alive. Paul's affirmation may thus be stated without any question that would be implied by *if*. **Since Christ is in you, you are spiritually alive even though you are experientially dead.**

But rather than leave us in this tragic state of defeat, Paul moves to verse 11 with an adversative conjunction *but* (*de*) to say that this is not the end of the story. The rest of the story is that Christ is ready, willing, and able to make a dynamic transfusion of life from the static storehouse in our spirits to our *mortal bodies* (8:11) if we will meet the necessary moral obligation (8:13). Merely having Christ in you will result in a live spirit but dead body. If you want to experience life in your body, you must do more than simply have Christ in you. You must allow Him to perform a dynamic ongoing transfusion. Therefore, what is at stake if you fail to meet your moral obligation for such a transfusion is not the death of your spirit but the continued experience of death in your body.



To restate the facts, **even if you are bodily dead and not meeting your moral obligation necessary to experience life in your mortal body, your spirit is nevertheless alive since Christ is in you** (8:10). Paul also indicates in his conclusion of this section that nothing can separate him from Christ (8:31-39). Moral failure will result in mortal calamity. But your spirit is not subject to such death since your regenerate spirit has been made immortal. The context in general and 8:10 in particular render the soteriological interpretation of 8:13 null and void. Incidentally, the word used by Peter to say that we have been born again of *imperishable* (*aphthartos*) seed is the same word used by Paul when he says that God is *immortal* (1Tim 1:17). The seed of life, which God has placed in us, is immortal. We will never perish because our spirit has become immortal by virtue of our new birth. Christ has taken up static residency within our spirits in that He does not come and go. This spiritual union is permanent. However, the experience of this reality is dynamic if we submit to the

transfusion of life to our bodies. But even if we do not, the flow of the transfusion is in one direction. The spirit can impart life to the body, but the body cannot impart death to the spirit.



So what are we to make of the Calvinian lamp in which Arminians and Calvinists join forces to assert that if the believer becomes unplugged from Christ by failing to persevere in faith the believer loses eternal life? We respond that eternal life is both dynamic and static. Even if the dynamic expression of that life is put out so that the static potential is hidden from view by the darkness, the static power is still there, residing just as powerful and just as available as ever in our spirit. The body of the lamp can become unplugged from the outlet, but this does not mean that the outlet becomes unplugged from itself. We need to plug into the power available in our spirit through the Spirit who indwells our spirit. But even if we fail to plug into that power source, the Spirit still indwells our spirit. The light-giving power is still there even though the lamp is not burning. We are not only the lamp, we are the outlet also. The lamp represents our body. The outlet represents our spirit. Even if we do not have life dynamically, we still have it statically. Our spirit cannot be unplugged from Christ since His Spirit permanently resides in our spirit. It is only our bodies that may fail to plug into Christ. But this failure is nothing more than failing to plug into the life that is available in our spirit and which permanently resides there in our spirit.

Granted, the response will be made that Paul says in Rom 8:13 that *you will die*. Rather than saying that your body will die, he speaks holistically of the entire person as dying. Does this mean that the believer's spirit will die also? No. But it does mean that the *person* himself will experience death, not just his body. When we experience temporal death, it is as a person, not just as a body. In ch. 7, Paul describes his temporal experience of death as a person. Despite the fact that his inner man is alive, his experience as a person is death.

The response will still be made that Paul says in Rom 8:13 that *you will die*. If you are presently living according to the flesh, you are dead. Your bodily experience is already one of death. But rather than say that *you are dead*, Paul says that *you will die* in the future. So Paul must mean that your spirit will die. Otherwise, he would have said, "You are dead."

We counter by noting two matters from the context. One, the statement *you will die* may just be implementing a logical future to denote the conditional nature of this death. This is certainly the case in 8:11 and 8:13b. However, we find no reason to limit this death to the temporal dimension. We agree with Arminians and Calvinists who find an eschatological dimension to this death since it is juxtaposed in the immediate context with eschatological life as a son of God. Moreover, the telic nature of this death for the believer has already been established from the broader context. But this does not require a soteriological understanding of this death.

Misthological death for the believer will mean that that believer will not be co-glorified as a son of God. Failure to experience this qualitative degree of life may be considered a form of death. Failure to attain to misthological life may be regarded as misthological death. Death may be defined as the absence of life. In this case, it is the absence of misthological life. So the fact that it is eschatological does not mean that it cannot be misthological. Nor does its futuristic nature conflict with its personal nature. If we are thrown into the outer darkness, it is as a person. Our body is not thrown into the outer darkness while our spirit is allowed to roam

freely. The consequences are very real. The believer cast into the outer darkness will weep and gnash his teeth in response to his misthological death. It will not be merely his body weeping and gnashing *its* teeth. It will be the believer himself weeping and gnashing *his* teeth. Since there will no longer be any disharmony between the believer's spirit and body, this expression of sorrow must be profound indeed. It will not be a case of rejoicing in spirit while sorrowing in body. Death will hurt—even if it is misthological death.

¹ John M. Sweigart, [Romans 6:23: A Pothole in the Romans Road](#).

² Believers cannot be separated from God in terms of their relationship as a child of God. Their fundamental relationship with God cannot die. But their fellowship with Him both now and in the future can die. Those believers who are cast into the outer darkness are separated from God in terms of fellowship. They do not share the joy of ruling with Him in heaven. To be sure, they will share the joy of being with Him in heaven, but this joy will certainly be impoverished compared to the life of those who rule as lords with Him who is Lord of lords.

³ Paul links becoming a son with receiving the Spirit in Gal 4:6. Sonship in this dimension would suggest sonship by birth. God imparts His life, eternal life, to us via this new birth. Just as our parents imparted their genetic code to us in giving us life, so God has imparted His type of life to us as well. Our sonship, as an expression of the life that God has imparted to us, is eternal. This impartation is in terms of quality and quantity. It is eternal in quantity and moral in quality. Paul describes us as sons of light (1Thess 5:5). Light certainly has moral connotations. However, the context shows that sons of light are in danger of living like creatures of the night, but ontological sons of light will not suffer the same wrath as those who are ontologically creatures of night (1Thess 5:6-10). Again, such sonship does not guarantee daily performance, nor is such sonship conditioned on daily performance. Quite to the contrary, such sons are promised that they will not suffer wrath even if their daily performance is of the night. Moral imperfection does not nullify static retention of regeneration.