

DEATH AND AFTER

The Christian's Anticipation of Death

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The human side of man knows that there is something unnatural, grotesque and wrong about death. There is no way to humanly beautify death. Man may live with death and some may accept it but we cannot change death's foul nature. A corpse is never beautiful and no embalmer's art can make death look attractive. In spite of death's endless repetition, it is still not natural and it will never be because death is caused by sin and sin is foul, ugly and vile.
- B. Whether we like it or not, death is still our enemy even as Christians. The Apostle Paul spoke of death as "the last enemy to be destroyed" (I Cor. 15:26). Death is our enemy as Christians but that enemy will be abolished because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. NOTE: Death must be faced honestly by the Christian and the solution for death can only be found in a deep, abiding faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, accepting the fact of death, finding its meaning in Christ and facing it squarely is not the same thing as being obsessed with it. "One can no more look steadily at death than at the sun." When a person contemplates Christ, death will take its proper place in God's plan for the Christian.

II. THE FACT OF DEATH

- A. Secular World: The secular world would state that death is the permanent, irreversible cessation of the vital functions of the body. Until recently, the lack of heartbeat was considered the final evidence of death, but with the use of modern machines there has been a shift from the heart to the brain. Death is declared by doctors as complete when there are no brain waves being produced and no oxygen flow to the brain.
- B. Religious World: Religious people, no matter what their religion, would consider physical death to be the moment the immaterial part of man leaves the material body.
- C. Christian World: True Christians would say that physical death takes place when the soul separates from the body and all bodily functions cease and the soul goes to its eternal destiny (heaven or hell). NOTE: Outwardly, it appears that Christians die in the same manner as non-Christians, but according to the Bible there is a difference. Unbelievers die but believers fall asleep (John 11:11-13; Acts 7:59-60; I Cor. 11:30; I Thess. 4:13-18). Christians fall asleep at death in the arms of Jesus and awake in His presence forever. NOTE: Just as we do not fear sleep, those who are trusting in Christ do not need to fear death.

I must for once be in dying circumstances; I must for once feel the real death of the body; my heart-strings must break; my eyes must fail; my pulse cease; I must, in my body, undergo a dissolution of it; my breath must cease, and go out of it, so as for me to be forced in this way into a world I have never seen yet. I shall be wholly passive in death; so I shall be in my entrance into the unseen state. All you need, O my soul, is to apprehend how safe you are in

the hands of Jesus Christ, and be perfectly persuaded that He is all-sufficient for you, and all you concerns, then as truly as he is now, and to give yourself no concern about what shall take place in you, and the change of state into which you will be removed (Samuel Eyres Pierce, Death).

III. THE FUTURE HOPE OF THE CHRISTIAN

A. The Hope of a New Body (II Cor. 5:1-8)

1. Context: In II Cor. 4:1 Paul begins to speak of the ministry in more detail and tells why he and the others do not faint at the terrific task. In II Cor. 5:1-8 he gives another reason why he does not faint for he constantly looks for death and the receiving of a new body.
2. “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down,” – This “earthly tent” speaks of the human body which is earthly. The words “torn down” mean destroyed or dissolved. If Paul is killed for the Gospel’s sake, he still has hope. The hope of a new body.
3. “We have a building from God, a house made not with hands, eternal in the heavens” – It seems as though in this context Paul is not talking about the final resurrected body the Christian will receive at Christ’s coming, but about some kind of a new, intermediate body that will house his soul and spirit in heaven while he awaits the return of Christ to get his resurrected body.
4. “For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven,” – Paul groans continually in this present body because of sin that is still present, but he is anxiously awaiting the new, future intermediate body he will receive if he should die (Rom. 8:23).
5. “Inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked.” – Paul seems to be assured that he will have some kind of body to house his soul and spirit after death.
6. “For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” – Again, Paul has confidence that a body would be provided to house his immaterial self.
7. “Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.” – God sovereignly worked in the Christian to bring regeneration (salvation). In saving the Christian, he saved the whole man and it is only natural that Christians would have intermediate bodies to house their eternal spirits after death. The Holy Spirit is a down payment to the Christian that there is much more to come. NOTE: The things that are in store for the Christian in the future are beyond the wildest imaginations.
8. “Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are home in the body we are absent from the Lord.” – The Christian has great confidence and courage because of the pledge and inner workings of the Holy Spirit that while he may presently be absent from the Lord’s physical presence the Lord is with him in his earthly body.
9. “For we walk by faith, not by sight,” – The Christian has never seen the Lord, felt the pledge of the Spirit, or seen an intermediate body, but he lives by faith, knowing that a spiritual body will be his at the appointed time.
10. “We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” – The Christian should desire to be absent

from the physical body through death because this would mean the very presence of Christ. The Christian at that time will be face to face with Christ.

B. The Hope of the Presence of Christ (Phil. 1:20-24)

1. Context: Paul in this chapter is speaking about the ministry in relation to suffering. He was at this time in a Roman prison but he was still determined in spite of the adverse circumstances, to magnify and exalt Jesus Christ. Paul knew that Christ would be magnified in his life or in his death (martyrdom) (Phil. 1:20).
2. “For to me to live is Christ” – Paul’s whole purpose for living was to please Christ. Apart from a life occupied with Christ, there is no meaning to life. Living is Christ (Col. 3:4; John 15:4-5; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10; Col. 3:17). NOTE: Christianity is not a system, not doctrines, not a code of ethics and not an organization, but a person.
3. “And to die is gain.” – This could be translated, “And to have died is gain.” This stresses the consequences or results of physical death. Death is gain for the Christian because death means full, total and complete fellowship with the person of Jesus Christ. The results of death are blessed but the act of dying may be difficult. Even though every Christian will be given dying grace at the moment of death, no one looks forward to the act of death because death is the enemy and there is a natural fear of the unknown. Yet the consequences of death for a Christian are beyond the wildest dreams of man. For the Christian death begins life and does not end it.
4. “But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me,” – As long as Paul was living in his present earthly body, he would be laboring and laboring meant spiritual fruit. NOTE: As long as a Christian can still breathe, God has a purpose for him.
5. “And I do not know which to choose.” – Paul had to make a choice in his own mind as to live and labor or die and be with Christ. He had a conflict in desire.
6. “But I am hard pressed from both directions,” – Paul was hemmed in and could not make up his mind on this issue. He wanted to die but yet he wanted to live and serve Christ.
7. “Having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better.” – There is a definite article (the) before the word “desire” in the Greek, showing that to die and be with Christ was Paul’s preference. The word “depart” means to break camp. Death is simply breaking camp and moving on to be with Christ. Paul obviously expected to be with Jesus Christ at the moment of death. Death is God’s servant to usher the Christian into the presence of Christ. NOTE: The words “very much better” are a triple comparative in the Greek, indicating that it was three times better to die and be with Christ than to live on this earth. Paul’s vocabulary does not match his concepts. To be with Christ is beyond human expression and too wonderful for the human mind to conceive. The appointed day of the death of a Christian is a glorious day! NOTE: Wherever and whatever heaven is, it is where Christ is and if Christ is there that is enough!
8. “Yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.” – Paul shows his unselfishness, for while his first preference is to die and be with

Christ, yet if God wills that he should live, he is ready to minister and labor among the Philippian believers.

IV. THE FAITH TO BELIEVE THAT DEATH IS GAIN OR HOW IS DEATH GAIN?

- A. The Christian will be with Christ (Phil. 1:23). He will be in the presence of Jesus Christ forever.
- B. The Christian will see Christ face to face (II Cor. 5:8). At that time there will be full knowledge of Christ and His purposes (I Cor. 13:12). The Christian's knowledge of Christ in time, at best, is still woefully incomplete, but at death he will see and know his Lord perfectly.
- C. The Christian will be free of sin forever. Death delivers the soul and spirit out of the body of sin (Rom. 7:24). It will be a wonderful state never to be a victim of sin or even think an evil thought.
- D. The Christian will be free from troubles and anxieties (Job 14:1; Psa. 21:10). There will be no more tears, heartache, frustrations or disappointments. Augustine said, "Life begins with a cry and ends with a groan, but at death all troubles die."
- E. The Christian will gain absolute holiness. At death saints will arrive at perfection; their knowledge will be clear, their sanctity perfect, and they need not pray ever again for an increase of grace, for they shall love Christ as much as they would love Him, and as much as He desires to have them love Him.
- F. The Christian will receive a heavenly mansion prepared for him (John 14:2-3). God has deliberately not told us much about heaven because it will be too wonderful for the human mind to comprehend.
- G. The Christian will have a full realization of his position in Christ – eternal life, heirs, etc.
- H. The Christian will fellowship with the saints of all ages. What fellowship that will be for there will be perfect love among the saints.
- I. The Christian will see departed loved ones who died in Christ.