

Someone once said, *“There are only 2 certainties in life – Death and Taxes”*... *And it seems to me, the wealthier someone is, the more successful they are in cheating their taxes, and **often** the wealthier someone is, the longer they can cheat death...* And today, millions (probably billions) of dollars, are being spent on research into various kinds of anti-aging gene therapy, and they have had some success in restoring age-damaged organs in miceⁱ. But eventually death **does** catch up with everyone... Or does it???

Today we’re answering the age-old question – a question that concerns every generation, “What happens when I die?”

Some people are more concerned with that question than others. It’s a question which some people don’t even think about, because for them, life and its continuation, is taken as a certainty.

But usually, when someone does consider “What happens when I die?”, what they’re looking for, isn’t necessarily truth, but a perspective on death (that they can believe) that will give them peace – Peace that “It’s all gunna be OK when I die.” Peace, that I’ll be able to handle death; or peace that death will take them away from their current pain; or suffering; or turmoil...

Now, when it comes to the world religions, there’s all sorts of perspectives about death:

- Some believe in reincarnation. If you lived well, you’ll come back as a higher lifeform. If you lived poorly, you’ll come back as a lower life form. But if you finally manage to rid yourself of bad karma (the effect of evil

action or evil intent), then you might have a chance to **escape** the cycle of reincarnation and your spirit will be absorbed into what they perceive as god – that spiritual force, present in the world.

that's what reincarnationists believe.

- Some believe when we die, we just go into a state of unconscious sleep
- Some believe those who have done good stuff in their life, will be rewarded with some kind of 'heaven', and that the wicked punished with some kind of 'hell'
- Some believe the good will be rewarded and the wicked will be annihilated – that means they will be destroyed (instantly and maybe painlessly) – they will simply cease to exist.

The band "Blood, Sweat and Tears" sing, "*I can swear there ain't no heaven but I pray there ain't no hell.*"

- Most **atheists** today believe that once you die, there's nothing. Consciousness stops; there is no spirit.... "Man", in their eyes, is merely an accident of time, chance and random physics and biology – consciousness is merely a chemical reaction, and when someone dies, they are no more...

And most people, with their belief, are looking for peace... They want to believe the pain will stop; They want to believe that what comes next, is going to be better, or that there is nothing at all... As long as there's nothing to worry about.

But what do **we** believe? Our belief – our faith, isn't something that should be based on wishful thinking. Our belief **shouldn't** be a quest to find an answer that gives us a feeling of peace – Our belief should be based on truth – it should be based on what God has told us in His word.

So, as disciples of Jesus Christ, what **do** we believe happens when we die?

- What do we believe about those who are saved?
- What do we believe about those who are not saved?

Well, we believe in the resurrection. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we believe that Jesus is the first-fruits of the resurrection... – He was the first. Yes, there were others who were raised from the dead, but that was a different sort of resurrection. E.g.

- the Prophet Elijah raised the widow's son back to life
- Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son back to life
- One day, a dead man was thrown into Elisha's grave, and his corpse came in contact with Elisha's bones, he came back to life
- Jesus raised a widow's son
- **And** Jairus' daughter
- And of course, how could we forget Jesus' mate, "Lazarus"?

All these were raised back to life (before Jesus was), but they went on to live-out their physical life, and die. But when **Jesus** was raised back to life, He was the first of a **different** kind of resurrection. His body, wasn't a normal physical human body any more – it was a glorified body. And we're

going to learn more about our new resurrection bodies in a couple of weeks time, when we study v35-58.... We will receive a new, Spiritual body. "Same, but different"...

So, what's the order? How does it all happen?

Well, Christ has already been raised. Jesus already has **His** resurrected, glorified body. But we're going to have to wait a little while for ours. V23 tells us, that when Jesus returns, is when we will be bodily raised.

²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

And that's backed up by what we find in 1 Thessalonians 4 as well:

1 Thessalonians 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with

the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Alright, so it's when Jesus returns, that we will be bodily raised. But what happens between death, and the resurrection of the body?... Well, this is where the Scriptures are a little more (“vague” isn't the right word) – they just don't define it precisely and exactly... - but we do get some little glimpses of what happens between death, and our resurrection.

So, what do we learn from these little glimpses?

1.

Well firstly, at the point of death, is when our separation **from** Christ, or unity **with** Christ, becomes permanent.

In Luke 16, Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man lived lavishly, and feasted sumptuously, and right at his front gate, was poor old Lazarus, starving, covered with sores... Longing, just to get some of the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table... Anyway, they both died. The rich man ends up in “Hades” (the Greek word for “the land of the dead”) (It's not the word for “Hell”, BTW [gehenna]), but it's pretty obvious that the rich man's place of death was **not** a pleasant place to be. It wasn't only a place of death. It was a place of torture and torment (βάσανος).

And the rich man begged Abraham to let Lazarus (who was by Abraham's side), to just bring a few drops of water over to cool his anguish...

But Abraham says, "We can't. There's a great chasm between us, that cannot be crossed."...

Alright, so at the point of death, our separation **from** Christ, or unity **with** Christ, becomes permanent. If when I die, I don't belong to Christ, there are no further chances.

2.

Which brings us to our second point: There are those who belong to Christ, and those who don't belong to Christ.

And it's only those who belong to Christ, who at the point of death, are **not** separated from Jesus, and who will be raised to eternal life.

We catch a glimpse of this, in Luke 23, when one of the criminals, hanging on a cross beside Jesus, confessed his guilt,
⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ And [Jesus] said to him, "**Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.**"

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul is talking about "death" as being away from the body. And he says he'd rather be away from the body, and with the Lord. Alright, even when he dies, he'll be with the Lord (but not in the body).

In Revelation 20, we catch a glimpse of the throne room of Heaven. And there in the throne-room of God, are the saints

who have been martyred for their faith. Yes, the devil may be able to kill the body, but that doesn't separate God's faithful witnesses from the presence of God.

When we die, those who belong to Christ are **with** Christ.

Which is why Paul could **confidently** say:

Romans 8:38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Only those who belong to Christ, will be raised to eternal life. And in the period between death, and when Jesus returns, our bodies have fallen asleep (They're rotting in the ground). But our soul, is in the presence of Christ... Now, we don't know exactly what that looks like, but it's what Jesus described as "Paradise", and that sounds pretty good to me...

3.

But not everybody who dies, goes to Paradise. Those who **don't** belong to Christ, when they die, they don't go immediately to Hell, but their separation from Christ, (which they've been living, by their own choice), becomes permanent.

And so they **won't** be in paradise. Until the day of their judgment, they're in the land of the dead (Hades), and while they await the day of judgment, the Scriptures seem to indicate that it'll be a time of torment. We've already seen this, with the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

4.

And then, at the second coming of Jesus, 2 things will happen. First, the disciples of Jesus, who haven't yet died, will be snatched up, and **all** those who belong to Christ (those who have been with Him in Paradise and those who have just been snatched up,) will be given new, glorified bodies.

5.

But the second thing that happens when Jesus returns, is the judgment of those who **don't** belong to Christ. They too will be raised, but they will be raised for judgment.

In v24, it talks in terms of **destroying every rule and every authority and power**. It says: ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

That's an image of total victory for Jesus, and the total defeat of his enemies. Who are the enemies of Jesus? Well, to **reject** Jesus, is to be an enemy of Jesus.

Sin, is the enemy, you see... :

- Sin, is the rejection of God;
- Sin, is trusting in my own righteousness, instead of depending on God;
- Sin, is whatever keeps my knee from bowing before Jesus as Lord...

And every worldly rule and power – every authority that is against Christ, will be defeated **by** Christ.

And in Rev 20, we get a very graphic picture of the day of judgment:

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

What's this book of life? It sounds like a pretty important book. It's the book with the names of all of those who belong to Jesus... It's a roll, of all of the faithful disciples of Jesus...

And if anyone rejects Jesus in this life, their name won't be in the book. They will be judged by their rejection, and on the day of judgment, they will be thrown into the lake of fire that represents Hell.

6.

And then will come the new Heaven and the new earth. We will begin new life, in the world as God intends it to be.

Wow!! That's all pretty important stuff, hey... It is critical, that on the day of judgment, our names are written in that book of life.

And I think that Corinthian church knew that.

Paul gives 2 examples, to help them remember that they know the resurrection is coming (and that it's important). The first example, was a rather bazaar practice that some of the Corinthians had, that probably wasn't the right thing to be doing.

In V29 he says:

²⁹ Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptised on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised on their behalf?

What's that about???

Well, it's weird, and even though Paul used it as an example I think it's important for us to realise that he's not agreeing with it, in fact he distances himself from the practice.

This verse has been the cause of countless theories and arguments and interpretations, but what it is plainly saying, is that there were people there, who were taking part in baptism of the dead by proxy. Essentially, what was happening was there were those who had become Christians, but they then died, before they got a chance to be baptised. And what happened, was people would stand in their place and be

baptised on their behalf. Sort of like when a medal is awarded posthumously.

Now, this is not a normal Christian practice and could be open to terrible abuse. What surprises us is that Paul didn't speak strongly against it. But we have to realise that he wasn't speaking about it, but rather using this silly practice as an example of how they should know better.

It is **those** people who are doing it. Not us. So he distances himself from the practice, but asks the question "if even these people do this, then surely, even they must even have a belief in the resurrection of the dead, otherwise it would be pointless.

And then he speaks about **us**. If there were no resurrection of the dead, then why would **we** risk life and limb for the Gospel? You and I risk very little to be Christians, but remember, those were the days that Christians were fed to the lions.

By the way, there was this Christian running from a lion, and called up to the Lord, "God, please make this lion a Christian". The Lion stopped, clasped its paws and said "Lord, what I am about to receive, I am truly thankful".

But seriously, why would people risk their lives?

The Open Doors websiteⁱⁱ, carries the stories of Christians who are being persecuted, all over the world. In June (so it's only a few weeks ago), there was this story:

Most of the victims were in their homes sleeping when the attacks began ... when Muslim Fulani militant herdsman began their killing spree in Nigeria that lasted four days, Thursday through Sunday evening and into Monday.

In only days, a dozen villages in Nigeria's Plateau state were wiped out. The affected communities surround the city of Jos—known as the epicentre of Christianity in northern Nigeria's Middle Belt.

As many as 200 Christians had been killed, however, some residents fear the death toll may be even higher, as more bodies are yet to be recovered, while others were burned beyond recognition. On Sunday, 75 of the victims were buried in a mass grave.

We are still gathering information about the violence, but the details we have so far reveal the scale and brutality of the attacks:

- 120 people who were attending the funerals of an elderly member were hacked to death as they returned home.*
- In another attack, in Gana Ropp village, a pastor, Rev. Musa Choji, was killed, as were his wife and son.*
- In Gidin Akwati, the whole community was burned down. Local sources say that some of those displaced are still hiding in the bush, as they haven't yet been able to find their way to a safe haven.*
- A pastor with the 'Evangelical Church Winning All' (ECWA) denomination, who wanted to remain anonymous for security reasons, said that following an attack on Saturday, his entire village was*

reduced to ashes, and more than 100 people lost their lives.

*The ECWA pastor said **more than 50 heavily armed Fulani herdsmen surrounded the village of Nghar, in Gashes district, at around 3:30 a.m. They burned down all the houses, as well as two churches. Only a few people were able to escape.***

*His wife's family was decimated. The assailants killed 14 members of her family, including her mother and sister. Others who had come to visit them were also killed. **In total, 27 people lost their lives in the same house. They were all burned to death.** Only one person—his wife's younger brother—survived, as he managed to escape through the roof.*

Christians are dying, every day of the week, merely because they belong to Christ, and the world hate them because of Him.

Now, why would they do that? If there was no resurrection of the dead (if there was no eternity), why would they risk life and limb for the Gospel? It's because it's true. The dead will be raised.

And those who belong to Jesus, will be raised to eternal life. And those who **don't** belong to Jesus, will be raised to judgment and the second death, which is the lake of fire.

What Paul is forcing this Corinthian church to assess, and what he is forcing us to assess today, is “Do I really believe this?”

Somebody once said, “You show me what you do, and I’ll tell you what you really believe.”

What we do with our life, demonstrates what we truly believe.

The world’s perspective is, “**Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.**”

They live as if there is no resurrection of the dead. They live as if there is no judgment of the faithless... And a lot of people who profess to being Christians, live exactly the same way...

And Paul would say to us this morning:

³⁴ Wake up from your drunken stupor [sober up], as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

If we truly know God, we’re not going to be living for today – we’re going to be living for eternity... How is the way we’re living our lives, any different to the way our non-Christian neighbours are living theirs?

If we truly know God, we live for eternity – not for today.

And the tragedy is, today, many people who claim to be Christian, are locked in to a worldly mindset, and aren’t living as true disciples of Jesus.

In v33, he says: ³³ **Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."**

And that is so true... Who do you run with?

If the people you spend most of your time with aren't Christians, you might have the attitude, "That doesn't matter – my faith's strong enough – they're not going to affect me." Don't be deceived... **"Bad company ruins good morals."**

I've met so many Christians who start dating non-Christians, and they convince themselves that their faith's going to stay just as strong. They been deceived. **"Bad company ruins good morals."** And in my experience, in most cases, when a Christian starts dating someone who isn't a Christian, it's not long until they're:

- they're drinking more
- they're swearing more;
- they're quicker to give in to sexual temptation;
- They might still get to church occasionally, but;
- they read their Bible less;
- their prayers become more self-centred;
- they fall away from serving God;
- their faith becomes more of a maintenance thing, rather than a living, vibrant thing; and
- they start chasing after worldly values instead of God's eternal values.

³³ **Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."**

We become like those we run with.

How well I know God, will be reflected in whether I'm living with an eternal perspective, or a worldly perspective.

And Paul says to that church, as he would say to our church:

Sober up and do what is right. Don't go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

Let's pray:

Oh Lord, In our heads, we believe the day of the resurrection is coming.

Please translate this from head knowledge, to heart action.

Lord, we know you a little, and we want to know you better.

In so many ways, we have been living with a worldly perspective, as if our short time on this earth, is as important as eternity in Your glorious new earth. And yet Lord, it isn't.

Lord, change our hearts.

Help us to live with an eternal perspective – not so that we can (in some way) earn our right to be in eternity,

But fill us with Your Spirit, so that we truly know you,

And so that the way we instinctively live in this world, will be in accordance with Your eternal values.

Lord Jesus Christ, you have saved us;

You have saved us now, already.

By faith, we have entered into Your eternal plan,

and Now Lord, develop in us, the instinct of an eternal perspective.

Lord, help us not to be deceived.

We confess to you, that sometimes ,
our greatest deceit, has been self-deceit.

We deceive ourselves into feeling that we're strong enough to resist the lure of the world, and who I hang out with, doesn't matter.

Lord, Your word tells us, a very different story:

Bad company ruins good morals.

Lord, fix our resolve, to run from bad company.

Draw us into fellowship, with your children, who **do** live with your eternal perspective.

And help us to break with those who don't.

And Lord, we pray with confidence,

“Your Kingdom Come”,

having no fear of the day of judgment,

but eagerly looking forward, to Your glorious new Kingdom on Earth.

in Jesus' name,

Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/aging-is-reversible-at-least-in-human-cells-and-live-mice/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/a-dozen-christian-villages-in-nigeria-wiped-out-in-four-day-killing-spree/>