



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 4 – THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

LESSON 81 – DEATH

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE – JOHN MACARTHUR, PGS. 399-451

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY – WAYNE GRUDEM, PGS. 439-528

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End of Life

- ▶ In this fallen world, human death is the harsh and inevitable final reality. Or is it final?
- ▶ Death involves the separation, for a time, of the soul/spirit from the body (James 2:26).
- ▶ At physical death, the body returns to the ground, where it decays, returning to dust from which it was originally formed.
- ▶ Genesis 3:17 “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. 19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”

End of Life

- ▶ God warned Adam that if he disobeyed then death would be the result (Genesis 2:17).
- ▶ 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—
- ▶ Death is the king of terrors (Job 18:14), and used by Satan to cause bondage to fear (Heb. 2:15).
- ▶ Death is referred to as our enemy that must be defeated (1 Cor. 15:26).
- ▶ Not only does death extinguish life, but it causes loss and grief for those who remain (Gen. 23:2; 50:1).

God, Life, and Death

- ▶ God holds sovereign control over life and death.
- ▶ 1 Samuel 2:6 The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up.
- ▶ Job 12:10 In whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?
- ▶ But one day, finally, death will die!
- ▶ Revelation 20:14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.
- ▶ The Scriptures link death with the final breath (Job 14:10; Gen. 25:8; Mark 15:37).
- ▶ The dignity of personhood begins at conception and ends at death. Since God's image is structural to being human, there never comes a point when a person becomes anything less than a full person. Being human is not what you do or can do; it is what we are.

Life After Death

- ▶ What happens to a person at death? There are several views:
- ▶ 1. Cessation of Existence – those who hold to a naturalistic worldview believe that death means the cessation of existence.
- ▶ Consciousness and thought are believed to be functions of the brain so once the human body dies, all consciousness and thought ceases.
- ▶ The body is buried and that is the end. There is no “next life.”
- ▶ This view gives a false hope that in death there will be no accountability for this life, no judgment to come, and so should not be feared.

Life After Death

- ▶ 2. Continuation of the Soul Only – Some believe that people possess an immaterial soul that survives physical death to exist in another realm. The physical body however is temporary and will not be resurrected.
- ▶ Only the soul is immortal in this view. Greek philosopher Socrates taught that the body was a prison for the soul.
- ▶ Plato also believed the soul alone survived at death – the persistence of personality without the body.

Life After Death

- ▶ 3. Annihilationism – This view teaches that only some people will cease to exist, but that believers will live forever experiencing the resurrection of the body.
- ▶ The wicked, they believe, will at some point be snuffed out of existence, either at physical death or after a time spent in hell.
- ▶ So the saved live forever while the lost cease to exist, being obliterated.
- ▶ Those who hold this view deny that God's character can be consistent with eternal, conscious punishment of the wicked.

Life After Death

- ▶ 4. Soul Sleep – This view asserts that physical death brings a temporary end to one's conscious existence until a subsequent day of resurrection. Just as you sleep with no memory (usually) of the time of rest, so a gap in consciousness occurs between death and resurrection.
- ▶ This view denies the intermediate state of conscious existence and requires resurrection before believers go to heaven.
- ▶ Defenders of this view are typical cult followers, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Christadelphians.

Life After Death

- ▶ 5. Reincarnation – Or the transmigration of the soul, asserts that at physical death the soul of a person inhabits another entity, such as a human about to be born, or an animal.
- ▶ Most often linked with Eastern religions, it is believed that all living things experience a cycle of births, deaths, and rebirths until they achieve and impersonal union with the highest reality. It is expected that reincarnation will happen several thousand times for this union to be completed.
- ▶ The Law of Karma governs the reincarnation process where what you do in one life will determine your next life.

Life After Death

- ▶ 6. The Biblical View of the Intermediate State – the Christian view is that the soul/spirit (immaterial part of us) lives in an intermediate state between death and the resurrection of our body. The body returns to the ground and the soul resides in another realm with God in heaven.
- ▶ The soul of an unbeliever is separated from God's goodness and mercy in hell, awaiting the resurrection to the final judgment.
- ▶ “The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour. The bodies of the just shall, by His Spirit be raised to honour, and made conformable to His own glorious body.” (2LBCF)

Life After Death

- ▶ Evaluating these views, the Scripture teaches that souls enter into an intermediate state of blessing (heaven) or judgment (hell) while waiting for the resurrection of the body. Three truths help us come to this understanding:
 - ▶ 1. Every person possesses an immaterial soul.
 - ▶ 2. An intermediate state exists.
 - ▶ 3. There is a coming resurrection.

Life After Death

- ▶ 1. Every person possesses an immaterial soul.
- ▶ That the human person possesses an immaterial soul was discussed in a previous lesson.
- ▶ At death we are told that the soul departs or that the spirit departs (Gen. 35:18; Luke 12:20; Psa. 31:5; Luke 23:46).
- ▶ Our spirit, another term for the immaterial part of our being, comes from a word that means wind, breath, or life force (Amos 4:13; Job 9:18; Psa. 135:17; Psa. 51:11; 106:33; Isa. 42:1; Gen. 6:17; Eccl. 3:19, 21).

Life After Death

- ▶ 2. An intermediate state exists.
- ▶ Paul clearly states that being separated from the body meant being with the Lord, alive and aware in His presence.
- ▶ 2 Corinthians 5:8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.
- ▶ He also said that departing this life to be with Christ is to be preferred over this current life on earth (Phil. 1:22-24).
- ▶ Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration (Luke 9:30-31), and the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) all point to conscious (living) existence even after physical death or being taken bodily to heaven.
- ▶ This refutes cessation, reincarnation, and soul sleep.

Life After Death

- ▶ 3. There is a coming resurrection.
- ▶ Multiple passages in the Old and New Testaments testify to the resurrection of the body (Job 19:25-26; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Romans 8:23; Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:23).
- ▶ The Bible's teaching on the resurrection of the physical body (and its subsequent glorification) refutes the view that only the soul continues to exist after death.
- ▶ Annihilationism denies the Scripture which teaches us that the wicked will experience eternal, conscious torment (Matt. 25:41, 46; Rev. 14:11).
- ▶ As eternal life is unending for believers, so too will eternal punishment for unbelievers. The relationship between the two is symmetrical and points to the absolute holiness of God and the cost for sin, paid by Christ, or the sinner himself.

Death Defeated

- ▶ Death is our enemy, but not to be feared.
- ▶ Death causes grief and loss, but we still have hope.
- ▶ Death will one day be defeated.
- ▶ 1 Corinthians 15:20 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.

Death Defeated

- ▶ 1 Thessalonians 4:13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.