



BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

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SERIES : "THE LAST THINGS"

Study 9 : "What Happens When We Die?" - October 8, 2006

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INTRODUCTION : to the series

The "Last Things" is a Series on God's ultimate purposes for his people & his creation. The Series will pick up on the main themes through the Scriptures; themes which find their ultimate fulfilment when Jesus returns to the world - the whole of creation is renewed, his people are "clothed with immortality," and God reigns supreme.

INTRODUCTION : to Study 9

From Study 6 (Resurrection)

If we are living when Jesus comes again - our bodies will be TRANSFORMED

If we are already dead - our bodies will be RESURRECTED

Irrespective of our state at Jesus Return, we will all have new, glorified bodies FIT FOR ETERNITY

... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ... We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet ... the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed 1Cor15:50-52

From Study 7 (New Heavens and Earth)

Our eternal home is this creation - RENEWED ... also fit for eternity

... we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. 2Pt3:13

Creation ... will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the Children of God." Rom8:21-23

Contrary to popular belief, biblically, our eternal future is in real bodies in a real world ... we do not exist as disembodied "spirit beings" living in the clouds, playing harps, for eternity!
BUT THAT IS FUTURE. WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DIE BEFORE THE LORD'S RETURN?

A. THE NATURE OF MAN : Muddied Waters!

A number of issues influence our understanding of the nature of man and cause considerable confusion when it comes to understanding what the Bible teaches.

1. GREEK PHILOSOPHY in the time of the New Testament saw the "spirit world" as the perfect reality of which the "material world" was an evil and perverted reflection. The "body" was the "prison" of the spirit (or soul) and death was a blessed release from that prison.

So pervasive has this influence been on how we understand the Scriptures, that there is the tendency to read these influences back into the biblical record - which **does not** see the body as a prison **and cannot** imagine life in its fullness without a body. "Christian" teaching on a strict separation between the "parts" of man (body, soul / spirit) owes more to ancient Greek philosophy than it does to the Bible (and Hebrew thought forms).

Greek : The Soul is truly itself when FREED from the body

Hebrew : The Person is a complex UNITY of body and soul and requires both to be truly itself

2. WIDE RANGE OF MEANINGS : The Hebrew word "nephish" is most often translated "soul" in the KJV Old Testament (472 times) However it has no single meaning on these occasions and must be understood by its context.

It can describe the attributes of man that transcend physical life, differentiate him from animals and mark him as bearing God's image. But often it just indicates "the whole person" or of describing an inner depth of suffering or understanding. It is also translated by "life" (118 times) and "person or self" (50). Another 26 English words are used as well. Given this, it is too easy to be selective on what "soul" means and then to be dogmatic about the conclusions.

3. PROGRESSIVE REVELATION : Particularly in regard to "what happens when we die" and the eternal state. The whole picture could not be described in the Old Testament because Jesus had not COME! *"Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light."* 2Tim1:10

B. THE NATURE OF MAN : Old Testament Material

1. CREATION : God "breathed" into Man and he became a "living being" ("nephesh") Gen2:7
"Nephesh" indicates that we are more than just a mechanical or material entity. NOTE : We are a "living being" made in God's image. "Nephesh" is not used here for a "separate entity" within man.

2. MAN & DEATH

"Sheol" is the place of all the dead, not just the "righteous." Translated as "pit" or "grave" The dead are "rephaim" - mere shadows (Is14:9;26:14; Ps88:5)

MAIN UNDERSTANDING : The dead are SEPARATED from their bodies and from the created world

IMPLICATIONS DRAWN : cut off from RECEIVING the blessings of God (appreciated through conscious existence) and from RESPONDING in praise and worship. (also requiring a living body that responds in the context of life's experiences.)

I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. ... Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction? Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? from Ps88:6-12 (see also Ps115:17-18; Is38:18-19)

Sheol (remember "Progressive Revelation?") is a testimony to the fact of continued existence rather than to its nature. The "bottom line" from the Old Testament is that both consciousness & identity are understood to CONTINUE after death.

Note that people's faith went FURTHER than Revelation in the Old Testament.

Belief in an eternal God of grace and compassion demanded that death and ("sheol") not be the last word.

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, ... you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. from Ps16:10-12

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God Job 19:26 (See also Ps49:15, 73:24)

C. WHAT HAPPENS To A Christian at Death? ... 4 Possible Answers

1. "SOUL SLEEP" - an unconscious state until the resurrection. This is claimed to be the significance of the many references to Christians "falling asleep" when they die. (eg. 1Th4:13-15)
But "asleep" seems to be just a metaphor for death - just as "awake" is for life :

He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 1Th5:10

The point of using the metaphor "sleep" is not to teach the nature of some "temporary state" but to indicate that death is not our final end; the morning will dawn - resurrection life in a new creation.

2. PURIFICATION - in some place to more fully prepare us for living in God's Presence. For example Roman Catholic theology places the dead in "Purgatory;" our prayers may help - as will any "surplus" of our "good deeds" that may be credited to them.

Mainly based on "tradition," Scriptural support is said to be found in 2Tim1:18 ((Regarding Onesiphorus) "May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day!") and from the Apochrapha - 2 Maccabees 12:42-45 where a monetary offering is said to have "made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sins" However, the NT affirms that our "status in Christ" is settled in this life. Eg. Rom5:1-10.

3. IMMORTAL SOUL lives on. We are disembodied spirits in heaven for eternity. (Probably the "popular" understanding ... unknowingly influenced more by Ancient Greek Philosophy. (See A:1)

4. TEMPORARY SEPARATION of "us" from our Bodies. "Personhood" and conscious experience continues in God's presence after the body dies. This is not only temporary, but also ABNORMAL - a consequence of the Fall, covered by God's gracious provision and to be put right at the Resurrection when Jesus returns.

D. WHICH ANSWER? New Testament Material

If we should die before Jesus returns? Then

"Today you will be with me in paradise" Jesus to the dieing thief (Luke 23:43)

"Look! I see heaven open... Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Stephen. (Acts7:57)

"For me to live is Christ, to die is gain. . I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far"
Paul writing while under house arrest. Php1:21-23

"...away from the body, at home with the Lord" 2Cor5:8

SO.... Which Answer?

TEMPORARY SEPARATION of "us" from our Bodies. "Personhood" and conscious experience continues in God's presence after the body dies. This is not only temporary, but also abnormal - a consequence of the Fall, covered by God's gracious provision and to be put right at the Resurrection when Jesus returns.

In Summary :

Can we answer the question, "What happens to us after we die? In detail? No. The Scriptures do not fill in the fine print . Because the Scriptures are largely silent, any theory about the exact nature of the "Intermediate State" will be tentative & speculative - and probably best left alone!

But the information we do have encourages a deep sense of security about our future even though we are unable to develop a detailed description of the intermediate state.

For the Christian there is no FEAR in death because our sin and guilt are dealt with and...

.... neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom8:38-39

At death, we will be "with Christ" (Lk23:43, Ac7:57), which is "far better" (Php1:23). On death "we gain" (Php1:21) Dieing is not so much a "leaving home", but a "coming home" to be with the Lord (2Cor5:8)

*My sheep listen to my voice. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish
. No one is able to snatch them out of my hand. John 10:27-28*

WE AFFIRM :

The complex unity of man - physical and spiritual.

That the death of Christ restores us from Spiritual Death (Eph2:4-5)

That the Resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of our own resurrection. (1Cor15:20)

That the Return of Christ "will bring all things together in heaven and earth" (Eph1:10)

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Php3:20-21