



1 Cor. 15:12-54

Life or Death after Death?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise.

16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

27 For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.

28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?

30 And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?

31 I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

32 If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

35 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"

36 Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.

37 And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain -- perhaps wheat or some other grain.

38 But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.

39 All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.

40 There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.

41 There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.

43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

47 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.

48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.

49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed --

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

[One of the most requested subjects I received was eschatology, that is the doctrine of the last things, the end times, and to tell the truth I hesitated to preach on that, first because it is such an involved subject, and also because it is the subject of our bible conference in the fall, and I'd rather have Derek Thomas tackle it any day. But I didn't want to ignore the subject entirely, so I've decided to do some very basic sermons. And I wanted to start talking about the end times and the final judgment not with the end of the world, but with the end of individuals, that is death for "*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*" (Heb. 9:27)]

I want to start by noting that while all men are in one sense mortal, that is we are all susceptible to death, we are also in another sense immortal

I. Why Do We Die?

Is this natural? The materialist assumes so. Most of you will have watched nature films where the cute little snow rabbit or gazelle gets jumped on and eaten by some large tooth and claw filled predator and

as this poor little animal is being killed, the narrator will say something like “we may be saddened by the horror of this scene, but it is nature’s way” implying that what is, is what ought to be.

But that isn’t the biblical view at all.

Death is the *enemy, it will be trampled beneath the feet of Christ*. It is a curse, and it came in because of the fall of man –

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned --

1 Cor. 15:21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

The souls and bodies of men were never meant to be separated.

But death while it is a terrible enemy, only has real power, a real sting, real victory, over those who have not been loosed from it’s bonds. Those who do not believe in Christ, who have not obtained forgiveness are still slaves to sin and will earn only death which is the wages of sin. Many men emboldened by the idea that there is nothing after death do live that “eat drink for tomorrow we die” life, and learn far too late that there is a judgment day.

For the believer in Christ that sting has been pulled, he has been set free from it’s chains:

Romans 6:22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

II. Difference in the Death of the Righteous and the Unrighteous

For the unrighteous death is the beginning of eternal punishment

But for the righteous “death is divested of its sting, and rendered powerless to do them any real injury. Not only is it disarmed of its power to hurt them, it is compelled to perform a friendly part to them. It is their release from warfare ; their deliverance from woe ; their departure to be with Christ.” – Robert Shaw

a) Still it consists in the temporary dissolution of the union between soul and body so we might ask at this point, **why must the righteous die?** Would it not be more fitting if all of God’s saints were directly carried up into heaven like Enoch or Elijah. We’d never again have to wonder if so and so was saved. We’d know without a shadow of a doubt.

There are good reasons though why we must die, we see of course the grace of God in supporting his saints – as the glorious end of 1 Cor. 15 indicates. As the hour of death is the most trying to men, so the power and grace of God are most gloriously displayed, in supporting his people in that solemn hour; in enabling them, in the exercise of faith and hope, to rise superior to the fear of death, and to triumph over this last enemy as conquerors

But the most important reason is so that in this as well, we might be conformed to the image of Christ our savior, so that just as he the first fruits died, was buried, and then gloriously rose again we too must enter into glory only after passing through the valley of the shadow of death under his care.

III. But What Happens to Our Souls after Death?

The bodies of all men go down to the grave, the bodies of the righteous rest in the grave waiting for the resurrection – only the righteous truly rest in peace, while the bodies of the wicked are imprisoned and await their resurrection to judgment – in both cases though the soul survives the death of the body in that sense all men are immortal. Death is never the end of existence.

a) Now while asleep in the Lord is often used to describe the state of the bodies of believers, it does not describe the state of their souls. Our souls do not sleep, but go in a conscious state to be with the Lord, as Paul put it, 2 Corinthians 5:8 ***“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”*** We see this also in other passages of scripture: In Rev. 6 we hear the souls of the martyrs in heaven crying out for judgment day to come, in Luke 16 in Christ’s parable of the Rich man and Lazarus we see both Lazarus and the Rich man are both very much awake, Lazarus in Heaven and the Rich man in Hell.

b) And that parable answers the next logical question, ***where do our souls go?*** The souls of the righteous in Christ go to heaven, and the souls of the wicked go to hell. There is no intermediate state. No purgatory as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. Christ did not tell the thief on the Cross, “someday, after the stains of your venial sins have finally been purged in the fires of purgatory, you will join me in heaven.” He said ***“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)*** That is why Stephen was able to cry out “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” even as he was being stoned to death. There is no waiting for those for whom Christ has prepared a mansion.

There is no need for purgatory, for while even the best of saints still sin in this life, when they die they are instantly glorified, made perfectly holy and join the assembly “of the spirits of just men made perfect” Heb. 12:23

The Souls of the Wicked however, go immediately to hell. Jesus puts the difference this way: “So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’”

In Numbers 11 the people of Israel had complained against the Lord and his fire broke out amongst them consuming some, and we read in Numbers 11:2 that ***“the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched.”*** But Jesus tells us that in Hell the “worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” Just as the rewards of the righteous have no end, the punishment of the wicked also is eternal.

Incidentally, this should also assure you that there really are no ghosts. The souls of men do not linger on earth, they are never trapped here. Unfortunately, however there are demons, and they are happy to pretend to be whatever will scare us, or make us superstitious or turn us from Christ. These servants of Satan are happy to masquerade as false gods, angels, and even the spirits of the departed. Remember their aim is always to deceive.

IV. What will happen to our bodies in the end? The answer is the main theme of these verses we read from 1 Cor. 15 - The Resurrection!

On the last day when Christ returns, “the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised” Just as Christ rose from the dead, we who have died in Him will be raised as well. In fact the bodies of all the dead will be raised, the bodies of the righteous shall be changed and they will be raised with glorious, incorruptible bodies. While the bodies of the unrighteous shall be raised to dishonor. As Daniel 12:2 **And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.**

And that is something else you need to remember, while the resurrection is clearer in the New Testament it is in the Old as well. Job gloriously looked forward to his own resurrection day, ***Job 19:25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;
26 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God,
27 Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!***

We will have the same bodies we died with, reconstituted. The bodies of unrighteous raised to corruption, judged and sent forever into the lake of fire, but the bodies of the righteous will be changed and made new. Glorious celestial bodies that will dwell in the new heavens and the new earth. Bodies that will never again wear out or decay suited for eternity.

Not all will die, some will be alive when he returns, but their bodies will also be changed “in the twinkling of an eye” as Paul puts it.

Application 1: Remember this, while we all have bodies that are running down, some suffer chronic illness, believer this suffering is only for a short while, the time is coming when your body will be renewed better than ever before. [Joni Eareckson Tada]

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Application 2: Remember also the difference that death makes between the Christian and the non-Christian, the persecutor and the persecuted. The Martyr may die in flames at the stake, the persecutor may live a long life and die in his bed, but the martyr passes into glory, the Lord Jesus receives his Soul, while the persecutor who dies like Stalin, shaking his fist at God descends into that pit from which there is no release for ever.

Application 3: There are only two eternal destinies, heaven and hell, and all the difference between them is Grace of God in His Gospel. How can you get to heaven?

John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

2 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

4 "And where I go you know, and the way you know."

5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"

6 *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

7 *"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."*

How can you get to Hell? Shall I tell you the secret? It's not hard. It's easy. Simply do nothing, ignore this message and my plea. Go on ignoring God and the Gospel, the offers salvation you hear. Tell yourself there is no afterlife. Content yourself to run after the things of this world. Pretend you will never die. Live your life like that rich man Jesus spoke about in **Luke 12:19** *'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." '*

20 *"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'*

If though, that isn't what you want and you are honestly asking like that Philippian Jailer asked Paul and Silas, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

Acts 16:31 *So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."*