

On Death

- I. Scripture refers to various things as death:
 - A. Spiritual death in trespasses and sin. **GEN 2:17; EPH 2:1.**
 - B. Separation from fellowship and accord with God.
JAM 5:19-20; EPH 5:14; 1TI 5:6; REV 3:1.
 - C. Physical death. **JAM 2:26.**
 - D. Reproductive death. **ROM 4:19.**
 - E. The *second death* or eternal separation from God in the lake of fire. **REV 20:14; 21:8.**
 - F. Death of delusions of righteousness. **ROM 7:7-9.**
 - G. *Legal* death TO sin and practical *mortification* (depriving of life) of self and flesh.
ROM 6:2, 10-11; COL 3:5; 1CO 15:31.

- II. Points A to E (above) speak of death in the sense of the *penalty* of Adam's sin which imposed a *bondage of corruption* upon the creation. **ROM 5:12; 8:20-22.**
 - A. Sin results in death. **ROM 6:23; JAM 1:15.**
 - B. Since death came from sin, and that from Adam, no Christian should believe in a theory which affirms death prior to Adam's sin.
 1. Such theories destroy the doctrine of salvation from sin and death by Jesus Christ, the last Adam. **1CO 15:21-22, 45.**
 2. If sin and death did not come by the first Adam, there is no reason for the last Adam.

- III. This study concerns itself with physical death. It will be helpful to remember that man is a tripartite being. **1TH 5:23.**
 - A. The entire person of the elect, including his body, is the purchased possession of God.
1CO 6:20; JOB 14:12-15; 19:25-27.
 - B. The inward part of man (soul / spirit) lives on after the body dies.
LUK 16:22-24; REV 6:9-10.
 - C. Cultures and religions worldwide have believed in life after death of the body.
 1. Christianity is unique in that it has a testimony of One who died and resurrected bodily to declare the certainty of life after death. **REV 1:18; 19:10.**
 2. This testimony changed the world by delivering men from the fear of death.
HEB 2:14-15.

- IV. Death is an appointment which all must keep until the return of Christ. **JOB 30:23; HEB 9:27.**
 - A. Exceptions like Enoch and Elijah (who never died physically) or the saints which are *alive and remain at Christ's coming* (**1TH 4:15-17**) are still reckoned as *legally* dead and judged in Christ. **2CO 5:14; COL 3:3.**
 - B. The days of our lives on earth are by the appointment of God. **JOB 7:1; 14:5.**
 1. appoint: To determine authoritatively, prescribe, fix (a time, *later* a place) for any act.
 - a. determine: To put an end or limit to...
 - b. Man's lifespan is limited by bounds as are the seas.
JOB 26:10; 38:8-11.
 - c. The days of man have a limit imposed by God.
 - (1) The lifespan of man has undergone great reductions since the time of the flood of Noah, decreasing rapidly from multiple hundreds of

- years to less than 200 at Abraham's time (**GEN 25:7-8**); and eventually levelling off to an average of 70. **PSA 90:10**.
- (2) Dreams of super-longevity or immortality through science will not overthrow God's limitation.
- d. The designs of rebels and fools to evade the punishment which sin demands amount to nothing. **ECC 8:8; ISA 28:14-15, 18; AMO 9:10**.
2. Only God knows the appointed *day* of death and He may alter it at His discretion. **GEN 27:2; ISA 38:1-5**.
3. We are justified in praying for the living but not for the dead. **2SAM 12:22-23**.
- a. John commands believers to not pray for a brother who has *sinned unto death*. **1JO 5:16**.
- b. This is a sin which is not private in nature and thus cannot be contained by the rule of **JAM 5:19-20**.
- c. This sin results in death of fellowship and may result in the death of the body. **1CO 10:1-11; 11:30**.
- C. As a general rule, ungodly living will shorten one's life. **PRO 10:27; PSA 55:23; ECC 7:17**.
1. It perplexed some prophets that some wicked men live long and prosper. **JOB 21:7; ECC 7:15; PSA 73:3-4**.
2. Consider that God may be preserving them for use as His sword. **PSA 17:13-14**.
3. Consider that God may be preserving them as useful providers for the righteous. **PRO 13:22; 28:8**.
4. Consider that this life is all the "heaven" that the unsaved shall enjoy. **PRO 14:32; 11:7; PSA 73:17-24**.
- D. As a general rule, godly living will be rewarded with a lengthy life. **PRO 3:1-2, 16; 9:10-11; PSA 34:12-14; EPH 6:2-3**.
- E. God may bring about the death of the righteous prematurely as an act of mercy. **ISA 57:1-2**.
- F. Premature death may be simply owing to the general vanity of the bondage of corruption. **ROM 8:20-22**.
- G. Premature death may be owing to foolishness which produces natural consequences or divine punishment. **ECC 7:17; ACT 5:5**.
- H. One may choose to engage in high-risk occupations, hobbies, etc. which increase the odds of premature death.
1. We do well to remember that every man must bear his own burden and accept responsibility for the outcome of what he sows. **GAL 6:5-7**.
2. Let us not blame God for the bad outcome of our own choices. **PSA 107:17; PRO 19:3**.
3. We ought not to presumptuously tempt God. **MAT 4:6-8**.
- I. Ultimately, the seeming unfairness of varying longevity is resolved in the sovereignty of God.
1. It is His creation to sustain or dispose of as He pleases. **DEU 32:39; DAN 4:35**.
2. We are to be reconciled to whatever life and burden God gives. **JOH 21:18-22**.
- J. It is the height of folly to assume we have plenty of time left in this world. **PRO 27:1; JAM 4:13-15**.
- K. It behooves us to *number our days*. **PSA 90:12; EPH 5:16; 1CO 7:29; JOH 9:4**.
- V. Death and the grave are the great leveller of men. They are the common home of all, good or bad.

They are unimpressed by earthly distinctions and accomplishments.

ECC 9:2-3; JOB 21:23-26; 3:16-19.

- A. The grave is man's *long home*. **JOB 17:13; ECC 12:5.**
- B. It is a land of darkness and disorder from which no sinner can will his spirit back. **2SAM 12:23; 14:14; JOB 10:21-22; ECC 8:8.**
- C. Then, the grand thoughts of man perish. **PSA 146:4 c/w JAM 4:13-14.**
 - 1. All of natural man's schemes and dreams are arrested by death. He will not carry on his ambitions "from the other side." Death is not like prison on earth for a mobster!
 - 2. The station and relationships of this world do not carry over. Consider the pagans who thought it proper to have their servants slain upon death so as to continue their service in the afterlife.
 - 3. The acquisitions of this world have no influence beyond the grave.
 - a. Consider the pagan Egyptians who would be buried with their treasures and implements which they supposed would be useful to them in the afterlife.
 - b. You can't take it with you. **PSA 49:16-17; 1TI 6:7; JOB 1:21; ECC 5:15.**
 - c. A lifetime devoted primarily to the acquisition of things without consideration to spiritual concerns may be arrested suddenly by a bitter end. **JER 17:11; LUK 12:15-21.**
 - d. "Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." **JOH 6:27; MAT 6:19-21.**
 - 4. It is not guts, grit, girth or goods that yield promise of the life to come, but godliness. **1TI 4:8; 2PE 1:5-11.**
- D. The grave is a temporary home for the dead body. **JOH 5:28-29.**

VI. Throughout history there has been an almost universal belief in an afterlife.

- A. Archeological and literary evidence confirms this.
 - 1. Pagan, secular and Christian literature are replete with things about the afterlife.
 - 2. The Old and New Testaments constantly affirm life after the death of the body.
- B. That men carefully dispose of their dead and honor them suggests the idea of an afterlife.
- C. Belief in the afterlife is somehow tied to man's nature.
- D. C. S. Lewis wrote in his book, *Mere Christianity*: "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same."
- E. The historical resurrection of the dead body of Jesus Christ unto immortal life proves that there is life after death. **ACT 17:30-32; 1CO 15:20-23; 1TH 4:13-14.**
 - 1. Therefore, physical death is not the end of everything for man. **HEB 9:27.**
 - 2. At this judgment the dead will be raised to stand before God and to be consigned to

their everlasting portion. **REV 20:11-15; MAT 25:31-46.**

3. It is the fear of this judgment that causes unbelievers to outright deny an afterlife or to block out consideration of it. **ACT 24:25.**
4. “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.” (C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*)
5. “When you sweep death under the rug, you will likely sweep the afterlife under the rug with it. By hiding death, you hide the afterlife, and by hiding the afterlife, you hide any hope you have in it.” (Ted Dekker, *The Slumber of Christianity*, p. 84.)
6. One's view as to time plays a powerful role in how he lives.
 - a. If one views the past as everything, he is handicapped to improve his quality of life and has no long term hope as an incentive.
 - b. If one views the present as everything, he is likely to replay the errors of history and be given over to complete hedonism.
 - c. If one views the future life as everything, he is likely to replay the errors of history, be disconnected from the present and manipulated by whatever he believes determines his future.
 - d. If one believes the past is real and instructive, and the present is preparatory for and evidence of a real future life, then he has wisdom, incentive and hope. This is the essence of Christianity.

VII. The gospel announces to believers that a hope is laid up for them in heaven, beyond this earthly sphere of existence. **COL 1:5.**

- A. In fleeing for refuge, believers lay hold of this hope set before them, a hope that enters into heaven itself where Jesus is. **HEB 6:18-20.**
 1. flee: To run away from or as from danger; to take flight; to try to escape or seek safety by flight.
 2. refuge: Shelter or protection from danger or trouble; succour sought by, or rendered to, a person.
 3. Our hope in heaven does provide an escape to a place of safety from the dangers and troubles of life.
 4. The hope is *sure and steadfast*, secured by the very truthfulness of God, and serves as an anchor to steady the believer and keep him from drifting.
 5. The hope that Christianity gives us keeps us tied to it.
 - a. Men will gravitate towards whatever it is in which they have hope.
 - b. This is why it is so important to ground hope in the faithful Creator rather than the failing creation.
- B. Heaven, where our hope is, is not something for us to give an occasional thought to. It is a place upon which we should set our affections. **COL 3:1-5.**

1. As for those who do not set their affections on things above, Ted Dekker had this to write: “You have no living hope because you imagine heaven to be far less interesting than the earthly vacation you have your eyes on, or the man you would like to marry.” (Ibid., p. 134)
 2. Having our affections set on heaven leads to mortifying sinful deeds and affections.
- C. This hope has a purifying effect. **1JO 3:1-3.**
1. If there is no resurrection of the dead, no afterlife, then hedonism, the philosophy which asserts that pleasure is the sole or chief good in life, makes sense. **1CO 15:32.**
 2. If there is no afterlife, then the Bible tells lies in both the Old and New Testaments. Why conform to the moral code of a book that violates its own code and lies?
 3. The resurrection and the judgment after death are incentives to repent (**ACT 17:30-31; ECC 12:13-14**). Why repent if there is no such thing as a resurrection and judgment after death?
 4. Without the Christian hope, men will give themselves to their own desires (**JER 18:12**). This explains materialism, philosophies of despair, free sex, and the drug culture.
 5. The great dilemma of mankind is that it wants the hope of an afterlife but it doesn't want a hope that means curtailing lusts in this life and so it places its hope in something else that accommodates its lusts.
- D. This hope has a healing effect.
1. People have actually died of despair.
 - a. Paul's despairing of life was mitigated by resurrection hope. **2CO 1:8-9.**
 - b. “To despair is to turn your back on God.”
(Marilla Cuthbert in *Anne of Green Gables*)
 2. The power of hope can be seen in the effectiveness of a placebo in those who expect that the supposed remedy will cure them.
 3. Consider how often we say to someone who is suffering, “It will be alright.”
 - a. We are trying to impart hope in order to alleviate the pain.
 - b. Even the wicked believe that “it will be alright,” but in the end they will be disappointed. **PRO 11:7.**
 4. Since the gospel is a message of hope, the gospel brings healing. **LUK 4:18; PSA 107:17-20.**
 5. Perhaps it is through the gospel of hope that we have access to the leaves of the tree of life which are “for the healing of the nations.”
1CO 2:7 c/w PRO 3:13, 18 c/w REV 22:2.
- E. This hope puts our present trials into perspective. **ROM 8:18; 2CO 4:17-18.**
- F. This hope fosters patience and a sound mind. **ROM 8:24-25; 2TI 1:7-10; 1PE 1:13.**
- G. The afterlife is described in terms of things we value and enjoy on this earth, things such as precious stones, health, peace, joy, food and drink, loving relationships, social gatherings, gardens, and communion with God.
1. If these things did not bring us pleasure on earth, then we would fail to grasp their analogy to heaven.
 2. Pleasures in this life can never bring lasting satisfaction. They are rather foretastes of what is to come and should be received as such.
 3. Those who look for ultimate satisfaction in the things of this earth will move from one relationship to another, from one place to another, from one job to another in a futile search to find the real thing.

4. When you view earthly pleasures as foretastes of better things to come, you cease expecting those pleasures to give you ultimate and lasting satisfaction.
5. We set ourselves up for disillusionment when we expect from this world what it cannot deliver. **PRO 13:12.**
6. One can enjoy this earth more when he moderates his expectations from it.

VIII. What happens when someone dies? Is that the end of existence or does something continue on? Do souls migrate after death or reincarnate? Do souls hibernate or “sleep” in an unconscious state when one dies? Is there a kind of “half-way house” after death for saints (e.g., purgatory)?

- A. **LUK 16:19-31** provides insight which counters soul sleep, soul mortality, soul migration, soul detention, soul annihilation, reincarnation and purgatory.
1. Some (like Jehovah's Witnesses) affirm that this account is only a parable.
 - a. The text does not say that it is a parable.
 - b. The text does not use the common language of a parable, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto...,” etc.
 - c. Christ is not here using earthly things to speak of spiritual and eternal realities, as in parables. He is speaking of those great things themselves.
 - d. Proper names are used, unlike the indeterminate, “A certain man...” (**MAR 12:1**) which is common to Christ's parables.
 - e. Christ's parables used sensible, concrete things as analogies of spiritual things.
 - (1) Jesus never spoke parables such as, “A 4100-year-old man neglected his centaur...” or “An elf and a leprechaun were on a boat...”
 - (2) If conscious existence in hell is abstract nonsense, then it cannot be a parable of spiritual truth.
 - f. If conscious existence after death is heresy, then should we suppose that Jesus was using a heretical lie to teach a spiritual truth?
 - g. Ezekiel (among many harsh warnings) prophesied about conscious torment in hell (**EZE 31:14-16; 32:21, 30-32**). The rebellious unbelievers of his day wrote off his warnings as *parables*. **EZE 20:49.**
 2. **v. 22.** The souls of the righteous upon death are promptly carried into glory, where they have conscious existence.

c/w **LUK 23:43; PHIL 1:23; REV 6:9-10; HEB 12:23.**

 - a. To the Jew, being close to Abraham was the sum of all good.
 - b. “Abraham's bosom” implies reclining with him at the heavenly feast. **MAT 8:11 c/w JOH 13:23.**
 3. **v. 23.** The souls of the wicked upon death are contrarily cast into the torment of hell where they suffer consciously without ceasing. Their only comfort comes from the fact that they are not alone. c/w **JUDE 1:7; EZE 32:30-31; REV 14:11.**
 4. **v. 26.** There is no soul migration or reincarnation. Souls are consigned to one of two places of continual residence where they must stay until the Second Coming and Judgment Day. **REV 20:11-14.**
 - a. Some have speculated from texts like **MAT 11:13-14** that John the Baptist was a reincarnation of Elijah.
 - (1) Elijah never physically died. **2KI 2:11.**
 - (2) He furthermore was seen as himself on the Mount of Transfiguration. **MAT 17:1-3.**
 - b. Moses, who had died (**JUDE 1:9**), was still seen on that Mount as Moses,

- obviously in a state of conscious existence.
- c. Elijah and Moses on the Mount with Christ are typical of the *children of the resurrection* (**LUK 20:36**). All the elect, both dead and living, shall be caught up to meet Christ in the air. **1TH 4:16-17**.
 - d. Spirits of *devils* may leave hell to come to earth (**MAT 8:16; REV 16:14**) but not the souls of *men*.
 - e. The one occasion where a departed spirit returned momentarily to this world was a notable exception. **1SAM 28:11-20**.
5. Catholicism believes in Purgatory, which is "...a place between heaven and hell where sinners, through punishments, pay off the balance of the price for their sin before entering into Heaven. It is held that souls in purgatory can obtain earlier entrance into Heaven if they, while living, were devoted to Mary through the Rosary and the Brown Scapular, or through the Sacrifice of the Mass, or both." (Timothy F. Kaufman, *Graven Bread*, pp. 192-193)
- a. "So we presume all Catholics who die to be in Purgatory, although it may often seem more probable for a particular soul that it is in heaven or hell." (*Plain Facts*, p. 125, a Catholic publ.)
 - b. "We would appeal to these general principles of Scripture rather than to particular texts often alleged in proof of Purgatory. We doubt if they contain an explicit and direct reference to it." (*Catholic Dictionary*, p. 704)
 - c. Combining Purgatory with another error called the Treasury of Merit (which supposes that there is excess righteousness in Christ and the Saints that can be purchased by survivors of "purgatoried" Catholics to expedite their release to heaven), the Roman church has found a lucrative way of exploiting grief. But see **PSA 49:7-8; 1PE 1:18-19; MAT 23:14**.
 - d. The notion of a third destination after death (other than heaven or hell), the migration or transfer of departed souls, and the manipulation of the departed soul's circumstance by the living do not square with **LUK 16:19-31**.
 - e. Bless God for the liberating truth that eternal life is entirely a gift of God's grace according to His own will! **2TI 1:9-10; EPH 1:4-7**.
- B. **LUK 16:19-31** does show that there is conscious recognition between the inhabitants of heaven and hell.
1. Jesus had previously affirmed that the wicked's misery would be exacerbated by seeing the righteous dead in peace. **LUK 13:28**.
 2. That the rich man in hell saw Abraham "...afar off..." (**LUK 16:23**) may have implications for the hireling prophet, Balaam. **NUM 24:17**.
- C. **LUK 16:19-31** indicates that souls in hell or heaven have some knowledge of things on earth.
1. As to whether or not the departed saints have full cognizance of things on earth, we have limited information.
 2. Heaven is a foreign country, beyond the veil. We now only "...see through a glass darkly..." (**1CO 13:12**) into that land. Here are some considerations:
 - a. From **REV 6:9-10**, the souls of the martyrs are not totally ignorant of this earth.
 - b. **LUK 16:25** shows that Abraham had some knowledge of the affairs of earth, though God may have informed Abraham directly concerning the backgrounds of the two men (but this latter is not stated).
 - c. **ISA 63:15-16** appears to teach that Abraham was ignorant of the affairs of

his earthly brethren but the context implies that they were acknowledging the power of the *living* God to save as opposed to the powerless *dead* patriarchs.

3. According to **ISA 65:17**, the things of this earth are not to be remembered in the new heavens and earth, but this may not be absolute.
 - a. Similar terminology is used to describe the superiority of the N.T. church age over the O.T. in **JER 3:14-19**.
 - b. Obviously, N.T. apostles and believers have not forgotten everything about the ark of the covenant, etc.
 4. Conclusion: departed saints may have some cognizance of the affairs of earth, but just how or how much is sketchy.
 - a. Beyond what it is written, it is unwise to speculate, lest we be found “...wise in your own conceits” (**ROM 12:16**)” or “...intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (**COL 2:18**).
 - b. It suffices us to know that we serve a God *before Whose eyes all things are naked and open*. **HEB 4:13**.
- D. **LUK 16:19-31** does not support the belief that prior to the resurrection of Christ nobody went to heaven when they died, that the souls of the righteous were “imprisoned” (soul detention) in a netherworld world called *paradise* or *Abraham's bosom*.
1. It is said that during His entombment, Jesus went down to this netherworld which is the same plane as hell and preached to the spirits of the righteous, facilitating their release. This is based largely on a faulty interpretation of **1PE 3:18-19**.
 2. The *paradise* which Jesus promised the thief (**LUK 23:43**) was not some netherworld of temporary detainment. Other scripture proves that paradise is in the very presence of God in heaven. **2CO 12:2-4; REV 2:7 c/w REV 22:1-2**.
 3. The spirit of the saint in the O.T. upon physical death returned upward to God. **ECC 3:21; 12:7**.
 4. Elijah (a sinner who did not die), went to heaven. **2KI 2:11**.
 5. Moses (a sinner who died) was seen in *glory* on the Mount of Transfiguration prior to Christ's resurrection (**LUK 9:30-31**). *Glory* is where Christ was later received (**1TI 3:16**), and it is the final destination of all the saved. **1PE 5:10; ROM 8:30**.
 6. The context of **1PE 3:18-19** helps discern the time-frame and circumstances of the preaching unto imprisoned spirits. See **1PE 3:20**.
 7. **1PE 3:18-20** is describing spirits who are NOW in prison that WERE disobedient in the days of Noah. God preached unto them while they were living men by His spirit, the Spirit of Christ. **2PE 1:21; 1PE 1:10-12; 2PE 2:5**.
 8. At the time of Peter's writing in the first century A.D., the spirits of the wicked rebels of Noah's day were still in prison in hell, reserved unto judgment, just like the fallen angels and the wicked Sodomites. **2PE 2:4-6; JUDE 1:6-7; 2PE 2:9**.
 9. **1PE 3:18-20** is simply teaching that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the Spirit of God (**ROM 8:11**), the same Spirit which delivered His words in the days of Noah.