

What Happens to People When They Die – Part One

"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." II Corinthians 5:1

The Bible is less clear regarding those who die outside of Christ than regarding those who die in Christ. Scripture teaches that those who die outside of Christ remain estranged from God throughout eternity, and await the final Judgment of God promised at the end of the age.¹ I am unclear as to what happens to them between the time of their death and the Judgment.

In II Corinthians 5:1-10 Paul elaborates on the fate of those who die in Christ. They leave their current body/tent for an eternal body prepared for them by God. For most, however, the latter does not immediately follow the former. If you die before Christ returns, you go to be with the Lord in your spirit, without your body. At the return of Christ, your spirit and body are rejoined, and in this state you serve Christ throughout eternity. As Paul says, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."²

Nothing in Scripture suggests that people have a second chance after they die. This life is the seedtime of eternity. "For he says, 'At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation.' Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation³...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"⁴ If you wish to prepare for Judgment, now is the time to do it.

¹ Cf. Revelation 20:11-15 ² I Thessalonians 4:16-17 ³ II Corinthians 6:2 ⁴ Hebrews 2:3

What Happens to People When They Die – Part Two

"Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." I Corinthians 15:12-14

Only those religions spawned by the Bible believe in the resurrection of the body, for reason suggests that because the body is the source of so much we hate, we are best served entering the next life without one. In this section of the Bible, Paul reveals why God considers the resurrection of the body an essential component in His plan of redemption.

God's creation was perfect. He perfectly created man in two parts, body and spirit/soul. When man sinned he died, first spiritually, in that he was estranged from God, and then physically, in that his body died and returned to the earth. For Jesus Christ to redeem man, He had to die both physically and spiritually, and His resurrection after His propitious death is essential for the consummation of that redemption, for how can a dead god save man from death?

The living God has a body, and this is the basis for the doctrine of the resurrection. That Christ is now living in a human body; that this Christ is a life-giving Spirit – these are the opposite but mutually dependent ideas around which Paul develops the doctrine of the resurrection. The incarnation is essential for propitiation, which in turn is foundational for the resurrection.

Christ's resurrection was a conquest over death, not a mere escape from the bonds of death. If the Savior could not conquer death, there is no hope for His followers. All people have hope, distinguishing them from the rest of God's creatures. Without the resurrection, the hope of the Christian is gone: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."⁵ This verse teaches that in this life you will be more miserable than the non-Christian in the sense that without the resurrection you are dead in your sins and the cost you paid for following the Saviour is all for nothing; if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, living life as a believer is more miserable than living life as a non-believer, for the non-believer can eat, drink, and be merry, and the believer undergoes meaningless persecution.

⁵ I Corinthians 15:19