

## Question #16: What Is Death?\*

### I. Why Do Christians Die?

- A. Death does not serve as punishment for Christians. The complete punishment for our sins was paid by Jesus Christ's work on the cross. There is no more condemnation for those in Christ (Rom. 8:1).
- B. Yet, God has allowed for his followers to experience some of the effects that the curse of sin has on creation.
  - 1. Christians still get sick, experience natural disasters, face injustice and acts of evil. In a similar manner, we still will die.
    - a) These happenings and circumstances should not be viewed as something that is natural in the world in which we live.
    - b) These things do not seem to have been a part of God's plan (Gen. 1:31) for his creation, but came about as a result of sin and the subsequent curse placed on creation because of it (Gen 3:14-19; Rom 5:12-21; 8:18-22).
  - 2. Ultimately, Christ defeated death with his work on the cross, yet death will be the last result of sin to be removed from this fallen world. Death represents the last enemy to be destroyed by Christ (1 Cor. 15:25-6).
- C. God uses death to complete the work of sanctification in our lives (Rom 8:28-30).
  - 1. God uses hardships, pain, and suffering to bring about good ends for those who are saved (Rom. 8:28).
    - a) God disciplines us, sometimes by means of pain and suffering, to bring about holiness and righteousness within in our lives (Heb. 12:6, 10-11).
    - b) God also uses suffering to teach us obedience and perseverance. Since this was Christ's experience (Heb. 2:10; 5:8), we should expect more of the same.
  - 2. The final steps in the plan of our salvation require that we pass from this life. To reach glorification, many, if not all, of us will be required to die (Rom. 8:29-30).
  - 3. Since we can expect God to use suffering to further and conclude our sanctification, our own comfort and well-being should not be the main focus of our lives. Rather, like Paul, we should seek to obey God and remain faithful to him in every circumstance of life (Acts 20:24).

\* The material in this handout is a summary of chapter sixteen, "What Is Death?" in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 108-112.

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### II. When Christians Die

A. The Christian should view his/her own death as a joyous occasion.

1. We should not fear our own death because Jesus died to deliver us from the fear of death (Heb. 2:15).
2. Rather, we should recognize that this is the moment that we will now be with our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
  - a) 2 Corinthians 5:8 -- Paul says that he would rather be at home with the Lord than in his present body.
  - b) Phil. 1:23 -- Paul states that departing and being with Christ is far better than what this world is presently offering.

B. The reason for such joy is that at the moment of death the Christian enters immediately into the presence of God (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23).

1. Since the souls of the saints are eternally happy in the presence of the Lord, there is no need to pray for them.
2. This understanding of Scripture stands in stark contrast to the Roman Catholic teaching which views even the souls of the saints as having to go to purgatory.

C. Although the death of a believer is a joyous event, those who remain should still feel sorrow and grieve at the loss of a believing friend or loved one.

1. The early church believers greatly lamented over the death of Stephen (Acts 8:2).
2. Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35).
3. Yet, the believers' grief is not a hopeless sorrow because we know that the death of a believer means that he or she is present with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:13).

### III. When Non-Christians Die

A. At the death of unbelievers, their souls go immediately to eternal punishment (Luke 16:23).

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1. There they await the day that their souls will be rejoined with their bodies for the last judgment (Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:12).
  2. Scripture does not hold out any hope for a second chance of repentance after death.
    - a) Luke 16:24-26 -- For the rich man, there is no escape from hell.
    - b) Heb 9:27 -- A person is only appointed one time to die, and then after this, that one must face the judgment.
- B. At the death of someone who we think has rejected Christ, there is not a mix of sorrow with hope (Rom 9:2).
- C. Yet, we may not know if a person responded to the Gospel at the last moments of life.
1. Certain death can cause great conviction, and the Spirit may use this to bring a person to the point of salvation.
  2. Nevertheless, we, as believers, can do great harm for the effectiveness of the Gospel in the hearts of unbelievers by saying that their unbelieving loved one is in heaven to comfort them in their grief.

### IV. When Are Christians Raised from the Dead?

- A. The final step in the application of our salvation will be the day that Christ returns and reunites our souls with our new, perfect bodies.
1. "The redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23-24) will be complete when we are "glorified" with Christ (Rom. 8:17).
    - a) Jesus Christ was the first to experience such a resurrection from the dead (1 Cor 15:20-21).
    - b) As believers, we will experience a similar resurrection (1 Cor 15:22-23).
    - c) Those Christians who are still alive at the return of Christ will have their perishable bodies changed instantly into imperishable bodies (1 Cor 15:51-2).
  2. All believers will receive renewed resurrected bodies like Christ did (1 Cor 15:20, 23, 49; Phil 3:21). This marks our glorification.

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- B. Our new bodies will be imperishable (1 Cor 15:52).
1. They won't grow old, wear out, or ever be subject to sickness. They won't age but will remain strong and healthy for eternity.
  2. These bodies will represent what God planned for us to be from the beginning of his creation. They will reflect the magnificent qualities that God wanted us to have when He created us "very good" (Gen 1:31).

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