

"Practical Eschatology: What Happens the Moment I Die?"
For the week of April 11, 2021

In the beginning, the world was God's kingdom and it operated per His ways. Then Adam and Eve sinned, which changed everything. Sin resulted in physical death, but it also resulted in spiritual death from which the only escape is salvation by grace through faith. The Old Testament writers understood all this, but not a lot more. Their knowledge went to the grave and not much further.

Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God, but the people thought of a physical kingdom on earth, like the Roman Empire but ruled by Jewish law. Jesus explained it will be a physical kingdom, but only after this world comes to an end as we know it. So, the big question was what happens between now and the end-time coming of God's kingdom on earth? Jesus answers this question with a new revelation that for the first time people would know the details of what happens after death and how their behavior affects what occurs to them on "the other side."

Opening Question

Are most people scared or hesitant about talking about dying? Why or why not?

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Read Luke 16:19-31. Describe the contrasts between the rich man and Lazarus.

The rich man lived to acquire more wealth and then to enjoy it fully. There is nothing wrong with earning and enjoying wealth so what is the problem with the rich man?

What Happens to the Unbeliever?

Now let's look at the passage with some truths as it relates to the unbeliever (e.g., the rich man):

- They go immediately to torment (verse 23)

Was there a gap between death and going directly to torment? How does this give urgency to our present life and sharing the gospel with others?

“Torment” comes from a Greek word meaning “severe pain caused by torture.” It originated with ancient coin inspectors who tested currency by bending, biting, cutting, or melting it. How do you envision torment for the unbeliever?

- They are conscious of their torment (verses 23-24)

The Pew Research Center recently surveyed Americans about hell. Here are some results:

58% of adults overall did NOT believe in hell.

29% of Catholics do NOT believe in hell.

11% of evangelicals do NOT believe in hell.

29% of mainline protestants do NOT believe in hell.

65% of religious “nones” do NOT believe in hell.

Discuss in your community group the results of this survey. What are reasons for this unbelief? Does the Christian church have some responsibility for these results? If so, what should be done? Finally, do you and I share responsibility? If so, what should each of us be doing about this?

- This torment is eternal (verse 26)

Does the Bible teach the doctrine of eternal death? Look up the following passages for insight:

Daniel 12:2

Matthew 25:46

Revelation 20:15

Teaching on the doctrine of death opens one up to scorn and ridicule. Why is the doctrine of death an unpopular doctrine to teach or proclaim?

What Happens to the Believer?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

- While in this body, we are away from the Lord (verses 6-7)

Paul says that to be “at home in the body” means to be “absent from the Lord.” The contrary is true: to be “absent from the body” means to be “at home with the Lord.” Paul prefaces this comment by saying we are to be of “good courage.” What does that mean? And Paul also mentions “faith.” How can faith give us confidence for the future, even though we cannot see the fullness of the coming glory?

Two false claims have been given by other religions. One is “soul sleep,” where there is an unconscious hiatus before resurrection. The second is the idea of purgatory, which is an intermediate state where a Christian’s soul goes to after death to be cleansed of the sins that had not been fully satisfied during life. Both positions are unbiblical. How do verses 6-10 counter these false positions?

- When we die, our spirit and body are separated (verse 8)
- Our body returns to the ground (verse 8)
- Our spirit goes to be with Christ (verse 8)

Comment on this explanation of verse 8 from ESV Study Bible: *“Paul means that when he dies, though his physical body will be buried here on earth, he expects that he (as a “spirit” or “soul” without a body) will go immediately into the presence of Christ and will be present with Christ in that condition until the day of resurrection.”*

- We will give an account for how we lived (verses 9-10)

At the “judgment seat of Christ,” Christ will not judge believers to determine innocence or guilt. Why will innocence or guilt not be judged (see 2 Corinthians 5:21)?

At the “judgment seat of Christ” our future reward in the kingdom of God will be determined. What will it be based on (see 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 4:4-5)?