



What happens when
a Christian
dies?

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What happens when Christians Die?

All of us are born and then we will die. We all face death at some time. What does this mean for the faithful believer in Jesus Christ? There are many opinions about what happens at death.

Some believe that immediately after death we are unconscious or possibly even go out of existence into annihilation. There are also some who believe in universalism which says that the soul after death will have a second chance.

Some have the idea of a place called purgatory on the view that no one can go to heaven immediately after death unless they are perfectly holy, perfectly clean before they die. This means that there must still be a sort of intermission, a sort of transition, a state in which the soul becomes pure and prepared, so everyone can go to heaven. This view says that Christ's atonement is inadequate and we must finish the work ourselves. But the Bible

teaches us if we haven't denied ourselves and taken up our cross to obey Jesus, finishing school won't help.

What does the Bible say about what happens at the Christians death?

Some background information

In the beginning God created man in His own image and likeness. (Gen 1:26-27) He made him a body from the earth, and then He breathed His Spirit into him so that man was in character like Himself. *'Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.'* (Gen 2:7) Man became a living being, body and spirit, and all is good, his body was made as a suitable vehicle for his spirit to experience life on earth as a child of God.

Then man wanted to be equal with God. At that time God was no longer His God and the one to be obeyed; because man had decided to please himself, and in that way made himself

to be his own god. As a result man died in his spirit of goodness towards God because his spirit was now corrupted in disobedience. A further consequence was that his body was now corrupted and now subject to decay, disease and death along with the rest of creation. Gen 3:17-19

But God loved the man so much He sent His Eternal Son to earth, so that all who believed in Him and obeyed Him would have eternal life once again. This amazing offer of life was foretold in the Old Testament. *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”* Ezek 36:26-27

The repentant and obedient man would receive a new heart and a new spirit; the new heart referred to a new attitude of submission to God. And he would have the assistance of

God's own Spirit. Man was to be a new creation, (2 Cor 5:17) laying aside his old life of disobedience. *“Since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”* Col 3:9-10

When we are saved from sin and death by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ who died on a cross in our place, our spirit is made alive again to God, but our bodies have to wait for redemption along with the rest of creation until Christ comes again. Rom 8:23

So when man dies his body remains in the earth. If he is a Christian his spirit will be called up to be with God. Those who have not believed in and obeyed Jesus Christ will not see life. (John 3:36) For the unbeliever, there is no golf course in the sky; not even a sunny day, there is no resting without a worry in the world. Instead their bodies will remain in the earth as with us, but their spirits will

experience unrelenting torment as all the good in man and creation is now absent in their existence; because they reject God they reject all the good that comes from the God they reject. They will live amongst all the unrestrained human evil and treachery which Satan has bought upon mankind.

When Christ returns the believers will receive their resurrection bodies, they will be heavenly bodies so they will be complete, body and spirit according to God's original plan. But those who have not believed and obeyed Jesus Christ will only see judgement and eternal suffering in darkness without any light of the glory of God's grace.

Back to the present

The Bible teaches us that we remain conscious even though our bodies sleep in the ground. The Bible also teaches that there is no second chance, Christ will come to claim those who love Him and there will be judgement for those who don't. (Matt 25:1-13,

31-46) Therefore there is no place of purification in a half way house, the work of Christ is sufficient for all who truly believe. The Bible teaches us that the spirit of man continues in existence after death, some to eternal life and some to eternal judgement and separation from God into a state we call hell. It is hell because God is the source of all good, in hell there is a complete absence of good.

We must remember what the Bible teaches us about our new birth by the Spirit into the image and likeness of God, (Col 3:10) so that we can be holy as He is holy. We are now spiritual beings. Our home is in heaven. (Phil 3:20) We are a new creation. (2 Cor 5:17) We have received the Spirit's anointing. (1 John 2:20) We are the temple of God and the priest of God. (1 Cor 6:19) The Bible teaches us we have fellowship now with the Father and the Son while we are alive on earth. (1 John 1:3, 7) Jesus has said He has shared the glory given

Him by God with those who faithfully follow Him. John 17:22

The bible teaches us that the believer can say *"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."* Gal 2:20

Any view of life after death must consider these important things. So in considering what happens after we die, we cannot ignore all that has been taught us in the word of God.

So it is inconceivable that what God has done in us to draw us closer to Him and teach us about Himself, would be put asleep until sometime in the future. It is hard to believe that the relationship that already exists between God and man isn't enhanced by the removal of the hindrance of the flesh at the time of death; the flesh which remains to be redeemed in the coming of the Lord. Rom 8:23

Without the Scriptures we would know nothing about the things between the time of our physical death and the time of the Lord's coming: the intermediate state.

The intermediate state refers to the state of man in the absence of the body. In this situation we now refer to the believer, the Christian. We cannot talk in the same breath of the believer and of the unbeliever when we speak of the intermediate state.

We are also concerned with heaven to be experienced at death, not the new heaven to come. The final kingdom of heaven to come is pictured in Scripture and we can have some kind of idea of what it is like. In this sense the Bible speaks of the new creation, a new heaven and a new earth when all the created things of earth shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption and shall enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The question we now face is not about the final state, of the final realisation of the

kingdom of God in glory. We are concerned with heaven as it is now, as we will know it when we die before the Lord returns.

What is death?

Death is nothing but a transformation. Death is not annihilation. Death is a transformation from one state to another, just as the Lord speaks of the seed that falls into the earth and dies and then brings forth much fruit. That death of the seed does not mean that the seed disappears. A seed of wheat that you plant in the earth stays there and is transformed in the earth. It does not disappear; it is so transformed that the living kernel sprouts up and grows into a fully developed wheat plant. So is death, death both for the righteous and the wicked. Death is a mystery, but death nevertheless means a transformation in our life; one to eternal life, and the other to eternal judgement and death.

On the one hand, the transformation means "*absent from the body.*" The apostle says in

2 Cor 5:1, "*We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved.*"

This tabernacle we live in is going to be dissolved. This tabernacle in which we live, in which we were born, in which we speak, is going to be dissolved. That is, the human senses are going to disappear: the eye, the ear, the nose, the smell, the taste, the touch. It is all going to disappear through death. It is going to disappear as far as we are concerned.

On the other hand, all that will be left alive is a transformed spirit changed in such a way that instead of seeing earthly things, we will see heavenly things. Instead of sensing with whatever senses we may have on earth, in heaven we will sense with heavenly things.

It means that instead of seeing the world and hearing the world and all things in the world, we will see Christ and hear Christ and be with Him, "*which is far better,*" says the apostle Paul. It is that kind of transformation.

Scriptural View of the Intermediate State

The Scriptures speak of the intermediate state enough for us to form some conception about that state between death and the resurrection. Already in the Old Testament the psalmist declared that God would not leave his soul in hell, and that, on the contrary, He would show him the path of life even through the mystery of physical death. As the psalmist puts it, "*Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory.*" Psalm 73:24

In the New Testament the passages that concern the intermediate state are many. The Lord says to the penitent thief on the cross, "*Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.*" (Luke 23:43) Take a look at 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 '*For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we,*

having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— for we walk by faith, not by sight— we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.' How can we be absent from the body and dead in the ground at the same time?

We are told that if the earthly house is dissolved, *we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* We have this building of God immediately after the house of this present tabernacle is dissolved. There is nothing in between. We have a house of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. That is not a temporary

body. That is not a body that will come at the resurrection. No! This is the state of the saints immediately after death in the house of God with Christ. This existence is a spiritual reality.

The apostle Paul says it will be far better for him to die and pass on, for then he will be with Christ. (Phil. 1:21-23) He will be with Christ immediately after death. Christ's promised the penitent thief, "*Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.*" (Luke 23:43) Today!

That means, in the first place, that the death of believers cannot be understood to be the same as the death of every man. What happens in the death of believers is not only that the body is separated from the spirit, but also that the outward man is separated from the inward man, the new man from the old man. The old man is earthy. The old man is sinful. The old man is corrupt and defiled. The new man is heavenly, holy, and immortal.

Immortality characterises the new man. And therefore the words of Jesus Christ apply here: *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"* John 11:25-26

That is immortality beyond physical death. This passing into glory is immediate. When we die, we will be with Christ. We look forward to glory when we die. This is our personal testimony; this is our hope as we wait for its realisation every moment.

Scripture tells us that the saints after death will continue to exist consciously. The Scriptures also teach us that this conscious state immediately after the moment of death will be a state of glory.

The Bible tells us that there is a house of many mansions. That house of many mansions is not to be identified with the new creation, but is certainly the state of the saints and of Christ immediately after death. Christ

went, immediately after death, into the state of the house of many mansions. And He tells us, *"Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now.... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"*

John 14:2

Where is heaven?

Heaven is where God rules absolutely. Heaven is therefore not far off, but in our midst, for Heaven is where the Lord is, and the Lord dwells in us by His Spirit. (Rom 8:9) Because Christ lives in us, Heaven is here and God is at work in us to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Phil 2:13) Jesus said, *"If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honour him."* John 12:26

We shall enter into His glory. *'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.'* (Rom 8:18) *'For I am*

convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Not even death.

Rom 8:38-39

In heaven there will be the glory of a perfect fellowship. In the house of many mansions we shall have perfect fellowship with God and see Him face-to-face and know Him as we are known. God is there! Our God and our Father! And we will have fellowship with Him forever!

The heaven that ultimately awaits believers when Christ returns is the New Heavens and New Earth. (Rev 21-22) Heaven will indeed be a physical place. Our physical bodies will be resurrected and glorified, made perfectly fit for eternity on the New Earth. Currently heaven is a spiritual realm.

We can rest assured that believers in heaven are perfectly content, enjoying the glories of heaven and worshipping the majesty of the Lord. In Heaven there is Christ. Christ who loved us even unto death, and bore for us all the wrath of God that we might have everlasting life in Him so we can fellowship with Him and enjoy His presence.

In heaven there is the perfect fellowship of the saints. All the saints! From Adam to the present moment, and to the moment when the Lord shall take the last elect into heavenly glory. That whole throng of saints will be in heaven, and all shall glorify the God of our salvation in perfection, in his own voice, in one grand harmony. That will be glorious.

God gives us comfort in His word

Scripture certainly comforts us with the assurance of immediate glory in the house of many mansions that is the intermediate state. Nevertheless we must always fix our eye upon the final end of all things. The intermediate

state is not the final end, neither for us nor for the saints who have gone before us into heaven. We and they together must still wait and look for the final coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the final rest. That is the perfect object of our hope. Then, when the whole church of the elect shall have been gathered in the new heavens and the new earth, and when the tabernacle of God shall be with men forever, then our hope shall be realised.

Until that time they and we, in heaven and on earth, must wait and long for the coming of the day of Jesus Christ, our Lord. "*He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly."* Amen. *Come, Lord Jesus.*" Rev. 22:20

The Bible makes it clear that deceased believers are with the Lord. '*Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say,*

and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 2 Cor 5:6-8

The Bible shows us that to be with Christ is better than living in the flesh. *'But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better.'* Phil 1:23

The Bible also indicates that the resurrection of believers has not yet occurred, meaning that the bodies of deceased believers are still sleeping in the grave.

1 Cor 15:50-54; 1 Thess 4:13-17

The Bible also points out that the physical body is dead when the spirit separates from it. *'For just as the body without the spirit is dead'* James 2:26

The Bible gives some indication of the intermediate state in Rev 6:9, *"I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained."* In this verse John is given a vision of those who will be killed

because of their faith during the end times. In this vision those believers who had been killed are under God's altar in heaven and are described as "souls." So, from this one verse, if there is a biblical answer for the intermediate state, it would seem that believers in heaven are in spiritual form until the resurrection.

Paul also said that "*while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord*" and that therefore he would "*prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.*" (2 Cor 5:6-8) Consequently, it is important that he speaks of the possibility of being *absent from the body*. This implies that we indeed do have souls which continue existing after the body dies. Furthermore, notice again that he speaks of this state as his preference, which indicates that we not only continue existing between death and the resurrection, but that we are aware of our existence.

Phil 1:23

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” John 11:25-26

"After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also." John 14:19

Abide in Him

Living Water Resources



Come to the river

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

John 11:25-26

Robert C May

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