

San Juan Church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About... Our Physical Death

What does death involve? This terminal human experience can be a frightening prospect if one is unprepared for it. The writer of Psalms exclaimed, "My heart is in anguish within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me" (Psm. 55:4-5). The Hebrew writer spoke of those "who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (Hebrews 2:15). Few of us have confidence to reach that plateau of faith where we might say, along with Paul, that we desire to die and "be with Christ, for that is much better" (Phil. 1:23).

With the New Testament revelation we can face the mysteries of death with calmer spirits. So what is the biblical view of death? Paul wrote, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:14). The term "sleep" is used in the scriptures to describe the state of the body in death. Only the body of man sleeps in death. Solomon wrote that when we die "All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all will return to the dust. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Eccl. 3:20, 12:7). God will assign the spirit its final disposition, either in heaven with the Lord, or separated from God eternally in hell. Upon Christ's return "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, some to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Therefore, the body of man that is placed in the dust of the earth is that which sleeps. Death occurs when the spirit leaves the body (James 2:26).

For the wicked and those who are not in Christ "the wages of sin is death [separation from God], but the free gift of God is eternal life IN Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Though it is not a popular theme in contemporary society, the doctrine of hell is still a vital part of the Bible. At death, all who have lived in rebellion to God will enter a spirit state characterized by pain, distress, sorrow, disgrace, and everlasting contempt (Psm. 116:3; Daniel 12:2; Matthew 22:13; Mark 9:48).

Many times we have heard it said, when a family member dies, that they are looking down from heaven with approval at activities happening on earth. According to scripture, when a person dies, they have no knowledge of events happening in the earthly realm. Solomon wrote, "For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything... Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun [the earthly realm]" (Eccl. 9:5-6).

Jesus warned us to "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life [heaven], and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14). One cannot live wrong and die right! After death there is no opportunity for repentance or salvation for those who are outside of Christ [unbelievers]. Such concepts as "a second chance after death," "baptism for the dead," and "purgatory," are false teachings and are the doctrines of men. Therefore, "today" we need to resolve to learn the will of Christ and to obey Him (2 Thess. 1:8; Hebrews 5:9).

One must believe in Christ (John 8:24), turn from sin (Luke 13:3), confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9), and unite with the Lord in the likeness of His death through immersion in water (Romans 6:3-4). Then as a newborn babe, long for the word and grow closer to Him (1 Peter 2:2). Though there are many things about death that we do not know [and the unknown can be frightening], the inspired word of God does give us enough information that we can take courage as to where we will spend eternity.

Send comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to:
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