

A Biblical Perspective of Death for Believers

By Ellen DeWitt

- ◆ **Why should we talk about death?**
- ◆ **Why does death exist?**
- ◆ **How does the Bible describe death for believers?**
- ◆ **How should we face our own death?**

C. S. Lewis observed that the statistics on death are impressive--so far it is one out of one! It's a certainty. Death awaits us as the concrete floor awaits the falling light bulb.

Why should we talk about death?

An animal apparently does not know that one day it will die. But man does know. This knowledge requires man to make decisions in this life to prepare for the next life.

Before you die, you determine two things:

- (1) Whether you will spend eternity in heaven or hell. The Bible says, *For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:16).
- (2) What eternity will be like for you as a believer. The Bible says *God will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built remains, he shall receive a reward* (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

Why does death exist?

In the Garden of Eden, God commanded Adam, *from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die* (Genesis 2:17). Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God and eating from the tree (3:6). The result was death--spiritual death (they were separated from God and needed to be redeemed by the blood of Christ (Romans 6:23 5:12-21) and physical death, *to dust you shall return* (Genesis 3:19).

Attempts to see beyond death

Channeling is using a spirit medium, or a psychic, to contact the dead. Demons can impersonate the dead to create the illusion that the living can communicate with the dead. The Bible says, however, that whoever *does these things is detestable to the Lord* (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 17; Deuteronomy 18:10-12; 1 Corinthians 10:19-21).

Reincarnation teaches that we physically die many times, but our spirit keeps being recycled. The Bible says, however, *it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment* (Hebrews 9:27).

Near Death Experiences must be carefully evaluated to see whether they conform to the biblical picture of the hereafter. Satan wants people to think that one's relationship to Jesus has nothing to do with the beauty and light that awaits everyone, that there is no judgment, no examination of one's life. Satan's most believable lie is that everyone will be saved. Rather than take the word of a near-death experience, we would do better to take the word of Jesus, who actually did die and rose again (Matthew chapters 27 and 28).

Fear of death

Satan does not have the power over death in the sense that he determines the day a person dies, but he does use the fear of death to keep people in bondage. But Christ came that He *might deliver those who through the fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives* (Hebrews 2:14-15). By telling us in the Bible exactly what happens after death, we learn the truth. And Christ says when *you shall know the truth, the truth shall make you free* (John 8:32). Although an insect can still frighten us when the stinger is gone, it can do no damage. So, Paul says, *O death, where is your sting?* (1 Corinthians 15:55).

What the Bible says about death for the believer

- ◆ At death, you will see angels, who have the assigned responsibility of escorting you to heaven. ... *it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels* (Luke 16:22).
- ◆ The moment we leave this body, we go to be immediately with Jesus, *to be absent from the body to be present with the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:8).
- ◆ Paul spoke of his death as a departure from this life (2 Timothy 4:6), to go to a better place. He expressed *having the desire to depart and be with Christ* (Philippians 1:23).
- ◆ Paul also spoke of death as a dismantling of a tent, a temporary dwelling place, in order to go to our eternal home. *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* (2 Corinthians 5:1).
- ◆ Death is necessary because *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. We need to leave these mortal bodies behind. ... for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed and this mortal must put on immortality* (1 Corinthians 15:50-55).

Christ's example of how to die

Jesus does not ask us to go where He has not already gone before us (John 13:36, Hebrews 6:19-20).

(1) He died with the right attitude: a mixture of grief (Matthew 26:38) and joy (Hebrews 12:2). We should not feel guilty facing death with apprehension. Christ experienced emotional agony the night before the horror of His death on the cross. Yet if we can look beyond the immediate heartache to the eventual glory, there is joy. The exit is grievous, the entrance is joyful.

(2) He died at the right time: Jesus died at the exact moment planned by God (John 13:1). Our death is just as meticulously planned as the death of Christ (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2). God can control diseases and restrain the wicked. The immediate cause of death might be any number of things, but the ultimate cause is God. There is nothing you can do to change His timetable.

(3) He died in the right way: There are many ways to die--disease, accidents, murder, suicide, etc. The circumstances differ for each person. God planned the horror of the cross for Christ's death. The time and means of our death is also in God's plan. Christ said, *do not fear those who kill the body, but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell* (Matthew 10:28). If we fear God, we need fear nothing else.

(4) He died with the right commitment: Death can be a time of trust in God. Christ's last comment was, *Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit* (Luke 23:46).

Our future existence is not in the hands of doctors, disease, or the drunk who runs into our car on the highway. Our death is in the hands of God Almighty, Who can use any means He wishes, including the above, to bring us into heaven to be with Him forever.

Charles Spurgeon said, "You do not want dying grace until dying moments. Ask for living grace and glorify Christ you shall have dying grace when the time comes." Sorrow and grief are to be expected. But we do not grieve *as do the rest who have no hope* (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

D. L. Moody said before he died, "Soon you will read in the papers that Moody is dead. Don't believe it, for in that moment I will be more alive than I have ever been."

Questions and Answers

Q: *Why should we talk about death?*

A: To prepare for eternity.

Q: *Why does death exist?*

A: It is the penalty of sin.

Q: *How does the Bible describe death for believers?*

A: As going home to be with Christ.

Q: *How should we face our own death?*

A: As we live life, trusting in God, knowing the time and manner of death are in God's hands, and as Christ said, *Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.*