

What Happens After Death?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as we continue then our progress coming towards the end of the biblical basis behind our church's confession of faith, we come to the basis behind chapter 32, the penultimate chapter in the confession of faith, and this is entitled, Of the State of Men After Death and of the Resurrection of the Dead.

The State of Men After Death and the Resurrection of the Dead. Now, obviously we know that we all die, it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment.

And Christ likewise, he likewise himself died once upon the cross, and thereafter rose again victorious over the grave. And unless the Lord comes back first, we shall all die sooner or later.

And as Paul puts here in the chapter, I'll show you a mystery, verse 51, we shall not all sleep, not everybody in the world will die, because there will be some left alive when the Lord comes back.

But we shall all be changed. In a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump, and a trumpet just sang, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

[1 : 1 4] But if the dead are being raised incorruptible, fine, at the last trump, at that moment, when Christ comes back, what happens to us immediately then after we die?

Well, first of all, we can state categorically there is a resurrection of the dead. This is part of what Paul has been testifying in this extensive chapter in 1 Corinthians 15, where we read, you know, if we were to go back prior to what we started to read in verse 12, 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. There is a resurrection of the dead to which Paul testifies, you know, as being spoken of in the Old Testament scriptures.

Remember his testimony before the governor, Felix, and so on, and in front of the Jews. He said in Acts 24 at verse 14, But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets, and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust.

A resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust. Now, it's easier in some ways, although it's not technically correct, that we can speak of a resurrection of the soul and a resurrection of the body.

[2 : 5 9] Technically, the soul is not resurrected because it doesn't die. We receive our souls. Our souls are not eternal, technically. Only one is eternal.

That is God. That means he has been from all eternity to all eternity. But what our souls are is immortal. Once they are conceived and brought into being, they never die.

They haven't been from all eternity, but they have a starting point, and that is when we are conceived in the womb of our mother, when our body begins to form and the cells begin to form, as soon as there is that fusion which the Lord brings about between the seed of the mother and the father, joining together, creating one new human being.

From that instant, that new human being, even though its cells are not yet completely formed or multiplied, an immortal soul has been brought into being.

And therefore, whether that child should perish from the womb by natural causes or tragically be taken from the womb artificially, as is so often the case, nearly 9 million abortions in the United Kingdom since it was legalized 350 years ago.

[4 : 13] So a huge number of children are taken violently from the womb. But in each instance, it is an immortal soul which then dies. The soul doesn't die.

The child dies. An immortal soul has been brought into being, and that soul does not die. That soul is, from that moment of conception, immortal. And Christ has brought this immortality into being through his own creative work.

1 Timothy 6, verse 16, Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen nor can see, to whom the honour and power everlasting.

Amen. If anything is immortal, Christ has made it. He has brought it into being. 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verses 9 and 10, Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

[5 : 25] Life and immortality to light. So, likewise, that which is immortal, it cannot die, it does not sleep. The soul goes on forever.

And it goes on forever, even when the body has died. This resurrection of the soul, if we can call it that, as I say, it's not technically correct, but, you know, we use lots of terms that are not technically correct.

We talk about a bigger half, when really if something is cut in half, then they must be absolutely equal. We talk about something being, you know, quite unique, or very unique, which is incorrect as well.

If something is unique, there's literally only one of it. So you can't modify it by being very, or being quite, or whatever. We use these terms all the time that are not technically correct. I think it is helpful for us to recognize that there is what we could call a resurrection of the body, and a resurrection of the soul.

The resurrection of the body will happen at the last day. The resurrection of the soul is immediate at the point of death. Whenever the body and soul are parted from one another, the soul will go immediately to one of two locations.

[6 : 39] And it will be immediate. We know that it will be immediate, because, again, Scripture testifies to it. If those who remain behind, and who are still there when Christ comes back, will be either permanently with them, or permanently separated from them, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, then it is likewise the case that when the body dies, the soul immediately goes to its eternal destination, either to be with the Lord for all eternity, or to be separated from him for all eternity, which, of course, we call hell, to be without the Lord.

We know that it is immediate, because Jesus says, remember, to the thief on the cross, he says, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom, and he says, Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

Now, what was happening that day? Jesus was going to die himself on the cross, and after he had died, Pilate marveled that he had died so quickly. The soldiers came, and they broke the legs of the other two thieves, because they were still alive.

But it was that day, that special day, preparation for that high holy day, the Sabbath day, the Passover time, it was so that they would take the bodies down from the crosses before the onset of the holy day.

So, we know that those two thieves were both killed before the end of that day. So, Jesus said, you know, today thou shalt be with me in paradise.

[8 : 14] Now, Jesus' body was put in the grave. We don't know what happened to the bodies of those thieves, but we know they definitely didn't go to heaven and or hell there and then.

The bodies would be put into the ground. They would be buried probably in some pauper's grave, or some unsanctified piece of ground somewhere as criminals who had been executed.

But the bodies would not go into heaven or into hell. But Jesus says to them, today thou shalt be with me in paradise. What does he mean? He means the resurrection of the soul.

He means that the soul of that believing people on the cross will be that very day with Jesus in paradise. The same day, instantly upon the point of death.

Jesus illustrates this also, of course, with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Where we read in chapter 16 of Luke, verse 22, it came to pass that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

[9 : 18] The rich man also died and was buried. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and see if Abraham are far off and Lazarus in his bosom. Now, Lazarus, clearly, as a beggar, if he was buried anywhere, it would be in a ditch or a pauper's grave.

It's not his body which is being carried by the angels. Abraham's bosom, it must be his soul. His soul that is there with the Lord in glory.

Likewise, we read the rich man died and was buried. It is not his body which is at this stage in hell. It is his soul. In hell he lift up his eyes.

The soul is conscious. The soul does not sleep. The soul does not die. So, this is why it's incorrect, technically, to call for the resurrection because it's not coming back from the dead.

It hasn't died. The soul goes on eternally. Whoops, sorry. Immortally. It goes on immortally for the rest of eternity. Either with the Lord or without him.

[10 : 21] Now, if we have no thought of the Lord here, then it's going to be too late to have any thought of the Lord hereafter. We only get one shot at this life.

We only get one opportunity. And that might seem, oh, that's not very fair. Why don't we have another chance? Why don't we have someone else? Because, after all, you know, their own Catholic church teaches about purgatory, this sort of middle way where you don't go to heaven or you don't go to heaven or there's purgatory, which is not a nice place by all accounts, but where you get a chance to just sort of let somebody else buy enough masses or work out enough good works to get you back up the ladder a bit and finally get you out of purgatory and into heaven as if the confession of faith doesn't even go into that.

It simply states succinctly that outside of these two places, i.e. heaven and hell, for souls departed from their bodies, the scripture acknowledge of none.

And that is it in a nutshell. There is no suggestion anywhere in God's holy and inspired word that there is any other location for departed souls than either heaven on the one hand or hell on the other.

There's no middle ground. How can there be a middle ground with God? How can there be neutrality with God? We are either for him or against him, Jesus says. We are either with him or we are not with him.

[11 : 57] You know, like again the example I've often used in the past, the ark. You can't be sort of half in and half out. You can't be hanging on by your fingernails to the side as the waves are coming, bashing against the side.

You're either inside the ark or you're on the outside. And if you're on the inside, then you may not be the nicest of people, but if you're always family and you're of that covenant family and you've acted in faith, you're safe.

And you may be very nice people and good neighbours and so on on the outside, and you maybe haven't done anything bad that you're conscious of, but if you're not inside the ark, you're going to die. You're going to perish from the floodwaters.

Now the only ark of our salvation that can ever redeem or save us is the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we are not with him, we are taken as being against him.

If we're not inside that ark of salvation, then we're on the outside. And once our soul has departed from our body, there is no way back.

[12 : 57] And there is nothing then that is ever going to give us another chance to sort of make good. Here is the opportunity. Now is the time of grace. Now is the day of salvation.

So we have this resurrection of the soul, which is immediate. And for as long as it takes until the Lord comes back, our souls will be either with the Lord in glory or else they will be in hell.

Well, putting it too bluntly, that's where they'll be. They'll be in hell because hell is a place without God where there is none of God's grace at work, none of his mercy, none of his kindness, none of his people, none of his forgiveness.

It is in a sense what we have desired if that's where we are. We have desired to live without God. And that's what he has given us for all eternity. What we didn't get and what we didn't grasp, perhaps, is that the only reason this world is so palatable, the only reason there's anything good in it, the only reason there is any beauty, any kindness, any wonder of creation, any soft rain from heaven, any clean water to drink, any food upon our tables, the only reason there is any joy, any love, any blessing, is because God has been at work in this world which he has not forsaken.

But of course, there's a lot of evil and sin in the world too and that is clearly what we have chosen to be without the Lord. So, the resurrection of the soul is immediate.

[14 : 29] It has this immediacy. What happens then to the body when we talked about Jesus' body being laid in the grave, talked about the people on the cross obviously being buried somewhere, we assume, we trust.

God says, of course, to Adam when he sins at the beginning, he says, in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground. For out of it wast thou taken for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.

That is what will happen to our human bodies. They will be laid in the ground, they will decay. They will return to the dust. Peter, in the Acts of the Apostles, he's preaching about David and he says, David was laid in the tomb and saw corruption.

His body decayed. Jesus' body did not decay. He rose again the third day with his resurrection body, his spiritual body. Paul was talking about this in this chapter where he says, you know, it is sown in dishonor, it's raised in glory, it's sown in weakness, it's raised in power, it is sown a natural body, earthly flesh and blood body, it is raised a spiritual body.

There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. We'll come to that in just a wee minute. But an ordinary body, well, we know what happens to that, don't we? You know, Ecclesiastes chapter 3 tells us, that which befallerth the sons of men, befallerth beasts, even one thing befallerth them.

[15 : 54] As the one dieth, so dieth the other. Yea, they have all one breath, so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast, but all his vanity. And in a sense, if we don't have the Lord in this world, we are just highly sophisticated beasts.

That's all we're behaving like. We don't have Christ. All go on to one place. All are of the dust and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

And if we turn a couple of pages, we see at the end of Ecclesiastes chapter 12, verse 7, then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

This is what happens to the body. Now we think, oh yeah, well what about people who are cremated? What about people whose bodies just become ash? And then, where's there going to be any resurrection?

Then, well, don't imagine for a moment that God hasn't already got that in hand. You know, some people are created from choice. Some people were burned at the stake as martyrs at the Reformation or in the persecutions under the Roman Empire or whatever the case may be.

[17 : 04] Some people's bodies were lost at sea and buried at sea. Now remember, there's that verse in Revelation 20 where it's quite explicit where it says, verse 13, the sea gave up the dead which were in it and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them and they were judged every man according to their works.

That's the last judgment. We'll come to that next week, Lord willing. That is the final chapter in the Confession of Faith and we'll look at the biblical basis for that. But at the moment, we're talking about what happens to our body, what happens to our soul.

Whether our body is buried at sea, whether it is burned to powder and ash, whether it just becomes dust that people sprinkle somebody's ashes up on the mountainside or bury them in the garden or bury them in the cemetery or scatter them at the beach or whatever.

Oh well, how's God ever going to bring back a resurrection body? Oh dear, all this dust that's been scattered. We've just been reading Genesis. What do you think God made the first man from in the first place?

He made him from dust. He made him from the dust of the earth, from the ground he took and he made man out of it. Can you really imagine God can't bring together every last particle of dust, every last piece of decay and reconstitute and remake a new body when the day comes.

[18 : 29] But for now, the body decays. But the soul is already in its eternal destination. It already has its immortality.

So, what happens then at the last day? How do we get from the resurrection of the soul, which is already in its eternal destination then, to the resurrection of the body?

Well, at the last day, as Paul says here, we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed in a moment and the twinkling of an eye at the last time. For the trumpet shall sound, the dead shall be raised incorruptible.

In other words, once they are raised, the dead, they will have a new body. They will have a resurrection body with different qualities. A body which is able to withstand all the eternity of the ages.

It won't decay. It won't grow old. It won't die in the way that the old body died. Again, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul writes, For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent, that is, not go before them which are asleep.

[19 : 40] For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and with the voice of the archangel and with the trump 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.

Therefore comfort one another with these words. The dead in Christ shall rise first. Their bodies shall be raised to honour, not to disallow. The new resurrection bodies that they have, Paul already writes about this.

There is a natural body, that's our old body of flesh and blood, and there is a spiritual body. It's still the same body. It has been remade, reconstituted.

It's the same body. We shall rise in the same bodies that we live this life, but they will have different qualities. Like, well, come on, how can that be?

Well, Paul says there is a natural body, there is a spiritual body. You think of how Jesus' body was different after the resurrection than it was before.

[20 : 47] He said, handle me and see, for ye see a spirit of not flesh and bones as ye see me have. He didn't say blood, as we've mentioned in the past, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Verse 50, nor doth corruption inherit incorruption. It was a pure resurrection body, a spiritual body that Christ had after he rose from the dead. It could pass through locked doors.

It could pass through walls. It could still eat and drink. Have ye here any meat? They gave him a piece of a broiled fish and a honeycomb and he ate before them. It was the same body. It was manifestly Jesus.

He said, look at my hands and my feet. And he said to Thomas, put your hand into my side. See it is I, myself. Handle me and see. So it was the same Jesus.

It was the same body, but it had different qualities. It will be the same body with which we are raised at the last. The resurrection of the body.

[21 : 45] Those who are the dead in Christ shall rise first and their bodies will be united everlastingly with their souls, which are already in glory. and likewise the bodies of the unjust will be raised and will be reunited with their souls in hell.

And that means that they will then have a body with different qualities. Now, there's no way of giving an example or illustration of this, although we can only ever try to make things clearer.

How can it be the same body but different body? The example I know I've used in the past is if you look at a photograph of yourself when you were five years old or when you were 16 and then you look in the mirror now, well, there's going to be a wee bit of difference, isn't there?

And yet, nobody's given you a transplant body. Nobody's changed your body. You're not a dummy or a mannequin now that you weren't before. You're the same person in the same body. When you look at the photograph and you look in the mirror, the body is very, very different now to what it was but it is exactly the same body but it has changed.

I have changed in my body from what I was when I was five years old and I will have changed in my body when I have my resurrection body compared to the body that I have now but it will be the same body and it will be the same me and it will have different qualities.

[23 : 15] So Christ was manifestly still himself but with different qualities to his resurrection body. With it, he was able to ascend into heaven.

Our flesh and blood bodies cannot ascend into heaven. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump this is the last day being spoken about now for the trump that shall sound the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we who are still alive those who are still alive when the Lord comes back our flesh and blood bodies shall be changed into spiritual bodies.

There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. As we are born in the image of the earthly so we shall bear the image of the heavenly and we shall be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye.

We shall have such bodies as are able to withstand eternity without age without decay without disease without pain without sorrow without suffering that's if we're in heaven of course.

[24 : 31] And we know that this resurrection body is what we shall have. Remember way back in what is arguably the oldest book in the Bible where Job says chapter 19 verse 23 Oh that my words were now written Oh that they were printed in a book that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever but for I know that my Redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth He's coming back and though after my skin worms destroy this body you know his body laid in the grave and all decayed all the worms are given up yet in my flesh shall I see God whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold and not another though my reins be consumed more than me even though I be laid in the grave even though my body may decay I shall see God with my own eyes in my own flesh because Job being a righteous man before God redeemed and saved by Christ will have a resurrection body and it will be reunited to his soul at the last day likewise

Elijah although he goes up to heaven in the fiery chariot his flesh and blood could not enter heaven his body needs must have been spoured up his soul would have entered heaven his spirit would be there just as we read in Hebrews you know we've come to the general assembly of the firstborn the spirits of just men made perfect not their mortal bodies the spirits of just men made perfect so Elijah's soul and spirit is there it's his glorified soul and spirit that they would have seen on the mount of transfiguration likewise Moses as well but his flesh and blood could not have entered heaven Elijah would need a resurrection body just like everybody else just like Enoch just like everybody else will have and if we are in heaven with the Lord then our bodies will be immune to decay immune to pain immune to suffering sorrow any of these things I would be failing in my duty if I do not point out but likewise the resurrection bodies of the lost will be unable to die in the way that our mortal flesh and blood bodies can die if we are administered sufficient pain the body will shut down it will be unable to deal with it will channel so much energy and power to the dealing with that pain that it will drain the life out of the body the heart will stop the body will die there is only so much pain we can endure if we are being tortured or whatever the case may be before finally we die from it and it comes to an end now in eternity of course we can't die because in a sense we are in an ongoing state of death we are already dead and yet the soul does not die it is immortal we are therefore in a state of living death because God hath all immortality and life and life in himself and we are completely separated from God if we don't die therefore there is no life there is no joy there is no relief there is no relief from pain there is no end to the torment there is nothing but hell sheer ongoing agony there are flames and so on yes the Bible talks about that and I won't say well therefore it isn't there of course if the Bible says that it's there there will be the agony that we endure in a physical sense but I would suggest to you that is not the worst of it just as I would suggest to you with all reverence and respect that what our Lord endured on the cross the agony that he endured the torments in his body for that six hours of the crucifixion and the scourging and the pain before that was not the worst of it because if he was bearing the suffering the pain the price of sin for all his elect in every age then he would have gone in his spirit and soul down as it were to the depths of hell whilst his body was on the cross he would have been enduring that spiritual darkness and he would have that indescribable separation from the comfortable presence of his father which would make the physical suffering seem you know far less by comparison and not denigrating the physical suffering but the spiritual torment that Christ endured he descended into hell the darkness the blackness the fear the absolute terror and torment he must have endured if he was enduring that on his own behalf it would be one man one lifetime again recognizing that he is God of course not wanting to speak irreverently if one was enduring that for oneself it would be one person one lifetime if you were enduring it for two people it would be doubled if you're

enduring it for ten people it's multiplied by ten Christ is enduring it for all his elect in every age we do not know the number of the elect but we know that it will number millions probably billions God knows the exact number and all of that spiritual suffering and torment is in Christ telescoped into six hours on the cross and you imagine the intensity no you can't none of us can but for the individual who is not redeemed by Christ there is no one to pay for their sin but themselves they will have to spend an eternity expediting those sins expediting those sins because all sin must be paid for we cannot be turned a blind eye to it it's appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment we have to our sins our sins must be paid for if they're not paid by somebody else they must be paid by ourselves and it will take an eternity because we have sinned against an eternal God so whatever may be the flames and the torments of hell and so on

I would suggest to you it is as nothing compared to the spiritual torment of knowing that we are by then cut off from God cut off from the only source of help of healing of relief of salvation it's gone from us because by then you're in hell nobody gets out of hell you know the rich man in the parable he says oh father bring me out of this hell at least dip your finger in water and cool my tongue he says no we can't do that there's an unbridged gulf fixed between us nobody can pass from there to here or from here to there nobody's getting chucked out of heaven anymore down to hell the angels yes which kept not their first estate yes they were cast out from God's presence that's why it's hell that they were cast into that's what we read in the book of Jude chapter 5 and there's only one chapter verse 6 the angels would kept not their first estate but left their own habitation yet reserved in everlasting chains under darkness until the judgment of the great day even they will stay until the last day when the trumpet sounds even Sodom and

Gomorrah and the sinners of earth and in like manner giving themselves over to fornication and going after strange flesh are set forth for an example suffering the vengeance of eternal fire eternal fire fire I would love to be able to tell you that it's okay you don't have to worry if you end up going to hell it just means non existence it just means that you cease to exist it's like fainting or falling asleep it just means you cease to exist annihilation that's all there is the sin will go to heaven but the damn it just cease to exist that's all there is and there's a lot of people subscribe to that and a lot of people think well hell would only ever be for a wee while because it wouldn't be fair to make people last an eternity in hell for what is only a lifetime of sin but as we said before it is an eternal God that has been sinned against the sin is of an eternal nature and therefore it will take an eternal payment I would love to be able to say no it's okay it will just cease it will just disappear it will just cease to exist but the word of

[33 : 25] God does not teach that and therefore I do not do so I cannot lie to you I cannot pretend that the word of God says something different from what it says God is truth Jesus prayed for his disciples he prayed to his father sanctify them through that truth thy word is truth and the word of God teaches that the state of men after death is that their souls go immediately and eternally to one of two locations either to be with the Lord for all eternity or to be parted from him for all eternity and their bodies for those who are saved by Christ they as it were sleep in the grave until they are raised at the last day and reunited with their souls to be forever with the Lord those resurrection bodies which will have the qualities that cannot die that cannot any longer be afflicted by pain suffering or any of the sorrows of earth they are perfected but likewise the unjust shall rise their bodies being as it were in the prison of the grave will be restored to their souls in a lost eternity where those bodies cannot die those bodies cannot have the relief of shutting down and ceasing to exist it is an eternity of torment that is what the bible teaches that is what the scripture says that is what god in his infallible knowledge and wisdom has revealed to us and unpalatable as it may be we know that there is one and only one solution and only one means of avoiding that lost eternity and that is christ there is not a multiplicity of gods to choose from it is not the case oh all religion is just the same no it isn't there is true religion which is in god in christ god honouring christ centred and there is false religion which is everything else man centred man invented and man destroying there is christ and there is all of us there is only one way to do a deed and only one name given under heaven whereby we must be saved whether it is with him for all eternity or whether it is without him for all eternity these we give the names of heaven and hell but that is the division with christ or without him that is the state of man after death and that is where the resurrection of the dead will lead us to either to be with christ or to be without him that is then that is that is not him so he them and that he heard